



## Music & Social Impact Lesson Plan

### Introduction

Songs can provide entertainment but can also help to bring people's attention to world problems and to inspire people to seek solutions to those problems. Songwriters often use the lyrics of songs to educate, inspire, influence and change society, and provide social commentary.

### Objectives

At the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe and write about their emotional response to a song and the meaning, message, or viewpoint of the songwriter.
- Conduct research about a song and write a brief summary of its intended message.
- Critically review and report on whether a song's message is still relevant today.

### Essential Questions:

- What might people learn from music, or how might they be influenced or inspired by music?
- How were these songs used to educate or inspire the movement for Soviet Jewry?
- How were you inspired by these songs?

**Duration:** Two or three periods, one to introduce song analysis, one to analyze songs from Soviet Jewry Movement, and one, if relevant, for students to present their playlist.

**Materials:** Links to songs, Lyrics, Lyrics Worksheet



## Procedure:

1. **Trigger:** Distribute copies of the lyrics or provide Web link to the song, “Waiting on the World to Change,” (2006) by John Mayer. Ask students what the song might be about based on the title. Hand out the question sheet on page XX and ask the students to analyze the song in pairs.

## 2. Guided Class Discussion:

- What do you think the message of the song is? What metaphors does the writer use in the song?
- Some people think that Mayer is saying it’s OK to wait while others think that he is trying to encourage his generation to act. Which statement do you agree with, and why?
- What do you think Mayer means when he says, “When they own the information, oh they can bend it all they want”? Who are “they”?
- In what way(s) does he express hope for the future?
- Which lines in the song do you most relate to?
- Do you feel that your generation is misunderstood? Do you think your generation will wait for change or act to make change happen?
- If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be and why?



3. Choose one of the following Songs about Soviet Jewry: Watch the videos/ Listen to the songs and Use the “Lyrics Worksheet” to further understand each song.

- **LEAVING MOTHER RUSSIA**

- How was music used to inspire, motivate, or teach about the movement to free Soviet Jewry? In this video, watch Cantor Sherwood Goffin performing at the event of the American Jewish Historical Society -
- Unbroken Spirits: Yosef Mendelevich and Soviet Jewry Activists at the Center for Jewish History on November 20, 2013. [ajhs.org/UnbrokenSpirits.cfm](http://ajhs.org/UnbrokenSpirits.cfm)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bzJc3Rg5dKc>
- 

### **LEAVING MOTHER RUSSIA**

Words and Music by Robbie Solomon ©1978

They called me Anatole  
In prison I did live,  
My little window looked out  
On a Russian sky.  
For nearly nine long years  
Secluded and in pain  
But all my people know  
The charges were a frame.  
See my accuser standing in the hall,  
He points his finger at us all.  
You now must pay the penalty  
For the crime of daring to be free.  
*Chorus:*  
We are leaving Mother Russia,  
We have waited far too long.  
We are leaving Mother Russia,  
When they come for us we'll be gone.  
For all those centuries  
We called this land our home,  
We loved the Russian soil  
As much as anyone.  
*Chorus:*

In countless armies  
Our young boys have died for you,  
But never did you call them "sons,"  
You always called them "Jew."  
We fell in battle for the Tsar,  
One hundred thousand died at Babi Yar,  
And yet no monument will mark their grave,  
Just on our passports the word "Yevrei".  
*Chorus:*  
I send my song of hope  
To those I left behind  
I pray that they may know  
The freedom that is mine  
For in my darkest hour  
Alone inside my cell  
I kept the vision  
Of my home in Yisrael.  
My friends we know what silence brings,  
Another Hitler waiting in the wings,  
So stand up now and shout it to the sky,  
They may bring us to our knees but we'll never die!



- LIGHT ONE CANDLE, Peter Paul and Mary
  - Freedom 25: Peter Yarrow Sings "Light One Candle" Remembering Freedom Sunday <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufymlwmAszs>

**Light One Candle  
Peter, Paul and Mary**

Light one candle for the Maccabee children  
With thanks that their light didn't die  
Light one candle for the pain they endured  
When their right to exist was denied  
Light one candle for the terrible sacrifice  
Justice and freedom demand  
But light one candle for the wisdom to know  
When the peacemaker's time is at hand  
Don't let the light go out!  
It's lasted for so many years!  
Don't let the light go out!  
Let it shine through our hope and our tears. (2)  
Light one candle for the strength that we need  
To never become our own foe  
And light one candle for those who are suffering  
Pain we learned so long ago  
Light one candle for all we believe in  
That anger not tear us apart

And light one candle to find us together  
With peace as the song in our hearts  
Don't let the light go out!  
It's lasted for so many years!  
Don't let the light go out!  
Let it shine through our hope and our tears. (2)  
What is the memory that's valued so highly  
That we keep it alive in that flame?  
What's the commitment to those who have died  
That we cry out they've not died in vain?  
We have come this far always believing  
That justice would somehow prevail  
This is the burden, this is the promise  
This is why we will not fail!  
Don't let the light go out!  
Don't let the light go out!  
Don't let the light go out!

**4. Guided Discussion:**

- How were these songs used to educate or inspire the movement for Soviet Jewry?
- Are these songs' messages still relevant today?
- What movement are you passionate about?
- Can you think of a movement happening now or in the past where a song was used to help motivate or make meaning (Found Tonight <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aQykulaJVI> composed for protest against gun violence in schools, We Shall Overcome)
- What song(s) would you choose for your playlist?



5. **Further Discussion:** Distribute copies of the editorial, “The Other Education,” by David Brooks. Ask: “What questions does it bring to mind for you? Who agrees/ disagrees with Brooks’ opinion?” (Tally responses on an easel pad or whiteboard.)

- What does Brooks mean by his ‘second education’? Or his ‘emotional curriculum’
- Who was the “professor” to which he refers? In what way(s) did Bruce Springsteen teach him? What do you know about Springsteen’s music?
- Do you think that music can provide an education as important as formal schooling? Do you agree that society pays ‘too much attention to the first education and not enough to the second’?
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/27/opinion/27brooks.html>

#### 6. Extension:

- Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, a Rabbi-activist who was very active in the struggle for Soviet Jewry, was asked to compose some songs to inspire and motivate the activists. Two of his tunes became very popular both with the activists and with the refuseniks themselves, am yisrael chai and l’ma’an achai v’rayii.
- Teach your students the tunes to these songs and sing them in a group. Follow up with a discussion about how the songs made them feel, how they were used to empower the student activists and to inspire the refuseniks stuck in the Soviet Union.
- Shlomo Carlebach - Am Yisrael Chai <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkLJgK0Hfql>
- Shlomo Carlebach - Lemaan Achai <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kY07fTcYb6M&index=4&list=RDwkLJgK0Hfql>