



## Lesson Plan: Music as Social Protest

### OVERVIEW:

This lesson plan is designed to be used in conjunction with the film *Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars*, the story of a band born in a West African refugee camp that chooses to fight back against their suffering and circumstances with music. **Note: A significant portion of the film has subtitles. In addition, the film includes graphic war images and accounts of atrocities. Please preview before showing the entire film in a classroom setting.**

P.O.V. documentaries can be taped off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from the initial broadcast. In addition, P.O.V. offers a lending library of DVD's and VHS tapes that you can borrow anytime during the school year — FOR FREE!

### OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Analyze a song about the recent civil war in Sierra Leone
- Discuss the role of social protest music
- Write new lyrics to an existing song to address a current social issue
- Present their original protest songs to classmates

**GRADE LEVELS:** 9-12

**SUBJECTS:** Geography, World History, Music

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Political map of Africa
- Handout: Viewing Guide and Song Analysis (PDF file)
- Method (varies by school) of showing the class a video clip from the P.O.V. Web site for *Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars*, or have a copy of the film and a VHS/DVD player and monitor.
- One or two examples of other protest songs. A good source of ideas is the Independent Lens protest song feature, *Strange Fruit* ([www.pbs.org/independentlens/strangefruit/protest.html](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/strangefruit/protest.html))

**ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED:** Two 50-minute class periods, plus homework

### SUGGESTED CLIP:

Performance of "Weapon Conflict" in Sembakounya Refugee Camp (2:49 min)  
(The clip begins at 3:15 with text on the screen: "Sembakounya Refugee Camp, Republic of Guinea." The clip ends at 6:04 with the performance of "Weapon Conflict.")

### BACKGROUND:

Created in the late 18th century by freed slaves from the British colonies in the West Indies, Sierra Leone gained independence in 1961. From 1991-2002, a brutal civil war displaced more than 2 million people (about a third of the population), caused at least

50,000 deaths, and brought about the mutilation of an estimated 100,000 men, women, and children. Hundreds of thousands of civilians from Sierra Leone, including those who formed the band Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars, found refuge in the neighboring country of Guinea, primarily in camps run by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Once peace was reestablished in Sierra Leone, the UNHCR began actively repatriating Sierra Leoneans from the camps. By mid-2004 UNHCR reported that fewer than 2,000 Sierra Leonean refugees remained in Guinea. Those who chose to stay will be integrated into Guinean society and will no longer receive UNHCR aid.

**ACTIVITY:**

1. To set the stage for the lesson, have the music of the band Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars playing in the background as the students enter the classroom. If you go to the filmmaker's Web site (<http://refugeeallstars.org>), you can find mp3 clips of the band's music. Alternately, you can download one of their songs from an online music provider.
2. Show students the location of Sierra Leone and Guinea on a map of Africa. Explain that from 1991 to 2002, Sierra Leone was devastated by civil war. Civilians were the victims of brutal murders, mutilations, and other atrocities committed by soldiers on each side of the war. To escape the violence, hundreds of thousands of Sierra Leoneans fled to the neighboring country of Guinea, where they lived for years in United Nations refugee camps.
3. Pass out the lesson handout and explain that while in a refugee camp, a number of musicians came together to fight back against their circumstances using their music. They formed a band called Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars, and the class is going to watch as they sing their song, "Weapon Conflict." Go over the questions on the handout to help focus student viewing, and then show the clip (length: 2:45).
4. Use the handout to analyze the song as a class. As part of the discussion, explain that while living in refugee camps, the band was able to visit several other camps to perform their music. Ask students how the band's music might have helped them and other refugees cope with their circumstances (e.g., provided a place of refuge and escape from everyday realities, gave them a source of power, provided a sense of purpose, built unity among refugees, raised awareness of their situation, helped refugees deal with loss, etc.)
5. Discuss the role of protest music and provide an example or two of other protest songs that students might be more familiar with. Use the questions from the handout to examine the content of these other examples.
6. For homework, challenge students to identify a social issue of importance to them, research it, and then write original protest song lyrics to a tune of their choice. For example, students could address concerns about an environmental issue with original lyrics set to the tune of, "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." Or students could choose a favorite pop song to which they could match their lyrics. Encourage them to be creative!
7. Allow time for student presentations of their original protest songs. Consider asking for volunteers to perform for the class, or break students into smaller groups to share their work. Then, have students submit their lyric sheets. (Be sure students indicate on their lyric sheets the tune to which the lyrics are set.)

