

LESSON 3: RESPECTING YOURSELF AND OTHERS

"RESPECT" was written and performed by Otis Redding (1965).

"RESPECT YOURSELF" was written by Luther Ingram and Mack Rice and performed by the Staple Singers (1971).

Introduction

This lesson opens a dialogue between two Stax recordings on a shared theme: Otis Redding's "Respect" and the Staple Singers' "Respect Yourself." One song focuses on the human need to be respected by others, while the other song emphasizes respect for oneself.

Facing History Theme: Respect

Essential Questions

- What is respect?
- If you feel respected (or disrespected), how does that impact the way you see yourself and others?
- How does feeling respected or disrespected influence the choices you make?

Guiding Question

- How do Otis Redding's "Respect" (1965) and the Staple Singers' "Respect Yourself" (1971) represent changing attitudes and ideas in the civil rights movement?

Objectives

- Students will use the song's lyrics as a primary text for analysis.
- Students will compare and contrast the lyrics and music of two songs about respect.
- Students will make text-to-world connections between the songs, the civil rights movement, and current events.

Common Core Anchor Standards for Reading (R), Writing (W), and Speaking and Listening (SL)

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1](#)—Citing Textual Evidence
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2](#)—Theme/Central Idea
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3](#)—Plot & Character/Process
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4](#)—Word Meaning
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6](#)—Point of View/Purpose in a Text(s)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9](#)—Compare and Contrast Themes and Topics in Two or More Texts
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1](#)—Collaborative Discussion

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2](#)—Interpreting Information in Diverse Media
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2](#)—Write Informative/Explanatory Texts

Outcomes/Assessment

Students will write a brief essay exploring how the songs “Respect” and “Respect Yourself” responded to and represented changing ideas in the civil rights movement.

Media/Resource List

- [Handout 1](#): “Respect” and “Respect Yourself” Lyrics
- [Handout 2](#): “Respect” and “Respect Yourself” Historical Background
- Text-Dependent Questions for “Respect” and “Respect Yourself” (Lyrics and Historical Background), see Appendix.
- Film Clip: “[Respect Yourself](#),” as Performed by the Stax Music Academy
- Film Clip: “[Respect](#),” as Performed by the Stax Music Academy
- Film Clip: “[Record Producer Al Bell discusses Otis Redding’s ‘Respect’](#),” from *Respect Yourself: The Stax Records Story*.

Learning Activities

Warm-up

1. Begin by writing the word “RESPECT” in large letters on the chalkboard or a big piece of paper. Provide each student with one sticky note, and ask everybody to write the name of one person whom they respect. When they are finished, have them affix their notes near the word RESPECT. Once the board is covered in sticky notes, read the names and ask a few students why they respect those persons. Bridge to a discussion of the idea of respect. How do people earn respect? How do people show respect toward one another?
2. Psychologist James Gilligan, author of *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*, sees a strong relationship between feeling disrespected and using violence. He writes, “I have yet to see a serious act of violence that was not provoked by the experience of feeling shamed and humiliated, disrespected and ridiculed.”³³ To continue the conversation you might ask students, How does feeling disrespected affect how you think, feel, and act? What does Gilligan’s comment suggest about the relationship between respect and self-esteem?

Analyzing the Lyrics

3. Distribute the song lyrics ([Handout 1](#)). Students will learn more about the Staple Singers in the next lesson; for now inform them that the group was another well-known Stax Records act. Students can follow along with the lyrics as they watch both film clips (“[Respect](#)” and “[Respect Yourself](#)”).
4. Have students respond to the [text-dependent questions for Lesson 3](#). This can be done individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

Historical Context/Deeper Understandings

5. Both songs address the issue of respect, but in very different ways. Some music scholars identify “Respect” as a metaphor about broader social issues, whereas “Respect Yourself” was a more psychological work. To explore Redding’s metaphor, watch the film clip “[Record Producer Al Bell discusses Otis Redding’s ‘Respect’](#).” This clip will introduce students to the singer/songwriter and his motivation for writing “Respect.” Students may wish to take notes while viewing the clip.
6. You can provide further context by sharing the Historical Background handout ([Handout 2](#)). It contains some information about the inspiration for the Staple Singers’ “Respect Yourself.” This is another moment for asking students to respond to the [text-dependent questions for Lesson 3](#).
7. After considering the additional information about the song, students should reread the lyrics. Does anyone now have a new interpretation of the song?

