

NO FEAR: The Extraordinary Artistry of Nina Simone

"I'll tell you what freedom is to me: no fear."

Overview

Prodigy. Pianist. Songwriter. Singer. Activist. Nina Simone. Born Eunice Kathleen Waymon in Tryon, North Carolina on February 21st, 1933, Nina Simone is an icon of American music and one of the most extraordinary artists of the twentieth century. Her activism during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s earned her the title of "Singer of the Black Revolution." In this lesson plan (with modifications for any grade level) students will explore the life and career of this extraordinary musician through reading (including the option of engaging with the children's book "[NINA: A Story of Nina Simone](#)"), discussion, and examining samples of Nina Simone's incredible work. Students culminate what they have learned about Nina Simone by creating a concept design for the reuse of Nina Simone's birthplace.

Grades

Any (options for all grade levels are included in the materials provided)

Materials

- Computer with speakers & access to YouTube (for playing Nina Simone recordings)
- [I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free](#) (audio recording)
- [A Guide to Nina Simone in 10 Songs](#), 5-minute video overview of Nina Simone's career
- Nina Simone (article providing an overview of her life/career) with accompanying questions, attached
 - This reading contains the title of the song "Mississippi Goddam;" teachers who think that the spelling of the song will be problematic for their school/community population may choose to blackout the spelling of the title's second word
- [NINA: A Story of Nina Simone](#), check your library for this children's book, or purchase from your preferred seller (While this is an illustrated children's book, this powerful story with its beautiful art can be used – with modifications – with almost any grade of student.)
- Read Aloud & Discussion Guide for [NINA: A Story of Nina Simone](#), attached
- [Mississippi Goddamn](#) (video recording); a handout of the lyrics is attached
 - [This Carolina K-12 program](#) on Nina Simone includes a video performance of Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddamn;" the lyrics and some civil rights imagery are overlaid. (Start at [41:22](#) to hear two minutes of Nina discussing the Civil Rights Movement. "Mississippi Goddamn" starts at [45:40](#).)
 - For an alternative version without that does not sing the curse word, by Dr. Leonora Helm Hammonds, [click here](#).
- [\(Why\) The King of Love is Dead](#), (audio recording); a handout of the lyrics is attached
 - [Carolina K-12's program](#) on Nina Simone includes a recording of the song over a slideshow of images of Dr. King. (Start at __ and play through __.)
- Listening to Nina Simone, worksheet versions for both elementary & middle/high school students attached
- Nina Simone Childhood Home Reuse Project Concept Designs & Culminating Activity, handouts attached
- Teacher reference:
 - See Carolina K-12's recorded program on Nina Simone [here](#).
 - [The story behind Nina Simone's protest song, "Mississippi Goddam"](#)
 - [A History of Protest Music: When Nina Simone Sang What Everyone Was Thinking](#)
 - [How Nina Simone used protest music to challenge racial discrimination](#)
- Related lesson plan: [Freedom Music, From Spirituals to Protest Songs](#)

Duration

45+ minutes

Preparation

- Students should have at least a basic understanding of the Jim Crow South and the Civil Rights Movement.
- Students must understand expectations for respectfully discussing [“hard history”](#) such as Jim Crow and segregation, which intersect with Nina Simone’s life, career and civil rights activism. While this history brings up difficult topics, such history represents a critical part of our shared state and national narrative that students must understand in order to comprehend its impact on the present. To ensure students are able to respectfully and empathetically discuss such topics, teachers must ensure a foundation of civil discourse, respect and empathy in the classroom. For techniques on building such a classroom community, see Carolina K-12’s classroom management activities in the Database of K-12 Resources under the [“Activities”](#) section and specifically [Tips for Tackling Sensitive History & Controversial Current Events in the Classroom](#).
- One of Nina Simone’s most powerful songs, “Mississippi Goddamn,” is mentioned throughout the lesson and the materials. Teachers must consider the grade level of their students, as well as the community in which you teach, and pre-determine whether or not to include mention of the song by name and/or whether to play it for analyzation. Teachers of course have the option to focus on other songs instead, and/or to black out the curse word on student handouts. Additionally, a version of the song that does not include the curse word is available by North Carolina musician Dr. Lenora Helm Hammonds [here](#).

Procedure

Warm Up: Freedom

1. As students enter the classroom, have Nina Simone’s version of [“I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free”](#) playing. As a warm up, ask students to consider the word “freedom” and give them until the end of the song to free-write on what freedom means to them. After a minute, project the following quote from North Carolina born musician Nina Simone:
 - “I’ll tell you what freedom is to me: No fear...like a new way of seeing.”
2. Ask students to consider the quote and their own concept of freedom. Discuss as a class:
 - What does freedom mean to you? When have you felt free, or unfree? What examples of freedom, or lack of freedom, come to mind from events happening in the world today?
 - What do you think Nina Simone means when she says freedom is “no fear...a new way of seeking?”
3. Next, ask students whether they have heard of Nina Simone. What do they already know about her? Let them know that the song they just heard, [“I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free”](#), was recorded by Nina Simone in 1967. Ask students to comment on the song, asking them about the tone, emotion, message, lyrics that stood out, etc. Further ask them to consider the year 1967, and to share what they think was happening in the world at that time that may have influenced Nina to record and perform this song. Make sure students understand that these were the prime years of the Civil Rights Movement. Give students an opportunity to review/share what they know about the Movement of the 1950s-60s.

