Course Description: An American History of Rock and Roll

Overview: An American History of Rock and Roll seeks to integrate the history of America with the history and progression of Rock and Roll. Students taking this one-semester course will be able to trace the history of Rock and Roll and understand the influences it had on major historical events within the United States. The class will cover issues of race, gender, age, and sex and how Rock and Rock helped to spur rebellion in those areas in an attempt to create equality. The course covers the United States History from the mid 1950’s through a study of the Blues progression from its origins to its growth to Rock and Roll and related genres. The course is inclusive of African Americans, Asian Americans, Chicanas/os and Latinas/os, Native Americans and their experiences and contributions through music to the history of Rock and Roll and the United States.

The purpose of the course is to take a topic the students are genuinely interested in, music, and use that to show the impact of music on the history of the United States. After the course students will be much more aware of how music can be and is impactful of the world around them. This course will strengthen students skills that include reading, writing, and listening.

Prerequisites: None

Co-requisites: None

Course Content:

Birth of Rock and Roll Unit

In this 5 week unit students will learn how in the mid-1950s, Rock and Roll slammed into the consciousness of the American people. Whether you liked it or not, there was no denying that Rock and Roll had arrived. It was the first American musical tradition constructed from the many musical traditions that animated life in the 20th century, including Gospel, Blues, Country, Jazz and R&B. In bringing together these musical bloodlines, Rock and Roll also brought people together, from across regions, across race and class lines, and, finally, across oceans. It was the beginning of a historical turn that would change daily life in the modern world. This first section, The Birth of Rock and Roll, explores the roots of Rock and Roll, its emergence and its entrance into the cultural mainstream of America. Students will understand how race and music became intertwined and led to both conflict and understanding.

Sample Assignment:

ESSENTIAL QUESTION
How did Elvis Presley’s early career reflect race relations and racial tensions in mid-1950s America?

OVERVIEW
At the end of World War II, the United States sat poised on the brink of a Civil Rights movement that would challenge the nation’s inherent racial inequality and push for the integration of the races throughout American society. The second-class status of African Americans was a fact of life throughout the country, but particularly palpable in the Jim Crow South, where segregation prevented African Americans from voting, attending certain schools, sitting alongside whites on public transportation and even drinking from the same water fountains as whites.

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court issued its landmark ruling in Brown v. Board of Education, declaring that state-sponsored segregation in America’s public schools was inherently unconstitutional. Though the decision marked a critical turning point in race relations, it would be many years before its
promise of dismantling the machinery of segregation and ensuring full enfranchisement of minorities would begin to bear fruit. Two months after the Brown ruling, 19-year-old Elvis Presley released his first single on Sun Records. The first side was a cover of “That’s All Right,” a 1940s Rhythm and Blues song written and originally recorded by African-American Bluesman Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup. The “B” side of the single was a cover of “Blue Moon of Kentucky,” a 1946 tune written and popularized by Bluegrass musician Bill Monroe. The single showed that black and white music could live side by side on a 45 RPM slice of vinyl in 1954, even if the men who wrote the songs often could not in public life. In some ways, Elvis’ first single did what the Supreme Court could only dream of doing at that moment, integrating black and white culture in one neat package that would have enormous influence on millions of Americans. On the other hand, the fact that this melding of black and white culture was delivered through the voice of a white teenager demonstrates the racial realities of the mid-1950s. White audiences may have been ready for African-American-inspired Rock and Roll, but not necessarily to embrace music actually performed by African-American artists. Indeed, Sam Phillips, who produced Elvis’ first single, is said to have commented, “If I could find a white man who had the Negro sound and the Negro feel, I could make a billion dollars.” When radio audiences responded enthusiastically to the first airing of Presley’s “That’s All Right,” Memphis disc jockey Dewey Phillips went out of his way to let listeners know that Elvis was white. In this lesson, students will investigate how Elvis’ first single offers a window onto the complex race relations of 1954, and how it fits into the broader narrative of Brown v. Board of Education and the early stirrings of the Civil Rights movement.

OBJECTIVES
Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. Know (knowledge):
   o The provisions of the Supreme Court’s 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*
   o The impact of segregation and Jim Crow laws on African Americans in the southern United States
   o The complexities of race relations in 1950s America
   o The importance of both African-American and white musical forms to the development of early Rock and Roll

2. Be able to (skills):
   o Evaluate the historical context in which music was performed
   o Interpret how public reaction to popular music reflects the social norms and values of a particular historical era
   o Make connections among political, legal, and cultural developments

ACTIVITIES

Motivational Activity:
Play the video clip “American Segregation,” an excerpt from the 1987 PBS documentary *Eyes on the Prize*, which examines the state of race relations in the United States in 1954, on the eve of the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Ask students:

- What was segregation? What were Jim Crow laws?
- How did many whites feel about socializing with African Americans?
- What did the Supreme Court rule in *Brown v. Board of Education*?
- How did many whites affected by the ruling react to the decision?

Procedure:
1. Display the map of Tupelo, Mississippi, and Memphis, Tennessee, Elvis Presley’s birthplace and the city where he attended high school.

