

# American Music History & Listening

Teacher Edition

---

*A complete year-long course with daily lessons,  
student prompts, projects, and grading guidance*

Created by Justin Berchtold

Version 1.0 | 2026

A **Virtunity** Resource | [virtunity.io](https://virtunity.io)

© 2026 Justin Berchtold. All rights reserved.

This curriculum may be used and shared by educators for instructional purposes.

Please do not sell or redistribute modified versions without permission.

---

---

# Table of Contents

---

Course Snapshot .....	3
Course Overview & Design Principles .....	4
How to Use This Document .....	4
<b>Unit 1 — How We Listen</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Unit 2 — Foundations</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Unit 3 — 19th Century Roots</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Unit 4 — 1900–1930</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Unit 5 — 1930–1950</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>Unit 6 — 1950–1969</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>Unit 7 — 1970–1989</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>Unit 8 — 1990–Today</b> .....	<b>41</b>
Exercises & Assignments Reference .....	47
Listening Literacy Progression .....	64
Suggested Listening Excerpts .....	64
A Note for Teachers .....	65

# Course Snapshot

---

<b>Course Title</b>	American Music History & Listening
<b>Grade Level</b>	9–12
<b>Length</b>	Full Year (8 units, ~4 weeks each)
<b>Prerequisite</b>	None

## Course Focus

Students learn how to listen to American music using evidence from the sound itself rather than relying on taste or memorized historical facts. The course builds listening skills through a four-level framework—Describe, Analyze, Contextualize, and Evaluate—phased in gradually across eight units.

## Core Skills

- Describe musical features using specific vocabulary
- Analyze how musical elements affect meaning and impact
- Connect music to its historical and cultural context
- Evaluate music using clear, evidence-based criteria

## Major Projects

1. Listening Methods Check
2. Roots Map Exhibit
3. Seminar + Evidence Response
4. 1920s Radio Show Script
5. Industry vs. Innovation Debate
6. Curated Playlist + Liner Notes
7. Genre Jigsaw Exhibit
8. Portfolio + Capstone

## Materials Needed

- Audio playback (speakers or headphones)
- Paper or digital response sheets
- Optional: presentation slides

# Course Overview & Design Principles

---

This course teaches students how to listen to American music on purpose. It is not a survey of music history organized by dates; it is a listening skills course that uses history as the material. Every unit builds on the one before it, and the progression is designed so that any teacher can actually run it.

## The Listening Literacy Progression

The course uses a four-level framework that phases in skills gradually: **Describe, Analyze, Contextualize, and Evaluate** (D-A-C-E), with Interpret woven throughout. Units 1–2 focus on Describe, Analyze, and Interpret. Units 3–5 add Context. Units 6–8 add Evaluation and Cross-Era Comparison. Assessment phasing matters: Context is not scored until Unit 3. Evaluation is not scored until Unit 6.

## A Sane Whole-Year Routine

- Use 30–60 second clips, played twice.
- Keep most written work to 4–6 sentences.
- Full-score one short response most weeks, plus the project and one unit listening check.
- Paper copies work fine. Slides help, but they are not required.

## What Each Unit Contains

1. Unit Overview with theme, historical focus, skills emphasized, and big question
2. Core Listening Excerpts with “Why it works” and “Listen for” notes
3. Week-by-Week Lesson Plan (4 weeks per unit)
4. Daily Lesson Examples with step-by-step procedures
5. Student Listening Prompts
6. Unit Project with student directions, teacher setup, timeline, and grading guidance
7. Sample Student Response
8. Simple Grading Guidance across four dimensions
9. Teacher Tips

## How to Use This Document

Part 1 (Units 1–8) contains the complete course: overviews, listening excerpts, lesson plans, daily lessons, student prompts, projects, sample responses, grading guidance, and teacher tips. Part 2 (Exercises & Assignments) provides an expanded reference for each unit project with additional student directions, example prompts, and grading detail. Use the Teacher Project Packet (separate PDF) for ready-to-copy handouts and scoring forms.

**UNIT 1**

# How We Listen

## Unit Overview

<b>Unit theme</b>	Learning how to hear music on purpose instead of reacting only by taste.
<b>Historical focus</b>	Broad sampling across eras and styles.
<b>Listening skills emphasized</b>	Describe, Analyze, Interpret.
<b>Big question</b>	How do I move from “I like it” to “I can explain what it’s doing”?
<b>Major project</b>	Listening Methods Check.

## Core Listening Excerpts

1. John Philip Sousa — “The Stars and Stripes Forever” (1896).

**Why it works:** clear march pulse, bright brass color, obvious form.

**Listen for:** tempo, march beat, brass vs percussion, repeated themes.

2. Bessie Smith — “St. Louis Blues” (1925).

**Why it works:** students can hear strong vocal tone and blues phrasing right away.

**Listen for:** vocal timbre, call-and-response feel, slower groove, expressive delivery.

3. Duke Ellington — “Take the ‘A’ Train” (1941).

**Why it works:** easy entry into swing feel and big-band texture.

**Listen for:** swing rhythm, brass/reed contrast, ensemble hits, melody return.

4. The Supremes — “You Can’t Hurry Love” (1966).

**Why it works:** clear pop form, layered vocals, strong hook.

**Listen for:** backbeat, verse/chorus, vocal layering, repetition.

5. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five — “The Message” (1982).

**Why it works:** students hear rhythm, groove, and spoken delivery clearly.

**Listen for:** beat loop, vocal flow, repeated hook, mood created by production.

6. Billie Eilish — “bad guy” (2019).

**Why it works:** sparse modern production is easy to analyze.

**Listen for:** bass line, space, vocal style, contrast between sections.

---

## Week-by-Week Lesson Plan

### Week 1

**Anchor listening activity:** March vs blues comparison.

**Discussion activity:** “What is a fact about the sound, and what is just an opinion?”

**Short listening response:** 4 sentences on one excerpt using two sound details.

**Project/context:** Start a one-page listening toolbox with class vocabulary.

### Week 2

**Anchor listening activity:** Pop hook comparison using two short clips.

**Discussion activity:** Taste vs criteria mini-lesson.

**Short listening response:** Rewrite opinion words as listening words.

**Project/context:** Practice short response format for the Listening Methods Check.

### Week 3

**Anchor listening activity:** Timbre and texture lab with live vs studio or full band vs solo.

**Discussion activity:** How does instrumentation change mood?

**Short listening response:** 5 sentences on one excerpt’s timbre, texture, and meaning.

**Project/context:** Teacher models a strong response on paper.

### Week 4

**Anchor listening activity:** Version comparison of one song in two different performances.

**Discussion activity:** What stayed the same? What changed?

**Short listening response:** One short compare/contrast paragraph.

**Project/context:** Listening Methods Check + brief self-reflection.

---

## Daily Lesson Examples

### Daily Lesson 1: From Opinion to Observation

**Objective:** Students will name at least two musical features and explain how they affect the mood.

**Listening excerpt:** Sousa, “The Stars and Stripes Forever” and Bessie Smith, “St. Louis Blues.”

#### Step-by-step

1. Bellringer: Write two words you might use to judge music, like “good” or “boring.”
2. Teacher says: “Today we’re replacing opinion words with sound words.”
3. Play the Sousa clip twice. Students jot down three things they hear.
4. Play the Bessie Smith clip twice. Students jot down three things they hear.
5. On the board, sort student answers into categories: tempo, instrumentation, dynamics, texture, voice.
6. In pairs, students complete this sentence: “This music sounds \_\_\_ because I hear \_\_\_ and \_\_\_.”
7. Whole-class share-out.
8. Students write a 4-sentence response on one excerpt.

#### Discussion prompts

- What do you hear that anyone else in the room could also hear?
- Which excerpt sounds more public? Which sounds more personal?
- What musical details led you to that idea?

Exit ticket

Write one interpretation sentence: “This music seems to communicate \_\_\_ because \_\_\_.”

### Daily Lesson 2: Taste vs Criteria

**Objective:** Students will separate personal taste from evidence-based listening.

**Listening excerpt:** The Supremes, “You Can’t Hurry Love” and Billie Eilish, “bad guy.”

#### Step-by-step

1. Quick poll: Which clip do you prefer? No explanation yet.
2. Play both clips once. Students vote.
3. Teacher explains the difference between preference and criteria.
4. Play both clips again. Students fill out a T-chart: what I prefer / what I can prove from the sound.
5. Model one sentence: “Even though I don’t prefer \_\_\_, it is effective because \_\_\_.”
6. Students write a short paragraph using two musical details.
7. Pair-share and revise one sentence.

### Discussion prompts

- What did you notice when you had to explain your choice?
- Can a song be effective even if it is not your favorite?
- What musical detail matters most in your judgment?

Exit ticket

Finish this sentence: "Taste is personal, but criteria means I can point to \_\_\_\_."

\_\_\_\_\_

### Student Listening Prompts

- Describe two musical features you hear.
- Which sound grabs your attention first?
- How do tempo or rhythm shape the energy?
- What does the voice or instrument tone add to the meaning?
- What seems to be the mood or purpose of this music?
- Which detail best supports your interpretation?
- Compare two versions: what stayed the same and what changed?

### Sample Student Response

*The song has a steady beat, layered vocals, and a chorus that comes back in a really clear way. That makes it feel catchy and easy to remember. The sound seems built for a wide audience because the melody is simple and the rhythm stays steady. It sounds upbeat, but it also sounds controlled because the singers stay locked together. The music seems to communicate confidence and energy because the hook repeats and the beat keeps moving forward.*

### Simple Grading Guidance

Listening accuracy

**Strong:** Names real musical features correctly.

**Partial:** Uses vague words or mislabels what is heard.

Evidence use

**Strong:** Uses two clear sound details.

**Partial:** Gives one thin detail or a general impression.

Interpretation

**Strong:** Says what the music seems to communicate and backs it up.

**Partial:** Makes a guess that does not connect to the sound.

### Context/Evaluation

Not required in this unit.

## Teacher Tips

1. Model weak answers on purpose. Students learn fast when they see what does not count as evidence.
2. Grade the paragraph, not every scrap of notes.
3. Keep a class word bank on the board all month.

## Unit Project – Listening Methods Check

### Student directions

You will listen to 2 short excerpts in class. For each one, write:

1. Two things you hear
2. One sentence about how those details affect the mood, energy, or meaning
3. One interpretation sentence: “This music seems to communicate \_\_\_ because \_\_\_.”

Then choose one of the excerpts and turn your notes into a short response of 5–6 sentences.

### Teacher setup

Use two contrasting clips the class has already worked with. Good pairings:

- Sousa and Bessie Smith
- Supremes and Billie Eilish
- Ellington and Grandmaster Flash

Print a one-page response sheet. This project fits in one class period.

