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Segall/Helmsing

**Popular Culture Artifact**

I intend to incorporate the lyrics and music video of “Sleep Now in the Fire” by Rage Against the Machine to my 11th grade U.S. Government classroom. This song was made famous by the video game “Rock Band” which several of my students will be familiar with. On the surface, the song seems to be a typically punk rock song about people “raging against the machine” or the forces of nature. In this case, the “machine” would be the government of the United States. At the beginning of the term, I showed the music video to “Handlebars” by Flobots to explain how much influence corporations and people with money have on government. Our system inherently continues to benefit the wealthy, and people living with poverty find themselves in a cycle that keeps them from obtaining wealth. My hope is that since I introduced students to the fact that government has a lot of intricacies to it that cannot be seen on the surface, they should have an idea about how people get upset and speak out against the government.

I will show “Sleep Now in the Fire” at the end of the semester (in five weeks) and ask them to analyze the video. Before the video, I will have them answer two questions:

1. What do you know about the band Rage Against the Machine?
2. What do you know about Michael Moore?

After that I will pass out the lyrics to the song and students will read through the lyrics and do a think, pair, share with their neighbors, and with the class as a whole. The questions I’ll want them to answer after they read through the lyrics are:

1. What lyrics stick out to you? Why do you think they are particularly important?
2. What does the band mean by “Sleep now in the Fire”? What is the fire?
3. Are these lyrics supporting a capitalist economy?

After this serious of discussion, we will watch the video as a class. I will pause it to answer the “Who wants to be a Millionaire” questions because the music video moves so fast it is hard to read. Students will be encouraged to write down any patterns or trends they might see when viewing the video. Interestingly enough, Michael Moore (the director of the music video) was arrested during the making of this video, and the New York Stock exchange shut its doors due to the growing protests nearby as a result of the band. After watching the video, students will answer the following questions:

1. What is the band saying about the U.S. Government’s involvement in slavery, the conquest of Native Americans, using Agent Orange in the Vietnam War, and dropping Atomic Bombs on Japan at the end of WWII?
2. How does this relate to the rights of citizens as listed in the 1st amendment to the U.S. Constitution?
3. Do you know of any other songs that demonstrate discontent with the U.S. Government? Why do you think some people feel this way?
4. How can YOU participate in government to seek out changes to form a more perfect nation for future Americans?

Students will also be asked to begin a discussion on what they have learned since the beginning of class. Now that they are finishing the nine-week course, they should have much more information on how the government affects their life.