Suffrage Songs as Tools of Protest

Words by
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Music by
Mrs. Alfred E. Clark

This curriculum may be successfully used with or without a museum visit.
Developed by Sarah Anderson in consultation with OHS staff and advisory board. This lesson has been partially adapted from the New York Times Learning Network lesson Teaching with Protest Music.
## Suffrage Movement in Oregon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Overview</strong></th>
<th>Students listen to examples of songs from the suffrage movement and try their hand at writing a verse for a present-day protest song.</th>
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</table>
| **Learning Objectives** | › Students understand that music and song played important roles in unifying and empowering women in the suffrage movement.  
› Students can analyze suffrage song lyrics for meaning and consider their effectiveness as a means of protest. |
| **Guiding Questions** | › How did suffragists use songs and music to persuade and influence listeners towards their point of view?  
› How can we analyze songs and song lyrics as primary sources?  
› How do we use songs as tools of protest today? |
| **Background Information** | Song has been a powerful protest tool throughout American history. The suffrage movement was no exception. Suffragists unified their voices in song during local community meetings, larger gatherings and conferences, and in marches and parades. Mass media also helped suffragists spread their message through music. Women could purchase sheet music to suffrage songs and even purchase recordings of songs to play at home. To read an overview of songs in the national suffrage movement, see [Songs of Women's Suffrage](https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/souhtml/souint8.html) from the Library of Congress website. In Oregon, Abigail Scott Duniway, for one, also wrote lyrics for songs to promote the rights of women. |
| **Delivery Time** | One to two 45-minute class periods |
| **Remote Teaching Guide** | These documents are not meant to be a replacement for the lesson plan, but are intended to be used alongside it to guide delivery modifications.  
› [Suffrage Songs Tools of Protest Remote Learning Modification](#)  
› [General tips for promoting discussion and engagement online](#) |
| **Vocabulary** | **Note:** Some of the song lyrics contain 19th century language that may take some time to unpack with your students. This is especially true for “Daughters of Freedom”  
› **Hymn:** a religious song or poem of praise to God or a god |
| Vocabulary (continued) | • **Primary Source:** information about an event or time in the past made by someone who lived during that time and learned about or participated in the event or time. Some examples include a letter, speech, or artifact, such as a basket or shoe, as long as they were made or used by the person at that time.  
• **Secondary Source:** information about an event or time in the past that was created after the fact by someone who did not experience it first-hand or participate in the events. Examples include scholarly books, articles, and reference books such as encyclopedias.  
• **Suffrage:** the right to vote in political elections  
• **Tone:** a musical or vocal sound with reference to its pitch, quality, and strength; the general character or attitude of a place, piece of writing, situation, etc. |
| --- | --- |
| Materials Needed | • [Suffrage Song Lyrics](#)  
• [Suffragist Songs: Primary Source images](#)  
• Links to audio or video:  
  • [Daughters of Freedom](#) (Library of Congress audio)  
  • [The March of the Women](#) (choir video, 2019)  
  • [Oh Dear, What Can the Matter Be](#) (creativefolk.com), or on [Youtube](#)  
• [Protest Song Graphic Organizer](#) to help prepare students to write a verse of their own |
| Step by Step Instructions | **Step One:**  
Can songs be used as tools of protest? Two of the biggest challenges of the suffragists were to persuade men and to rally women. One way they did both was through music. Songs have been a powerful protest tool throughout American history: “John Brown’s Body” (abolition movement) and “We Shall Overcome” (civil rights movement) are just two examples.  

**Step Two:**  
Hand out the lyrics to one or more of the songs in the materials section. Note that the three selections represent three different kinds of songs. “Daughters of Freedom” is a hymn, “The March of the Women” is a march, and “Oh Dear, What Can the Matter Be” is an example of using the tune of a popular song with rewritten lyrics. If you listen to all three songs, you can compare and contrast how effective they are in terms of tone, message, and emotional impact.
| **Step by Step Instructions (continued)** | **Step Three:**  
Listen to the songs (links in the materials section). Encourage your students to annotate the lyrics by underlining, highlighting, and writing on the sheet. Their notes can respond to anything in the lyrics or the music. |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Step Four:**  
After listening to each song, discuss:  
› What did you notice in the song?  
› How did it make you feel?  
› Is this an effective protest song? Why or why not?  
› What parts of the lyrics or music do you think are most effective at swaying the listener towards supporting suffrage? |
|  | **Step Five:**  
Ask students to think of a song they know that somehow inspired them. Perhaps it showed a new way of looking at something, taught them something, or made them feel emotional about an issue. Pair-share. |
|  | **Step Six:**  
Hand out [Protest Song Graphic Organizer](#). Students work in pairs or small groups to brainstorm an issue they would like to turn into a protest song (examples: climate change, Black Lives Matter, gun laws, plastics in oceans, LBGTQ+ rights, immigration, etc.). Or, if you like, you could have them write a song on the topic of woman suffrage using contemporary music. Choose a song that they would like to use for the tune and write new lyrics for at least one verse. |
|  | **Step Seven:**  
Share with the class and reflect on the experience. Do you think your song or a classmate’s song would make an effective protest song today? Why or why not? What came up for you while doing this activity? What did you notice? What questions do you have? |
| **Assessments** | › A written reflection based on one of the discussion questions above.  
› Assign students to rewrite an entire song to be a protest song. Have students explain why their song is a good protest song. |
<p>| <strong>Teacher Notes</strong> | Students should have some background info about the suffrage movement before doing this lesson. |</p>
<table>
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<th>Support for All Students</th>
<th>You can model what it looks like to annotate lyrics by showing your own reactions to one of the songs.</th>
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| Extensions               | Additional Suffrage Songs  
› **“Winning the Vote”**  
› **Songs of the Suffragettes** album gives some more examples of substituting words in famous tunes (Yankee Doodle, Auld Lang Syne)  

The *Teaching Tolerance* lesson **“Sounds of Change”** examines protest songs through more contemporary music. A good way to connect suffrage songs to the present.  