### Suggested timeline

- Day 1: Review the response format
- Day 2: Listening Methods Check

### Simple grading approach

Strong work names real sound details, uses them as evidence, and makes a believable interpretation.

Partial work stays vague, leans on taste words, or makes a claim with no sound evidence.

## UNIT 2

# Foundations

## Unit Overview

<b>Unit theme</b>	Early musical roots that keep showing up later in American music.
<b>Historical focus</b>	Community songs, sacred music, work songs, spirituals, and folk roots.
<b>Listening skills emphasized</b>	Describe, Analyze, Interpret.
<b>Big question</b>	Which early sound habits keep returning in American music?
<b>Major project</b>	Roots Map Exhibit.

## Core Listening Excerpts

1. Teacher-selected tribally specific social song (traditional; recording year varies).

**Why it works:** centers community function and respectful listening.

**Listen for:** pulse, repetition, group participation, leader/group relationship.

2. Traditional / The Sacred Harp Singers — “Idumea” (1825 hymn; use a clear modern recording).

**Why it works:** students can hear shape-note texture right away.

**Listen for:** open harmony, loud group sound, phrase shape, raw blend.

3. Traditional / Jean Ritchie — “Barbara Allen” (traditional ballad; 1952 recording).

**Why it works:** simple, story-based folk singing.

**Listen for:** strophic form, plain vocal tone, repeated melody.

4. Traditional / Lead Belly — “Take This Hammer” (1940).

**Why it works:** strong example of work-song rhythm and function.

**Listen for:** steady pulse, repeated line, group response feel.

5. Traditional spiritual / Paul Robeson — “Go Down Moses” (1958 recording).

**Why it works:** clear text delivery and expressive vocal color.

**Listen for:** pacing, vocal timbre, weight of the melody, text emphasis.

6. Traditional son jarocho / Ritchie Valens — “La Bamba” (1958).

**Why it works:** shows a folk tradition carried into popular listening culture.

**Listen for:** dance rhythm, strummed pattern, repeated chorus, vocal energy.

---

## Week-by-Week Lesson Plan

### Week 1

**Anchor listening activity:** Tribally specific community song with “study, don’t imitate” norms.

**Discussion activity:** What tells you this music belongs to a group setting?

**Short listening response:** 4 sentences on pulse, participation, and function.

**Project/context:** Start Roots Map with first branch.

### Week 2

**Anchor listening activity:** Shape-note hymn vs ballad.

**Discussion activity:** How do communities sing differently?

**Short listening response:** Compare texture and vocal style.

**Project/context:** Add two more branches to the Roots Map.

### Week 3

**Anchor listening activity:** Work song and spiritual pair.

**Discussion activity:** What jobs can music do besides entertainment?

**Short listening response:** Explain how repetition helps the music function.

**Project/context:** Groups plan exhibit connections.

### Week 4

**Anchor listening activity:** Review all six excerpts in short clips.

**Discussion activity:** Which traits show up in more than one tradition?

**Short listening response:** One short paragraph on a shared trait.

**Project/context:** Roots Map Exhibit + gallery walk.

---

## Daily Lesson Examples

### Daily Lesson 1: Study, Don't Imitate

**Objective:** Students will describe a community song respectfully and explain one possible function.

**Listening excerpt:** Teacher-selected tribally specific social song.

#### Step-by-step

1. Put this norm on the board: "We study this music. We do not imitate voices, language, or ceremony."
2. Give students a simple organizer with three boxes: what repeats / who leads / what the group does.
3. Play the clip twice. Students write only what they hear.
4. Teacher gives a short context card: community use, not sacred/private material, why this recording is being studied.
5. Play the clip again. Students add one interpretation sentence.
6. Pair-share using this frame: "I hear \_\_\_\_, which suggests \_\_\_\_."
7. Whole-class debrief.

#### Discussion prompts

- What repeats?
- How do you know this is group-centered music?
- What seems to be the function of this song?

Exit ticket

Write one sentence about the music's function using one sound detail.

### Daily Lesson 2: Repetition and Function

**Objective:** Students will compare how repetition works in a work song and a spiritual.

**Listening excerpt:** Lead Belly, "Take This Hammer" and Paul Robeson, "Go Down Moses."

#### Step-by-step

1. Bellringer: "What kinds of work become easier with rhythm?"
2. Play "Take This Hammer" twice. Students list two repeated features.
3. Play "Go Down Moses" twice. Students list two repeated features.
4. On the board, make two columns: physical coordination / emotional or communal meaning.
5. Students sort their evidence into one column or both.
6. Partners write one compare sentence and one interpretation sentence.
7. Share a few aloud.

### Discussion prompts

- How does repetition help each song?
- Which song feels more collective? Why?
- Which song feels more reflective? Why?

Exit ticket

Finish: “Repetition matters here because \_\_\_\_.”

---

### Student Listening Prompts

- What musical feature repeats the most?
- Does this sound more communal or more personal? Why?
- How does the group sound differ from a solo sound?
- What job does this music seem built to do?
- What kind of setting fits this music best?
- Which two excerpts share the clearest musical trait?
- What changed when a folk tradition moved into a recorded popular style?

### Sample Student Response

*We connected the work song and the spiritual because both use repetition to hold people together. In the work song, the repeated line helps the rhythm stay steady. In the spiritual, repetition helps the message feel stronger and easier for a group to remember. They sound different, but both use repetition to build participation.*

### Simple Grading Guidance

Listening accuracy

**Strong:** Accurate details about pulse, texture, vocal style, and repetition.

**Partial:** General words like “old” or “slow” without real listening.

Evidence use

**Strong:** Uses at least two audible features.

**Partial:** Gives only one weak example.

Interpretation

**Strong:** Explains what the music seems built to do.

**Partial:** Makes a claim without linking it to sound.

## Context/Evaluation

Not required in this unit.

## Teacher Tips

1. Keep research light. This unit should stay sound-first.
2. For Indigenous music, use tribally specific sources and avoid sacred/private material.
3. Let groups present from posters if tech is limited.

## Unit Project – Roots Map Exhibit

### Student directions

In a group of 3 or 4, listen to 3 traditions from this unit and create a one-page or one-poster Roots Map.

Your map must include:

1. The name of each tradition or excerpt
2. Two sound details for each one
3. One short interpretation of what the music seems designed to do
4. Two arrows or connections showing a shared trait between traditions

Be ready to give a 1-minute explanation during the gallery walk.

### Teacher setup

Give each group:

- three assigned excerpts
- one simple handout with vocabulary
- one poster paper or one shared slide

Keep the focus on listening, not research. This project takes 2 class periods.

### Suggested timeline

- Day 1: Listen, sort evidence, plan connections
- Day 2: Build map and gallery walk

### Simple grading approach

Strong work shows real listening and clear connections between traditions.

Partial work mostly labels traditions without describing the sound.

## UNIT 3

# 19th Century Roots

## Unit Overview

<b>Unit theme</b>	Music in faith, home, public life, and popular entertainment.
<b>Historical focus</b>	Spirituals, gospel continuation, ballads, parlor song, public band music, and the context around
<b>Listening skills emphasized</b>	Describe, Analyze, Interpret, Contextualize.
<b>Big question</b>	How did 19th-century settings shape what music sounded like?
<b>Major project</b>	Seminar + Evidence Response.

## Core Listening Excerpts

1. Traditional spiritual / Fisk Jubilee Singers — “Steal Away” (traditional; use a clear recording).

**Why it works:** useful for group blend, phrasing, and spiritual style.

**Listen for:** blend, text shaping, pacing, emotional weight.

2. Mahalia Jackson — “Move On Up a Little Higher” (1947).

**Why it works:** a clear link from spiritual roots into gospel power.

**Listen for:** repetition, improvisatory energy, vocal intensity.

3. The Carter Family — “Wildwood Flower” (1928).

**Why it works:** accessible example of folk-ballad continuation.

**Listen for:** plain melody, simple accompaniment, story flow.

4. Stephen Foster / clear classroom recording — “Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair” (1854 song).

**Why it works:** easy example of parlor-song style.

**Listen for:** regular phrasing, sentimental melody, home-music feel.

5. Stephen Foster / instrumental or neutral classroom recording — “Oh! Susanna” (1848 song).

**Why it works:** helps teachers discuss popular song plus the need for context.

**Listen for:** catchy refrain, simple repeated form. Teach with artifact context and alternate pathway as needed.

6. John Philip Sousa — “The Stars and Stripes Forever” (1896).

**Why it works:** strong example of public band music.

**Listen for:** march beat, brass color, clear sections, crowd function.

---

## Week-by-Week Lesson Plan

### Week 1

**Anchor listening activity:** Spiritual to gospel comparison.

**Discussion activity:** How does setting shape vocal style?

**Short listening response:** One paragraph using two sound details and one context link.

**Project/context:** Seminar claim prep begins.

### Week 2

**Anchor listening activity:** Ballad and parlor song comparison.

**Discussion activity:** Home music-making vs community singing.

**Short listening response:** Explain how the setting shaped the sound.

**Project/context:** Add one source card to seminar prep.

### Week 3

**Anchor listening activity:** Popular song and minstrelsy artifact lesson with alternate pathway available.

**Discussion activity:** Why is sound alone not enough here?

**Short listening response:** 4-box reflection on sound, setting, profit, impact.

**Project/context:** Seminar prep sheet due.

### Week 4

**Anchor listening activity:** Sousa and public music.

**Discussion activity:** What does public music need to do well?

**Short listening response:** One paragraph connecting sound to function.

**Project/context:** Seminar + Evidence Response.

---

## Daily Lesson Examples

### Daily Lesson 1: From Spiritual to Gospel

**Objective:** Students will explain how performance setting helps shape vocal style.

**Listening excerpt:** “Steal Away” and Mahalia Jackson, “Move On Up a Little Higher.”

#### Step-by-step

1. Bellringer: “Where would you expect to hear each kind of singing?”
2. Play “Steal Away” twice. Students record three listening notes.
3. Show a simple class source: church photo, concert poster, or short quote.
4. Play Mahalia Jackson twice. Students record three listening notes.
5. Teacher models one context sentence: “Because this music is built for \_\_\_\_, it sounds \_\_\_\_.”
6. Partners write one compare sentence.
7. Students complete a 5–6 sentence response.

#### Discussion prompts

- Which performance sounds more restrained? Which sounds more expansive?
- What in the sound tells you something about the setting?
- How does repetition work differently in each piece?

Exit ticket

Write one sentence linking setting to vocal style.

