

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT
Lesson Title – Interpreting the Music of Vietnam
From Christopher Morgan

Grade - 11

Length of class period – 53 minutes

Inquiry –

What were the issues facing the American people during the Vietnam War? How would you (the student) respond to these songs?

Objectives

Students will:

Identify key terms from the Vietnam Era.

Identify and analyze the problems faced by the general population during the Vietnam Era.

Explain how these songs would impact them as young adults living during Vietnam.

Materials

-Computer Access (access to youtube or any site you can use to quickly access music)

-Head phones

Or, access to mp3 players with internet access

(At Windham Tech, we have an itouch cart, making an assignment like this more convenient.

Some schools have computer labs or laptop carts that would also work.)

-Songs: Select a variety of songs for your students to listen to. Here is the list I will work with the first time I run the lesson:

- Fish Cheer – Joe McDonald
- 8th of November – Big and Rich (recorded 2005)
- Ballad to the Green Beret- SSgt Barry Sadler
- War- Edwin Starr
- Ohio (Kent State)- Crosby, Stills, Nash and Neil Young
- Eve of Destruction- Barry McGuire
- Fortunate Son- CCR
- Born in the USA – Bruce Springsteen (Recorded 1984)

All but one of these songs are protest songs (ballad of the Green Beret), which is still a fair representation because very few songs were made from a pro-war perspective.

Activities

10 minutes- Activator: Post question, “What does this song tell you about the Vietnam War or the experiences of soldiers who were in the war?”

Play “8th of November” (There is a video version easy to find on youtube.com)

When the song is over, take responses to the song? (Some references made in the video are to the M16, age of marines, Napalm, Helicopters, deaths and drinking. All of these topics can make for good conversation.)

Discuss with students how music can play a role in telling stories of different historic events.

Break students into groups based on how many songs and media players they have access too. For example, I will have 6 groups of students. 1 group for each song they will analyze. If you are short on computers or mp3 players you could allow students to split headphones and use one ear bud each.

Handout “Questions for Vietnam Songs” and tell students they will try to answer these questions as they listen to the songs.

Allow students approximately 15 minutes to play songs and write down notes on question sheet. (They may have to pause and rewind songs to keep up with the content.)

15 minutes- Ask students to volunteer to talk about the song they listened to and what they got out of listening to it. As long as time permits have at least one volunteer representing each song present.

7 minutes- Closure- When presentations are complete ask for a volunteer to make some generalizations about the war based on what they heard in the songs. *Were there a lot of similarities about the topics addressed or the climate/attitude towards the issues addressed?* They should recognize that the majority of the songs were negative or war protest songs. Some common issues addressed were young people dying for a war they didn’t understand or agree with. They may also point out that the songs were used to stir emotion and gain support. From there you can ask them to make comparisons to other wars. (most likely students will bring up modern examples of Iraq and the War on Terror. Be ready to discuss) Also ask, *“Most of these songs were anti-war so do you think most of the people were anti-war?”* Answers will vary based on how deep into your Vietnam Unit you are and what you have already presented to them.

6 minutes- As a homework assignment, direct students to find a song they are familiar with that may relate to them the same way people in the 60’s and 70’s related to Vietnam Songs. They may not be able find songs that relate directly but could find songs that stir emotion, are used to gain support, or identify problems the general population faces.

During the following class period, allow students to share the names of their songs, summarize the connections, present powerful quotes or even play excerpts from the song. (once again if time permits)

How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?

Students will not be graded but assessment will come through verbal presentations following the listening and analysis of their assigned songs and/or I will be checking the student understanding by reading the questions sheet while students are working.

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards –

1.1 Demonstrate an understanding of significant events and themes in United States history.

#6 (compare and contrast various American beliefs, values and politics)

#11 (analyze how the arts, architecture, music and literature of the United States reflect its history and cultural heterogeneity)



QUESTIONS FOR VIETNAM SONGS

DIRECTIONS: ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS WHILE LISTENING TO YOUR ASSIGNED SONG. FEEL FREE TO PAUSE OR REWIND THE SONG TO MAKE SURE YOU COMPREHEND AS YOU LISTEN.

1. WHEN DO YOU THINK THE SONG WAS WRITTEN? WHY?
2. WHAT ISSUES ARE BEING ADDRESSED?
3. LIST ANY KEY TERMS THAT ARE REFERENCED IN THE SONG?
4. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE PURPOSE OF THIS SONG WAS? (WHY DID THE ARTIST OR ARTISTS WANT THIS SONG TO BE HEARD?)
5. HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND TO THIS SONG IF YOU WERE LIVING DURING THE VIETNAM ERA? DOES IT HAVE ANY EFFECT ON YOU NOW OR COULD YOU RELATE OR APPRECIATE THE MESSAGES BEING SENT?