



## AIDS: A Pop Culture History

VH1 Music Studio  
Cable in the Classroom

Lesson for Music Classes, Grades 9-12

### Lesson 1

Note to Teachers: The programs viewed in conjunction with these lesson plans may include references, consistent with the eras portrayed, to substance abuse, violent acts, and topics of a sexual and/or political nature. Because this may be considered inappropriate for classroom use in some communities, you are encouraged to review the programs before presenting them to your students, and if necessary, choose those sections that enhance your lesson and are acceptable for use in your classroom.

*Important Note: Due to the nature of this program and the topics discussed through the lessons, teachers should use careful judgment when deciding whether to present this material to students younger than high school age.*

## Objective

- Students will discuss the relationships between music, media, and popular culture.
- Students will observe musical elements and lyrics in popular music.

### National Standards for Music Education

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.

## Materials

- VHS VCR Player
- Television
- Audio playback equipment
- VH1's *AIDS: A Pop Culture History*
- Web-based lesson materials
- Pencils/Pens and paper (students)
- Audio recording of Bruce Springsteen's "Streets of Philadelphia"

### Prior Knowledge:

- Students are familiar with the popular issues of the time that they and their peers may encounter.
- Students can identify musical genres and discuss concepts accurately.

## Procedures

1. Initiate a discussion with students regarding the issues they and their peers face presently in their daily lives (drug abuse, peer pressure, relationships, academic pressures, health concerns, etc.). Ask them to identify those issues that are of most concern. Have them give examples of the ways in which images in popular culture (music, movies, fashion, television, etc.) affect these issues, positively or negatively, to varying degrees. Limit the discussion to no more than 10 minutes to allow time to view the entire program.
2. Introduce students to the video presentation by explaining that it focuses on the disease AIDS, and the political and cultural events surrounding the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s. Ask student to take notes regarding the specific events and turning points during the time period while they are watching, as well as any points that are of particular interest to them. Have them pay close attention to the music that is featured in the program, and write down the titles of songs as they are mentioned.
3. Show VH1's *AIDS: A Pop Culture History*, in its entirety.
4. After students have watched the program, have them use their notes to briefly discuss what they learned of society's reaction to the emergence of the disease AIDS. Has there been anything else in their lifetime that has garnered a widespread reaction on the same scale?
5. Have students identify the key songs that they heard during the video, and ask them why they were included (e.g. Salt and Pepa's "Let's Talk About Sex" was included because it featured one of the ways in which pop music confronted the issue of safe sex and the transmission of disease). If it is not mentioned, draw students' attention to Bruce Springsteen's song "Streets of Philadelphia," and the section of the program that discusses the movie "Philadelphia" with Tom Hanks. Lead students in discussing the cultural impact of the movie. Use the following as needed for discussion:

“Philadelphia” was the first Hollywood movie to openly discuss homosexuality and AIDS. Tom Hanks’ character is a notable lawyer stricken with AIDS whose law firm terminates his position. He seeks legal counsel to file a lawsuit against the firm for wrongfully terminating him. The movie is triumphant in the sense that his legal counsel proves that he was wrongfully terminated, and that AIDS victims are the subject of discrimination in many ways.

6. Play the audio recording of Bruce Springsteen’s “Streets of Philadelphia” for students, and ask them to listen for key phrases in the lyrics that relate to the movie (see [www.brucespringsteen.net/songs/StreetsOfPhiladelphia.html](http://www.brucespringsteen.net/songs/StreetsOfPhiladelphia.html) for complete lyrics if needed). After listening, have them identify the genre, and lead them in discussing the song’s connection to the movie. Which phrases point to the loneliness that AIDS victims felt? Do some lines describe physical changes related to the disease? Is there symbolism in the words “streets of Philadelphia?”
7. Lead students in discussing the ways in which Bruce Springsteen’s song might have affected popular thinking. How did he bring the suffering of AIDS victims to light through music? Can a song truly change the opinion of its listeners?
8. Ask students to name other movies with which they are familiar that have dealt with important societal issues, and that had a cultural influence through the music and/or the movie itself.

#### Extensions:

1. Have students refer to the issues they discussed in Step 1, and write down one topic that they feel weighs heavily on them. Take a class vote in order to choose the one of most concern to them as a whole. Ask them to create a short statement, poem, or other literary creation that reflects their view on the topic selected. Have them share their statements with the class one at a time, and consider video taping them so they can be viewed in sequence after the exercise. Lead students in discussing the variety of opinions and viewpoints that are evident in their class by watching the video.

#### Supplemental Resources:

- “Streets of Philadelphia” lyrics: [www.brucespringsteen.net/songs/StreetsOfPhiladelphia.html](http://www.brucespringsteen.net/songs/StreetsOfPhiladelphia.html)

## 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.



These standards-based materials are provided through a partnership with MENC: The National Association for Music Education. This lesson plan was created by MENC member Funmilayo Eke, Tutt Middle School, Augusta, GA.