Exploring the Extraordinary Talent and Career of Nina Simone

4. Let students know that in today’s lesson, they will be learning about the incredible Nina Simone, who was born in Tryon, NC (Polk County) and who went on to become an award-winning musician as well as an iconic civil rights activist. Options (which can be done independently or combined, depending on length of class time available and grade level of students):
 - **All grades:** Play [A Guide to Nina Simone in 10 Songs](#), a 5-minute video overview of Nina Simone’s career. This video is recommended for students to view before engaging with the book or the article below. (*Teacher Note: This video does mention the song “Mississippi Goddamn” by name.*)

- **K-8th:** Read out loud the illustrated book [“NINA: A Story of Nina Simone,”](#) written by Traci N. Todd and illustrated by Christian Robinson; a discussion guide is attached. (Note that while this is an illustrated book, it can be meaningful and relevant for use with most any age as long as the teacher adapts the discussion to the appropriate level.)
 - [This program](#) by Carolina K-12 on Nina Simone includes a 7-minute reading of an excerpt of the book by professional performance artist Kathryn Williams. (Start at [58:44](#).)
- **8th – 12th:** Have students read the attached overview of Nina Simone and answer the accompanying questions (this can be done individually or in reading partners; this reading can also be assigned as homework the evening before the lesson)

Exploring Nina Simone’s Civil Rights Songs

5. With an understanding of Nina Simone’s overall life and career, allow students to engage with one or more of her civil rights songs, most of which are rich enough to be the content of an entire lesson on their own. Begin by asking students to share their feelings about music in general:
 - What types of music do you listen to/enjoy and why? What role does music serve in your life and in society at large? (i.e., entertainment, inspiration, comfort, etc.) In what ways does music impact you? (For instance, does music or an artist ever cause you to think differently, take up a cause or action, etc.)? Can you think of particular times throughout history and current events when music has played a major role?
6. As students discuss, focus them on the role of music throughout the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s-1960s. Share (and/or project) the following quote from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. from a 1962 NY Times article and allow students to comment on what they think Dr. King means. What examples of this can students cite, either from history, from current events, or from their own lives?
 - “The freedom songs are playing a strong and vital role in our struggle. They give the people new courage and a sense of unity. I think they keep alive a faith, a radiant hope, in the future, particularly in our most trying hours.”
7. Refocus students on the fact that Nina Simone came of age in the south during Jim Crow laws and customs. Her career was blossoming as the Civil Rights Movement escalated during the 1960s, and several violent events propelled her to address what was happening in society directly in her music. Although it was a risk to her career (and she did receive push back), Nina Simone believed that it was an artist’s responsibility to reflect the times.
 - Teachers may want to play a clip of Nina Simone discussing her beliefs regarding the responsibility of an artist to reflect the times they are in, available at the beginning of [Carolina K-12’s program](#) on Nina Simone. Afterwards allow students to reflect on what message they think Nina is conveying regarding art/music, as well as young people.
8. Tell students they are going to listen to (or ideally, view) a recording of a song by Nina Simone while following along with the lyrics. Lyrics are attached for the songs “Mississippi Goddamn” and “(Why) The King of Love is Dead,” but teachers may also want to utilize other Nina Simone recordings. Two levels of student response sheets (“Listening to Nina Simone”) are attached.
 - **Mississippi Goddamn:** A search on YouTube of the song will provide many options of recordings (both of just the song, as well as video performances).
 - [Carolina K-12’s program](#) on Nina Simone includes a video performance of Nina Simone’s “Mississippi Goddamn;” the lyrics and some civil rights imagery are overlaid. ((Start at [41:22](#) to hear two minutes of Nina discussing the Civil Rights Movement. “Mississippi Goddamn” starts at [45:40](#).)
 - For teachers seeking a version of the song that does not expose students to the curse word, you may want to use North Carolina musician Dr. Leonora Helm Hammonds’ recording [here](#).

