

The Musical Roots of the Surf Sound (Elementary Version)

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does the “Surf Sound” in Rock and Roll reflect early surf culture, and what are the roots of this genre of music?

OVERVIEW

In this lesson students will investigate the history of surfing and surf culture, and discover the musical characteristics of Surf Rock by visiting four listening stations featuring Chuck Berry-inspired electric guitar riffs, rich vocal harmonies, a production aesthetic influenced by Phil Spector’s “Wall of Sound” recordings, and the liberal use of “reverb” effects facilitated by technical innovations to Fender amplifiers in the early 1960s.



Photo: Shalom Jacobovitz

The sport of surfing is thought to have originated in the Polynesian Islands of the Pacific Ocean. Historians tell us that the sport of wave riding also took place in West Africa and Peru. Surfing was popularized in the Hawaiian Islands, and it was there that “wave sliding” was seen as a recreational as well as a spiritual practice. In Hawaii, rules and taboos known as *Kapa* governed such things as the selection of wood for a surfboard, offerings for excellent waves, and how to give thanks after surviving a wipe out. Ancient Hawaiian surfers competed to see who could ride a wave the fastest or the longest, and who could ride the biggest waves. Some surf spots in the Hawaiian Islands were reserved for royalty and the elite, and surfing became known as “the sport of kings”. Surfboards were crafted from specific woods and made in special shapes for different members of society. Only the highest chiefs could ride the longest boards, called “Olos”. Though it had existed for centuries, surfing was first introduced to the Anglo world in 1777, by a doctor traveling with explorer Captain James Cook on his ship *Resolution*.

Hawaii was annexed by the United States in 1898, and soon the isolated islands were visited by people from around the world. Visitors were in awe of Hawaiian surfers and in 1907 Hawaiian Surfer George Freeth traveled to Southern California, where he gave surfing demonstrations. Then, in 1914, Olympic Swimmer Duke Kahanamoku traveled to Australia and New Zealand and surfed for astonished crowds there. Soon Americans were flocking to Hawaii and the population of American residents there grew. Surfing was becoming more and more popular and Hawaii became a state in 1959.



The “surf sound” in Rock and Roll of the early 1960s began shortly after Hawaiian Statehood. This unique sound was built on an interplay of different musical traditions that came together to form something new, something that in its heyday took California, and then the nation by storm. In the case of The Beach Boys’ early music, a mix of popular musical genres resulted in a sound built upon both Black and white roots. Bringing together the R&B-inflected guitar of Chuck Berry with vocal-group harmonies associated with white groups like the Four Freshman, The Beach Boys took off and grew the surf sound and surf culture in Southern California.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The historical significance of surfing, its influence on Hawaii becoming the 50th State, and the growth of Surf Culture
- The contributions of such artists as The Beach Boys, Dick Dale, and the Surfaris to the “surf sound”
- The influence of technical innovation on musical expression, specifically the impact of reverb effects on recording artists using the Fender amplifiers produced in the early 1960s
- The musical roots of the Surf sound of the early 1960s, including Rhythm and Blues guitar styles, vocal-group harmonies, and the “Wall of Sound” production technique

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to apply knowledge of events leading to the birth of the surf sound, and evaluate its influence on American Culture in the 1960s.

ACTIVITIES

Note to Teacher: This lesson can be split into a two day lesson. Day One could cover the history of surfing and how Hawaii became the 50th U.S. State. Day Two could focus on Surf music, it's roots in many styles of music, and its influence on culture.

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Share with students the TedEd video: “The Complicated History of Surfing.” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=jyn_orqdyHQ&feature=emb_title) (*Note: this link will open to the official song on YouTube, we suggest loading the video before class to avoid showing advertising during class.*) Then ask students:
 - According to the video, where were some of the places surfing first began?
 - What are some of the roles surfing plays for Hawaiians?

- When did European explorers first encounter surfing?
- What did early non-native Hawaiians who arrived on the islands think of surfing?
- How was surfing introduced to the mainland United States? How was it introduced to Australia and New Zealand?
- Why was surfing first promoted by Alexander Hume Ford?

