

Music and Lyrics: Societal Reflections and Influence

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Introduction: About this Course and Unit

Early on in my career as an English teacher I discovered the power that music has in the classroom. Music offers something for every student, regardless of their academic level, motivation, or favorite genre; all you need to do is find the right access point. This was always something I knew and tried to incorporate into my English classes whenever possible. Always being cognizant of this important connection lead me to develop and write my own English elective, which is running for first time this semester. The course is called “Music and Lyrics: Societal Reflections and Influence.”

In developing the course, I have created the following Vision and Mission:

Throughout history, music has functioned as a way for people to express emotion and communicate ideas to those around them. In addition to being a reflection of the human experience, music has also functioned as a catalyst for change in society. Understanding the role that music has played in our culture’s development is crucial to students’ grasp of their place in, and awareness and appreciation of, society. The State of New Jersey’s Core Curriculum Content Standards describe arts education as “an essential part of the academic curriculum for the achievement of human, social, and economic growth.” Studying the progression of music and lyrics will provide interdisciplinary growth because it will require a focus on historical and social progression, as well as the use of language and study of universal human stories and themes. It is our vision that the study of music and lyrics in contemporary culture will better the social awareness, critical thinking/analyzing skills and conceptual understanding of the students who participate in the course. Students will participate in activities that enhance their lives and provide opportunities to apply this knowledge to new situations. The ultimate goal is to educate students to become informed citizens of the global age. Opportunities will be provided to develop a number of learning processes and skills, such as listening, analyzing, interpreting, speaking, and writing through a focus on music and lyrics, history, and language arts education.

Our mission is to provide opportunities for students to develop their understanding of significant human experiences, themes, and cultural development through the study of contemporary music. Additional goals for the course include: enabling students to understand the role music has played in the lives of humans, how music functions as both a reflection and stimulant of social change, and to provide meaningful links between music and the lives of the students enrolled in the course.

The course aligns with the following Core Curriculum Content Standards:

Reading: Literature	<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1</u> - Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
	<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2</u> - Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
	<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4</u> - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).
	<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6</u> - Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.
Writing	<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1</u> - Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
	<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2</u> - Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
	<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4</u> - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
	<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.10</u> - Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
Speaking and Listening	<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1</u> - Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
	<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.3</u> - Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.
Language	<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1</u> - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
	<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2</u> - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
	<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3</u> - Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
	<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4</u> - Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on <i>grades 9-10 reading and content</i> , choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.
	<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.5</u> - Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
History/Social Studies	<u>6.2 World History/Global Studies</u> - All students will acquire the knowledge and skills to think analytically and systematically about how past interactions of people, cultures, and the environment affect issues across time and cultures. Such knowledge and skills enable students to make informed decisions as socially and ethically responsible world citizens in the 21st century.
Visual & Performing Arts	<u>1.2 History of the Arts and Culture (12.A.1 and 12.A.2)</u> - All students will understand the role, development, and influence of the arts throughout history and across cultures.

The students enrolled in this course have been enthusiastic and motivated to learn and grow. They enrolled in the course for different reasons but all are using and developing skills typically taught in the English classroom in order to further explore their passions for music and lyrics.

The following unit is entitled 'Influencing Social Consciousness,' wherein we are studying music relating to various social issues. While all of my units integrate music, I chose to share this one because it is perhaps the best at demonstrating the true heart and nature of the class: music both as a means through which we view various aspects of our society, and attempt to foster positive change within it.

Unit: Influencing Social Consciousness (Thematic Study of Contemporary Music)

Background Information and Preparation for the Unit:

Prior to the start of this unit, students were given an independent study assignment (see attached **Resource A**). They were to choose a theme and develop a mini-lesson to present to their fellow classmates. The theme had to relate to social consciousness in some way (things like “love” and “heartbreak” did not make the cut). Students were given time in class and at home to research and analyze 3 songs relating to the theme and two additional resources that showed a connection between music and the theme/social issue.

