



THEMATIC LESSON: LOVE SONGS

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Why is the Pop song such a common medium for expressing feelings about love, and how do individual songs relate to their historical moments?

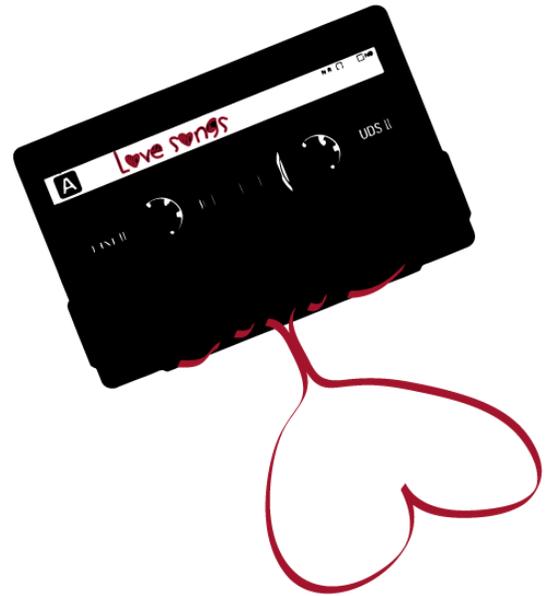
OVERVIEW

The love song has been around for thousands of years and existed in virtually every culture: fragments of love songs and lyric poetry etched on papyrus and carved in stone survive from ancient Greece and Egypt. Medieval troubadours perfected the art of writing and singing about idealized love. Opera composers dramatized romance in music. Amorous parlor songs played a role in courtships.

And of course, love songs are a fixture in contemporary musical culture. By most estimates, they have made up the majority of songs on the popularity charts throughout the 20th century and into the 21st. Musicians working in every major genre of American popular music—including Folk, Jazz, Pop, Country, Rhythm and Blues, and Rock and Roll — have produced songs about love. The variety of themes is similarly broad, encompassing many different aspects of and perspectives on relationships, from loss and longing to hope and dreaming.

Rock and Roll love songs inherit much from their historical predecessors, but they also demonstrate how cultural ideas about love, sex, and relationships change over time. New musical styles present opportunities to approach an old subject in new ways, and the sometimes raucous sounds of Rock and Roll made entirely new types of songs about love possible.

In this lesson, students will listen to examples of love songs from several musical styles and historical moments. The activities are designed to explore how music and lyrics work together to express different sentiments toward love and relationships.



OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- How different perspectives on love can be expressed through lyrics
- How songwriters use music to enhance or change the meaning of the lyrics.
- That songs reflect their cultural and historical context.

2. BE ABLE TO (SKILLS):

- Develop interpretive skills by analyzing song lyrics
- Compare and contrast musical performances
- Identify connections between artistic expression and the broader social and political context in which that expression occurs
- Common Core: Students will read and listen to analyze lyrics to comprehend the meaning more fully (CCSS Speaking and Listening 2; CCSS Language 3)

ACTIVITIES

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY:

- 1. Have each student write down the title of a song that he/she hears on a regular basis. Go around the room and ask each student to share his or her song. Ask students to raise their hands if the songs they chose have lyrics dealing with love or relationships.**
- 2. Ask students the following questions, encouraging discussion:**
 - Why might love be a common theme in songs?
 - Is music as a medium particularly effective in establishing a romantic mood? In other words, can it influence mood in ways that other media (like paintings or films) cannot?
 - What are some different kinds of feelings about relationships that could be expressed in songs? (Longing, hope, loss, etc.)
- 3. Break the class into small groups of about three students. Ask students to collaborate on a list of features that a good love song might have. (Imagery, instrumentation, tempo, etc.) Select a representative from each group to share their list with the class.**

PROCEDURE:

1. Distribute Handout 1, which contains excerpts of lyrics used in this lesson.
2. As a class, watch the video of the Doo Wop group the Flamingos singing the song “Would I Be Crying” (1956), and discuss:
 - Whose point of view is expressed in this song? (The singer’s/songwriter’s)
 - Whom is being addressed? How do you know? (Note use of pronouns like “you” or “she”)
 - What kind of message or story does the song have? What do you imagine has happened to the singer and the person he is singing to?
3. Discuss the musical qualities of the song. What does the music sound like?
 - Is the music happy or sad? What makes it sound that way? (Tempo, melody, etc.)
 - What instruments are used in the background?
 - How do the performers present the song? Do they act out the lyrics in any way?
 - In what respects does this song match your list of good love-song qualities?
4. Play the video of Dion DiMucci (a singer-songwriter and leader of the Doo Wop group Dion and the Belmonts), “Music as a Way Out,” starting at 1:34. Ask:
 - What does Dion say about emotional songs like the Flamingos’ “Would I Be Crying”? What is his “secret”?
 - Why might it be easier to sing rather than speak about emotions like love or heartbreak?
5. Ask a volunteer to read some of the lyrics of “Would I Be Crying” out loud:

*I can't be lying
 Can't you see that I'm crying
 Would be I crying
 If I were lying to you*

*My heart is about to break
 I regret making my mistake
 My love for you burns the same
 And my tears can't put out the flame*