2. Ask students what kind of music they imagine someone growing up in those places in the late 1940s and early 1950s might have listened to. Explain that you will play two examples for them.
3. Display the picture of Bill Monroe and play the excerpt from Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys, “Blue Moon of Kentucky” (1946), and ask students:

- How would you describe this music? (*Note to instructor: Students should be able to identify this as a Country song recorded by white artists.*)

4. Display the picture of Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup and play the excerpt from “That’s All Right” (1947), and discuss:

- How would you describe this music? (*Note to instructor: Students should be able to identify this as a Rhythm and Blues song recorded by an African-American artist.*)
- How is it different from the first song?
- Why might a white southern boy, or any other teenager, have listened to this kind of music? What was appealing about it?
- Why might white teenagers, especially in the South, have been discouraged from listening to this kind of music?
- What barriers might have prevented artists such as “Big Boy” Crudup from becoming major recording stars in the late 1940s and early 1950s? Why might certain radio stations not have played their songs?

5. Distribute **Handout 1 – Sun Records and Race Records**. Ask for volunteers to read it aloud, one student per paragraph. Instruct all students to underline key words and phrases as they listen and follow.

7. Play the excerpt from Elvis’ recording of “That’s All Right” and discuss:
   - How is the recording similar to/different from “Big Boy” Crudup’s recording of the same song?

8. Play the video clip of Dewey Phillips, “Red Hot and Blue,” explaining to the class that Phillips was a highly popular disc jockey in Memphis who was known for his extroverted style and who played records by both black and white artists at a time when most radio shows catered specifically to either a black audience or a white one. Distribute Handout 2 – “That’s All Right” on Memphis Radio, July 1954. Ask for a volunteer to read it aloud. All students should underline key words and phrases as they listen and follow. Discuss:
   - How did the audience react to the record?
   - Why might listeners have thought Elvis was African-American? Why would it have mattered in a southern state in 1954?
   - In 1954, how could a resident of Memphis have known the race of a person simply by knowing where he went to high school?
   - Why do you think Dewey Phillips wanted the audience to know that Elvis was white?

9. Play the excerpt of Elvis’ recording of “Blue of Kentucky” and discuss:
   - How is the recording similar to/different from Bill Monroe’s recording of the same song?
   - Does this recording seem to have been at all influenced by Rhythm and Blues – in other words, by African-American music? If so, in what way?
10. Why do you think Elvis put these two particular songs on the same record? Does the appearance of these two songs on the same record in any way reflect what was happening in the United States in 1954, particularly in terms of race relations? If so, how?

**Summary Activity:**
1. Explain to students that while the audience reaction to Elvis’ first single was largely very positive, many people, particularly in positions of authority, were angered by Elvis and his music. Display the two quotes below:

“The big show was provided by Vancouver teenagers, transformed into writhing, frenzied idiots of delight by the savage jungle beat music.”

— Review of an Elvis Presley concert in *The Vancouver Sun*, September 3, 1957

“When our schools and centers stoop to such things as ‘rock and roll’ tribal rhythms, they are failing seriously in their duty.”

— Letter from Samuel Cardinal Stritch, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Chicago, banning Catholic school students from attending Presley concert, Feb. 28, 1957

2. What do you think the authors meant by the terms:

- “Savage jungle beat music”?
- “Tribal rhythms”?

3. Why might these authors have used these terms to describe Presley’s music? What do they seem to fear about Presley?

4. Where were these comments made? What conclusions can you draw about racial tension in the mid-1950s in other parts of North America besides the South?

5. Ask students to think back to the video from *Eyes on the Prize* at the beginning of the lesson, and discuss:

- In this historical context, why might it have been more acceptable for some people to hear African-American music from a white artist than from an African-American artist?
- Why might any type of music bearing an African-American influence have been unacceptable to some people in this climate?
- How did Elvis’ first single reflect the racial and social climate in America in 1954?
- Looking ahead, how do you predict Elvis’ embrace of African-American music would influence the way people would come to think about race in the late 1950s?

**Writing Prompt:**
Write a short response in reaction to the class discussion. Take a position in answering the questions below, or use one of the questions posed in class, citing evidence from the texts and videos in your analysis.
What was the Supreme Court trying to accomplish when it issued its ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954?

How might music have helped accomplish what the Supreme Court was trying to do in the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling?

**Extension Activity:**

1. Have students read Robert Palmer’s 1978 article “Sam Phillips: The Sun King” and write a short paper of several paragraphs explaining who Phillips was and what he accomplished at Sun Records. Among the points they should address: What made Sun Records important? Why was Phillips uniquely in a position to “discover” Elvis Presley?

2. Have students read the chapter essay Elvis: Hillbilly Becomes Country, Rockabilly Becomes Rock and Roll written by Colin Escott. Write a short paper of several paragraphs explaining how Elvis redefined pop music with his recordings at Sun Records. Describe the birth of Rock and Roll; how did it challenge the conformity of 1950s America?

