lena: a moment with a lady
A Moment with a Lady

Lena Horne. She was born in 1917 in New York City to an upper-middle class, well-educated African American family. At the age of sixteen, Horne dropped out of school and, pushed by her mother’s ambition, was hired as a dancer in the chorus of Harlem’s famous Cotton Club. There she was introduced to a growing community of jazz performers including Billie Holiday, Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington. Horne also met Harold Arlen, who would author her biggest hit “Stormy Weather.” For the next five years she performed in New York nightclubs, on Broadway and toured with the Charlie Barnet Orchestra. Singing with Barnet’s primarily white swing band, Horne was one of the first Black women to successfully work on both sides of the color line.

In 1942, Horne became the first African American performer to sign a long-term contract with MGM Studios (Metro Goldwyn Mayer), the major Hollywood Studio of the time. During that signing period, the NAACP and Horne’s father were very vocal regarding the stipulations of the contract including a demand that Horne not be relegated to roles where she would play a domestic worker, which was the industry standard for African American screen performers at the time. Despite the racism Horne faced, she continued her career and broke barriers. By the mid-1940s, Horne was the highest paid black actor in the country. Her renditions of “Dear Mr. Do” and “As Long as I Live,” and Cole Porter’s “Just One Of Those Things” became instant classics. For the thousands of Black soldiers living abroad during World War II, Horne was the premier pinup girl.

Horne consistently stood up to the racial injustices plaguing the African American community during this time. In the 1940s, she publicly sued a couple of restaurants and theaters because of their discriminatory practices. Lena Horne joined numerous organizations that fought against inequality. She partnered with athlete and performing artist Paul Robeson in joining the liberal organization Progressive Citizens of America. She even went as far as financing her own travel to entertain Black troops. Eventually, MGM Studios pulled her off of their tour because Horne complained to the NAACP about African American soldiers having to sit in the back of the audience. Horne’s Civil Rights activism and friendship with Robeson and others marked her as a communist sympathizer. Like many politically active artists of the time, Horne found herself blacklisted because of her political views and activism. This incident happened during an anti-communist hearing in the U.S. Congress during the 1950s, led by Senator Joseph McCarthy. Lena was unable to perform on television or in the movies for several years afterwards and the attacks on her person and political beliefs continued. Despite this, Horne remained very active in the Civil Rights Movement. Horne performed at the March on Washington which was a big moment in history. She also sang at New York’s first integrated venue, Cafe Society.

Later in her life, Lena was elected as the first African American to serve on the Screen Actors Guild Board of Directors. From 1978-1978, Horne appeared in more than 16 feature films and several shorts. One of her most notable roles was playing Glinda in The Wiz. It was a film adaptation based on the musical The Wizard of Oz. The Wiz had an all-Black cast which included Michael Jackson, Nipsey Russell, Diana Ross, Richard Pryor and many others.

Over the years, Lena Horne won four GRAMMY® Awards: Best Jazz Vocal Album for An Evening with Lena Horne, a live performance album at the Supper Club; Best Pop Vocal Performance and Best Cast Show Album for Lena Horne: The Lady and Her Music and a Lifetime Achievement Award in 1989. Horne also won a Tony Award for her Broadway show Lena Horne: The Lady and Her Music. In 1984, Horne was a recipient of the Kennedy Center Honors. Lena Horne died May 9, 2010, leaving a legacy of art and activism to learn from.

about Lena Horne

Lena: A Moment with a Lady focuses on the life of Lena Horne. An GRAMMY®-winning singer and Civil Rights activist. Lena Horne’s career spanned over 70 years, appearing in film, television and theater. This one-woman performance with music celebrates the story and contributions of Lena Horne. While she is best known for her singing, Horne was also an accomplished actress, dancer, and activist.

The show’s mission is to not only share the truth but to provoke emotion. This one-woman piece will take audiences on an engaging journey through American history. Lena Horne was one of the most influential African American entertainers of all time. She was not only a voice during the Civil Rights Movement, but she also broke the color barrier in Hollywood. Many of the issues Lena faced in her career still affect many people today. Lena: A Moment with a Lady will touch your heart and spark conversation.