### Daily Lesson 2: Teaching Popular Song with Context

**Objective:** Students will explain why context matters when studying 19th-century popular song.

**Listening excerpt:** Short neutral or instrumental clip of “Oh! Susanna” plus a class artifact.

#### Step-by-step

1. Give a brief content note and explain the alternate pathway.
2. Play a short instrumental or neutral classroom version. Students describe only the sound.
3. Show an artifact such as sheet music cover or performance image.
4. Students complete four quick notes: sound / setting / who profits / community impact.
5. Teacher gives a short explanation of how popular entertainment and caricature connected.
6. Students write one paragraph or choose the alternate comparison pathway if needed.
7. Close with a reminder: “Sound is part of the story. Context is part of the story.”

#### Discussion prompts

- What can we say from the sound alone?

- What changes once we add the artifact?
- Why is it important not to treat this like neutral entertainment?

Exit ticket

Complete: “This example shows that context matters because \_\_\_\_.”

\_\_\_\_\_

## Student Listening Prompts

- What in the sound suggests a church, home, or public setting?
- How does the voice shape meaning?
- What does repetition do in this excerpt?
- What class source helps explain why the music sounds like this?
- Who might this music have been for?
- What did the music need to do in that setting?
- Why is sound alone not enough for this example?

## Sample Student Response

*The Sousa march sounds built for public space because the beat is steady and the brass is loud and clear. That would work well for a parade or civic event where people need to follow the rhythm from a distance. The spiritual sounds more focused on group singing and shared feeling. The church source card helped because it showed that this music was tied to community worship, and that matches the way the voices blend and repeat the text.*

## Simple Grading Guidance

Listening accuracy

**Strong:** Names clear sound details.

**Partial:** Describes the piece in general terms only.

Evidence use

**Strong:** Uses sound details and at least one class source.

**Partial:** Uses only one kind of evidence.

Interpretation

**Strong:** Explains what the music seems to communicate or do.

**Partial:** Interpretation is present but unsupported.

Context/Evaluation

**Strong:** Makes one accurate context link from class material.

**Partial:** Drops in a fact without connecting it to sound.

Evaluation is not required yet.

## Teacher Tips

1. For the seminar, grade the prep sheet and paragraph. Do not try to score every spoken turn in detail.
2. Keep the minstrelsy lesson tight and structured. Artifact + context works better than performance imitation.
3. Use sentence starters for mixed-grade classes.

## Unit Project – Seminar + Evidence Response

Student directions

Question: How did where music happened shape what it sounded like in the 19th century?

Before the seminar, prepare:

1. One claim
2. Two listening details
3. One class source or artifact
4. One interpretation sentence

During the seminar, speak at least twice using evidence.

After the seminar, write one paragraph of 6–8 sentences answering the same question.

Teacher setup

Use two or three excerpts from the unit plus one source card per student or group:

- church photo
- parade poster
- song sheet
- concert ad
- quote from performer or listener

This works best over 2 days.

Suggested timeline

- Day 1: Build claims and evidence
- Day 2: Seminar and written response

Simple grading approach

Strong work uses sound plus one useful context point.

Partial work gives history facts but does not connect them back to the music.

## UNIT 4

# 1900–1930

## Unit Overview

<b>Unit theme</b>	City life, migration, recording, jazz, and radio.
<b>Historical focus</b>	Blues, ragtime, early jazz, Tin Pan Alley, and the rise of recorded popular music.
<b>Listening skills emphasized</b>	Describe, Analyze, Interpret, Contextualize.
<b>Big question</b>	How did migration, urban life, and new media change the sound of American music?
<b>Major project</b>	1920s Radio Show.

## Core Listening Excerpts

1. Scott Joplin — “Maple Leaf Rag” (1899; use a clear piano recording).

**Why it works:** easy entry into syncopation and form.

**Listen for:** steady left hand, syncopated right hand, section changes.

2. Mamie Smith — “Crazy Blues” (1920).

**Why it works:** early hit record and strong blues vocal delivery.

**Listen for:** vocal tone, blues phrasing, band support.

3. Bessie Smith — “St. Louis Blues” (1925).

**Why it works:** rich blues timbre and expressive shape.

**Listen for:** bend in the voice, groove, call-and-response feel.

4. King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band — “Dipper Mouth Blues” (1923).

**Why it works:** students can hear ensemble jazz texture clearly.

**Listen for:** collective improvisation, brass breaks, layered rhythm.

5. Louis Armstrong — “West End Blues” (1928).

**Why it works:** famous opening and strong solo voice in jazz.

**Listen for:** opening trumpet line, phrasing, contrast between solo and ensemble.

6. Duke Ellington — “East St. Louis Toodle-Oh” (1927).

**Why it works:** great example of timbre and arranged color.

**Listen for:** muted brass, ensemble color, mood created by tone.

7. Gene Austin — “My Blue Heaven” (1927).

**Why it works:** radio-friendly crooning and pop market sound.

**Listen for:** smooth voice, light accompaniment, easy-to-sing melody.

---

## Week-by-Week Lesson Plan

### Week 1

**Anchor listening activity:** Blues and migration map lesson.

**Discussion activity:** How does the city show up in the sound?

**Short listening response:** One paragraph using two sound details and one context link.

**Project/context:** Start radio show teams and assign possible tracks.

### Week 2

**Anchor listening activity:** Ragtime to jazz comparison.

**Discussion activity:** What changes when solo voices move to the front?

**Short listening response:** Compare syncopation in two excerpts.

**Project/context:** Groups choose 3 tracks for radio show.

### Week 3

**Anchor listening activity:** Jazz Age and crooner/radio comparison.

**Discussion activity:** What sounds “broadcast friendly”?

**Short listening response:** Explain how one excerpt fits its audience.

**Project/context:** Script writing day.

### Week 4

**Anchor listening activity:** Quick review clips.

**Discussion activity:** Which track best represents the 1920s?

**Short listening response:** One short recommendation paragraph.

**Project/context:** Radio show performance or recording + unit listening check.

---

## Daily Lesson Examples

### Daily Lesson 1: Blues and Migration

**Objective:** Students will connect sound to movement, city life, and new audiences.

**Listening excerpt:** Mamie Smith, “Crazy Blues” and Bessie Smith, “St. Louis Blues.”

#### Step-by-step

1. Bellringer: Students mark North and South on a simple migration map.
2. Play “Crazy Blues” twice. Students note three sound features.
3. Show a short class source: migration map, theater ad, or record ad.
4. Play “St. Louis Blues” twice. Students add three more sound features.
5. Teacher asks: What feels intimate? What feels public?
6. Students write a 5-sentence response linking one sound detail to one context detail.
7. Share two responses aloud.

#### Discussion prompts

- How does the vocal sound pull the listener in?
- What might make this kind of music work well on record?
- How does the source card help explain the style?

Exit ticket

Finish: “This music fit its time because \_\_\_\_.”

### Daily Lesson 2: From Ragtime to Jazz

**Objective:** Students will explain how ragtime and early jazz handle rhythm differently.

**Listening excerpt:** Scott Joplin, “Maple Leaf Rag” and Louis Armstrong, “West End Blues.”

#### Step-by-step

1. Clap the steady beat together before listening.
2. Play “Maple Leaf Rag.” Students underline where the right hand feels “off” from the beat.
3. Play “West End Blues.” Students mark where a solo voice stands out.
4. On the board, make two columns: written/structured and flexible/solo-centered.
5. Students sort evidence into the two columns.
6. Pairs write one compare sentence.

7. Whole-class debrief.

### Discussion prompts

- What stays steady in both examples?
- What becomes more flexible in jazz?
- Why might audiences find that exciting?

Exit ticket

Write one sentence comparing ragtime and early jazz.

---

### Student Listening Prompts

- What sound detail makes this feel urban, local, or intimate?
- Where do you hear syncopation or swing-like looseness?
- What does the soloist add that the group cannot?
- What class source helps explain why this music spread?
- How does the recording sound shape the listener's experience?
- What makes this track feel radio-friendly or dance-friendly?
- How is this excerpt different from the folk-root sounds from earlier units?

### Sample Student Response

*We picked "West End Blues" because the opening trumpet line grabs attention right away and sounds like a star stepping out in front. That fits the Jazz Age idea of solo identity and showmanship. We also used a club photo because this kind of playing feels built for a listening room where the audience notices individual skill. Compared with the smoother crooning track, this one sounds more unpredictable and alive.*

### Simple Grading Guidance

Listening accuracy

**Strong:** Students hear specific features like solo lines, ensemble color, syncopation, or vocal style.

**Partial:** Students stay on broad mood words only.

Evidence use

**Strong:** Uses sound plus one class source.

**Partial:** Uses one detail and does not build it out.

Interpretation

**Strong:** Makes a clear claim about meaning, mood, or function.

**Partial:** Claim is present but thin.

Context/Evaluation

**Strong:** Uses context to explain why the music sounds that way.

**Partial:** Mentions context without linking it back to sound.

Evaluation is still not required.

## Teacher Tips

1. Grade the script more than the performance. That keeps scoring fair and fast.
2. Keep source cards short. One image or quote is enough.
3. Do not let groups spend the whole period pretending to be radio actors.

## Unit Project – 1920s Radio Show

Student directions

In a group of 3 or 4, create a 3–4 minute radio show set in the 1920s.

Choose 3 excerpts from the unit. Your show must include:

1. A short opening
2. One sound detail for each excerpt
3. One interpretation for each excerpt
4. One context link for each excerpt
5. A short closing statement connecting the tracks

You may perform live or make a simple audio recording.

Teacher setup

Give groups a script frame:

- opening
- track 1
- track 2
- track 3
- closing

Provide excerpt list and one source card per track. This project fits in 3 class periods.

Suggested timeline

- Day 1: Pick tracks and outline
- Day 2: Write and rehearse

- Day 3: Perform or record

Simple grading approach

Strong work sounds like students actually listened. Each track should have a real sound detail and a useful context link.

Partial work turns into generic history talk with little attention to the music.

## UNIT 5

# 1930–1950

## Unit Overview

<b>Unit theme</b>	Big-band popularity, artist experimentation, wartime pop, and early R&B.
<b>Historical focus</b>	Swing, bebop, WWII-era pop, and jump blues/early R&B.
<b>Listening skills emphasized</b>	Describe, Analyze, Interpret, Contextualize.
<b>Big question</b>	What pushes music forward more: audience demand or artists taking risks?
<b>Major project</b>	Industry vs Innovation Debate.

