

“Life has got a habit of not standing hitched.
You got to ride it like you find it. You got to change with it.
If a day goes by that don't change some of your old notions for new ones,
that is just about like trying to milk a dead cow.”
-Woody Guthrie

Objectives:

- Students will develop their critical thinking skills through classroom debate.
- Students will have a better understanding of American Folk music.

Educational Perspective:

The ability to think critically about issues is a cornerstone of the American way of life. Revolutions, protests and civil discourse have played significant roles in shaping society. This lesson is intended to encourage critical thought.

Lesson Procedures:

Inform the students that music has often played an important role in American history. It has brought people together, influenced political change and brought social awareness to many issues.

- Have the students name current musicians or songs that have influenced the way they view the world.
- Write the names of these musicians and/or songs in a visible place for the entire class to read.
- Encourage the students to verbalize how these musicians or compositions changed the way they view the world.

Ask the students if they have ever heard of the singer Woody Guthrie. Ask the students if they have ever heard the song “This Land is Your Land.” Inform the students that Woody was a musician during the 1930s.

- Have the students think of words that come to mind when the 1930s are mentioned.
- Write these words down in a visible place.
 - If Internet access is available, write the words into the text box at:
<http://www.wordle.net/create>

Explain to the students that the 1930s were times of extreme hardships for many people. Not only did the stock market crash on October 29, 1929 but many farmers from the Oklahoma/Texas panhandle lost their crops due to a drought that lasted throughout the 1930s. This drought caused many of farmers to lose their homes. Unemployment rose to 25%.

- Have the students determine if their words from the previous exercise match the realities of the 1930s.
- If they do not match, challenge the students to critically investigate where their perception of the 1930s comes from.

Divide students into groups with 2-4 members in each. Total number of groups should be an even number (2, 4, 6, 8, 10 total groups) – each group will be assigned a topic in which they will argue “for” or “against.” Assign one topic for every two groups. Select topics that are suitable for debate discussion in relation to today.

Some suggested topics:

- Does the death penalty deserve a place in a civilized society?
- Are single-sex public schools more effective than their co-ed counterparts?
- Should violent video games be banned?
- Should grading system in schools be abolished?
- Alternative Energy
- Media censorship pros and cons.

After students have had ample opportunity to debate their topic, have the students return to their normal seating areas.



http://www.voicesofoklahoma.com/files/images/WoodyGuthrie/guthrie_10.jpg

Pass out copies (or post where visible to the entire class) to the lyrics to Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land"

http://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/This_Land.htm

- Have the students examine the lyrics and speculate what Woody might have been writing about in the last three verses.
- Ask students to write a short one-page essay on what they believe the last three verses mean to them.
 - If Internet access is available, have the students type their essays into the text box at: <http://www.wordle.net/create>

Further discussions can be held around the students' printed word clouds. What words are common among the students?