

Singer-Songwriters and the Environmental Movement (Elementary Version)

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

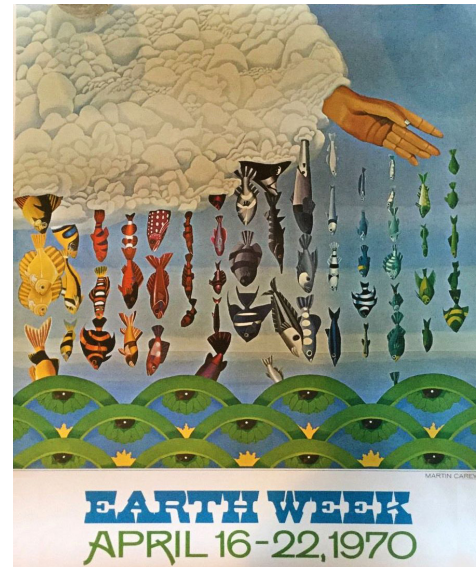
How did the singer-songwriters of the 1960s and 70s address the concerns of the environmental movement?

OVERVIEW

*We are stardust
We are golden
And we've got to get ourselves
Back to the garden*

—Joni Mitchell, “Woodstock” (1970)

In this lesson, students will analyze a series of songs articulating a connection to nature and the environment—a longing to “get ourselves back to the garden”—and examine the ways in which they reflect a growing attention to environmental issues in American culture.



Design: Martin Carey

In 1962, marine biologist Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, a chilling account of the damage done to the environment by pollution, particularly in the form of chemicals and pesticides. Eight years later, on the first “Earth Day,” Americans joined in protests over the degradation of the country’s air and water, launching an environmental movement that continues today.

Silent Spring introduced environmental concerns to new audiences, leading to a strengthened environmental movement. But well before the publication of Carson’s book, many Americans were already intimately familiar with the dangers of pollution and the extraction of resources. Poor Americans, people of color, and immigrants have regularly worked in close proximity to dangerous chemicals or other pollutants. For centuries, indigenous people have witnessed the desecration of the environment, from the eradication of the buffalo to the pollution of waterways to the strip mining of mountains considered sacred. Songs created by these communities that address such experiences and concerns have long been part of the American musical landscape.

In part thanks to the publication of *Silent Spring*, environmentally-minded songs began to become commercially popular in the 1960s. Some artists made assertive statements about protecting the land from the ravages of corporate greed: As Jackson Browne sang in “Before the Deluge,” “Some of them were angry at the way the earth was abused/By the men who learned how to forge her beauty into power.” In “Big Yellow Taxi,” Joni Mitchell lamented that “They

paved paradise and put up a parking lot,” and invoked a world where “They took all the trees / Put ‘em in a tree museum / And they charged the people a dollar and a half just to see ‘em.” Mitchell explicitly called attention to the insecticide DDT, a specific concern at the heart of *Silent Spring*. Marvin Gaye voiced his sorrow and concern for the polluting of the natural world with his 1971 hit single, “Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology),” singing, “Whoa, mercy, mercy me / Things ain’t what they used to be, no, no / Oil wasted on the oceans and upon our seas / Fish, full of mercury.”

At the same time, many Singer-Songwriters expressed a more general unease about America’s increasing urban sprawl and suburbanization, and a longing for a closer connection to the land. “In my mind I’m gone to Carolina / Can’t you see the sunshine / Can’t you just feel the moonshine,” sang James Taylor in “Carolina in My Mind.” In “After the Gold Rush,” Neil Young painted a portrait of “a fanfare blowin’ to the sun / That was floating on the breeze / Look at Mother Nature on the run in the 1970s.”

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The main ideas and historical importance of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), which detailed threats to the environment from pollution and the use of pesticides
- The growing attention of Singer-Songwriters in the late 1960s and early 1970s to themes relating to nature and the environment
- The musical contributions of such Singer-Songwriters as Joni Mitchell, Marvin Gaye, James Taylor, Neil Young, and Jackson Browne

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE

- Students will be able to describe the important ideas that lead to the first Earth Day, and evaluate the contributions of singer-songwriters to the Environmental Movement in the late 1960’s and 1970s.

ACTIVITIES

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Display **Image 1, Environmental Protesters**. Ask the class:

- Who might the people in the picture be?
- What might they be doing? Where are they doing it?
- Why might they be carrying signs?
- What might they want other people to know?

