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MEDIA LITERACY

Thinking Critically About

MUSIC & MEDIA

Peyton Paxson

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To the Teacher

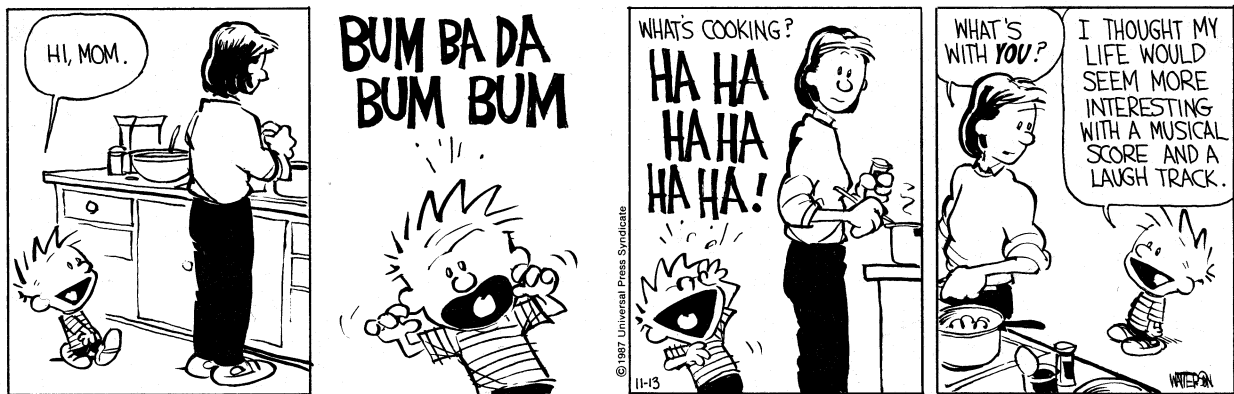
IN HIS BOOK *The Anthropology of Music*, Alan P. Merriam says,

The importance of music, as judged by the sheer ubiquity of its presence, is enormous . . . there is no other human cultural activity which is so all pervasive and which reaches into, shapes and often controls so much of human behavior.¹

It is likely that many of your students are far more interested in music than they are in their academic studies. This book is designed to help students use their interest in music to develop

better critical-thinking skills. Students will develop these skills by analyzing information, reflecting on their own thoughts and feelings, and employing creative problem solving. They will investigate common themes in musical lyrics, the economic structure of the radio industry, and social and legal concerns related to music. Students will also encounter ethical considerations, learn about musical history, and discuss gender issues.

Through analysis of a subject that most teenagers already enjoy, students will become more media literate and develop a better awareness of the social issues that affect music and its listeners.



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¹Alan P. Merriam, *Anthropology of Music*. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964)

To the Student

YOU HARDLY NEED TO BE TOLD that music and media are a major part of teenagers' lives. But consider the following statistics:

- In 2001, Americans spent over \$13.7 billion on compact discs (CDs), music digital video discs (DVDs), music videotapes, and cassettes. Americans between the ages of 10 and 19 years old represented over 20% of the total market, spending nearly \$3 billion.
- Each week, nearly 95% of American adults listen to one of the nearly 5,000 AM or over 8,500 FM radio stations in the United States. The average American between the ages of 12 and 17 years old listens to the radio 14 hours per week.
- Combining radio, CDs, DVDs, videos, MP3s, and other media, the average teenager listens

to 10,500 hours of music between the 7th and 12th grades—just slightly less than the entire number of hours spent in the classroom from kindergarten through high school.

Many people have commented that teenagers become heavy consumers of music at about the same time that teenagers begin the conscious process of trying to identify themselves in the world. Clearly, music helps play a role in this process. Many teenagers also use music as a way to develop independence from their parents.

It is *not* the purpose of this book to try to convince you that most music is bad! In fact, music has always been a part of the human experience. Music serves an important role in the lives of people of all ages, races, and beliefs.

This book's purpose is to

- present you with methods for evaluating the attitudes and ideas that are presented in today's music
- encourage you to investigate your relationship with music
- help you become more knowledgeable about how businesses use your interest in music to get you to buy things

There are probably several words in this book with which you are not familiar. You will find a glossary at the back of the book. Words that

are defined in the glossary are highlighted in bold when used in the book.

The objectives of this unit are to help students

- understand the role music plays in defining a nation's culture
- recognize the ethnic and cultural roots of music
- explore the relationship between evolving technology and music
- anticipate future social and cultural trends

THIS UNIT HELPS students place music, a subject with which most students are familiar and comfortable, in a historical and social context. This unit allows students to assess the economic, cultural, and technological factors that inform music. Students already understand the role of music in entertaining society. This unit encourages students to place music in a broader context, and see how music serves both as a source of reinforcement of traditional values and as an agent of change.

In this Unit . . .

Should We Change the National Anthem of the United States? provides students with information on the history of "The Star-Spangled Banner" and has students evaluate the occasional calls to change the national anthem. The lyrics of several songs are included for students to consider.

Hip-Hop/Rap has students investigate the socio-economic influences of urban music on contemporary culture.

