

Analyzing a Song

Instructions: The “global revolutions” that began in 1968 were an important international political backdrop to the U.S. war in Vietnam. Below is a small sample of songs from around the world from 1968. Your teacher will assign your group one of these songs to analyze. Before you analyze your song, read the questions below so that you understand clearly what to look and listen for. Listen to your song as many times as you need before you complete the questions below. Be prepared to share your group’s findings with your classmates.

Part I: Analyze Your Song

Arist:

Song Title:

Country of Origin:

Historical context: In one to two sentences, summarize what was happening in the artist’s country/the world at the time they wrote or performed this song.

Song Elements

1. Instrumentation (*Definition: The instruments and characteristics of each instrument used in a piece of music.*)

What instruments do you hear?

How would you describe the volume of each of the above instruments? (Loud? Soft? Medium? Other?)

How would you describe the “sound” of the song? Use any adjectives that come to mind (ex. loud and heavy; thin and light, warm or cool, gentle or harsh, etc.).

2. Tempo (*Definition: The speed of the music.*)

Is the song fast or slow? Medium?

Does the tempo remain the same throughout the song, or does it slow down or speed up at certain times?

If the tempo changes, how do you think the changes affect the song? If the tempo does not change, how do you think the steady tempo affects the song?

Name: _____

3. Rhythm (*Definition: Repeated pattern of musical sounds.*)

What types of rhythms does the song use?

Do the rhythms repeat throughout the song, or are there varying types of rhythms used throughout?

Do different instruments play different rhythms? If so, describe the differences.

4. Lyrics (*Definition: The words of a song.*)

What topics do the lyrics address?

Do certain lyrics or sections of lyrics repeat? If so, what is the repeated message?

What is the overarching message of the lyrics?

What is the tone of the lyrics (angry, hopeful, happy, etc.)?

Part II: Summarize and Interpret Your Song

What do you think the meaning of this song is? How is the “meaning” of the song revealed through its elements (i.e. instrumentation, tempo, lyrics, etc.)? What emotion(s) do you think the songwriter(s) wanted to make listeners feel? How is that emotion revealed through the song’s elements?

Use the information and analysis that you have collected above to write a three to five sentence summary of your interpretation of this song’s meaning and the emotions it expresses in the space below. Then choose a short excerpt from the song (around thirty to forty-five seconds long) to play for the class that shows how the song’s elements reveal its meaning and emotions.