FOUNDERS OF THE WALL

VVMF

ECHOES FROM THE WALL



DISCUSSION GUIDE

How Does Music Reflect Perspectives on War?

War will always have impacts on society and culture. Within the realm of popular culture, music of the Vietnam era reflected a range of public opinion about military conflict.

This lesson plan will involve a review of popular music of the Vietnam era, as well as more recent popular music that deal with the subject matter of war and peace. Students will examine the perspectives of these songs and how the range of perspectives was reflected in broader society during and following the war.

Download the **Accompanying Powerpoint Presentation** for use in the classroom

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY

Songs and Part Wars

Listen to the World War II era songs "Goodbye Mama, I'm Off to Yokohama" by Teddy Powell and his Orchestra (1942) and "Arms for the Love of America" composed by Irving Berlin (1941). Ask students to listen closely to the lyrics and answer the following song analysis questions for each song, giving them only the context information of the year it was composed and released:

- What were the major events of the year in the US at the time?
- Who do you think the intended audience of the song is?
- What is your emotional reaction to the song? What do you like or dislike about it?
- In one sentence, what would you identify as the central message of the song?
- How do the musical elements contribute to the message of the song?
- If you had to title the song, what would you title it?

IN THE CLASSROOM

Songs from Vietnam and Today

Begin by asking students to create list of songs that deal with the subject matter of war and peace, or are more broadly either highly patriotic, or highly critical of problems in the nation. Which of the list are their favorites, and why?

In the early days of the war, songs like Sgt. Barry Sadler's "Ballad of the Green Berets" received extensive radio play—"Ballad of the Green Berets" reached #1 on the Billboard Hot 100 in 1966. Listen to the song as it plays through slides 1-3, and ask students to answer the song analysis questions included in the pre-visit activity above. Sgt. Barry Sadler served in Vietnam and wrote the song to celebrate the Green Beret Special Forces. This song has a clear perspective that celebrates the contributions of soldiers, yet it does not explicitly discuss political concerns or more broadly interpret the war. (click here for lyrics)

Three years before the Ballad of the Green Berets topped the charts in 1966, Peter, Paul and Mary's cover of "Blowin' in the Wind" topped the Billboard charts, reaching #2 in 1963. The song, originally written by Bob Dylan in 1962, has come to be identified as perhaps the quintessential anthem for peace because of its widespread adaptation by the public to express disapproval of the Vietnam War. Ask students to listen to the song as it plays in slides 4-5, answering the song analysis questions. This song was



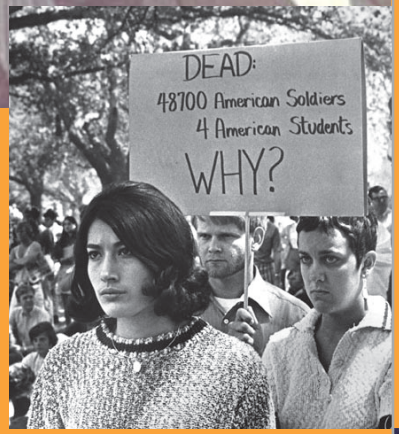


Cover: Peter, Paul & Mary's record, Blowin' in the Wind

Top: On the ground in Vietnam

Bottom: Protests against the war in Vietnam





not explicitly written to voice a perspective on the Vietnam War. How does it compare with "Ballad of the Green Berets?" (click here for lyrics)

A few years later, as the war progressed, the public grew increasingly disillusioned with the war, with disapproval ratings reaching 64% in 1970. That same year, Edwin Starr's performance of the Temptations' song "War (What Is It Good For)" topped the Billboard charts at #1. Ask students to listen to the song as it plays in slides 6-7, answering the song analysis questions. How does a song like "War" compare with a song like "Arms for the Love of America" (from the pre-visit activity)? (click here for lyrics)

