Explicit Content in Music Lyrics

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System Dynamics Lesson Plan

“EXPLICIT CONTENT IN MUSIC LYRICS”

Grade Level:
This lesson is designed for Eighth Grade students.

CFSD Curriculum:
This lesson is taught to students after a “History of Rock and Roll” unit and either before or after a “Music Blues Writing” unit. It is used to expand the student’s perspectives and knowledge of music with explicit content in lyrics.

Lesson Objectives:
Students will be able to listen to music lyrics objectively, take personal responsibility for understanding lyrics and be considerate of others’ sensitivity to lyrics. Students will demonstrate these things through dialogue.

Systems Concepts:
• Patterns and trends
• Interdependencies
• Structure generates behavior
• Trade-offs

Systems Tools:
• Behavior-over-time graphs
• Ladder of Inference

Activities at a Glance:
• Students will respond to questions in a mini-journal (attached).
• Students will communicate and participate in class by using the skills of dialogue.
• Students create behavior-over-time graphs of various issues.
• Students are introduced to the concepts of the Ladder of Inference.
• Debrief/Closure

Time Allotment:
This lesson unit is approximately five, 42 minute, class periods.

Integration Area(s):
This lesson could also be integrated with Social Studies classes studying the time period of the late 1950’s to the present day.
Materials Needed For Lesson:

Materials:

- Students will need a pencil.
- Teacher supplies each student with a copy of the attached mini-journal.
- Large Poster Board or Banners including the names and definitions of the Parents Music Resource Center and the Recording Industry of America.

Media:

- Overhead transparencies explaining the Parents Music Association of America and the Record Industry Association of America (RIAA).
- The Heritage Dictionary’s description of “Explicit” and “Lyrics” and possibly various quotes regarding explicit content in music.

Equipment:

- Projector for scanned pictures of various Recording Jacket covers with the Parental Advisory Label.
- CD/Cassette player
- Music from the 1950’s to present day

Preparation:

- Research information about Parent Music Resource Center.
- Research information about the Recording Industry Association of America.
- Research information about how various record companies label music with Parental Advisory Labels.
- Dictionary definitions of “explicit” and “lyrics.”

Preparation (continued):

The American Heritage Dictionary states that:

“Explicit” means: “Forthright in expression; unreserved; outspoken”
“Lyrics” means: “Of or relating to a category of poetic literature that is distinguished from the narrative and dramatic, is most representational of music in its sound patterns, and is generally characterized by subjectivity and sensuality of expression.

- Preparation of the Visuals: Scanned pictures (see equipment), various poster boards and overhead transparencies (see media).
- Mini-journal handouts prepared for each student.
- Seating chart and/or check mark list so students can easily be “checked” for assessment purposes when dialoguing.
- Current records of sales of music with explicit content.
Background Information:

- Annual updated research of the Parents Music Resource Center, the Record Industry Association of America and various record companies to determine what current guidelines are being followed for labeling recorded music with the Parental Advisory Labels and the history of what guidelines were followed previously.
- Students need to understand dialogue and how it “sounds.” They need to know prior to the Ladder of Inference instruction so that this unit is successful.
- A knowledge of the history of Rock and Roll music is helpful for both the teacher and student in order to understand the historical issues in this unit, and to allow them to actually hear or see the differences in music lyrics from the 1950’s to present day.
- Updated records of record sales with explicit content. (Can be found through Billboard, The Harry Fox Agency or other sources available).

Activities:

Day One:

Set up: Each student is supplied with a mini-journal (see attached). All students desks or tables are facing each other in a “U” shape.

1) Introduction: Teacher communicates the following overview to students in the first 42 minute class.

Day One - Introduction (continued):

- Explicit Content in Music Lyrics Lesson
  - This unit is a Systems Dynamics unit which is designed to allow the students to think about music with explicit content by using several perspectives.
  - This unit is designed not to change opinions, but to allow students to gather and personally assess information about explicit content in music.

