

**LESSON: H-UVI-L2**

# Music as an Instrument of Memory

**Unit VI:** Remembrance and the Creation of Memory

**Grade Levels:** 9–12

**Time:** 40–120 minutes



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## Objectives

- Analyze the lyrics and patterns in music to interpret what the composer is saying through song.
- Explain how people may find music a powerful means to express many different emotions, to honor people, and to memorialize both tragic and joyous events.
- Explain how the culture, traditions, and history of a people and a nation may be traced and analyzed through its music.

## Key Terms

- bridge
- lyrics
- theme
- chorus
- refrain
- verse
- image
- stanza

## Lesson Materials

- Songs About Historical Events  
(found at [http://www.songfacts.com/category-songs\\_about\\_historical\\_events.php](http://www.songfacts.com/category-songs_about_historical_events.php)).  
Choose a song to play and discuss in class. Prepare copies of the song lyrics for the students.
- List of songs about the September 11 attacks  
(found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_songs\\_about\\_the\\_September\\_11\\_attacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_songs_about_the_September_11_attacks))
- “9/11 in Song” by John Metzger (found at <http://www.musicbox-online.com/9-11.html>)
- lyrics to “The Rising” by Bruce Springsteen  
(found at [http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/bruce+springsteen/the+rising\\_20025196.html](http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/bruce+springsteen/the+rising_20025196.html))
- lyrics to “Into the Fire” by Bruce Springsteen  
(found at [http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/bruce+springsteen/into+the+fire\\_20025188.html](http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/bruce+springsteen/into+the+fire_20025188.html))
- lyrics to “You’re Missing” by Bruce Springsteen  
(found at [http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/bruce+springsteen/youre+missing\\_20025199.html](http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/bruce+springsteen/youre+missing_20025199.html))
- lyrics to “My City of Ruins” by Bruce Springsteen  
(found at [http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/bruce+springsteen/my+city+of+ruins\\_20025192.html](http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/bruce+springsteen/my+city+of+ruins_20025192.html))
- lyrics to “Countin’ On A Miracle” by Bruce Springsteen  
(found at [http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/bruce+springsteen/countin+on+a+miracle\\_20025185.html](http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/bruce+springsteen/countin+on+a+miracle_20025185.html))

## Lesson Background

Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, a number of musicians sought to understand 9/11 through music.

## Lesson Plan

### Day #1

- Review the key terms and ask students for definitions of each term. The terms should be defined in reference to their musical definition. If students are unable to offer an acceptable definition of a term(s), refer to dictionary.
- Initiate a class discussion about the many uses of music in people’s lives. Make a list of the ideas students offer. A few possibilities are:
  - for entertainment
  - to commemorate an event
  - to express an emotion
  - to share a sound or emotion with others such as grief and sorrow, introspection, or humor, etc.
  - to set the mood in a film, television show, or other performance;
  - to march, dance, strut, or just walk or saunter alongThe students may have many other suggestions drawn from their own experiences with music.
- Tell the class that you are going to play a song for them. All they need to do is to listen carefully to the words and music. Play the song you selected from the list of songs about historical events.
- After the students have listened attentively to the song, tell them that you are going to play the song again but this time you want them to read the lyrics as they listen to the music. Distribute the sheet of lyrics to the students and replay the music.
- At the conclusion of the song, ask the students what themes or ideas the songwriter has written about in the song.

### Day #2

- Explain that Bruce Springsteen’s album *The Rising* was distributed in 2002 as a response to 9/11. It contains fifteen songs; almost all were written after 9/11. One song, “My City of Ruins,” was written by Springsteen as an expression of his feelings for his hometown, Asbury Park. The song can also be analyzed in terms of 9/11.
- Divide the class into groups to analyze one of the following songs from Springsteen’s album:
  - “Into the Fire”
  - “My City of Ruins
  - “The Rising”
  - “You’re Missing”Organize the groups based on class size, but be sure that at least two students analyze the same song.
- Have the groups read and analyze their song and answer the following questions:
  - Explain the figurative language used in the lyrics.
  - How can these lyrics refer to 9/11?
  - Whose voice is Springsteen using (victim, loved one of victim, etc.)?