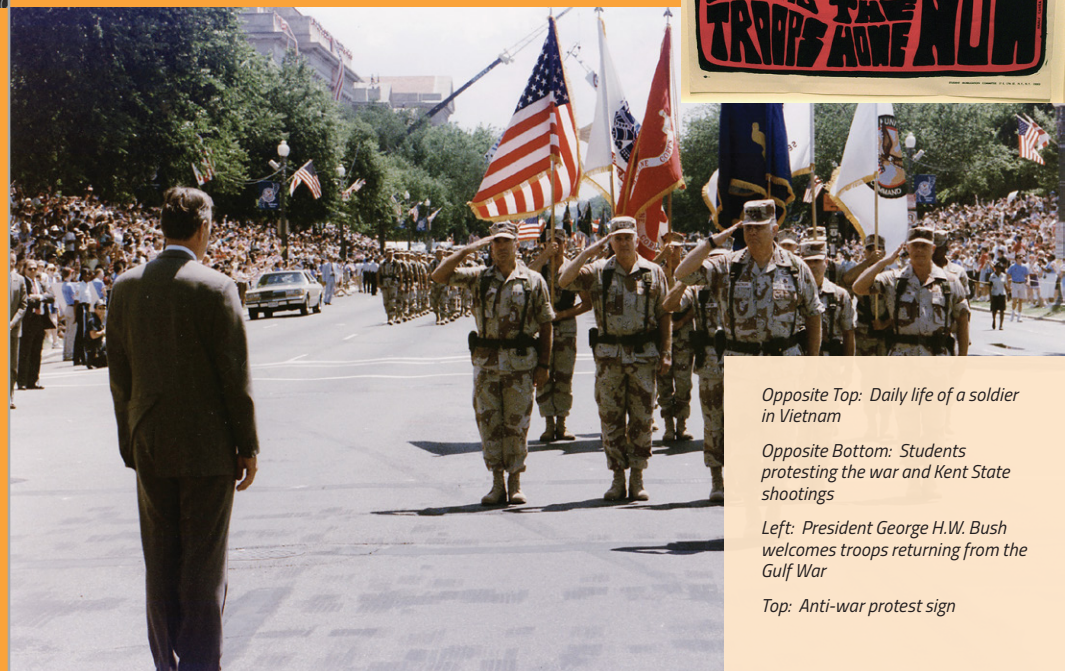
In the years following the Vietnam War, there were also songs that interpreted the post-war experience—specifically the negative aspects of the post-war experience—that became popular. In 1982, the same year that the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was dedicated, The Charlie Daniels Band released a song titled "Still in Saigon," written from the perspective of a Vietnam veteran unsure of his place in the world after his return from war. Ask students to listen closely to the lyrics as the song plays in slides 8-9. What issues are mentioned that returning veterans may have to face? (click here for lyrics)

The Vietnam era set a precedent for music as a public space to reflect perspectives on war, with critical perspectives being acceptable and potentially even popular. With the outbreak of war in the Persian Gulf in 1990, Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the USA," though originally released in 1984, gained prominence as a patriotic song of support for troops serving in the Gulf War. Though the song was not written in the context of war, it was readapted by the public in order to voice support in a time of war. Ask students to listen to the song as it plays in slides 10-11, answering the song analysis questions. Do you think it is possible to identify an overall expression of approval or disapproval for war in this song? (click here for lyrics)

Even more popular than "God Bless the USA" was Bette Midler's "From a Distance," reaching #2 on Billboard's Hot 100 in 1991. Ask students to listen to the song as it plays in slides 12-13, answering the song analysis questions. The song, originally written by Julie Gold in 1985, is again not explicitly centering on war as a subject, though it was adopted by the public as both an expression for peace and longing for the return of troops. (click here for lyrics)

On September 11, 2001, a global terrorist group known as Al-Qaida coordinated a series of attacks on the US which left over 3000 civilians dead at the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in the Washington, DC area, and at a plane crash site in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Play a small portion of the live video coverage from 9/11 included on slide 14. Following the attacks, "Only Time," a song by Irish singer Enya that had been released the previous year in 2000, quickly rose to #10 on the Billboard Hot 100 charts as Americans adopted the song's mournful tone and message for the current tragedy. Ask students to





