

**Dear, Nina Simone: Now that the King of Love is Dead**  
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**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 15 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?” In this lesson, the students will work towards answering Nina Simone’s questions.

**Key Words**

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

**Grade Level**

Adaptable for any grade level

**Primary Learning Objectives**

The students will:

- learn about Nina Simone’s musical contribution to the Civil Rights Movement.
- be able to identify what an “elegy” is.
- recognize empathy and emotion in music.
- illustrate a creative response to questions raised in song lyrics.

**Approximate Duration of Lesson**

One Class Period

**Materials and Equipment Needed**

Internet Access, Computer w/ Sound, Writing and/or Art Supplies, Chart Paper or White/Black Board

**Background/Preparation**

Utilizing the sources located at the end of this lesson, the teacher will need to locate a copy of the song, “Why (The King of Love is Dead.)” The author suggests the teacher locate a video that uses images to illustrate the song. Again, suggested web videos on Youtube.com and npr.org are listed below. The teacher should also print a copy of the song lyrics or have them on the board, chart paper or overhead projector for students to see. The teacher should also locate and print a photograph of Nina Simone, as well as a copy of her biography (or at least have a copy that can be projected for the entire class to view). The teacher should become familiar with both the song and the biography before presenting them to the class.

## Procedures/Activities

- Ask students if they have ever heard of the singer, Nina Simone. If they answer, “Yes,” ask them to share with the class what they know about her. If they have not heard of the singer, give them a brief biography of Nina Simone, using the information you gathered before class.
- As you introduce the singer to the students, tell them that many media publications refer to Nina Simone as, “The Voice of the Civil Rights Movement.” Ask students what they think that means. Ask them how one might achieve such a reputation. Explain to students that 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.
- Next, play Nina Simone’s performance of “Why (The King of Love is Dead.)” Have students close their eyes as they listen to the words and ask them to pay special attention to the emotion coming through the singer’s voice.
- Ask students to describe Nina Simone’s voice and the feelings she expressed throughout the song. Explain the word “empathy” to the students and have them identify whether or not they can empathize with Nina Simone’s feelings. Why or why not?
- Engage students in a discussion about what events led up to the writing and subsequent performance of this song (violence in the CRM, Dr. King’s death, etc.).
- Have students explain in their own words what might be gained from writing and performing a song of this nature. If they are having a difficult time understanding this concept, prompt students with ideas like: writing the lyrics might bring closure for the artist, or singing may be an emotional release and foster healing from a deep pain. You can also explain that some people need an “outlet” to relieve themselves of painful experiences. Teach the students that people choose to react in both positive ways and negative ways. Ask them to discuss examples of both. “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.
- Play the video of “Why (The King of Love is Dead)” again for the class – this time, their eyes should remain open. Once finished, ask students if the images matched their imagination. Allow them the opportunity to share reactions aloud.
- Next, ask students to recall the questions Nina Simone asked throughout the song. Their responses should include: “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?” Write their responses on the board or on chart paper.
- Instruct students to choose one of the questions raised by Simone in the lyrics and draft a response. They should tell Nina Simone what has happened since King’s assassination; or perhaps the advancements we’ve made since her death in 2003. Students could share their views on whether or not Dr. King’s efforts were in vain. They could also discuss why they believe James Earl Ray shot Dr. King in 1968. Their letters could begin like the title of this lesson, “Dear Nina Simone, Now that the King of Love is dead...”

## Assessment Strategies

Teachers should look for all the elements necessary to write a proper letter. Quality letters should be written with a great deal of expression, creativity and clarity.

### **Extension**

- Students could choose to write a new verse to the song, “Why (The King of Love is Dead)?” or perhaps write a new song about what has happened since Dr. King’s death.
- Have students research other songs written or performed by Nina Simone and write an essay about the lyrics that landed her the title, “The Voice of the Civil Rights Movement.”
- Working with a partner, encourage students to make an updated video presentation of one of Simone’s songs that include a greater variety of pictures, including images that reflect the changes we have experienced since King’s death.

