



VH1 Legends

Sam Cooke
VH1 Music Studio
Cable in the Classroom

Lesson for Music Classes, Grades 7-12

Lesson 1

Note to Teachers: The content of the videotape may be found, in many communities, to be inappropriate for classroom use because of references, consistent with the era portrayed, to sexual, political, and violent lyrics and acts. You are strongly encouraged to review this program before presenting it to your students.

Objective

- Students will identify the impact of the social injustices and Civil Rights movement on Cooke's life and career.
- Students will compare and contrast the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement era to contemporary times.
- Students will create lyrics to a familiar song that express a personal struggle or concern.

National Standards:

3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Materials

- VHS VCR Player
- Television
- Audio playback equipment
- VH1 Legends: Sam Cooke program
- Web-based lesson materials
- Pencils and paper - students

Prior Knowledge:

- Students are familiar with the basic elements of rhythm and melody.

Procedures

1. As students enter the classroom, play Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come" from the program. When students are seated, ask them what the music brings to mind for them.
2. Show VH1 Legends: Sam Cooke, Segment 3. Ask students to make note of the struggles during the Civil Rights Era as they watch.
3. Lead students in a discussion of the injustices and struggles of the Civil Rights era (prejudiced insults, separate facilities for restaurants, performances, lodging, etc.). What direct effect did these injustices have on Sam Cooke and his peers as they were developing their careers (forced to travel long distances before finding a place to stay, segregated audiences, performance cut in television program, etc.)? Did these constraints hinder the development of black artists' musical careers? Use the following information about Sam Cooke as needed:

Sam Cooke was born in the south, the son of a minister, and grew into quartet gospel singing along with his family while a young man. During his time (Civil Rights Era, especially during the 1960's), African-Americans faced the dilemma of segregation; therefore, he was confronted with social injustice. Cooke later moved to Chicago to continue his singing career. He sang with the Soul Stirrers and the Highway QC's (quartet groups) until he crossed over to pop music. Despite the social injustices he experienced, Cooke was determined to succeed in his singing/songwriting career, and also saw how taking control of his own publishing and owning the rights to all of his music could help him succeed and gain independence.

The Say It Loud! A Celebration of Black Music in America lesson series, specifically "Can I Get a Witness" Lessons two and three can be used to enhance this lesson (http://www.vh1musicstudio.com/specials/say_it_loud/sayitloud.html)

4. Have students discuss the obstacles Sam Cooke encountered as he pursued his dream of becoming his own publisher. What would he gain by having control of his own music? How was he eventually able to begin helping his peers get a start in the music business? (For further information about the struggles and successes of artists pursuing a career in the music business see: <http://www.vh1musicstudio.com/specials.html> – Lessons for: Say It Loud! A Celebration of Black Music In America – "Pursuing The Dream"
5. While the Civil Rights issues of the time had a definite impact on Sam Cooke and his career, Cooke had an impact on the issues of the day himself. Lead students in a discussion of the influence Cooke had on the Civil Rights movement. Was he a role model for young blacks? How did he and his music break down the barriers (refusing to play for all black or all white audiences, music that was appealing to everyone, etc.)?
6. Ask students to consider what might have happened if Sam Cooke was alive today. How could he have continued to influence Civil Rights issues? Would he likely be a Civil Rights advocate, such as many other Civil Rights leaders past and present, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, and entertainer Stevie Wonder, who worked toward promoting the King holiday and recorded "Happy Birthday" to Dr. King.

The struggle for equality in many different arenas is ever present. Are some of the issues Cooke stood for still prevalent today, even in the recording industry?

7. Refer students to the song they heard when they entered the room, “A Change Is Gonna Come”. What clearly influenced Sam Cooke to write the song? What types of songs/lyrics would he write and record today?

8. Ask students to comment on how they would feel if they were young, aspiring artists during that era. Have them compare and contrast issues of the Civil Rights era to contemporary times. Are some of those issues still prevalent? What additional issues exist now? Is racism and discrimination still in existence, and in what ways?

7. Have students select a simple melody that would be familiar to the class (i.e. children’s song), and create lyrics (four or five lines) to the melody that express their feelings about either the struggles that Sam Cooke and his peers faced, or a contemporary issue that is of concern to them (if preferred, this activity could be done without reference to a particular melody, but as a poetry writing exercise). Students who wish may share their compositions with the class.

8. Ask students to discuss any difficulties they encountered while writing their songs or poems. Did they feel an emotional involvement during and after writing their composition? Did they gain a greater understanding of how they felt about the particular issue? Was it “liberating” to express their thoughts? Can they imagine why Sam Cooke wanted to maintain some control of his work by keeping ownership, etc.?

National Standards for Music Education

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

These standards-based materials are provided through a partnership with MENC: The National Association for Music Education. This lesson plan was created by MENC member Dr. Joan R. Hillsman, Ph.D, Professor of Music, Bowie State University, Bowie, MD.



VH1, in partnership with Cable in the Classroom, collaborated with MENC: The National Association for Music Education to develop this series of lessons.