[More suffrage songs titles and lyrics](https://www.genevahistoricalsociety.com/organizations/suffrage-songs/) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman  

[Even more suffrage songs and lyrics](https://protestsonglyrics.net) from protestsonglyrics.net |
| Connect to the National Story |  
› [Women’s Suffrage in Sheet Music](https://www.loc.gov/pua/songs/songslist.html) Collection from the Library of Congress  
› **“Songs of Women’s Suffrage”** from the Library of Congress |
| Additional Educator Resources | Links for two of the songs in this lesson came from this blog: [https://genevahistoricalsociety.com/organizations/suffrage-songs/](https://genevahistoricalsociety.com/organizations/suffrage-songs/)  

**“Suffragists in Song”** blogpost from Library of Congress |
| Oregon Social Studies Standards | **Middle School**  
› **6.4** Recognize historical and contemporary means of changing societies and promoting the common good.  
› **6.17** Identify and examine the roles and impact of diverse groups of people (e.g. gender roles, social roles, political and economic structures) within the countries of the Western Hemisphere.  
› **6.26** Analyze how a specific problem can manifest itself at local, regional, and global levels. Identify challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address a specific problem.  
› **6.27** Assess individual and collective capacities to take action to address local and regional issues, taking into account a range of possible levers of power, strategies, and potential outcomes.  
› **7.27** Critique and analyze information for point of view, historical context, distortion, propaganda, and relevance including sources with conflicting information. |
Oregon Social Studies Standards (continued)

- **7.28** Draw on multiple disciplinary lenses to analyze how a specific problem can manifest itself at local, regional, and global levels over time, identifying its characteristics and causes, and the challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address the problem.
- **7.29** Assess individual and collective capacities to take informed action to address local, regional, and global problems, taking into account a range of possible levers of power, strategies, and potential outcomes.
- **8.7** Analyze the expanding eligibility of citizenship in the continuing struggle for the expansion of rights for ethnic and traditionally marginalized groups.
- **8.9** Analyze the effect of historical and contemporary means of changing societies and promoting the common good.
- **8.27** Determine and explain the importance and contributions (products, events, actions, and ideas) of key people, cultures, ethnic groups (including individuals who are American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian or Americans of African, Asian, Pacific Island, Chicano, Latino, or Middle Eastern descent), religious groups, and other traditionally marginalized groups (women, people with disabilities, immigrants, refugees, and individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender) in Oregon, the United States, and the world.
- **8.28** Identify issues related to historical events to recognize power, authority, and governance as it relates to systemic oppression and its impact on ethnic and religious groups, as well as other historically persecuted individuals in the United States in the modern era (bias, injustice, discrimination, and stereotypes).
- **8.29** Use and interpret relevant primary and secondary sources pertaining to U.S. history from multiple perspectives.
- **8.32** Critique and analyze information for point of view, historical context, distortion, bias propaganda, and relevance, including sources with conflicting information in order to question the dominant narratives in history.

**High School**

- **HS.7** Analyze political parties, interest and community groups, and mass media and how they influence the beliefs and behaviors of individuals, and local, state, and national constituencies.
- **HS.11** Examine the pluralistic realities of society recognizing issues of equity and evaluating the need for change.
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<tr>
<td>› <strong>HS.55</strong> Analyze the complexity of the interaction of multiple perspectives to investigate causes and effects of significant events in the development of world, U.S., and Oregon history.</td>
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<td>› <strong>HS.63</strong> Identify and analyze ethnic groups (including individuals who are American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian or Americans of African, Asian, Pacific Island, Chicano, Latino, or Middle Eastern descent), religious groups, and other traditionally marginalized groups (women, people with disabilities, immigrants, refugees, and individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender), their relevant historic and current contributions to Oregon, the United States, and the world.</td>
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<tr>
<td>› <strong>HS.66</strong> Examine and analyze the multiple perspectives and contributions of ethnic and religious groups, as well as traditionally marginalized groups within a dominant society and how different values and views shape Oregon, the United States, and the world.</td>
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<td>› <strong>HS.67</strong> Evaluate historical sources for perspective, limitations, accuracy, and historical context.</td>
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<tr>
<td>› <strong>HS.73</strong> Identify and analyze multiple and diverse perspectives as critical consumers of information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>› <strong>HS.74</strong> Analyze an event, issue, problem, or phenomenon, critiquing and evaluating characteristics, influences, causes, and both short- and long-term effects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>› <strong>HS.75</strong> Evaluate options for individual and collective actions to address local, regional, and global problems by engaging in self-reflection, strategy identification, and complex causal reasoning.</td>
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