- Teachers should consider the grade level of students and the community in which you teach when determining whether or not to expose students to this song. It may be wise to discuss options with colleagues and/or administration while weighing this decision.
 - **(Why) *The King of Love is Dead*:** Again, a YouTube search will provide many options of recordings
 - [This Carolina K-12 program](#) on Nina Simone includes a recording of the song over a slideshow of images of Dr. King. (Start at [1:07:25](#).)
 - **Additional civil rights related recordings by Nina Simone:**
 - Strange Fruit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ughAVo2ZAag>
 - Backlash Blues: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0W7K8tYK-Y>
 - Ain't Got No - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZVQmJVXDkk>
 - Old Jim Crow <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ky380OFxZhM>
 - To Be Young, Gifted & Black - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTGiKYqk0gY>
 - Four Women: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWwQx_Keo1U
8. After determining which song students will engage with, provide them with the lyrics and the appropriate "Listening to Nina Simone" response sheet (depending on what grade level you are teaching.) Tell students that as they listen, they should annotate the lyrics by underlining, highlighting, writing, and/or doodling in the margins their reactions/responses to anything in the lyrics or in the music itself.
- Teachers with ample class time may also want to have students engage with more than one of Nina Simone's songs. Comparing and contrasting various recordings can be a powerful activity as well.
9. After students have engaged with one or more of Nina Simone's recordings, discuss their responses as a class, and provide additional context regarding whichever song they heard. See the article [A History of Protest Music: When Nina Simone Sang What Everyone Was Thinking](#) for historical context to provide and discuss. Other articles of interest:
- [The story behind Nina Simone's protest song, "Mississippi Goddam"](#)
 - [How Nina Simone used protest music to challenge racial discrimination](#)
 - [A Raised Voice: How Nina Simone turned the movement into music](#)
10. Culminate with a discussion:
- Think back to everything we have learned and read about – what are all of the challenges Nina Simone faced throughout her lifetime and career? Despite all of these challenges, in what ways did Nina persist, resist, and persevere? What does this say about her and so many others like her, who stand up and speak out despite the risks?
 - Considering everything we have discussed and learned about Nina Simone, what words would you use to describe her and why? What most inspires you about her?
 - How should Nina Simone be remembered?

Nina Simone's Legacy

11. Project an [image of Nina Simone's childhood home](#) and tell students that in 2016, with Simone's childhood home in Tryon on the market, four African American artists teamed up to purchase the structure, fearing it would be demolished. Two years later, the [National Trust for Historic Preservation](#) designated the house a "national treasure," thereby protecting it from demolition, with the organization working to find ways to restore it. Discuss:
- Why is it important to preserve this important site of Nina Simone's life?
 - As the National Trust and other community partners determine what to do with the house and the surrounding site, what do you think is most important for them to consider? What aspects of Nina Simone's life and career are most important to highlight and educate visitors about? What kinds of things do you think the site should include and why? To what audience should the site be geared and why?

12. Tell students that the Trust's [Nina Simone Childhood Home Reuse Project](#) (as of Feb. 2022) proposed two design concepts for the future of Nina Simone's home to the community for feedback. Handout and go over the attached Concept Designs and allow students to weigh in on the concepts for a bit. Next, explain that their assignment is to synthesize everything they have learned about Nina Simone to design their own concept for how her homesite should be designed, what it should focus on, and to whom the design should be directed (i.e., children, musicians, activists, general public, etc.)
13. Prior to assigning this culminating activity, teachers should determine whether it will be completed individually, or in project partners/teams, as well as how much class time and homework time students will be provided for engaging in the assignment. (This can be done as a brief in class processing activity, or it can be more in depth and last over several days.) Teachers should let students know the due date, as well as how their final work will be shared and discussed. (A fun presentation option, for instance, is for teachers to ask a few other faculty/staff members to serve as a selection committee. Students can present their concepts in a "Shark Tank" style pitch to the Committee, after which the Committee can select which concepts they are most interested in.)

Read Aloud & Discussion Guide for NINA, A Story of Nina Simone

Introduction: Hold up the cover of the book [“NINA: A Story of Nina Simone,”](#) written by Traci N. Todd and illustrated by Christian Robinson, for students to view for a few moments. Ask them what stands out to them about what they see.

Read: Tell students you are going to read the book to them, which will teach them more about the extraordinary life and career of Nina Simone. Teachers may want to give students blank paper and colored pencils or crayons so that they can doodle while they listen. Provide a prompt such as: “As I read, I want you to fill in your paper with any colors that represent how the book makes you feel, doodles or drawings that come to mind, words that stick out, or thoughts/feelings that pop in your head.”

Discussion Questions:

- What did you like about that book? What was your favorite part?
- How did Eunice first start playing piano?
- How did Mrs. Miller help Eunice? How did Mrs. Miller also hurt Eunice?
- (Return to the pages in the book that picture the moment when Mrs. Miller determines her son, David, and Eunice should no longer play together, and allow students to comment on what they see in the illustrations.) Why do you think Mrs. Miller made the choice to prohibit David and Eunice playing together? (Use the “White Only” and “Colored Only” imagery to open up a discussion about [Jim Crow in North Carolina](#) and the South.)
- Mrs. Miller was enforcing and Eunice was experiencing the customs of segregation. At what other points is Eunice (later to call herself Nina) hurt by segregation and Jim Crow?
- Despite the hurt she experiences from the unjust laws and customs, how does Eunice fight back, even as a little girl? (Return to the images in the book when Eunice refuses to play piano until her parents are returned to the front row; allow students to comment on this moment and what it says about Eunice’s courage and conviction.)
- How do you think these early moments in Eunice’s life impacted and influenced her and her music as she became known as Nina Simone?
- Take students back to the moment in the book when Curtis rejects Nina. Reread the sentence, “And for the first time, Eunice wondered whether being Black meant an end to all of her dreams.” Why was Eunice feeling this way? What could you say to her to encourage her? (This question can also be posed as a culminating writing activity at the end of the lesson.)
- Reread: “But while Nina sang of love, something else stirred in the streets of Philadelphia. A low rumble of anger and fear – the sound of Black people rising, rising, unwilling to accept being treated as less than human.” What time in our history is this referring to? What can you tell me about the Civil Rights Movement?
- What sound does the author mention several times throughout the story? (A drumbeat.) Why do you think she chose to move the story forward with the beat of a drum in the background? What might this symbolize? (“The drumbeat was relentless, demanding. Its steady rhythm tugged at the hurt Nina had tucked away for so long, and set it free.”)
- What are some of the moments the book specifically mentions regarding the escalating fight for civil rights? Review moments from the book such as:
 - “Hundreds of miles away, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. sat in a Birmingham jail. He had marched the streets of that Alabama city, demanding respect and dignity. Instead, he and his followers were hosed, beaten, and arrested. And that steady, rising roar grew – louder, faster, until at last it

