

Department: English

Course Name: Behind the Lyrics: Tracing the Development of American Popular Music

Course Description:

This one-semester elective will explore the history and impact of popular music in the 20th Century. Students will trace the development of rock and roll from its early roots (gospel, country, blues, rhythm & blues, and more) to its “birth” in the 50s and on to the present day. Along the way, particular attention will be focused upon issues of race, gender, and class and how music can not only be a reaction to the times (e.g. punk music in the 70s), but also an empowering influence upon our culture (e.g. soul music and the Civil Rights movement). Through an analysis of historical/biographical information, song lyrics, and movie/video clips, students will gain a greater understanding of the importance of music and how it truly is the “soundtrack of our lives.”

Content:

Pre-1900 American Music

The Roots of Rock and Roll—Jazz, Blues, Folk, Gospel, Country, Rhythm & Blues, Pop

The “Birth” and “Death” of Rock & Roll in the 1950s

Rock, Folk, and Soul in the 1960s

Mainstream and Fringe Music of the 1970s

MTV and the Video Age

Music of the 1990s-Today

Skills:

Develop note-taking and listening skills.

Analyze the development of popular music in America.

Evaluate the effect and influence of music on our culture and society.

Listen to and analyze the structures of popular music.

Relate historical and sociological issues (race, class, gender, etc.) to their expression through music.

Apply critical thinking strategies in analyzing music and its influence upon culture.

Demonstrate insight about music and its development through writing and discussion.

Develop reading, speaking, and critical listening skills.

Conduct research and present in MLA format.

Text and Materials:

Starr, Larry and Christopher Waterman, American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MP3 (5th ed, 2018)

Methods and Instruction:

Lecture

Class discussion

Class projects

Individual and group presentations

Listening and demonstrations

Methods of Evaluation:

Reading quizzes

Midterm test

Research papers

Oral presentation (group and individual)