2. Display **Image 1: Poster from the 1963 Hollywood movie Beach Party**. Ask students:

- What is this image advertising?
- Based on what you learned in the video you just watched, what moment in the history of surfing might be represented in this image?
- What kind of music do you think you might hear in this movie? What kind of mood would it create? What words come to mind to describe it?

PROCEDURE

1. Share with students that in this lesson they will be learning about how surfing and surf music created a culture still associated with Southern California today.
2. Pass out **Handout 1 -The Roots of Surf Sound Vocabulary**. (*Note to teacher: vocabulary can be used at the beginning or end of the lesson.*)
3. Share **Handout 2 - The Roots of Surf Sound Timeline** with students. Talk over the events in the timeline and ask students to work in teams to create a visual timeline with illustrations depicting each event on their group's timeline.
4. Ask students to write at least five questions that could be answered by looking at their timeline. Tell students that they will be quizzing another team later in the lesson.
5. As groups finish, have them share their timelines and their questions with other

teams and to encourage understanding of the sequence of events.

6. As groups finish sharing and asking each other questions, ask students to recap important events in surf history without looking at their timelines. You may want to note these events on your whiteboard or document camera. (*Note: This is a logical place to break if you are teaching the lesson in two days.*)
7. Set up the room to create four separate listening stations on classroom computers. If equipment is available, the instructor may wish to set up duplicate stations, for a total of eight. Each station should consist of the following videos:

Listening Station 1: Vocal Harmonies

- Song 1: "The Things We Did Last Summer," The Beach Boys (1963)
- Song 2: "Angel Eyes," the Four Freshmen (1956)

Listening Station 2: R&B Guitar

- Song 1: “Fun, Fun, Fun,” The Beach Boys (1964)
- Song 2: “Johnny B. Goode,” Chuck Berry (1958)

Listening Station 3: Wall of Sound

- Song 1: “Don’t Worry Baby,” The Beach Boys (1964)
- Song 2: “Be My Baby,” the Ronettes (1963)

Listening Station 4: Instrumental Reverb

- Song 1: “Wipeout,” the Surfaris (1963)
- Song 2: “Miserlou,” Dick Dale and the Del-Tones (1962)

8. Divide students into groups of no more than four, and distribute to each group **Handout 3 - Surf Listening Stations** and **Handout 4 - Surf Listening Activity**. Explain to students that during this activity, they will visit each of the listening stations. As students visit each station, they should read out loud the station description in Handout 3, and discuss the questions. Then, they should fill out the appropriate section of the chart in Handout 4. When the groups have visited all four stations, they should return to their seats with their groups.
9. Still working in groups, students will answer the final two questions on Handout 1, focusing on identifying the central musical elements of Surf and working toward a definition or general statement about the spirit of the Surf sound.
10. Briefly summarize student findings by going around the room and soliciting sample answers from each group.

SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Briefly discuss with students:
 - How did the history of surfing and Hawaiian statehood in 1959 impact the birth of Surf Music?
 - What was it about the Surf sound that gave it such broad appeal in the early 1960s?
 - The Beach Boys’ music combined the sounds of vocal group music that had long appealed to white audiences, with a Rhythm and Blues sound derived largely from African-American musical influences. Are you surprised that these two forms could be so successfully combined? What does their merging in Surf music tell us about the history of Rock and Roll and American popular culture?
 - How does Surf Music represent the sport and culture of surfing?
2. Ask students to vote on which of the songs in this lesson best represents Surf Sound.
3. Display the image that was shown at the opening of the lesson, this time accompanied by the song the students selected.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