MTV and Cool introduces students to marketing firms' efforts to anticipate and indulge teenagers' desires and interests.

Future Rock and Roll Hall-of-Famer? requires students to assess the contributions of contemporary figures in music and write a persuasive argument in support of a particular musician.

Music Technology: Good? Bad? Both? has students evaluate the role technology plays in the evolution of labor.

Your Personal History of Music challenges students to write a descriptive summary of the popular music of today's generation and compare it to the music of the previous generation.

Music Buzz

REMEMBER, as we begin our exploration of music and media, that humans are not the only animals who use music. Some birds use music to attract each other, as do some fish and other animals. Some music historians say that humans enjoy music for biological reasons. Others say we enjoy music based on cultural and social reasons. Still others say human interest in music is based on both animal instincts and intellectual reasons.

Whatever the case, music has been around for as long as human beings have existed. The earliest types of music probably involved chanting

“All human cultures have shown evidence of having music.”

and playing percussive instruments, such as sticks and bones. Certain types of horns and stringed instruments were invented more than 4,000 years ago. All human

cultures have shown evidence of having music. Music existed in the Americas before Europeans began to come here. Africans, Asians, and Australians, as well as people on small islands, also have long musical traditions. The European tradition of classical music is actually relatively young, originating with the sacred music of the medieval Christian church. More simple styles of popular music have also endured.

Technology and Music

The Industrial Revolution, which began in the United States in the mid-1800s, made it possible for many Americans to buy musical instruments. Factories could mass-produce instruments more quickly and less expensively than handcrafting.

This made musical instruments affordable for many people. For example, the middle class could purchase pianos, which had previously been available only to wealthy families. Sales of **sheet music** also increased as more and more people took up music as a hobby.

Music as a recorded medium began in 1877. That year, Thomas Edison (the inventor of the light bulb) invented an early phonograph, or record player. Edison later received patents for several different types of record players as he continued to improve on his original design. Other inventors also invented new types of machines to play prerecorded music throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s.

After 1915, recordings were commonly available on flat 10-inch wide discs that played at 78 revolutions per minute (rpm). These 78-rpm records could only hold about three minutes of music on each side. As a result, writers of popular songs, which had once averaged five to eight minutes, began to shorten their songs to around three minutes. This is still the usual length of songs played on the radio today.

In the 1930s, inventors began experimenting with electric guitars. One of the early experimenters was Les Paul, who invented the solid body guitar. Leo Fender was one of the first people to mass-produce electric guitars. The Gibson Company's Les Paul Guitar and various Fender models are still the favorites of many guitarists today.

During World War II, electronics companies devoted their efforts to producing items needed by the military. After the war ended in 1945, many of these companies began to focus on goods for civilian use. The commercial

Music Buzz

introduction of the transistor in 1954 allowed teenagers to buy inexpensive radios, which they could listen to away from home (and their parents). Stereo sound was invented after the war, as was tape recording. Multitrack recording, another invention of Les Paul's, allowed musicians to record one instrument or singer at a time, and to mix them later. This allowed music recordings to become much more complex than they had been before. Previously, music had to be recorded live, with all musicians and singers being recorded at the same time.

In the late 1940s, recording companies engaged in the "war of the speeds." Columbia introduced 12-inch records that played at $33\frac{1}{3}$ -rpm. The following year, RCA Victor introduced records that played at 45-rpm. By 1951, each company began selling both formats. The $33\frac{1}{3}$ -rpm records, which could hold over 20 minutes of music per side, were sold as long playing albums. The 7-inch 45-rpm records were used for "singles," usually a popular song on one side and a less well-known song on the "B side." The old 78-rpm record was discontinued soon afterward.

In the 1960s, William Lear, the designer of the Lear Jet airplane, invented the 8-track tape. This was, at the time, the most convenient way to play music on portable listening devices and in cars. The 8-track tape was popular through the late 1960s and the 1970s. Cassette tapes, which allowed users to play or record music on the same tape, and which had better sound quality, replaced 8-track tapes in popularity in the late 1970s.

Several competing companies developed the compact disc (CD) in the late 1970s. These

competitors agreed on a common standard disc in the early 1980s and soon released pre-recorded discs to the public. Recordable compact discs, which allow users to "burn" their own discs, followed in 1991. The newest recorded music medium, the **MP3**, was invented by a German firm that received a U.S. patent for it in 1996. This technology allows recorded music to be digitally compressed, making it easier and faster to transmit music over the Internet. MP3 also allows for music playing devices to become smaller than previously possible.

Changing Musical Styles

As music technology changed during the twentieth century, so did musical styles. Jazz, the first uniquely American music style, arose in the early part of the century. Jazz, along with rhythm and blues—both which were associated with African-American musicians—was the basis of early rock and roll. In an age when widespread bigotry still existed, the willingness of young white Americans to embrace the music of black musicians caused discomfort with some white parents. In fact, much of the music favored by younger people was referred to as "race music" because of its African-American heritage. Perhaps for the first time in American history, the country began to see a real difference in the music that young people enjoyed and the music of their parents. This difference became increasingly apparent in the 1950s, with the baby boom and the new emphasis on youth culture.

