



THE RISE OF THE “GIRL GROUPS”

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Were the Girl Groups of the early 1960s voices of female empowerment or reflections of traditional female roles?

OVERVIEW

Tucked between the popularity of the early Rock and Rollers and the mid-1960s British Invasion was the phenomenon known as the “Girl Groups.” With names like the Bobbettes, the Shangri-Las, the Ronettes and the Chantelles, they offered a style rich in vocal harmonies that was eagerly embraced by a wide audience.

A number of Girl Group hit songs were co-written by female songwriters, including Carole King, Ellie Greenwich, Cynthia Weil, and Florence Greenberg (who also launched her own record label and whose life served as the basis for the 2011 Broadway musical *Baby It’s You*). If, up to that point, male voices and male songwriters dominated the popular music scene, things were changing. Rock and Roll had a new female sound that produced a string of hits.

The Girl Groups rarely if ever performed material they had written themselves and rarely if ever played the instruments featured on their recordings, a job left to male studio musicians. Lyrically, most of their songs -- from the Dixie Cups’ “Chapel of Love” to the Angels’ “My Boyfriend’s Back” -- focused on the males in their lives and the promise of a satisfying relationship with that perfect guy. But there was nonetheless something new at work: a female voice was emerging despite it all.

In this lesson, students will evaluate what the emergence of the Girl Groups says about the roles of girls and women in the early 1960s, as the nation sat on the threshold of a new Women’s Rights movement that would challenge traditional female roles. In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, widely considered a milestone in the emerging feminist movement – and it came at the peak of the Girl Groups’ popularity. Did the success of the Girl Groups signal a new female empowerment, under which girls and women could finally come out from the shadows of Rock and Roll and tell the world what was on their minds? Or did the very labels “Girl Group” and “girl singer” and the focus of so many of their songs on the search for the ideal man simply reflect the traditional domestic roles of women as wives and mothers?



OVERVIEW (CONTINUED)

Instructors can utilize the materials in this lesson in a variety of ways. It is written in the form of a Structured Academic Controversy (SAC), a teaching strategy similar to debate that focuses on students building consensus rather than on identifying a “winner” who has developed the more convincing argument. However, the instructor may easily use the materials in a more traditional debate format, or simply as the basis for a general class discussion.

The Twist caught on as a fashion. It broke down age barriers, becoming popular among adults. It inspired a new freedom of movement that defied the traditional male-female roles of earlier dance forms. And, as Elvis Presley had several years earlier, it invoked the wrath of critics who labeled its liberal hip-shaking “vulgar” and “obscene.”

In this lesson, students will investigate the vast cultural impact on American culture of teen dance shows in general, and the Twist in particular.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The musical contributions of important "Girl Groups," including the Shirelles, the Crystals, the Chiffons, the Angels, and the Dixie Cups
- The significance of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*
- The growing economic power of teenage girls in the late 1950s and early 1960s
- Key events of the Women's Rights movement of the 1960s and 70s

2. BE ABLE TO (SKILLS):

- Analyze the lyrics of popular songs for meaning
- Link musical movements with the social and historical circumstances from which they emerged
- Evaluate what the music of the Girl Groups says about the roles of girls and women in the late 1950s and early 1960s
- Common Core: Students will read, interpret and evaluate an excerpt from Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (CCSS Reading 8)
- Common Core: Students will work in small groups to analyze multiple sources including song lyrics and collaborate on assessing the various points of view before writing an argumentative essay on the role of the Girl Groups (CCSS Reading 7; CCSS Writing 1; CCSS Speaking and Listening 1)

ACTIVITIES

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY:

1. Display this image of teen girls in an advertisement from the late 1950s, and discuss the following:



- Who is in the picture? How old do they appear to be?
- How would you describe their general appearance? What kinds of activities are they involved in?
- How independent do they seem to be? What evidence can you find in the pictures to support your answer?

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY: (CONTINUED)

2. Display the following quote from the essay "Good Culture, Bad Girls," by Susan Douglas, and discuss:

In 1960, the year of the Shirelles' first number-one hit, there were approximately 11.7 million girls between the ages of 12 and 17 in the United States and they were exerting increasing economic clout. The average of four dollars a week a girl received as an allowance was spent on cosmetics, magazines, movies, records and clothes. In an effort to tap into this flow of discretionary income, executives in the culture industry, from film producers to admen, sought to produce music, films, TV shows, ads, and magazines that these girls would buy, both literally and figuratively. The goal, of course, was to cash in on this newly identified market of female 'baby boomers.'

- What does the author mean by "economic clout"?
- According to the passage, how much money did the average girl receive each week in allowance?
- What sorts of things did girls spend this money on?
- If you were an executive in the "culture industry" at that time, what things might you have done to market your products to these teenaged girls? Look back at the pictures in the first part of this activity to help with your answer. What kinds of products are the girls using?

