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## Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young

storytellers  
STORYTELLERS

Lesson for Music Classes, Grades 7-12

Lesson 1 of 3

### Exploration of Folk 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 be introduced to the genre of folk music through the music of Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young (CSNY).
- Students will aurally connect to other past and present folk artists.

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 Storytellers: Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young Taped Program (aired for VH1 Music Studio 1/7/03 4:00 AM EST)
- Web-based lesson materials
- Copies of geared listening table (included with lesson) for students
- Pencils/Pens and paper (students)
- Teacher selected recordings of “folk music” (e.g. Joni Mitchell, James Taylor, Bob Dylan, Carly Simon)
- Recordings of two contrasting vocal versions of “The Star-Spangled Banner” (e.g. The Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Whitney Houston)
- Teacher selected recordings from the following Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young albums and members’ solo albums (see Supplemental Resources):
  - CSNY: *Crosby, Stills and Nash, Déjà vu, So Far, Four Way Street, Carry On, Looking Forward*
  - David Crosby: *If I Could Only Remember My Name, King Biscuit Flower Hour, Live*
  - Stephen Stills: *Manassas, Stephen Stills*
  - Graham Nash: *Songs for Beginners, Songs for Survivors, Wild Tales*
  - Neil Young: *After the Gold Rush, Harvest, Harvest Moon, Decade*

### Prior Knowledge:

- Students are able to discuss using proper musical terms and show comprehension of dynamic structure and melodic and harmonic contour.
- \* Students are familiar with songs typical of the American folk music genre (e.g. Home On The Range, America etc.)

## Procedures

1. Before class, write the word “people” on the board. After students have taken their seats, ask them to provide a definition explaining what or who “people” are, both as individuals and as a group. Answers might include: humans, family, blood, intelligence, hobbies, ideas, nationality, etc. Suggest to students that there are many abstract and tangible aspects that combine within one person or within people as a group. Ask them to think of synonyms for the word “people” (population, community, citizens, etc.), guiding them to the term “folk”.

2. Lead students in a discussion of the term “folk”, and how it relates to music genres. The following may be helpful, along with additional folk music examples:

Folk music is defined as “music of the people” (detailed definition found at [www.coe.ufl.edu/courses/edtech/Vault/Folk/DEFINITION.HTM](http://www.coe.ufl.edu/courses/edtech/Vault/Folk/DEFINITION.HTM)). There are thousands of varieties of folk music, each culture having its own style. Jewish “folk” music has a specific sound (e.g. *Hava Nagilah*), as does African “folk” music (e.g. *Che Che Koolay*). The most important aspects of folk music are the lyrical content and instrumentation.

Measuring prior knowledge, ask students to name several traditional American “folk” songs (e.g. *Home on the Range*, *Oh Susanna!*, *America*, etc.). List the song titles on the board.

3. Have students suggest the type of instrumentation that might be used in the songs they have mentioned (voice, guitar, piano, percussion, banjo, etc.). Are there any similarities in instrumentation between the songs? Would the meaning of a song such as *Home on the Range* be as significant if the music and/or instrumentation was altered (possibly)? What if the words were changed (probably not)?

4. Provide students with a brief description of American folk music of the 1960s and 70s, and a biographical introduction to Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. Use the following as needed:

In the 1960s and 1970s, there was a revival of American folk music led by singer/songwriters who were inspired to be the voice of their generation. These artists (e.g. Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, James Taylor, Carly Simon, CSNY) primarily composed music motivated by their views of society and of their own lives. The music had significant political and personal meaning, shedding light on subjects such as environmental causes, war, and love lost.

