

Global Music Lesson Plans

Lesson 3: Songs of Fela Kuti – Nigeria (Age range 14-16)

Time required:

60 minutes.

Activity:

Listening to and appraising 'Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense' by Fela Kuti.

Aims:

- To explore popular songs as a powerful medium for protest against corrupt political regimes.
- To introduce the life and music of Fela Kuti, one of Africa's musical superstars.

Pupils will learn:

- How Afro-beat fuses characteristics of traditional Nigerian, Jazz and soul music.
- To appraise fusion music.
- How songs can be used as a powerful medium of protest.

Web links you will need:

- [Information about Fela Kuti](#).
- Audio file: '[Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense](#)' by Fela Kuti. Note: the song length is 25 minutes which makes this a large file to download, it can be downloaded for approx. 52p. The excerpt used in this lesson relates to the following timings: 15' 58" – 21' 40".
- [Lyrics of 'Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense' by Fela Kuti](#). Note: click on link and scroll down to find the song.
- Audio file of the [Yoruba chant 'Obatala'](#). Note: scroll down to 'Listen to samples' and click on track 2 sample 'Obatala'

Other resources you will need:

- 'Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense' Listening worksheet provided.
- 'Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense' Teacher prompt sheet provided.

Useful information	
<p>Because of its potential for mass appeal, music has often been used to convey social, political and cultural messages. There are many examples of songs from diverse cultures around the world that communicate the outrage of individuals at all forms of social injustice. Fela Kuti is an example of a musician whose defiant messages resonated with mass audiences and made him a powerful voice of dissent.</p> <p>He was a Nigerian musician, born into an elite family, who enjoyed huge popularity and respect across the African continent and beyond. Fela Kuti was outraged by the high levels of corruption in Nigerian politics, which resulted in appalling levels of poverty. He spent his entire career writing highly politicised songs which openly criticised the government and also the governments of reactionary conservative nations (including the USA and UK). As a result he was continually harassed by the Nigerian government (this included violence towards himself, his family and fellow musicians) and he was once imprisoned. Kuti died in 1997 of AIDS leaving 50 albums to his credit.</p> <p>Fela Kuti's songs are unusually long. 'Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense' lasts for over 25 minutes. Kuti developed a new musical style which fused elements of Afro-Soul Jazz and traditional Nigerian music. Kuti moves between languages in his songs often using pidgen English, the language of the Nigerian poor. The style that emerged was named Afro-beat.</p> <p>Read a full account of the life and music of Fela Kuti.</p>	

Lesson plan Songs of Fela Kuti – Nigeria (Age range 14–16)	
Starter	<p>Ask pupils in pairs to write down words they associate with 'freedom'. Ask them to categorise their words with a suitable heading for each group.</p> <p>Discuss the categories of words as a class. What do they have in common?</p> <p>Next introduce the idea of 'Freedom to do ...' and 'Freedom from'. Discuss whether there is a difference between the two.</p> <p>Explain that they will be learning about the music of Fela Kuti, a Nigerian who was a politically motivated and who's lyrics were highly critical of the Nigerian government. As a result, he spent most of the 1980's in prison.</p>
Main	<p>Introduce the music of Fela Kuti. He was a musician whose freedoms were restricted by an oppressive government. Using the worksheet provided, outline the context of his music as essentially politically motivated protest music (see 'Useful information') along with some of the key biographical details that help pupils understand his situation.</p> <p>Ask pupils to listen to part of the excerpt and follow the lyric. Note: the teacher will need to locate the part of the lyric that relates to the excerpt. Discuss the mix of languages in the song (question 1), using the teacher prompt provided.</p> <p>Point out that the song is in Afro-beat, a fusion style created by Fela Kuti. To help pupils understand this, ask them to listen to the song and answer question 2, completing the grid provided. Note: the track timings are provided and pupils will need to be prompted as to when each section begins.</p>