1. **Writing Prompt:** What is the Surf Sound? Write an encyclopedia-style entry explaining it, using examples from the songs and techniques studied in this lesson.
2. **Arts Integration Activity:** Have students create Slow Write Surf Art using an image of a wave and the lyrics of a famous surf song. Follow the directions on the **Art Project: The Roots of Surf Sound** handout. Students will need paper, sharpie pens or crayons, and watercolors. Consider playing surf music as your students are working on this project. See this link for instructions on illustrating a wave: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=jyn_orqdyHQ&feature=emb_title.
3. Play the first minute of the Chuck Berry song “Sweet Little Sixteen” (1958), followed by the first minute of The Beach Boys’ “Surfin’ USA” (1963). Note that musically, these songs are almost identical; Berry sued and was given a songwriting credit after “Surfin’ USA” was released. Discuss with students the similarities and differences between the songs, how The Beach Boys’ lyrics changes the meaning of the song, and who the different audiences might have been for each song.

STANDARDS

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading (K-12)

Reading 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Craft and Structure 4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing (K-12)

Text Types and Purposes 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language(K-12)

Language 1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Language 3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening (K-12)

Speaking and Listening 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Speaking and Listening 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Presentation of Knowledge 4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Theme 3: People, Place, and Environments

Theme 8: Science, Technology, and Society

Theme 9 : Global Connections

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

Core Music Standard: Responding

Analyze: Analyze how the structure and context of varied musical works inform the response.

Interpret: Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators' and/or performers' expressive intent.

Evaluate: Support evaluations of musical works and performances based on analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.

Core Music Standard: Connecting

Connecting 11: Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

Responding

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Anchor Standard 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Anchor Standards 11: Relate artistic ideas and work with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.



RESOURCES

VIDEO RESOURCES

- The Beach Boys – Fun, Fun, Fun (1964)
- The Beach Boys – Surfin' USA (1963)
- The Four Freshmen – Angel Eyes (1956)
- The Beach Boys – Don't Worry Baby (1964)
- Chuck Berry – Sweet Little Sixteen (1958)
- Chuck Berry – Johnny B. Goode (1965)
- The Beach Boys – The Things We Did Last Summer (1963)
- The Ronettes – Be My Baby (1963)
- Dick Dale – Miserlou (1962)
- The Surfaris – Wipeout (1963)

HANDOUTS

- Handout 1 -The Roots of Surf Sound Vocabulary
- Handout 2 - The Roots of Surf Sound Timeline
- Handout 3 - Surf Listening Stations
- Handout 4 - Surf Listening Activity
- Art Project: The Roots of Surf Sound

Lesson Materials



Image 1: Poster from the 1963 Hollywood Movie *Beach Party*



Handout 1 -The Roots of Surf Sound Vocabulary

Please learn each vocabulary term below. Draw a picture to represent the word and/or answer the question in the box to the right of each term:

<p>Astonished: (Adjective) Sudden and unusual wonder and surprise.</p>	<p>Illustrate the vocabulary word here:</p>	<p>What is something that astonishes you?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>Demonstration: (Noun) The act of showing someone a product, service, or something interesting.</p>	<p>Illustrate the vocabulary word here:</p>	<p>What is something that you could demonstrate to your classmates?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>Heyday: (Noun) A period of great popularity within a place or group of people.</p>	<p>Illustrate the vocabulary word here:</p>	<p>Is a Heyday something that is made up of a bunch of hay?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>Harmonies: (Noun) The combination of musical notes sung together by a group.</p>	<p>Illustrate the vocabulary word here:</p>	<p>Name a song that uses harmonies:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>Reverb: (Noun): An effect that makes an instrument or voice sound as if it is coming from a particular place (like a theater or subway station).</p>	<p>Illustrate the vocabulary word here:</p>	<p>Does talking in the classroom sound different than talking in the cafeteria? Why?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Handout 2 - The Roots of Surf Sound Timeline

Create an Illustrated Timeline of the following events. Then create a list of at least five questions for classmates to answer about this timeline.

Ancient Times: Surfing originated in Polynesia and was known as “The Sport of Kings” in Ancient Hawaii.

1777: A doctor aboard explorer Captain Cook’s ship writes about surfing.

1898: Hawaii is annexed by the United States of America.

1907: Surfer George Feeth visits Southern California and amazes beachgoers with his surfing demonstrations.

