

For this activity, place students in small groups and provide them with one of the following instances of controversy in musical expression. After that, have students answer the discussion questions below. Instructors should bring the class back together for a moment to share their findings, then regroup the students and have them complete one of the post-discussion activities.

Songs:

- [Sinead O'Connor](#) on *Saturday Night Live* (1992)
- [Billie Holiday](#) "Strange Fruit" recording (1939)
- [Loretta Lynn](#) "The Pill" (1975)
- [Sex Pistols](#) "God Save the Queen" (1977)

Discussion Questions:

- What was deemed controversial about the case you studied? What is the message the artist was trying to convey? Did they succeed in doing so? Why or why not?
- Choose one public response to the case. What was the reason for the opposition? Do you think this response was justified? Did the artist respond to the opposition? Do you think this attention towards the issue is what the artist wanted?
- Think of one of your favorite songs right now. How do the music and lyrics of that song impact your perceptions? Have you ever altered your thoughts on a topic because of a musical artist's music, lyrics, or album artwork? If so, elaborate. If not, why don't you think so? Does this sort of controversy still exist in music today?

Post-Discussion Activities:

- Rewrite the song/moment that was deemed controversial. Read it aloud with the same enthusiasm as the original piece, then read it with a new attitude that reflects the change in lyrics. Does it have the same impact? Why or why not?
- Take the opposite stance and either create a protest sign or a press release from the artist. How does it feel to represent the opposite perspective?

References & Resources:

- Kornhaber, S. (2020). "[Country Music Can No Longer Hide Its Problems.](#)" *The Atlantic*.
- Perrine, W. (2013). "[Religious Music and Free Speech: Philosophical Issues in Nurre v. Whitehead.](#)" *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 21(2), pp. 178-196.
- Philipp, Z. (2009). "[The Social Effects of Jazz.](#)" *The York Scholar*, 6(1).