PROTEST AS EVENT

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Since the 1960s, how have artists used musical events to promote change?

OVERVIEW

“Artists write, and sing, and think, and this is how we get to put our two cents in, and we do it right in front of people, not in secret meetings behind closed doors. We let people know what we think … I don’t know if people go to musicians for their politics. I doubt that they do, you know, but you can rally people to think on serious issues together, and that’s what we’re trying to do.” - Bruce Springsteen, August 4, 2004, Nightline, ABC Network

In August 1971, former member of the Beatles George Harrison gathered a group of musical colleagues that included Bob Dylan, Ringo Starr, Eric Clapton, and many others to perform two benefit concerts at New York’s Madison Square Garden. The so-called Concert for Bangladesh was intended to raise money for and awareness of the refugees fleeing a bloody civil war in Pakistan, a situation made even worse by a devastating cyclone earlier that year.

The concert, which was also recorded as a film and a live album, became a model for how Rock and Roll stars could marshal their celebrity in support of a particular cause. The efforts of Harrison and his friends ultimately raised millions of dollars for UNICEF and established a new precedent for how Rock and Roll could engage the public in order to promote meaningful change in the world.

The mass gatherings of the 1960s – including the March on Washington, antiwar demonstrations on college campuses, and the Woodstock festival – had clearly demonstrated the power of events to command media attention and to make voices heard. These gatherings instilled in a rising generation of young musicians a spirit of activism that continued well beyond the 1960s. Through the Concert for Bangladesh, Live Aid in 1985, and other notable benefit events, musicians have brought people together for performances that advocate for a wide range of social, political, and environmental issues.

In this lesson, students will investigate ways in which artists including George Harrison, Bob Geldof, and others drew on the experiences of the 1960s to harness the inherent power of musical performance to promote awareness and encourage activism. Students will look at the messages, methodologies, and historical contexts of both the Concert for Bangladesh and Live Aid and will refer to these events to develop a proposal for a benefit performance of their own.
Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. **KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):**
   - How a climate of political engagement in the 1960s helped influence a generation of artists to become promoters and activists
   - How music festivals such as Woodstock showed how music could be a powerful tool to organize massive numbers of people
   - The historical circumstances and issues at the root of the Concert for Bangladesh and Live Aid

2. **BE ABLE TO (SKILLS):**
   - Evaluate the message and methodology of a protest event
   - Make connections between musical performances and the historical contexts in which they occur
   - Common Core: Students will research protest concerts by exploring a variety of text and video sources as a basis to reflect on the role of a musician in civic life (CCSS Reading 7; CCSS Writing 1; CCSS Writing 9; CCSS Speaking and Listening 2)

**MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY:**

Prompt students with the following scenario: You have just been put in charge of organizing a protest against an unfair policy at your school (for instance, students are being prohibited from speaking anywhere on school grounds outside the classroom). What are some actions you could take to encourage your fellow students to join your cause?

As a class, make a list on the board of different ways to organize a protest and discuss how these various strategies would work in different ways. Let the students know that this activity is meant to help them understand the possibilities of protest events.

[Note to teacher: examples you may wish to contribute may include marching, making speeches, sit-ins, boycotts, picket lines, writing letters to elected officials, petitions, wearing a t-shirt or wristband, etc.]
PROCEDURE:

1. Among the most celebrated examples of protest events is the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963. Show clip of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivering the “I Have a Dream” speech. Review with students that the March on Washington was one of the largest political rallies for human rights in the history of the United States. Estimates of the number of participants varied from 200,000 to 300,000. Discuss as a class:
   - Why was the March on Washington such an effective and memorable protest event? You may ask the students to consider the location, number of attendees, the featured speaker, and the mood of the event.
   - How do you think attending an event like this would have felt? How would it have felt watching it on television?
   - Do you think most of the marchers and speakers shared a similar set of values?

2. Show images of the March on Washington (1963) and the Woodstock Festival (1969). Ask students to compare images of two public gatherings in the 1960s. What do you notice about these images? What do they have in common?

3. Explain that the first photo is of the crowd at the March on Washington, looking out from the Lincoln Memorial where Dr. King stood. The second photo is from the Woodstock festival, looking out from where the bands played. Explain that Woodstock was a Rock concert that was held in upstate New York in 1969. The festival was advertised as “Three Days of Peace and Music” and was considered by many to be the most significant gathering of the counterculture of the 1960s. Approximately 400,000 young people were said to have been in attendance. Discuss as a class:
   - What are some reasons people might have attended the March on Washington?
   - What are some reasons people might have attended Woodstock? How might their reasons have been different than those of the marchers?
   - Think back to the phrase used to advertised the festival – “Three Days of Peace and Music.” What kind of political values do you think the attendees of Woodstock might have shared?
   - What does the photo of the Woodstock suggest about the popularity of live Rock and Roll music in 1969?

