



CITIZEN ADVOCACY CENTER

First Amendment Rights: Music Censorship

LESSON PLAN AND ACTIVITIES

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Funding for lesson plans was provided to the Citizen Advocacy Center by the McCormick Foundation.

First Amendment Rights: Music Censorship

Lesson Plan and Activities

Grade Level: 6, 7, 8

Subject(s):

- Social Studies: Government, Judicial System

Duration: 1 class session

Description: This lesson plan will give students the opportunity to discuss censorship and the First Amendment as it applies to the music industry.

Goals:

Illinois Learning Standards

A. Social Science: 16D, 18; and

B. English/Language Arts: 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B.

Objectives:

1. Study the history of music censorship in the United States.
2. Identify music that may be subject to censorship.
3. Understand the arguments in favor of and against music censorship.
4. Develop an informed opinion on the subject of music censorship.

Materials:

1. Timeline of American Censorship
2. Artwork Pictures – David Censored and Uncensored
3. Handout - class discussion outline

Lecture

- 1) Introduction to censorship
 - a) Ask the students: what does it mean to censor?
 - i) Definition – Censor – the removal or suppression of what is considered morally, politically or otherwise objectionable
 - b) Ask the students for examples of censorship: *i.e. book burning, library reading lists, bleeping out words on the TV or radio, dubbing over swear words in movies shown on TV, parental blocks on the internet or on cable, censorship of explicit art, movie ratings.*
 - c) Today we are talking specifically about music censorship. Show timeline.

Class Discussion

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- 1) Music Censorship
 - a) Brainstorm the titles of songs that might be subject to censorship.
 - i) Set guidelines with respect to profane titles and how to appropriately discuss the topic.
 - ii) Write these on the board
 - b) Why are these songs censored?
 - c) Do you think music can negatively influence children and teen? Why or why not?
 - d) Do you think that there should be age requirements for buying an explicit version of a song at the store?

- 2) Standards
 - a) Are different types of music censored differently?
 - b) What types of music are more heavily targeted for censorship?
 - c) Do you know of songs in other genres that could deserve to be censored under current standards?

- 3) The line between Art and Obscurity
 - a) Do you think that music is censored more than other forms of art?
 - b) Would it be appropriate to “clothe” statues of nude models? Why or why not?
 - i) Example – Show a picture of Michelangelo’s David and then add clothes.
 - ii) Example – Attorney General John Ashcroft’s request that the art deco statue, Spirit of Justice, be covered during his press conferences because her toga only covered one breast.
 - (1) See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/Americas/1788845.stm>

Journaling/Writing Assignment

- 1) Either have the students spend the last five minutes journaling about their thoughts on music censorship, or have them write a two page essay on the subject.
 - a) Thought questions:
 - i) Is censorship fair?
 - ii) Is it ever appropriate?
 - iii) Are different standards for different types of music fair?

Timeline of Music Censorship in the United States

<p>1950s</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Billie Holiday’s song “Love for Sale,” is not permitted to be played on radio stations because of its strong sexual content and its depiction of prostitution• “Transfusion” was banned because it was felt that a blood transfusion was not a laughing matter.• When Elvis Presley was scheduled to perform on the Ed Sullivan show, cameramen were instructed not to film any of Elvis’s lower body because his dancing was considered inappropriate for the viewing audience.
<p>1960s</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In 1964, the state of Indiana banned the song “Louie Louie” because they felt that it had some sexual content in it.• The Rolling Stones were forced to change the lyrics of a song in order to perform in on national television because, of course, it had sexual content. The song was called “Let’s Spend the Night Together” and they were forced to say “Let’s Spend Some Time Together.”• John Lennon and Yoko Ono's album "Two Virgins" featured a naked picture of the two artists. These albums were confiscated before they even had a chance to hit the record stores. One Chicago retailer was shut down by the vice squad for carrying this album.
<p>1970</p> <p>Officials in Illinois released a list of popular music that contained drug references. The list included the popular children's song "Puff The Magic Dragon" and the Beatles "Yellow Submarine."</p>
<p>1980</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Olivia Newton John's song "Physical" was banned because it was believed to have strong sexual content, and this considered to be more than inappropriate for the Mormon religion.• The Parents Music Resource Group/Parents Music Resource Center headed by Tipper Gore focused on getting record companies to monitor and rate their artists’ releases with a system similar to the MPAA system for movies.• In 1987, a singer by the name of Jello Biafra was arrested for the distribution of pornography. He had a picture of a naked lady on the cover of his album and it was found to be inappropriate for the public. These albums were later seized, and his band eventually broke up.
<p>1990's</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An album released by Nirvana featured a naked baby on the cover. There was very little controversy over the cover and there was no ban of the record sale.• 2 Live Crew released a very risqué album. The record sale and distribution of this album were deemed illegal in Florida and Alabama. 2 Live Crew were also arrested in Florida at a concert. The police claimed that the performance was too obscene for the general public. 2 Live Crew's next album was titled "Banned In The USA."

- Ice T's album "Freedom of Speech" was banned. Its lyrics were considered to be too obscene. (Music Censorship: Elvis to Ice-T 5)
- Public Enemy's, album, "By the Time I Get to Arizona," featured depicting the governor of Arizona as a David Duke-type of character was banned from T.V.
- In the mid 1990s WalMart and KMart decided not to sell any records that they determined to be obscene.

2001

Some radio stations voluntarily stopped playing certain songs after the attacks on the World Trade Towers. This list included: "Enter Sandman", Metallica; "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" The Beatles; "Crash into Me" Dave Matthews Band; "Walk Like an Egyptian" The Bangles; "Only the Good Die Young" Billy Joel; "Benny and the Jets" Elton John; "Wipe Out" Surfaris.

This information can be presented either in a time line at the front of the class, or on individual handouts.

Additional Resources:

Rock Out Censorship at <http://www.theroc.org>

"Singing in the Echo Chamber?" Music Censorship in the U.S. after September 11th by Eric Nuzum

http://censorshipinamerica.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/echo_chamber_web_version1-2.pdf

Recording Industry Association of America Parental Advisory

http://www.riaa.com/toolsforparents.php?content_selector=parental_advisory

2 Live Crew – "Banned in the U.S.A." lyrics http://www.xyno.de/lyrics/lyr_bannedintheusa.html

[Shoot the Singer!: Music Censorship Today](#)

[Taboo Tunes: A History of Banned Bands and Censored Songs \(Book\)](#)