Syndee Winters is no stranger to the stage and tours across the world sharing stories through art. The show’s mission is to not only share the truth but to provoke emotion. This one-woman piece will take audiences on an engaging journey through American history. Lena Horne was one of the most influential African American entertainers of all time. She was not only a voice during the Civil Rights Movement, but she also broke the color barrier in Hollywood. Many of the issues Lena faced in her career still affect many people today. Lena: A Moment with a Lady will touch your heart and spark conversation.

Syndee Winters portrays Lena Horne through her timeless music and words. Lena Horne: A Moment with a Lady focuses on the life of Lena Horne. An GRAMMY®-winning singer and Civil Rights activist. Lena Horne’s career spanned over 70 years, appearing in film, television and theater. This one-woman performance with music celebrates the story and contributions of Lena Horne. While she is best known for her singing, Horne was also an accomplished actress, dancer, and activist.

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Prepare for the performance

Introduce Lena Horne with the video “Lena Horne: In Her Own Words” by Turner Classic Movies.

Before viewing: Share and review discussion questions with students in preparation for response.

After viewing: Lead a class discussion surrounding the questions.

Experience the performance

Before the show: Briefly discuss what students know about Lena Horne and what they anticipate to find out.

After the show: Facilitate a discussion around Ms. Horne’s experiences with racism and how they led her to become an activist in the Civil Rights Movement.

Reflect, respond and read

Reflect: Recall Lena’s reaction to African American soldiers being seated in the back at the USO Show, behind the prisoners of war. Further discuss the impact of the reaction to the reaction to Lena’s reaction. Reference the line from the show, “I lost my mind. Or maybe I found my mind”.

Respond: Have students work in pairs or small groups to brainstorm, research and compile a list of other famous figures who took a stand against injustice by completing Worksheet 1: Take a Stand.

Read: Have students read the BBC article “Beyoncé’s Super Bowl Performance: Was It so Significant?” Lead a discussion about the specific ways Beyoncé took a stand against injustice during the performance. Then, watch the performance and discuss any similarities noticed between Lena Horne and Beyoncé. Reference the line from the show, “There would be no Beyoncé, and there’d be no Diana Ross or Eartha Kitt without Lena Horne.” Encourage students to think of any other celebrities who have used their status and platform as a means of taking a stand against injustices.

Focus

Watch the recap of the 2020 NAACP Image Awards as an introduction to both the NAACP as an organization and their annual awards ceremony. Provide time for students to explore the Image Awards website to garner additional knowledge. Encourage students to also explore the hashtag #naacpimageawards on social media.

Lead a discussion regarding the purpose, significance and necessity of the Image Awards in our current time. Prompt students to find and research information about Lena Horne and discuss any postings from 1963. Specific requirements could include a posting from the March on Washington, the moment in 1963 when the NAACP presented Ms. Horne with the President’s Award at the NAACP Image Awards in 1963, the same year she joined the March on Washington as a Civil Rights activist. Working independently, students will draft Ms. Horne’s acceptance speech for the President’s Award, using the provided Worksheet 1: Speech Brainstorming Sheet.

This may require additional research into her activism. Helpful resources can be found one page 3.

Options for younger students (Grades 4-8): Create a mock social media template (suggested resource: Google Slides) for Ms. Horne with postings from 1963. Specific requirements could include a posting from the March on Washington, the moment in 1963 when the NAACP presented Ms. Horne with the President’s Award at the NAACP Image Awards in 1963, the same year she joined the March on Washington as a Civil Rights activist. Working independently, students will draft Ms. Horne’s acceptance speech for the President’s Award, using the provided Worksheet 1: Speech Brainstorming Sheet. Draft their hypothetical acceptance speech for the 2020 NAACP Image Awards President’s Award, reflecting upon what specific words and phrases were most powerful. What was Rihanna’s overall message to all listeners? Then, imagine that Lena Horne hosted the 2020 NAACP Image Awards. After viewing the performance, the students should draft a final speech either as a video or as a live presentation for the class. Based on what you have heard about Lena Horne, do you imagine she ever won an award during her lifetime?

Originate

Watch Rihanna acceptance speech for her NAACP Image Awards President’s Award in 2013. Discuss her most pertinent point and how she took a stand against injustice in her speech. Instruct students to imagine that Lena Horne was awarded the President’s Award at the NAACP Image Awards in 1963. The same year she joined the March on Washington as a Civil Rights activist. Working independently, students will draft Ms. Horne’s acceptance speech for the President’s Award, using the provided Worksheet 1: Speech Brainstorming Sheet.