- This is how students participate:
  - Raise your hand to talk.
  - Listen with the intent to hear what each person is saying. Don’t interrupt.
  - Don’t be afraid to give input and opinions. Your view is important!
  - Allow others to feel comfortable giving their opinion by using polite listening skills.
  - You don’t have to agree, but you do need to listen.
  - Use non-verbal positive communication skills as well as verbal.
  - Don’t worry about not being called on right away. Students are equally given a chance to gain points.
  - Be specific about your comments.
  - Ask others to clarify before forming your opinion/comment.
• Participation points: (How student is graded on a daily basis)
  • You may be called on in some capacity in order to gain some points even if you aren’t raising your hand or volunteering to speak. (i.e. - showing your graph to class...)
  • There will be four verbal dialogue questions. Teacher will clearly identify each of these particular questions for students.
  • Each time you participate in these dialogue questions appropriately by reinforcing the above and by staying on task/on subject, you receive a check mark.
  • Four to six dialogue check marks equals 1% added to your quarter grade.

• Journal entries instructions:
  • Look at your journal to see what is expected of you. You will be directed to answer certain questions during certain times throughout this unit. Do not write in your journal otherwise.
  • Completed mini-journal is worth another 1% added to your quarter grade.

Day One - (continued):

2) First journal entries:
  • Ask students to write their first two responses in their mini-journal.
    Question one: What **effect** do you feel **music lyrics have on society**?
    Question two: What **effect** do you feel **society has on music lyrics**?
  Allow students approximately 10 - 15 minutes to complete this task.

3) Class discussion on journal entries.

4) Class discussion on the following two questions:
  • Question: What does the term “explicit” mean?
  • Question: What does the term “lyrics” mean?
  • Have students talk about how they feel the above two words “go together” in regard to music.

Day Two:

1) Introduce the Parent’s Music Resource Center (PMRC), the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) and Parental Advisory Labels on music and briefly talk about Record Companies and their roles as “decision makers” when it comes to putting the “Parental Advisory” labels on the music.
  • The Parent’s Music Resource Center, which started in 1990, is a group that is led by Tipper Gore and Susan Baker. This group introduced a music
labeling system. The PMRC’s stance is that all recordings whose themes relate to sex, violence, drugs, alcohol, suicide or the occult should receive warning labels. The Recording Industry Association of America is to provide all the individual record companies with any standards, criteria or guidelines for determining what recordings should be labeled with the stickers that read “Parental Advisory - Explicit Lyrics”. The decision of which music should be labeled is left up to the record companies at their discretion.

• The RIAA’s stance since 1985 is that they agreed to label sound recordings containing strong language, violence, sex or substance abuse. In 1990, the RIAA enhanced the Parental Advisory Label creating a more standard, uniform design. In 1995, the RIAA stepped up its plans to enhance the industry’s voluntary Parental Advisory Program in order to help consumers identify sound recordings with explicit lyrics.

Day Two (continued):

2) Introduce the Ladder of Inference (see attached visual):

• At this point in the curriculum, either the System’s mentors or teacher introduces the Ladder of Inference to the students which gives them one of the resources necessary to dialogue.

Ladder of Inference example:

Perceivable “Data” and Experiences:

• There are all kinds of possible factors that affect teenage violence.

I select “Data” from what I perceive:

• The PMRC selected data which showed that violence among young people has risen since explicit lyrics have been more prominent in music.

I add meanings (cultural and personal):

• More music with explicit content is being composed, sales of music with explicit content has risen, and there is more violence among young people.

I make assumptions based on the meanings I added:

• The assumption being made by the PMRC could be that because there is more music with explicit content being sold, it is being sold to mostly young people which is creating more violence among young people.
I draw conclusions:

- The PMRC felt that by record companies utilizing a labeling system for music with explicit content, the sale of music with explicit content would decrease.

Day Two - Ladder of Inference (continued):

I develop beliefs about the world:

- The PMRC felt that violence amongst young people would decrease if the young people weren’t allowed to purchase and/or listen to the music with explicit content which had Parental Advisory Labels.

I take actions based on my beliefs:

- The PMRC is having the RIAA develop a “labeling system” by which the individual record companies are expected to put a Parental Advisory Label on any music with explicit content.

Day Three:

1) Students are asked the first two dialogue questions:

   Question 1: How do you listen to music that has lyrics? Do you listen to the words, the beat, the rhythm, who the artist is, instrumentation or a combination of these things? In addition, do you think there is a connection between/among these elements of music?

   Question 2: Do you think there is a connection between current events and music lyrics? If so, what connection(s)? If not, why not?

2) Have students create BOTG’s on back of their mini-journal paper.

