



BEHIND THE MUSIC

Behind the Music: Music in America 1972

VH1 Music Studio
Cable in the Classroom

Lessons for High School Music and Social Studies Classes

An American Ballad

Lesson 1

[Note to Teachers: This series of lessons covers music that rose to popularity during conflict in the United States over participation in the Vietnam War. Some of the topics may address social change, the sexual revolution and drug culture. If your curriculum is subject to restrictions on the topic, you should review the videotape before using it in the classroom.]

The decline of the peace movement is addressed in the four lessons accompanying Behind the Music: Music in America 1972. The peace movement arose in the 1960s in response to the Vietnam War, but as U.S. combat troops were being withdrawn in the early 1970s, the peace movement lost energy. This program explores the overall cultural transition of the time and its reflection in popular musicians and music laying aside political protest songs and turning inward for themes.

Objective

Students will listen to and analyze the ballad “American Pie”
Students will use correct musical terminology to describe “American Pie”
Students will learn about ballads

National Standards 6, 9—Listening to, analyzing, and describing music; Understanding music in relation to history and culture

Materials

VHS VCR Player

Television

VH1 Cable in the Classroom program Behind the Music: Music in America 1972

Web-based lesson materials, including copies of reproducible music description chart

Teacher-provided Recording of “American Pie” by Don McLean

Audio-playback equipment

Chalkboard

Student notebooks

Optional: Teacher-provided Recordings of other ballads, such as: “Barbara Allen,”

Prior Knowledge and Experiences

Students have appropriate music vocabulary for describing and identifying meter, tempo, melody, style, and form.

Procedures

1. Cue the video Behind the Music: Music in America 1972 to [3:35].
2. Before students arrive in classroom, have the following definition of ballad written on the chalkboard:

A ballad, from the Latin ballare -to dance, is a strophic folksong with narrative elements. The stanzas usually have 4 or more lines, normally without melodic repetition within a stanza. The subject matter usually concerns the marvelous, the historical, the heroic, or the sentimental. Originally, the word referred to song-dances, but had lost that meaning by the 14th century, and became a general term for narrative solo song.
3. As students enter the classroom, have recording of Don McLean’s “American Pie” playing.
4. As students are settled, ask students if they can identify the song they are hearing. Ask them when they think the song was first popular and what it might have been about? (Accept short answers, leading students to the next step of watching the video segment.)
5. Tell students they are going to watch the first segment of Behind the Music: Music in America 1972. Start video at 3 minutes 35 seconds and play through 7 minutes 57 seconds. (You may show the entire video, but this lesson is related to music in the video’s first segment.)
6. Read the following transcript from the video narration and review with students the definition of a ballad: “In

January, 1972, the pop chart was topped by the 8 _ minute melancholy review of rock's first 15 years. Mournful and enigmatic, Don McLean's ballad "American Pie" struck an emotional chord with a nation exhausted by conflict."

7. Ask students why "American Pie" would be considered a ballad. (Accept reasonable answers, including story song, narrative, simple vocal melody with light instrumental accompaniment, etc...)

8. Ask students to focus on the story being told, the lyrics, as you play the recording of "American Pie." Ask students what story they think is being told in this ballad.

(Accept any reasonable answer, and let students know that the composer has never given detailed interpretation to the lyrics. You can also tell students that the meaning of the lyrics were debated when the song first came out and that there have been many interpretations.)

"American Pie"
by Don McLean

1st verse

A long, long time ago I can still remember how that music used to make me smile
And I knew if I had my chance
That I could make those people dance
And maybe they'd be happy for a while.
But February made me shiver
With every paper I delivered.
Bad news on the door step,
I couldn't take one more step.
I can't remember if I cried
When I read about his widowed bride
But something touched me deep inside.
The day, the music, died.

Refrain:

Bye, bye Miss American Pie
Drove my Chevy to the levee but the levee was dry
Them good ol' boys were drinkin' whiskey 'n' rye
Singin' this will be the day that I die.
This will be the day that I die.

9. Review with students the composer Don McLean's comment in the video "I wanted to combine a sense of what was going on in the country politically with what was happening musically and do it almost as if it were a dream." You may also point out the comment from Ira Jackson, former aide to Boston mayor. "It was a plaintive cry of remorse about some chapters in American life. It was about a culture losing its innocence, losing some of the best of its youth." (If appropriate, discuss the political climate of 1972, or collaborate with a social studies teacher to discuss.)

10. Ask students if they have heard of Buddy Holly and the Crickets, identifying him as a rock 'n' roll singer who died in a plane crash in Iowa in 1959 along with singing stars The Big Bopper and Ritchie Valens (La Bamba). The song "American Pie" laments his death as "The day the music died"--or the end of an era of rock 'n' roll music. (If your students are interested in further research on the lyrics, have them go to <http://wilstar.com/midi/americanpie.htm> and other Internet music sites. You could have them prepare a report on interpretations of the lyrics.)

11. Tell students you are going to play the song again and this time they are to focus on the music. Pass out copies you have made of the Musical Descriptions worksheet below. Tell students to circle the appropriate descriptive words of the song's medium form, melody, tempo and dynamics, and style. Tell them they also may write in their own words describing what they hear, but encourage them to use correct musical terminology whenever possible. Ask if these musical elements were appropriate to the song's message? Request examples.

12. Lead students in a discussion of their responses to each music element on the chart.

13. Lead students in summarizing what they have learned about ballads.

Extensions

1. Compare other ballads with "American Pie." From the school's music library, select a recording of a ballad, "Barbara Allen," for example. After playing the recording, lead students in a discussion of the lyrics. Using fresh copies of the Musical Descriptions worksheet, lead students in identifying musical elements of the recording. Compare worksheets with completed "American Pie" worksheets and discuss similarities and differences.

2. Have students interview their parents or other adult relatives or family friends about "American Pie." Have them ask the following questions and then share their findings orally with the class.

1. Do you remember when you first heard "American Pie."
2. Did the lyrics had any special meanings? What do you recall was the meaning?
3. Were there different interpretations of the lyrics? And what were they?
4. Did you and your friends like the song? Do you still?

3. Have students perform the song.

4. Teach students an accompaniment and have one or more accompany the class as it sings the song.

5. Have students compose a melody using musical elements from the matrix that are similar to "American Pie." (See Lesson 3 of Behind The Music: Music in America 1970)

6. Work with an English or Social Studies teacher on creating lyrics that reflect a current event and then combine with the melody in Extension 5. (See Lesson 3 of Behind The Music: Music in America 1968.)

VH1, in partnership with Cable in the Classroom, collaborated with MENC: The National Association for Music Education to develop this series of lessons.

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Musical Descriptions of “American Pie”

Circle the terms that best describe the music you are hearing.

Medium	Form	Melody	Tempo and Dynamics	Style
Solo Vocal	ABA	pentatonic	Allegro	Blues
Choral	Strophic without refrain	minor	Moderato	Jazz
Instrumental	Through-composed	major	Andante	Rock
Guitar	Strophic with refrain	modal	Adagio	staccato
Trumpet	Sonata-allegro	mostly stepwise	Largo	legato
Drums	fugue	chromatic	Changing dynamics	chordal
Orchestra	Theme and variations	extended range	piano	ad. lib.
Band	Call and response	one note per syllable	forte	Rap
		many notes per syllable	pianissimo	
			mezzopiano	

National Standards for Music Education

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

This lesson was developed by Dee Spencer, professor of music at San Francisco State University and Willie Hill, president-elect of MENC: The National Association for Music Education and director of the University Fine Arts Center at University of Massachusetts-Amherst in collaboration with



and

MENC: The National Association for Music Education