

America before Beatlemania

"[Beatlemania is] a relief from Cyprus and Malaysia and Viet Nam [sic] and racial demonstrations and Khrushchev. Beset by trouble all around the globe, America has turned to the four young men with the ridiculous haircuts for a bit of light entertainment."
(Anthony Burton, NY Daily News, February 11, 1964; as quoted in Spizer, Bruce. *The Beatles are Coming! The Birth of Beatlemania in America* - 498 Productions - New Orleans, LA., 2004)

Rationale:

While the exact cause of Beatlemania – the wild, screaming, fainting, frenzy by Beatles fans – remains hard to pinpoint, there is no doubt that a variety of factors were defining the world stage by 1964, and that these factors made The Beatles arrival a welcomed story in the United States. What were some of those factors? How might they have influenced the youth, the media, the music, and the mood that greeted The Beatles with screams and shouts?

Standards: Activities in this lesson can be used to address –

- Common Core Anchor Standards: Speaking and Listening
 - o **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1** Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
 - o **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2** Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- Common Core Anchor Standards: Reading
 - o **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1** Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific
 - o **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7** Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.¹
 - o **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9** Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Focus Questions:

- What was world news by 1964?
- How did these events impact American society in the early 1960s?



Ladies and Gentlemen...The Beatles!

- How might these world events have impacted Beatlemania?

Materials:

- Handout 1: Negative, Positive, Other, brainstorm
- Handout 2: Focus Topic Research, graphic organizer

Procedures:

Warm Up / Brainstorm

1. Ask students to describe what they know about the 1960s, referencing as many events and/or people as possible
 - a. Have students write silently to generate their answers
 - b. Students should first share their answers in pairs, thus ensuring that each student has the opportunity to voice his/her response
 - c. Collect responses from the class. Write brainstorm list on the board or paper for later reference
2. Students return to pairs, placing the brainstormed topics into three **categories: "Positive," "Negative," and "Other" (Handout 1)**
3. Based on the new lists, ask students what words they would use to describe the 1960s (Imagine they were creating a chapter title for a textbook section on the 1960s)
4. Debrief class discussion: How might the events listed impact American culture of the 1960s? What impact, if any, might they have had on The Beatles' arrival in February, 1964?

Overview/Framing (to be shared with the class)

The 1960s are often described as the most turbulent decade in American history. From the threat of international, nuclear war to hard-won Civil Rights legislation, the United States had a lot on its plate when Beatlemania first arrived. There is much disagreement about whether these turbulent factors caused The Beatles' success in the US. When asked to explain the Beatlemania explosion, rather than attempting to define the factors leading to the success of Beatlemania, John Lennon suggested that they "leave it to the psychologists and let them get it wrong." (p. 39, Millard)



Ladies and Gentlemen...The Beatles!

While the cause of Beatlemania remains hard to pinpoint, there is no doubt that a variety of factors was shaping America when The Beatles arrived in 1964.

What were some of those factors?

How might these factors have influenced the youth, the media, the music, and the mood that welcomed The Beatles in 1964 with screams and shouts?

Jig-Saw Student Research:

Divide students into at least five groups, assigning each group a topic from the list below.

Each group should research their focus topic using websites, primary source documents and teacher preferred readings. While teachers can/should provide each group with at least a few documents, this is also an excellent opportunity to teach research and library skills, including evaluating the reliability of sources.

Possible websites for research:

- Library of Congress: <http://www.loc.gov/index.html>
- Library of Congress: Newspaper Archives: <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>
- National Archives: <http://www.archives.gov/research/topics/>

Students should complete the accompanying graphic organizer (Handout 2) with information from their research. While students learn the details of the events they choose, they should also consider how the American media covered these events. The items listed below each focus topic are only suggestions. Encourage students to look for important events within their topics, beyond those listed.

Fishbowl Discussion

After groups have completed Handout 2 (Focus Topic Research) have the class sit in a circle (or two concentric circles, with the inner circle serving as the fish bowl for discussion)

NOTE: tips for facilitating fishbowl discussion can be found here: <http://www.learner.org/workshops/tml/workshop3/teaching2.html>)

Using evidence from their research and class work, have students discuss the following:

- What word would you use to describe the 1960s (similar question to the opening activity)
- What do you think most influenced the mood in America in the early 1960s?



Ladies and Gentlemen...The Beatles!

