

Topic 2 : Into the Art of Darkness

Axis 3 : Art and Power

Key question : *How has art been a powerful tool for African Americans ?*

How can art be a powerful tool in the fight against slavery and its legacy ?

Part 2 : Raising voices

I- Billy Holliday « Strange fruit »

Activity 1 : Look at the picture and explain what it illustrates.



Activity 2 : Listen and fill in the blanks

Southern bear fruit,
Blood on the and blood at the
..... bodies swinging in the southern breeze,
Strange fruit from the poplar trees.

Pastoral of the gallant
The bulging and the twisted
Scent of magnolias, sweet and
Then the sudden of burning flesh.

Here is a for the crows to
For the to gather, for the to suck,
For the to rot, for the trees to drop,
Here is a and bitter crop.

*Composed by Abel Meeropol (Aka Lewis Allan) –late 1930s
Originally sung: Billie Holiday (1939)*

① Listen and fill in the blanks. They, let's play a kahoot.



Tool box

- Bulging : exhorbité
- Pluck : déchiqueter
- Drop : laisser tomber
- Crop : récolte
- Gather : récolter
- Rot : pourrir
- Suck : assécher

② Identify the document (type, music, melody, singer, date, country, region...)

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③ Complete the following lists with more words from the poem and find the lexical fields.

TREE				
Lexical field :				

Lexical field :				

④ **Imagery and symbolism**

Instructions:

Match the literal image with its symbolic meaning.

Literal Image		Symbolic Meaning
"Southern trees bear a strange fruit"		Violence rooted in history
"Blood on the leaves and blood at the root"		Contrast between beauty of nature and horror of crime
"Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze"		Innocent victims of racism
"Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh"		Lynching in the American South

➔ **What effect does this contrast create?**

- What kind of "fruit" is described in the song?
- What atmosphere is created by the lyrics and the music?
- What feelings does the song express?
- The Artist's Objective in "Strange Fruit" ?

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⑤ Discuss these questions in pairs or write short answers.

1. Why was this song so shocking for the public at the time?

2. How does Billie Holiday's voice contribute to the message?

3. How does this song relate to the Harlem Renaissance ideals?

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4. Compare and contrast B. Holiday's and L. Hughes' objectives and way to reach their goal ?

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⑧ Give your personal opinion about this poem/song – Writing (about 150 / 200 words)

- Had you ever heard it before we studied it in class?
- Do you like it? Why? Why not? Justify your point of view commenting on the words but also the melody.
- According to you, can a song be an effective form of protest? Can it contribute to the political awareness of the public? Justify with examples.
- Discuss why this song has been considered as the most influential song to protest against racism in American history.

II- Civil Rights leaders

Activity 1 : Mr Brainwash's mural



Document 1 :
Mr Brainwash's mural. On the walls of his LA studio, on South La Brea Avenue and Dockweiler Street

General description

- 1) Identify the type of document and present it : author ? Where ?
- 2) What is the general subject of this artwork?
- 3) Who are the people you can see? What do you know about them? Why are they together?
- 4) When was this artwork created? Explain how Obama's victory is related to the two other people in this artwork.

Focus on the text

- 4) Who does the pronoun “your” refer to in the white text?
- 5) Who does the pronoun “we” refer to in the black text?
- 6) What play on words can you find in the black text on the side of the block?
- 7) Explain the meaning of each line in simple English.

✓ Line 1

Rosa Parks sat →
MLK could walk →

✓ Line 2

MLK walked →
Obama could run →

✓ Line 3

Obama ran →
We could fly →

- 8) What effect is produced by the repetition and accumulation of verbs?

Explain the message

Task : In groups of 3, prepare a 1-minute explanation:

- 9) What is the main message of the mural? Why are these three people connected?
- 10) Why is it painted in a public place?

Activity 2 : RESEARCH

How do Rosa Parks or MLK illustrate the relationship between art and power?