## **ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS:**

Students can be assessed on:

- Analysis provided on the Viewing Guide and Song Analysis handout
- Contributions in discussions
- Understanding of current social issues as demonstrated in their original song lyrics
- Presentations of their protest songs

## **EXTENSIONS & ADAPTATIONS:**

- Have students match images to their protest songs in a musical slideshow. Or let them explore the music and performances of Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars by making music videos with the songs and footage of the band available on the P.O.V. Web site.
- The P.O.V. Web site features additional scenes with Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars taped after the film was completed. Explain that after the civil war ended, the band members returned to Sierra Leone and recorded their music. They have been able to go on tour, perform their music, appear on The Oprah Winfrey Show, work with bands like Aerosmith and U2 to record new music, and much more. Students can watch exclusive video on the P.O.V. Web site to find out more about life on the road with the band and write news stories describing their activities.
- Put together a class film festival featuring African issues. In addition to *Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars*, P.O.V. has also featured *Rain in a Dry Land* (Somalian refugees resettling in the U.S.), *LUMO* (a young woman suffering from a fistula in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and *Lost Boys of Sudan* (two Sudanese "lost boys" are resettled in the U.S.) Other films on African issues include FRONTLINE/World's *Sierra Leone: Gunrunners* or *Sudan: The Quick and the Terrible*, plus Wide Angle's *Democracy in the Rough* (Democratic Republic of the Congo), *Ladies First* (Rwanda), and *AIDS Warriors* (Angola). After watching the films, have students compare and contrast the situations in each country and the perspectives that were shared.
- Use the lesson's analysis of the song "Weapon Conflict" as an introduction to the reading of the memoir, "A Long Way Gone", by Ishmael Beah. This account from a former child soldier in Sierra Leone's civil war describes how the war came to the author's community, how he got involved in the fighting, and how he was later able to be rehabilitated and rejoin civilian life. The Web site for this book ([www.alongwaygone.com](http://www.alongwaygone.com)) features video clips of the author and a book excerpt. Have students determine how and why the civil war began, how the conflict evolved over time, and how it changed Sierra Leonean culture. Also, explore the methodology used by soldiers to recruit children to fight in the war. Point out that an estimated 300,000 child soldiers may be fighting in more than 50 conflicts worldwide.
- Learn more about refugees by visiting [ninemillion.org](http://ninemillion.org), a site that features the song, "Living Like a Refugee" by Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars, includes a map that shows how the plight of refugees is a worldwide problem, and provides photos, video clips, and essays describing visits to refugee camps. Students could use this information to educate others about refugees, raise funds to

donate to organizations that support refugees, or inspire creative writing about life in a refugee camp.

- Use the lesson's song analysis as a springboard for examining social protest music in U.S. History. The Web site for Independent Lens' film *Strange Fruit* ([www.pbs.org/independentlens/strangefruit/protest.html](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/strangefruit/protest.html)) provides a timeline of such music from 1776 to the present, and includes lyrics, music clips, and historical context.
- Watch the entire film, *Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars* (**Due to some graphic war images and accounts of atrocities, be sure to preview before classroom use**). Discuss life in a refugee camp, how such camps are funded, and the services provided by the United Nations.

## RESOURCES:

### Afropop Worldwide

[www.afropop.org/multi/interview/ID/105/Reuben+Koroma-Refugee+Alls+Stars-2006](http://www.afropop.org/multi/interview/ID/105/Reuben+Koroma-Refugee+Alls+Stars-2006)

The Web site for this public-radio series introduces people to a wide range of world music and includes an interview with Reuben Koroma and a review of the band's CD.

### Cry Freetown

[www.cryfreetown.org](http://www.cryfreetown.org)

The Web site of a film documenting the 1999 rebel attack in Freetown includes an excellent set of links representing diverse groups, as well as general background on the conflict, including information on the diamond trade.

### Sierra Leone Web

[www.sierra-leone.org/](http://www.sierra-leone.org/)

A convenient gateway to a broad range of information about Sierra Leone.

### United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone

[www.un.org/depts/dpk/missions/unamsil/index.html](http://www.un.org/depts/dpk/missions/unamsil/index.html)

This Web site provides an account of the Sierra Leonean peace process from the perspective of the United Nations.

## STANDARDS:

These standards are drawn from "Content Knowledge," a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at [www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/](http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/).

### Arts and Communication

Standard 3: Uses critical and creative thinking in various arts and communication settings.

Level IV, Benchmark 8: Knows ways in which different sources are used to produce art forms.

### Geography

Standard 9: Understands the nature, distribution and migration of human populations on Earth's surface.

Standard 10: Understands the nature and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics.

Standard 13: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface.

### **Language Arts**

Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes.

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

### **Music**

Standard 7: Understands the relationship between music and history and culture.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in broadcast journalism, secondary education, and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive's Director of Education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource Web site (now PBS Teachers), and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and Northern Virginia.

### **Background Sources:**

Sierra Leone. CIA World Factbook. Updated February 8, 2007.  
<https://cia.gov/cia//publications/factbook/geos/sl.html>

Sierra Leone. UNHCR Country Information. UNHCR.  
[www.unhcr.org/country/sle.html](http://www.unhcr.org/country/sle.html)