



LIVERPOOL: THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE BEATLES

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did growing up in post-WWII Liverpool influence the Beatles?

OVERVIEW

In 1940—the year John Lennon and Ringo Starr were born—the Nazis bombed Liverpool every other day. These attacks were part of the Blitz, a military strategy designed to demoralize the European Allies with relentless bombing of strategic and civilian locations in England and Northern Ireland. Because the majority of war supplies shipped from abroad (mainly the United States) entered Great Britain through the Liverpool docks, the port city was a key target throughout the war. Lennon and Starr were too young to remember the constant air raids, but they and the other Beatles certainly experienced the effects of the war as children and young adults. When they were in elementary school, much of the city was still in ruins, unemployment was high, and food rationing—which continued until 1954—was a part of daily life.



The Nazis, in obvious contrast, never bombed the United States, which enjoyed an economic boom in the postwar period. The Beatles and other European youths saw the U.S. as a land of hope and optimism. With American support, the Liverpool docks once again filled with ships in the postwar years. As Marshall Plan aid helped rebuild Liverpool's economy, the transmission of American culture—especially movies and music—also inspired the area's youth. Merchant seamen known as the Cunard Yanks traveled to New York City and returned to Liverpool wearing American fashion and carrying American recordings, including Blues, Country, and Rock and Roll.

In this lesson, students will work in groups to discover how growing up in post-WWII Liverpool influenced the Beatles, nurtured their fascination with American music and culture, and helped them become a force that would in turn take American culture by storm in the 1960s.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The influence of geography on history, particularly the geographical reasons Liverpool, as an important center of trade, was a focal point of cultural diffusion between the United States and Britain
- The differences between the postwar experiences of the United States and those of Great Britain
- The impact on both Liverpool and the Beatles of the Blitz, postwar rationing, the Marshall Plan, and the Cunard Yanks, a group of merchant seamen who traveled between Britain and the United States
- The concept of cultural diffusion, the spread and intermingling of cultures from different places

2. BE ABLE TO (SKILLS):

- Refine note-taking skills during class discussion
- Common Core: Students will develop strategies to gain domain-specific understandings of key vocabulary terms, such as “cultural diffusion” (CCSS Reading 4; CCSS Language 4)
- Common Core: Students will work together to analyze and interpret primary sources and make connections (CCSS Reading 3; CCSS Reading 7; CCSS Speaking and Listening 1)
- Common Core: Students will synthesize historical information into a well-supported narrative and share it with their class (CCSS Writing 3; CCSS Writing 4; CCSS Writing 6; CCSS Speaking and Listening 4)

ACTIVITIES

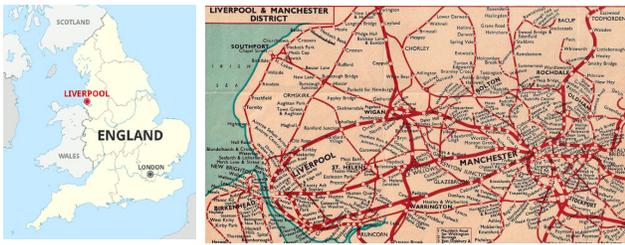
MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY:

1. Ask students to think about a particularly sad or difficult time in their lives. Briefly discuss:

- Was there a particular song that helped you through this difficult time? How did it help?
- Does music have the power to turn a bad situation around?
- Why do people often turn to music in difficult times?

PROCEDURE:

1. Distribute Handout 1: Growing Up in Liverpool. Instruct students to complete the questions on the handout during the discussion.
2. Display a map of the world on a projector or Smartboard. (If these are not available, you may wish to duplicate printouts of maps and distribute them to students.) Ask students to locate Great Britain and the United States on the map.
3. In a similar fashion, display the two maps (one and two) that include Liverpool. If Google Earth or Google Maps is readily available, you may wish to use one to slowly zoom in and out of the city.
5. Ask students how living in a port city might have affected the things residents were able to buy in an era before air travel and shipping were commonplace. Would they have been exposed to new things before others living inland?
6. Ask students to define the term “cultural diffusion.” If students have not encountered this term in prior studies, the instructor should define it as the spread of culture from one geographic location to another.
7. Ask students to imagine they have been hired to help one of the Beatles write his autobiography. They have been assigned to work specifically on the chapter discussing the way growing up in Liverpool influenced their Beatle as a young man. They will work in small groups and use their newfound knowledge of history and geography to help their Beatle enrich his book.