1914: Olympic Swimmer Duke Kahanamoku travels to Australia and New Zealand to demonstrate surfing to people there.

1928: The world’s first surfing championship is held in Corona Del Mar, California.

1958: The first Hollywood Surf Movie, “Gidget” is released.

1961: Dick Dale plays the first “Surf Music” style of Rock and Roll.

1962: The Beach Boys song “Surfing’ Safari” becomes popular.

1966: Bruce Brown releases the first Surf Movie “Endless Summer.”

Handout 3 - Surf Listening Stations

Listening Station 1: Vocal Harmonies

- Song 1: “The Things We Did Last Summer,” the Beach Boys (1963)
- Song 2: “Angel Eyes,” The Four Freshmen (1956)

Founded in Indiana in 1948, the Four Freshmen were a popular male vocal group that combined Jazz stylings with the sound of traditional barbershop quartets. As you listen to the two songs, think about the ways in which the groups use their voices to create a specific mood.

- In the two songs, is every singer singing the same part?
- How do the combinations of different sounds create a single whole?
- Note that the Beach Boys’ performance came seven years after “Angel Eyes.” How do you think groups such as the Four Freshmen might have influenced the Beach Boys’ vocal style?
- Note that “The Things We Did Last Summer” is a 1946 song that has been recorded by numerous artists. Why do you think the Beach Boys chose to perform this song in 1963? What does it suggest about the influence of earlier musical styles on them as a group?

Listening Station 2: R&B Guitar

- Song 1: “Fun, Fun, Fun,” The Beach Boys (1964)
- Song 2: “Johnny B. Goode,” Chuck Berry (1958)

Chuck Berry’s “Johnny B. Goode” remains one of the classics of early Rock and Roll, and a source of inspiration for many subsequent Rock and Roll groups.

- The first time you listen, listen only to the first 18 seconds of each song. What do you notice?
- Listen to each song in its entirety. Why might the Beach Boys have borrowed the opening guitar riff to “Johnny B. Goode” for their song? What does it add to the song? Do the Beach Boys successfully take this famous guitar riff and make it their own?
- In the two songs, is every singer singing the same part?

Listening Station 3: Wall of Sound

- Song 1: “Don’t Worry Baby,” The Beach Boys (1964)
- Song 2: “Be My Baby,” the Ronettes (1963)

The Ronettes’ recording demonstrates a production technique called the “Wall of Sound,” pioneered in the early 1960s by record producer Phil Spector. It was a style that influenced Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys.

- Pay particular attention to the opening seconds of each song as you listen. What about them is similar?
- Listen carefully and think about how that sound was created. What kind of effect does this technique accomplish? What kind of mood does it create?

Listening Station 4: Instrumental Reverb

- Song 1: “Wipeout,” the Surfaris (1963)
- Song 2: “Miserlou,” Dick Dale and the Del-Tones (1962)

In the early 1960s, the Fender Musical Instruments Corporation introduced a new type of electric amplifier that could produce a reverberating sound, an echo-like effect popularly known as “reverb.” This effect was featured on many instrumental songs of the Surf era.

- What kind of mood does it create in the two songs here? (Note that “Miserlou” is a recording of a traditional Greek song that was written in the 1920s.)

