**GET ON THE BUS**
Music & the Movement

**Grades**  K – 5

**Objective**  To examine the role of music in social movements; to learn, adapt and sing an original version of *Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around*

**Materials**  Access to internet for research, chart paper for lyrics

**Background**

Music is an important part of *Get On The Bus*, just as it was crucial to the Civil Rights Movement itself. Music helps tell the story and frame the historical moment, but it also represents one of the tools in the activist’s tool box. Popular music can communicate ideas across large populations, to create awareness or specify a position. Songs, like marches, chants and signs, are participatory expressions of a cause. Activists can sing them to onlookers, adversaries, and each other. Songs can rally participants in a social movement, or console them when challenges arise.

In *Get On The Bus*, the characters sing in a couple different instances. The songs are actual songs from the Civil Rights Movement, sung acapella, just as the original Freedom Riders sang on the buses and when they were jailed. Vivian and Carl sing *Aint Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around*, with lyrics shared by original Freedom Rider, Earnest “Rip” Patton, Jr. Earlier, Vivian teaches Thalia and James the song, *If You Miss Me From the Back of the Bus*, a song that challenged the Jim Crow laws of the South. Another popular song among the Freedom Riders was *Hallelujah, I'm a Travelling*. Many of these songs use the melodies of spirituals and gospel songs with new lyrics to reflect the cause.

The songs of the Civil Rights Movement are participatory music, which works well developmentally with young learners since participatory, hands on (voices on) modalities resonate especially well with this age group. When exploring this musical repertoire, never let your musical expertise (or lack thereof) get in the way. Classroom teachers without musical experience can invite the class to sing along to audio or video recordings (links below) or collaborate with music specialists to help students delve into the music.

**Lesson Procedure**

1.) Reflect
   Ask students how music added to *Get On The Bus*.
   - When and why did characters sing?
   - What was the feel of the music in those moments?
   - What about the instrumental music – how was it used in the production?

2.) Research
   As a class, view *Freedom Riders: The Music* from *American Experience* up through 2:18. Before viewing, ask students to consider how music was used by the original Freedom Riders. Who sang it? When? Why?
Access the clip at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuZQkl09Jho or https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amERICANexperience/features/freedom-ridERS-mUssiC/.

Next, share with students the important role of music in helping people keep their spirits up and share their message as they worked for a change. The Roots covering “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around” is a great visual juxtaposition of contemporary musicians singings a Civil Rights song with footage from the original movement.

3.) Sing
Using video or audio recordings, sing by ear or collaborate with the music specialist at your school to sing songs like:
- Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around
- We Shall Overcome
- This Little Light of Mine
- Eyes On The Prize
- Hallelujah, I’m a Travelling
- If You Miss Me at the Back of the Bus

4.) Create
Just as activists of the Civil Rights Movement applied topical lyrics to existing melodies, work with your class to identify causes they are passionate about and create your own lyrics based on those issues. It could be about “big” social issues or classroom community issues like sharing, anti-bullying, and so on. Consider starting with a basic song structure:

Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me around
Turn me around, turn me around
Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me around
Keep on a-walkin’, keep on a-talkin’
Marching on to Freedom’s Land

Experiment with first/third line substitutions with this structure:
- Ain’t gonna let _________ turn me around
- Ain’t gonna let no _________ turn me around

Vary the final line to fit your topic, such as:
Gonna build a brand new world
- Marching on to _________
- Walking on to _________
- Working for _________
- Building up _________

Additional Online Resources:
Lesson on the history of This Little Light of Mine from Smithsonian Folkways
Recordings of Freedom Songs from Smithsonian Folkways
Music of the Civil Rights Movement (free audio and lesson plans from TeachRock)
Music in the Civil Rights Movement (Article from PBS)
The Roots covering “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around”
Civil Rights Songs (community scholarship)