#### **Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young**

David Crosby was the most public of the *Byrds*, fired from the group in 1967 after disagreements over musical direction and conflicts with Roger McGuinn. Besides providing the top harmony on hits like “Mr. Tambourine Man” and “Turn Turn Turn”, his jazz-tinged guitar playing and songwriting were responsible for some of the *Byrds*’ finest moments. But his biggest asset was his tenor voice, one of the purest in rock, which linked perfectly with...the former *Hollie* Graham Nash. By 1968, Nash had become the *Hollies*’ chief songwriter, but increasingly he found his songs clashing with the musical policy of the rest of the group. Harmonies had been his trademark, too, perhaps the best example being the incredibly high vocal line at the end of the chorus of “I Can’t Let Go”, which most people took to be a guitar rather than a human voice.

The jigsaw was completed by the most versatile musician of the three, Steve Stills. A brilliant guitarist and keyboards player, Stills could turn his hand to almost any instrument. Since leaving *Buffalo Springfield* he had been concentrating on his guitar playing rather than his singing, but his rough, raw voice contrasted with and matched the sweet blend of Crosby and Nash. The trio came together at John Sebastian’s house late in 1968. Crosby had been recording a solo album, when he was joined by Stills fresh from his work on the “Super Session” album with Al Kooper. Together they made a few rough demos, collaborated on the song “Wooden Ships” with Paul Kantner of the *Jefferson Airplane*, and worked out some harmonies on several of Stephen’s compositions. Nash visited the duo while on tour with the *Hollies* in the States, heard them singing and instinctively joined in. It didn’t take them long to realize that the vocal mix was perfect, and so they set about overcoming the contractual difficulties that might prevent them recording together. Nash hurried to sever his ties with the *Hollies* and EMI; Crosby had been a free agent since leaving the *Byrds* and Columbia; and Stills was already with Atlantic, which proved the obvious choice of label for the newly formed trio. Early in 1969 they began sessions for their first album, “Crosby, Stills And Nash”.

All three members had several songs in store, so their biggest problem was finding musicians. Crosby was a fine guitarist, but hadn’t enjoyed his brief period as bassist with the early *Byrds*; and Nash was an adequate guitarist and pianist. Stills filled in most of the gaps. Helped by drummer Dallas Taylor from *Clear Light*, he laid down the rhythm tracks and basic guitar parts, before the trio added their perfect three-part harmonies. Then Stills polished off the tapes with some remarkable guitar and organ fills, using electric sound to enhance the acoustic feel of the album. The results were polished, almost neurotically so, with the harmonies the album’s main attraction. Some people criticized their search for perfection, and later in their career the trio were prone to sacrifice emotion for technical excellence; but the close personal rapport of the band members, and long periods of rehearsals, made absolutely sure that all the vocals were complex and exact. The band was keen to go out on the road, but needed musical support for Stills. After casting round for a session pianist, Stills remembered his *Buffalo Springfield* colleague Neil Young. Young played rudimentary piano, but was renowned as a guitarist and idiosyncratic vocalist. Having assured himself that he would be able to continue his solo career with *Crazy Horse*, Young agreed to join, bringing with him another *Springfield* member, Bruce Palmer, to play bass. This aroused considerable speculation that the *Springfield*’s unfortunate personality differences might be revived in the new band. In fact, Palmer scarcely stayed long enough to find out. A disagreement with Nash over technique ended in him being fired. He was quickly replaced by Greg Reeves, a young session player.

Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young (CSNY) began live performances with a gig at the Fillmore East in July 1969. Their second show was rather more daunting - at the massive Woodstock Festival in August. Although they were some way down the bill, the pressure on the band was enormous - as the opening comments of Crosby and Stills (preserved on both film and vinyl) reveal.

The use of their music in the film and the soundtrack album helped to connect the group and the event in people's minds, and CSNY became very much the epitome of the festival spirit, reflecting the feeling of togetherness and shared ideals that the event had supposedly inspired. In fact, despite the success of their set, only one of their songs was actually shown in the film, although a couple of remixed studio tracks were used as background to some of the general scenes of the crowd and the site.

(CSNY biographical information edited from text by Peter Dogett on [www.4waysite.com/articles/CSN83.htm](http://www.4waysite.com/articles/CSN83.htm).)

