

MUSIC · GRADES 5–6

# Songs of the Movement

How music helped the civil rights era

## Music as a tool

During the US civil rights movement (1954–1968), music wasn't just entertainment — it was a tool for organizing, comforting, and motivating people. Songs were sung at marches, in jail cells, at funerals. They built courage and unity in the face of violence.

## Five songs

Song	Year	Why it mattered
We Shall Overcome	spiritual / 1947	Anthem of the movement. Sung at almost every major march.
A Change Is Gonna Come	1964	Sam Cooke's response to segregation. Hopeful and defiant.
Strange Fruit	1939	Billie Holiday's haunting song about lynching. Confronted listeners.
Lift Every Voice and Sing	1900	Often called the 'Black national anthem'. Sung by communities and choirs.
Mississippi Goddam	1964	Nina Simone's furious response to specific acts of violence in the South.

## Discuss

1. Why might music be especially powerful at moments of struggle?



2. Most of these songs are still sung today. Why do you think that is?
3. Can you think of a recent movement that used music? What songs?

