

DR. BEN DUMBAULD

SESSION 2

USING POP MUSIC TO
ENCOURAGE SEL

The Five Ws of "Here"



Read the lyrics of Alessia Cara's "Here," then answer the questions below.



I'm sorry if I seem uninterested
Or I'm not listenin', or, I'm indifferent Truly I ain't got no business here
But since my friends are here, I just came to kick it But really I would rather be at home all
by myself Not in this room
With people who don't even care about my well-being I don't dance, don't ask, I don't need a
boyfriend
So you can, go back, please enjoy your party I'll be here
[. . .]

Oh-oh-oh here, oh-oh-oh here
Oh I ask myself, what am I doin' here? Oh-oh-oh here, oh-oh-oh here
And I can't wait 'til we can break up out of here

Excuse me if I seem a little unimpressed with this
An anti-social pessimist, but usually I don't mess with this And I know you mean only the best
And your intentions aren't to bother me But honestly I'd rather be
Somewhere with my people We can kick it and just listen to
Some music with a message, like we usually do And we'll discuss our big dreams
How we plan to take over the planet So pardon my manners
I hope you'll understand that I'll be here Not there in the kitchen
With the girl who's always gossiping about her friends So tell them I'll be here
[. . .]

Oh-oh-oh here, oh-oh-oh here
Oh I ask myself, what am I doin' here? Oh-oh-oh here, oh-oh-oh here
And I can't wait 'til we can break up out of here

Hours later congregatin' next to the refrigerator Some girl talkin' 'bout her haters, she
ain't got none
How did it ever come to this? I shoulda never come to this So holla at me, I'll be in the car
when you're done
I'm stand-offish, don't want what you're offerin'
And I'm done talkin', awfully sad it had to be that way So tell my people when they're ready
that I'm ready And I'm standin' by the TV with my beanie low
Yo I'll be over here

Oh-oh-oh here, oh-oh-oh here
Oh I ask myself, what am I doin' here? Oh-oh-oh here, oh-oh-oh here
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Questions:

Who is the main character in the song?

Where is the main character in the song?

How does the main character feel about her situation?

What doesn't she like about where she is?

Where would she rather be?

Why might she have decided to be where she is?

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LITTLE KIDS ROCK LESSON

ALESSIA CARA'S "HERE": PERSPECTIVES ON FUN, PEER PRESSURE, AND ANXIETY



ESSENTIAL QUESTION

In what ways does Alessia Cara's "Here" defy popular music conventions, and what does the song say about peer pressure in youth culture?

OVERVIEW

From surf rock beach parties in the 1960s to present day rappers "in the club," popular music has long been associated with socialization activities like dancing and drinking, usually amongst a large crowd of people. But for those who are more comfortable spending their time at home or with a small group of friends, the glorification of parties and dancing in popular music may provoke anxiety. For many such people, Alessia Cara's "Here" is an anthem.

"I'm used to being alone. I enjoy it," Cara writes on *Genius.com*, "I think you get a lot done when you're alone. It's easier to get your feelings out when you're alone. You don't have to worry about how you look. You can do whatever, look however. It's just the best time to do whatever you want." Cara began her music career largely alone in 2010, posting YouTube videos of her popular music covers and celebrity impressions, mostly filmed in the comfort of her own bedroom. Soon Cara's videos began attracting attention and her viewership increased dramatically. In 2015, Cara, a self-made star, signed with Def Jam Recordings.

"Here" was Cara's first single with Def Jam, and its lyrics are inspired by lived experience. Cara recalls that on the day she wrote the song, "all I kept thinking about was this party I'd gone to the night before, which was like the most uncomfortable party I'd ever gone to. I realized how uncomfortable I was and I called my mom, and I was like 'mom I have to come home early, please pick me up.'" By relating her feelings of discomfort towards parties, Cara hoped the song would appeal to "all the antisocial, awkward, and miserable party-goers of the world."

"Here" peaked at #6 on the *Billboard* charts, and secured positions in many "Best Songs of 2015" lists as well. The success of "Here" is likely due in part to its appeal to those who do not feel represented by the images popular music culture often promotes. In "Here," Cara makes it clear she has no interest in the gossip, drug use, alcohol consumption, and flirtation that she associates with parties, and that she'd prefer socializing with a small group of "real" friends.

Many students experience similar feelings. "Here" encourages her audience to be themselves in the face of peer pressure, a message she has continued to advocate in newer songs, such as "Scars to Your Beautiful."

In this lesson, students compare lyrics to historical content to determine how Alessia Cara's song "Here" defies popular music conventions. Then, they consider their own experiences with peer pressure, and imagine what their own "unconventional" pop song might be about.

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Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

KNOW (KNOWLEDGE)

The motivation and background behind the song "Here" The historic association between popular music and socialization activities such as parties and dancing.

The pioneering role of disc jockeys Dewey Phillips (Memphis) and Hunter Hancock (Los Angeles) in playing Rhythm and Blues on the radio.

MASTERY OBJECTIVE

Through textual and historical analysis, students will be able to analyze how Alessia Cara's song "Here" confronts pop music conventions and discuss how it might inspire people to be comfortable with themselves.

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY:**Ask Students:**

How do music videos portray the lifestyles of famous musicians? Do you think they are honest depictions?

2. Play the video to Alessia Cara's "Here" for students.**PROCEDURE:**

Play Videos 1-4 (Video 1 , Gene Vincent, "I Got a Baby on Seventeen," Video 2, The Beach Boys, "Surfin' U.S.A.," Video 3, Peaches and Herb, "Shake Your Groove Thing," and Video 4, "Don't Knock the Rock.") (Note: teachers may choose to play all or some of the videos, or substitute other music videos that features partying and dancing).

Ask students:

- What are the musicians and listeners doing in these videos?
- Watching these videos, what might someone conclude is one of the purposes of popular music?
- Can you think of more recent examples of songs that promote dancing, partying, and having a good time, either in the lyrics or the music video?
- How is Cara's song "Here" different from the videos you just saw?
- What kinds of activities are promoted as being fun in the popular music in your life? Are those activities a realistic part of your life?
- How do the activities you see in popular music affect your social decisions? (*Encourage students to consider peer pressure, or the pressure to behave a certain way, etc.*)

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Split students into groups, and pass out Handout 1, "The Five W's of 'Here'" to each group. Have students complete the worksheet as a group, then discuss their answers as a class.

Point out to the students that this is an example of Country Blues, in which the musician mixes rhythm guitar with finger picking on an acoustic instrument.

Ask students:

- Has there ever been a time in your life when you wished you were somewhere else? Where was it, and why did you go? Did anyone pressure you to go?
- What didn't you like about that place? Where would you have rather been?
- Looking back, would you make the same decision to go? Why or why not?

Have each student compose song lyrics based on the following prompt:

Think of something you enjoy doing that may not be an activity commonly addressed in popular music (for example: being with your family, playing board games, reading books, cooking, etc.) and write a poem or song lyrics about it.

Have students present their lyrics to class (*If time permits, set some of the lyrics to music.*)

SUMMARY

Ask: Do you think Alessia Cara's "Here" says something new or different, compared to other popular songs? Why or why not? Can you think of other songs that might have a similar message to "Here"? (Lorde's "Royals," for example).

What kinds of people do you think "Here" especially speaks to?

What sort of inspiration might someone get from Cara's song? What might be the message of this song in regards to peer pressure?