



True Spin

VH1 Music Studio
Cable in the Classroom

Lesson for Music Classes, Grades 7-12

Lesson 1 - Getting the Meaning in Pop Music



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.

Objective

- Students will explore the power of visual stimulus versus aural perception, and their affect on understanding of artistic intent.

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 *True Spin*
- Web-based lesson materials
- Pencils/pens and paper (students)
- Overhead projector, screen, and transparency materials
- Chalkboard or chart and pens
- Audio recordings of some of the following:
 - *Born in the USA* – Bruce Springsteen
 - *Losing My Religion* – REM
 - *Back in Black* – AC/DC
 - *Ray of Light* – Madonna
 - *Rio* – Duran Duran
 - *Under the Bridge* – Red Hot Chili Peppers
 - *Every Breath You Take* – Police
 - *Safety Dance* – Men without Hats
 - *In The Air Tonight* – Phil Collins
 - *Walk Like an Egyptian* – Bangles
- Original music video for some of the above songs (optional)
- Lyrics of some of the above songs on transparency (suggested resource: www.lyrics.com)

Prior Knowledge:

- Students have minimal experience discussing music as it relates to society, politics, culture, etc.
- Students have some knowledge of popular musical styles (disco, heavy metal, punk rock, etc.).

Procedures

1. Begin class by asking students if they have ever written a song, or a poem, and shared it with a friend or family member. Ask them to comment on whether that person understood what they were trying to express, or if they misconstrued the meaning. If they didn't understand, what factors might have caused them to misinterpret the writer's intent? Did they have any personal concerns or beliefs that caused them to read alternate meanings into the song or poem?
2. Tell students they are going to explore the ways in which a listener interprets, or understands, a piece of music, specifically in the pop music genre. Have them suggest factors that can influence interpretation (political climate, social issues, current events, etc.), and list them on the chalkboard or transparency for referral throughout the lesson, and use in Lesson Two.

3. Explain to students that they will be hearing songs that have been popular over the past 20 years, so they may not be familiar to them. As students listen to the selected songs, have them jot notes about their interpretation of the songwriter's intent based on the lyrics, the music, and the video (optional).

NOTE to teachers: The songs listed in the materials section reflect all of those featured in the True Spin episode on which this lesson series is based. Teachers should select a few songs from the list for use with this lesson, applying the following steps to each one. The same songs should then be used in Lesson Two.

4. Play an audio recording of one of the songs chosen from the materials list. (If the original music video is available, the video may be used, but turn the monitor/TV away from the students so they cannot view the video.) Display the lyrics for the song on the overhead projector, and remind students to take notes about their understanding of the song.
5. Suggest to students that in the case of popular music, a song's meaning is overwhelmingly dependent on lyrics, although sometimes with a juxtaposition of styles (e.g. a song with "sad" lyrics placed with an upbeat tempo). Lyrics can be narrative, in first person, metaphoric, or use imagery. Lead students in briefly discussing their interpretation of the song based on the lyrics and the music itself. What does the artist seem to be trying to convey? Do they use metaphors? Are there political or social undertones? Does the style of the music reflect the lyrics?
6. *Optional:* Show students the original music video of the song, but do not display the lyrics, and turn the volume down so the music is not audible. Students should again make note of their interpretation.
7. Guide students in discussing their interpretation of the song based on the images in the music video. How does it compare to the earlier interpretation based on music and lyrics alone? How much of an impact does it have on their impression of the artists' intent?
8. Repeat steps four through seven for the songs selected. Students should keep their notes for use with lesson two.
9. Ask students to share their thoughts about how a music listener can know the true meaning of a song. Without the songwriter or performing artist's statement, is it possible to determine their intentions?

Extensions:

1. Have students select two songs of contrasting lyrical styles (i.e. narrative, second person, metaphoric, etc.) from their personal music collection. Ask them to analyze the two styles, offering their interpretation of artistic intent based on aural perception. If possible, they should also compare and contrast with the music video's perceived meaning. Have them share their analysis with the class.

Supplemental Resources:

- Song lyrics: www.lyrics.com

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 Michelle Barnes, General Music and World Drumming, Fall Creek Valley Middle School, Indianapolis, IN.