- What were the challenges facing America in the 1960s?
- How are the 1960s remembered today? Given your research, is that an accurate memory?

Assessment Suggestions

After the fishbowl activity have students reflect individually on and write a response to the prompt: How might the events of the early 1960s have impacted the American reaction to Beatlemania?

EXTENSION: Have student groups (with a representative from each focus topic) make a poster (or other visual) with images and key information from their research, summarizing America before Beatlemania. Allow each group to visit the other posters. Display these "summary posters" as reference for future discussions of the 1960s and Beatlemania.



FOCUS TOPICS:

1. Civil Rights

- i. Nashville Sit-ins, 1960
- ii. Freedom Rides, 1961
- iii. March on Washington, 1963

- Describe the event
- How was it covered by the American media?
- What was the role of young people in this event?
- How might this event have impacted/defined the 1960s?

2. The Cold War

- i. Bay of Pigs, 1961
- ii. Berlin Crises, 1962
- iii. Cuban Missile Crises, 1963
- iv. Vietnam War, 1962 - 1975

- Describe the event
- How was it covered by the American media?
- What was the role of young people in this event?
- How might this event have impacted/defined the 1960s?

3. American Politics

- i. Robert Kennedy (role in Civil Rights)
- ii. John F Kennedy (presidency and assassination, 1963)
- iii. Lyndon B Johnson (presidency)

- Describe the person/event
- How was it covered by the American media?
- How were young people involved/impacted by this event?
- How might this event have impacted/defined the 1960s?



4. **Music in America (Refer to the text from the Museum Exhibit, found below)**

- i. Buddy Holly
- ii. Elvis Presley
- iii. Chuck Berry

Billboard top artists, 1960-1963:

<http://www.billboard.com/artists/top-100/1960>

(Once on the site, slide the time line between 1960 and 1963)

- How did these musicians impact The Beatles' music?
- Where were these legendary artists by 1964?

5. **1960s Media***

- i. Music technology innovation
- ii. Changing role of television
- iii. Changing role of radio

- Describe the event
- What was the role of young people in this event?
- How might this event have impacted/defined the 1960s?

6. **Social Demographics***

- i. Baby boom
- ii. American teenage demographics
- iii. American economy
- iv. Women's movement

- Describe the event
- How was it covered by the American media?
- What was the role of young people in this event?
- How might this event have impacted/defined the 1960s?

* Recommended resource for topics 5 and 6: Millard, Andre. *Beatlemania: Technology, Business and Teen Culture in Cold War America*. The Johns Hopkins University Press., 2012.



Exhibit Text

America Before the Beatles

Rock & Roll had suffered the loss of many of its mid-1950s pioneers, but America's pop music scene in the early 1960s—the years before the arrival of The Beatles—was not a music wasteland.

There were bright spots: the sunny California soundtrack of surf and fun from the Beach Boys; from Detroit, the Motown Sound created by Berry Gordy and Smokey Robinson; the soul stirring songs of Sam Cooke, Ray Charles, and James Brown; the records made by Phil Spector and his girl groups; and from New York's Greenwich Village, an emerging folksinger named Bob Dylan.

An ocean away, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr were deeply influenced by Rock & Roll's earliest stars as well as many of these new American pop sounds.

In the early 1960s, however, American Rock & Roll was stuck in neutral. Many of the music's most important pioneers were missing from the scene. Elvis Presley, its biggest star, had been in the army. Chuck Berry was in jail for unlawfully transporting a minor across state lines, allegedly for immoral purposes. Ritchie Valens and Buddy Holly were in Rock & Roll heaven, their tragic deaths occurring in a plane crash. Eddie Cochran joined them after his death in a car crash.

Little Richard found religion and Jerry Lee Lewis found his first cousin, whom he promptly married, causing a social uproar. Johnny Cash cared more for country music than for Rock & Roll, and headed in that direction. Earlier, Carl Perkins had barely recovered from a car wreck on his way to New York, and Gene Vincent had nearly lost his leg in a motorcycle mishap.



Handout 1

Place the items from the class brainstorm (people/events) into the categories below:

Positive	Other	Negative

the 1960s: _____ (create a title)



Handout 2: AMERICA BEFORE BEATLEMANIA

Focus Topic: _____

Event Researched	Key facts summarizing the event	How was this event covered in the media? Give specific evidence.	Using specific evidence from your research, how did this event contribute to the culture of the 1960s?

