

Using Popular Music in Lessons on Terrorism Across History

Susan Daly developed this lesson for her AP World and Global 10 classes while at teacher at Arcadia High School in the Greece (NY) CSD. It is designed to address New York State Standards for World History, Civics and Government, and United States History as well as AP World themes on the relationship of change and continuity across the world history periods and changes in functions and structures of states and attitudes towards states and political identities. The objective is to make it possible for students to place the events of September 11, 2001 into historical perspective by creating a list of historical events that can be classified as acts of terrorism. Material used may vary depending on whether there are students who had personal family involvement with the events of 9/11.

Day 1: Students view 8 to 10 minutes from a video of the first 24 hours in NYC following the attack. They write a one-page description of their immediate and long-term reactions to the events of 9/11/01 including their remembrance of where they were when they first learned about the attacks. We listen to “Where Were You When the World Stopped Turning” by Alan Jackson and the class discusses the feelings presented in this work, how the music makes them feel, what music expresses about a culture, and how this particular song conveys these things. Essential questions are “What is the function of music in most societies?” and “How does music reflect the culture which created it?” The class discusses “What is a modern definition of terrorism?”; “How has the definition changed over time?”; and “How have the events of 9/11 changed the definition of what terrorism is world wide?” Student teams divide up responsibility to work overnight researching acts of terrorism. They must go back deep into history and only four examples can be since 1945.

Day 2: Based on their research, the class constructs a large flow chart detailing the events they considered examples of terrorism. The list may start with the Mongols throwing plague-ridden bodies into cities they were attempting to take over. We highlight specific examples such as the terrorist tactics used by late 19th century Russian anarchists and actions against civilians by the Irish Republican Army. For homework, students write about how different societies have coped with acts of terrorism and how American society dealt with the events of 9/11.

Day 3: I play selections of popular music and ask students to think about how the artist is expressing his or her reaction to the events of 9/11. Discussion of the lyrics leads to considering what makes an action an act of terrorism, how societies respond to internal radical elements and external threats, especially from a fringe movement whose members are prepared to die for a cause, and how societies cope with the impact of these actions. This leads to a discussion of how American reaction to the events of 9/11 changed the world’s perception of Americans and America. We also discuss how an understanding of history better prepares us understand the reasons behind the attacks on September 11, 2001. For homework, student teams conduct Internet research on terrorist groups from 1950 to the present. Each person in the group is assigned a different world region. They look at both who was involved and why and the government response.

Day 4: Based on the additional research students add to the flow chart. Discussion focuses on how responses to terrorism were similar and different in totalitarian and democratic societies.

Recommended Popular Music

“Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue” by Toby Keith. (L) <http://www.cowboylyrics.com/lyrics/keith-toby/courtesy-of-the-red-white-and-blue-10125.html>. (V) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dBwEeCks5Y>.

“One Last Time” by Dusty Drake. (L) <http://www.cowboylyrics.com/lyrics/dusty-drake/one-last-time-2050.html>. (V) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGj0c3sKMgg>.

“Where were you When the World Stopped Turning?” by Alan Jackson. (L) <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/alan-jackson/wherewereyouwhentheworldstoppedturning.html>. (V) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvj6zdWLUuk>.

“The Rising” by Bruce Springsteen. (L) http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/bruce+springsteen/the+rising_20025196.html. (V) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eNnB4dkVRJI>

“Have You Forgotten” by Darryl Worley. (L) <http://www.cowboylyrics.com/lyrics/worley-darryl/have-you-forgotten-3876.html>. (V) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6yLQRF-cEU>

“Into The Fire” by Bruce Springsteen. (L) http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/bruce+springsteen/into+the+fire_20025188.html. (V) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usD7RDp-w5Q>