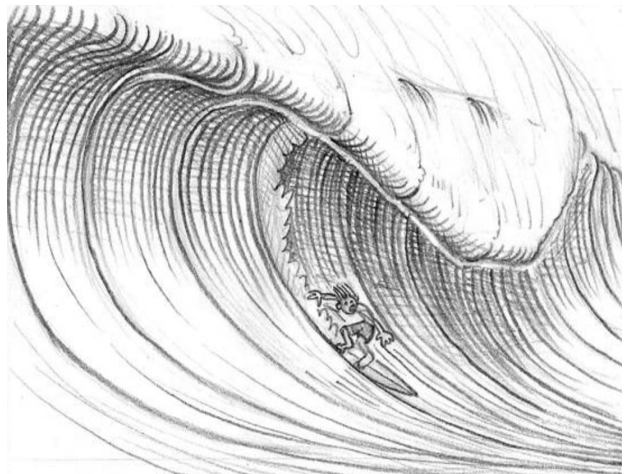
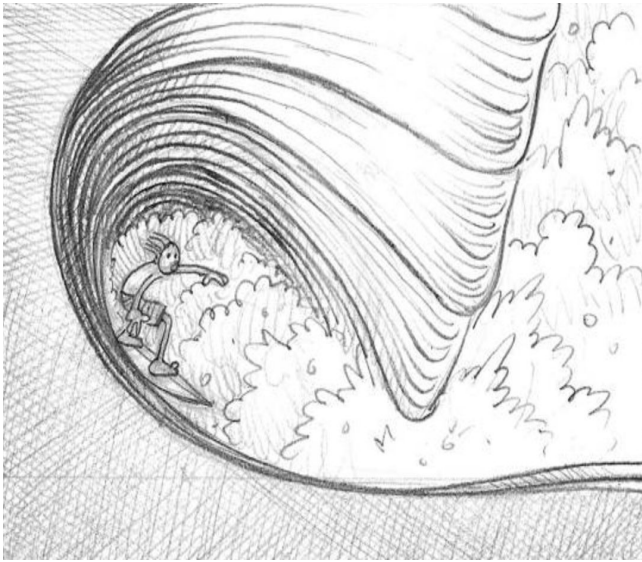
Handout 4 - Surf Listening Activity

Complete the following chart as you visit each listening station:

	Specific Musical Elements Heard <i>Example:</i> <i>Heavy drumbeat,</i> <i>female voices, electric guitar.</i>	General Mood or Tone <i>Example: Sad, Exciting, Hopeful, Angry.</i>
Listening Station 1: Vocal Harmonies		
Listening Station 2: R&B Guitar		
Listening Station 3: Wall of Sound		
Listening Station 4: Instrumental Reverb		
Summarize: What were the important elements of the Surf sound?		
Evaluate: How would you describe the overall spirit of the Surf sound that was created when these different musical elements came together?		

Art Project: The Roots of Surf Sound

You will be creating Slow Write Art using song lyrics! First, create a wave drawing using the examples below. (you can use sharpie or crayon, watercolor makers will not work well with this project). Then write the lyrics to one of these songs in the lines of your wave using a crayon or sharpie pen. Finally, using shades of blue and green, create a watercolor wash over your writing on the wave. Have fun!



Surf Music Lyrics

The Beach Boys, “Fun, Fun, Fun”

Well she got her daddy’s car
And she cruised through the hamburger stand
now

Seems she forgot all about the library
Like she told her old man now
And with the radio blasting
Goes cruising just as fast as she can now

And she’ll have fun fun fun
‘Til her daddy takes the T-bird away
(Fun fun fun ‘til her daddy takes the T-bird away)

Well the girls can’t stand her
‘Cause she walks looks and drives like an ace
now
(You walk like an ace now you walk like an ace)
She makes the Indy 500 look like a Roman chari-
ot race now
(You look like an ace now you look like an ace)
A lotta guys try to catch her
But she leads them on a wild goose chase now
(You drive like an ace now you drive like an ace)

And she’ll have fun fun fun
(Fun fun fun ‘til her daddy takes the T-bird away)

“Surfer Joe” by The Surfaris

Down in Yohee where the surfers all go
There’s a big beach blondie named Surfer Joe
He’s got a green woody & a board to match
And when he’s riding the waves, man is he hard
to catch

Surfer Joe, now look at him go-o-o
Surfer, surfer, surfer Joe
Go man go

Oh-o-o Surfer Joe
Joe went to Huntington’s Meet one week
Where the annual surfing convention meet
He was hangin’ five and walkin’ the nose
And when the Meet was over, the trophy was
Joe’s

Surfer Joe, now look at him go-o-o
Surfer, surfer, surfer Joe
Go man go
Oh-o-o Surfer Joe