1. Art as a Tool of Power in the Civil Rights Movement

Rosa Parks: the power of a symbolic image

A. Key questions to guide your research

1. Who was Rosa Parks?

- Short biography (date, place, job, role in the Civil Rights Movement).

2. What happened on December 1st, 1955?

- Explain the bus incident clearly and simply.

3. Why is her gesture considered *symbolic* and *powerful*?

- What does this image represent for African Americans?
- Why did the media turn her into an icon?

4. How did her action inspire the Montgomery Bus Boycott?

- Duration, leaders, consequences.

5. How does her story illustrate the theme *Art and Power*?

B. What to include in the presentation

- A **symbolic image** of Rosa Parks (bus arrest, portrait...).
- A **2–3 sentence explanation** of why the image is powerful.
- A short **quote** by Rosa Parks or about her.

C. Useful vocabulary

symbolic act – segregation – arrest – boycott – courage – media – representation – empowerment – legacy

2. MLK: art through the power of rhetoric

A. Key questions

1. Who was MLK?

Short biography (date, place, job, role in the Civil Rights Movement).

2. What were the main ideas in “I Have a Dream”?

3. How did MLK use *artistic techniques* in his speeches?

4. Why is his voice considered an instrument of power?

5. How did his speeches influence American society?

B. What to include

- A short **analysis of 1 quotation** from “I Have a Dream”.
- Identification of **1 rhetorical device** (repetition / metaphor / symbolism).
- 2–3 sentences explaining why his rhetoric is powerful.

C. Useful vocabulary

rhetoric – repetition – metaphor – persuasive – justice – non-violence – movement – leadership – dream

3. Aretha Franklin: A Voice for Civil Rights

A. Key questions

1. Who was Aretha Franklin?
2. How did she support the Civil Rights Movement?
3. Why is “Respect” a political song?
4. How did she use her celebrity to fight segregation?
5. How does her art connect to *Art and Power*?

B. What to include

- Short commentary on **“Respect”** or **“Think”** (message + impact).
- A **key moment** when she acted for civil rights.
- 1–2 sentences explaining why her voice mattered.

C. Useful vocabulary

anthem – dignity – empowerment – pride – activism – voice – influence – protest – equality

Aretha Franklin, dubbed “the Queen of Soul”, was one of the most influential musicians in the U.S. charts. She won 18 Grammy awards but also made a massive contribution to the civil rights movement: her songs would become their anthems.

Aretha Franklin grew up in the 1950s in Detroit, where her father was a popular Baptist minister with a large congregation of African Americans who had escaped segregation in the Southern states. Reverend Franklin was an early leader of the civil-rights movement for racial equality and worked closely with Dr Martin Luther King Jr. Aretha started singing gospel music in her father’s church, then she moved over to R&B, singing a string of hits. The fame would soon come, but she was determined not to forget her sense of activism: she made sure her contract in the 1960s included the clause that she would never perform for a segregated audience.

Franklin used her fame to fundraise for the civil rights movement and in 1968 recorded “Think”, an anthem for equality with the catchy chorus, “Give me some freedom, oh, freedom, right now!” She sang both at Martin Luther King’s funeral in 1968 and at the inauguration of the U.S.A.’s first African-American president, Barack Obama, in 2009.

MLK’s daughter, Dr Bernice King, said of Franklin, “She was a shining example of how to utilise the arts to support and promote nonviolent social change. As a daughter of the movement, she not only used her voice to entertain but to uplift and inspire generations through songs that have become anthems”.

In August 2018, when she died, Barack Obama said of Aretha, “Aretha helped define the American experience. In her voice, we could feel our history, all of it and in every shade—our power and our pain, our darkness and our light, our quest for redemption and our hard-won respect.”

General structure for their oral/written presentation

1. Introduction

- Present the figure (who, when, why important).
- Link to the theme **Art and Power**.

2. Development

- Biography: key moments.
- Actions against segregation.
- Artistic tools (symbol / rhetoric / music).
- Impact on society.

3. Conclusion

- Why and how is this figure still remembered today?
- What makes them inspirational?