Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War to Civil Rights

Magpie presents a collection of freedom songs, songs based in the pre-Civil War era, and songs that make a direct connection to the freedom struggle of the modern Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and beyond. Terry Leonino and Greg Artzner begin with music from the abolitionist movement and from the Underground Railroad, the dangerous flight of the fugitive slaves to freedom in the north, music borne, as was the war itself, from the malevolent institution of slavery. The songs also celebrate characters from the struggle such as the famed raider of Harper’s Ferry, John Brown, and the great conductor of the Underground Railroad, Harriet Tubman. From there the program tells the story in song of the continuing struggle for freedom and equality through the years, into the 1960’s, and to the present day. The connection is made directly between the songs used in the Underground Railroad and their adaptation for use in the direct actions, sit-ins, freedom rides, and other demonstrations organized by freedom fighters of the modern Civil Rights Movement.

Performance Follow-up Activities: “Goin' to Freedom Land”

Goal:
To familiarize students with women whose lives and work were significant in the history of abolition and Civil Rights in the United States.

Objectives:
• Students will learn about four African American women and their contribution to the struggles for abolition and Civil Rights in the United States.
• Students will gain a sense of history and its connection to current times, as well as a sense of pride and self-esteem.
• Students will learn salient words in the lyrics in American Sign Language and actively participate through this activity, as well as singing along with their voices.

Background:
The song includes a verse about each of four women, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, and Fannie Lou Hamer.

Sojourner Truth was an eloquent orator and activist during the pre-Civil War abolition movement. After Emancipation she continued to travel the country speaking on behalf of equal rights for women and African Americans. She said “We'll have our rights, see if we don't, and you can't stop us from them, see if you can.”

Harriet Tubman was famous as a "conductor" on the Underground Railroad, traveling many times into the southern states at great risk to bring hundreds of people out of slavery. She was called "Moses". In her role as conductor, she, like many others, would use songs to convey messages among those conspiring to escape.

Rosa Parks committed one of the most famous acts of civil disobedience in American history when she sat in a front seat on a public bus and refused to give it up for a white man, which was required
by the segregationist laws of the time. This simple act led to a famous boycott of the Montgomery, Alabama buses, a movement that launched the public career of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Fannie Lou Hamer was a grassroots organizer in the state of Mississippi during the middle 1960's. She came to prominence with her impassioned speaking and her powerful singing when civil right organizers from SNCC formed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and sent an official counter-delegation to the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City.

Preparation:

- Seek out books on the history of abolition, the Underground Railroad, and the Civil Rights Movement. Read and discuss the stories of these women and the parts of the history in which they were involved.
- Learn and practice American Sign Language for the following words:
  - Glory, freedom, land, voice, help, stop, railroad, travel, night, song, no thank you, front, view, not, still, live, people, will, woke up, march, feet, strength.

Questions for discussion:

1. Name other women who have contributed to the struggle for freedom in America.
2. Name some of the men who contributed to the struggle.
3. What was the abolition movement and who were those who created it and moved it forward?
4. What was the Underground Railroad?
5. What are some examples of the legacy of slavery in American society? How have they been changed or not changed? Have they been eliminated? Why? Why not?

Follow Up Activities: "Give Light"

Goal:
To familiarize students with Ella Baker and her role in the Civil Rights Movement. To give students a sense of their own power to bring about positive change in their own lives and in the world around them.

Objectives:

- Students will learn about Ella Baker, her work, and her beliefs regarding leadership.
- Students will learn about nonviolence as a means of resolving conflict and bringing about peaceful change.
- Students will learn salient words in the lyrics in American Sign Language and actively participate through this activity, as well as singing along with their voices.

Background:
Ella Baker was one of the most important activist/organizers in the history of the modern Civil Rights Movement. She was an active member of the NAACP and helped to establish state chapters throughout the South. She was also active in founding the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, in which capacity she advised Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She also was a founding member of SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and was instrumental in organizing many of their most important and successful actions, including the Mississippi Summer Project of 1964. She believed strongly in the power of people to bring about change on their own, working together, without the necessity of charismatic leadership. Her belief in this regard is eloquently encapsulated in her quote, which is the basis for this song, "Give light, and people will find the way."
Preparation:
- Seek out books on the history of the Civil Rights Movement. Read and discuss some of the stories of the movement and the part Ella Baker played in it.
- Learn and practice American Sign Language for the following words: Give, light, people, way, believe, teach, peace, stand, together, love.

Questions for discussion:

1. What is racism and give some examples of it in American history?

2. What were some of the injustices of segregation that caused the people to organize and create the Civil Rights Movement?

3. Did the Movement succeed? If so, how? If not, how did it fail and what did it fail to accomplish? What can we do today to make the Movement a success?

4. Do people really need strong leaders? Can they make changes independently when they work together?

   What is the difference between racism and racial prejudice?

   In what ways is American society racist?

   In what ways has the face of racism changed since the years of slavery?

   How is racism sustained in society?

   Cite examples of racism in current events.

   What is "affirmative action?" How far has it gone to alleviate some of the legacy of racism and other forms of discrimination in America?

   Many "white" people in America consider themselves to be "non-racist." Is it truly possible to be "non-racist" while silently enjoying the innate privilege of being "white" in a racist society?

   What direct action can you take to fight racism?

**Battle Cry of Freedom**

**TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. What did you feel while watching this program? Did you learn anything you didn't already know? If so can you relate it to your own life?

2. Can you name any other people in history of different races or ethnic backgrounds you are aware of that worked for positive social change together? Can you name any today, or that you know personally?
3. What does the word "racism" mean to you? What is "prejudice?" What is the difference between "prejudice" and "racism?" What are your own personal stories about times when you have encountered racial prejudice or injustice?

4. What is "discrimination?" Can you name ways people discriminate against each other?

5. What does the word "freedom" mean to you? What is "free speech?" Religious freedom?

6. What is "separatism," and how does it affect our society and our world?

7. What is "privilege?" What is the difference between a right and a privilege? How does the class system affect the rights that our constitution says are guaranteed to all of us?

8. Do you have friends that are from social, economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds other than your own? What is "integration" and why is it important in today's society and world?

9. In what areas of our society are African-Americans and other people of color still not achieving "equal justice under the law" that all people deserve?

10. How does using violence create more violence? Can you name any solutions?

11. What is non-violence? How could non-violence be used in situations you may encounter?

12. What can you personally do to help stop racial prejudice in your own community?

13. How can we help heal, build bridges, and break down barriers in our own lives?

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