became the anguished beat of a single drum.” Teachers should show students some [images from Birmingham](#) and further discuss:

- How do you imagine Nina felt seeing these images in the papers and knowing peaceful protestors were being treated this way?
 - Why do you think the protestors didn’t fight back, didn’t they want to? (Teachers should discuss the strategic choice of nonviolence, and how it helped capture images in ways that fighting back would not. However, it’s equally important to let students know that other civil rights activists did fight back, and believed in physical self-defense when necessary. This was an equally important part of the Civil Rights Movement that is often neglected. Show students images such as [this one](#) and allow them to compare and contrast.)
 - “It sounded on June 12, 1963, when Medgar Evers, who demanded justice for Black people, was killed...”
 - “The drum sounded again on September 15, when a Black church was bombed in Birmingham...”
 - “And when that drumbeat sounded on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee, Black people looked to Nina to ease their pain. ‘What will happen,’ she sang, ‘now that the King of Love is dead?’”
 - A recording of The King of Love is Dead (with a visual slide show of images of Dr. King) is available in [This Carolina K-12 program](#) on Nina Simone includes a recording of the song over a slideshow of images of Dr. King. (Start at [1:07:25](#).)
- How did Nina fight back against (resist) the unjust laws and customs of Jim Crow, as well as the violence that was being waged against Black people? What are other ways people (young and old) across the nation stood up against the injustice of Jim Crow?
 - Re-read the page, “Nina pushed all of it into a raging storm of song. She called out Alabama and Mississippi by name. Her lyrics were so fed up and true, they couldn’t be spoken in polite company. But Nina was done being polite. As far as she could tell, politeness had gotten her people nothing.” What important role did music serve during the Civil Rights Movement?
 - Teachers should play and discuss a sample of Nina Simone’s songs that relate to civil rights. (See this lesson’s section on “Exploring Nina Simone’s Civil Rights Songs” for more specifics.)
 - Re-focus students on the section, “But now, as they sat at lunch counters, demanding to be served; rode buses, demanding to be seated; and marched, demanding good jobs for good pay – they knew how much she truly loved them.” As students review the various ways people resisted, teachers may want to show images of the various [sit-ins](#), [Freedom Rides](#), marches for [employment equality](#), etc. for students to discuss.
 - Why do you think Traci Todd ends the book with “hope?” What is hope? What gives you hope when thinking about civil rights for Black people? What can each of us do to help further the continued fight for civil rights?
 - Think back to all of the challenges Eunice/Nina faced throughout the book. Despite all of these challenges, in what ways did Nina persist, resist, and persevere?
 - After reading this book, what words would you use to describe Nina Simone and why? How are you left feeling about her? What most inspires you about her?
 - What questions do you still have about the book or about Nina Simone?

Background & Early Career

Born as Eunice Kathleen Waymon in Tryon, North Carolina on February 21, 1933, Nina Simone's talent as a musician was evident early on when she started playing piano by ear at the age of three. Her mother, a Methodist minister, and her father, a handyman and preacher himself, encouraged all eight of their children to play piano, and couldn't ignore young Eunice's special gift of music. After Eunice began playing piano in church (she didn't yet sing), two local women – her mother's employer and a music teacher – were struck by her talent. Eunice's family was unable to afford lessons, so the women arranged for Eunice to take classes for free.



A young Eunice Waymon (Nina Simone) in North Carolina; 1930s

Eunice was soon studying and expertly playing Bach, Chopin, Brahms, Beethoven and Schubert. Her music teacher saw such promise that she helped establish a special fund to pay for Eunice's secondary education. In 1948 Eunice attended the private Allen Home School for Girls in Asheville, where she flourished musically and academically, graduating as valedictorian. After finishing high school, her community contributed to send the pianist to New York City's famed Juilliard School of Music. When her education fund ran low, Eunice hoped to continue her classical training with a scholarship to the prestigious Curtis Institute of Philadelphia, but was denied entrance. Eunice believed the denial was because she was Black and a woman. (Curtis Institute granted her an honorary degree the year before she died.)



