

Songs about Nuclear Weapons

Objectives:

Students will: Explore the relationship between political events and popular culture.

Compare and contrast songs with different viewpoints.

Assess the place of political themes in popular music today.

Required Reading:

Students should have read “Songs about Nuclear Weapons” and completed the “Songs about Nuclear Weapons” worksheet.

Note: This activity benefits greatly from being able to watch and listen to the music. Be sure to preview the content.

In the Classroom:

1. Student Interpretations—Call on students to offer their interpretations of the songs presented. Play the videos of the songs to demonstrate how music reinforces the message of the lyrics. Ask students to organize the songs

by themes and types. Compare and contrast the songs.

2. Identifying Values—Call on students to identify the most important values in the songs. Invite students to reflect on the connection between the songs and the public mood during the Cold War era. To what extent did the songs mirror, or shape, public attitudes?

3. Comparing Past and Present—Ask students to compare songs of the Cold War with popular music today. Call on them to give examples of current political songs. How have the themes changed since the Cold War? How are feelings of patriotism or protest expressed in today’s music?

Songs about Nuclear Weapons

Instructions: Answer the questions below for three of the songs.

1. When was the song written and what events were happening at that time? (Be sure to identify the songs you chose.)

song #1:

song #2:

song #3:

2. What is the mood of the song? Is it angry, sad, hopeful, sarcastic, joyful, triumphant, etc.? (Remember that songs are meant to be heard, not read. The music may play an important part in conveying the meaning. If you have access to recordings of any of these songs, bring them in to class.)

song #1:

song #2:

song #3:

3. What attitude toward nuclear weapons is being expressed? Do you think the songwriter is expressing his or her personal feelings, or the general attitudes of his or her society?

song #1:

song #2:

song #3:

Name: _____

Songs about Nuclear Weapons

Introduction: Throughout history, conflict and war have raised strong feelings in poets, artists, and songwriters. Songs captured the strong feelings of the nuclear age and offer a window on the differing perspectives of the Cold War. Below is a small selection of the many songs written during this period.

When They Drop the Atom Bomb

<http://youtu.be/W7V4tOdboWA>

Jackie Doll and His Pickled Peppers, 1950

There will soon be an end to this cold and wicked war
When those hard-headed communists get what they're looking for
Only one thing that will stop them and their ferocious fun
If General MacArthur drops the atomic bomb
Now over in Korea our boys have fought and fell
But they died just like heroes, so many shot and killed
They had their hands tied behind them and were murdered by the score
By those dirty-minded Communists who started this sad war

There'll be fire dust and metal flying all around
And the radioactivity will burn them to the ground
If there's any commies left they'll be all on the run
If General MacArthur drops the atomic bomb

Old hard-headed Joe will be feelin' mighty blue
When he finds out he's bitten off more than he can chew
For the thrashing will be ended and the job will be well done
If General MacArthur drops the atomic bomb

Ol' MacArthur has the power to stop those thieves
And he'll make them sorry for their underhanded schemes
Just leave it to the general for he really has the nerve
To give those no good communists just what they deserve

There'll be fire dust and metal flying all around
And the radioactivity will burn them to the ground
If there's any commies left they'll be all on the run
If General MacArthur drops the atomic bomb

Russians

<http://youtu.be/wHy1QRVN2Qs>
Sting, 1984

In Europe and America, there's a growing
feeling of hysteria
Conditioned to respond to all the threats
In the rhetorical speeches of the Soviets
Mr. Khrushchev said we will bury you
I don't subscribe to this point of view
It would be such an ignorant thing to do
If the Russians love their children too

How can I save my little boy from
Oppenheimer's deadly toy
There is no monopoly in common sense
On either side of the political fence
We share the same biology
Regardless of ideology
Believe me when I say to you
I hope the Russians love their children too

There is no historical precedent
To put the words in the mouth of the president
There's no such thing as a winnable war
It's a lie that we don't believe anymore
Mr. Reagan says we will protect you
I don't subscribe to this point of view
Believe me when I say to you
I hope the Russians love their children too

We share the same biology
Regardless of ideology
What might save us, me, and you
Is that the Russians love their children too

Political Science

<http://youtu.be/Du3WhHrrNgs>
Randy Newman, 1972

No one likes us—I don't know why
We may not be perfect, but heaven knows we
try
But all around, even our old friends put us
down
Let's drop the big one and see what happens

We give them money—but are they grateful?
No, they're spiteful and they're hateful
They don't respect us—so let's surprise them
We'll drop the big one and pulverize them

Asia's crowded and Europe's too old
Africa is far too hot
And Canada's too cold
And South America stole our name
Let's drop the big one
There'll be no one left to blame us

We'll save Australia
Don't wanna hurt no kangaroo
We'll build an All American amusement park
there
They got surfin', too

Boom goes London and boom Patee
More room for you and more room for me
And every city the whole world round
Will just be another American town
Oh, how peaceful it will be
We'll set everybody free
You'll wear a Japanese kimono
And there'll be Italian shoes for me

They all hate us anyhow
So let's drop the big one now
Let's drop the big one now

Name: _____

Breathing

<http://youtu.be/VzlofSthVwc>

Kate Bush, 1980

Outside
 Gets inside
 Through her skin.
 I've been out before
 But this time it's much safer in.