Opposite Top: Daily life of a soldier in Vietnam

Opposite Bottom: Students protesting the war and Kent State shootings

Left: President George H.W. Bush welcomes troops returning from the Gulf War

Top: Anti-war protest sign

listen to the song as it plays in slides 15-16, answering the song analysis questions. (click here for lyrics)

Two years later in March 2003, the US invaded Iraq in search of nuclear weapons, in what marked the beginning of the eight year war in Iraq. Ask students to listen closely to Toby Keith's 2003 song "American Soldier" as it plays through slides 17-18. How does this song compare with Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the USA?" Do you think it is possible to identify an overall expression of approval or disapproval for war in this song? (click here for lyrics)

As the war in Iraq progressed, Americans' approval for the war steadily decreased, with CNN polls showing over 60% public disapproval of the war by 2006. That same year, Pearl Jam released "World Wide Suicide," a song written by the group's lead singer Eddie Vedder about Pat Tillman, a professional football player who turned down a contract with the Arizona Cardinals to enlist in the US Army. Tillman served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and his story became popular with the public after his death in 2004. The song, which reached #41 on the Billboard Hot 100 charts in 2006 and #1 on the Billboard Modern Rock charts, is critical of the war, while recognizing the service of soldiers like Tillman. Ask students to listen to the song as it plays in slides 19-20, answering the song analysis questions. How does this song's perspective on war differ (or not differ) from a song like Edwin Starr's "War?" Why do you think there is a more explicit separation of war and warrior in the songs of more recent times? (click here for lyrics)





Right: Veterans at the Vietnam Memorial

Top: A demonstration protesting the war in Iraq

Opposite Top: A scene from the wreckage of September 11, 2001

Opposite Bottom: Anti-war protestors gather in Philadelphia in 2007 to call for support for US troops and an end to the war in Iraq.





Since the Vietnam era, music has been used to reflect a range of perspectives on war, a tradition which continues into the 21st century. That civic dialogue that can be traced through popular music has included reflections on the post-war experience of remembering the fallen at The Wall. In 2014, Bruce Springsteen released a song titled "The Wall" which tells the story of visiting the Vietnam Memorial to reconnect with a friend. The song was written after Springsteen visited the Vietnam Memorial and decided to write a song in honor of his friends and fellow musicians Walter Cichon and Bart Haynes who died in the war. Ask students to listen to the song as it plays in slide 21, answering the song analysis questions. (click here for lyrics)

POST-VISIT ACTIVITY

Today's Music

Ask students to research a current song that they would choose as describing their personal perspective on a current or recent conflict (e.g. Syria, Afghanistan, etc). Have students then use their selected songs as prompts for a writing exercise in which they express their opinions on the conflict, e.g. Should we have forces fighting ISIS in Syria and Iraq?

FURTHER SUGGESTED READING

The Republic of Rock: Music and Citizenship in the Sixties Counterculture.
Kramer, Michael J.
New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Music and Protest in 1968.
Kutschke, Beate and Barley Norton.
Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

"There Must be Some Way Outta Here: The Vietnam War in American Popular Music." In The Vietnam War: Its History, Literature, and Music.
Pratt, Ray.
El Paso, TX: Texas Western Press, 1998.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1
Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6
Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9
Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1
Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3
Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6
Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Standards

D.2.Civ.10-9-12
Analyze the impact and the appropriate roles of personal interests and perspectives on the application of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights, and human rights.

D2.His.2.9-12
Analyze change and continuity in historical eras

D2.His.10.9-12
Detect possible limitations in various kinds of historical evidence and differing secondary interpretations

D2.His.11.9-12
Critique the usefulness of historical sources for specific historical inquiry based on their maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose.

D2.His.16.9-12
Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

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