The Theme of Rebellion in the 1950s as it occurs in the arts

Louise Gray
Grade Level: 4, 5, or 6
Discipline: Music

Standards addressed
Pennsylvania standards 1,2,3,4

Objectives
The students will:

• identify several features of the historic/social/cultural background of the 1950s
• sing and perform a percussion accompaniment to “Summertime Blues” by Eddie Cochran
• name important personages of the 1950s
• write personal lyrics to “Summertime Blues”
• create an artwork in the style of artist Jackson Pollock
• describe salient features of rock-n-roll music
• perform a 1950's dance compose a poem in the style of Alan Ginsberg

Resources

Song(s) used in lesson:

• “Summertime Blues” by Eddie Cochran

Bibliography:


**Recordings:**

*Rock’n’Roll: 50’s and 60’s Hits*, 3 CD set; Quebec, Canada: Madacy Entertainment Group, Ltd, 2003.

**Cinema on Video:**
*Blackboard Jungle*. MGM Home Entertainment, 1955

*Rebel without a Cause*. Warner Home Video, 1955

*The Wild One*. Columbia/Tri Star Home Entertainment, 1954

**Television Shows Re-recorded to Video:**
"Town Hall Party" (tv show of Eddie Cochran performance) BimBam records
Videos:
"Christy Lane’s: Learn the Dances of the 50’s and 60’s." Palm Springs, CA: Let’s Do It Productions, 1996.

Related Web Sites:
Rock’n’roll’n’film: Teaching materials on rock music and its history
http://www.mediamusicstudies.net/tagg/teaching/mmi/filmrock.html


Literature and Culture of the American 1950’s: Related web site to the above mentioned topics http://dept.english.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/home.html/

Decades of Rebellion: 1920’s and the 1950’s: Pittsburgh Teachers Institute website, various curriculum units on a variety of topics http://www.chatham.edu/PTI/Twenties/Gray_01.htm

The Eddie Cochran Connection: British website devoted to this cult-musician of the 1950’s http://www.cochranconnection.co.uk

Other resources:
Overhead projector, transparencies, VCR/TV, blackboard, chalk, CD player, CD’s, percussion instruments, paints, brushes, paper, journals, pencils, videos , 1950's questionnaire

Song History
The 1950s was a decade of prosperity, optimism, conservatism and conformity. But as the era neared its end, a counter-culture reared its head through American society along the lines of "Leave It to Beaver" meets "Twin Peaks." Rebellion and non-conformity were the reactions to the “white-bread” texture of American society. Various celebrities epitomized the defiance of youth-Marlon Brandon, James Dean, Elvis Presley, Jack Kerouac, and others. Eddie Cochran composer and virtuoso guitarist co-penned the teen-age anthem “Summertime Blues” which amplified the dissatisfaction and unrest which continue to trouble our youth even today. “Summertime Blues” served as a vehicle to explore the various trends present within 50’s society whose echoes are still felt more than 50 years later.

Eddie Cochran (1938-1960), killed in a fiery car crash in London in 1960 and thus propelled instantly to iconic rock-n-roll legend, was a song-writer/performer who was over-shadowed by Elvis Presley. In fact, Eddie coveted Elvis’ fame and stardom saying, “I’m gonna be big. . .I can play guitar-he can’t.” Some say that his magnetism wooed more females than Elvis with his aggressive Rockabilly style of performance. “Summertime Blues” was composed in nearly one-half hour in 1958 and recorded that same year. It consists of a three-chord accompaniment with over-dubbed hand-clapping as performed by song-writer Sharon Sheeley. It took Cochran one hour to perfect the hand-clapping of Sheeley who was not an instrumentalist. The spoken lyrics which cap each verse are Eddie’s impression of King Fish from Amos’n-Andy, an African American radio show. “Summertime Blues” was Eddie’s only Top 10 hit in America. It took two months to enter the charts and peaked at number 8 on the Billboard 100.
This success came at a crucial time when Eddie’s career seemed to be at a lowpoint. His management gave him the go-ahead to write, produce, and play his own material and still be creative. “Summertime Blues” encapsulates the rebelliousness of youth, the hypocrisy of the politics, and the growing generation gap of the fifties. Although it is not a protest song, it anticipates those songs of the 1960’s through its defiance to authority. Eddie Cochran proves himself to be an innovator rather than a re-creator in this dynamic paean to teenage freedom versus adult responsibility. “Summertime Blues” is one of rock’s most covered songs with recordings made by the Beach Boys, Blue Cheer, T-Rex, Ritchie Valens, Dick Dale, The Who, Alan Jackson, Joan Jett, The Flaming Lips, The Flying Lizards, Olivia Newton-John, Buck Owens, the Ventures, and Motorhead, among others.

Procedure
“Summertime Blues” will serve as the instructional focal point of an interdisciplinary unit which will involve a minimum of nine teaching sessions of approximately 45 minutes each.

Introductory learning activities:

Session One
Students will become familiar with the fifties and the theme of rebellion through viewing photographs and excerpts of films and participating in a discussion. Students will become familiar with Eddie Cochran’s “Summertime Blues”.

