



# Music Around the World

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Social Studies  
Grades 9–12



## Introduction

Music often serves as the soundtrack for history. In this lesson students will be challenged to analyze music and lyrics across history. They will have the opportunity to compare and contrast these lyrics as a means to uncover the impact history has had on musical artistry.

## Learning Objectives

- ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4](#)) Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.
- ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5](#)) Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.

## Materials Needed

- Access to computers/laptops
- [Literature web graphic organizer](#)
- [Lyrics to Stevie Wonder's song "Higher Ground"](#)
- [Lyric video of Stevie Wonder's song "Higher Ground"](#)

## Procedure

1. At the start of the lesson, ask the students to think of their favorite song at this moment. Ask them to share with a partner what this song is and why it is their favorite song. Then ask the students to think of a song that causes them to have a powerful memory of something in their lives. The memory could be of something happy, exciting, sad, or any other type of strong emotion. As the students share these songs, guide the discussion to arrive at the point that music is often connected to events in life. Explain to the students how lyrics serve as a soundtrack to historical events.
2. As a guided practice exercise, share with the students that you will look at a song's lyrics, analyze the meaning, and examine the historical context. You will then play the Stevie Wonder song "Higher Ground" and have the students simply listen to the words. You may do this by showing the lyric video using the link above. After they have viewed this video, allow them to share some key things that stood out from what they heard and what they think the lyrics mean. It will be important to highlight the historical context of this song by providing information about the Vietnam War that was going on when the song was written (1972-1973).

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3. Continue this exercise by extending the discussion with the completion of the literature web. Using a handout of the lyrics (link above), guide the students to identify key words, ideas, feelings, structure, and images/symbols from the song.
4. As independent practice, have the students choose song lyrics from two different decades to analyze using the literature web. The students will need to first find the lyrics, listen to the song, and complete the literature web. On the back of the literature web or in a separate place, the students should write a summary of the historical context of the song lyrics. Depending on the song that is chosen, you may have to assist students with finding the connection between the song and historical context.
5. The students should be given an opportunity to share their work with their peers.

## Evaluation

Collect the completed literature webs as a form of evaluation. These webs may be graded for each student based on how well they were able to use the web to analyze the song lyrics. There are 5 web components and each of them may be given 20 points. You may give them points as follows:

- Not Completed or Incorrect Analysis (0 points)
- Partially Completed or Weak Analysis (10 points)
- Fully Completed or Strong Analysis (20 points)

It is advised to review this grading process with the students prior to them starting their work.