**Teenage Rebellion Unit**

In this 5 week unit students will learn about rock and roll from its raucous beginnings to the time of its mainstream acceptance, Rock and Roll was youth music. More exactly, it was the music of the teenager. Born of postwar affluence and the increased leisure time such affluence afforded young Americans, the teenager was a thing new to the American landscape. If for some they were an object of anxiety, this had everything to do with the fact that teenagers defined themselves in opposition to the parent generation. Rebellion was a part of being a teenager. And Rock and Roll was an expression of that rebellion and of the growing gap between generations. From the teen surf culture celebrated in the music of the Beach Boys to the mini-melodramas of the Shangri-Las’ Girl Group sound and teen dances including the Twist, the Stroll, the Mashed Potato, and the Watusi, the world of the teenager was made larger and more powerful through the music itself. As 60s Soul and the British Invasion demonstrated, it would be the teenagers, inspired by their music, who would define American life moving forward.

**Sample Assignment:**

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION**

How did car culture intersect with and inspire Rock and Roll?

**OVERVIEW**

In 1949, General Motors introduced the Oldsmobile 88. Dubbed “Futuristic” and advertised as “the lowest-priced car with a ‘rocket’ engine,” the sleek new vehicle epitomized an American fascination with speed, exploration, and space travel in the early 1950s. The Oldsmobile’s appeal was so widespread, that in 1951, Jackie Brenston and His Delta Cats (an alternate name for Ike Turner’s Kings of Rhythm, with whom Brenston played saxophone and occasionally sang) recorded the song “Rocket 88” — an ode to the fantasy of driving the stylish car. Many historians would argue that “Rocket 88” was the first Rock and Roll song, citing the tremendous raw energy the band brought to the music. Without question, it signaled a connection between car culture and Rock and Roll. Cars had been part of the American experience since the early twentieth century. In 1908, Henry Ford debuted his assembly-line produced Model T. The car’s relatively low price and interchangeable parts enabled many middle- and working class Americans to own, and maintain, a car for the first time. The auto industry boomed through the 1920s, but with the onset of the Great Depression, sales began a sharp decline. In early 1942, America’s entry into World War II necessitated a complete halt in the production of domestic passenger vehicles while auto factories
were reconfigured for wartime contracts. With no new models available for the duration of the war, car culture was effectively on hiatus. After the Allied powers achieved victory in both the Pacific and European theaters, Americans were filled with a sense of confidence, optimism, and national pride at levels they had never before experienced. Additionally, because the battles of WWII had not been fought on American soil, the U.S. was in a unique position not to rebuild from the destruction caused by the war, but rather to expand. As soldiers returned home and began to buy houses and start families, suburban communities developed around cities, necessitating not only new roads, but an abundance of brand new cars to drive those roads. By the time civilian auto production resumed in 1946, many Americans had not owned a new car since before the Depression — if they had ever owned a car at all. With the postwar economy surging, car sales in the United States skyrocketed. The creation of an interstate highway system in 1956 further transformed where people lived, how they got around, who they socialized with, and how they spent their money. A rising population of teenagers, born after the war into a country enjoying an unprecedented surge of prosperity, soon forged an intense and energetic relationship with cars as they became old enough to receive their driver’s permits. By the early 1960s, the intersection of car culture and Rock and Roll was well-established and vibrant. Transistor radios became a standard feature on many new car models, allowing increasing numbers of Americans to listen to music while on the road. Songs including Chuck Berry’s “No Money Down,” Jan & Dean’s “Surf City,” and the Beach Boys’ “Fun, Fun, Fun” emphasized the extent to which the automobile had captured the nation’s imagination. The very act of driving had come to symbolize a new-found freedom of movement, particularly for American teenagers. Using a selection of songs, statistics, television spots, archival films, and magazine advertisements, students investigate how the postwar resurgence of the U.S. automotive industry coincided with the rise of the teenager, the two intersecting in Rock and Roll culture.

OBJECTIVES
Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. Know (knowledge):
   o The role of the Ford Motor Company in establishing private automobile ownership as an essential component of the American experience
   o How the resurgence of automobile manufacturing after WWII coincided with the rise of teen culture
   o The impact of the Interstate Highway Act of 1956 on life in postwar America
   o How Rock and Roll acts including Chuck Berry and the Beach Boys brought together teenage interests in cars and Rock and Roll

2. Be able to (skills):
   o Interpret a variety of archival magazine advertisements produced by the Ford Motor Company and General Motors between 1903-1950
   o Discuss figurative and connotative meanings of Rock and Roll song lyrics portraying the confluence of teen and auto culture in the United States

ACTIVITIES

Motivational Activity:
Play clip of Your Permit to Drive (1951). Students should take notes on any phrases the narrator uses to illustrate the societal effects of highways, cars, and driving. Ask students:

- Why does the narrator refer to a driver’s permit as a “round-trip travel ticket,” a “passport to pleasure,” and a “magic carpet”?
- How might having a car give daily life “new meaning” for millions of people? For a teenager?
Procedure:

1. Display the above photograph from a 1959 issue of *Life* magazine illustrating the kinds of goods teens purchased in the 1950s. Explain that during the postwar years (approximately 1945-1968), teenagers became a distinct demographic, with many middle-class teens enjoying more leisure time, mobility, and more spending power than previous generations of young people. Ask class to identify any recognizable items in the photograph, making sure that the students notice the two cars near the back of the image.