*Allen School photo;
14 years old*

With her hope of becoming an African American classical pianist dashed by the denial, Eunice had to make money to support herself and help her family, who had since moved to Philadelphia to be near her. Turning away from classical music, she started playing popular songs of the time in Atlantic City clubs in the 1950s. Before long, she started singing while playing piano, after a bar owner told her it was necessary if she wanted to keep performing. Not wanting her mother, a strict Methodist minister, to know that she was performing "the devil's music," around this time Eunice began using the stage name Nina Simone. (She eventually told her mother the truth, and while her mother wasn't happy with Nina's new work, she was grateful for the much-needed money it brought in.)

Innovative Fusion of Styles

Nina grew in popularity due to her unique style. In many ways, her music defied standard definitions. Her classical training showed through, no matter what genre of song she played, and she drew from styles that included gospel, pop, folk, jazz, and blues. Mixed with her soulful voice, Nina became a hit and began recording her music in the late 1950s under the Bethlehem label, releasing her first full album in 1957.

Prominent Civil Rights Artist & Activist

While Nina Simone's popularity and career were escalating, so too was the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. More and more people were pushing back against Jim Crow, the name referring to racist laws (such as segregation and voting restrictions) and customs that restricted the rights of Black people and other people of color. As Nina's fame grew, she became friends with prominent Black leaders, writers, musicians, and civil rights activists, such as poet Langston Hughes, novelist James Baldwin, playwright Lorraine Hansberry, and activist Malcolm X.



By the mid-1960s, after civil rights leader Medgar Evers was gunned down in Mississippi, and the 16th Street Baptist Church was bombed in Alabama killing four little girls, Nina quickly came out with a song titled "Mississippi Goddam" in response. But the tune wasn't just crying out about these violent events. Nina was voicing anguish about all the acts of violence and oppression against Black communities in the segregated South. Composed in under an hour, the song would become her first battle cry for the civil rights movement. "It was my first civil rights song," she later recalled, "and it erupted out of me quicker than I could write it down."

Actual justice was agonizingly slow for the victims and community affected by the bombing. One of the Birmingham perpetrators wasn't convicted until 14 years after the attack and two others weren't jailed until more than 38 years later. The fourth died before being charged.

There were some who protested the protest tune. "We got several letters where they had actually broken up this recording and sent it back to the recording company, really, telling them it was in bad taste," Simone said during a 1964 interview on the Steve Allen Show. "They missed the whole point."

In the years after she first penned the song, Simone changed the lyric, "Tennessee made me lose my rest," several times during various live performances around the country and the world. On the same 1964 episode of Allen's show, Simone swapped the line for, "St. Augustine made me lose my rest," in honor of the civil rights movement that took hold in that Floridian city. A year later, she sang for "Selma," after the brutal police confrontation with peaceful marchers across Alabama's Edmund Pettus bridge in 1965, and later that same year for "Watts," when riots broke out over six days in that Los Angeles neighborhood. Simone then mourned that, "Memphis made me lose my rest," after Martin Luther King was assassinated there in 1968.

"An artist's duty, as far as I'm concerned, is to reflect the times. That to me is my duty," Simone said in an interview with Black Journal. "And at this crucial time in our lives when everything is so desperate, when every day is a matter of survival, I don't think you can help but be involved."

"Young people, Black and white, know this. That's why they're so involved in politics. We will shape and mold this country, I will not be molded and shaped at all anymore."

Nina then dedicated herself and her music to the fight for freedom, often playing at civil rights marches and rallies, including the 1965 March from Selma to Alabama. As she commented, "You can't be an artist and NOT reflect the times."



The singer openly mocked segregation laws in her song “Old Jim Crow.” She came out with “Backlash Blues” in 1967, written by her friend Langston Hughes. After the assassination of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, Simone's bassist Greg Taylor penned "Why (The King of Love Is Dead)," which she performed in honor of Dr. King. In 1969 she wrote the civil rights anthem “Young Gifted and Black” as a tribute to (and borrowing the play title from) her longtime friend, playwright Lorraine Hansberry.

Struggles and Career Renaissance

As the 1960s drew to a close, Simone tired of the American music scene and the country's deeply divided racial politics. She later lived in several different countries, including Liberia, Switzerland, England and Barbados before eventually settling down in the South of France. For years, Simone also struggled with severe mental health issues and experienced financial troubles.

Simone went through a career renaissance in the 1980s when her song "My Baby Just Cares For Me" was used in a Chanel No. 5 perfume commercial in the United Kingdom. The song thus became a Top 10 hit in Britain in 1985. She also penned her autobiography, *I Put a Spell on You*, which was published in 1991. Her next recording, “A Single Woman”, came out in 1993. Touring periodically, Simone maintained a strong fan base that filled concert halls whenever she performed.

Death and Legacy

In her final years, reports indicated that Nina Simone was battling breast cancer. She died at the age of 70 on April 21, 2003, at her home in France.

While she may be gone, Simone left a lasting impression on the world of music, art and activism. She sang to share her truth, and her work still resonates with great emotion and power. Simone has inspired an array of performers and her deep, distinctive voice continues to be a popular choice for television and film soundtracks.