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Rehearse

As a group, discuss or review important facets of effective public speaking. Consider speaking techniques employed by Ms. Horne and consider the important aspects to consider when drafting a speech. Practice, pitch, volume, speed and body language. In partners or small groups, have students practice their speech for one another and provide feedback on both content and delivery. After receiving their original speech and delivery, have students perform their final speech either as a video or as a live presentation for the class. Encourage students to implement aspects of Ms. Horne’s personality and appearance (if applicable) for this performance.

Make magic

Share student speech videos with your school, community and parents. If possible, invite others to attend the live performances. Use your student’s creativity and connect with others by highlighting and recognizing the strong and courageous words as a call to action for your school and community to take a stand against racial injustice. Lena would be proud of you!

Teacher Focus

Student Activity

Watch the video clip “Lena Horne: In Her Own Words” by Turner Classic Movies.

Participate in a class discussion surrounding the following questions:

1. What words best describe Lena Horne’s personality?
2. Was Lena Horne an actress, an singer, or dancer?
3. Lena states, “I had a lot of my life wishes fulfilled, but I wasn’t all cake and candy.” What roadblocks did Ms. Horne encounter during her career?

Before the show: What do you know about Lena Horne currently and what do you anticipate you will know after viewing the show?

After the show: Describe an instance from the show when Ms. Horne faced racism in her life and/or career. How did she react? How did she elevate her personality and become a Civil Rights activist?

Before the show: How can you take the beliefs and attitudes of the strong and courageous African American women you’ve studied (Beyoncé, Rihanna and of course Lena Horne) and apply them to your everyday encounters? How can you take a stand against racial injustice beyond this activity? Continue Lena Horne’s legacy as an advocate for what is right through her passion as an entertainer.

Reflect: How does Lena’s reaction to African American soldiers being seated in the back at the USO Show behind the prisoners of war reflect her personality? What do you imagine Lena would have done in that situation? Have that situation enlighten Lena to become an advocate for the Civil Rights Movement?

Response: Complete Worksheet 1: Take a Stand with a partner or small group.

Read: What made Beyoncé’s 2019 Super Bowl halftime performance significant? How do you imagine Lena Horne would have reacted to the performance? What makes this performance a good example of an African American entertainer standing up for the rights of people of color?

After watching Rihanna acceptance speech for her 2020 NAACP Image Awards President’s Award, reflect upon what spoken words and phrases were most powerful. What was Rihanna’s overall message to all listeners? Then, imagine that Lena Horne hosted the 2020 NAACP Image Awards. After viewing the performance, the students should draft a final speech either as a video or as a live presentation for the class. Based on what you have heard about Lena Horne, do you imagine she ever won an award during her lifetime?

Practice, practice, practice! Once you have drafted your speech, practice delivering it independently and in front of your partner(s). Consider and provide feedback from and for your peers, both on the content of your speech and performance aspects such as diction, eye contact, posture, pitch, volume, speed and body language. After making any necessary changes to your original speech and delivery, perform a final speech either as a video or as a live presentation for the class. Implement aspects of Ms. Horne’s personality and appearance (if applicable) for this performance.

How can you take the beliefs and attitudes of the strong and courageous African American women you’ve studied (Beyoncé, Rihanna and of course Lena Horne) and apply them to your everyday encounters? How can you take a stand against racial injustice beyond this activity? Continue Lena Horne’s legacy as an advocate for what is right through her passion as an entertainer.
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and use of evidence and rhetoric.
Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and analyze their development; summarize
Determine central ideas or themes of a text
NJSLSA.R8

Determine and analyze the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

NJSLSA.R6b
Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

NJSLSA.R7
Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

NJSLSA.R8
Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

NJSLSA.R3
Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text

Social Studies

6.1.8.CivicsHR.1
Construct an argument as to the source of human rights and how they are best protected

6.3.8.CivicsDP.3
Use historical case studies and current events to explain why due process is essential for the protection of individual rights and maintenance of limited government.

6.3.8.CivicsPL.4
Investigate the roles of political, civil, and economic organizations in shaping people’s lives and share this information with individuals who might benefit from this information

6.3.8.CivicsPR.3
Take a position on an issue in which fundamental ideals and principles are in conflict (e.g., liberty, equality).