2. As a class, create a list of ways that having access to a car might affect a suburban teenager’s lifestyle. List suggestions on the board. (*Answers may include: cars give you the ability to travel to places where your friends hang out; the freedom to date; access to a job; space to listen to your own music; cars can be decorated or customized, etc.*)

*Note to teacher:* If students live in an urban setting where car ownership is of less importance, ask students to imagine how having access to a car might affect the life of a teenager who does *not* live in an easily walkable city with access to a public transit system.

3. Distribute **Handout 1 – Car Culture in Rock and Roll Lyrics.** Play audio clip of Chuck Berry performing “No Money Down” (1955). Explain that Chuck Berry is considered one of the founding fathers of Rock and Roll music and that many of his songs present teenage themes and life experiences, such as school, dancing to popular music, and driving. Ask students:

- How does this song convey a sense of excitement about buying a new car?
- How do the lyrics convey a sense of youth?

Explain that we are now going to look at how cars became a commodity in the lives of millions of Americans, beginning in the early twentieth century.
4. Display 1903 and 1904 advertisements for two of the earliest Ford automobiles. Explain that cars began to appear in the U.S. during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Because they could only be built by hand, one at a time, by highly skilled mechanics, cars were considered a luxury item, reserved only for the wealthiest Americans. Ask students:

- What phrases stand out in these two advertisements? (Answers might include: “In the eyes of the Chauffeur” and “Boss of the Road.”)
- What do these phrases suggest about the segment of the population who could afford a car around 1904?

**Note to teacher:** For reference, $850 in 1904 is equal to about $22,000 in 2015.
5. Display 1925 advertisements for the Ford Model T. Explain that in 1908, the Ford Motor Company revolutionized the automotive industry by introducing the Model T. Ask students:
What phrases stand out in these three advertisements? (Answers should include: “You Can Own This Car Today,” “Have Fun with a Ford,” “Drive as You Pay,” and “Within means of millions.”)

What are the people in these ads doing? How do the ads target middle- and working class Americans?

How has the affordability of a car changed since the ads from 1903 and 1904? How might offering a payment plan allow more people to buy cars?

6. Distribute Handout 2 – Early Car Culture. Read aloud as a class, then ask students:

- How were cars constructed before Henry Ford’s introduction of the assembly line? How did the assembly line help facilitate the beginning of a “car culture” in the United States?
- How were automobile production and sales affected by the Great Depression and America’s entry into World War II?
- Why was it important for Americans to make a decision between either making cars for civilian use or making tanks for the U.S. military during World War II? How might wartime rationing of manufactured goods have helped build a sense of national unity?
- How did automobile production and sales change once again after the end of the war? What factors accounted for this change?

7. Explain that one of the first new cars to come on the market after World War II was the Oldsmobile 88, a model introduced by General Motors in 1949. Play audio clip of “Rocket 88” by Jackie Brenston and his Delta Cats (1951). Students should use the lyric handout as a guide and pay attention to the advertisement for the Oldsmobile 88 seen in the video clip. Ask students:

- “Rocket 88” went to No. 1 on the Billboard Rhythm and Blues chart and is sometimes referred to as the first Rock and Roll song. How would you describe the rhythm of this song? How would you describe the mood of the vocals?
- How does the magazine ad for the Oldsmobile 88 portray a sense of optimism and progress as it relates to auto culture?
- Why do you think Americans insisted on having the opportunity to travel for pleasure and enjoy leisure time in the years following a depression and a war?
8. Play the television commercial for the Oldsmobile 88 (1953). Explain that Mel Torme was a Pop singer with a career that began in the 1930s. After WWII, many companies began to feature celebrities in their advertising campaigns — a new idea at the time. While the music of Mel Torme helped to sell cars to adults, the teen audience of the 1950s looking for something more beat-driven and raw. Ask students:

- How are the rhythm and vocals of this commercial jingle different from the rhythm and vocals of “Rocket 88” by Jackie Brenston and His Delta Cats?
- Between the commercial jingle and “Rocket 88”, which song do you think appealed more to the tastes of teenagers? Why?

Explain that car culture wouldn’t have had the effects it did if it didn’t also have the infrastructure to cultivate changing driving behaviors in the United States.

9. Distribute Handout 3: The Highway Act of 1956 and Statistics on Automobile Production. Read aloud as a class, then ask students:

- How did the passage of the Highway Act of 1956 incentivize Americans to buy cars?
Questions for Graph A

- What happens to the population of Americans aged 15-19 years just after the passage of the Highway Act in 1956? (It goes up considerably.)
- Why do you think this population segment changes so drastically at this particular time? (All of the children born during the early part of the Baby Boom, which began in 1946, are starting to become teenagers.)

