

COMPARING LANGUAGE OF SELF-EMPOWERMENT

A LANGUAGE ARTS LESSON PLAN

GRADES 6–8

Overview

In 1829, David Walker (1796/97-1830), a free African American born in North Carolina, published his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. Known simply as *Walker's Appeal* or the *Appeal*, it invoked the Bible and the Declaration of Independence to challenge the brutal injustices of slavery in America. It also criticized the hypocrisy of whites for advocating democratic and Christian principles, yet at the same time, condoning slavery. Walker used sophisticated language that resonated powerfully with free and enslaved blacks, many of whom were illiterate. He urged African Americans to stand up and to fight for their freedom with violence if necessary, although he hoped bloodshed could be avoided. The *Appeal* had a tremendous impact throughout the North and South, igniting a new yearning for freedom among the enslaved and an explosion of outrage among many whites. In 1968, 138 years after the *Appeal's* publication, James Brown, an African American singer, songwriter, and performing artist recorded the top-ten hit, "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud." This work also encouraged African Americans to resist racial injustice. Born in South Carolina and raised in poverty, Brown had an extraordinary talent and driving ambition that led him to become a national and international musical sensation, known by such titles as "The King of Soul" and "The Hardest Working Man in Show Business." Although most of his recordings were apolitical, "Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud" was targeted to African Americans and urged them to fight racism with black pride, self-reliance, and activism. Unlike Walker, Brown used simple language that a child could understand and even used children's voices to sing the chorus. He clearly wanted black youth to hear his message of racial pride and self-empowerment.

In this lesson, students examine the language of self-empowerment used by Walker and Brown. They learn how each man used his unique talent, the resources available to him, and his creativity to get his political message disseminated to a large national audience. While written in different historical eras—the late 1820s vs. the late 1960s—both works were designed to galvanize the national black community into political awareness and action.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Discuss the life and times of both David Walker and James Brown.
- Recall what the *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* was.
- Describe the Civil Rights Era and some of the historical events that happened in 1968, the year in which James Brown wrote "Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud."
- Identify common themes of the *Appeal* and "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud."
- Discuss differences and similarities in the language used, purpose, and audience for each work.
- Consider the influence of recent technological advances in communication and how these technologies are used as political tools.

Guiding Questions

What can we learn about the struggle for racial equality from speeches, works of literature, songs, and other written materials produced in a given political era?

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

1. Read and review Teacher Tool 1, a brief biography of David Walker.
2. Read and review Teacher Tool 2, a brief biography of James Brown.
3. View the short video, *Excerpts from David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, and be prepared to show the video to your students.
4. Access the music for "Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud" available at:
 - <http://www.lala.com/#song/432627043554446802>
 - <http://new.music.yahoo.com/james-brown/tracks/say-it-loud-im-black-and-im-proud-pt-1--482675>and be prepared to have your students listen to the song.
5. Review Teacher Tool 3, which provides a brief overview of role of abolitionism in American politics and society from 1820 through the 1850s.
6. Review Teacher Tool 4, which provides an overview of the American civil rights movement from 1954 to 1968.
7. Review and print Student Handout 1, which provides an excerpt from David Walker's *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. The full text of Walker's *Appeal* is available at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/walker/walker.html>.
8. Review and print Student Handout 2, which provides the lyrics for James Brown's "Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud."

Teaching the Lesson (Suggested Steps)

1. Ask the students if they talk differently with their friends than with teachers and parents? Do they put time and thought into being persuasive when the topic or the listener is important to them? Ask students for additional examples. Explain to students that when they do this, they are changing their communication in order to reach different audiences.
2. Using the information in Teacher Tool 3, provide students with a brief introductory overview of the origins of the abolition movement and its influence on politics, society, and the emerging crisis from 1820 through the 1850s.
3. Show the short video, *Excerpts from David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, which includes a performance of some words and ideas in the *Appeal*.
4. Using the information in Teacher Tool 1, provide students with a brief overview of the life of David Walker and his *Appeal*.
5. Provide students with a copy of Student Handout 1 and ask them to read it.
6. Ask students to share their impressions of Walker's *Appeal*. Draw their attention to the sophisticated language. Have students consider the purpose and audience for his work.
7. Ask students specifically to consider Walker's text and speech; does Walker's choice of words and syntax counter Thomas Jefferson's theory that African Americans are mentally inferior to whites? Why does Walker make references to the Bible and United States history? Why did Walker smile at the article in the South Carolina paper about the Turks being barbarians? You could introduce or reinforce the idea of irony. Ask students if this text affects their view of the intelligence of the enslaved?

8. Explain to students that 138 years after David Walker's *Appeal*, African Americans were still fighting for equal rights. Using the information in Teacher Tool 4, provide students an overview of the civil rights movement.
9. Play James Brown's "Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud."
10. Using the information in Teacher Tool 2, provide students with a brief overview of the life of James Brown.
11. Provide students a copy of Student Handout 2, the lyrics to the song "Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud." Have students review the lyrics.
12. Ask students to share their impressions of the song and consider the audience and purpose of this song.
13. Have students consider both pieces. Why do they think that David Walker challenged a largely illiterate audience with a very sophisticated essay presented in very learned language, while James Brown used much simpler language in trying to reach his audience?
14. Complete the lesson by engaging students in a discussion regarding current political messages and different communication tools such as the Internet, Twitter, and text messages. How have technological advances changed political messages?
15. As an assignment to complete the lesson plan, ask students to either modify the song "Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud" to include selected terms and references from the *Appeal* to refine and support its emotional message; or, use selected terms and references from Walker's *Appeal* to transform it into a series of Twitter or text messages, rhyming song lyrics, or catchy slogans.