Last night in the sky,
 Such a bright light.
 My radar send me danger
 But my instincts tell me to keep

Breathing,
 (out, in, out, in, out, in...)
 Breathing,
 Breathing my mother in,
 Breathing my beloved in,
 Breathing,
 Breathing her nicotine,
 Breathing,
 Breathing the fall-out in,
 Out in, out in, out in, out in.

We've lost our chance.
 We're the first and the last, ooh,
 After the blast.
 Chips of plutonium
 Are twinkling in every lung.

I love my
 Beloved, ooh,
 All and everywhere,
 Only the fools blew it.
 You and me
 Knew life itself is
 Breathing,
 (out, in, out, in, out...)
 Breathing,
 Breathing my mother in,
 Breathing my beloved in,
 Breathing,
 Breathing her nicotine,

Breathing,
 Breathing the fall-out in,
 Out in, out in, out in, out in,
 Out in, out in, out in, out...
 (out!)

In point of fact it is possible to tell the
 (out!)
 Difference between a small nuclear explosion and
 A large one by a very simple method. The calling
 Card of a nuclear bomb is the blinding flash that
 Is far more dazzling than any light on earth—brighter
 Even than the sun itself—and it is by the duration
 Of this flash that we are able to determine the size
 (what are we going to do without?)
 Of the weapon. After the flash a fireball can be
 Seen to rise, sucking up under it the debris, dust
 And living things around the area of the explosion,
 And as this ascends, it soon becomes recognizable
 As the familiar mushroom cloud. As a demonstration
 Of the flash duration test let's try and count the
 Number of seconds for the flash emitted by a very
 Small bomb; then a more substantial, medium-sized
 Bomb; and finally, one of our very powerful,
 High-yield bombs

What are we going to do without?
 Ooh please!
 What are we going to do without?
 Let me breathe!
 What are we going to do without?
 Ooh, quick!
 We are all going to die without!
 Breathe in deep!
 What are we going to die without?
 Leave me something to breathe!
 We are all going to die without!
 Oh, leave me something to breathe!
 What are we going to do without?
 Oh, god, please leave us something to breathe!
 We are all going to die without
 Oh, life is—breathing.

Talking World War III Blues

<http://youtu.be/7IgMKFfiZxg>

Bob Dylan, 1963

Some time ago a crazy dream came to me,
 I dreamt I was walkin' into World War Three,
 I went to the doctor the very next day
 To see what kinda words he could say.
 He said it was a bad dream.
 I wouldn't worry 'bout it none, though,
 They were my own dreams and they're only in
 my head.
 I said, Hold it, Doc, a World War passed through
 my brain.
 He said, Nurse, get your pad, this boy's insane,
 He grabbed my arm, I said Ouch!
 As I landed on the psychiatric couch,
 He said, Tell me about it.

Well, the whole thing started at 3 o'clock fast,
 It was all over by quarter past.
 I was down in the sewer with some little lover
 When I peeked out from a manhole cover
 Wondering who turned the lights on.

Well, I got up and walked around
 And up and down the lonesome town.
 I stood a-wondering which way to go,
 I lit a cigarette on a parking meter
 And walked on down the road.
 It was a normal day.

Well, I rung the fallout shelter bell
 And I leaned my head and I gave a yell,
 Give me a string bean, I'm a hungry man.
 A shotgun fired and away I ran.
 I don't blame them too much though,
 I know I look funny.

Down at the corner by a hot-dog stand
 I seen a man, I said, Howdy friend,
 I guess there's just us two.
 He screamed a bit and away he flew.
 Thought I was a Communist.

Well, I spied a girl and before she could leave,
 Let's go and play Adam and Eve.
 I took her by the hand and my heart it was

thumpin'
 When she said, Hey man, you crazy or sumpin',
 You see what happened last time they started.
 Well, I seen a Cadillac window uptown
 And there was nobody aroun',
 I got into the driver's seat
 And I drove down 42nd Street
 In my Cadillac.
 Good car to drive after a war.

Well, I remember seein' some ad,
 So I turned on my Conelrad.
 But I didn't pay my Con Ed bill,
 So the radio didn't work so well.
 Turned on my record player
 It was Rock-A-Day, Johnny singin',
 Tell Your Ma, Tell Your Pa,
 Our Loves Are Gonna Grow Ooh-wah, Ooh-wah.

I was feelin' kinda lonesome and blue,
 I needed somebody to talk to.
 So I called up the operator of time
 Just to hear a voice of some kind.
 When you hear the beep
 It will be three o'clock,
 She said that for over an hour
 And I hung it up.

Well, the doctor interrupted me just about then,
 Sayin, Hey I've been havin' the same old dreams,
 But mine was a little different you see.
 I dreamt that the only person left after the war was
 me.
 I didn't see you around.