Questions for Graph B:

- How do the rates of homeownership and car ownership change around the start of the Great Depression in 1929? (Both rates decrease.)
- How does the rate of car ownership change once the United States enters WWII at the end of 1941? (It decreases again.) Why does the rate of car ownership decrease when the U.S. enters the war? (Because the auto manufacturers were not making new cars for civilians during the war.)
- What happens to the rates of homeownership and car-owning households between 1945 and 1965? (They both increase). Which rate increases more? (Car-owning households goes up considerably more.)
- What conclusions can we make about the relationship between homeownership and car ownership after approximately 1950? (There is a big boom in homeownership, but a much bigger boom in auto sales, suggesting that many homeowners also own more than one car.)
- When a parent purchases a second car, who do you think is often times the recipient of the older car?

10. Display the above magazine advertisement for Ford from 1950. Ask students:

- What phrase stands out in this advertisement? What is the phrase referring to?
- How does this ad relate to the graphs we just looked at?
• What age do the “children” in this ad appear to be? What is the family depicted in this advertisement doing? (Teacher should read to the class that the teenagers are saying, “Don’t worry, Mom. If Pop isn’t back in time, we can take everything in the Country Squire.”)
• How has Ford’s messaging changed since the ads we examined from before World War II?

11. Play clip of “Fun, Fun, Fun” or another one of the Beach Boys songs mentioned above.

12. Students will conduct independent research into how the “space race” – a historical period during which the United States and the U.S.S.R. competed to be the first country to land on the moon – shaped U.S. automotive design and car culture. Write an essay examining how America’s fascination with space travel and jet propulsion technology affected the way we designed, drove, sold, and thought about cars during the postwar era.

13. Students will research a driving-related song of their choice. Write a short essay discussing how the song relates to and expands upon the materials discussed in class, if and how it references any specific car models or driving-related social activities (if applicable), as well how the song illustrates the teenage idea of having a car. Students may select a song from the following list or choose another song with the teacher’s approval:

- The Beach Boys – “Don’t Worry Baby”
- The Beach Boys – “Little Deuce Coupe”
- The Beatles – “Drive My Car”
- Bruce Springsteen – “Thunder Road”
- Bruce Springsteen – “Used Cars”
- Charlie Ryan – “Hot Rod Lincoln”
- Chuck Berry – “No Particular Place to Go”
- The Clash – “Brand New Cadillac”
- Coolio – “Fantastic Voyage”
- Gary Numan – “Cars”
- The Hondells – “Little Honda”
- J. Frank Wilson and the Cavaliers – “Last Kiss”
- Jan & Dean – “Dead Man’s Curve”
- Jan & Dean – “Surf City”
- Johnny Cash – “One Piece at a Time”
- Kanye West – “Drive Slow”
- Neil Young with Stephen Stills – “Long May You Run”
- Prince – “Little Red Corvette”
- Queen – “I’m in Love With My Car”
- Ronny and the Daytonas – “G.T.O.”
- The Rip Chords – “Hey Little Cobra”
- The Shangri-Las – “Give Us Your Blessings”
- The Surfer Girls – “Draggin’ Wagon”
- Tracy Chapman – “Fast Car”
- The Trashmen – “A-Bone”
- War – “Low Rider”
- Wilson Pickett – Mustang Sally”
Transformation Unit

In this 5 week unit student will learn about how the the teenage culture of the fifties and early sixties was the seedbed for the youth-driven counterculture of the late sixties and early seventies. This shift toward a countercultural sensibility among young people was reflected in the music itself. If in the fifties Rock and Roll had been viewed primarily as a popular entertainment, in the period of “transformation” it would come to be viewed as— in its most elevated forms— an Art. In the hands of Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, and others, music became a “serious” thing. As young people faced the troubling facts of a war that included them and a country that refused them the right to vote, music now offered, among other things, a megaphone through which their disillusionment could be voiced. As the nation saw the rise of the Civil Rights movement and the Black Power movement that followed, artists like Marvin Gaye, James Brown, and Stevie Wonder used music to express feelings of frustration about the racial divide and excitement around the possibility of change. And as the music addressed the world of which it was a part, the music grew more complex, more varied—but, importantly, that music was also changing the world in ways it hadn’t previously.

Sample Assignment:

OVERVIEW

The early 1970s were an unsettling time in America. The nation was divided about U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, and Americans were still reeling from the 1968 assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy. Race riots in cities like Watts, Newark, and Detroit indicated a high level of tension and frustration. During the Civil Rights movement, African Americans had fought hard for equal rights, but in the early 1970s, many of those rights were still unrealized. Not surprisingly, the Soul music of this era, according to Hip Hop pioneer Chuck D, was “darker,” reflecting national tensions.

Motown recording artist Marvin Gaye addressed some of these realities with his album *What’s Going On*, speaking directly about Vietnam and the political upheaval of the time. Meanwhile, Curtis Mayfield, who with his group The Impressions had recorded the hopeful Civil Rights-era anthem “People Get Ready,” began producing new songs that captured the raw facts of ghetto life. When Mayfield released the soundtrack album for the movie *Super Fly* in 1972, it seemed to epitomize the direction in which music was moving. The age of Funk was coming. “The groove was so thick you had to get with it,” recalls Chuck D. Though Hip Hop would not enter the picture until the late 1970s, this period of “Social Soul” in the early 1970s was planting the seeds for Hip Hop’s deep groove and social awareness. In this lesson, students will examine photographs, live recordings, video interviews, and a government report in order to learn about the historical and cultural context of the Soul music recorded in the 1970s.

