

Learning From Lyrics

RESEARCH IDEAS FOR STUDENTS

Folk: The first time Bob Dylan played an electric guitar at the Newport Folk Festival, it caused quite a stir. Folk purists in the audience were infuriated at him, berating him with cries of "sellout!" and the like. Dylan was moving into a new genre of music, and his choice to do so had profound effects on the course of the 1960s and the lives of a generation. Choose three of his most politically charged songs and discuss.

Blues: The lyrics of blues songs are a map of the emotions and social issues affecting the lives of African-Americans for the last century. There are different types of blues - explore these genres on the [Blues Road Trip](#). Choose three examples, compare and contrast the lyrical choices, and explain them with reference to their respective social contexts.

Jazz: Billie Holiday sang a lot of songs about love and heartache. Choose several of her songs for analysis. How are her songs different than love songs of today? How are they the same?

Country: This genre of music is known for its common themes (love and loss, country life, pickup trucks, etc.). Choose songs representative of this. Are these themes significantly different from the themes present in forms of contemporary music more common in urban areas, or are the differences only superficial, with underlying meanings being the same?

Opera/Musicals: Music is a mirror of life and culture. Songs can provide a window into the soul of the artist, tackle important issues, or tell a story. Music serves a variety of functions and purposes in society, with opera and musicals usually falling into the story-telling role. What different types of moods are evoked by these types of musical stories? Choose three fairly disparate examples, such as a comedic song, a hopeful song, and a tragic song.

Celtic/British Isles: This region of the world has a powerful, diverse, and rich musical tradition. Of the many forms in this genre, the ballad is one of the most salient sub-genres. Find several choices, become familiar with the standard format of the ballad, and then find modern equivalents for comparison.

Oldies: Parents, grandparents and great-grandparents enjoyed popular music in their day. Choose several examples of music that was popular at some point in history prior to 1950. How are the selections representative of the time period in which they were popular?