In 2016, with Simone's childhood home in Tryon on the market, four African American artists teamed up to purchase the structure, fearing it would be demolished. Two years later, the National Trust for Historic Preservation designated the house a "national treasure," thereby protecting it from demolition, with the organization reportedly intent on finding ways to restore it for use by future artists.

Article excerpts taken from <https://respect-mag.com/2016/02/respect-black-history-moment-nina-simone/> and <https://www.biography.com/musician/nina-simone>;

Answer:

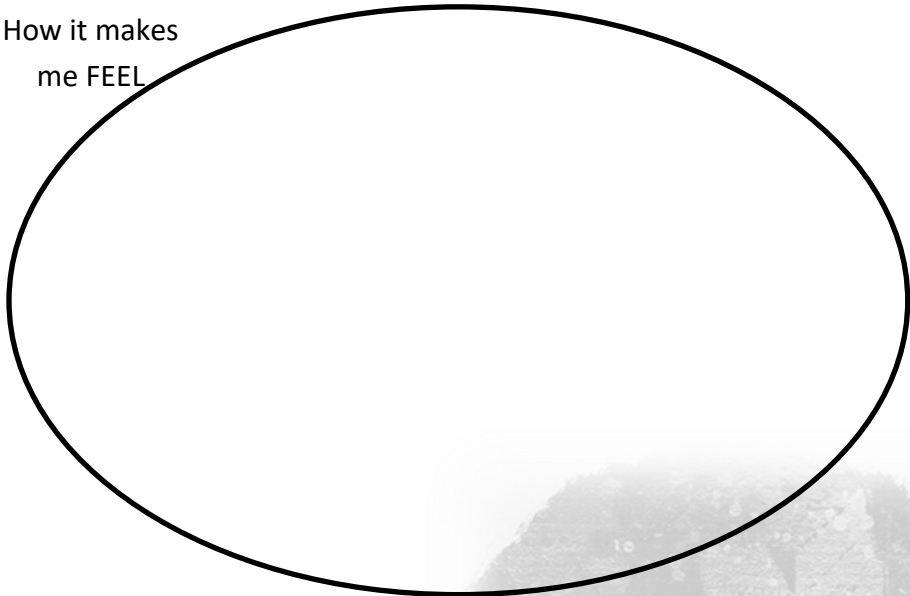
1. What successes and obstacles did Eunice Waymon face in her early musical education?
2. What made Nina Simone's style so unique?
3. Considering the years in which Eunice Waymon/Nina Simone worked and lived (she was born in 1933), what challenges (personally and in society at large) did she face? In what ways did Nina use music to address some of these challenges?
4. What led Nina to write the song “Mississippi Goddamn?” Why was this a revolutionary (and even dangerous) choice at the time?
5. What do you most admire about Nina Simone and why?

Name: _____

Listening to Nina Simone

Song Title: _____

How it makes
me FEEL



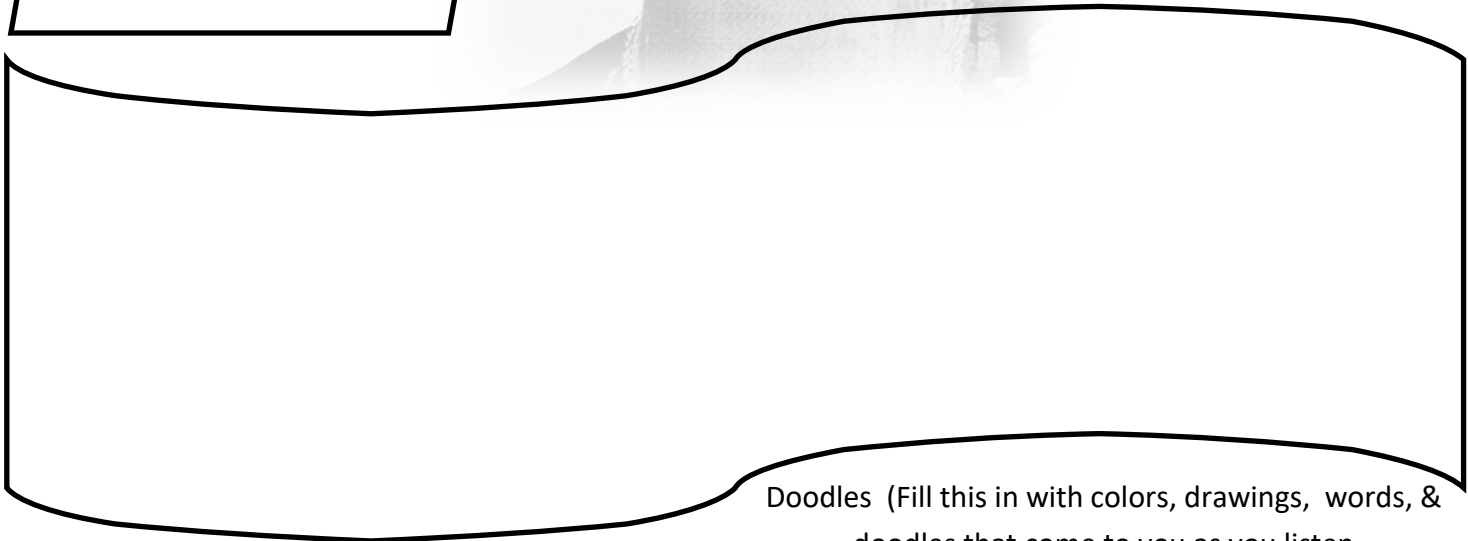
What it makes me THINK about



A lyric I like or that is important ...