## Core Listening Excerpts

1. Benny Goodman — “Sing, Sing, Sing” (1937).

**Why it works:** easy entry into big-band energy and drum-driven swing.

**Listen for:** riff repetition, brass hits, long build, dance feel.

2. Count Basie — “One O’Clock Jump” (1937).

**Why it works:** strong example of riff-based swing with space.

**Listen for:** groove, repeated figures, lighter ensemble feel.

3. Duke Ellington — “Take the ‘A’ Train” (1941).

**Why it works:** polished swing arrangement and urban imagery.

**Listen for:** clean sections, melodic hook, ensemble balance.

4. The Andrews Sisters — “Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy” (1941).

**Why it works:** catchy wartime pop with obvious audience appeal.

**Listen for:** tight vocal harmony, hook, bounce, memorable phrasing.

5. Billie Holiday — “God Bless the Child” (1941).

**Why it works:** intimate vocal interpretation and smaller-scale texture.

**Listen for:** phrasing, vocal color, lyric emphasis, intimacy.

6. Dizzy Gillespie — “A Night in Tunisia” (1946 recording).

**Why it works:** shows harmonic and rhythmic adventurousness.

**Listen for:** angular melody, fast lines, contrast with swing.

7. Charlie Parker — “Ko-Ko” (1945).

**Why it works:** students instantly hear that this is not dance-band music.

**Listen for:** speed, complexity, intense solo lines.

8. Louis Jordan — “Caldonia” (1945).

**Why it works:** bridge from jump blues into early R&B energy.

**Listen for:** humor, groove, strong backbeat feel, short repeated hooks.

---

## Week-by-Week Lesson Plan

### Week 1

**Anchor listening activity:** Swing groove lab with Goodman, Basie, and Ellington.

**Discussion activity:** What makes music feel built for dancing?

**Short listening response:** One paragraph on swing feel and audience.

**Project/context:** Debate teams assigned.

### Week 2

**Anchor listening activity:** Swing vs bebop comparison.

**Discussion activity:** What changed when listening became less dance-centered?

**Short listening response:** Explain one major sound change from swing to bebop.

**Project/context:** Teams gather two excerpts and one class source.

### Week 3

**Anchor listening activity:** Wartime pop and jump blues.

**Discussion activity:** How do market and audience shape the sound?

**Short listening response:** Choose one track and explain whether it sounds more audience-driven or innovation-driven.

**Project/context:** Debate prep and rebuttal practice.

#### Week 4

**Anchor listening activity:** Quick compare review across the unit.

**Discussion activity:** Which track best balances innovation and popularity?

**Short listening response:** Write a short verdict before the debate.

**Project/context:** Debate + unit listening check.

---

## Daily Lesson Examples

### Daily Lesson 1: What Makes Swing Swing?

**Objective:** Students will identify musical traits that make swing danceable and audience-friendly.

**Listening excerpt:** Benny Goodman, “Sing, Sing, Sing” and Count Basie, “One O’Clock Jump.”

#### Step-by-step

1. Bellringer: Students tap quarter notes while teacher counts aloud.
2. Play “Sing, Sing, Sing.” Students note what repeats.
3. Play “One O’Clock Jump.” Students note what feels lighter or looser.
4. Teacher introduces or reviews the word “riff.”
5. Students make a short T-chart: evidence that helps dancers / evidence that helps listeners notice the band.
6. Partners write one interpretation sentence.
7. Quick share.

#### Discussion prompts

- What keeps the groove steady?
- Where does the band build excitement?
- Which piece feels more polished? Which feels more open?

Exit ticket

Write one sentence explaining what makes swing feel like swing.

### Daily Lesson 2: Why Bebop Felt Different

**Objective:** Students will explain how bebop changed the listening experience.

**Listening excerpt:** Duke Ellington, “Take the ‘A’ Train” and Charlie Parker, “Ko-Ko.”

### Step-by-step

1. Bellringer: “Which is easier to dance to: something predictable or something surprising?”
2. Play Ellington. Students list three features.
3. Play Parker. Students list three features.
4. On the board, make two headings: audience comfort / musician challenge.
5. Students sort evidence under one or both headings.
6. Teacher adds a short source card about small clubs or after-hours jam sessions.
7. Students write a 5-sentence response on how the context shaped the sound.

### Discussion prompts

- Which piece feels more built for the broad public?
- What makes bebop sound harder to follow?
- Why might some musicians want that change?

Exit ticket

Finish: “Bebop sounds different because \_\_\_\_.”

\_\_\_\_\_

### Student Listening Prompts

- What in this track feels built for dancing?
- What in this track feels built for close listening?
- How does the band create excitement?
- What class source helps explain the style?
- Does this track sound market-friendly, artist-driven, or both?
- What changed from swing to bebop?
- How does early R&B simplify or sharpen the groove?

### Sample Student Response

*In “Ko-Ko,” innovation mattered more because the speed and line shape sound like the player is pushing past normal dance-band expectations. In “Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy,” industry mattered more because the hook is easy to remember and the arrangement feels made for wide appeal. The chart source helped with that because it showed how songs like this were built to travel fast. So the answer is not one thing every time, but you can hear which force is stronger in each example.*

## Simple Grading Guidance

Listening accuracy

**Strong:** Students point to rhythm, texture, phrasing, riff use, or solo style accurately.

**Partial:** Students describe the mood without the musical reason.

Evidence use

**Strong:** Uses at least two sound details and one context source.

**Partial:** Uses one general idea only.

Interpretation

**Strong:** Explains what the track seems built to do.

**Partial:** Makes a claim that stays surface-level.

Context/Evaluation

**Strong:** Uses context to explain how audience or industry shaped the sound.

**Partial:** Uses context as trivia instead of explanation.

Formal evaluation is still not required.

## Teacher Tips

1. Use short debate rounds. Long rounds lead to repeated points.
2. Grade the written verdict more heavily than live speaking.
3. Students often confuse “popular” with “simple.” Push them to prove it from the music.

## Unit Project – Industry vs Innovation Debate

Student directions

Question: For the music in this unit, what mattered more: industry pressure or musical innovation?

In a team of 3 or 4, use:

- 2 excerpts
- 1–2 class sources
- one short written verdict from each student

Each student must contribute:

1. One sound detail
2. One context point
3. One rebuttal idea

After the debate, each student writes a 5–6 sentence verdict.

### Teacher setup

Assign teams a side at first so students do not default to personal opinion.

Use short source cards such as:

- chart list
- club ad
- record ad
- quote about dance halls
- magazine review

This project works well in 2 class periods.

### Suggested timeline

- Day 1: Build cases
- Day 2: Debate and written verdict

### Simple grading approach

Strong work shows that students can hear the difference between audience-friendly features and risk-taking features.

Partial work stays stuck on popularity without analyzing the sound.

## UNIT 6

# 1950–1969

## Unit Overview

<b>Unit theme</b>	Rock 'n' roll, soul, protest, crossover, and who gets credit.
<b>Historical focus</b>	Covers, credit/profit, Motown, soul, protest song, and psychedelic experimentation.
<b>Listening skills emphasized</b>	Describe, Analyze, Interpret, Contextualize, Evaluate, Compare across eras.
<b>Big question</b>	Who gets heard, who gets credited, and how does crossover change the sound?
<b>Major project</b>	Curated Playlist + Liner Notes.

## Core Listening Excerpts

1. Big Mama Thornton — “Hound Dog” (1952).

**Why it works:** great for raw vocal delivery and groove.

**Listen for:** vocal bite, blues-based groove, band feel, attitude.

2. Elvis Presley — “Hound Dog” (1956).

**Why it works:** ideal for cover comparison and audience shift.

**Listen for:** tempo change, cleaner production, different vocal style.

3. Chuck Berry — “Johnny B. Goode” (1958).

**Why it works:** classic guitar hook and rock ‘n’ roll drive.

**Listen for:** guitar intro, backbeat, form, lyric energy.

4. The Supremes — “You Can’t Hurry Love” (1966).

**Why it works:** polished pop production and vocal blend.

**Listen for:** hook, layered vocals, groove, verse/chorus design.

5. Aretha Franklin — “Respect” (1967).

**Why it works:** strong call-and-response and direct vocal authority.

**Listen for:** groove, backing vocals, vocal phrasing, emphasis on text.

6. Sam Cooke — “A Change Is Gonna Come” (1964).

**Why it works:** good for protest, orchestration, and emotional communication.

**Listen for:** orchestral backing, vocal expression, build of tension.

7. Kyu Sakamoto — “Sukiyaki” (1963).

**Why it works:** useful AAPI/global-flow anchor and chart history example.

**Listen for:** melody shape, orchestration, vocal tone, crossover appeal.

8. The Jimi Hendrix Experience — “Purple Haze” (1967).

**Why it works:** strong contrast with earlier polished pop.

**Listen for:** guitar timbre, distortion, riff, psychedelic texture.

---

## Week-by-Week Lesson Plan

### Week 1

**Anchor listening activity:** “Hound Dog” cover comparison.

**Discussion activity:** What changed in the sound, audience, and credit story?

**Short listening response:** One paragraph comparing the two versions.

**Project/context:** Start playlist themes.

## Week 2

**Anchor listening activity:** Motown vs soul comparison.

**Discussion activity:** What makes a track sound polished or direct?

**Short listening response:** Evaluate one track by audience fit or emotional communication.

**Project/context:** Students choose 4 playlist tracks.

## Week 3

**Anchor listening activity:** Protest and crossover lesson with Sam Cooke and “Sukiyaki.”

**Discussion activity:** How do songs travel across audiences?

**Short listening response:** One paragraph with a criterion and a cross-era comparison.

**Project/context:** Draft liner notes.

## Week 4

**Anchor listening activity:** Psychedelia and late-1960s experimentation.

**Discussion activity:** What counts as innovation here?

**Short listening response:** Compare one Unit 6 track to an earlier-unit track.

**Project/context:** Playlist + Liner Notes due + unit listening check.

---

## Daily Lesson Examples

### Daily Lesson 1: Who Gets Credit? “Hound Dog” Comparison

**Objective:** Students will compare two versions of the same song using one criterion.

**Listening excerpt:** Big Mama Thornton, “Hound Dog” and Elvis Presley, “Hound Dog.”

#### Step-by-step

1. Bellringer: “Can the same song feel like two different songs?”
2. Play the Big Mama Thornton clip twice. Students list three sound details.
3. Play the Elvis clip twice. Students list three sound details.
4. On the board, write two possible criteria: audience fit / emotional communication.
5. Students choose one criterion and write which version is more effective by that criterion.
6. Add one short context card about release dates, audience, or promotion.

7. Students finish a 6-sentence comparison paragraph.

### Discussion prompts

- What changed in tempo, attitude, and production?
- Which version sounds rougher? Which sounds more market-ready?
- How does your criterion change your judgment?

Exit ticket

Write one compare sentence using the words “more effective by the criterion of \_\_\_\_.”

