

# Songs about Nuclear Weapons

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## 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

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*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

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*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/Hi5q3Gq6UHI>*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.