Doodles (Fill this in with colors, drawings, words, & doodles that come to you as you listen)



Name: _____

Listening to Nina Simone

Song Title: _____

Recording Date: _____

As you listen, pay attention to the words of the song, as well as the aspects of the music itself (mood, tempo, style, etc.) Annotate the handout of lyrics provided to you while listening then answer the following questions.

1. What did you notice in the song as you listened? What stood out to you?
2. How did the song make you feel?
3. What emotions did Nina Simone herself present throughout the song? (Cite particular sections where you noticed the strongest emotions.)
4. Is there anything about the structure of the lyrics and/or music that strikes you as important or unique? Explain.
5. How does the song connect to the Civil Rights Movement? Which civil rights events, social issues, and/or struggles are being alluded to? Note specific examples.
6. How do you think this song would have been received by opponents of Jim Crow and segregation, and those actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement and why? How would this song have been received by proponents of Jim Crow and segregation and why?
7. What year was this song produced? Given the realities of the times, what risks did Nina Simone face in releasing/performing this song?
8. Review the lyrics and your annotations. In your opinion, what is the most powerful part of the song and why? (Note specific lyrics or musical moments.)
9. In what ways is this song still relevant today? (Are there connections to be made to current events?)

Lyrics to *Mississippi Goddam* by Nina Simone (1964)

Alabama's gotten me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam
Alabama's gotten me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam
Can't you see it
Can't you feel it
It's all in the air
I can't stand the pressure much longer
Somebody say a prayer
Alabama's gotten me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam
This is a show tune
But the show hasn't been written for it, yet
Hound dogs on my trail
School children sitting in jail
Black cat cross my path
I think every day's gonna be my last
Lord have mercy on this land of mine
We all gonna get it in due time
I don't belong here
I don't belong there
I've even stopped believing in prayer
Don't tell me
I tell you
Me and my people just about due
I've been there so I know
They keep on saying "Go slow!"
But that's just the trouble
"Do it slow"
Washing the windows
"Do it slow"
Picking the cotton
"Do it slow"
You're just plain rotten
"Do it slow"
You're too damn lazy
"Do it slow"
The thinking's crazy
"Do it slow"
Where am I going
What am I doing
I don't know, I don't know

Just try to do your very best
Stand up be counted with all the rest
For everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam
I made you thought I was kiddin'
Picket lines
School boy cots
They try to say it's a communist plot
All I want is equality
For my sister my brother my people and me
Yes you lied to me all these years
You told me to wash and clean my ears
And talk real fine just like a lady
And you'd stop calling me Sister Sadie
Oh but this whole country is full of lies
You're all gonna die and die like flies
I don't trust you any more
You keep on saying "Go slow!"
"Go slow!"
But that's just the trouble
"Do it slow"
Desegregation
"Do it slow"
Mass participation
"Do it slow"
Reunification
"Do it slow"
Do things gradually
"Do it slow"
But bring more tragedy
"Do it slow"
Why don't you see it
Why don't you feel it
I don't know
I don't know
You don't have to live next to me
Just give me my equality
Everybody knows about Mississippi
Everybody knows about Alabama
Everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam
That's it!

Lyrics to *The King of Love is Dead* by Nina Simone (1968)

[Verse 1]

Once upon this planet earth
Lived a man of humble birth
Preaching love and freedom for his fellow man

He was dreaming of a day
Peace would come to earth to stay
And he spread this message all across the land

Turn the other cheek he'd plead
Love thy neighbor was his creed
Pain humiliation death, he did not dread

With his Bible at his side
From his foes he did not hide
It's hard to think that this great man is dead (Oh
yes)

Will the murders never cease
Are thy men or are they beasts?
What do they ever hope, ever hope to gain?
Will my country fall, stand or fall?
Is it too late for us all?
And did Martin Luther King just die in vain?

[Chorus]

Cos he'd seen the mountain top
And he knew he could not stop
Always living with the threat of death ahead

Folks you'd better stop and think
Cos we're heading for the brink
What will happen now that he is dead?

[Verse 2]

He was for equality
For all people, you and me
Full of love and good will, hate was not his way

He was not a violent man
Bigotry had sealed his fate
We can all shed tears but it won't change a thing

Teach your people, will they ever learn
Must you always kill with burn and burn with
guns

And kill with guns and burn
Don't you know how we gotta react?
Don't you know what it will bring?