### Daily Lesson 2: Motown and Soul

**Objective:** Students will compare polished pop-soul and more direct soul expression.

**Listening excerpt:** The Supremes, “You Can’t Hurry Love” and Aretha Franklin, “Respect.”

### Step-by-step

1. Bellringer: Students define “polished” in music terms.
2. Play the Supremes clip. Students note three sound traits.
3. Play Aretha. Students note three sound traits.
4. Teacher asks students to label which details feel controlled, which feel forceful.
5. Students pair up and write one interpretation for each song.
6. Teacher gives a short note about label systems and crossover audiences.
7. Students write one short evaluation paragraph with a comparison to an earlier unit.

### Discussion prompts

- What makes the Supremes sound polished?
- What gives Aretha’s recording its force?
- Which track feels more direct? Which feels more tightly designed?

Exit ticket

Finish: “Compared with an earlier track from this course, this song sounds \_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_.”

### Student Listening Prompts

- What changed between the original and the cover?
- By the criterion of audience fit, which version works better?
- By the criterion of emotional communication, which track works better?
- What in the sound suggests crossover appeal?
- What context detail helps explain why this song reached a wider audience?

- How is this song different from a swing or jazz track from an earlier unit?
- What makes this track sound innovative?
- What stayed the same even as the style changed?

## Sample Student Response

*I put "Respect" at the center of my playlist because by the criterion of emotional communication, it works immediately. The groove is strong, but the biggest thing is how the voice pushes the message forward. Compared with the polished vocal blend of the Supremes, this track sounds more direct and personal. That helps show how soul music could hit the listener in a different way even within the same decade.*

## Simple Grading Guidance

Listening accuracy

**Strong:** Students name specific features like vocal phrasing, backbeat, riff, distortion, or hook.

**Partial:** Students stay vague.

Evidence use

**Strong:** Uses sound plus a useful context detail.

**Partial:** Uses one weak detail or summary only.

Interpretation

**Strong:** Explains what the song seems to communicate.

**Partial:** Meaning claim is thin or unsupported.

Context/Evaluation

**Strong:** Uses one context link, one criterion, and one comparison when asked.

**Partial:** Drifts into taste or makes comparison with no evidence.

## Teacher Tips

1. Keep the playlist at four songs. More songs do not improve the thinking.
2. Students need only one criterion. Do not turn evaluation into a giant rubric lesson.
3. Full-score the intro and two song notes if grading time is tight.

## Unit Project – Curated Playlist + Liner Notes

Student directions

Create a 4-song playlist around one theme:

- youth culture
- protest
- crossover
- dancing
- raw vs polished sound
- voice and identity

Choose:

- 3 songs from Unit 6
- 1 comparison song from an earlier unit

Your final product can be one page, four slides, or a playlist card.

Include:

1. Playlist title
2. A short intro of 3–4 sentences
3. 2–3 sentences of liner notes for each song
4. One criteria-based judgment
5. One cross-era comparison

Teacher setup

Offer 4 or 5 themes so students do not freeze.

Give students a short model with one sample note.

This project takes 2–3 class periods.

Suggested timeline

- Day 1: Choose theme and songs
- Day 2: Draft notes
- Day 3: Peer check and submit

Simple grading approach

Strong work explains why each song is in the playlist using sound, context, and one clear criterion.

Partial work turns into artist trivia or personal taste.

## UNIT 7

## 1970–1989

## Unit Overview

<b>Unit theme</b>	Scenes, media, clubs, DIY culture, and new technologies.
<b>Historical focus</b>	Funk, disco, punk, hip-hop origins, MTV pop, Latin growth, and Chicago House.
<b>Listening skills emphasized</b>	Describe, Analyze, Interpret, Contextualize, Evaluate, Compare across eras.
<b>Big question</b>	How do scenes, media, and technology shape what becomes mainstream?
<b>Major project</b>	Genre Jigsaw Exhibit.

## Core Listening Excerpts

1. James Brown — “Get Up (I Feel Like Being a) Sex Machine” (1970).

**Why it works:** easy way to hear groove-based funk.

**Listen for:** repeated groove, bass/drum lock, short horn hits, call-and-response.

2. Donna Summer — “I Feel Love” (1977).

**Why it works:** strong example of electronic dance texture.

**Listen for:** synthesizer pulse, repetition, layering, club feel.

3. Chic — “Good Times” (1979).

**Why it works:** clean disco groove and famous bass line.

**Listen for:** bass groove, guitar pulse, dance pocket, repetition.

4. Ramones — “Blitzkrieg Bop” (1976).

**Why it works:** students instantly hear contrast with disco and funk.

**Listen for:** fast tempo, stripped-down texture, chant-like chorus.

5. The Sugarhill Gang — “Rapper’s Delight” (1979).

**Why it works:** early rap delivery over groove-based backing.

**Listen for:** flow, looped groove, hook, party feel.

6. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five — “The Message” (1982).

**Why it works:** useful contrast with party-oriented hip-hop.

**Listen for:** spoken flow, repeated hook, mood, sparse beat.

7. Michael Jackson — “Billie Jean” (1982).

**Why it works:** strong pop production and MTV-era identity.

**Listen for:** bass line, drum sound, vocal layering, build.

8. Miami Sound Machine — “Conga” (1985).

**Why it works:** clear dance groove and Latin crossover energy.

**Listen for:** percussion layers, chorus hook, call-and-response feel.

9. Marshall Jefferson — “Move Your Body” (1986).

**Why it works:** ideal Chicago House anchor.

**Listen for:** drum-machine pulse, repetition, build, club function.

---

## Week-by-Week Lesson Plan

### Week 1

**Anchor listening activity:** Funk and disco groove comparison.

**Discussion activity:** What makes groove feel “tight”?

**Short listening response:** Evaluate one track by function or audience fit.

**Project/context:** Assign jigsaw genres.

### Week 2

**Anchor listening activity:** Punk and hip-hop contrast.

**Discussion activity:** What counts as stripped-down? What counts as innovative?

**Short listening response:** Compare one Unit 7 track with an earlier track from Unit 6.

**Project/context:** Groups collect exhibit evidence.

### Week 3

**Anchor listening activity:** MTV pop and Latin crossover.

**Discussion activity:** How do visuals and media change the music market?

**Short listening response:** One paragraph on crossover appeal or production choices.

**Project/context:** Build exhibit board or slide.

## Week 4

**Anchor listening activity:** Chicago House listening lab.

**Discussion activity:** Why does repetition work in club music?

**Short listening response:** Evaluate one scene by function and compare it to an earlier era.

**Project/context:** Jigsaw Exhibit + unit listening check.

---

## Daily Lesson Examples

### Daily Lesson 1: Groove Lab

**Objective:** Students will explain how funk and disco build groove in different ways.

**Listening excerpt:** James Brown, “Sex Machine” and Chic, “Good Times.”

#### Step-by-step

1. Bellringer: Students define groove in their own words.
2. Play the James Brown clip. Students mark what repeats.
3. Play the Chic clip. Students mark what repeats.
4. Teacher draws a simple box on the board: bass / drums / voice / other.
5. Students place evidence in the box for each track.
6. In pairs, students decide which track is more effective by the criterion of dance function.
7. Share one sentence per pair.

#### Discussion prompts

- What role does the bass play?
- Which groove feels tighter? Which feels smoother?
- What makes a groove stay interesting even when it repeats?

Exit ticket

Write one sentence explaining why repetition is a strength here.

### Daily Lesson 2: Hip-Hop Origins

**Objective:** Students will explain how flow and beat shape meaning in early hip-hop.

**Listening excerpt:** “Rapper’s Delight” and “The Message.”

#### Step-by-step

1. Bellringer: “What can a repeated beat make possible for a vocalist?”
2. Play “Rapper’s Delight.” Students note beat, hook, and flow.

3. Play “The Message.” Students note beat, hook, and flow.
4. Teacher asks students to compare the mood and purpose of each track.
5. Add one context card about block parties, DJ culture, or urban conditions.
6. Students write a 6-sentence paragraph using one criterion and one comparison.
7. Quick share-out.

### Discussion prompts

- How does the beat function differently in the two tracks?
- Which track feels more playful? Which feels more urgent?
- What does the vocal delivery add that the beat alone cannot?

Exit ticket

Finish: “This track is effective by the criterion of \_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_.”

\_\_\_\_\_

### Student Listening Prompts

- What is the main groove ingredient here?
- How does repetition function in this scene?
- What earlier style can you still hear inside this track?
- How does technology shape the sound?
- By the criterion of function, why is this track effective?
- What makes this scene different from 1950s or 1960s pop?
- How does media or audience change the musical choices?
- What does this scene seem built for: dancing, protest, identity, or something else?

### Sample Student Response

*Our group argued that Chicago House is effective by the criterion of function because everything in the track supports dancing over a long stretch of time. The drum-machine pulse stays steady, and the layers build slowly instead of changing all the time. Compared with a disco track like “Good Times,” it feels more stripped down and mechanical. That difference fits a club setting where the groove matters more than a verse story.*

### Simple Grading Guidance

Listening accuracy

**Strong:** Points to beat, groove, production, flow, or texture accurately.

**Partial:** Describes the scene but not the sound.

### Evidence use

**Strong:** Uses sound, context, and comparison.

**Partial:** Uses only labels or general impressions.

### Interpretation

**Strong:** Explains what the scene seems built to do.

**Partial:** Interpretation is vague.

### Context/Evaluation

**Strong:** Uses one criterion and one earlier comparison with evidence.

**Partial:** Gives a taste-based judgment or weak comparison.

## Teacher Tips

1. Assign genres. Student choice usually creates five hip-hop groups and no one else.
2. Use the same template for every group.
3. Fully score the exhibit card. Treat the gallery talk as a completion piece if time is short.

## Unit Project – Genre Jigsaw Exhibit

### Student directions

Your group is assigned one scene or genre:

- funk/disco
- punk
- hip-hop origins
- MTV pop
- Latin crossover
- Chicago House

Create one exhibit board, one poster, or one slide that teaches the class:

1. What the scene sounds like
2. What context helped shape it
3. What earlier music it connects to
4. What it does especially well

Use:

- 2 scene excerpts
- 1 earlier comparison track

Each group member must explain one part during the gallery walk.

### Teacher setup

Give each group:

- a template
- an excerpt list
- one or two source cards
- chart paper or a slide option

This project takes 3 class periods.

### Suggested timeline

- Day 1: Listen and gather evidence
- Day 2: Build exhibit
- Day 3: Gallery walk

### Simple grading approach

Strong work teaches the class something they can actually hear and prove.

Partial work leans on fashion, visuals, or history facts without enough listening.

## UNIT 8

# 1990–Today

## Unit Overview

<b>Unit theme</b>	Parallel mainstems, digital production, streaming, globalization, and algorithm culture.
<b>Historical focus</b>	1990s alternative and R&B/hip-hop, 2000s digital shifts, 2010s–2020s streaming and global c
<b>Listening skills emphasized</b>	Describe, Analyze, Interpret, Contextualize, Evaluate, Compare across eras.
<b>Big question</b>	What changed most in how American music is made, found, and shared?
<b>Major project</b>	Portfolio + Capstone Comparison Project.

