



MUSICUNITESUS

Lesson Plan: *Sol y Canto and the Nueva Canción*, 9th grade Social Studies

Context

This lesson has been written specifically to prepare 9th grade Social Studies students at Waltham High School for Sol Y Canto's *MusicUnitesUS* performance at Brandeis in February. Sol Y Canto is a Latin musical ensemble based in Boston, and this performance in particular will focus on the *Nueva Canción* (New Song) movement in Latin America. According to the school curriculum, the 9th grade will be focusing on Latin America during the month of January, hence the timing of this lesson/performance.

Goals

Students will:

- Review the causes of the social unrest in Latin America during the 20th century, particularly those that gave rise to the *Nueva Canción* movement (the focal point of Sol Y Canto's performance)
- Investigate the power of art as a vehicle for protest and change
- Identify examples of social injustice in contemporary United States
- Produce a "protest song" of their own that exhibits understandings of the importance of lyrics, style, instruments used, and audience.

Assessment

Formative: Teachers will evaluate students' level of understanding and engagement throughout the two-day lesson during the various periods of discussion and class activities.

Summative: Students will compose their own "protest songs," which will be evaluated according to the students' demonstrated understanding of role of lyrics, style, instrumentation, and audience.

Frameworks

This lesson augments the Latin America unit already in place at Waltham High School and pertains to the following Social Studies Frameworks as published by the Massachusetts Department of Education.

WHII.16 Identify the major developments of Latin American history to the early 20th century.

(H, E)

- *economic and social stratification*
- *the role of the church*
- *the growing influence of the United States*

WHII.38 Describe the development and goals of nationalist movements in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, including the ideas and importance of nationalist leaders. (H)

Materials

Students' Social Studies text (*World History: Connections to Today*)

Blackboard/whiteboard

Worksheets (attached)

Lesson Plan

Preparation

Depending on how recently the students finished the Latin America unit, teachers should probably have them prepare for the lesson (as a homework assignment) by re-reading pages 934-937 in their Social Studies text and compiling a list of the causes of social unrest in mid-century Latin America (social stratification, population growth and poverty, and rapid urbanization, among others).

Day 1

Introduction and Review (10 minutes)

The teacher introduces this two-day lesson by explaining that the class will be looking at one way that people across the world, and in particular Latin America, have tried to change the political realities of their nations. The teacher and students briefly prepare for the lesson by listing the causes of social unrest in mid-century Latin America on the blackboard, where all of the students can see them. It may be helpful have students give background on each of the causes as they list them.

Pair Activity (10 minutes)

Students get into pairs and respond to the following question for 5 minutes. They should be prepared to explain their answers with the class (though there will only be time for a few students to do so).

“Imagine that you lived in Latin America during the mid-20th century and wanted to fight the injustices that you saw all around you. There are many things that you could do to try and change your society. You could run for political office, you could write editorials in newspapers and magazines, you could use violence to forcibly change things, you could use religious arguments and inspiration, or you could use the arts (dance, poetry, music, etc). Which method do *you* think would be the most effective? Which do you choose and why?”

Nueva Canción Introduction (5 minutes)

The students are probably aware of those who attempted to fight injustice in Latin America through violent means, and they may also be aware of those who used liberation theology (one of their vocabulary words in the textbook). *Nueva Canción* (“New Song”) refers to a movement that started in Argentina and Chile in which musicians fought for new governments and social justice through music, especially what they termed “commitment” songs (we’ll call them “protest songs.”) These musicians used simple lyrics to highlight the injustices they saw and to inspire people to work toward a better society. Often they used traditional Andean instruments such as the *charango* (a small, 10-stringed, fretted instrument using an armadillo shell for the resonating chamber), the *zampoñas* (pan pipes), and the *queña* (bamboo flute), all of which reminded Chilean and Argentine people of their amazing heritage. Victor Jara, a Chilean musician, was one of the most famous members of the *Nueva Canción* movement.

Investigating Jara's Lyrics

During this portion of the class, the students and teacher will investigate two of Jara's songs. Spanish-speakers will be able to help by translating the titles and providing linguistic nuance.

- Pass out Day 1 Materials (two songs).
- Ask for a volunteer to read "Canción de cuna para un niño vago" aloud.
- Lead class in discussion of the song with the help of the below questions.
- Repeat process with the longer "Plegaria a un Labrador."
- Listen to both songs (provided on the CD) and discuss the power of the music when added to the words.

Questions for "Canción de cuna para un niño vago."

1. Who is this about? [a child who is so poor that he lives on the street in one of Argentina's cities]
2. How does this song connect to the causes of social unrest listed on the board? [poverty and urbanization are obvious connections]
3. What does the line "a child dreams of flying" mean? Does the child really dream of flying? [perhaps, but it is also a symbol - profound optimism pervades Jara's work]
4. What do you think Jara is trying to say about the connection between love and money in Verse 3? [open-ended]
5. What do you think is Jara's goal in singing this song? [open-ended]
6. How do the words of this song make you feel?

Questions for "Plegaria a un labrador"

1. What is a laborer?
2. Why do you think Jara frames this song as a prayer? [many answers, but note the connection to Liberation Theology if it has been covered in the unit]
3. In line 6, Jara exhorts the laborer to look upon his hands. What do you think "hands" might represent? Why might they be an appropriate symbol for laborers in Chile?
4. Can you find a line where Jara shows that he is optimistic about changing the future? ["Today is the time/when we can shape tomorrow"]
5. What prayer do you recognize in verses 2 and 3? [The Lord's Prayer]
6. Does Jara really have a gun? What might the gun symbolize? [Jara's "gun" was actually his song - it was his method of forcing change]

Final Discussion Questions

1. Which song do you like the best? Do you think it is possible to judge a song just based on the words, or do you need to hear the music? (Think of your favorite songs - is it the words or the music that you actually love?)
2. Now listen to the recordings of the songs on the CD. Do you still have the same opinion about which song is best? What does the music add that the words cannot?
3. What does this tell you about the power of musicians?

Homework Assignment

Each student should brainstorm three injustices s/he sees in the United States today. Students should list these injustices, along with a sentence for each injustice explaining why s/he believes it is an injustice. Some examples could be poverty, racism, environmental issues, abortion rights, or the war in Iraq.

Day 2

Start-up (5 minutes)

Ask students to get out their homework and then share their lists with a partner. This should only take a few minutes.

Class Reading and Discussion (20 minutes)

Pass out the Day 2 materials.

- Have one student read aloud the account of Victor Jara's death. Ask the students to respond. Are they surprised that he was killed for his music? Why did Pinochet think that Jara (and other musicians and artists) were so dangerous?
- Ask another student to read aloud the Pinochet section. Ask the students to respond. Do they agree with the argument presented? Is censorship ever appropriate? If so, when?
- Initiate a conversation about power. It would seem that in this particular situation, General Pinochet is very powerful (in control of the country and its military), and Victor Jara, as a musician, is not. Why, then, was Pinochet so concerned about Jara and those like him? *What does this say about the power of art?*
- Think back to Jara's songs that you read and heard yesterday. Would they have been as powerful if they were only poems? *What about music makes it powerful?*

Student Project (20 minutes)

The rest of class time (and probably the night's homework activity) should be dedicated to students composing their own "protest songs." For this song they will pick an issue they care about, decide to whom the song should be directed, pick what style of music would be most appropriate for this audience, and propose what instruments might be appropriate. They will do everything but write the music itself! A worksheet is attached.

Student projects may be shared with the class or posted around the room for everyone's enjoyment!

Bibliography

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