When television arrived in American homes in the early 1950s, radio moved away from broadcasting dramatic and comedy programs and focused on music. Alan Freed, a Cleveland disc jockey, is credited with being the first to use the

Unit 1: Our Musical Heritage

Music Buzz

term “rock and roll” to describe this music style in the early 1950s. Many music historians point to the early 1950s recordings of Bill Haley and Sam Phillips as the first rock and roll records.

Over the last half century, rock and roll has evolved into a wide variety of styles. Today, teenagers can hear “soft rock,” “hard rock,” “heavy

metal,” “techno,” “trance,” “industrial,” “hip-hop,” “Goth,” and various other styles of music. What does today’s music have in common with early rock and roll? One thing is for sure—most older adults did not like teenagers’ music then, and most adults don’t like it now.



Should We Change the National Anthem of the United States?

FRANCIS SCOTT KEY, a lawyer and poet from the Washington, D.C. area, wrote the words of "The Star-Spangled Banner" during the War of 1812 between the United States and Great Britain. Key watched a British attack on Fort McHenry in Baltimore in 1814. After a long night of bombardment, the "flag was still there" in the morning, meaning that the Americans had held the fort despite the bombing. Key based his melody on an eighteenth-century English drinking song, "To Anacreon in Heaven."

"The Star-Spangled Banner" did not become the official national anthem until Congress declared it such in 1931. Despite the anthem's continuing popularity, some have complained that it is not as good an anthem as it could be. Some people point out that the song covers a musical range of $1\frac{1}{2}$ octaves between its high and low notes. This means that few people other than trained singers can properly sing the song. Others criticize the song because they say it seems to celebrate warfare and death.

Supporters of "The Star-Spangled Banner" argue that it is good that the song is hard for most people to sing. They say that the song's difficulty forces Americans to concentrate on the song, and thus to pay more attention and respect to the song. Some supporters of the song say that its references to war help remind us that the United States has had to fight to gain and preserve its freedom.

Some of the people who want to change the national anthem to another song have suggested Irving Berlin's "God Bless America," written in 1938. However, some people point out that the song's reference to God may be a problem. The U.S. Constitution's First Amendment says that the federal government "shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." If Congress made "God Bless America" the national anthem, that action might be interpreted as an establishment of religion.

Another choice is "America the Beautiful," written by Katharine Lee Bates in the 1890s as a poem. The poem's words are most often sung to the melody of "Materna," composed in the 1880s by Samuel A. Ward. Another common suggestion is Woody Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land," written in 1940. However, Guthrie's supposedly liberal politics bother some conservatives, who believe that the national anthem should be generally patriotic, without a particular political slant.

(continued)

Should We Change the National Anthem of the United States?

This Land Is Your Land

Woody Guthrie

This land is your land,
This land is my land,
From California
To the New York island,
From the Redwood Forest,
To the Gulf Stream waters,
This land was made for you and me.

As I was walking,
That ribbon of highway,
I saw above me
That endless skyway,
I saw below me
That golden valley.
This land was made for you and me.

I've roamed and rambled
And I've followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sands of her diamond
deserts
And all around me a voice was sounding
This land was made for you and me.

The sun comes shining
As I was strolling
The wheat fields waving
And the dust clouds rolling
The fog was lifting, a voice came chanting
This land was made for you and me.

As I was walkin'
I saw a sign there
And that sign said no tresspassin'
But on the other side
It didn't say nothin!
Now that side was made for you and me!

In the squares of the city
In the shadow of the steeple
Near the relief office
I see my people
And some are grumblin'
And some are wonderin'
If this land's still made for you and me.

Nobody living can ever stop me
As I go walking
That freedom highway
Nobody living can make me turn back
This land was made for you and me.

(continued)

Activity 1 (continued)

Should We Change the National Anthem of the United States?

God Bless America

God bless America, Land that I love. Stand beside her, And guide her, Through the night with a light from above.	From the mountains, To the prairies, To the oceans, white with foam. God bless America, My home, sweet, home.
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America, the Beautiful

O beautiful for spacious skies, For amber waves of grain, For purple mountain majesties Above the fruited plain!	O beautiful for patriot dream That sees beyond the years Thine alabaster cities gleam Undimmed by human tears!
America! America! God shed His grace on Thee, And crown thy good with brotherhood From sea to shining sea!	America! America! God shed His grace on Thee, And crown thy good with brotherhood From sea to shining sea!

The Star Spangled Banner

Oh! say can you see, By the dawn's early light, What so proudly we hailed At the twilight's last gleaming? Whose broad stripes and bright stars, Through the perilous fight, O'er the ramparts we watched Were so gallantly streaming? And the rockets red glare, The bombs bursting in air, Gave proof through the night That our flag was still there.	Oh! say does that star-spangled banner yet wave O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave? On the shore, dimly seen Thro' the mist of the deep, Where the foe's haughty host In dread silence reposes, What is that which the breeze, O'er the tower steep, As it fitfully blows, Half conceals, half discloses?
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