4. Show trailer for the Concert for Bangladesh (1971). Explain that George Harrison was a former member of the Beatles. This video is from a year after the Beatles broke up at the height of their popularity in 1970. Discuss as a class:
   - At the beginning of the clip, how does George Harrison respond to the reporter who asks “Of all of the enormous problems in the world how did you choose this one to do something about?”
   - While not shown in the clip we just watched, Harrison also said the following statement at the press conference announcing the Concert for Bangladesh:
     “Ravi [Shankar] came to me and he said if he was to do a concert, maybe play to so many thousand people, but to the size of the problem, the money, the funds that would be made would just be so small. So that’s where I came on. I can generate
money by doing concerts and by making albums.”

• As a former Beatle, why was Harrison such a valuable spokesperson?

5. Divide students into groups of 3-4. Distribute Handout 1: The Concert for Bangladesh. Groups should read aloud, alternating paragraphs.

Discuss as a group and share out answers with the class:

• What did the Concert for Bangladesh borrow from both the intentions of Civil Rights demonstrations and the spirit of the Woodstock festival to create a new kind of event?

• Why was it important to build awareness about Bangladesh in 1971?

• How might the public demonstrations of the Civil Rights movement have inspired Harrison to become an advocate for change?

• How might the Woodstock festival have suggested that there was an audience for the Concert for Bangladesh?

6. Show clip of Live Aid press conference (1985). What words does musician and organizer Bob Geldof use to describe the event?

[Note to teacher: Ask students to listen for descriptive words in Geldof’s announcement before playing the clip so the class knows what to listen for.]

7. Distribute Handout 2: Live Aid. Groups should read aloud, alternating paragraphs. Discuss as a group and share out answers with the class:

• How did Live Aid use the example set by the Concert for Bangladesh and expand it?

• Why was it important to build awareness about Ethiopia in 1985?

• What technological advances made the Live Aid concerts possible that would not have been feasible during the 1960s and early 1970s, the time of Harrison’s event?

8. Play clip of Geldof discussing the role of pop music in humanitarian causes. Ask class: Why does Geldof think that a benefit concert is “the ultimate that pop music can do”? What point is he trying to make?

SUMMARY ACTIVITY:

1. Read students the following quote from Bruce Springsteen:

“Artists write, and sing, and think, and this is how we get to put our two cents in, and we do it right in front of people, not in secret meetings behind closed doors. We let people know what we think … I don’t know if people go to musicians for their politics. I doubt that they do, you know, but you can rally people to think on serious issues together, and that’s what we’re trying to do.”

- Bruce Springsteen, August 4, 2004, Nightline, ABC Network

2. Ask students to write a short paragraph that responds to the following prompt: Bob Geldof and Bruce Springsteen both agree that popular music can help make people think about serious issues. Can musicians make a greater impact than government in creating change? Why or why not?”
EXTENSION:

Distribute Handout 3: Summary Activity to each student. Instruct students to imagine that they are producing a benefit concert to raise awareness about an important issue occurring in the world today. Students should select an issue, a reason why that issue is worth advocating for, determine what type of event would work best to raise awareness (e.g. a march, a concert, a demonstration, etc.), and create a wish list of contemporary artists they think would help generate the greatest amount of public and media attention to their cause. Students should take 5 minutes to sketch out their idea using the handout. If time allows, volunteers may share proposals with the class.

WRITING PROMPT:

Students will translate their notes on Handout 3 into essay form, writing 3-4 paragraphs illustrating their issue and a proposed protest/advocacy event in more detail. The essay should include clear detailed background research into how their issue has become a problem worthy of everyone’s attention, a step-by-step explanation of their plan to raise awareness, and how their event will help to improve the situation.

STANDARDS

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

College and Career Readiness Reading Anchor Standards for Grades 6-12 for Literature and Informational Text

Reading 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

College and Career Readiness Writing Anchor Standards for Grades 6-12 in English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects

Writing 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Writing 9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening for Grades 6-12

Speaking and Listening 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)
Theme 1: Culture

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

Core Music Standard: Responding

Select: Choose music appropriate for a specific purpose or context.

Analyze: Analyze how the structure and context of varied musical works inform the response.

Interpret: Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators’ and/or performers’ expressive intent.

Evaluate: Support evaluations of musical works and performances based on analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.

Core Music Standard: Connecting

Connecting 11: Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.

RESOURCES

VIDEO RESOURCES
• Bob Geldof – Live Aid (1985)
• Concert For Bangladesh Trailer (1971)
• Bob Geldof – The Role of Pop Music In Humanitarian Causes (1985)
• Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. – I Have a Dream (1963)

FEATURED PEOPLE
• George Harrison

HANDOUTS
• Handout 1: The Concert for Bangladesh
• Handout 2: Live Aid
• Handout 3: Protest as Event - Summary Activity