	<p>Also the modality of each section has been provided. Much of the music is pentatonic, the modality of a great deal of African traditional music.</p> <p>Ask pupils to feedback their answers so far.</p> <p>Discuss questions 3 – 5.</p> <p>Summarise the context and key features of the music, pointing out that this is one of many fusion styles currently developing in Africa.</p>
Plenary	<p>To deepen their understanding of the music of Fela Kuti, listen to ‘Obatala’.</p> <p>This chant originates from the Nigerian Yarouba tribe that Fela Kuti’s family originated from.</p> <p>Discuss the features of ‘Obatala’ and ask pupils if they can identify a section of ‘Teacher Don’t Teach Me Nonsense’ in which Fela Kuti uses a similar chant. <i>(It is most similar to section 6 – the unison chant.)</i></p> <p>Ask pupils why ‘Obatala’ comes from Cuba? <i>(Because of the transportation of Yarouba slaves during the slave trade.)</i></p> <p>What does this tell us about the melodies and rhythms of Cuban music? <i>(They have their roots in the musical traditions of West Africa.)</i></p> <p>Point out that it is interesting how musical influences are fluid, passing backwards and forwards between diverse cultures e.g. Fela Kuti is influenced by Soul and Jazz, both essentially black American fusion styles that owe their origins to black oppression.</p>

Worksheet: Listening to an excerpt from *Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense* By Fela Anikulapo Kuti

Fela Kuti was a Nigerian musician, born into an elite family, who enjoyed huge popularity and respect across the African continent and beyond. Fela Kuti was outraged by the high levels of corruption in Nigerian politics, which resulted in appalling levels of poverty and spent his entire career writing highly politicised songs which openly criticised the government and also the governments of reactionary conservative nations (including the USA and UK). In response he was continually harassed by the government (including violence towards himself, his family and fellow musicians) and spent time in prison. Kuti died in 1997 of Aids leaving 50 albums to his credit.

Fela Kuti's songs are unusually long, *Teacher don't teach me nonsense* lasts for over 25 minutes. Kuti developed a new musical style which fused elements of Afro-soul Jazz and traditional Nigerian music. The style that emerged was named Afro-beat.

Listen to a six minute excerpt taken from the song *Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense*.

Questions:

1. Why do you think that Fela Kuti mixes languages in the song?
2. Complete the grid below identifying and writing down the foreground and the accompaniment features of each section of the song.
3. Which aspects of the song are traditional Nigerian and which are Jazz/Soul influenced?
4. Much African traditional music is cyclic. Which aspects of this song are cyclic and which are linear?
5. Why do you think that Fela Kuti's songs have not received more widespread popularity outside Africa?

Timing	Features
Section 1 15.58	Foreground: Accompaniment: Modality: pentatonic
Section 2 16.20	Foreground: Accompaniment: Modality: pentatonic
Section 3 17.09	Foreground: Accompaniment: Modality: pentatonic
Section 4 18.15	Foreground: Accompaniment: Modality: pentatonic
Section 5 18.50	Foreground: Accompaniment: Modality: pentatonic
Section 6 19.32	Foreground: Accompaniment: Modality: pentatonic

Teacher Prompt sheet:

Q. 1 Why do you think Fela Kuti mixes languages in the song?

(Because the Nigerian poor speak pidgen English and he wanted to reach a wide audience)

Q. 2

Timing	Features
Section 1 15.58	Foreground: Solo chant with repeating brass and saxophone riff. Accompaniment: electric and bass guitar chordal and melodic riffs & percussion Modality: pentatonic
Section 2 16.20	Foreground: Solo call with unison responses from female backing singers and brass and saxophones Accompaniment: electric and bass guitar chordal and melodic riffs & percussion Modality: pentatonic
Section 3 17.09	Foreground: Solo chant with short brass and saxophone 'stabs'. Accompaniment: electric and bass guitar chordal and melodic riffs & percussion Modality: pentatonic
Section 4 18.15	Foreground: Short hypnotic solo call answered by an a cappella riff response from mixed voice backing singers Accompaniment: electric and bass guitar chordal and melodic riff & percussion Modality: pentatonic
Section 5 18.50	Foreground: Solo chant Accompaniment: lead guitar improvisation, rhythm guitar chordal riff, bass guitar riff and percussion Modality: pentatonic
Section 6 19.32	Foreground: Unison chant leading into a hypnotic choral riff with solo improvised chanting Accompaniment: lead guitar improvisation, rhythm guitar chordal riff, bass guitar riff and percussion. Addition of short brass and saxophone 'stabs' as music builds up Modality: pentatonic