Visual & Performing Arts

Artistic Process: Creating/Anchor Standard 1
Generating and conceptualizing ideas.

Artistic Process: Creating/Anchor Standard 2
Organizing and developing ideas.

Artistic Process: Creating/Anchor Standard 3
Refining and completing products

Artistic Process: Responding/Anchor Standard 9
Applying criteria to evaluate products.

Artistic Process: Connecting/Anchor Standard 11
Relating artistic ideas and works within societal, cultural, and historical contexts to deepen understanding.

Artistic Process: Performing/Presenting/Producing Anchor Standard 6
Conveying meaning through art.

SEL: Social Awareness

Sub-competency 8
Recognize and identify the thoughts, feelings and perspectives of others

Sub-competency 9
Demonstrate an awareness of the differences among individuals, groups and others’ cultural backgrounds

Sub-competency 10
Demonstrate an understanding of the need for mutual respect when viewpoints differ

Sub-competency 11
Demonstrate an awareness of the expectations for social interactions in a variety of settings

SEL: Responsible Decision Making
Sub-competency 13
Utilize positive communication and social skills to interact effectively with others

Career Readiness, Life Literacies, and Key Skills

9.4.12.CI.1
Demonstrate the ability to reflect, analyze, and use creative skills and ideas

9.4.8.GC.1
Explore the role of creativity and innovation in career pathways and industries.

9.4.8.GC.2
Demonstrate openness to diverse ideas and perspectives through active discussions to achieve a group goal.
Art and Activism:

Using the Arts for Societal Change

Among the many qualities Lena Horne was known for during her lifetime, it was her strength and willingness to stand up for what she believed in that solidified her legacy. Artists have often played a key role in social movements in the United States, addressing issues like immigration, sexism and gun violence. Through their expressive talents, artists can challenge cultural narratives and inspire in a way that politics alone rarely do. Artistic Activism is the practice of combining the creative power of the arts and the strategic planning of activism to bring about social change. Art and activism share different goals: activism promotes, impedes, directs or intervenes in social, political economic or environmental reform with the desire to make changes in society, toward a perceived greater good. Art expresses technical proficiency, beauty, emotional power or conceptualizes ideas using the power of one’s imagination.

Good art is full of meaning: something we can’t quite describe, but moves us emotionally, altering our perception of the world. Art, similar to activism, is an expression that generates an effect. Similar to Lena Horne, there were several examples of artists or movements from past and present that utilized their creative gifts to aid in a better world.

Civil Rights Movement of 1960s

In the struggle for Civil Rights for African Americans, activists staged events to provoke societal change by drawing upon the stories, songs and call-and-response culture best reflected in African American churches. These events included the Montgomery Bus Boycotts and student participation in mass public sit-ins at restaurants and lunch counters. Despite racist reactions, the activists pushed forward to promote desegregation. Activists relied heavily on religion, music and often transformed familiar gospel songs into political and justice-themed tunes that were central to unifying the movement and gaining supporters—the most famous of these songs being “We Shall Overcome.” Music was especially important to the movement as it aligned with the oral tradition of storytelling through song that already resonated in African American history and culture. The familiarity of the songs helped supporters get behind the new, sometimes radical, societal changes the movement demanded. Music and singing was the “heart and soul” of the movement and proved to be an extremely practical nonviolent tool in the civil rights movement.

Mexican-American/Chicana Mural Art

In the 1960s and 1970s, Mexican Americans from Southern California would use community murals to celebrate their unique culture while simultaneously using imagery that conveyed its insistence for economic and political rights as United States citizens. Community murals successfully represented the radical messages of the Chicano Movement, through painted scenes that were widely and easily viewed by the community. Murals were a popular form of communication to the masses which captured the essence of the movement’s radical ideals. Later they functioned as a manner for disseminating practical messages of daily survival in the barrio.

Banksy: Guerilla Street Visual Artist of 2010s

A globally famous guerrilla street artist, Banksy uses his satirical, clever and often funny visual works to interact with global politics and global issues. His pieces are a great example of what protest art can achieve. He once characterized graffiti as “a form of underclass ‘revenge’ that allows an individual to take over the power, territory and glory from the privileged.” Banksy has dealt with various political and social themes such as anti-war, anti-consumerism, anti-fascism, anti-imperialism and anti-authoritarianism or anarchism.
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Rosie the Riveter: The Iconic Poster of World War II

vocabulary

Activism
The policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change.