PROCEDURE:

1. Divide students into pairs for a "Think-Pair-Share" activity.
 - How do this song and its popularity tie in to what was discussed in the opening activity?
2. Distribute Handout 1: Excerpt of Lyrics for "Be My Baby" by the Ronettes (1963), and play the audio clip of the group performing the song.
3. Ask each pair to discuss the following, and then share sample responses with the class:
 - What is the song about and from whose perspective is the story told?
 - The single of the song sold more than 2 million copies in 1963. Why do you think it was so popular? Do you think it would have been as popular if it had been sung by a male group? Why or why not?
 - Who do you imagine was the target audience for the song?
 - How are the performers in the photograph dressed? How do you think this compares with the traditional outfits worn by women in the 1950s?
4. Distribute Handout 2: The Feminine Mystique. Ask for a volunteer to read the introduction aloud. Instruct students to highlight key words and phrases as they follow along. Discuss:
 - What traditional roles for women does Friedan describe? What kinds of things do these women spend most of their time doing?
 - What are some of the main words Friedan uses to describe women's feelings about their situation? (Likely answers include "dissatisfaction," "yearning," "struggle," etc.)
5. Ask for another volunteer or two to read the excerpt from Chapter 1 of Friedan's book. Discuss:
 - According to Friedan, what was happening to the age at which young women were getting married in the late 1950s?

PROCEDURE: (CONTINUED)

- What was happening to women's college attendance rates in this period?
 - What was happening to little girls' fashions? How did these reflect general attitudes toward women's roles?
 - Does anything about these trends surprise you? Why or why not? Based on your knowledge of this period in American history, why do you think this was happening?
6. Explain that in the remainder of the lesson, students will engage in a Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) in which they will analyze "He's A Rebel," along with other songs of the "Girl Group" era, and consider what they tell us about the roles and attitudes of girls and women in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The SAC will ask students to address this question: Were the Girl Groups of the 1960s voices of female empowerment or a reflection of traditional female roles?
 7. Divide students into groups of four. Distribute Handout 3: Girl Groups Structured Academic Controversy to each group. Briefly explain to students that a Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) is very similar to a debate, except that rather than dividing students into opposing teams whose goal is to win the debate, all students will evaluate arguments on both sides and attempt to come to a consensus as to how to best answer the question.
 8. Go over the procedures for the SAC as described in the handout.
 9. Distribute Handout 4: Additional Resources on Girl Groups. Instruct students to use the resources in the packet, as well as the resources already discussed in this lesson (the lyrics and video of "Be My Baby" and "My Guy" and the handout on The Feminine Mystique), for the SAC. You may also wish to show the 1960s Girl Groups video featuring the songs from the packet.
 10. Allow groups ample time to complete the SAC.

SUMMARY ACTIVITY:

1. Poll sample group responses to the overall question of the SAC (Were the Girl Groups of the 1960s voices of female empowerment or a reflection of traditional female roles?).
2. Discuss:
 - Do the Girl Groups reflect what Friedan was writing about in The Feminine Mystique? In what ways?
 - In retrospect, is the "Girl Group era" an appropriate name for the period when the groups discussed in this lesson had their heyday on the charts? Why or why not?

WRITING PROMPT:

Have students write a one paragraph summary of the best argument developed by the groups, acknowledging any counterarguments and including evidence from the texts examined in class.

EXTENSIONS:

1. Teachers of mature students may wish to substitute the Shirelles’ 1960 hit song “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” for “Be My Baby” in this lesson. “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” marked the first No. 1 hit for an all-female group on the American charts. It has also proved an enduring song, and has been recorded by numerous subsequent artists. Carole King, who wrote the lyrics, recorded the song in ballad style for her hit 1971 album Tapestry.

It is up to the instructor to decide whether “Will You Love Me Tomorrow,” which hints at a romantic encounter between the singer and the “you” in the song, is appropriate for his or her students. If used, class discussion might cover the impact of the newfound availability of birth control pills in the United States on women’s sexual freedom.

Instructors may also wish to have students compare the Shirelles’ version to King’s later recording, considering the overall mood and effect of each version. Instructors may also wish to address the difference between a group performing a song written by someone else and the artist performing his/her own material. Finally, they may wish to investigate what had changed in the United States that made it commercially viable for a woman to record and perform her own material in 1971, which had not been the case in 1960.

2. Ask students to research specific female musical groups that have emerged since the early 1960s and analyze their impact on female audiences. Students should consider the subjects and themes of the songs recorded by these groups, and whether they mirror those of the 1960s Girl Group or branch out into other territory. Some suggested groups for such an investigation include:
 - The Pointer Sisters
 - Salt-n-Pepa
 - TLC
 - The Spice Girls
 - K-Pop groups
 - Destiny’s Child

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.

Reading 8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

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 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

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.

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

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

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

- The Shirelles – Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow (1964)
- The Ronettes – Be My Baby (1963)
- 1960s Girl Groups

HANDOUTS

- Handout 1: Excerpt of Lyrics to “Be My Baby”
- Handout 2: The Feminine Mystique
- Handout 3: Girl Groups Structured Academic Controversy
- Handout 4: Additional Resources on Girl Groups

FEATURED PEOPLE

- The Angels
- The Chiffons
- Carole King
- The Ronettes
- The Shirelles