2. Display **Image 2, Front Page of the *Wisconsin State Journal*, April 23, 1970.** Read the quote from the newspaper article aloud to students. Ask students:
 - What does the main headline say? What news is this headline reporting?
 - What age group does the newspaper say was leading the pollution protest?
 - Have you heard of Earth Day?
 - Why was this important in 1970?
3. Inform students that the first Earth Day was on April 22, 1970, and that environmental protests were held all over the country. Earth Day continues to be celebrated every year.
4. Write the date April 22, 1970 on your whiteboard, you will be referring back to that date late in the lesson.

PROCEDURE:

1. Pass out **Handout 1 - Introducing Vocabulary** to each student, and ask them to complete the handout (alternatively, they can complete the handout at the end of the lesson).
 - DDT was finally banned in 1973, 10 years after Rachel had testified. Why do you think that DDT was not banned earlier?
2. Play the video “**Rachel Carson - A History for Kids,**” and write on the board: “Rachel Carson Testifies: 1963.”
 - How do you think that Rachel felt when she testified to the US Senate? How do you think she felt when it took so long for her ideas to be heard?
3. Group students into pairs, and have each pair answer the following questions:
 - Who was Rachel Carson?
 - What was her book “*Silent Spring*” about?
 - What is DDT and why did Rachel feel it was important to tell people about DDT?
 - Rachel Carson testified to the United States Senate and told them about DDT. Do you feel this was a good idea?
 - Why were the chemical companies against Rachel’s ideas about DDT?
4. Play the short excerpt from Joni Mitchell’s live performance of her 1970 song “Woodstock” and display **Image 3, Woodstock Lyrics.** (If students are unfamiliar with Woodstock, briefly explain that it was a three-day music festival in 1969 that attracted almost half a million people. It was held on farmland owned by a man named Max Yasgur in Bethel, N.Y.) Discuss with students:
 - What does Mitchell suggest happens when you “camp out on the land”?

- What do you think Mitchell means when she says, “We’ve got to get ourselves back to the garden”?
 - In this song, Mitchell sings about getting back to the gardens and getting her soul free. How do you feel when you are in a garden or in nature?
5. Set up five listening stations around the room:
- **Station 1:** Joni Mitchell, “Big Yellow Taxi” (1970)
 - **Station 2:** Marvin Gaye, “Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)” (1971)
 - **Station 3:** Neil Young, “After the Gold Rush” (1970)
 - **Station 4:** James Taylor, “Carolina in My Mind” (1968)
 - Station 5: Jackson Brown, “Before the Deluge” (1974)
6. Distribute **Handout 2 - Lyrics for Songs in This Lesson** to students. Instruct students to visit each station to listen to the song excerpts and follow along with the lyrics. Divide students so that an equal number begin at each station. (*Note to teacher: It is up to the instructor to decide whether students will complete this activity individually or in small groups or pairs.*) Clips are between 48 seconds and 1 minute 18 seconds, you may want to establish a signal to move students to each station. Allow students sufficient time to visit all five stations.

SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Reconvene the class and discuss:
- Are there common themes to all four songs? If so, what are they?
 - Remember that these performers are called “Singer-Songwriters” because they generally perform material that they themselves have written. Why do you think many Singer-Songwriters might have chosen to write about ideas relating to nature and the environment in the late 1960s and early 1970s?
 - Do these songs reflect the influence of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*? What do you hear in the songs to suggest that they do?
 - Do these songs reflect the spirit of Earth Day and the idea of getting “back to the garden”?
 - If you had to pick one of these songs to be the theme song for Earth Day, which would it be and why?
 - Refer to the dates that you have written on your whiteboard: Rachel Carson Testifies: 1963, and April 22, 1970. Ask: “Do you think that Singer-Songwriters helped to share the important ideas of the Environmental Movement?”

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. **Art Activity:** In this activity, students will illustrate some lyrics from one of the songs they have heard at the listening stations earlier in this lesson. Students may write the lyrics themselves or you may use **Handout 3 - Song Lyric Arts Activity**. Allow students to select from the lyrics below to choose the lyrics they would like to illustrate if possible. The choice is yours regarding art media. This activity lends itself to simple drawing, crayon resist, elaborate collage, etc. Send photos of student work to info@teachrock.org!
2. **Writing Prompt:** How did the Singer-Songwriters of the late 1960s and early 70s reflect the concerns of the early environmental movement in their music? Be sure to discuss the work of Rachel Carson and the first Earth Day on the environmental movement in your answer.
3. Ask students to research the history of Earth Day since 1970. Have them identify songs by popular artists from later eras that reflect the concerns expressed on Earth Day. You may also wish to ask students to identify a current song that might be used as a theme for an upcoming Earth Day celebration in your school or classroom.
4. Have students engage in a creative writing exercise by writing their own song lyrics about the current state of the environment.
5. Ask students to imagine that they are able to interview Rachel Carson today and create an imaginary conversation.
6. Have students research the current Environmental Movement. What steps are being taken today to protect our Earth? Who are the important figures in the Environmental Movement today?

