

LESSON PLAN

Level: About the Author: Grades 9 to 12 MediaSmarts

Popular Music and Music Videos

Overview

Popular Music and Music Videos is part of a three-lesson unit designed to introduce students to the concept of popular culture and the role that it plays in their lives. In this lesson, students examine the importance of videos to the music industry and the role that music plays in popular culture. In pairs, students interview each other about their musical preferences. This information is then tallied as a class. Activities for this lesson include: viewing and listening to videos, with and without sound, in order to analyze aesthetic visual elements; exploring the history of the music video; and independent projects on music videos for selected musical genres.

Learning Outcomes

Students demonstrate:

- an understanding of the importance of rock videos to the music industry
- an understanding of rock music's contribution to popular culture

Preparation and Materials

- walkmans with earphones
- tapes or CDs

Procedure

Working in pairs, have students bring examples of their own popular music to share with their partners. After listening to their partner's selection, each student will conduct an interview of the other, asking the following questions:

- 1. How much time do you spend listening to music each day?
- 2. What is your favorite type of music?
- 3. What is it that you really like about the music that you have brought to class?
- 4. Do you like the music loud or soft? Why?
- 5. The first time that you saw the video for this song, did it match your interpretation from just listening to it?
- 6. Does the video of the song influence your liking of it?
- 7. Have you ever seen this band live? Did they meet your expectations?



As a class, tally the results of questions one, two and three to determine the music and listening habits of your students. Discuss the other interview questions together.

Activities

Activity One: Viewing & Listening

- Have students watch a music video for a song they are unfamiliar with without turning on the sound and record their impressions based solely on visual presentation. Elements to consider include, camera angles, lighting, imagery, characterization, tone (is the overall tone of the video in-your-face? Humorous? Serious? Psychedelic?)
- Then have them listen to the lyrics of the song itself, without the visuals and record their impressions. Elements to consider include style of music, lyric content, themes, and imagery, rhythm and repetition.
- Once this is completed, have students write down their observations for presentation in groups or as a class. In their conclusions, they should consider:
 - are the video and the song compatible? Do they tell the same story?
 - were they predisposed in their interpretation of the song after seeing the video? (Students might like to try this exercise in reverse, listening to a new song first, and then studying the video.)
 - does the video add depth or value to the song, or does it seem to be more of a marketing ploy?
 - which would convince them more to buy a tape or CD: seeing a video or hearing a song?

Activity Two: The Evolution of the Rock Video

Rock videos are a fairly recent phenomenon, emerging as a mainstay of popular culture in the early 1980s. Have your students research the evolution of this medium:

- Who were the original pioneers? (Students might look at artists like David Bowie, Steve Miller, Michael Jackson, or the early "rock" movies of the Beatles and Elvis Presley)
- What is MTV's contribution to the evolution of the rock video? (Individual students might want to study the concept of MTV as a mirror of their own popular culture.)
- Can students identify any trends in these videos over the past fifteen years?
- You are the first rock video generation. How has this medium molded your attitudes towards music?
- Let's talk dollars and cents. What is the cost of an average rock video? Are there any statistics detailing how rock videos contribute to record sales? Which performers spend the most on their videos?
- How has the rock video changed the nature of rock bands?
- What trends in popular culture can be directly attributed to rock videos?



Activity Three: Video Themes

This activity encourages students to critically analyse the videos for a particular style of music. Students will select a type of music that interests them (i.e. hip hop alternative, rap, soul, rock, funk, heavy metal) and record and analyse five music videos that they feel are reflective of that style. As students study these videos, they should consider the following questions:

- What is the dominant message of these videos?
- What are the similarities between these videos?
- What are the differences?
- How are the following individuals depicted in their videos?
 - visible minorities
 - teenagers
 - women
 - men
 - parents
 - authority figures
- What lifestyle choices are promoted in these videos?
- What trends in popular culture have been inspired by these videos?
- How has this music influenced their lives?

From their observations, students will create a multi-media presentation, using clips from their videos to augment their opinions.

Evaluation

Selected student activities.

