ESSENTIAL QUESTION
What is the Surf sound and where did it come from?

OVERVIEW
The Surf sound of the early 1960s was built on the interplay of different musical traditions that came together to form something new, something that in its heyday took the nation by storm. In the case of the Beach Boys’ early music, a mix of popular forms resulted in a sound with both black and white roots. Bringing together the R&B-inflected guitar of Chuck Berry with vocal-group harmonies associated with white groups like the Four Freshman, the Beach Boys hit their teen audience very directly.

In this lesson students will investigate the different elements of the Beach Boys’ Surf sound by visiting four listening stations and identifying some essential elements of their early music. These elements include rich vocal harmonies, a production aesthetic influenced by Phil Spector’s “Wall of Sound” recordings, Chuck Berry-inspired electric guitar riffs, and the liberal use of “reverb” effects facilitated by technical innovations to Fender amplifiers in the early 1960s.
Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. **KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):**
   - The contributions of such artists as the Beach Boys, Dick Dale, and the Surfaris
   - The influence of technical innovation on musical expression, specifically the impact of reverb effects on recording artists using the Fender amplifiers produced in the early 1960s
   - The musical roots of the Surf sound of the early 1960s, including Rhythm and Blues guitar styles, vocal-group harmonies, and the “Wall of Sound” production technique

2. **BE ABLE TO (SKILLS):**
   - Develop listening skills by analyzing musical performances to identify common motifs and themes
   - Common Core: Students will evaluate music to build understandings and make connections between culture and technology (CCSS Reading 7; CCSS Writing 2; CCSS Speaking and Listening 2); CCSS Speaking and Listening 1)

**MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY:**

Display the poster from the 1963 Hollywood movie Beach Party. Ask students to imagine what kind of music they think they might hear if they saw this film. What kind of mood would it create? What words come to mind to describe it?
**PROCEDURE:**

1. Set up the room to create four separate listening stations on classroom computers. If equipment is available, the instructor may wish to set up duplicate stations, for a total of eight.

2. Divide students into groups of no more than four.

3. Distribute Handout 1: Surf Listening Activity.

4. Explain to students that during this activity, they will visit each of the listening stations. Handout 2: Surf Listening Stations contains specific information that should be posted at each listening station. As students visit each station, they should discuss the questions with the other members of their group, and complete the chart on Handout 1. When they have visited all four stations, they should return to their seats with their groups.

5. Still working in groups, students will answer the final two questions on Handout 1, focusing on identifying the central musical elements of Surf and working toward a definition or general statement about the spirit of the Surf sound.

6. Briefly summarize student findings by going around the room and soliciting sample answers from each group.

**Listening Station 1: Vocal Harmonies**

- **Song 1:** “The Things We Did Last Summer,” the Beach Boys (1963)

- **Song 1:** “The Things We Did Last Summer,” the Beach Boys (1963) Song 2: “Angel Eyes,” the Four Freshmen (1956)

**Listening Station 2: R&B Guitar**

- **Song 1:** “Fun, Fun, Fun,” the Beach Boys (1964)

- **Song 2:** “Johnny B. Goode,” Chuck Berry (1958)

The first time you listen, listen only to the first 18 seconds of each song. What do you notice? Then go back and play the rest of each song. Chuck Berry’s “Johnny B. Goode” remains one of the classics of early Rock and Roll. Think about why the Beach Boys might have borrowed its opening guitar riff for their song. What does it add to the song? Do the Beach Boys successfully take this famous guitar riff and make it their own? Go over the procedures for the SAC as described in the handout.

**Listening Station 3: Wall of Sound**

- **Song 1:** “Don’t Worry Baby,” the Beach Boys (1964)

- **Song 2:** “Be My Baby,” the Ronettes (1963)

The Four Freshmen were a popular male vocal group founded in Indiana in 1948 that combined the sounds of Jazz with the styles of traditional “barbershop quartets.” As you listen to the two songs, think about the ways the groups use their voices to create a specific mood. In these songs, is every singer singing the same part? How do the combined voices create a single whole? Note that the Beach Boys’ performance came seven years after “Angel Eyes.” How do you think groups such as the Four Freshmen influenced the Beach Boys’ vocal style? Note also that “The Things We Did Last Summer” is a 1946 song that was recorded by numerous artists. Why do you think the Beach Boys chose to perform this song in 1963? What does it suggest about the influence of earlier musical styles on them as a group?
PROCEDURE: (CONTINUED)

Pay particular attention to the opening seconds of each song as you listen. What about them is similar? The Ronettes’ recording demonstrates a production technique called the “Wall of Sound,” pioneered in the early 1960s by record producer Phil Spector. It was a style that influenced Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys. Listen carefully and think about how that sound was created. What kind of effect does this technique accomplish? What kind of mood does it create?

Listening Station 4: Instrumental Reverb

- Song 1: “Wipeout,” the Surfaris (1963)
- Song 2: “Miserlou,” Dick Dale and the Del-Tones (1962)

In the early 1960s, the Fender Musical Instruments Corporation introduced a new type of electric amplifier that could produce a reverberating sound, an echo-like effect popularly known as “reverb.” This effect was featured on many instrumental songs of the Surf era. What kind of mood does it create in the two songs here? (Note that “Miserlou” is a recording of a traditional Greek song that was written in the 1920s.)

SUMMARY ACTIVITY:

1. Briefly discuss with students

- What was it about the Surf sound that gave it such broad appeal in the early 1960s?

- The Beach Boys’ music combined the sounds of vocal group music that had long appealed to white audiences with a Rhythm and Blues sound derived largely from African-American musical influences. Are you surprised that these two forms could be so successfully combined? What does their merging in Surf music tell us about the history of Rock and Roll and American popular culture?

2. Ask students to vote on which of the songs in this lesson best represents the Surf sound.

3. Display the image that was shown at the opening of the lesson, this time accompanied by the song the students selected.
WRITING PROMPT:

What is the Surf sound? Write an encyclopedia-style entry explaining it, using examples from the songs and techniques studied in this lesson.

EXTENSIONS:

Play the first minute of the Chuck Berry song “Sweet Little Sixteen” (1958), followed by the first minute of the Beach Boys’ “Surfin’ USA” (1963). Note that musically, these songs are almost identical; Berry sued and was given a songwriting credit after “Surfin’ USA” was released. Discuss with students the similarities and differences between the songs, how the Beach Boys’ lyrics changes the meaning of the song, and who the different audiences might have been for each song.

STANDARDS

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

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

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 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

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.

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

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity

Theme 8: Science, Technology, and Society
NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

Core Music Standard: Responding

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
• The Beach Boys – Fun, Fun, Fun (1964)
• The Beach Boys – Surfin’ USA (1963)
• The Four Freshmen – Angel Eyes (1956)
• The Beach Boys – Don’t Worry Baby (1964)
• Chuck Berry – Sweet Little Sixteen (1958)
• Chuck Berry – Johnny B. Goode (1965)
• The Beach Boys – The Things We Did Last Summer (1963)
• The Ronettes – Be My Baby (1963)
• Dick Dale – Miserlou (1962)
• The Surfaris – Wipeout (1963)

FEATURED PEOPLE
• The Beach Boys
• Chuck Berry
• Dick Dale
• Four Freshmen
• The Ronettes

HANDOUTS
• Handout 1: Surf Listening Activity
• Handout 2: Surf Listening Stations