INTERDISCIPLINARY LESSON: “TWIST AND SHOUT”

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What role did cover songs like “Twist and Shout” play early in the Beatles’s career, and how did their experiences growing up in post-WWII Liverpool and performing in Hamburg nightclubs help them to develop as a professional musical ensemble?

OVERVIEW

People: The Beatles

In late-1950s Liverpool, a teenage John Lennon teamed up with Paul McCartney to form the Quarrymen, a group that by 1960 would become the Beatles. As teenagers, Lennon and McCartney were initially drawn to Skiffle music. Skiffle, which developed in Britain after World War II, was a kind of street music that relied on homemade or inexpensive instruments—often a washtub bass, a washboard, a banjo and an acoustic guitar—and combos generally played covers of Folk and Blues-style songs. Similar in ways to Punk and Hip Hop, Skiffle players were not always reliant on traditional venues, expensive equipment or in-depth knowledge of an instrument. Because of this, young musicians without much money or experience, including Lennon and McCartney, found the genre accessible. It was their door in.

By 1960, Lennon and McCartney had transformed their band into a more professional operation. Now calling themselves the Beatles, their ensemble included lead guitarist George Harrison and drummer Pete Best, who would later be replaced by Ringo Starr. The group had incorporated more Rock and Roll and Rhythm and Blues covers into their repertoire and were soon performing gigs in dancehalls and nightclubs. Between 1960 and 1962, the Beatles were hired to play several residencies at nightclubs in Hamburg, Germany, including the Kaiserkeller and the Indra Club. During this period, the group typically played multiple sets over four and half to six hours a night. Their shows leaned heavily on the repertoire of early American Rock and Roll artists, including material by Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Buddy Holly. In the process of playing so many shows and learning so many songs, the Beatles sharpened their skills as entertainers, as instrumentalists, and ultimately, as songwriters.
The Beatles grew up in Liverpool, England in the late 1940s and 50s, the years following World War II. Unlike the United States, which did not directly experience combat on American soil, Great Britain struggled for many years to return to normalcy following the devastation caused by the war. Though the war had ended in 1945, rations on food and other material goods continued into the 1950s, and port cities, including Liverpool, had to rebuild much of their bombed-out infrastructure. Compared to the booming postwar years in the United States, life in Liverpool was bleak. Set against this backdrop, it was no wonder that the bright sounds of American R&B and Rock and Roll music proved attractive to teenagers like John Lennon and Paul McCartney. This new music came from a far-off country they had never visited, a place about which they had a vivid fantasy life based on images described in Chuck Berry and Little Richard songs. American Rock and Roll and R&B deeply affected the Beatles as they began to find their own musical style as a cover band.

After several years of developing their act in Liverpool and Hamburg, the Beatles signed to EMI in 1962. The group traveled to London to record their debut album, Please Please Me. The album showcased a band in transition, containing eight original songs including “I Saw Her Standing There” and “Love Me Do,” in addition to six cover songs including “Twist and Shout.” The collection portrayed the Beatles with one foot still in the world of the cover band and the other foot planted in their future as recording artists and original songwriters. Of the band’s first five albums, four included a mix of both Beatles originals and cover songs. But after 1965, the band recorded seven more studio albums, with only one cover song appearing on the cumulative track list. During this later stage in their career, the Beatles committed to crafting original songs and exploring new frontiers of recording popular music in the studio.

Timeline:
The Beatles’s fascination with American music culture can best be understood when considered in the context of teenage life in postwar Europe. The world in which Lennon, McCartney, Harrison, and Starr grew up was deeply scarred by war. Liverpool, an important shipping center in England, had been largely bombed out by the Germans, requiring years of rebuilding. Food rationing, which had once been a wartime necessity, continued for nine
OVERVIEW (CONTINUED)

years after the war as the British economy recovered. American records, including the Isley Brothers’ 1962 hit “Twist and Shout,” provided the members of the Beatles with an escape from this everyday reality. By performing this song and others like it in their setlist, the Beatles were able to immerse themselves, and their European audiences, in an American sound driven by a youthful energy that symbolized another world of possibility.

MAY 1945: WORLD WAR II ENDS -- While a marked period of prosperity and growth follows the war in the United States, in England, it’s a time of lingering deprivation and rebuilding.


JULY 1954: RATIONING ENDS IN THE U.K. -- Britain ends food rationing, which had continued for over nine years after the end of WWII. During that same time, the U.S. economy had experienced a period of rapid growth and prosperity.

AUGUST 1960: THE BEATLES PLAY HAMBURG, GERMANY -- The group begins their first residency at Hamburg’s Indra Club. Playing long hours on stage helps the group develop their musical skills and group image.

MARCH 1963: BEATLES RELEASE DEBUT ALBUM -- Please Please Me includes original Beatles songs such as “Love Me Do” and “I Saw Her Standing There,” as well as covers including “Twist and Shout.” The album tops the U.K. charts for 30 weeks.