Student presentations were scheduled in conjunction with lessons from me on either the same or related topics. As students presented their mini-lessons, the rest of the class was instructed to take basic notes (see attached **Resource B**) on the presentations so as to utilize the information later in a creative response project (see attached **Resource C**). These creative response projects culminated in a gallery walk so students could see and interact with one another’s’ projects.

Unit Rationale:

By structuring the unit this way, it gave the students freedom to explore themes that were most meaningful to them. Not only that, they were able to choose music and lyrics that they felt most eloquently expressed the issues at hand. There is a lot of educational research that supports student-lead learning and my experience supports the idea that students become more invested, and thus learn better, when they have guided and structured choice and control over their learning. With my lessons supplementing there’s, it provided additional perspective on how music plays a vital role in our society’s discussions on social issues. With the creative follow up project, they were given the opportunity to further explore such important themes, though through a different angle. Again, they also had the freedom to express themselves in a way that was most profound to them.

Unit Objectives:

Given lessons from a classmate and their teacher on the day’s theme, students will be able to understand how artists seek to enhance social consciousness through their music. Students will also then be able to further connect with the world around them, both musically and socially.

Given lessons from a classmate and their teacher on various themes as they are represented in music, students will be able to creatively incorporate thematically relevant music into a project of their choosing.

Unit Lesson Plans

Time Requirement:

- Half a period for each student presentation (these presentations are paired appropriately with either another student's presentation OR the teacher's supplemental lesson plans, outlined below)
- 2-3 work days for their creative responses
- one day for the culminating gallery walk

My supplemental lessons are as follows:

Theme: Peace / Anti-War

- Listen to, annotate, and discuss the following songs
 - "Scarborough Fair / Canticle" by Simon & Garfunkel
 - "Sunday, Bloody Sunday" by U2
 - "99 Luftballons" by Nena
 - "For What It's Worth" by Buffalo Springfield
- Discuss anti-war efforts of musicians like Joan Baez and Bob Dylan
- Discuss events like Woodstock that had distinct anti-war sentiments expressed
- To wrap up the lesson, students will share what they found to be the most interesting take-away from either their peer's lesson or my lesson

Theme: Tolerance/Intolerance

- Listen to, annotate, and discuss the following songs
 - "Everyday People" by Sly and the Family Stone
 - "Get Together" by The Youngbloods
- Show excerpts from the documentary *Matter of Trust: The Bridge to Russia* which details Billy Joel's groundbreaking Russia tour in 1987. During this documentary he discusses the unifying power of music at a time when the Cold War had severely damaged The US's view of and relationship with Russia
- To wrap up the lesson, students will share what they found to be the most interesting take-away from either their peer's lesson or my lesson

Theme: Racism

- Listen to, annotate, and discuss the following songs
 - "Hurricane" by Bob Dylan
 - "Sun City" by Steve Van Zandt
 - "Pride (In the Name of Love)" by U2
- Discuss more current musical efforts to address this issue (have students contribute) and how they relate to current social movements
 - i.e. Kendrick Lamar's "Alright" becoming an anthem for the Black Lives Matter movement
- To wrap up the lesson, students will share what they found to be the most interesting take-away from either their peer's lesson or my lesson

Theme: Environment

- Listen to, annotate, and discuss the following songs
 - “The Last Resort” by The Eagles
 - “Share the Land” by The Guess Who
 - “Black Moon” by ELP
- Discuss additional efforts of musicians to draw attention and aid to environmental problems (such as Hurricane relief concerts, Farm Aid benefits, etc.)
- To wrap up the lesson, students will share what they found to be the most interesting take-away from either their peer’s lesson or my lesson

Theme: Sexism/Objectification

- Listen to, annotate, and discuss the following songs
 - “Blurred Lines” by Robin Thicke
 - “Under My Thumb” by The Rolling Stones
- Discuss current issues about the portrayal of women in music videos (watch a few, school-appropriate, clips)
- Discuss the current rise in female-empowerment songs and the societal pushback to songs like “Blurred Lines” seen through social media and extend to discussion of current instance of high profile sexual harassment being highlighted in the news
- Discuss artists like KUPCAKE who have tried to flip the script and objectify men in songs. Have class debate about “do two wrongs make a right?”
- To wrap up the lesson, students will share what they found to be the most interesting take-away from either their peer’s lesson or my lesson

