



The Music and Poetry Behind the Red Power Movement

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What was the Red Power movement, and what role did Folk and Country music play within it?

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students are introduced to the activist music of Buffy Sainte-Marie, Peter La Farge, and Johnny Cash, as well as the Native American Red Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s. By analyzing clips from RUMBLE:

The Indians Who Rocked The World and examining historical documents, students will gain a deeper understanding of the history of Native American social movements, their tactics, the Federal Government's response to the movement, and the ways music might have contributed to their goals. Students also draw connections between the poetry of John Trudell and Ishmael Hope and the motivations and ideas behind the Red Power Movement.



When 21-year old college graduate Buffy Sainte-Marie arrived to Greenwich Village in 1962, the neighborhood was already a hotbed of socially-aware folk music. Village regulars like Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and Phil Ochs were at the forefront of a national movement that mixed political activism with music, reviving protest songs of the past and penning new ones for the present. Sainte-Marie's songwriting quickly caught the attention of Peter La Farge, a fellow folk musician and Greenwich Village mainstay. The son of anthropologist and Native American advocate Oliver La Farge, Peter shared with Sainte-Marie a passion for bringing to light the historic tragedies and the contemporary injustices Native Americans experienced. La Farge supported Sainte-Marie, writing praises for her in Folk publications and inviting her to musical events he organized.

That same year, La Farge and Sainte-Marie's musical advocacy gained a perhaps unlikely ally: country music superstar Johnny Cash. Following his 1962 debut performance at Carnegie Hall, Cash and friend Ed McCurdy decided to spend the remainder of the evening at Greenwich Village's Gaslight Cafe. There, Cash first saw La Farge perform. The two became friends, and Cash embraced the Native American issues La Farge and Sainte-Marie advocated in their music. When it came time to record a new album, Cash created *Bitter Tears: Ballads of the American Indian*, an album comprised largely of songs written by La Farge about the plight of Native Americans. Aided by Cash's national celebrity, the message of Sainte-Marie, and particularly La Farge, was spread beyond the confines of Greenwich Village and the countercultural movement.

OVERVIEW (CONTINUED)

Sainte-Marie, La Farge, and Cash were part of a growing “Red Power” movement that advocated for Native American causes. In 1961, for instance, a collection of Native American college students and young people in Chicago established The National Indian Youth Council, with the goal to foster solidarity across tribes and fight for land and resource rights. In 1968, a group of disenfranchised urban Native Americans in Minnesota founded the American Indian Movement (AIM) to protest ongoing relocation and termination programs that were affecting reservations. Based in San Francisco, the United Native Americans (U.N.A) began advocating for better schools and hospitals in reservations that same year. Collectively, these groups staged a wide range of protests, including the occupation of Mt. Rushmore, Alcatraz Island, Wounded Knee, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs office in Washington, D.C.

These Native American organizations, like so many other activist groups of the era, were viewed with distrust and even stymied by many in the government. The FBI’s notorious Counterintelligence Program was tasked with disrupting “subversive” organizations such as AIM and U.N.A., a project it enacted through espionage, character assassination, infiltration, harassment, psychological warfare, and, at times, direct violence. Many Native leaders and individuals were harassed and even arrested on questionable charges, and their organizations struggled. Sainte-Marie, La Farge, and Cash were viewed as “subversive” as well, and the FBI pressured DJs and others in the music industry to attempt to suppress their pro-Native music.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The development of the Greenwich Village folk scene in the 1960s
- The role of Buffy St. Marie, Peter La Farge, and Johnny Cash as advocates for Native American rights
- The Alcatraz occupation, the Mount Rushmore occupation, the Trail of Broken Treaties, and other key events in the Red Power movement in the 1960s and 1970s
- The conflict between the Red Power movement and the Federal Government, particularly the FBI
- The role folk music plays in social movements
- Dennis Banks as an important historical figure
- The poetry of John Trudell and Ishmael Hope

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Through analysis of video clips and historical documents, students will be able to recognize how Native Americans participated in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

ACTIVITIES

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Show students **Image 1, “Martin Luther King, Jr.”**, but do not announce his name. Then ask students to raise their hand if they know who is pictured. Choose a student to identify the image and explain to the class why the person pictured is historically important.
2. Repeat this process for **Image 2, “Rosa Parks,”** and **Image 3, “César Chávez.”** Each time, ask students why the people featured are important, providing context clues if necessary.
3. Show students **Image 4, “Dennis Banks,”** and ask them if they know the person in the photo. If no students can identify him, ask students:
 - Based upon the clues from this picture, what might this person’s background be?
 - How might this person fit in with the other figures discussed earlier?

4. Tell students the man featured is Dennis Banks, a Chippewa activist and a leading figure in the Red Power movement. Ask students:

- What kinds of issues might have Banks fought for? How might his issues differ from those of the other figures? (*Encourage students to think about things unique to Native American communities: that they occupy their own lands, make treaties and agreements with the United States government, etc.*)
- Why might Dennis Banks not be as well known as Martin Luther King, Jr., César Chávez or Rosa Parks?