FEBRUARY 1964: BEATLES APPEAR ON THE ED SULLIVAN SHOW -- In one of the most significant moments in music and television history, a record 73 million viewers tune in, launching the group into U.S. superstardom. Within two years of their first appearance on American television, the band would transition away from mixing covers with original material and commit entirely to writing original songs.
Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. **KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):**
   - The impact of German bombing and post-war economic struggles on life in 1950s Liverpool
   - Ways in which American musical styles reached British teenagers, including radio broadcasts and records imported by merchant sailors and U.S. Air Force soldiers
   - The importance of the “Hamburg years” to the professional and musical development of the Beatles
   - How musical ensembles often learn their craft through the performance of “cover” songs

2. **BE ABLE TO (SKILLS):**
   - Analyze and draw conclusions from musical performances and interviews (Common Core State Standard: Reading 7)

**ACTIVITIES**

**PROCEDURE:**

1. Display an image from 1942 of Liverpool after a German bomb attack during World War II. Mention that Liverpool is where the future members of the Beatles grew up. It is also an important port city in Northern England which made it a target during the war. For contrast, display an image of a suburban family in postwar America. Study both photos as a class, then ask students:
   - What do you think it might have felt like to live in a place that looked like Liverpool after the war?
   - Compare that to what it might have felt like to grow up in a house in an American suburb, untouched by the war. How might everyday life have felt different?
   - Why might a teenager growing up in Liverpool post-war Liverpool have harbored fantasies about living some place else, such as the U.S.?

2. Play a clip of musician Gerry Marsden discussing how American records arrived in Europe, followed by one of musician Graham Nash discussing the emergence of Skiffle music in postwar England. Ask students:
   - How might growing up in a port city such as Liverpool have contributed to the Beatles’s early education in American music?
   - Why might a working-class teenager in post-War Liverpool, such as John Lennon or Paul McCartney, have been attracted to Skiffle?

3. Play the audio clip of “Twist and Shout,” recorded in 1962 by the American group the Isley Brothers. Explain that the Beatles performed this song during their early period as a professional “cover band,” the term for a band that plays songs written and first recorded by other performers. Ask students:
   - Thinking back to the postwar landscape of Europe, why do you think a song like “Twist and Shout” might have appealed to the Beatles?
   - What do you think a recording like this made the
Beatles think about life in the U.S. compared to their lives in postwar Europe? [Students may answer that given the devastation caused by the war, “Twist and Shout,” as an American product associated with Rock and Roll culture, might have stood as a symbolic contrast to the bleakness of life in Europe, and might have triggered a fantasy about life in the United States.]

4. Present the class with the following scenario: Imagine that you are a member of the Beatles in the early 1960s, when the band was beginning to play professional gigs. You’ve just heard “Twist and Shout” for the first time. At band practice that night, how would you describe the song to the rest of the group? How would you make your case to convince your band to cover it at your next show?

5. Explain that between 1960 and 1962, the Beatles played a series of residencies in Hamburg, Germany, where they were hired to perform in nightclubs, playing multiple sets over four-and-a-half to six hours a night, six or seven night a week. Distribute the Beatles Discuss Hamburg Worksheet that includes a series of quotes about the Beatles in Hamburg and have a volunteer read the introduction aloud to the class.

6. Divide students into small groups of three or four. Direct groups to take turns reading the Beatles quotes aloud, underlining any words and phrases that describe how the band improved as a musical ensemble during their time in Hamburg. After reading through the quotes, groups should discuss the questions and fill in the answers on the second page of the worksheet. Once everyone has finished, invite groups to share out something the Beatles learned about being professional musicians from their time in Hamburg.

7. Play the video clip of the Beatles performing “Twist and Shout” live in 1963. Ask the students:

- What reaction do you think the Beatles were trying to elicit from their concert audience?
- How might the band’s experience playing covers in Hamburg have prepared them for the larger audiences they would see as they became more successful?

8. Display an image of the album cover and list of songs the Beatles recorded for Please Please Me, their debut album from 1963. Ask the students to identify and count the cover songs on the album, material not credited to John Lennon and Paul McCartney. Discuss as a class: What does the inclusion of six cover songs (all by American artists) on this record suggest about the Beatles’s relationship to American music culture and American life?

9. Play a video interview with musician Steven Van Zandt discussing the early career of the Beatles and how playing covers can help shape the identity of a band. Discuss as a class:

- What specific things does Van Zandt believe a group learns from playing covers?
- Do you think the Beatles would have been as successful later on if they had not spent this time playing together in Hamburg? Why or why not?

10. Ask students: as a music class using the Little Kids Rock methods, why do you think we spend time learning to play cover songs? What connections can we make between
PROCEDURE: (CONTINUED)

what we are doing as a class and what the Beatles did in their early days as a band? [Note: Teacher may opt to have students write a short paragraph reflecting on these questions in place of, or in addition to, discussing as a class.]

STANDARDS

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

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

Reading 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the 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 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.

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 4: Individual Development and Identity

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

Core Music Standard: Responding

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)
- Graham Nash – Skiffle
- Isley Brothers – Twist and Shout (1962)
- The Beatles – Twist and Shout (1962)
- Steven Van Zandt – The Early Beatles

FEATURED PEOPLE
- The Beatles
- George Harrison
- John Lennon
- Paul McCartney
- Steven Van Zandt

HANDOUTS
- The Beatles Discuss Hamburg