[Chorus]

[Verse 3]

Folks you'd better stop and think...and feel again
For we're headed for the brink
What's gonna happen now? In all of our cities?
My people are rising; they're living in lies
Even if they have to die
Even if they have to die at the moment they
know what life is
Even at that one moment that ya know what life
is

If you have to die, it's all right
Cause you know what life is
You know what freedom is for one moment of
your life
What's gonna happen now that the King is
dead?

Nina Simone Childhood Home Reuse Project Concept Designs (as of Feb. 2022)

The Site

Concentrating on her home and its immediate context, key locations are highlighted and labeled in this map with potential use opportunities in and around the site. These locations remain conceptual in nature, but begin to identify areas of opportunities for modes of transportation, connection to the site, and use of the property once restored.



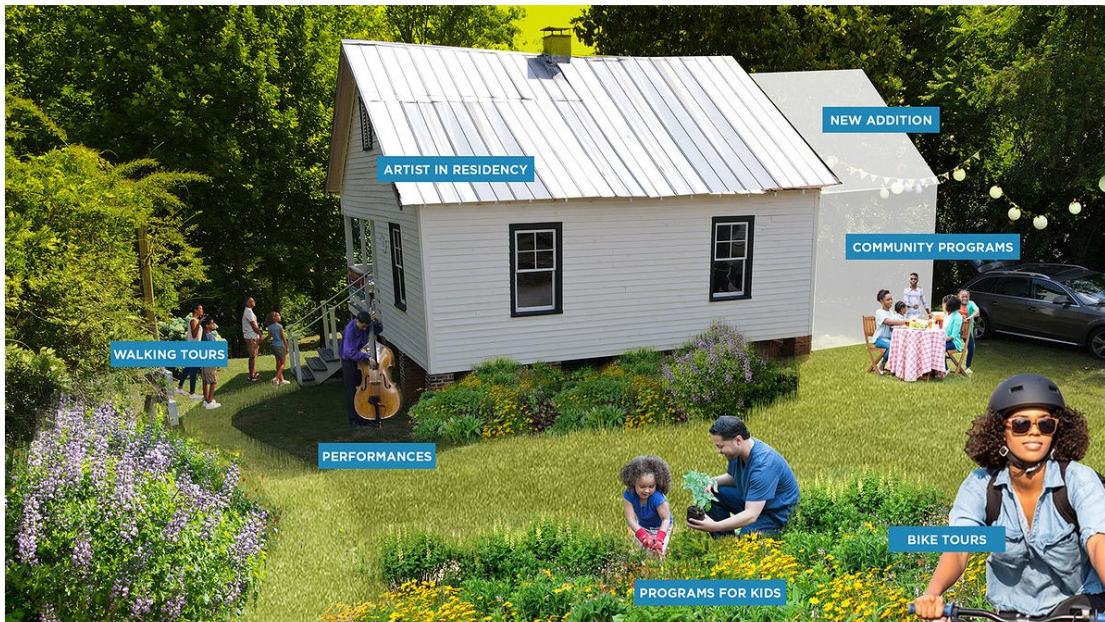
Concept 1: Keep it Authentic

This concept is focused on fully restoring the Nina Simone Childhood Home and keeping it without any additions of modern amenities, providing an opportunity to preserve the authenticity of the home, space, and scale that was experienced by Nina Simone and her family. Visitors and artists could meditate and gain inspiration in offsite facilities. These could be located near the home or further out, creating an opportunity to connect with the wider community and the broader Nina Simone story.



Concept 2: Create an “And” instead of an “Either/Or”

This concept includes full rehabilitation of the historic structure and adding an expansion structure to accommodate modern amenities, such as upgraded electrical and an HVAC system. This would allow for year-round occupation by artists and activists and make the home and the overall site a daily community anchor. Artists in residence, visitors, and people from the community would be comfortable and able to fully utilize the house and site regardless of the weather or time of year.



Create Your Own Concept Design for Nina Simone’s Birthplace

After reviewing the concepts officially proposed, consider what components you like, which you do not, and what you think is missing or could be improved. Using these thoughts, plus everything you have learned about Nina Simone, design your own concept for Nina Simone’s birthplace. Your concept might pull from the two proposed, or it might be completely different. Consider:

- What should the goal and mission of Nina Simone’s restored birthplace be? What do you want visitors to walk away thinking, feeling, and remembering?
- Relatedly, who is the intended audience to whom your mission is directed? (i.e., musicians, artists, civil rights activists, children, college students, the general public, etc.)
- How will you design your concept to ensure it best conveys and realizes your goals and mission?
- What important themes will your design elevate and how? (i.e., freedom, perseverance, resilience, resistance, artistry, hard work, etc.)
- What specific design elements will your concept include? (Review the map provided under “The Site” and think about what you might do with this plot of land to maximize impact in your own concept.)

Your final concept should include:

- A map of the site (this can be a plot outline, as pictured under the section “The Site”, that shows what you envision the site will include)
- A paragraph or more written description of your final concept. This should include your answers to the questions above, organized in a clear and inspirational way that will motivate others to choose your concept as the final design.
- A visual, with labeling, to accompany your concept (see the visuals under the 2 concepts provided as examples)

DUE DATE: _____