Theme: Addiction

- Listen to, annotate, and discuss the following songs
 - “White Rabbit” Jefferson Airplane
 - “Black Flame” Renaissance
- Class will participate in a Socratic seminar to discuss the misconception that substance use/abuse helps the creative process
- To wrap up the lesson, students will share what they found to be the most interesting take-away from either their peer’s lesson or my lesson

RESOURCE A:

Independent Thematic Music Study

This project will help us study contemporary music based on theme. Each person will be given a theme in advance and will work on compiling information to share during the full class's study of that theme.

Tasks:

1. Find at least 3 songs related to your assigned theme
 - Annotate and analyze each song and prepare a brief explanation of your interpretation
2. Find at least 2 additional sources that depict music's connection with that theme/a closely related social issue
 - Examples could include... Mellencamp's "Rain on the Scarecrow" details the plight of the American Farmer so you also include how Mellencamp (along with other artists) participates in Farm-Aid concerts, OR something like an article from *Rolling Stone* explaining the significance of a particular work in relation to the theme

Theme Options:

- Peace/Anti-War (2)
- Tolerance/Intolerance (2)
- Environment
- Racism
- Sexism/Objectification
- Struggle of Growing Up
- Addiction
- ...if you think of another, just run it by me!...

Student has chosen 3 thematically relevant songs	
Songs are thoroughly annotated, interpreted, and explained	/ 20
Student has provided 2 additional sources appropriate to the assigned theme	/ 15
Presentation is effective and engaging, it is clear that its construction has been well thought-out (15-20 mins in length)	/ 7
Delivery of Information: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Eye contact & Posture- Tone and voice	/ 3
Spelling/Grammar/Mechanics	/ 2.5
All sources properly cited	/ 2.5

Additional Comments:

Total: _____ / 50

RESOURCE B:

Mini-Lesson Response Sheet

Lesson Topic: _____

Presenter/Presentation Date: _____

How the presenter informed/influenced your understanding of the topic? (bullet point your answers)

RESOURCE C:

Creative Response Project

In response to one of the mini-lessons on socially conscious music (not your own topic) you will choose one of the following creative project options.

You should incorporate the information presented to you by your classmate and/or teacher.

Theme: _____

Step 1: Choose one of the following project options:

- Lyrics Re-Vamp
 - EITHER... (1) change a socially-conscious song's lyrics to make it relevant to today **OR**, (2) choose a lyrically vapid song and change the lyrics to make them socially conscious
 - You can provide just a lyrics sheet, **OR** feel free to record the song as well!
- Flyer/Pamphlet (with slogan)
 - Slogan should utilize lyrics to help get your message across
- Mash-Up Song
 - Choose 3-4 songs related by theme and mash them up to create one song
 - *You may either create this song digitally (prior technological knowledge required) **OR** you can record yourself performing your mash-up
- "Mix Tape" / Themed Playlist (w/ Cover Art)
 - Choose 6-8 songs related by theme and create a playlist (you may use some of the songs played by your classmate)
 - Design the cover art for the album cover (incorporate the theme into your design and album title)
- Music Video
 - Choose a song (not used by a classmate) and make a music video to help visually portray the theme

Step 2: Written Rationale

1-2 paragraphs, typed, double-spaced, explaining (1) What you learned about the theme you responded to, and (2) Why you chose the project that you did

All components of creative portion are included	/4
Creative portion demonstrates both <ul style="list-style-type: none">- an adherence to theme, and- an effort to be creative, poignant, and thorough	/8
Provided a thorough, written rationale for the project	/6
Rationale is free of grammatical/spelling/mechanical errors and is typed, double-spaced	/2

Additional Comments:

Total: _____ / 20