- Students will view photographs of the 1950s and compare/contrast to the present.
- Students will discuss conformity/non-conformity and the pro’s and con’s of each.
- Students will name non-conformists of the present.
- Students will view excerpts from three films of the era which feature rebellious youth: Rebel without a Cause, The Wild One, and Blackboard Jungle.
- Students will listen to “Summertime Blues” and discuss how it may relate to their own feelings.
- Homework assignment: Interview someone who lived during the 1950s. (Interview questionnaire.)

Session Two
Students will identify Eddie Cochran and “Summertime Blues” as parts of the 1950’s milieu.

- Students will view Eddie Cochran performing “Summertime Blues” on video and discuss the experience.
- Students will listen to samples of typical 1950’s rock-n-roll and identify key features of the music (i.e., the beat, the instruments, the speed, etc.)
- Students will follow the score to “Summertime Blues” and read lyrics.
- Students will use percussion instruments and play rock-n-roll riff on percussion instruments.

Sessions Three and Four
Students will define the term “icon” and identify several from the 1950s.
• Students will view portraits of celebrities from the 1950s as created by Andy Warhol.
• Students will discuss what makes someone an “icon” and will name several.
• Teacher and students will take turns reading excerpts from Stephen King’s story “They Must Have Had A Hell of a Band Up There.”

Session Five
Students will become familiar with the life of artist Jackson Pollock and his “drip” style of painting.

• Teachers (art and music or otherwise) will provide the students with information about Jackson Pollock’s life and background about his unique style of painting.
• Students with teachers’ assistance will create their own “drip” paintings.

Session Six
Students will compose their own lyrics to “Summertime Blues”

• Students will analyze lyrics of “Summertime Blues”.
• Students will work in pairs and change keywords to personalize lyrics. (See rubric at the end of the unit.)
• Upon completion, groups will share their lyrics with the class.

Session Seven
Students will become familiar with a dance popular with 1950's teens.

• Teacher and students will discuss social teenage dances in the 1950’s and the present.
• Teachers (physical education and music or otherwise) will demonstrate the steps to 1950’s dance and students will imitate.
• Students will choose partner, rehearse steps, and perform dance.

Session Eight
Students will become familiar with the poetry of Allen Ginsberg.

• Teacher will discuss “the Beats” with students and several of their basic ideas.
• Students will examine a poem by “Beat” poet Allen Ginsberg-poem “To Lindsay” or appropriate excerpts of another poem.
• Students will write their own versions of a “Beat” poem.

Session Nine
Students will create an event which foreshadows the “Happenings” of the 1960s by presenting some of the art works that they created during the past nine (or more) sessions.

Students will divide into groups:
• One group will dress as beatniks, wearing black berets, black tops, and sunglasses. These students will read their “Beat” poems to the entire group along with a bongo accompaniment.
• A second group, in appropriate 1950’s dress-poodle skirts, bobby sox, jeans, white shirts, etc. will perform a 1950’s dance.
• A third group will perform their original lyrics to “Summertime Blues”.
• The session will end with everyone singing Eddie Cochran’s lyrics to the “Summertime Blues.”

Follow-up learning activities:
• 1950’s Questionnaire

Assessment criteria and performance descriptors

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<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Below Basic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONTENT</td>
<td>Words chosen go beyond original lyrics and show outstanding comprehension of text.</td>
<td>Adequate choice of new words to express basic meaning of song.</td>
<td>Little or no attempt to interpret words.</td>
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<td>LENGTH</td>
<td>Composed two or more original verses plus refrain.</td>
<td>Composed one verse and refrain.</td>
<td>Composed less than one verse.</td>
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<td>PERFORMANCE</td>
<td>Students consistently sang/chanted the lyrics together, maintaining the correct rhythm throughout the entire performance.</td>
<td>Students performed the rhythm together and correctly for most of the song, occasionally getting off beat.</td>
<td>Students seldom kept the performance of the lyrics to the song's original rhythm.</td>
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Struggling with themes such as Rebellion in George Orwell's 1984? We've got the quick and easy lowdown on it here. Just like the cookie leads the mouse down a path of increasingly complicated tasks and actions, Winston's diary sets him on a trajectory to all out rebellion against the Party. The diary allows him a place to unleash all his rebellious thoughts, which gives him the confidence to fall in love with Julia, which in turn leads him to become concerned with grand-scale, organized resistance to the Party’s rule. It all culminates with him joining the Brotherhood. Julia, on the other hand, contents herself with private acts of rebellion by engaging in sex and wearing makeup. The takeaway? No one in the book is purely evil, and no one is so different from real-world humans to fully embrace the lack of independence in Gilead. Whether large or small, attempting to destroy the Gileadean government or merely to make one’s personal circumstances more tolerable, each character commits rebellious acts, highlighting both the unlivable horror of Gileadean society, and the unsteadiness of its foundations. The ThemeTracker below shows where, and to what degree, the theme of Rebellion appears in each chapter of The Handmaid’s Tale. Click or tap on any chapter to read its Summary & Analysis. How often theme appears Rebellion is definitely an important theme throughout the play. Every character has committed an act of rebellion at some point in The Tempest. The subject of rebellion was very important to the audience at the time because of the risk of rebellion at the time against James I, who was the monarch. There is a lot of rebelling against masters, as shown by both Ariel and Caliban. We are less afraid to be drowned than thou art. (I.i.43-44). But in Act II scene 1, the two characters rebel against their king, Alonso, by planning to kill him. (II.i.292-294).