## Core Listening Excerpts

1. Nirvana — “Smells Like Teen Spirit” (1991).

**Why it works:** obvious contrast with polished pop sounds.

**Listen for:** distorted guitar, loud/soft contrast, vocal edge, chorus release.

2. Lauryn Hill — “Doo Wop (That Thing)” (1998).

**Why it works:** strong bridge across hip-hop, soul, and pop traditions.

**Listen for:** groove, vocal/rap contrast, hook, retro-modern blend.

3. TLC — “No Scrubs” (1999).

**Why it works:** clear late-1990s pop/R&B production.

**Listen for:** vocal layering, beat design, hook, polished arrangement.

4. OutKast — “Hey Ya!” (2003).

**Why it works:** good for genre blend and pop craft.

**Listen for:** groove, layered production, hook, formal surprises.

5. Beyoncé feat. Jay-Z — “Crazy in Love” (2003).

**Why it works:** easy to hear sampling, hook design, and star production.

**Listen for:** horn sample, beat, vocal energy, repetition.

6. Lady Gaga — “Bad Romance” (2009).

**Why it works:** strong modern pop production and theatrical hook writing.

**Listen for:** synth layers, form, vocal processing, build and release.

7. Billie Eilish — “bad guy” (2019).

**Why it works:** sparse production and playlist-era intimacy.

**Listen for:** bass, space, close vocal sound, contrast.

8. Lil Nas X — “Old Town Road” (2019).

**Why it works:** useful for genre crossover and platform culture.

**Listen for:** short form, hook economy, beat, genre blend.

9. BTS — “Dynamite” (2020).

**Why it works:** strong global pop example with clear U.S. market crossover.

**Listen for:** disco-pop groove, vocal layering, bright production.

10. Luis Fonsi and Daddy Yankee — “Despacito” (2017).

**Why it works:** useful for streaming, global spread, and bilingual mainstream presence.

**Listen for:** rhythm pattern, hook, vocal interplay, production polish.

## Week-by-Week Lesson Plan

### Week 1

**Anchor listening activity:** 1990s parallel mainstreams comparison.

**Discussion activity:** How can very different sounds all be mainstream at once?

**Short listening response:** Compare two 1990s tracks by audience or identity.

**Project/context:** Choose portfolio pieces.

### Week 2

**Anchor listening activity:** 2000s digital production and genre blend.

**Discussion activity:** What changes when production tools change?

**Short listening response:** Evaluate one song by innovation or audience communication.

**Project/context:** Start capstone planning sheet.

### Week 3

**Anchor listening activity:** Streaming, globalization, and algorithm-era listening.

**Discussion activity:** What makes a track travel fast now?

**Short listening response:** Compare one 2010s/2020s track with an earlier-era track.

**Project/context:** Capstone drafting.

### Week 4

**Anchor listening activity:** Final comparison lab across the whole course.

**Discussion activity:** What changed most across the year? What stayed?

**Short listening response:** One final cross-era comparison paragraph.

**Project/context:** Portfolio + Capstone presentation and final listening check.

---

## Daily Lesson Examples

### Daily Lesson 1: Parallel Mainstreams

**Objective:** Students will compare two 1990s tracks that represent different mainstream lanes.

**Listening excerpt:** Nirvana, “Smells Like Teen Spirit” and Lauryn Hill, “Doo Wop (That Thing).”

### Step-by-step

1. Bellringer: “Can two totally different sounds both represent the same decade?”
2. Play Nirvana. Students list three sound features.
3. Play Lauryn Hill. Students list three sound features.
4. On the board, create two headings: rough/edge and groove/control.
5. Students place evidence under one or both headings.
6. Add a short source note about 1990s music channels, radio, or market lanes.
7. Students write a short compare paragraph using one criterion.

### Discussion prompts

- What makes Nirvana sound different from polished pop?
- What makes Lauryn Hill feel connected to earlier soul and hip-hop traditions?
- How can both tracks fit the same decade?

Exit ticket

Write one sentence naming the biggest difference between the tracks.

### Daily Lesson 2: Playlist-Era Production

**Objective:** Students will explain how recent songs are designed for fast attention and replay.

**Listening excerpt:** Billie Eilish, “bad guy” and Lil Nas X, “Old Town Road.”

### Step-by-step

1. Bellringer: “How long does a song get to grab your attention today?”
2. Play “bad guy.” Students mark the first moment that catches them.
3. Play “Old Town Road.” Students mark the first catch point.
4. Teacher asks students to identify short-form hook choices, beat choices, and vocal choices.
5. Add one context card about streaming, short-form platforms, or playlist culture.
6. Students write a 6-sentence paragraph with one criterion and one cross-era comparison.
7. Share a few examples.

### Discussion prompts

- What catches the ear quickly in each track?
- How do short songs work differently from earlier radio hits?
- Which track is more effective by the criterion of audience fit?

Exit ticket

Finish: “This song fits the streaming era because \_\_\_\_.”

\_\_\_\_\_

## Student Listening Prompts

- What grabs attention first in this track?
- What production choice matters most here?
- How does this song connect to an earlier era from the course?
- What makes this track easy to share, replay, or remember?
- By the criterion of audience fit, which track is most effective?
- What changed from radio-era pop to playlist-era pop?
- How does globalization show up in the sound or the market path?
- Which musical idea lasted across eras even when the style changed?

## Sample Student Response

*My capstone compares a Sousa march, "Respect," and "Old Town Road." All three use repetition to stick in the listener's head, but they do it for different systems. The march is built for public space, "Respect" is built for radio and strong vocal identity, and "Old Town Road" is built for fast replay and crossover. By the criterion of audience fit, "Old Town Road" is the most efficient, but "Respect" communicates more force through the voice and groove. That comparison shows how I got better at hearing both the music and the system around it.*

## Simple Grading Guidance

Listening accuracy

**Strong:** Uses clear sound details from each era.

**Partial:** Makes broad claims with little listening.

Evidence use

**Strong:** Uses sound, context, and comparison together.

**Partial:** Uses one kind of evidence only.

Interpretation

**Strong:** Explains what the music communicates or does across eras.

**Partial:** Makes a point but does not really develop it.

Context/Evaluation

**Strong:** Uses context, one criterion, and one cross-era comparison clearly.

**Partial:** Comparison is weak or the judgment is just taste.

## Teacher Tips

1. Do quick 2–3 minute conferences while the class works. That saves weak capstones.
  2. Let students revise old pieces instead of starting from scratch on everything.
  3. Full-score the capstone and mark the portfolio pieces as revised / complete / missing.
- This is a full year-long course teachers can lift directly into handouts, slides, or an LMS with minimal rewriting.

## Unit Project – Portfolio + Capstone Comparison Project

### Student directions

Build a small portfolio with:

- 2 revised listening responses
- 1 project artifact from earlier in the year
- 1 new capstone comparison

Choose one capstone question:

- What changed most in how music reached listeners?
- Which musical idea lasted across eras?
- How did technology or gatekeepers shape what got heard?

Use 2–3 songs from different units.

Your capstone can be:

- one page
- 4 slides
- 2–3 minute recorded talk

Include:

1. 2–3 listening details
2. one context point for each era
3. one cross-era comparison
4. one criteria-based judgment
5. A short reflection on how your listening improved

### Teacher setup

Keep the portfolio small. The point is revision and synthesis, not a giant scrapbook.

This project takes 3–4 class periods.

### Suggested timeline

- Day 1: Choose artifacts and question
- Day 2: Draft comparison

- Day 3: Revise and conference
- Day 4: Present or submit

Simple grading approach

Strong work shows growth and a real cross-era claim supported by listening.

Partial work is mostly summary or a folder of old work with no revision.

## REFERENCE

# Exercises & Assignments

---

The following section provides expanded project details for each unit. These materials match the project sequence and listening progression above. Products are kept short on purpose so they work for teachers carrying big class loads: most can be graded from a one-page product, a short script, a single slide, or a brief recording.

**Progression reminder:** Units 1–2 = Describe / Analyze / Interpret. Units 3–5 add Context. Units 6–8 add Evaluation and Cross-Era Comparison.

## UNIT 1 – LISTENING METHODS CHECK

### Project Overview

This is the first “show me how you listen” assignment. Students practice hearing specific musical details, explaining what those details do, and making a simple interpretation without drifting into “I like it” or “I hate it.” Historically, this project is light on background on purpose; the goal is to build a listening habit first. It fits the early part of the listening progression because students are working mainly at Describe → Analyze → Interpret.

### Student Directions

1. You will hear 2 short excerpts chosen by your teacher. Each one will play at least twice.
2. For each excerpt, write:
  - 3 things you hear
  - 1 sentence explaining how those details affect the mood, energy, or meaning
  - 1 interpretation sentence: “This music seems to communicate \_\_\_ because \_\_\_.”
3. Choose one of the two excerpts and turn your notes into a short response of 5–6 sentences.
4. End with 2 reflection sentences:
  - Which musical detail helped you the most?
  - What is one thing you still need to get better at when listening?

5. Final product: one response sheet or a 1-minute audio response if your teacher gives that option.

### Teacher Setup

Use 2 contrasting excerpts that make differences easy to hear. Good pairings:

- a Sousa march and a blues vocal
- a folk ballad and a hip-hop beat
- a Motown chorus and a jazz combo

If you want specific examples, a simple bank could include:

- John Philip Sousa, “The Stars and Stripes Forever”
- Bessie Smith, “St. Louis Blues”
- The Supremes, “You Can’t Hurry Love”
- Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, “The Message” (clean clip)

Give students a one-page word bank with terms like tempo, dynamics, texture, timbre, steady beat, melody, brass, vocal, repetition. This works well in 1 class period if you model one response first, or 2 shorter periods if you want more guided practice.

### Example Prompts

- What do you hear first?
- What musical details stand out the most?
- How do the sound choices shape the mood or energy?
- What seems to be the point of this excerpt?
- Which detail best supports your interpretation?

### Sample Student Response

This excerpt has a fast, steady beat and a bright brass sound. The melody comes back in a big, clear way, and the drums make it feel like it keeps pushing forward. That makes the music sound confident and public instead of private. It seems like the goal is to get a group of people moving together and paying attention. I know that because the beat is strong, the sound is loud, and the main tune is easy to recognize when it returns.

### Simple Grading Approach

#### Strong response:

Listening accuracy is solid, the student names real musical details, the evidence is connected to an effect, and the interpretation makes sense.

#### Partial response:

The student uses vague words like “good” or “calm” without naming what creates that effect, or the interpretation does not match the musical evidence.

