



# Smithsonian Folkways

## **South Africa, Free At Last: The Freedom Songs of South Africa and the Civil Rights Movement in America**

**A Smithsonian Folkways Lesson**

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**Summary:** The following is designed for high school choral students (and is easily adaptable for middle school choral or general music students) including experiences in creative musical activities related to the singing South African Freedom Songs and the culture and performance practice behind the music. It will also allow students to explore the historical and cultural impacts of apartheid in South Africa from which these songs grew out of in opposition. The lesson segments also seek to provide a direct correlation, musically and historically, to the African American Freedom Songs of the Civil Rights Movement.

**Suggested Grade Level:** 9-12

**Country:** South Africa

**Region:** Southern Africa

**Culture Group:** Native South Africa

**Genre:** Freedom Songs

**Instrument:** Voice

**Language:** Zulu, English

**Co-Curricular Areas:** Social Studies

**National Standards:** 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

### **Materials from Smithsonian Folkways:**

“This Land is Mine: South African Freedom Songs” by various artists (Cat. # FW05588)

<http://folkways.si.edu/albumdetails.aspx?itemid=1068>

“South African Freedom Songs” by various artists (Cat. # FWEPC601)

<http://folkways.si.edu/albumdetails.aspx?itemid=2277>

“Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through It’s Songs”  
by various artists (Cat. # SFW40032)

<http://folkways.si.edu/albumdetails.aspx?itemid=2061>

“Voices of the Civil Rights Movement: Black American Freedom Songs from  
1960-1966” by various artists (Cat. # SFW40084)

<http://folkways.si.edu/albumdetails.aspx?itemid=2269>

### **Lesson Segment #1:**

Lesson plan on the musical and cultural significance of *Asikatali* and South African Freedom Songs, in general

### **Objectives:**

1. To listen to several South African Freedom Songs and discuss the musical characteristics of each piece and the text (language/translation).
2. To sing a South African Freedom Song in the context of proper performance practice of the oral tradition where one person leads the group and the other repeat.
3. To create improvised harmonies around the original melody.
4. To understand and discuss the culture and history behind the South African Freedom Song and apartheid

### **Materials Needed:**

1. Internet availability for Smithsonian Folkways
2. Lyric sheet
3. *Freedom is Coming: Songs of Protest and Praise from South Africa*, a songbook collection compiled and arranged by Anders Nyberg which contains a written arrangement of “Asikatali”. SATB a capella. WB528. Published by Walton Music (HL.8500021)
4. Paper and pencil/notebook

### **Procedure:**

1. Teacher has students echo phrases, spoken and sung, of the South African Freedom Song, *Asikatali*. The entire song will be taught by rote with the teacher leading while the others repeat. The teacher will explain the meaning of the lyrics as the song is being taught.
2. After the melody and text are learned, students will then be asked to create improvised harmonies around the original melody.
3. Listen to a recording of “Asikatali” from *South African Freedom Songs* (Cat. # FWEPC601)

4. Discuss what was heard. Teacher explains the context of the piece and what the text means. Students and teacher discuss the musical aspects and emotion of the piece to what they just heard.
5. Students will learn an SATB arrangement of *Asikatali* from Anders Nyberg's *Freedom is Coming* by rote.
6. After learning the song in parts, several students will be chosen to be the leader and "lead" the group through beginnings of phrases and conducting the piece as they think it should be sung with regard to tempo, phrasing, and dynamics. The teacher should encourage students to experiment with regard to leading the group.
7. Students listen to 2 or 3 more *South African Freedom Songs from the albums, This Land is Mine: South African Freedom Songs* (Cat. # FW05588) and *South African Freedom Songs* (Cat. # FWEPC601)
8. The teacher leads a discussion of South African Freedom Songs and the apartheid movement and the strong opposition that came with it. Students respond with their input and questions on this.

**Assessment:**

1. Students will sing the song in its original language without the teacher's help.
2. Members of the group reflect on the performance with regard to the culture and music and write a response to the questions, "What is a South African Freedom Song? Where did it derive from? What musical characteristics are prevalent? What is apartheid?"
3. As a homework assignment, students will be asked to listen to various South African Freedom Songs from Smithsonian Folkways off of the albums, *This Land is Mine: South African Freedom Songs* (Cat. # FW05588) and *South African Freedom Songs* by various artists (Cat. # FWEPC601). After, the student will chose one song that they would like to write a brief paper on explaining the text, how the song fits into the culture of the time, and any other interesting info pertaining to the music or performance practice. Students will share their findings in class the next day and listen to the songs select students have chosen.

**Lesson Segment #2**

Lesson plan on the musical and cultural significance of *We Shall Overcome* and *This Little Light of Mine*

**Objectives:**

1. To listen to recordings of *We Shall Overcome* and *This Little Light of Mine* and discuss the meaning behind the songs and notice the musical elements of each song as well.

2. To sing two Freedom/Protest Songs from the Civil Rights Movement, *We Shall Overcome* and *This Little Light of Mine*, in context to proper performance practice.
3. To create improvised harmonies around the original melody.
4. To create new lyrics to these songs within the character of the piece.
5. To understand and discuss the history and culture behind the civil rights movement
6. To compare, musically and historically, the Freedom/Protest Songs of the Civil Rights Movement with the Freedom/Protest Songs of the South African Anti-Apartheid Movement and to draw conclusions based on these findings.
7. To sing a written arrangement of each of these songs with a deep understanding of the culture, the meaning behind the music, and the musical nuances specific to the African American Freedom Song singing style.

**Materials Needed:**

1. Internet availability for Smithsonian Folkways
2. Paper and pencil/notebook
3. Written arrangements of *We Shall Overcome* and *This Little Light of Mine*

**Prerequisites:** Some knowledge of South African Freedom Songs in order to compare the Freedom Songs of the Civil Rights Movement with the Freedom Songs of South Africa in Procedure #7. (This procedure could be eliminated if there is no background knowledge of South African Freedom Songs.)

**Procedure:**

1. Students will listen to 2 different recordings of “We Shall Overcome” by the Freedom Singers and by an unlisted group of African Americans from *Voices of the Civil Rights Movement: Black American Freedom Songs from 1960-1966* (Cat. # SFW40084). Then students will listen to 2 different recordings of “This Little Light of Mine” by The Montgomery Improvement Association and The Freedom Singers from *Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through It’s Songs* (Cat. # SFW40032).
2. Students will be asked to list the musical elements, including a comparison of the 2 different recordings of each piece, and write a brief synopsis of what they think the meaning behind the songs might be.
3. Students will then be led in a discussion of the meaning behind the songs, the culture, and the musical elements prevalent in each selection.
4. Students will learn both songs by rote.
5. Students will be asked to create new harmonies around the original melody with one student leading the group in singing.

6. Students will then be asked to create new lyrics to *We Shall Overcome* and *This Little Light of Mine*. Performance of new lyrics will be done as students create these lyrics in context of the song.
7. Students will then compare the South African Freedom songs with the Freedom Songs of the Civil Rights Movement and draw conclusions with their findings.
8. Students will learn written arrangements of *We Shall Overcome* and *This Little Light of Mine* by rote.
9. Lastly, students will write brief program notes for *We Shall Overcome* and *This Little Light of Mine*. These notes will be read in class. These program notes could then be part of the performance if included in the choir performance repertoire.

**Assessment:**

1. Students will sing both songs without teacher help in proper performance practice.
2. Students will be assessed through their written program notes pertaining to the criteria of understanding the song and the culture.