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading

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.

Reading 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

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.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 10: Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing (Extension Activities Only)

Text Types and Purposes 3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

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

Comprehension & Collaboration 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.

Comprehension & Collaboration 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Comprehension & Collaboration 3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

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.

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

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 3: People, Place, and Environments

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

Theme 7: Production, Distributions, and Consumption

Theme 8: Science, Technology, and Society

Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION – NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MUSIC EDUCATION (NAFME)

Core Music Standard: Responding

Select: Choose music appropriate for a specific purpose or context.

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.

Core Music Standard: 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

- Neil Young - "After the Gold Rush"
- Joni Mitchell - "Woodstock"
- Jackson Browne - "Before the Deluge"
- James Taylor - "Carolina In My Mind"
- Joni Mitchell - "Big Yellow Taxi"
- Marvin Gaye - "Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)"

HANDOUTS

- Handout 1 - Introducing Vocabulary
- Handout 2 - Song Lyrics
- Handout 3 - Song Lyric Arts Activity

Lesson Materials



Image 1- Environmental Protesters



Image 2- Front Page of the *Wisconsin State Journal*, April 23, 1970

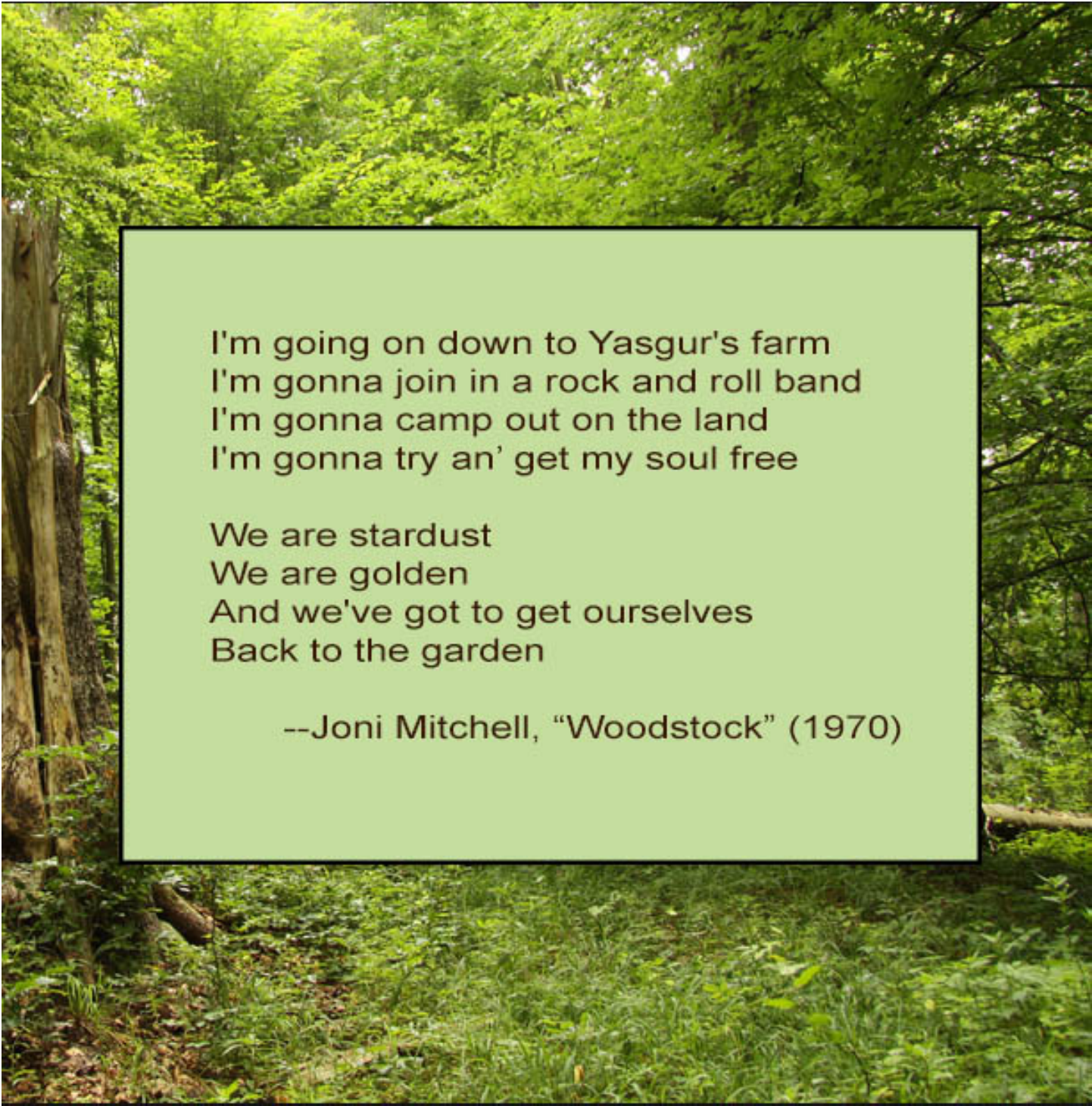


Youth joined hands with age across the generation gap Wednesday in a gigantic array of demonstrations pleading for an end to pollution.

Earth Day, as Wednesday was designated, was a phenomenon in this age of protest—a day when Americans of all shades of belief joined in protesting the spread of contamination which threatens the very existence of life on this planet.

--Wisconsin State Journal, April 23, 1970

Image 3- Woodstock Lyrics

A photograph of a dense forest with vibrant green foliage. A light green rectangular box with a black border is centered over the image, containing the lyrics of the song "Woodstock" by Joni Mitchell.

I'm going on down to Yasgur's farm
I'm gonna join in a rock and roll band
I'm gonna camp out on the land
I'm gonna try an' get my soul free

We are stardust
We are golden
