

Dear, Nina Simone: Now that the King of Love is Dead . . .

Overview

Legendary singer and song writer, Nina Simone, has been identified by many publications as, “The Voice of the Civil Rights Movement,” due to her soulful performances of the mid-1960s that spoke to the heart of the struggle for social justice and equality. In 1968, just three days after the untimely assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Simone’s bass player, Gene Taylor, penned the song, “Why (The King of Love is Dead.)”

The very day that Taylor presented his elegy to Simone, she and her band learned the music and lyrics and performed the song live during a concert at the Westbury Music Festival on Long Island, NY. The tribute lasted nearly 12 minutes as Simone sang, wept, and spoke about the loss of an icon.

The lyrics of the song ask many poignant questions, including: “Why was he shot down the other day?” “What will happen now that the King of Love is dead?” and “Did Martin Luther King just die in vain?” Our goal in this assignment is to really reflect on her questions in light of our entire educational experience throughout our trip, along with our own connections to current race relations in 2022.

Key Words

Legendary, assassination, soulful, poignant, social justice, equality, lyric, empathy, biography, reputation, anthem, elegy

Primary Learning Objectives

The students will:

- learn about Nina Simone’s musical contribution to the Civil Rights Movement.
- recognize empathy and emotion in music.
- illustrate a creative response to questions raised in song lyrics.
- Synthesize learning throughout the museum visits.

Warm Up

If you aren’t familiar with Nina Simone, take a couple of minutes to look up some background information on the internet. You’ll need to “know your audience” to do this assignment.

Many media publications refer to Nina Simone as, “The Voice of the Civil Rights Movement.” Nina Simone’s career began long before the Civil Rights Movement, however, her soulful, thought-provoking songs focused on the struggle during the 1960s and served as anthems for many. Talk it out with a friend:

- What do you think that title given to her means?
- How one might achieve such a reputation?

Activity

Play Nina Simone's performance of "Why (The King of Love is Dead.)" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wh6R0BRzjW4>

(Be sure to listen to the full recording, otherwise you'll miss some important content.)

Close your eyes as you listen to the words and pay special attention to the emotion coming through the singer's voice.

Describe Nina Simone's voice and the feelings she expressed throughout the song (jot down phrases/words):

Can you empathize with Nina Simone's feelings? Why or why not?

Consider some of the negative ways that people can react to pain, anger, and injustice. "Negative" outlets may include violence, anger, mischief, neglect, and abuse (physical, emotional, food, drugs, or alcohol). More "positive" outlets may include art, music, athletics, meditation, writing, praying, and therapy.

What might be personally gained from writing and performing a song of this nature?

Assignment

Write Ms. Simone a letter. In no particular order:

1. Tell Nina Simone what has happened since King's assassination; or perhaps the advancements we've made since her death in 2003 (Connect).
2. Share your views on whether or not Dr. King's efforts were in vain (consider your audience, Ms. Simone's feelings and experiences. Factor in the fact she's considered by some to be the voice of the civil rights movement.).
3. Based on the evidence you've seen this week, share whether the civil rights movement succeeded or not (claims and bias).
4. Finally, share some strategies that you believe can help us be courageous conversationalists and better at seeing all people as beloved image-bearers of God, based on Christianity and the work done by the church (Christian philosophy and its practical interaction with world cultures).

Your letter could begin like the title of this lesson, "Dear Nina Simone, Now that the King of Love is dead..."

Additional Resources

Nina Simone on Biography.com

<http://www.biography.com/people/nina-simone-9484532>

Music of the Movement on Essence.com

<http://photos.essence.com/galleries/music-movement-20-socially-conscious-classics/?slide=275261>

Lyrics for “Why (The King of Love is Dead)”

<http://www.stlyrics.com/songs/n/ninasimone2828/whythekingofloveisdead344165.html>

Assessment (below is “proficient”):

1. Ability to Connect: Make connections using historical thinking skills and reasoning processes including reasoning about comparison, causation, continuity and/or change.
2. Audience (your audience is Nina Simone): Assess the critical role of the audience in writing an effective argument. Students need to learn to challenge their own assertions and to provide substantial evidence to explain and justify a position to an often-skeptical audience.
3. Claims & Bias: Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant data and evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both claim(s) and counterclaims in a discipline-appropriate form that anticipates the audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.
4. Christian philosophy and its practical interaction with world cultures: Students demonstrate their ability to lovingly articulate the distinctions between Christian views and differing world cultures of what is real, what is good and the purpose of life.

Letter should be 1-2 pages in length. Longer is accepted.

| | Not proficient | Proficient | Advanced |
|--|----------------|------------|----------|
| Ability to Connect | | | |
| Audience | | | |
| Claims & Bias | | | |
| Christian philosophy & practical interaction with world cultures | | | |