**Context/Evaluation:**

Not scored yet in this unit.

**Teacher Tips**

1. Model one weak answer and fix it with the class. Kids learn fast when they see the difference between “It sounds cool” and actual listening.
2. Grade the short paragraph, not every note on the organizer.
3. Use the same excerpts for all sections so your examples and grading stay consistent.

---

## UNIT 2 – ROOTS MAP EXHIBIT

**Project Overview**

This project helps students hear foundational sounds before they start making bigger historical claims. Students compare 3 early musical traditions and build a simple visual map showing shared traits and differences. The listening work stays at Describe / Analyze / Interpret, and the historical thinking stays light: students are noticing continuities in sound, not writing full context explanations yet. This fits Unit 2 because it grows listening precision without overloading students with research.

**Student Directions**

1. In a group of 3 or 4, listen to 3 class excerpts from the Foundations unit.
2. Create a Roots Map on one poster, one slide, or one sheet of chart paper.
3. For each excerpt, include:
  - the title or label your teacher gives you
  - 2 things you hear
  - 1 short interpretation of what the music seems designed to do
4. Add 2 arrows or connections showing a shared sound trait between excerpts.

Examples: repeated rhythm, call-and-response, group singing, strong pulse, layered voices.

5. Be ready to give a 1-minute gallery walk explanation of your map.
6. Final product: one group map plus a short spoken explanation.

**Teacher Setup**

Use 3 short excerpts from the Foundations unit. A practical set is:

- a tribally specific social or community song from a museum/archive or culture-bearer source
- keep this to analysis only

- avoid sacred/private repertoire
- a shape-note hymn or early sacred/community song
- a work song or spiritual

Add one small image or source card for each excerpt just so students have a label and a visual anchor, but do not turn this into a research project. Groups of 3 work best. Plan on 1 class period to build the exhibit and 1 class period for gallery walk and debrief.

### Example Prompts

- What is one sound in this excerpt you would recognize quickly if you heard it again?
- Where do you hear group participation?
- What makes this feel communal, formal, personal, or functional?
- Which two excerpts share the clearest musical trait?
- What seems to be the job of this music?

### Sample Student Response

In the spiritual, the repeated phrases and group singing make it sound like people are meant to join in. The hymn is more blended and steady, but it also feels built for a group instead of a solo performer. We connected those two on our map because both use repetition to hold the singers together, even though the sound color is different.

### Simple Grading Approach

#### Strong response:

Listening accuracy is clear across all three excerpts, the group identifies real sound traits, and their connections are based on what they heard rather than guesses.

#### Partial response:

The group mainly labels traditions without describing the sound, or the map connections are too vague to tell whether students actually listened.

#### Context/Evaluation:

Not scored yet in this unit.

### Teacher Tips

1. Keep the design simple. If kids spend 30 minutes decorating arrows, the project is off track.
2. Put a class word bank on the board the whole time.
3. Grade the map with a quick checkmark system: accurate listening, clear connections, understandable interpretation.

## UNIT 3 – SEMINAR + EVIDENCE RESPONSE

### Project Overview

This is the first project where students turn listening into a short historical argument. They discuss how music functioned in different 19th-century settings, then write one evidence-based paragraph that connects sound to setting. The listening skills are still the core, but now students add a simple context link from a class source. This fits the progression because Unit 3 is where students begin moving from Analyze / Interpret into Context.

### Student Directions

1. Before the seminar, listen to 2 assigned excerpts and study 1 class source such as an image, poster, quote, or short reading.
2. On your prep sheet, write:
  - 1 claim answering the seminar question
  - 2 musical details from the excerpts
  - 1 context point from the class source
3. During the seminar, speak at least 2 times. Each time, use evidence from the music or the source.
4. After the seminar, write one paragraph of 6–8 sentences answering the question again.
5. Your paragraph must include:
  - a clear claim
  - at least 2 listening details
  - 1 context connection
  - 1 interpretation
6. Final product: seminar prep sheet + one paragraph.

### Teacher Setup

Use a simple seminar question like:

How did where music happened shape what it sounded like in the 19th century?

Good excerpt combinations:

- a spiritual
- a folk or fiddle tune
- a march or public band excerpt

Good source cards:

- parade poster
- church or singing-school image
- newspaper concert ad

- band photo
- short quote about performance setting

If you teach historically harmful material from this unit, keep the source use tightly structured and offer an alternate pathway. This assignment works well across 2 class periods:

- Day 1: listening, prep, claim building
- Day 2: seminar + paragraph

### Example Prompts

- What in the sound tells you who this music might have been for?
- How does repetition, instrumentation, or vocal style connect to the setting?
- What does the class source show about where or why this music was used?
- Which excerpt feels most connected to community function?
- How does the setting change what the listener is supposed to do?

### Sample Student Response

The march sounds the most public because the brass and drums are loud, steady, and easy to follow. The melody keeps returning in a way a crowd could recognize right away. Our parade poster showed that the band played at a civic event, and that matches the strong beat and outdoor sound. The spiritual feels more built around shared singing and response. Both create community, but they do it in different places and for different reasons.

### Simple Grading Approach

#### Strong response:

Listening accuracy is solid, the student uses specific evidence, the interpretation grows naturally from the sound, and the context point helps explain the music instead of sitting there by itself.

#### Partial response:

The student mostly repeats class discussion, uses thin musical evidence, or drops in a context fact without connecting it back to the sound.

#### Context/Evaluation:

Context is scored here. Evaluation is not.

### Teacher Tips

1. Give students 3 sentence starters before the seminar. It helps quieter kids a lot.
2. Grade the prep sheet and paragraph together. Do not try to score live discussion like a courtroom transcript.
3. If discussion drifts, stop and ask, "What in the music makes you say that?"

## UNIT 4 – 1920s RADIO SHOW

### Project Overview

This project asks students to explain music like a radio host without turning it into a costume performance. They practice concise listening-based speaking, connect sound to a few key context ideas, and help classmates hear how blues, jazz, and commercial music were reaching new audiences. Historically, students think about migration, nightlife, radio, and recording. This fits Unit 4 because students should now be able to add Context without losing the listening focus.

### Student Directions

1. In a group of 3 or 4, create a 3–4 minute radio show set in the 1920s.
2. Choose 3 short excerpts from class listening. Include at least:
  - 1 blues or jazz example
  - 1 other popular music example from the unit
3. Your script must include:
  - a short show opening
  - one sound detail for each excerpt
  - one interpretation for each excerpt
  - one context link for each excerpt

Examples: migration, club culture, radio, recording, city life, dance craze

4. End with a short closing sentence connecting the three tracks.
5. You may perform live or record it. Keep it simple.
6. Final product: one group script plus the short performance/recording.

### Teacher Setup

A practical excerpt bank:

- blues vocal
- early jazz combo
- dance-band or ragtime example
- Tin Pan Alley or radio-friendly popular song

Possible artists:

- Bessie Smith or Ma Rainey
- Louis Armstrong or Duke Ellington
- Scott Joplin
- Irving Berlin

Useful context cards:

- Great Migration map
- radio ad
- nightclub photo
- record label ad
- dance hall image

Plan on 2–3 class periods:

- Day 1: choose excerpts and outline
- Day 2: script and rehearse
- Day 3: present or record

### Example Prompts

- What should the listener notice first in this excerpt?
- What part of the sound makes people want to dance, listen closely, or remember the tune?
- What setting fits this music best?
- How does the source card help explain the sound?
- What do these songs show about how listening changed in the 1920s?

### Sample Student Response

Our second track feels more like city nightlife than formal concert music. The singer bends notes and the groove keeps repeating, so the sound feels close and direct. We connected it to the club photo because this music seems built for a smaller room where people are paying attention to the voice and the feeling. It sounds personal, but it also sounds like something people would remember and ask to hear again.

### Simple Grading Approach

#### Strong response:

The script shows real listening, not just historical summary. Each excerpt has one specific sound detail, one believable interpretation, and one useful context link.

#### Partial response:

The script sounds generic, the music descriptions are thin, or the context points feel random and disconnected.

#### Context/Evaluation:

Context is scored here. Evaluation is not.

## Teacher Tips

1. Ban fake old-time accents. They waste time and can get embarrassing fast.
2. Give every group the same script frame: intro, track 1, track 2, track 3, close.
3. If you are short on grading time, score the script and treat the performance as completion.

## UNIT 5 – INDUSTRY VS INNOVATION DEBATE

### Project Overview

This debate gets students thinking about cause and effect: what shaped the music more, the market around it or the musical ideas inside it? Students use listening evidence and a few simple context sources to argue a position. This is still a Context project, not a formal evaluation project, so the emphasis is on explaining what influenced the sound rather than ranking what is “better.” It fits Unit 5 because students should now be able to connect music to industry, audience, and setting with some confidence.

### Student Directions

1. Work in a team of 3 or 4.
2. Respond to this question:

For the music in this unit, what had the bigger effect on the final sound and success of a song: industry pressures or musical innovation?

3. Use 2 excerpts from the unit and 1–2 class sources to support your side.
4. Each student must prepare:
  - one musical detail
  - one context point
  - one response to the other side
5. During the debate:
  - each person speaks once in the opening round
  - each person speaks once in rebuttal
6. After the debate, write a short 5–6 sentence verdict explaining which factor mattered more in your examples.
7. Final product: team prep sheet + individual verdict.

### Teacher Setup

Good excerpt pairings:

- swing and bebop
- crooner/pop ballad and early R&B

- dance-band music and smaller modern combo

Possible artists:

- Benny Goodman or Count Basie
- Charlie Parker or Dizzy Gillespie
- The Ink Spots
- Louis Jordan or Ruth Brown

Good source cards:

- chart list
- label ad
- radio schedule
- club poster
- magazine review

This is a clean 2-day project:

- Day 1: build cases
- Day 2: debate + verdict

### Example Prompts

- What in the sound feels designed for broad audiences?
- What in the sound feels like musicians pushing past the usual style?
- What does the class source show about audience, venue, or market?
- Which musical change seems connected to business pressure?
- Which musical change seems connected to artistic experimentation?

### Sample Student Response

For our examples, innovation mattered more in the bebop track, but industry mattered more in the pop ballad. The bebop song is faster, less predictable, and the solo lines sound like the player is trying new ideas instead of playing it safe. The club poster also fits that because it points to a smaller listening space. The pop song sounds smoother and easier to sing along with, and the radio chart helps explain why that sound spread. So the answer depends on the example, but you can still hear which force is stronger.

### Simple Grading Approach

#### Strong response:

Listening accuracy is strong, evidence is specific, the student explains a real cause-and-effect relationship, and the context evidence actually supports the claim.

#### Partial response:

The student relies on broad opinions about popularity, uses weak musical evidence, or names “industry” without showing how it affected the sound.

