**Subjects:** History **/** Cultural Studies / English Language Arts

**The Chorus of Culture**

**Aim / Essential Question**

How do folk songs preserve cultural identity?

**Overview**

This lesson shows how folk songs helped the people of Estonia keep their cultural identity during

Soviet occupation. Stirringly demonstrated in the documentary *The Singing Revolution*, Estonians sang their way to freedom, a unique contrast to more familiar non-violent movements, such as Martin Luther King’s civil rights protests in the U.S.

**Materials & Technology**

* Class set of questions on chapters one and six of *The Singing Revolution*

(below)

* *The Singing Revolution* (Chapter 1 and Chapter 6)

(from Disc One / Chapters)

* Any DVD-compatible player that will allow distinct chapters to be shown
* A television or video projection unit

**Lesson Time:** One 50-minute class period.

**Objectives**

Students will:

* Identify Estonia as a Baltic country long desired by other nations throughout its history.
* Characterize the Estonian people, who were able to withstand Soviet occupation.
* Analyze how Estonia’s tradition of singing was instrumental in standing up to Soviet occupation.

**Instruction**

**Opening:** Bell Ringer / Do Now

Choose from one of the following to write on the board or chart paper:

Think of our national anthem, *The Star Spangled Banner*, which is sung before many sporting events throughout the United States. How do you feel when you hear it? Why? In four to six sentences, write about your emotions in response to our national anthem.

Or-

In four to six sentences, write down what you know about the non-violent protests/movements led by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

Ask several students to share their responses with class.

Tell students that they will watch two chapters of a feature-length documentary, *The Singing Revolution,* about a lesser-known non-violent movement carried out by the people of Estonia, a small Baltic country in Northern Europe.

**Activities**

1. Distribute questions on chapter one and chapter six of *The Singing Revolution*.
2. Read aloud each chapter question as students read along. Tell the students to write down their answers as they view the documentary. Tell students that, at the end of each chapter, questions and answers will be reviewed and, if necessary, clarified.
3. Play chapter one of *The Singing Revolution*.
4. After the chapter, stop the documentary and go over the chapter questions and answers by calling on students to read aloud the questions and their answers.
5. Play chapter six.
6. After the chapter, go over the chapter questions and answers by calling on students to read aloud the questions and their answers.

**Close:** Application / Summary

Call on a student to ask and then answer the aim. Appropriate answers may include: 1) In the case of the Estonians, the singing of folk songs kept alive the important idea that the Estonians were a distinct culture from the Soviet bloc, or Russian culture; and 2) Folk songs preserve cultural identity by sharing a collective knowledge of a certain people, such as the Estonians, who continued to sing their folk songs while under Soviet occupation.

Call on students to provide new information learned from documentary. Appropriate student responses may include: 1) Estonia was a land desired by a diverse group of people and empires, including the Danes, Swedes, Germans, and Russians; and 2) Estonian myths and legends are not made up of the more-familiar brave noblemen saving damsels in distress but, as the documentary pointed out, the barn keeper who waits, watches, then acts when the time is right.

Lastly, ask students how this lesson might connect to their own lives. Appropriate answers may include how America’s national anthem or American folk songs, such as slave spirituals or Appalachians ballads, bind particular cultures.

**Homework**

Write a two-paragraph response to the question posed by the narrator of *The Singing Revolution*: “What role can singing play when a nation is faced with annihilation by its neighbors?”

Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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***The Singing Revolution***

**Directions:** Answer these questions as you watch chapters one and six of *The Singing Revolution*.

**Chapter One**

1. Where is Estonia?
2. Why was Estonia a desired place?
3. What countries or empires sought, dominated, or occupied Estonia throughout its history?
4. How has singing been an integral part of Estonian identity?
5. When was the bloodiest chapter in Estonia’s history? Why? How?
6. How did the myth and legends of Estonia influence the character of Estonians and help them endure Soviet occupation?

**Chapter Six**

1. How did a summer concert ignite a spirit of revolution?
2. Why were the Communist authorities afraid of Estonian singing?
3. What was the symbol of Estonian pride that was represented at these singing protests?
4. How was singing “the fuel” for this revolution that undermined Soviet authority?
5. Who were some of the other people and organizations that influenced the revolution?

What I learned from *The Singing Revolution*: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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This story might connect to my life \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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