

Sounds Fair

The Music of the 1962 Seattle World's Fair



In what ways can we use music to better understand an historical era and examine perspectives from that era?

UNIT-AT-A-GLANCE

Music and entertainment were centerpieces of the World's Fair. Every week of the fair's six-month run featured major musical performances. From the glamour of Elvis filming *It Happened At the World's Fair* to the hidden moments when jazz greats jammed in Seattle clubs after hours, the fair would forever change music in the Northwest. Track the musical moments during the fair as well as the establishment of major venues and new scenes. Students will use music and popular culture to navigate across time, space, and cultural perspectives.

Primary Objective: Use music to navigate across time, space, and cultural perspectives.

Time Management:

Lesson 1: Students reflect on their own musical experiences and consider how music is used today. They hypothesize about musical styles and performance at the fair.

Lesson 2: Music as primary source: Students listen to recordings of fair theme songs and music by artists who performed at the World's Fair, documenting musical and lyrical elements.

Lesson 3: Students explore the international roster of performers at the fair and build geography skills by mapping them.

Lesson 4: Students analyze theme songs as marketing tools and pen their own songs.

Optional Activities: Additional lessons are available that challenge students to use music to document historical milestones. Other activities ask students to examine the social, generational, and ethnic tensions that underlie musical trends and ask students to write and perform original creative work to demonstrate understanding of fair content.

- Timeline
- Playlists
- The Producer's Puzzle
- Everyone's A Critic!
- Sonic Youth
- Dance Craze!

Grade/Subject Recommended: Modifiable elements for grades 4–12

Content and Performance Objectives

Content Objectives: Students will...

- analyze diverse musical genres.
- connect music to geographical locations and historical moments.
- examine the role of music as a promotional tool.
- examine the role of music as an indicator of social tension and change.
- compare and contrast elements of popular culture.

Performance Objectives: Students will...

- reflect on the role of music in students' own lives.
- strengthen listening skills with attention to vocal and instrumental settings.
- identify international performers at the fair and locate their countries of origin using a world map.
- examine the role of music in marketing and script their own promotional songs.
- optional activities challenge students to use music to contextualize the fair within a broader timeline, compare and contrast youth culture yesterday and today, and conceptualize large public events.

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Overview



The 1962 World's Fair introduced Seattle to an international line-up of the most popular musicians of the time. From major headliners to countless community and school bands, from rock and jazz to country and classical, music filled the arenas and pavilions and delighted fairgoers of all ages. From Chubby Checker to Igor Stravinsky, Benny Goodman and Nat “King” Cole, a number of headliners played the fair or other Seattle venues during the six-month run. Although he did not play the fair, Elvis made an extended appearance to film *It Happened at the World Fair*, upsetting attendance at high schools around the city during the early September shoot. Additionally, a broad roster of international performers including the Ballet Folklórico de México, Circus Berlin, and the Bunraku Theater of Japan came through town. From kids' fare like Yogi Bear to very adult strip shows featuring the Galaxy Girls and Gracie Hansen's Paradise International, the fair courted age-based niche audiences. Despite these adult programs, it was actually the teen shows that caused the most stir.

In fact, the question of who got to perform at the fair—and which audiences were best received—stirred more than a bit of controversy. The tension reflected in the musical performances that took place at and around the fair mirrored the broader generational, cultural, and geographical changes that were happening in the country. In addition to the friction around musical genres like rock n' roll and soul was the question of creating balance between local acts and international acts, as well as professional and amateur performances. (To explore this topic further, see the activities *The Producer's Puzzle* and *Sonic Youth*.)

Out of the wide range of musical activities connected to the fair, Seattle would emerge a different city. With greater connection between local, national and international acts and the creation of more spaces for live music, the World's Fair would lay the groundwork for futures chapters in Seattle's distinct musical story. From the 1964 Beatles concert to the first live show attended by a young Kurt Cobain in the early 80s, to decades of festivals like Bumbershoot and Folklife, venues created for the fair continue to connect the region to broader musical trends and cultivate its nascent talents.

Key Terms

- **Controversy** – a scandal or heated disagreement
- **Cooperation** – working together
- **Diverse** – varied, different
- **Essential** – necessary, vital, indispensable
- **Generation** – a group of people born around the same time
- **Genre** – a style, type, class, or category of something
- **Headliner** – the main attraction or performer
- **Lyrics** – words set to music
- **Promotional** – something used to spread the word about an event or product
- **Psychedelic** – mind-altering, also referring to the late 1960s rock scene and the “hippie” era



Lesson 1: Music Today and Yesterday

Materials:

Worksheet to be printed or projected

Optional hook: Recording by any artist on World's Fair Music List

Music is more than entertainment. It can be the soundtrack to our lives by marking special events or connecting us with others who have similar tastes or experiences. Music can bring people together—and it can tear people apart. Just like we develop a connection to sports teams, regions or activities, we often bond over certain types of music. This can lead us to develop a special connection with some and highlight our differences with others.

