



# THEMED LESSON: Protest Music

<b>Age Range:</b>	All Ages, with modifications by age
<b>Introduction:</b>	Students will understand the definition and intention of protest music with opportunities to respond, connect, and share their own thoughts. This lesson can be done sequentially as a whole lesson, or you can pick and choose pieces and activities based on your allotted time.
<b>Total Music Time:</b>	14:37

## DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

Explain that a protest is when people gather to express disapproval of something that is happening.

Use the following questions to generate discussion:

- What do you do when you don't agree with something?
- What issues are important to you?
- When you don't agree with something, how do you express those feelings?

## LISTENING ACTIVITY

Tens of thousands of people around the world have protested the unequal treatment of Black people. This issue is often referred to as "civil rights" or "human rights." Protesters are demanding equal treatment for everyone, regardless of the color of their skin.

In addition to attending protest gatherings, some people express their thoughts and feelings through art, including through songwriting and music. There is a long tradition of protest songs, or songs that were written to protest a certain topic or issue. Listen to the following examples and follow up with discussion of the lyrics.

- [\*What's Goin' On\*](#), with lyrics by Marvin Gaye, Renaldo Benson, and Al Cleveland. This song was composed after one of the songwriters witnessed some police brutality.
- [\*Ella's Song\*](#), by Ella Baker and Bernice Johnson Reagon, performed by Sweet Honey in the Rock and VocalEssence. In the introduction, the musicians explain a little bit about the song and help you sing along.
- [\*America the Beautiful\*](#), traditional, arr. McGill. In response to the murder of George Floyd, clarinetist Anthony McGill decided to perform American the Beautiful. He made some changes to the melody to make it mournful. Notice happens at the end. Why do you think McGill chose to end the piece this way?
- Here is a choir singing [a mash-up of two songs](#): a traditional spiritual called *Amen*, and a famous civil rights anthem, *We Shall Overcome*.



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## SINGING ACTIVITY

Try singing this song, called [I Lift My Voice](#), by Andrea Ramsey. As you read and sing the words, think about how you might use your voice to make a difference about issues you care about.

If you can't read notes, [watch this video](#) a few times and start singing along. You can find more songs like this by going to the [Justice Choir](#) page.

## BONUS ACTIVITIES

This is just a small sample of protest music. Others have used music to protest many issues throughout history. Do a little research on an issue that's important to you. Try to find any protest music that has been written in response to that issue.

Want some kid-friendly resources to help with conversations about racism, current events, and social justice? Here is a short list to help you get started:

- The [Brains On!](#) podcast has an episode about understanding the emotions behind protest and injustice.
- [Talking to Kids about George Floyd](#), from the [Child Mind Institute](#)
- [How to talk about race, justice, and equality with your children](#) from [Time Out](#)

*A special thanks to contributors to this lesson: Ahmed Anzaldúa, Rachel Bearinger, Karen Benson, John Birge, Emily Condon, Melissa Dundis, Tamara Gonzalez, Jodi Gustafson, Theo Jodzio, Vaughn Ormseth, Steve Staruch, Tesfa Wondemagegnehu.*

## ALL SUGGESTED LISTENING

Click [here](#) for a YouTube playlist of suggested listening. (Note that the McGill arrangement/performance of *America the Beautiful* is not in the YouTube playlist, since it is a Facebook video.)