

Example CMD Activity Plan:

MS-College: Music and Social Justice

See the lesson [Life on the Inside](#)

Watch a 6 min. [demonstration video](#) of a this activity

1) Teaching Context

- **Grade level:** College
- **Subject area:** Music
- **Unit:** Social Justice Songs
- **What might come before or after this activity:** History of protest songs and the role of music in social justice.
- **Other relevant contextual information:** It will also be important to talk about the relationship between race and imprisonment (the disproportionate presence of black and brown men in the U.S. prison system).

2) Content Objectives:

- Identify and analyze how musical styles and techniques are used to reinforce the meaning of a song.
- Compare different musical styles in songs about the same topic.

Literacy/Critical Thinking Objectives: (i.e., CCSS for literacy, media literacy)

- Discuss how the lived experience of musicians/composers is reflected in the lyrics of their songs.
- Reflect on how and why different people will interpret and respond to songs in different ways.

3) Document(s) description and link:

This activity is taken from the lesson [Life on the Inside](#)

4) Key Questions:

- What do you notice about the musical style of the song?
- What are the messages (in this song) about life in prison?
- How does the musical style enhance the message of this song?
- Who wrote and performed this song, and how does their lived experience show up in the lyrics and musical style?

5) Decoding Plan:

- Make copies of the song lyrics and hand out to the students.
- Play each song, leading the students through an analysis of the musical style used (instrumentation, rhythm, genre, etc.), and how the style influenced the impact of the lyrics.
- Divide the class into pairs or small groups, giving each group a different song to do some background research (online) about the musician/composer (Leadbelly, Robert Pete Williams, Johnny Cash, Nas), relating their lived experience and background to the song they wrote and sang. Have each group share their findings with the class.
- After all 4 songs have been presented by the students, lead a discussion about the songs taken together as a group, asking questions about:
 - The overall messages about prison life, including similarities and differences across the 4 songs
 - The power of spoken or sung lyrics and music to convey emotions related to the difficulties faced by prisoners
 - How the impact of the lyrics might have been different if performed in a different style or genre (e.g., “Life of a Prisoner” as a rap, “Last Words” performed as a country song)
 - Which song(s) they felt were most effective in raising issues about social justice and why