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OBJECTIVES
Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. Know (knowledge):
   - The impact of historical events in the late 1960s, including the Vietnam War protests, race riots, and the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy
   - The contributions of musical artists Marvin Gaye and Curtis Mayfield and how their music spoke to social issues of the time
   - The findings of the Kerner Report issued by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders in 1968

2. Be able to (skills):
   - Identify connections between artistic expression and its broader social and political context
   - Students will determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in text and lyrics, including figurative and connotative meanings (CCSS Reading 4)
   - Students will evaluate the speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence, specifically in song selections by Marvin Gaye and Curtis Mayfield (Speaking and Listening 3)
   - Students will analyze a seminal U.S. document of historical and literary significance and identify key themes, specifically within the 1968 Kerner Report (CCSS Reading: Informational Text 9)

ACTIVITIES

Motivational Activity:
As students enter the classroom, distribute Handout 1: Entry Ticket Prompt, or write the Entry Ticket Prompt on the board.

*Love and heartbreak may be the most popular themes in songwriting, but many songs focus on other topics. Sometimes songs deal with a specific issue in society. Please take a moment to think about a cause that is important to you and answer the following questions.*

- If you could write a song about one problem in society, what would it be and why?
- What would your song be titled?
- What musical genre would it be written in and why (i.e. Rock, Jazz, Hip Hop, etc.)?

Ask for three or four students to volunteer their answers. Discuss why music might be a powerful tool to deliver a message (e.g. music is a medium accessible to all, music is a “universal language,” music can unite people around a cause).

Procedure:
1. Distribute Handout 2: Marvin Gaye Lyric Comparison to each student. Explain that they will be comparing two songs by the same artist. Marvin Gaye was a celebrated Motown recording artist who pushed musical boundaries during his career. An extended Marvin Gaye biography is available on our site. Play the students a clip from “How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved By You)” released in 1964, followed by a clip of “What’s Going On?/Save The Children” released in 1971.

   - After listening, allow the students a few minutes to read through the lyrics and write down any key themes or phrases.
   - Ask students to compare and contrast the two songs. Are they similar in any way (e.g. vocals by the same artist, recorded for the same label)? How are they different? Think about their musicality, along with their message and tone.
Note the dates the songs were released. Can the students identify any historical events that transpired in between the release of these two songs (e.g. a rise in Vietnam War tensions, the Civil Rights movement, Woodstock, etc.)?

2. To explore the historical context of “Social Soul” music in the early 1970s, students will engage in a Gallery Walk. The teacher will set up the classroom with four stations using Handout 3: Gallery Walk Photos.

[Note to teacher: one of the stations includes a video of an interview with Sen. Robert F. Kennedy on the Merv Griffin Show in 1967 (Pt. 2). The teacher can elect to watch the video as a class before the Gallery Walk begins.]

3. Divide students into groups. Each student will receive a copy of Handout 4: Gallery Walk Worksheet. Each group will start at a different station and rotate after a few minutes, visiting all four stations. The student will examine the photographs and descriptive paragraphs provided for each station. Students will take a moment to write down their reactions. Then, they will discuss in their groups any common themes they see at the different stations.

- Station 1: The Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968, followed by riots in more than 100 cities throughout America.
- Station 2: Information concerning the number of African-American soldiers deployed in Vietnam, and information about “Project 100,000.”

4. After the students have visited all four stations, have them return to their seats. Poll the class:

- Are there any historical events that you learned about for the first time today? Are there any events from the late 1960s that surprised you?
- Which photograph has the biggest impact on you and why?
- What common themes could you come up with in your groups? How are these stations related, if at all?

5. To gain a deeper understanding of how these themes reoccur in Soul music, play the full video of Marvin Gaye performing “What’s Going On?” for a benefit in 1972 (the song was released the previous year, in 1971).

Explain to the students that when the President of Motown Berry Gordy first heard the track, he did not want to release the song. He generally wanted Motown artists to steer clear of making political statements. But Gaye insisted and prevailed. Gaye’s lyrics to this song were partly inspired by stories from his younger brother, Frankie Gaye. Frankie had returned from a three-year tour of duty in Vietnam and would often share with his older brother about the atrocities he had seen there.
After listening to the song, ask:

- What historical events do you think are addressed in “What’s Going On”? Do you see any links with the events described in the Gallery Walk (e.g. African-American soldiers returning from Vietnam)?
- Refer back to the Handout 2: Marvin Gaye Lyric Comparison and have a student volunteer to read aloud the quote from Marvin Gaye. As Marvin Gaye stated, “With the world exploding around me, how am I supposed to keep singing love songs?” What did he mean by this?