5. Play teacher selected recording of CSNY's "Helplessly Hoping." Ask students to focus on instrumentation, dynamics, tempo, and meaning of song, taking note of what they are aurally identifying.

6. Lead students in a discussion of the musical elements in "Helplessly Hoping":

- Instruments: voices, acoustic guitar
- Dynamics: piano to mezzo piano
- Tempo: moderato
- Meaning: poetic longing, love song

This song, written and released in 1969, shows a glimpse of a main focus of the time, the "summer of love." How is this love song the same/different than love songs of the present? What instrument is predominant (voices)?

7. The use of harmony as a musical element is predominant in folk music, especially in that of CSNY, in which the artists use tight harmonies in the vocal lines. The unique blend of CSNY's voices creates a mellow and aesthetically pleasing sound, while sending their messages of peace and love. Stylistically, how could the voices of CSNY be described (pure, rough, bright, natural, etc.)? How are they similar or different to operatic voices (e.g. Cecilia Bartoli), rock voices (e.g. Kurt Cobain), R&B voices (e.g. Alicia Keys)? How do the voices of CSNY complement each other?

8. Show VH1 Story Tellers: Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, "Only Love Can Break Your Heart" segment.

9. Ask students to compare this love song to "Helplessly Hoping." Obvious similarities are basic instrumentation (piano, guitar, vocals with unison and harmony) and topic. What are some differences (vocal style with Young on lead, compositional style [Young wrote this as part of his solo career], etc.)?

10. Play teacher selected recordings of "folk music" by other artists, such as Joni Mitchell, James Taylor, etc.) Have students compare and contrast the music of CSNY with these other folk musicians. Students should focus on instrumentation, style, lyrical significance, and dynamics. Below is a sample table for geared listening. Students should also fill in the necessary information that they aurally identify during class while listening to the recordings.

### Teacher Copy

Artist/Song	Instrumentation	Style	Lyrical Significance	Dynamics
Bob Dylan/ "Blowin' in the Wind"	Voice (tenor), acoustic guitar	"twangy" vocals, "strummed" chords	Racial and gender acceptance within society	Mezzo piano
Joni Mitchell/ "Big Yellow Taxi"	Voice (soprano), guitar, percussion instruments	"high, bright" vocals with harmony	Environmental awareness	Mezzo forte
James Taylor/ "Something in the Way She Moves"	Voice (tenor), acoustic and slide guitar	"mellow" vocals, lyrical guitar accompaniment	Love song	Piano
Carly Simon/ "That's the Way I've Always Heard It Should Be"	Voice (mezzo), piano, drums, bass, strings	"deeper" vocals, "sweeping" melodic accompaniment	Uncertainty about society's "expectations"	Mezzo piano to forte

### Student Copy

Artist/Song	Instrumentation	Style	Lyrical Significance	Dynamics
Bob Dylan/ "Blowin' in the Wind"				
Joni Mitchell/ "Big Yellow Taxi"				
James Taylor/ "Something in the Way She Moves"				
Carly Simon/ "That's the Way I've Always Heard It Should Be"				

11. To conclude, ask students to give examples of present day “folk” artists. Answers might include Dashboard Confessional, Dave Matthews Band, Barenaked Ladies, India Aire, Jewel, Blues Traveler, Sheryl Crow, Wyclef Jean, etc. Why do you think these artists convey the message “of the people?” What about their music, stylistically, is similar to CSNY, or the other previous folk artists? Have students consider what message they would convey if they were to write a folk song.

#### Supplemental Resources:

- Official Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young Web site [www.csny.net](http://www.csny.net)
- Folk music definitions [www.coe.ufl.edu/courses/edtech/Vault/Folk/DEFINITION.HTM](http://www.coe.ufl.edu/courses/edtech/Vault/Folk/DEFINITION.HTM)
- General information about American music (jazz, pop, blues, etc.) [www.American-Music.org](http://www.American-Music.org)

#### 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 Amy Rosenthal, Vocal Music, Cayuga Elementary, Lake Grove, NY.