

Study Guide for Teachers

RockRoots *A History of American Pop Music*

Presented by
Young Audiences New Jersey & Eastern PA
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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Take a historical, political, and geographical riff through American pop music with this unique live celebration of the history of rock & roll. From African rhythms, Delta blues, swing, R&B, and country through Elvis, Motown, the Beatles, Hendrix, disco, and world beat, four talented musicians play with authority and joy while sharing the tremendous educational and musical power of this uniquely American cultural history.

RockRoots has been bringing the rich history of American roots music and rock & roll (and the great experience of live music) to thousands of kids and teachers for more than 25 years.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

It's much more informative than a rock concert or a TV program—but it's much more colorful than your average history lesson! RockRoots takes you on a historical, geographic, and political tour of the United States as it traces the evolution of American pop music and rock & roll from its early days to the music we hear today.

After a spirited rendition of Chuck Berry's classic, "Rock 'n' Roll Music," the musical journey begins with the ethnic music early immigrants brought to America. It continues through Delta blues, ragtime, Dixieland, jazz, big band music, rhythm & blues, country, and rockabilly—and finally to rock & roll and the current musical scene. The journey ends with an original RockRoots rap!

Ensemble members demonstrate each instrument, explaining how it evolved and how all the instruments work in an ensemble. Children learn that they can make music just for their own enjoyment.

LEARNING GOALS

- To present the diverse elements of rock & roll history, from its rural beginning to the latest in technology, and to show how social, historical, and political events have shaped popular music in America.
- To stimulate interest in the many forms of music that contributed to rock & roll.

VOCABULARY WORDS

Acoustic instruments: Instruments designed to be played without amplification.

Arrangement: The organization of instruments in a song.

Back beat: Emphasis on the second and fourth beats in a measure of music; also referred to as "off" beat.

Hook: The repetitive musical portion of a song, usually containing the title.

Improvisation: Making up melodies that fit the existing music "as you go along."

Lead: The featured instrument in a solo portion of a song.

Riff: An instrumental theme occurring many times, resulting in instant recognition.

BEFORE THE PROGRAM

1. Discuss the following musical styles:

Folk: Strong dance beat, instrumental and acoustic music, community oriented.

Blues: Simple and repetitive story/song, with roots in early African-American Southern life.

Dixieland: New Orleans ragtime music, featuring brass instruments and improvisation.

Swing: Dance music with large orchestral arrangements, often with a leader and a singer.

Rhythm & Blues (often abbreviated to R&B): Combines African American blues with the drive of a big band sound.

Country: Simple melodies and harmonies of white rural Americans in the 1930s.

Rockabilly: Music of the 1950s that combined the R&B sound with the sound of country music.

British Invasion: Mid-1960s English rock (e.g., Beatles, Rolling Stones, The Who).

Motown: Detroit ("Motor Town") based pop sound featuring vocal groups and dance steps.

2. Discuss the elements of being a good audience: listening, participating when asked or when appropriate, dancing, singing along, etc. Discuss the differences between live and televised performances, and what behaviors might not be okay during a live performance.

AFTER THE PROGRAM

1. Have your class ask their parents about the kinds of music they listened to as young children and as teenagers. Perhaps they may still have recordings that children might share with the class. If children in your class can talk to grandparents or other older friends and family, so much the better!

2. With older children, discuss how social, political, and economic climate can influence popular music. How did the music of the various decades of the twentieth century reflect our history? How does today's music continue to reflect current events in our country?

3. Have individual students or groups of students research one of the various musical styles that have contributed to rock & roll today. Ask them to bring in music samples that illustrate the style they are studying.

ARTIST INFORMATION

RockRoots has been bringing the rich history of American roots music and rock & roll (and the great experience of live music) to thousands of kids and teachers for more than 25 years.

Dave Fry (mandolin & acoustic guitar) is a veteran folk and family/children's musician. He has won many awards for his children's CDs and his work as a performing artist in the Lehigh Valley.

Kevin Soffera (drums & percussion) is in constant demand as a performing and recording artist. He produces the work of other artists at his Hybrid Studios in Nazareth, PA.

Nick Franclik (bass) has been a mainstay in the RockRoots band. Nick also tours with many folk and alternative bands and accompanies solo songwriters.

Steve Placotaris (electric lead guitar and vocals), is a regular recording session player and performer, adept at rock, pop, and country.

RESOURCES

Lillian Erlich, *What Jazz Is All About*. Excellent for early history, especially of blues.

Charlie Gillette, *The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock and Roll*. Discusses the urban African-American influences on rock music.

Rock Music. Music Matters Series. An informative reference on the origins of the various types of rock and the social conditions that influenced them.

www.history-of-rock.com. A comprehensive history of the evolution of rock music. Includes biographies of major figures who influenced and contributed to rock music, as well as selected song lyrics.