6. Pass out Handout 5: “Freddie’s Dead” Lyrics. Play the video from of Mayfield performing “Freddie’s Dead” in 1973. Explain to the students that they will be listening to a live recording of a song that Mayfield originally released in 1972 for the soundtrack of the film Super Fly. The song depicts a character in the movie that meets his untimely death after dealing drugs. Based on the song and the lyrics, ask the students the following:

- Where do you think Freddie lives? From the text of this song, what do you think his life is like?
- Does this song make you think of a particular historical event from the Gallery Walk?
- Consider Marvin Gaye’s “What’s Going On.” How are these songs similar? How are these songs different? Think about their musicality, along with their message and tone.

Summary Activity:
Chuck D was the founder and leader of the groundbreaking Hip-Hop group Public Enemy. Play a clip from 2008 of Chuck D discussing the influence of Curtis Mayfield and “Freddie’s Dead”. In pairs, have the students discuss the following:

- Describe the impact of “Freddie’s Dead” on African-American communities living in urban America, according to Chuck D.
- As Chuck D states, “It was almost like [Curtis Mayfield] was the soundtrack to our everyday lives.” What do you think he means by this?

Invite pairs to share their Summary Activity answers with the class.

Writing Prompt:
Ask students to consider the subject matter of the different songs they heard in class. Students will select one societal issue that is described in either “What’s Going On” by Marvin Gaye or “Freddie’s Dead” by Curtis Mayfield. Students will write a research-based essay about their chosen issue, describing what factors contributed to its existence in the 1970s. Is it still an issue today? Why or why not?

Extension Activities:
1. Have students listen to Chuck D’s group Public Enemy perform “Fight the Power”. This song, released in 1989 by Motown Records, is an example of how “Social Soul” songs of the early 1970s had an impact on later Hip Hop tracks. Similar to “Freddie’s Dead,” “Fight the Power” was composed as a soundtrack for a film. In this case, it is Spike Lee’s Do The Right Thing which explores racial tension and the inequity of urban life in Brooklyn, New York. After listening, discuss the following:

- Chuck D, the founder of Public Enemy, describes the influence of Curtis Mayfield during the interview you watched earlier. How is “Fight the Power” similar to Mayfield’s “Freddie’s Dead”?
- Label three areas of the room with three song titles, “Freddie’s Dead,” “What’s Going On,” and “Fight The Power.” Ask the students to stand and go to the area of the room for the song that resonates the most with them as a listener. In their groups, students will discuss their song. What do they like about
the song in terms of its music, tone, and emotion? How does it convey its message? Groups can share their answers with the class.

2. For an extended writing assignment, distribute Handout 6: Kerner Report to the students. Students will read the Introduction Summary of the report issued by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders in 1968. The handout includes the primary text and the following questions:

- What does the Kerner Report identify as the cause of civil unrest in American cities?
- The Kerner Report famously states “Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.” Think about your own community today. Do any recommendations made in the report still apply today? Why or why not?
- How does this report relate to what you have learned regarding African-American life in the ghetto during the late 1960s and early 1970s?

Due to the length of the Kerner Report text, teachers may want to assign this writing prompt as homework.

**Fragmentation Unit**

In this 5 week unit students will learn that for a brief time, Rock and Roll seemed almost to be building its own utopia. In late sixties Rock and Roll culture in particular, the walls erected in the wider world – between the races, between men and women, between nations – seemed to collapse. The record collections of the young Rock and Roll audience often included R&B, Hard Rock, Blues, Pop, Jazz, Country, and more. Free Form FM radio mirrored this eclectic but inclusive approach to music by creating inventive playlists unbound by genre. And, then, as the “Fragmentation” crept in, the old walls seemed to reassert themselves. Fan communities, radio formats, and, indeed, even personal record collections came to be defined by genre. Hard lines were drawn. Punks defined themselves in opposition to the fans of arena rock groups like Led Zeppelin. Grunge borrowed from Heavy Metal but, more adamantly still, refused the theater of Heavy Metal. Radio was again split down racial lines. If Rock and Roll culture, in the broad sense, had been connected with youth culture as a whole, and this brought different genres and traditions into dialogue with one another, now Rock and Roll culture grew increasingly fragmented. It wouldn’t mean the end of the music. But some of the promise of late sixties Rock and Roll was, for the moment, compromised.

**Sample Assignment:**

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION**
What was Grunge and where did it come from?

**OVERVIEW**

“There’s a feeling of burnout in the culture at large. Kids are depressed about the future.”

— Music critic Simon Reynolds, 1992, about Generation X

The pre-Grunge era of the early 1980s was a time of media saturation, but many young people did not see themselves or their concerns accurately reflected in the slick music videos offered by MTV or in other mass media. The resulting alienation and apathy helped pave the way for the emergence of a new sound that became known, simply, as Grunge.
Sometimes called the “Seattle Sound,” Grunge began in the Pacific Northwest in the late 1980s and early 90s. The Grunge generation grew up on Heavy Metal, Punk, and Hardcore, drawing on elements of each to define its sound. The resulting aesthetic combined the droning, distorted guitar tones of Metal, the alienation and anti-authority attitude of Punk, and the edgy, physical stage shows of Hardcore. Like Punk, Grunge was full of anger, but with a dose of angst, self-deprecation, and depression added to the mix. And though the intimacy and spontaneity of live performances often gave it a similar feel to Punk, Grunge was more musically complex. More varied instrumentally, Grunge also accentuated dynamic shifts that evoked the frustrations of youth. Grunge musicians tended to reject the latest fashions and projected a feeling of indifference that was reflected in everything from their lyrics to their disheveled appearance. Adopting a thrift-store look, artists embraced lumberjack-style apparel — most notably flannel shirts — while pushing back against the exaggerated masculinity it often implied.

