

## Interview With a Freedom Rider

*What role did music play during the Civil Rights Movement?*

**Grades 6-8 Lesson:** Interview With a Freedom Rider

**Grade Band:** 6-8

**Arts Subject:** Theater

**Other Subject:** History

### SUMMARY

In this 6-8 lesson, students will learn about the song, “We Shall Overcome,” and the role it played as an anthem for the Civil Rights Movement in America. They will research the lives, motivations, and actions of the Freedom Riders. Students will collaborate with a partner to plan and perform a news interview for an audience.

### PREPARATION

#### Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Analyze the meaning and significance of a song.
- Recognize the impact individual and group actions can have on society.
- Identify individual responsibility in a democratic society.
- Appreciate the influence music has had historically as an agent of change.
- Role play news interviews based on a Freedom Rider biography.

### Standards Alignment

#### National Core Arts Standards

[TH:Cr1.1.6c](#) Explore a scripted or improvised character by imagining the given circumstances in a drama/theatre work.

[TH:Cr.1.1.7c](#) Envision and describe a scripted or improvised character’s inner thoughts and objectives in a drama/theatre work.

[TH:Cr1.1.8c](#) Develop a scripted or improvised character by articulating the character’s inner thoughts, objectives, and motivations in a drama/theatre work.

#### Common Core State Standards

[ELA-LITERACY.W.6.2](#) Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

[ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2](#) Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

[ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2](#) Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

### Recommended Student Materials



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**Editable Documents:** *Before sharing these resources with students, you must first save them to your Google account by opening them, and selecting “Make a copy” from the File menu. Check out [Sharing Tips](#) or [Instructional Benefits](#) when implementing Google Docs and Google Slides with students.*

- [Vocabulary: Freedom Riders](#)
- [Analysis: “We Shall Overcome”](#)
- [Planner: Freedom Rider Interview](#)

## Websites

- [Who Were the Freedom Riders?](#)
- [We Shall Overcome: Story Behind the Song](#)
- [Freedom Rider](#)

## Videos

- [“We Shall Overcome” by Joan Baez](#) (timestamp 0:20)
- [“He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands” by Marian Anderson](#) (timestamp 22:49)
- [“We Shall Overcome” by Morehouse College](#)
- [“We Shall Overcome” by Pete Seeger](#)
- [“We Shall Overcome” by Mahalia Jackson](#)

## Teacher Background

Teachers should review all media and print resources prior to teaching the lesson.

## Student Prerequisites

Students should have knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement.

## Accessibility Notes

Provide preferential seating and captions for video presentations. Present an option to create an audio news interview as opposed to a live performance. Modify handouts as needed.

## INSTRUCTION

### Engage

**1. Engage students in a listening session.** Tell students the songs are official audio from August 28th, 1963 when advocates for the civil and economic rights of African Americans conducted the March on Washington.

- [“We Shall Overcome” by Joan Baez](#) (timestamp 0:20)
- [“He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands” by Marian Anderson](#) (timestamp 22:49)

**2. Have a follow-up discussion with students about the songs.** Ask students: *What role does music play during an event like this? How can songs convey messages similar to speeches or chants?*

**3. Introduce students to the Freedom Riders.** Play the video, [Who Were the Freedom Riders?](#) As students watch, allow them to define or describe key vocabulary with the handout, [Vocabulary: Freedom Riders](#).

**4. Allow time for students to do further research on the terms.** Once they have defined or described the terms, they will note the significance of the term in relation to the civil rights movements.

## Build

**1. Have students listen to the song, “We Shall Overcome,” again.** Students can select one of the following versions:

- [“We Shall Overcome” by Morehouse College](#)
- [“We Shall Overcome” by Pete Seeger](#)
- [“We Shall Overcome” by Mahalia Jackson](#)
- [“We Shall Overcome” by Joan Baez](#) (timestamp 0:20)

**2. Divide students into small groups.** Share the website, [We Shall Overcome: Story Behind the Song](#), to build more background about the history of the song. Engage students in a follow-up discussion about the story behind the song. Ask students: *What new information did you learn? What does it mean to soundtrack a movement? Why are protest songs important to advocates, their audiences, and movements around the world?*

**3. Have students divide into pairs or small groups to analyze the song based on the lyrics and background.** Distribute the handout, [Analysis: “We Shall Overcome.”](#) Allow time for students to work through the analysis, referencing the song and accompanying resources.

## Apply

**1. Lead the class in a discussion about the Freedom Riders and what they hoped to accomplish.**

**2. Working in pairs, students will research and gather information about a [Freedom Rider](#).** Distribute the [Planner: Freedom Rider Interview](#), so they can note achievements, key dates, background, and significant events in preparation for a role-play interview.

**3. Plan a role-play interview.** One student will be a news anchor and the other will be a civil rights activist. After collecting information, together the students will create an interview. They will prepare 4-5 key questions with responses. One of the questions should be about the song, “We Shall Overcome.” Example questions: *How did you feel as you sang the song during a protest? How do you feel today when you hear the song? Do you still sing the song today and what memories or feelings does it evoke?* Encourage students to come up with their own unique questions.

**4. Model an interview with a student and provide partners time to practice the role-play interview to present to the class.** Each interview should range between 3-5 minutes. Encourage students to look at photos and dress as the Freedom Riders would have dressed.

**5. Design a news anchor studio for students to rehearse.** Students can stand as if conducting an outdoor interview, sit in a news studio, or set-up like a talk show.

### **Reflect**

**1. Present interviews to the class.** Have each group conduct their interviews in front of the class. Assess students' biographical knowledge of a Freedom Rider. After each interview, ask students to do a "Think, Pair, Share" while the next pair prepares. They will get up and move to someone they have not talked to and discuss their interesting point from the interview. This allows movement and opportunity to process the information.

**2. Optional reflection.** Freedom Riders put their personal lives on hold to dedicate time and energy to a movement. Reflect on the following questions:

- *What are examples of personal sacrifice that you've seen?*
- *What causes are important to you?*
- *What can we learn from the Freedom Riders?*
- *What kinds of inequalities exist in our world?*
- *What can you do when you see inequality?*

### **Extend**

**1. Invite a local community organizer or civil rights activist to talk to the class about nonviolent protest.** Identify a local issue that students can learn about and become involved in, such as hunger, climate change, racism, healthcare, human rights, etc.

### **Credits**

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