### **Remediation**

Students who are unable to write a letter can choose to illustrate a picture instead. Their pictures should convey the same message as the written letters – an answer to one of the questions posed in the song lyrics.

### **Additional Resources**

Nina Simone’s “Why (The King of Love is Dead)” (Short version)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mx-pfZDVm0Y&feature=share&list=PLEI4H92osmm5WXMWuonF-YmKrXcW8Y01X>

Nina Simone’s “Why (The King of Love is Dead)” (Full version)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wh6R0BRzjW4>

### **References**

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>

# Social Studies Course of Study Standards

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## FOURTH GRADE

**Standard 14.** Describe the social, political, and economic impact of the modern Civil Rights Movement on Alabama.

- Identifying important people and events of the modern Civil Rights Movement

Examples: people—Martin Luther King, Jr., George C. Wallace, Rosa Parks; events—Montgomery bus boycott, Birmingham church bombing, Selma-to-Montgomery march

- Identifying benefits of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act

## SIXTH GRADE

**Standard 13.** Describe the role of major civil rights leaders and significant events occurring during the modern Civil Rights Movement.

Examples: civil rights leaders—Rosa Parks; Martin Luther King, Jr.; events—Brown versus Board of Education; Montgomery bus boycott; student sit-ins; march on Washington, D.C.; Freedom Rides; Civil Rights Act of 1964; Malcolm X; voter registration efforts; Selma-to-Montgomery march.

## SEVENTH GRADE – Citizenship

**Standard 11.** Describe examples of conflict, cooperation, and interdependence of groups, societies, and nations, using past and current events.

- Tracing the political and social impact of the modern Civil Rights Movement from 1954 to the present, including Alabama’s role. *Extension to consider the impact.*

## ELEVENTH GRADE

**Standard 12.** Trace events of the modern Civil Rights Movement from post-World War II to 1970 that resulted in social and economic changes, including the Montgomery bus boycott, the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School, the march on Washington, and the Freedom Rides.

- Tracing the federal government’s involvement in the modern Civil Rights Movement, including the abolition of the poll tax, the desegregation of the armed forces, the nationalization of state militias, Brown versus Board of Education, the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965
- Explaining contributions of individuals and groups to the modern Civil Rights Movement, including Martin Luther King, Jr., James Meredith, Medgar Evers, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)
- Identifying people and events in Alabama that influenced the modern Civil Rights Movement, including Rosa Parks, Autherine Lucy, John Patterson, George C. Wallace, Vivian Malone, Fred Shuttlesworth, *the Children’s March*, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing, and the Selma-to-Montgomery march
- Describing the development of a Black Power movement, including the change in focus of the SNCC, the rise of Malcolm X, and Stokely Carmichael and the Black Panther Movement
- Describing the impact of African-American entrepreneurs on the modern Civil Rights Movement Examples: S. B. Fuller, A. G. Gaston



## English Language Arts Course of Study - Appendix D:

### Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12

#### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

**Standard 7.** *Integration of information from Walking Tour, sculptures, and original photographs.*

**Grades 6-8.** Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

**Grades 9-10.** Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts).

**Grades 11-12.** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

### Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12

#### Research to Build and Present Knowledge

**Standard 7.**

Grades 6-8. Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

Grades 9-10. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Grades 11-12. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

## English Language Arts Course of Study

### Speaking and Listening Standards

#### Comprehension and Collaboration

**[SL.6-12.1]** Engage [initiate and participate – grades 9-12] effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade-level topics, texts, and issues*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

*Information from Walking Tour, sculptures, and original photographs.*

**[SL.6.2]** Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

**[SL.7.2]** Analyze the main ideas and supporting details presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how the ideas clarify a topic, text, or issue under study. *With extensions to lesson plan.*

**[SL.8.2.]** Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation. *With extensions to lesson plan.*

**[SL.9-12.2]** Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally), [in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, - grades 11-12] evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source [and noting any discrepancies among the data – grades 11-12]. *With extensions to lesson plan.*

## **Language Standards**

### **Vocabulary Acquisition and Use**

**[L.6-8.6].** Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.