In its early years, Grunge was largely a localized phenomenon, emerging out of the club scene in the Pacific Northwest. Seattle had been deeply affected by the economic recession of the early 1990s, when unemployment was at a high and Starbucks did not yet have the ubiquitous presence it does today. Grunge, with its dour visuals and indifferent lyrics, seemed to encapsulate the grey and depressed mood of the region at the time. As the 90s progressed, the commercial success of groups such as Nirvana and Pearl Jam catapulted the Grunge sound into a national spotlight for which its creators and adherents were largely unprepared.

OBJECTIVES
Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. Know (knowledge):
   o The influence of earlier musical forms, particularly Heavy Metal and Punk, on Grunge
   o The social, cultural, economic, and geographic influences that led to the rise of Grunge
   o The musical contributions of such Grunge artists as Nirvana, Mudhoney, and Pearl Jam

2. Be able to (skills):
   o Connect music to the historical context in which it emerged
   o Common Core: Students will analyze primary source documents, including videos, photographs, and newspaper/magazine articles in order to make inferences and cite specific textual evidence (CCSS Reading 1; CCSS Reading 7; CCSS Writing 9; CCSS Speaking and Listening 2)
   o Common Core: Students will work collaboratively to write a three-paragraph review of early Grunge music (CCSS Writing 1; CCSS Speaking and Listening 1)

ACTIVITIES

Motivational Activity:
1. Ask students: When you watch TV or go to the movies, do you see people who look and sound like you? Who seem to share your outlook on life? Who seem to share the concerns and problems you face?

2. Display the three pictures below, explaining to students that they are all from hit TV shows of the 1980s and early 90s (Family Ties, Growing Pains, and Family Matters).
3. Ask students:

- What do you notice about the people in all three pictures, especially the teenagers? Do they look happy or unhappy? Do they appear to have the kinds of problems and issues teenagers typically have?
- If you had been a teenager then, how well do you think you would have been able to relate to these characters?
- Remember that there were no cell phones, no Internet, and no Facebook in the 1980s and early 90s. If you did not feel you were being represented in mass media, where might you turn? Where might you find art or culture that you felt represented your world and your outlook?

**Procedure:**

1. Play the interview with Grunge band Nirvana and briefly discuss:
   - What is their general attitude toward life?
   - How would you describe their appearance, especially compared to the characters in the television shows from the 1980s?
   - Why might their general attitude have resonated with teenagers during this time period?
2. Divide students into pairs. Explain that they will work with a partner to write a three-paragraph review of early Grunge music. The class will watch several music videos together, and each group will be given a set of documents that they will use as source material for their review.
4. Inform students that they will use the discussion questions in Handout 2 to help them review the documents in Handout 1. As they do so, they should take notes on the graphic organizer in Handout 3. Inform students that it is not necessary to fill in every bubble on the graphic organizer; conversely, they should feel free to create additional categories and bubbles.
5. Before they begin analyzing the documents, play brief excerpts from the following videos to help students with their discussion of the music. Encourage students to take notes on the graphic organizer as they watch and discuss the videos. (Please note: The opening line of “Smells Like Teen Spirit” contains a reference to guns; instructors should decide if this material is appropriate for their classrooms.)
   - Black Sabbath, “Paranoid” (1970), example of Heavy Metal
Black Flag, “Rise Above” (1981), example of Hardcore Punk
Mudhoney, “Touch Me I’m Sick” (1988)
Pearl Jam, “Alive” (1991)

6. Discuss with students:
- Do you notice any similarities in instrumentation and/or vocals? What are they?
- What do you hear in terms of dynamics? Are there contrasts between loud and soft? If so, what does this contribute to the song?
- What do you notice about the performers’ clothing and appearance? Do you see any similarities in aesthetic?
- What is similar about the attitude of the performers in the different videos?
- What specifically do the Grunge songs (Mudhoney, Nirvana, and Pearl Jam) appear to draw from the earlier Punk and Heavy Metal performances?

7. After the discussion is complete, allow students ample time to work their way through the documents, complete the graphic organizer, and write their reviews. Emphasize that the reviews should incorporate as much specific information from the documents and video clips as possible.

Summary Activity:
Ask a few groups to share excerpts from their reviews with the class. Discuss the different views of the Grunge songs and their meanings. Were certain viewpoints represented more than others?

Writing Prompt:
How did early Grunge reflect the social environment and the frustrations of youth in the Seattle area in the late 1980s and early 1990s?

Course Materials

Textbook

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