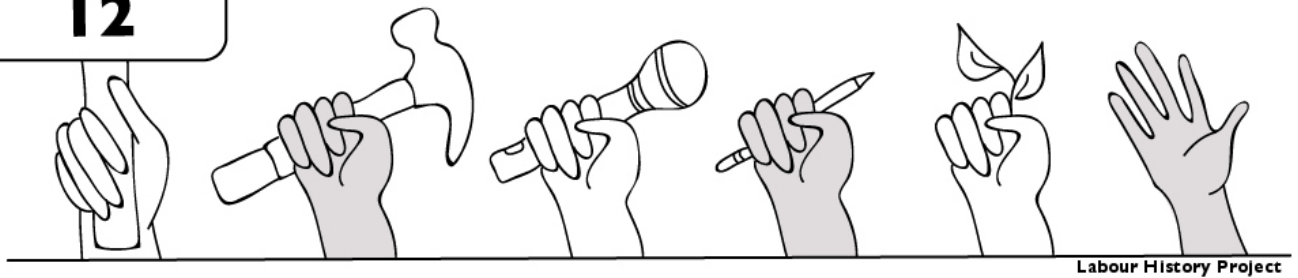




Lesson 13: Labour Songs



Labour History Project

Lesson Summary: Analysis of key labour anthems and opportunities for students to research and/or develop creative social justice projects.

Time: One or more classes depending on extension activities

Essential Question: What role have songs played in social justice movements?

Lesson Activities

1. Explain the purpose of the lesson by discussing the objectives below.
2. Discuss: can students think of any songs about social justice? Can music and song tell us anything about people from the past? Can it do anything to achieve social justice today?
3. Divide the class into five groups. Distribute one song for each group.
4. Have each group read the lyrics to their song and discuss its meaning; focus on the answers to the assigned questions.
5. When all the groups have reported, discuss together, or write about, the common themes in all five songs. What can it tell us about workers lives in the past?

Learning Objectives

Music has played a role in many social justice movements. From the civil rights movement in the United States in the 50s and 60s to the Singing Revolution in Estonia in the 80s and 90s, from protest music against the war in Vietnam and the foot stomping and Toyi-Toyi chants of the anti Apartheid era, people use music in their demands for change.

Songs are oral history, capturing the concerns, interest, and mood of the people. They are the voices of those who are often silenced.

Songs have always been an important part of labour's fight for social justice. On picket lines, around campfires, and in union halls, workers have enjoyed themselves, remembered their history, and expressed solidarity with one another through song. In the first two decades of the 20th century, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), 'Wobblies' for short, were very active in British Columbia organizing miners, loggers, and railroad workers. They have left us a strong tradition of union militancy and a musical heritage that still can be heard where workers gather.

Social Justice Prescribed Learning Outcomes:

Access a range of information sources on selected topics, including sources from a range of media producers, including mainstream and alternative sources.

Differentiate between written and non-written histories and information.

Assess the contributions of particular individuals and groups who are identified with struggles for social justice

Extension Activities (Possibilities)

See **Handout #13b Art, Action, and Social Justice**

1. Students might choose a song from the handout or on their own and research its connection to a social justice issue.
2. Students might research an art-action that addresses social justice theme, such as visual or performing arts, or create a video.
3. Students might create their own art action on a social justice theme.

*Adapted from Youth, Unions, and You: A Secondary Teacher's Guide to Labour Studies for B.C. Schools. A Joint project of the B.C. Teachers' Federation and the B.C. Federation of Labour May 2001
<http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/public/TeachingResources/YouthUnionsYou/index.html>