Blacklisted
List of people or products that is not approved by the masses.

Blues
Created by African Americans from the South that often expresses feelings of sadness through music.

Communism
An ideology and movement where the goal is to have an absence of social class, money and state involvement in ideas and production.

Jazz
A type of music that was created by African Americans at the beginning of the 20th century. Popular jazz instruments include brass and woodwind instruments, pianos, guitars and violins.

McCarthyism
A campaign carried out under Senator Joseph McCarthy from 1950–1954 against alleged communists in the U.S. government and other institutions. Many of the accused were blacklisted or lost their jobs, although most did not belong to the Communist Party.

MGM
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer is an entertainment company that focuses on film and TV content across platforms at a global scale.

Racism
Prejudice, discrimination or antagonism towards a person or people based their racial or ethnic group.

Segregation
The systematic separation of people into racial or other ethnic groups in daily life.

Stormy Weather
Lena Horne's studio album that came out in 1957.

resources

Websites
Lena Horne's Biography
biography.com/musician/lena-horne

“The Red-Baiting of Lena Horne”

Lena Horne, Singer and Actress, Dies at 92
nytimes.com/2010/05/10/arts/music/10horne.html

Lena Horne's Stormy Weather
youtube.com/watch?v=slBi6ByCrUw

Lena Horne's "If You Believe" from The Wiz
youtube.com/watch?v=A8fK2Qx7zc

5 Ways Lena Horne Revolutionized the Entertainment Industry
pbs.org/wm/americanmasters/5-ways-lena-horne-revolutionized-the-entertainment-industry/12484

Lena: A Moment with a Lady Trailer
youtube.com/watch?v=_sSawpU81cI

Syndee Winters – Lessons from a Lady: An Album
youtube.com/watch?v=vzFh8iUap_4

Why Artistic Activism?: The Center for Artistic Activism
capta.org/social-activism/why-artistic-activism

What Role Can Art Play in Creating Social Change?
broad.org/education/a323fa/what-can-art-play-in-creating-social-change

Timeline of Art in Social Movements
hoddesd, weekly.com/art-in-social-movements/timeline/

timeline-of-art-in-social-movements

Rosie the Riveter
history.com/topics/world-war-ii/rosie-the-riveter

Additional Resources for

Originate in the Preform Chart:
International Civil Rights Walk of Fame: Lena Horne
nps.gov/features/malu/feat0002/wof/lena_horne.htm

Black Enterprise: The Legendary Lena Horne Talks Racial Injustice
blackenterprise.com/lena-horne-talks-racial-injustice/

National Action Network: Lena Horne the Activist
nationalactionnetwork.net/rev/lena-horne-the-activist/

PBS's American Masters: "5 Ways Lena Horne Revolutionized the Entertainment Industry"
pbs.org/wm/americanmasters/5-ways-lena-horne-revolutionized-the-entertainment-industry/12484

njpac.org/education
the arts in your school

In-School Residencies: NJPAC teaching artists come right to your school — online — to teach the performing arts to your students. Our super-flexible virtual residencies are designed to meet your needs, and you’ll have a dedicated program manager to help you every step of the way. It’s the perfect program to keep your students creating, connecting and expressing themselves through the magic of the arts.

Professional Development: Calling all educators! Expand your teaching skills, deepen your curriculum and give yourself a creative boost in NJPAC’s forward-thinking professional development workshops. Our virtual PD programs are for teachers all the way from pre-K to high school, and include hip hop, dance, storytelling, theater, music and more. Not only will you learn something...you’ll also have fun and be inspired.

study the arts at njpac

Saturday Programs: NJPAC’s Saturday programs are geared towards students at every level — from those who dream of starring on Broadway to those who are still learning their scales. Students work with professional artists to build technique and develop their own creative style in hip hop, jazz, devised theater and symphonic band.

Summer Programs: Want to begin to explore the arts? Or immerse yourself in the study of one genre? Then join us at NJPAC next summer in one of seven programs that spark the creativity in every child through the study of music, dance and theater.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, please email our education sales team at artseducation@njpac.org.
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