6. Does adding music to these lyrics change your experience of listening to them? How do you think music helps to create or enhance emotions?
7. Distribute the lyrics to the second verse of the Led Zeppelin song “Communication Breakdown” (1969), but wait to identify the band:

*Hey, girl, I got something I think you ought to know.
 Hey, babe, I wanna tell you that I love you so.
 I wanna hold you in my arms, yeah!
 I'm never gonna let you go, 'cause I like your charms.*
8. Ask students to describe what kind of emotion is being expressed in these lyrics, and what they think the corresponding music should sound like. (Tempo, volume, instrumentation, etc.)
9. Next, play the clip of Led Zeppelin performing the song (the second verse begins at 0:48). Discuss the performance:
 - Did the music meet students’ expectations? Why or why not?
 - How does this song compare to the students’ list of love song features? Is it loud or soft? Fast or slow?
 - How does “Communication Breakdown” compare to “Would I Be Crying” by the Flamingos?
 - Does using the instrumentation of a Rock and Roll band (electric guitars, drums), along with the fast tempo and high volume, make this seem more or less like a song about romance?
10. Tell the students that the Hard Rock style of bands like Led Zeppelin

PROCEDURE: (CONTINUED)

developed in the late 1960s, more than a decade after the Doo Wop style of the Flamingos was popular. Ask: how might new and different styles of music produce different kinds of love songs?

11. Explain to students that the kinds of lyrics used in love songs can change over time, too. To illustrate, tell the students that they are about to hear two songs, one of which was written in the 1950s, before the feminist movement of the 1960s began,

and one that was written at the beginning of the movement. Play clips of the following two songs: “With My Eyes Wide Open, I’m Dreaming,” performed by Patti Page, and “You Don’t Own Me,” performed by Lesley Gore. Ask students which song they think is from which era, and why. (Patti Page made “With My Eyes Wide Open I’m Dreaming” into a hit in 1950; “You Don’t Own Me” was popular in 1963 and subsequently became an anthem for the feminist movement.)

SUMMARY ACTIVITY:

1. Ask students to return to their small groups from the beginning of class and revisit their list of love song features. Is there anything they would like to add to their lists after listening to the songs in this lesson?
2. Have the groups imagine that a music producer has come to them and asked them to compose new music for Led Zeppelin’s song “Communication Breakdown” in order to make it sound more like a romantic love song from the 1950s (like “Would I Be Crying” or “With My Eyes Wide Open, I’m Dreaming”). What changes would they make to the original version?

WRITING PROMPT:

Ask students to write their own love song lyrics, using the songs in this lesson as models. First students must decide who will be speaking and to whom or what the song will be addressed (a boyfriend/girlfriend, family member, friend, pet, even a place). After writing the lyrics, they should write a short description of the music they imagine might deliver the message of the song: is it loud or soft? Fast or slow? What instruments might the musicians use?

EXTENSIONS:

1. Have students compile playlists for a hypothetical school dance with a Valentine’s theme and write a journal entry or short paper explaining their selections. Write a two-page research paper, using examples to support your argument.
2. Listen to and compare Sam Cooke singing the songs “Wonderful” and “Loveable.” “Loveable” is a secular love song based on the earlier Gospel song “Wonderful.” What stays the same between the two songs? What changes? Students can also read Barney Hoskyns’s article “The Soul Stirrer: Sam Cooke” from *Rock’s Backpages* and discuss why turning a Gospel song

EXTENSIONS: (CONTINUED)

into a love song would be controversial.

3. Have students compare and contrast the following three love songs, all from the mid-1960s: “You’ve Really Got Me,” by the Kinks; “She Loves You,” by the Beatles; and “Mrs. Brown You’ve Got a Lovely Daughter,” by Herman’s Hermits. These three songs demonstrate different perspectives on relationships. Students should answer the following questions about each song:

- Who is speaking?
- To whom are they speaking, and what about? (Pay attention to nouns and pronouns.)
- What perspective on the relationship in the story does the speaker have?
- How does the music set the mood for the conversation taking place in the song? Is the song fast or slow? Soft or loud? What instruments are being used?

STANDARDS

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

College and Career Readiness Reading Anchor Standards for Grades 6-12 for Literature and Informational Text

Reading 4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

Reading 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Reading 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Reading 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening for Grades 6-12

Speaking and Listening 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Speaking and Listening 3: Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

Core Music Standard: Responding

Select: Choose music appropriate for a specific purpose or context.

Analyze: Analyze how the structure and context of varied musical works inform the response.

Interpret: Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators' and/or performers' expressive intent.

Evaluate: Support evaluations of musical works and performances based on analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.

Core Music Standard: Connecting

Connecting 11: Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.

RESOURCES

VIDEO RESOURCES

- Led Zeppelin – Communication Breakdown (1969)
- The Flamingos – Would I Be Crying (1956)
- Lesley Gore – You Don't Own Me (1963)
- Patti Page - With My Eyes Wide Open, I'm Dreaming (1959)
- Dion Dimucci – Music As a Way Out

FEATURED PEOPLE

- Sam Cooke
- Dion Dimucci
- Led Zeppelin

HANDOUTS

- Handout 1: Love Song Lyrics (Excerpts)