- One graph begins with the year most of these students started purchasing music on their own and goes to the current year. Students graph the low, medium and high levels of violence among young people during those years.
- Another BOTG utilizes the same years, and students graph the sales of music with explicit content.
- An optional use for BOTG’s would be to have the students graph the approximate percentage of parents and guardians over time from the 1950’s to the 1990’s who listened to the music their children listened to. Also, they could graph the approximate percentage of music from this same time period which was written with explicit lyrics. Finally, they could graph the approximate percentage of violence among young people from the same time period.
Day Four:

1) Briefly recap previous questions.

2) Introduce third dialogue question.

Question 3: Where do you think the line should be drawn as to what age person should be free to hear explicit lyrics in music? When and how should a personal moral issue become a legal issue with respect to music lyrics?

Example question to help students: If you were on the committee of either the PMRC or the RIAA, what would be your deciding factor(s) for your answer to question #3?

3) At this point in the curriculum, we bring up the perspective of different age generations (young children and “grandparent” age adults), and how different students feel about listening to music with explicit content when in the same room as younger or older people. What are the various factors that the students see which enter into their perspectives?

Day Five:

1) Introduce last dialogue question:

Question 4: What options do you have as the consumer of cd’s, cassettes, albums and concert tickets when deciding what music to support? How do you decide what music/which artist to support?

2) Have students complete their final entries in their mini-journal.

• What will you consider when listening to music with explicit content when listening:

  1) Alone?
  2) With peers?
  3) With younger or older people?

• What is your opinion about explicit content in music?
• Did your opinion change throughout this dialogue session?
• If it did change, why?
• If it did not change, why?
• Allow time for students to write down any further comments they have in their mini-journal. (#5 on mini-journal)
Debrief/Closure:

1) Through a class discussion, debrief the following concepts:

- Patterns and trends: Students reflect on the effect that music, society, history and current events have on each other by considering the patterns and trends expressed in their BOTG’s.

- Interdependencies: We look at how the music composed with explicit content is still increasing, as well as the sale of the music. Labeling recorded music with Parental Advisory Labels doesn’t seem to slow down the sales, but on the contrary it appears to increase the sale of music with explicit content. Students discuss the connection between the BOTG of music sales and the BOTG of music with explicit lyrics.

- Structure generates behavior and Trade-offs: Students talk about personal moral issues becoming legal issues with respect to music lyrics. How do you separate the two? How do they feel about the future of music lyrics regarding these trade-offs? (i.e., possibly when they have children or grandchildren...) They also talk about how the consumer plays the largest role in supporting or not supporting music with explicit content.

Assessment:

Assessment was completed on a daily basis by monitoring student dialogue and by students completing and handing in their mini-journals, which included their behavior-over-time graphs.

Sources:

- Parents Music Resource Center:
- Record Industry Association of America (RIAA): www.riaa.com
- Record Companies: (various companies)
- Billboard Magazine (monthly)
- Billboard Web Site: http://www.billboard.com

Extension(s):

- History of Rock and Roll dating back to the Civil War Field Hollers.
- Brief dialogue on other music styles which contain what the PMRC and RIAA consider to be “explicit lyrics.” (i.e. some country music and opera)
- The “Rolling Stone’s 20th Anniversary of Rock and Roll” video. (edited)
Ladder of Inference
Adapted from
The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook

I take ACTIONS based on my beliefs

I develop BELIEFS about the world

I draw CONCLUSIONS

I make ASSUMPTIONS based on the meanings I added

I add MEANINGS (cultural & personal)

I select "DATA" from what I perceive

Perceivable "Data" & Experiences

The Reflexive Loop
(our beliefs affect what data we select next time)
Please answer questions only when instructed. Different questions will be assigned on different days of this unit. Please do not draw or write on the back until instructed.

1. What effect do you feel music lyrics have on society?

2. What effect do you feel society has on music lyrics?

3. What will you consider when listening to music that has lyrics, when listening:
   ALONE:
   WITH PEERS:
   WITH YOUNGER OR OLDER PEOPLE:

4. A) What is your opinion about explicit lyrics or content in music?
   B) Did your opinion change through this dialogue session? ______________
   C) If it did change--Why?
   D) If it did not change--Why?

5. If you have any other comments or questions you did not get to express, please feel free to write them below.