

Getting Inside The Outsiders Through Music

Rationale

In order for students to understand S.E. Hinton's novel *The Outsiders* completely, they must understand the music of the time and how it relates to the novel's main characters. In the novel, different groups of characters emerge and Hinton distinguishes these groups by associating them with musicians of the time. She relates The Beatles to the Socs, Elvis Presley to the Greasers, and Hank Williams, Sr. to a rougher subculture of Greasers. Unfortunately, many students are not familiar enough with these early popular music artists to grasp Hinton's use of them in her novel. Therefore, in this lesson, students will gain an understanding of these and other musicians and how they relate to the novel's themes of forbidden love, friendship, and social ostracism.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. Recognize themes in *The Outsiders* and popular music.
2. Recognize social ostracism in their own lives.
3. Recognize different genres of popular music.

Audience

This lesson is designed for middle school students (seventh and eighth grade) reading S.E. Hinton's novel *The Outsiders*. However, it could be used with younger or older students reading a similar text.

Time Frame

In order to promote healthy class discussion, this lesson should be completed in roughly three fifty-minute class periods.

Materials

The lyrics and recordings of selected recordings; copies of S.E. Hinton's novel *The Outsiders*; a modified version of Paul Friedlander's *Rock Window*

Background

For this lesson to be most effective, students should have read nearly half of the novel. At that point, they will be able to recognize the themes of forbidden love, friendship, and social ostracism. Biographical information should be shared on Elvis Presley, The Beatles, Hank Williams, Sr., Bob Dylan, and The Who. Also, the phrase “social ostracism” should be defined and discussed with students.

Procedures

1. **“Heartbreak Hotel”**: Discuss this song using the modified Rock Window. Discuss how this song relates to the theme of forbidden love in *The Outsiders*, specifically concerning Cherry and Ponyboy. Discuss why the Greasers might relate to Elvis Presley.
2. **“You’ve Got to Hide Your Love Away”**: Discuss this song using the modified Rock Window. Discuss how this song might relate to the theme of forbidden love in *The Outsiders*, specifically concerning Cherry and Ponyboy. Discuss why the Socs might relate to The Beatles.
3. **“I’m So Lonesome, I Could Cry”**: Discuss this song using the modified Rock Window. Discuss how this song might relate to the theme of social ostracism in *The Outsiders*, specifically concerning the Greasers. Discuss why the Greasers might relate to Hank Williams, Sr.
4. **“Two of Us”**: Discuss this song using the modified Rock Window. Discuss how this song might relate to the theme of friendship in *The Outsiders*, specifically concerning Ponyboy and Johnny.
5. **“A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall”**: Discuss this song using the modified Rock Window. Discuss this song in relation to *The Outsiders*. Would the Socs or the Greasers relate to this song?
6. **“My Generation”**: Discuss this song using the modified Rock Window. Discuss this song in relation to *The Outsiders*. Would the Socs or the Greasers relate to this song?

Evaluation

In small groups, students are to select three modern songs. One of these three songs must relate to the theme of forbidden love, another to the theme of social ostracism, and a third to the theme of friendship. Lyrics to these songs are to be submitted with an essay explaining how the songs relate to the themes and to *The Outsiders*. If class time is available, students could present their songs and rationale to the class.

Selected Recordings

“Heartbreak Hotel” recorded by Elvis Presley (*Elvis Presley the Number One Hits*, RCA, 1987) written by Axton, Durden, and Presley, Sony/ATV Songs LLC (Tree).

“You’ve Got to Hide Your Love Away” recorded by The Beatles (*Help!*, Capitol, 1965). Written by Lennon and McCartney, EMI UNART Catalog, Inc.; Sony/ATV Songs LLC (Maclen SP).

“I’m So Lonesome, I Could Cry” recorded by Hank Williams, Sr. (*20 of Hank Williams Greatest Hits*, Mercury, 1997). Written by Hank Williams, Acuff Rose Music, Inc./ Hiram Music.

“Two of Us” recorded by The Beatles (*Let It Be*, Capitol, 1970) written by Lennon and McCartney, Sony/ATV Songs LLC (Maclen SP).

“A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” recorded by Bob Dylan (*The Freewheelin’*, Columbia, 1963) written by Dylan.

“My Generation” recorded by The Who (*Who’s Better, Who’s Best*, MCA, 1988) written by Peter Townshend and Dennis Blandfo, Devon Music Inc., Fabulous Music Ltd., Westminster Music Ltd.

Modified Rock Window

I MUSIC

a. Ensemble: What instruments are present? b. Rhythmic Emphasis: What is the dominant beat? What instrument or instruments carry this beat? c. Vocal Style: What words would you use to describe the vocal delivery? d. Instrumental Solo: Is there an instrumental solo? If so, what instrument?

II LYRICS

a. What are the song’s major themes? Does it tell a story? b. Is there an explicit or underlying political or cultural message?

III ARTIST’S HISTORY

What are the important elements of the artist’s personal history and career that enhance your understanding of the music?

IV SOCIETAL CONTEXT

How did the surrounding political and cultural climates influence the artists and their work?

V STANCE

Which elements of the artist’s live performances and public actions or behavior provide us with a clearer understanding of the music itself?