

# ... with my mind stayed on freedom

## *Lesson Plan for Middle and High School students*

### **OVERVIEW & PURPOSE**

This lesson is based upon a workshop designed and led by Civil Rights movement veteran and career teacher, Ms. Freda Andrews, of the Northside community in Chapel Hill. Known by her students as “the Poetry Lady,” Ms. Freda loves to share her passion for the songs and poems that inspired her and so many others during protest marches and ever since. Ms. Freda presented a version of this lesson as part of a series of workshops designed to teach students about the history of local African-American communities, the origins of the local civil rights struggle, and, mostly, how to tell their own stories. Ms. Freda began by telling everyone: “Let’s be clear: your story is your glory.” The purpose of this workshop is to learn how stories can be told through song and how song can inspire us, even serve as the theme music to our own stories. To prepare for the lesson, instructors can listen to some of Ms. Freda Andrews’s oral history found in the Jackson Center’s Oral History Trust at: <https://archives.jacksoncenter.info>.

### **OBJECTIVE**

1. To give students a feel for the energy and spirit of freedom by playing songs and reading poetry written about the Black experience and about the civil rights struggle.
2. To demonstrate the impact music and song had on people by listening to and learning the lyrics to important anthems of the civil rights movement.
3. To provide students the opportunity to reflect on songs that inspire them.

### **MATERIALS NEEDED**

- Handouts for students with song lyrics and poems.
- Laptop or phone for playing songs.
- Paper and pens for taking notes.

## ACTIVITY

1. Warm-Up: Ms. Freda began her workshop by teaching students a call-and-response chant popular during the 1960s and since then, too. She says, “This was one of the chants that encouraged, motivated, and inspired us to keep our dreams alive.” Tell students to get out of their seats. Then demonstrate the chant. It goes like this:

**Call:**                    **What do you want?**

**Response:**           **FREEDOM!**

**Call:**                    **When do you want it?**

**Response:**           **NOW!**

Then, lead students in a few rounds of the chant. Now, teach students the simple “Freedom Song,” popularized by freedom movement activists (you can find many versions on YouTube):

***Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me around.***

***Turn me around, turn me around.***

***Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me around.***

***Gonna keep on walkin’, keep on talkin’,***

***Marchin’ up freedom way.***

When they’ve sung it twice, ask students how they feel. (Some may have felt a surge of courage or strength; if so, they’ve figured out why activists chanted and sang so much!)

2. You can introduce the songs by sharing some of Ms. Freda’s words: “Back then, if you were white, you were all right; if you were brown, maybe you could stick around. But if you were Black, you better get back.” The four songs they are about to hear address issues like Black pride and courage during the long history of struggle. They are meant to pay tribute to those who fought for social justice, as well as to enlighten and inspire future generations. Have students form small groups and pass out song lyrics.

3. Instruct students to pick one member of the group to record responses. Then let them know you'll be playing four different songs. After hearing each song, groups will be asked to discuss what they heard. It's important that every member of the group has a chance to share. What did they think of the tune, the lyrics, the overall feeling the song left them with? Which parts did they like most and why?
4. Then go on to the poems, "Harriet Tubman" and "Hey, Black Child." Tell students to take turns reading the poems out loud. After reading a poem, students should come up with 3 words to describe what they heard and share with the group.
5. The final exercise involves the poem, "I want to be somebody," written by an 11-year old boy. Call on students to read stanzas out loud. When they finish, instruct students to write their own stanza or stanzas. Have those who want to do so stand up and share. Encourage them to be proud!
6. Homework or in-class follow up exercise: Ask students to choose a song that is especially important to them right now. Then ask them to write a few sentences about why this song speaks to them.