PROCEDURE:

1. Explain to students that they will be examining the Native American protest movement in the 1960s and 1970s, and considering the role music played within it. Play **Clip 1, “Peter La Farge and Buffy Sainte-Marie.”** Ask students:

- What does Antonino D’Ambrosio argue is the function of Folk music? How is that function different from mainstream popular music?
- What do you think Peter La Farge might have been doing that caused John Trudell to refer to him as, “the man”?
- Trudell remembers La Farge “addressing the reality we were going through and how we felt about it.” How might such actions have a positive effect for Native American communities? (*Encourage students to think through how La Farge might be educating non-Native people about Native American history and issues, and how he might instill confidence and pride in Native people.*)

2. Play **Clip 2, “Blacklisted.”** Ask students:

- Why might Columbia Records executives not have wanted Johnny Cash to release *Bitter Tears*? What about the album do you think they were against?

- According to Adam Beach, what was the result of the banning of *Bitter Tears*?
- Why does Buffy Sainte-Marie suggest her music was banned from radio?
- Why would the government want to keep Buffy Sainte-Marie “silenced,” as Trudell mentions? What power do you think the music of Sainte-Marie, Cash, and La Farge might have? What might be some examples of things considered “culture” by this definition?

3. Tell students that musicians such as Peter La Farge, Buffy Sainte Marie, and Johnny Cash could be considered part of the Red Power Movement, which fought for Indigenous rights and justice throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Pass out to students **Handout 1 - *Diablo Canyon, John Trudell.*** Individually, in groups, or as class, read the poem. Then ask students:

- What experience is Trudell recounting in the poem?
- What was Trudell’s response to being arrested?
- What might Trudell mean when he writes, “I was the Vietcong, I was Crazy Horse”?

- Why did Trudell express pity for those who arrested him?
 - Where does Trudell find his strength during the ordeal described in the poem?
 - Who might Trudell be addressing in the final stanza of the poem?
 - What connections might you draw between John Trudell's activism and the activism of Sainte-Marie, Cash, and La Farge?
4. Explain to students that they will be receiving sets of historical documents to further investigate Native American movements during the 1960s and 1970s. Break students into small groups. Distribute **Handout 1: Questions for Document Sets** to each group, as well as **Document Sets 1, 2, and 3**. After student groups have looked through all the documents and answered the questions in the handout, discuss group answers as a class.

SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Ask students:
- What kinds of issues were Native American social movements addressing in the 1960s and 1970s?
 - What were some of the tactics they used to bring issues of social injustice to light?
 - What kinds of threats did the Federal Government see in these movements? How did they respond?
 - What role might have music, especially folk music, played in Native American social movements?
 - In what ways were the Native American protest movement similar to that of the Civil Rights movement of Martin Luther King, Jr.? In what ways were they different?
 - In what ways were the Native American protest movement similar to that of the Civil Rights movement of Martin Luther King, Jr.? In what ways were they different?
 - In what ways might the ideals of the Red Power Movement be present today?

5. Pass out **Handout 3 - *Canoe Launching into the Gaslit Sea, Ishmael Hope***. Individually, in groups, or as class, read the poem. Then ask students:

- What might Hope be attempting to do in this poem?
- What kinds of activities is Hope suggesting? What might be the intended purpose of these activities?
- How would you describe the tone or feeling of the poem?
- In what ways might this poem connect to the views of actions of the Red Power Movement?
- Could this poem in itself be considered a kind of activism? Why or why not?



EXTENSION ACTIVITY

1. Do some web research on the Idle No More movement (<http://www.idlenomore.ca/>) and the Standing Rock group (<http://standwithstandingrock.net/>). Write a short essay on the ways these new social movements compare and contrast with the Native American Red Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Are these contemporary groups advocating for the same issues that groups like AIM did in the past? Are their protest techniques similar or different?
2. **Writing Prompt:** Today, does Folk Music remain the primary genre that addresses social justice issues? Or have other popular genres come to fulfill the political role Folk Music maintained decades ago? If so, which genres?

STANDARDS

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading (K-12)

Reading 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Reading 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Reading 4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone

Reading 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Reading 8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

Reading 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing (K-12)

Writing 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Writing 7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Writing 9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening (K-12)

Speaking and Listening 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Speaking and Listening 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.



SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 9: Global Connections Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

Core Music Standard: Responding

Analyze: Analyze how the structure and context of varied musical works inform the response.

Interpret: Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators' and/or performers' expressive intent.

Evaluate: Support evaluations of musical works and performances based on analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.

Core Music Standard: Connecting

Connecting 11: Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.

NEW JERSEY STATE LEARNING STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Reading

NJSLSA.R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences and relevant connections from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

NJSLSA.R6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

NJSLSA.R8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

NJSLSA.R9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Writing

NJSLSA.W1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

NJSLSA.W7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects, utilizing an inquiry-based research process, based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

NJSLSA.W9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

RESOURCES

VIDEO RESOURCES

- Rumble – Buffy Sainte-Marie and Peter La Farge
- Rumble – Blacklisted

HANDOUTS

- Handout 1 - “*Diablo Canyon*, John Trudell.”
- Handout 2 - Questions for Document Sets
- Handout 3 - “*Canoe Launching into the Gaslit Sea*, Ishmael Hope”
- Document Set 1: Native American Protests and Occupations
- Document Set 2: Song Lyrics
- Document Set 3: Government Response