Use the Activity I worksheet or project the following questions for students to discuss and respond to in writing:

Before exploring the music of the 1962 Seattle World's Fair, consider your own musical interests and experience:

- What are some of the musical genres (styles) that are popular today?
- Where and when is music part of your life? For example, do you listen in the morning, while doing homework, with friends or family?
- Where and when is music performed or played? What types of public events usually include music?
- When you've heard live music, where have you been and who have you been with?
- Are there certain types of music you listen to with one group and other types you listen to with another group? For example, do you enjoy one type of music with friends and another when you're with family or another group?

Next, imagine what type of music you may have encountered at the fair.

- Which, if any of today's musical genres do you think might have been part of the world's fair?
- What other types of music might have had a role at the fair?
- Given the time frame of 1962, venture a guess as to some possible performers that might have appeared at the fair.
- Aside from actual concerts, where else would music have appeared in fair activities?



Lesson 2: Can You Hear Me Now?

Materials:

Audio sample from fair listed below (If you don't want to purchase recordings, you can often find free streaming songs on [YouTube](#) or in the preview sections of [iTunes](#), [Amazon](#), etc.)

Activity II Worksheet or paper and pencil

In this activity, students will practice attentive listening and descriptive writing. At the same time, they'll get acquainted with some of the artists who performed at the fair. Part of the fun is to NOT give students the artist names, track titles, or recording dates. Keep it shrouded in mystery for now! Just play a minute or so from each.

Suggested Tracks to Choose From:

ARTIST	TRACK
Art Mineo	<i>Welcome To Tomorrow*</i>
The Lancers	<i>See You in Seattle (At the Big World's Fair)*</i>
Chubby Checker	<i>Let's Do the Twist!</i>
Igor Stravinsky	Any selection
Nat "King" Cole	Any selection
Elvis Presley	Any selection
John Raitt	<i>Surrey with the Fringe on Top</i>

* These tracks are only available in the online curriculum.

Questions to consider when listening to each track:

- How would you describe what you hear? Go beyond judgmental descriptors like "cool," "weird," "interesting" or "silly." Search out adjectives that describe the actual sounds and emotions conveyed. Use a thesaurus if necessary.
- If you can, identify specific instruments. What are they and how are they being played?
- Are there vocals? How are they sung? What is their message?



Lesson 4: Marketing the Fair with Music

Materials:

Recordings from the Fair
Pencil & Paper

Building on the skills from Lesson 1, listen to the following songs in their entirety. These songs were among the unofficial theme songs used to promote the fair.

Consider the lyrics:

How do the songs present the fair to would-be visitors?
What are some of the attractions the songs mention?
What themes do the songs reinforce?

Consider the music:

What types of instruments, sounds, or arrangements do the songwriters use to reinforce ideas like “the fair is fun” or “the fair is futuristic”?

Choose a public event in your community or in the country. Write promotional lyrics to encourage people to participate. Consider what musical style you would set the lyrics to. (Students can perform songs for each other.)



Additional Activities

Timeline (Grades 7–12)

Create a timeline of major performances and music festivals at Seattle Center. Use poster board, PowerPoint or www.Prezi.com to create a timeline of major concerts at the Seattle Center. Start with a few performers at the fair and then do web research to include other milestones like the Beatles first show in Seattle, Led Zeppelin in the 1970s, the start of festivals like Bumbershoot and Folklife, all the way up to performers from the past year like John Legend and Katie Perry. To add extra value to your timeline, refer to the timeline in Unit 1 so that you can also include milestones in U.S. history. How does the appearance of various groups overlap with broader social movements such as the Peace/Anti-War Movement or Women’s Rights? How do various concerts reflect broader musical trends like the British invasion, psychedelic rock, hip hop, and grunge?

Playlist (Grades 3–12)

Research and develop the “Essential” playlist to accompany the World’s Fair. What artists and genres will you include? Write producer’s notes to explain your choices.

Alternate: Develop an essential playlist for the history of the Seattle Center, based on a timeline like the one described above.