- *Note to Teacher:* You might use these suggestions and lyrics to explore the meaning of each song:
  - “Into the Fire”
    - Discuss the plight of firefighters that day
    - What do “up the stairs” and “love and duty” suggest to the listener?
    - How might “strength give us strength,” “faith give us faith,” “hope give us hope,” and “love bring us love”?
  - “My City of Ruins”
    - How is this song a symbol of New York City? (compared to the original intent of the lyric)
    - What images do the lyrics convey?
    - How might this be New York City after the tragedy?
    - Explain the spirituality in this song.
    - Why do people turn to religion in the midst of crisis?
    - Explain the symbolic significance of this place. Is it just a location?
  - “The Rising”
    - Does this song suggest a person or victim rising beyond or above the fire?
    - What are your thoughts as the song progresses from the person feeling a great burden to one who is reaching the sky?
    - At the end of the song, the image of the sky is frequently repeated (e.g., “blackness and sorrow,” “sky of blessed life”). What does each line/stage represent?
  - “The Missing”
    - This song portrays how a loved one prays for a victim’s return.
    - Describe the scene at home.
    - Explain the scene at home.
    - How do you know the victim has a family?
    - What is the significance of the last two lines, “God’s drifting in heaven, devil’s in the mailbox / I got dust on my shoes, nothing but teardrops”?
- After the students analyze the songs, ask them to find words or lines in the songs that signify or illustrate the presence of hope.
- Then have all the students examine the lyrics to “Countin’ on a Miracle.” Guide the class through the following steps and questions:
  - Find the lines that show sadness.
  - Find the lines that show hope.
  - How is remembrance a strong emotion in this song?
  - What message is Springsteen giving to those who lost loved ones?
  - How do we make our own miracles?
- Finally, listen to the audio of the songs. Continue the discussion with the following questions:
  - Does the musical artist stress any feelings in each song?
  - How does his singing style bring emotions to the songs?
  - After loss, how can music give hope?
  - Could these songs also be applied to other sad situations in life?
  - How does music help us heal?

## Evidence of Understanding

- For Day #1: Working individually, have the students write a brief essay describing/explaining how the songwriter reflected and expressed some of the same feelings and emotions that many people were experiencing at that time. Tell them to include in the essay an explanation of the way in which the composer's work continues and is part of the tradition of music as a part of the history of a people/nation.
- For Day #2: Have the students respond to these questions in a journal entry or an essay:
  - How can music respond to a tragedy?
  - How does music affect remembrance and memory?
  - How can a musical artist convey his/her own feelings of grief while echoing the feelings of so many others?
  - Does a musician have the right to speak for those lost?
  - Can music heal?
  - What other forms of art can express feelings and preserve memory?

## Additional Activities and Resources

- Have the students obtain the lyrics of other songs written about 9/11 or poems about the events of that day. Using the songs and/or poems, have them complete the following activity:
  - List some of the words and phrases that are used to describe 9/11 in each song and/or poem.
  - Who are the composers and/or authors of each piece of music or poem? Do the words used have a positive nature or a pessimistic nature? Are descriptions of the day more concerned with the physical reality or the pall cast by events of the day?
  - Explain and give examples from several songs and/or poems. Give the name of the song/or poem and the composer/author. Which work do you think best conveys the nature of the day, the events, and the mood of the people? Why?
- Reflect on the 10th Anniversary of September 11, 2001. Ask the students: "What music was involved in the ceremony? How did the music influence the atmosphere of the memorial ceremony?" Have the students find at least three pieces of music selected specifically for that day. For each piece of music, have them reflect on how or why the music was chosen. The students may use the following resources to explore these questions:
  - 9/11 Tenth Anniversary Memorial Ceremony full program (found at [http://www.ny1.com/content/911\\_tenth\\_anniversary/911\\_top\\_stories/146963/ny1-online--9-11-tenth-anniversary-memorial-ceremony--full-program-](http://www.ny1.com/content/911_tenth_anniversary/911_top_stories/146963/ny1-online--9-11-tenth-anniversary-memorial-ceremony--full-program-))
  - Paul Simon, "The Sound of Silence" (found at <http://bit.ly/LhhPVb> original link: <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/videos/paul-simon-the-sound-of-silence-at-9-11-memorial-20110911>)
  - James Taylor, "Close Your Eyes" (found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3IsxNpgwb4>)
  - Emi Ferguson, "Amazing Grace" (found at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ed1\\_l9Xao7A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ed1_l9Xao7A))
  - Yo-Yo Ma, "Sarabande" (found at <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/video/yo-yo-ma-plays-september-11-memorial-14492674>)

## **Taking Action and Giving Service**

- Have the students write a poem or song that they believe accurately describes the day of September 11, 2001 in mood and in physical reality. Have them consider how the song would change ten years later.
- Alternatively, have students paint or draw the scene of 9/11 reflecting the physical and emotional nature of the day. Have them consider how those images would change ten years later.