4. Discuss the following questions, reminding students to take notes on the handout:
 - How would you describe Liverpool’s geography, particularly in terms of river and sea access?
 - Why do you think Liverpool was a major trade city?
 - How does trade impact a city? (Students may consider economic growth or the city as a strategic bombing target in a time of war.)
 - What kinds of items do you think might have been shipped into and out of Liverpool during World War II?
 - How might Liverpool’s status as a port city have affected what happened to it during World War II? How might the experience of American cities during World War II have been different?
8. Divide students into six groups of no more than four students each. If the class is large, create duplicate groups.
9. Distribute Handout 2: The Autobiography of a Beatle. Distribute the handouts for Group 1, Group 2, Group 3 (Required video: Gerry Marsden on “American Music Brought to Liverpool,” the Beatles performing “Maxwell’s Silver Hammer,” George Formby performing “Leaning on a Lamp Post”), Group 4, Group 5 (Required video: “Cunard Yanks,” Gerry Marsden on “American Music Brought to Liverpool”), and Group 6 (Required video: “Wabash Cannonball,” Gerry Marsden on Skiffle, Graham Nash on Skiffle). These contain source materials for each group’s section of the autobiography, including photographs, quotations, and videos. Be sure to assemble all the materials,

PROCEDURE: (CONTINUED)

including a video station, prior to the start of the lesson.

10. Instruct each group to read the directions on its handout and complete the activity as directed. You can collect the sections and compile a complete autobiography;

alternatively, students could collaborate online to share their biographies, creating one complete autobiography per class. (If your school does not provide its own platform for a class website, many are available on the Internet, such as a shared Google document or a blog site).

SUMMARY ACTIVITY:

1. Distribute Handout 3: Lesson Summary. Explain to students that they will see a short video clip of Rock musician Steven Van Zandt, well known as a member of Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band. Ask students to answer the first question on the handout:
 - Based on what you've seen earlier in the lesson, what do you predict Van Zandt will say about postwar England?
2. Show the Steven Van Zandt interview. Remind students to take notes on how WWII impacted the U.S. and the U.K.
3. Ask students to complete the last question in their handout:
 - Did Van Zandt's description of the British experience echo the material in your autobiography entry? Give two to three examples.
4. Collect the handouts and, if time permits, discuss students' answers to the questions.

WRITING PROMPT:

How was life in postwar Britain different from life in America during the same period? How might this discrepancy have affected the timing of the British Invasion launched by the Beatles, which arrived roughly a decade after Elvis recorded his first single?

EXTENSIONS:

1. Ask students to create a timeline of key events in Liverpool during and immediately after World War II, as well as in the early lives of the Beatles, using pictures to illustrate key events.
2. Have students listen to early Beatles recordings and compare them to recordings of American musicians such as Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, and Little Richard. Students may also investigate the extent to which the Beatles' early recordings comprised "covers," or new versions, of songs by these and other American artists.

STANDARDS

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

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

Reading 3: Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a 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 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

College and Career Readiness Writing Anchor Standards for Grades 6-12 in English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects

Writing 3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Writing 4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Writing 6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

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

Speaking and Listening 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Speaking and Listening 4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language for Grades 6-12

Language 4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

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

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 3: People, Places, and Environments

Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity

Theme 9: Global Connections

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

- Gerry Marsden – American Music Brought to Liverpool (2009)
- Lonnie Donegan – Wabash Cannonball (1958)
- George Formby – Leaning on the Lamp Post (1937)
- Graham Nash – Skiffle
- Gerry Marsden – Skiffle (2009)
- Cunard Yanks
- The Beatles – Maxwell’s Silver Hammer (1968)
- Steven Van Zandt – The U.S. and England After WWII

FEATURED PEOPLE

- The Beatles
- Lonnie Donegan
- George Harrison
- John Lennon
- Paul McCartney
- Steven Van Zandt

HANDOUTS

- Handout 1: Growing Up in Liverpool
- Handout 2: The Autobiography of a Beatle
- Handout 3: Lesson Summary
- Materials for Group 1
- Materials for Group 2
- Materials for Group 3
- Materials for Group 4
- Materials for Group 5
- Materials for Group 6