

Music as Protest Art

Protest songs bring music and message to people. In the following activities, you will remix lyrics from famous protest songs in U.S. history to create your own protest piece related to an issue you care about deeply. Then, analyze a political protest song and explore how it is used in social media today.

Music has been at the center of expressing protest and speaking out against social injustice from the American Revolutionary era to the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020.

"[Yankee Doodle](#)" is widely regarded as the first American protest song, though it was originally written by British soldiers to mock the Americans and then adopted by the colonists as a rallying song for revolution.

"[Free America](#)" was another one of the first protest songs. It was composed by Joseph Warren, the man who enlisted Paul Revere and William Dawes to spread the alarm that the British were coming on April 18, 1775.



[Watch on YouTube](#)

A Jewish poet, Abel Meeropol (pseudonym Lewis Allen), wrote the song "Strange Fruit," which was sung by Billie Holiday to close her concerts ([Blues as Protest](#), Library of Congress).

[Woody Guthrie](#), born in Oklahoma in 1912, became a voice for ordinary people after traveling the country during the economic hard times of the Great Depression. His ballad "This Land Is Your Land" is one of 3000 songs he wrote during his lifetime.

In the current era, Black artists are speaking aggressively against White racism through music.

Activity 1: Remix Lyrics into Your Own Protest Song

- Review [The History of American Protest Music, from "Yankee Doodle" to Kendrick Lamar](#), Vox, May 22, 2017.
- Then, **remix song lyrics** from historical American protest songs into your own song of protest for an issue of interest to you today.
 - Songs you might include:
 - Go Down Moses
 - John Brown's Body
 - The Battle Hymn of the Republic
 - Strange Fruit
 - This Land Is Your Land
 - Blowin' in the Wind
 - A Change is Going to Come

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Remix Lyrics into Your Own Protest Song](#) by Justin Tralongo

Activity 2: Analyze Political Songs on Social Media

- Find a song that [expresses political protest](#).
- Research the song:
 - What is the main political message behind the lyrics?
 - What was the social, historical, and cultural context of the song?
 - What impact did the song make?
- Search this song on social media, including TikTok and YouTube. What are some ways young people engage with the song today?
 - What kind of comments do they get from posting the song?
 - Does sharing the song on social media help raise awareness of the political issue?
- **Present your findings in the form of a [podcast](#) or music video.**

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Analyze Political Songs on Social Media](#) by Mitchell Regan

Additional Resources

- [From Lil Baby to T-Pain: 10 New Black Lives Matter Protest Songs That You Have to Hear](#)
- [Social Justice Songs for Kids: A Playlist](#)
- [Why 2020's Protest Songs Aren't Part of a Passing Trend](#), Billboard (December 19, 2020)

Connecting to the Building Democracy for All eBook

[Building Democracy for All: How Can Books and Music Express Political Protests?](#)

Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
 - Examine the role of political protest in a democracy. (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) [8.T4.12]
- [ISTE Standards](#)
 - Digital Citizen
 - 2c: Students demonstrate an understanding of and respect for the rights and obligations of using and sharing intellectual property.
 - Knowledge Constructor
 - 3a: Students plan and employ effective research strategies to locate information and other resources for their intellectual or creative pursuits.
 - 3b: Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data or other resources.
 - 3d: Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.
 - Creative Communicator
 - 6a: Students choose the appropriate platforms and tools for meeting the desired objectives of their creation or communication.
 - 6b: Students create original works or responsibly repurpose or remix digital resources into new creations.
 - 6d: Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for the intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)
 - Ethics and Laws (CAS.b)
 - Digital Tools (DTC.a)
 - Collaboration and Communication (DTC.b)
 - Research (DTC.c)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.5
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.4
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5



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