Outcomes

8. One way to assess student understanding of the relationship between music and its social context is to have them write an informative/explanatory essay, describing how these two songs represent changing ideas about the notion of respect within the civil rights movement. Where appropriate, be sure to incorporate evidence from the lyrics of both songs, the Historical Background handout and the video clip “Record Producer Al Bell discusses Otis Redding’s ‘Respect’.” If you feel students need additional context, you may refer them to [the Facing History and Ourselves study guide](#) for the television documentary *Eyes on the Prize*. The guide includes a number of readings that speak to the themes in this lesson.

9. You may also wish to return to the essential questions of this lesson by revisiting the James Gilligan quotation from the introduction. He observed, “I have yet to see a serious act of violence that was not provoked by the experience of feeling shamed and humiliated, disrespected and ridiculed.” Why might feelings of respect be so important? Have students illustrate the ways that the two songs address his concern.

HANDOUT 1 “Respect” and “Respect Yourself” Lyrics

“Respect” by Otis Redding

What you want
Honey you've got it
And what you need
Baby you've got it

All I'm asking
Is for a little respect when I come home

Do me wrong
Honey if you wanna
You can do me wrong
Honey while I am gone

But all I'm asking for
Is for a little respect when I come home

Hey little girl, you're so sweeter than honey
And I am about to just give you all my money

But all I'm asking, hey
Is a little respect when I come home

Hey little girl, you're sweeter than honey
And I am about to give you all of my money

But all I want you to do just give it, give it
Respect when I come home

Respect is what I want
Respect is what I need
Respect is what I want
Respect is what I need

Got to, got to have it
Got to, got to have it
You got to, got to have it
Got to, got to have it

Give it, give it
Give it, give it
Give it, give it
Give it, give it
Give it

Give it to me baby, everything I need
Give it to me baby, everything I want
Give it to me

“Respect Yourself” by the Staple Singers

If you disrespect anybody
That you run into
How in the world do you think
Anybody's s'posed to respect you?

If you don't give a heck 'bout the man
With the Bible in his hand
Just get out the way
And let the gentleman do his thing

You the kind of gentleman
That want everything your way
Take the sheet off your face, boy
It's a brand new day

Respect yourself, respect yourself
If you don't respect yourself
Ain't nobody gonna give a good cahoot, na na na na
Respect yourself, respect yourself

If you're walking 'round
Thinkin' that the world
Owes you something
'Cause you're here

You goin' out
The world backwards
Like you did
When you first come here

Keep talkin' 'bout the president
Won't stop air pollution
Put your hand on your mouth
When you cough, that'll help the solution

Oh, you cuss around women
And you don't even know their names
And you dumb enough to think
That'll make you a big ol' man

Respect yourself, respect yourself
If you don't respect yourself
Ain't nobody gonna give a good cahoot, na na na na
Respect yourself, respect yourself
Respect yourself, respect yourself

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RESPECTYOURSELF: Lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group. Reproduced with permission.

HANDOUT 2 “Respect” and “Respect Yourself” Historical Background

On its surface, Otis Redding’s “Respect” tells the story of a man who feels he deserves the respect of his woman. He works hard all day to provide for her, and he believes she owes him *respect*.

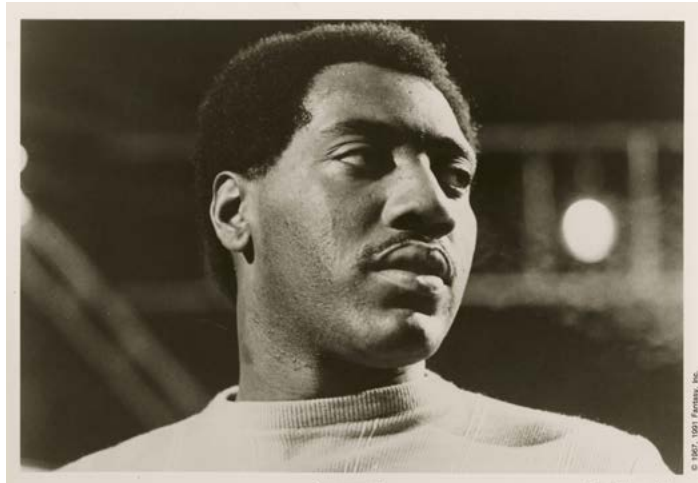
Redding drew on his own experiences when he wrote the song, as he was no stranger to hard work. Prior to becoming the “King of Soul” and an international star, Redding worked a variety of jobs to help support his family. In fact, he was working as the driver for musician and showman Johnny Jenkins when he first arrived at Stax Records. Once in the door, Redding pestered Booker T. and the MGs drummer, Al Jackson Jr., to give him a chance to perform. Jackson caved in: “The big tall guy that was driving Johnny, he’s been bugging me to death, wanting me to hear him sing. . . . Would you take some time and get this guy off my back and listen to him?”³⁴ Redding’s persistence earned him the opportunity to sing for an audience; he blew them away with his soulful singing and earned the respect he knew he deserved.