The Producer’s Puzzle (Grades 7–12)

One of the challenges for the event planners at the fair was to choose a wide representation of performers from different parts of the United States and the world. In addition, they had to consider many different genres of music and balance the need for international talent with the need to honor local performers. One of the great controversies of the 1962 World’s Fair entertainment line-up was how little opportunities there were for local musicians to work. In fact, outside of members of the musician’s union who made up the World’s Fair Band directed by Jackie Souder, there were few options for Seattle professional musicians within the fairgrounds.

- Read the HistoryLink articles, [Music at the Fair](#) and [Performing Arts at the Fair](#).

- Imagine you are the executive producer for a new world's fair in your area. What types of groups would you book? Why? What might happen if you just book what you like personally? How important would it be to balance local, national and international talent? Who are your audiences? (Consider youth, families, children, adults, ethnic communities, etc.) Create a fictional concert line-up featuring a wide array of today's performers. "Book" them in actual venues in your area and design promotional flyers, posters or social media posts that include original descriptive language and accurate photo/video/soundclips.



Everyone's A Critic! (Grades 9–12)

Some of the work of the media was to communicate who was going to perform and review concerts that took place. Now you get to be the Entertainment Editor and the Music Critic. Working from the actual 1962 line-up or from a hypothetical line-up (see previous activity):

- Write three short performance descriptions (like you might see in a weekly like *The Stranger* in Seattle)
- Design a newspaper ad for one of the headliners. Develop images and copy.
- Find concert reviews from your local paper and write a review of a major concert that took place at the World's Fair. Which group will you review? Research the group's history and music to develop a compelling review. Make sure to consider your point of view. Are you someone who approves of the new music of youth? What styles are you addressing and how do they tie to the broader social trends of the times?

Sonic Youth (Grades 9–12)

This activity explores how social tension between generations often shows up through music and pop culture. Specifically, students will look at changing views of rock in 1962 and make comparisons to today.

In many ways, music at the 1962 World's Fair exemplified the touch-and-go relationship between teens and adults.

On the one hand, fair organizers integrated music and events that drove teen participation. The carnival-style rides and attractions of the Gayway, along with the forward-looking exhibits of future technology naturally resonated with youthful audiences. Events like the Twist Parties featuring Chubby Checker helped build teen participation, not to mention the visit by Elvis to film *It Happened at the World's Fair*.

On the other hand, the fair had a rocky relationship with teen culture. The Performing Arts division did not book many rock or R&B performers, leaving much of that work to outside producers. In fact, it was another division that eventually set up Saturday night dances featuring local rock acts. Even when those were in place, some controversy continued around

questions of security and what constituted a “high tone” event and audience. Rock and R&B at the World’s Fair echoed the underlying generational, sexual and racial questions that these types of music spurred around the country. Even as some artists like Elvis—who only five years earlier was considered obscene and scandalous among adults—were beginning to crossover took a central role at the fair—other acts and scenes were discouraged.

- Read the HistoryLink articles, [Century 21 Exposition debuts Saturday night dances on July 28, 1962](#) and [Century 21 World's Fair opening twist party event is held on April 20, 1962](#).
- Consider the following questions:
 - What are some examples of events where teen culture was a welcome part of the 1962 World’s Fair?
 - What are some examples of tensions between fair organizers and the youthful scenes of rock and R&B?
 - Identify some historical markers related to music history in the U.S. Where does the World’s Fair fall among things like the advent of Rock ‘n Roll, the British Invasion, the Psychedelic Rock era—to mention the emergence of Black artists and the Civil Rights era?
 - One of the big dance crazes at the time of the fair was the Twist. Research some of the other dance crazes of popular music since then. What are some dances that are in today?
 - Elvis exemplifies an artist who crossed over from scandal to center stage. A modern equivalent might be Ice Cube, who started as a gangsta rapper and now makes formulaic family comedies. Can you think of any other artists from today whose careers started amidst controversy but who are now widely accepted by youth and adults alike?
 - Rock and R&B have historically played a role in cultural debates about topics ranging from sexuality to race relations. Other youth genres, including ska, reggae, hip-hop and alternative have also had associations with social change. How does today’s pop music spur debate about what is acceptable or not? Are there particular genres that are especially attuned to social debates?



Dance Craze! (Grades 4–12)

For physical learners! What are some of the dance trends of the past 50 years? In small groups, students can demonstrate various dance trends from the Twist to the Mashed Potato, the Monster Mash, disco, breakdance, krump, step, cha cha chá, mambo, salsa, ballroom resurgence, etc. In addition to sharing the moves and the accompanying music, students can talk about what was happening at that time in terms of broader historical events and milestones. The more timid may choose to compile video clips of the dances rather than busting a move.