**Context/Evaluation:**

Context is scored here. Evaluation is not.

**Teacher Tips**

1. Make students argue from assigned examples, not from whatever genre opinions they walked in with.
2. Use a visible timer and keep rounds short.
3. Grade the written verdict more heavily than the live debate if you want consistent scoring.

---

## UNIT 6 – CURATED PLAYLIST + LINER NOTES

**Project Overview**

This is where students start doing true curator work. They choose songs, explain what listeners should hear, connect the music to its era, and make one clear criteria-based judgment. Because this unit also asks for a comparison to another era, students begin moving into the course’s full Evaluate + Compare work. It fits the progression because Unit 6 is the point where students can handle sound, context, and judgment in one short product.

**Student Directions**

1. Build a 4-song playlist around one clear theme. Good themes:
  - youth culture
  - protest
  - crossover
  - dancing
  - rebellion
  - polished sound vs raw sound
2. Choose:
  - 3 songs from Unit 6
  - 1 comparison song from an earlier unit
3. Create:
  - a playlist title
  - a short intro of 3–4 sentences
  - 2–3 sentences of liner notes for each song
4. In each song note, include:

- one listening detail
  - one interpretation
  - one context connection
5. In your intro or ending, include:
- one criteria-based judgment
  - one cross-era comparison
6. Final product: one page, one playlist card, or 4 slides.

### Teacher Setup

Give students 4 or 5 theme choices so they do not get stuck. A workable excerpt bank:

- Chuck Berry or Little Richard
- The Supremes or Martha and the Vandellas
- Marvin Gaye or Aretha Franklin
- Bob Dylan or Nina Simone
- Jimi Hendrix
- one teacher-selected crossover/global-flow track from the unit

Comparison tracks can come from Units 3–5. This project works well in 2–3 class periods:

- choose songs and theme
- draft notes
- peer swap
- submit

### Example Prompts

- What does this song do well by the criterion of audience fit, innovation, or emotional communication?
- What sound details make this track feel of its era?
- How is this track similar to or different from your comparison song?
- What does your playlist suggest changed across eras?
- Which song best represents your theme, and why?

### Sample Student Response

I put “Respect” at the center of my playlist because by the criterion of audience communication, it works right away. The spelling hook, sharp backing vocals, and strong beat make the message clear even on the first listen. Compared to an earlier swing track, this song feels less polite and more direct. That difference helps show how pop music in this era could sound more personal and forceful.

### Simple Grading Approach

**Strong response:**

Listening accuracy is specific, evidence is clear, interpretations match the sound, and the student uses a real criterion plus a real comparison instead of just saying one song is “better.”

**Partial response:**

The playlist theme is vague, the notes read like artist trivia, or the evaluation sounds like personal taste with no criterion.

**Context/Evaluation:**

Both are scored here, and comparison matters.

**Teacher Tips**

1. Keep it to 4 songs. More songs do not make the thinking better.
2. Let students draft the liner notes as bullets first, then turn them into short sentences.
3. If you need a grading shortcut, fully score the intro and two notes, then spot-check the rest.

## UNIT 7 – GENRE JIGSAW EXHIBIT

**Project Overview**

This is a “teach the room” project. Students become the short-term experts on one scene or genre, then explain how it sounds, what shaped it, how it connects to an earlier era, and what it does especially well. It is strong Level 4 work because students have to compare across eras and evaluate using a criterion. It also works well in big classes because groups can do most of the lifting during class.

**Student Directions**

1. Your group will be assigned one Unit 7 scene or genre:
  - funk/disco
  - punk
  - hip-hop origins
  - MTV pop
  - Latin growth
  - Chicago House
2. Create one exhibit card, one poster, or one slide that teaches the class:
  - what the scene sounds like
  - what social or industry context shaped it
  - what earlier music it connects to
  - what it does especially well
3. Use:
  - 2 excerpts from your scene

- 1 earlier comparison track
4. Your exhibit must include:
    - 3 listening details
    - 1 context explanation
    - 1 cross-era comparison
    - 1 criteria-based judgment
  5. During the gallery walk, each group member must explain one part of the exhibit.
  6. Final product: one visual + short gallery talk.

### Teacher Setup

Assign genres instead of letting everyone choose the same one. A useful bank:

- Chic or Donna Summer
- Ramones or The Clash
- Sugarhill Gang or Grandmaster Flash
- Michael Jackson or Prince
- Miami Sound Machine
- Frankie Knuckles or Marshall Jefferson

Comparison tracks should come from Units 4–6. Use a shared exhibit template so all groups produce the same kind of work. Plan on 3 class periods:

- Day 1: listening and planning
- Day 2: build exhibit
- Day 3: gallery walk

### Example Prompts

- What is the first sound marker that tells you this belongs to this scene?
- What earlier style can you still hear inside it?
- What changed because of technology, media, club culture, or audience?
- By the criterion of innovation or function, what does this scene do especially well?
- Which other exhibit in the room feels closest to yours, and why?

### Sample Student Response

Our Chicago House exhibit argues that repetition is part of the point, not a weakness. The drum machine pulse stays steady, the layers come in slowly, and the track is built for the club instead of radio storytelling. Compared to earlier disco, the groove is more stripped down and mechanical. By the criterion of function, it works because the whole track is designed for long-form dancing and shared space.

## Simple Grading Approach

### Strong response:

Students teach something audible and specific, use real listening evidence, make a clear comparison, and evaluate with a real criterion.

### Partial response:

The exhibit is mostly fashion/history facts, the music itself stays vague, or the comparison and evaluation are too thin.

### Context/Evaluation:

Both are scored here, along with the cross-era comparison.

## Teacher Tips

1. Give every group the same template. Open-ended jigsaws usually turn into uneven messes.
2. Make groups actually play the two scene excerpts and the comparison track during the gallery walk.
3. Use a visitor note sheet so the rest of the class stays accountable.

---

## UNIT 8 – PORTFOLIO + CAPSTONE

### Project Overview

This final project asks students to show growth and make one clear cross-era claim about American music. The portfolio is a small collection of revised work, and the capstone is the new piece that pulls the year together. Students listen across time, connect music to systems and audiences, and make a supported criteria-based judgment. This is the final Evaluate + Compare project of the course.

### Student Directions

1. Build a small portfolio with 4 items:
  - 2 revised listening responses from earlier units
  - 1 project artifact from any unit
  - 1 new capstone response
2. Choose one capstone question:
  - What changed most in the way American music reached listeners?
  - Which musical idea lasted across eras even when the style changed?
  - How did technology or gatekeepers shape what got heard?
3. Use 2–3 songs from different units in your capstone.
4. Your capstone can be:

- a one-page response
  - a 4-slide deck
  - a 2–3 minute recorded talk
5. Your capstone must include:
- 2–3 listening details
  - one context connection for each era
  - one cross-era comparison
  - one criteria-based judgment
6. Add a short reflection:

What got better in your listening this year?

7. Final product: small portfolio folder + capstone.

### Teacher Setup

Keep the portfolio small on purpose. Students should choose their best work and revise it; this should not turn into a giant end-of-year archive. If your department wants a bigger portfolio, use this exact structure and simply add more artifacts.

Good capstone topic lanes:

- 1990s parallel mainstreams
- digital production
- streaming and playlist culture
- global flows shaping U.S. pop
- algorithms and discovery

This works well in 3–4 class periods:

- choose pieces
- revise
- draft capstone
- short presentations or conferences

### Example Prompts

- What do these songs have in common underneath the style differences?
- What changed in production, distribution, or audience between these eras?
- Which song is most effective by your chosen criterion, and why?
- Where do you hear continuity, and where do you hear a real break?
- How does this capstone show growth from the way you listened in Unit 1?

### Sample Student Response

My capstone compares a Sousa march, a Motown hit, and a recent pop track built for playlists. They sound very different, but all three use repetition to stick in the listener's head. What changed is the delivery system and the kind of sound that gets pushed forward. The march is built for public space, the Motown song is built for radio, and the recent track feels built for quick replay. By the criterion of audience fit, the recent track is the most efficient, but the Motown song communicates more personality through the voice and groove. That shows I'm better now at hearing both the music and the system around it.

### Simple Grading Approach

#### Strong response:

The portfolio shows real revision, the capstone compares across eras with specific listening evidence, and the evaluation is thoughtful and supported.

#### Partial response:

The portfolio is just old work dropped into a folder, the comparison stays on the surface, or the final judgment is unsupported.

#### Context/Evaluation:

Both are scored here, and the comparison is essential.

### Teacher Tips

1. Do fast portfolio conferences while the class works. Three minutes per student is enough.
2. Let students reuse earlier work. Revision is the point.
3. If you need a grading shortcut, fully score only the capstone and mark the portfolio pieces as complete, revised, or missing.

## REFERENCE

## Listening Literacy Progression

This table summarizes the skill progression across the eight units. Each level builds on the previous one. Assessment only includes skills that have been formally introduced.

Units	Skills Assessed	Not Yet Scored	Project Type
1–2	Describe, Analyze, Interpret	Context, Evaluation	Individual listening check Group map exhibit
3–5	Describe, Analyze, Interpret, Contextualize	Evaluation	Seminar + evidence response Radio show script Debate + verdict
6–8	Describe, Analyze, Interpret, Contextualize, Evaluate, Cross-Era Compare	—	Curated playlist + liner notes Genre jigsaw exhibit Portfolio + capstone

**Key principle:** Students are never assessed on skills they have not yet practiced. Context appears in grading starting in Unit 3. Evaluation and cross-era comparison appear starting in Unit 6. This phasing prevents the common problem of overwhelming students with too many criteria at once.

## REFERENCE

## Suggested Listening Excerpts

All clips used in this curriculum are 30–60 seconds long. Teachers may substitute equivalent recordings based on available resources. The following playlists contain the suggested excerpts organized by unit.

### Spotify Playlist

*Link coming soon*

### YouTube Playlist

*Link coming soon*

### Apple Music Playlist

*Link coming soon*

Excerpts are suggestions, not requirements. Any recording of the same piece will work. The listening skills transfer regardless of the specific performance.

---

## A Note for Teachers

This course is designed to be flexible. You may substitute listening excerpts, shorten or expand units, and adjust projects to fit your schedule and your students.

The goal is not to cover every historical detail. The goal is to help students hear music more clearly and explain what they hear.

**When students can do that, they have learned how to listen.**

---

### About Virtunity

Virtunity is a structured practice platform built by a band director for band directors. It helps students build fundamentals—time, rhythm, pitch—through guided daily practice, so teachers can spend lesson time on phrasing, expression, and artistry.

This curriculum was designed alongside Virtunity's mission: give teachers real tools, not more busywork.

**[virtunity.io](https://virtunity.io)**