The song “Respect” may feel intimate, but some see a broader message. Stax recording artist William Bell explained, “These were, like, during the sixties—all of the black power movements, marches, and all of these things were coming along. Otis wrote ‘Respect’ for that. . . . and he put it in the sense of a love relationship, but it was about life really.”³⁵

In *Respect Yourself*, author Robert Gordon, who also directed the eponymous documentary, adds, “It was that ‘tear’ in Otis’s voice, the crying and the ache that it evoked, that made him a transcendent vocalist. His songs were about love, but the sense of longing he conveyed was deeper than the love between a man and woman; Otis touched the heart of desire. He sang about love but summoned the poignancy of his times, of people used and being used and wanting an embrace instead of a fist. Black, white—no matter the listener’s race, only the listener’s empathy. Those seeking comfort found it in Otis Redding’s songs.”³⁶

Indeed, those who preached nonviolent paths to racial equality spoke often of the importance of touching people’s hearts. They won the sympathy of their fellow Americans by preserving their dignity in the face of ugly and dehumanizing intimidation. Just think of those civil rights activists, white and black, who quietly sat down at white-only lunch counters, marched with brave determination, and prayed while mobs of citizens and public officials attacked them with fists and batons or of Rosa Parks respectfully refusing to move from her place on that bus.

The respect they sought ranged from social customs to voting rights. In fact, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was signed nine days before “Respect” was released as a single.³⁷ Called by some scholars “the single most effective piece of civil rights legislation ever passed by Congress,” it sought to end



Otis Redding

Courtesy of Stax Museum of American Soul Music

voter disenfranchisement, particularly of black citizens, and forbade the various measures, such as literacy tests and redistricting, designed to bar men and women from the polls. The law, as noted at the website of the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice, “contained special enforcement provisions targeted at those areas of the country where Congress believed the potential for discrimination to be the greatest.”³⁷ Memphis was one “those areas of the country.”

Music scholar Dr. Portia Maulsby explores the connection between civil rights and the more personal narrative in the song “Respect”:

The themes of unity and respect advocated by the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements also applied to personal relationships. Many soul singers, for example, offered advice for establishing rewarding relationships. Otis Redding suggested “Try a Little Tenderness” (1966) and, along with Aretha Franklin, demanded “Respect” (1965 and 1967, respectively). Al Green, in “Let’s Stay Together” (1971), and Aretha Franklin, in “I Can’t See Myself Leaving You” (1969), encouraged committed relationships. In Michael Haralambos’s view, soul “expresses faith in love, hope for love, and the joy and happiness in love,” rather than failed relationships, a theme frequently found in the blues.³⁸

While Otis Redding’s “Respect” referred to respect *between* individuals and groups, the Staple Singers’ “Respect Yourself” focused on respect *within* an individual. Written in 1971, the ideas “Respect Yourself” echoed ideas expressed by activists calling for self-respect, self-reliance and black pride as a way counter belief that the pace of social change and the drive for equal opportunities were moving too slow.. Indeed, scholar Rob Bowman explains the inspiration for the song: “‘Respect Yourself’ resulted from a discussion [between songwriters Mack Rice and Luther Ingram]. At one point Ingram stated emphatically something along the lines of ‘black folk need to learn to respect themselves.’ Rice took the idea, and quickly cut a demo of the song with the help of Tommy Tate in Studio C. Bettye Crutcher heard the demo and suggested the song would be perfect for the Staple Singers.”³⁹