

Where Blooming Flowers Meet the Sky

The Power of Song



Grades K – 5

Objective To examine the roll of music in social movements; to learn, adapt and sing an original version of *Feeling Good*

Materials Access to internet for research, chart paper for lyrics

Background

This lesson focuses on Nina Simone’s iconic interpretation of “Feeling Good.” A continually popular song covered by everyone from Sammy Davis, Jr. and Lauryn Hill to John Legend, George Michael and Michael Bublé. In addition to being a show stopper, the song has come to signify Black joy.

Music is an important part of *Where Blooming Flowers Meet the Sky*, 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 toolbox. Popular music can communicate ideas across large populations, to create awareness or specify a position. Songs, like rallies, 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 *Where Blooming Flowers Meet the Sky*, we meet the iconic “High Priestess of Soul,” Nina Simone, a musical powerhouse at the piano and at the microphone. Simone had originally intended to pursue classical piano. Denied admission, she came to perform in clubs as both a pianist and singer. Living the day-to-day realities of the Civil Rights era, her music expanded from the usual repertoire of love songs to hard-hitting critiques of injustice and rallying cries for Black dignity.

Ms. Simone asserted that “Every song that I sing is important, that it communicates something to someone. It is not just a song. It’s something that says something to someone... Something that communicates and gets into the soul of people.”

Music of the Civil Rights Era and young learners

The songs of the Civil Rights Movement are participatory music, which work 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** (If students have already seen the performance. If not, go to Step 2)
Ask students to reflect on how music was integrated in *Where Blooming Flowers Meet the Sky*.
 - When and why did characters sing?
 - What was the feel of the music in those moments?

- 2.) **Investigate**
As a class, view the recently released official video for Nina Simone's version of "Feeling Good." Featuring dance and images of family, home and wellness, it conjures up images of what might make us feel good. https://youtu.be/oHRNrgDIJfo?si=KQzjh1BA_QjsiZb9

- 4.) **Connect**
Distribute or project the lyrics to the song (provided below). What are the phrases that Nina Simone uses to describe what makes her feel good? For example, her lyrics describe noticing simple and beautiful things in nature. What are they? Highlight or list the phrases.

- 5.) **Create**
Invite students to craft some of their own phrases about what makes them feel good. Consider starting with phrases tied to nature, as done by Simone – it could be the warmth of sunshine on our skin, the sound of rain, etc.

From there, expand into having students name/describe activities, special people, places, etc that bring them simple joy and make them "feel good."

- 6.) **Synthesize**
Use the basic structure of Nina Simone's rendition of "Feeling Good" and substitute students' own phrases and descriptions. Students' phrases will go in the verse, followed by "You know how I feel" or "You know what I mean", followed by the chorus as is.

[Student-generated description]

You know how I feel

[Student-generated description]

You know how I feel

[Student-generated description]

You know how I feel

It's a new dawn

It's a new day

It's a new life

For me

And I'm feeling good

I'm feeling good

Phrases can be adapted for the number of syllables, to fit in the song.

Songs can be created as a class or by students individually.

Optional: For a stronger phonics/literary connection, consider examining the rhyming scheme that Simone uses (sun/fun/done; high/sky/by; etc) in the verses. Challenge students to create their own rhyming scheme.

Optional: Create illustrated lyric sheets that include illustrations by students of the things that make them feel good.

7.) Perform! (Optional)

Sing the song you created! Either live or by creating a recording. Here's a link to a karaoke track you can use to accompany your song:

Full karaoke (verse 1 and chorus 1 acapella):

<https://youtu.be/KHigN-Sgk5I?si=kN5JcfOpb3sKd9IV>

Karaoke version starting at instrumental entrance:

<https://youtu.be/KHigN-Sgk5I?si=HaTxlev-12ULhbsO&t=45>

Additional Online Resources:

Children's Videos and Picture Book Recommendations at <https://www.ninasimone.com/for-kids/>

More resources for the music of the Civil Rights Movement:

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)

LYRICS TO FEELING GOOD ON NEXT PAGE

Feeling Good, by Anthony Newley and Leslie Bricusse, 1964

Birds flying high
You know how I feel
Sun in the sky
You know how I feel
Breeze driftin' on by
You know how I feel

It's a new dawn
It's a new day
It's a new life
For me
And I'm feeling good
I'm feeling good

Fish in the sea
You know how I feel
River running free
You know how I feel
Blossom on a tree
You know how I feel

It's a new dawn
It's a new day
It's a new life
For me
And I'm feeling good

Dragonfly out in the sun, you know what
I mean, don't you know
Butterflies all havin' fun, you know what I
mean
Sleep in peace when day is done, that's
what I mean
And this old world is a new world
And a bold world
For me
For me

Stars when you shine
You know how I feel
Scent of the pine
You know how I feel
Oh, freedom is mine
And I know how I feel

It's a new dawn
It's a new day
It's a new life

It's a new dawn
It's a new day
It's a new life
It's a new dawn
It's a new day
It's a new life
It's a new life
For me

And I'm feeling good
I'm feeling good