Well, now time passed and now it seems
 Everybody's having them dreams.
 Everybody sees themselves walkin' around with no
 one else.
 Half of the people can be part right all of the time,
 Some of the people can be all right part of the time.
 But all of the people cant be right all of the time.
 I think Abraham Lincoln said that.
 I'll let you be in my dreams if I can be in yours,
 I said that.

Name: _____

Jesus Hits Like an Atom Bomb<http://youtu.be/Hi5q3Gq6UHl>*Lowell Blanchard and the Valley Trio, 1950*

Ev'rybody's worried
 'bout that atom bomb.
 Well, no one seems worried about the day my Lord
 shall come.
 You better set your house in order,
 He may be coming soon,
 and He'll hit like an atom bomb when he come,
 when he come.

In 19 hundred and 45, the atom bomb became alive.
 In 19 hundred and 49, the USA got very wise.
 They found that a country across the line
 had an atom bomb of the very same kind.
 People got worried over the land,
 just like the people in Japan.
 God told Elijah He'd send down fire,
 send down fire from the sky.
 He showed old Noah by the rainbow sign,
 it won't be water but fire next time.

Oh well now Ev'rybody's worried
 'bout that atom bomb.
 Well, no one seems worried about the day my Lord
 shall come.
 You better set your house in order,
 well He may be coming soon,
 and He'll hit like an atom bomb when he come,
 when he come.

Now don't you get worried, bear in mind,
 trust King Jesus and you shall find
 peace, and happiness, joy divine,
 with my Savior all the time.
 God told Elijah He'd send down fire,
 send down fire from the sky.
 He said he would, and I believe He will,
 He'll fight your battles if you keep still.

Ev'rybody's worried
 'bout that atom bomb ...

... And He'll hit...
 And He'll hit like an atom ...
 Hit like an atom ...
 Hit like an atom bomb when He come, when He come.
 You better straighten up and fly right 'cause He may be

Who's Next?<http://youtu.be/CdtAFil2jh>*Tom Lehrer, 1965*

First we got the bomb and that was good,
 'Cause we love peace and motherhood.
 Then Russia got the bomb, but that's O.K.,
 'Cause the balance of power's maintained that
 way!

France got the bomb, but don't you grieve,
 'Cause they're on our side (I believe).
 China got the bomb, but have no fears;
 They can't wipe us out for at least five years!
 Who's next?
 Then Indonesia claimed that they
 Were gonna get one any day.
 South Africa wants two, that's right:
 One for the black and one for the white!
 Who's next?

Egypt's gonna get one, too,
 Just to use on you know who.
 So Israel's getting tense,
 Wants one in self defense.
 "The Lord's our shepherd," says the psalm,
 But just in case, we better get a bomb!
 Who's next?

Luxembourg is next to go
 And, who knows, maybe Monaco.
 We'll try to stay serene and calm
 When Alabama gets the bomb!
 Who's next, who's next, who's next?
 Who's next?

99 Luftballons

<http://youtu.be/14IRDDnEPR4>

Nena, 1984

You and I in a little toy shop
Buy a bag of balloons with the money we've
got
Set them free at the break of dawn
'till one by one they were gone
Back at base, sparks in the software
Flash the message "something's out there"
Floating in the summer sky
Ninety nine red balloons go by

Ninety nine red balloons
Floating in the summer sky
Panic bells, it's red alert
There's something here from somewhere else
The war machine springs to life
Opens up one eager eye
And focusing it on the sky
The ninety nine red balloons go by

Ninety nine decisions treat
Ninety nine ministers meet
To worry, worry, super scurry
Call the troops out in a hurry
This is what we've waited for
This is it boys, this is war
The President is on the line

As Ninety nine red balloons go by
Ninety nine knights of the air
Ride super high-tech jet fighters
Everyone's a super hero
Everyone's a Captain Kirk
With orders to identify
To clarify and classify
Scramble in the summer sky
Ninety nine red balloons go by

As ninety nine red balloons go by

Ninety nine dreams I have had
In every one a red balloon
It's all over and I'm standing pretty
In this dust that was a city
If I could find a souvenir
Just to prove the world was here
And here is a red balloon
I think of you and let it go

Name: _____

Radioactive Mama<http://youtu.be/CQNwG6GTx6E>*Sheldon Allman, 1960*

Radioactive mama, hold me tight
Radioactive mama treat me right
Radioactive mama we'll reach critical mass tonight
Well when we get together clear away the crowd there won't be nothing left except a mushroom
shaped cloud
Radioactive mama treat me right
Radioactive mama we'll reach critical mass tonight
Well, your kisses do things to me in oh so many ways
I feel them going through me all those gamma gamma rays
Radioactive mama treat me right
Radioactive mama we'll reach critical mass tonight
Well since I kissed you baby, that evening in the park,
I lost my hair and eyebrows and my teeth shine in the dark
Radioactive mama treat me right
Radioactive mama we'll reach critical mass tonight.