And we've got to get ourselves
Back to the garden

--Joni Mitchell, "Woodstock" (1970)

Handout 1 - Introducing Vocabulary

Please learn each of these vocabulary terms and answer the questions for each term below.

<p>Banned Verb: an official order that has made something against the law.</p>	<p>What is something that you think should be banned?</p>
<p>Environmental Movement Noun: organized efforts that support the health of the earth and all living things.</p>	<p>Is Environmental Movement a new idea to you? (circle one)</p> <p>Yes No Maybe</p>
<p>Pesticide Noun: a substance used to kill pests such as insects, spiders, or rats.</p>	<p>Why would a farmer like to use pesticides?</p>
<p>Singer-Songwriter Noun: A musician who writes and performs their own songs.</p>	<p>Would you like to be a Singer-Songwriter? (circle one)</p> <p>Yes No Maybe</p>
<p>Testify Verb: to make a formal statement about something known to be true.</p>	<p>Where is a place that a person might testify?</p>
<p>Wide Support Adjective: including or involving many people who share the same idea</p>	<p>Why is it important to have wide support when you want to make a big change?</p>



Handout 2 - Song Lyrics

Station 1: Joni Mitchell, "Big Yellow Taxi" (1970)

They took all the trees
Put 'em in a tree museum
And they charged all the people
A dollar and a half just to see 'em...

Hey, farmer farmer
Put away that DDT now
Give me spots on my apples
But leave me the birds and the bees

Don't it always seem to go
That you don't know what you've got
Till it's gone
They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot

Whoa, ah, mercy mercy me
Oh things ain't what they used to be, no no
Where did all the blue skies go?
Poison is the wind that blows from the north and south and east

Station 2: Marvin Gaye, "Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)" (1971)

Whoa mercy, mercy me,
Oh things ain't what they used to be, no no
Oil wasted on the oceans and upon our seas, fish full of mercury

Ah, oh mercy, mercy me
Ah things ain't what they used to be, no no
Radiation under ground and in the sky
Animals and birds who live nearby are dying

Oh mercy, mercy me
Oh things ain't what they used to be
What about this overcrowded land
How much more abuse from man can she stand?



Station 3: Neil Young, "After the Gold Rush" (1970)

Well, I dreamed I saw the knights in armor coming
Sayin' something about a queen
There were peasants singin' and drummers drumming
And the archer split the tree
There was a fanfare blowin' to the sun
That floated on the breeze
Look at Mother Nature on the run in the 1970s

Station 4: James Taylor, "Carolina in My Mind" (1968)

In my mind I'm gone to Carolina
Can't you see the sunshine?
Can't you just feel the moonshine?
Ain't it just like a friend of mine to hit me from behind
Yes, I'm gone to Carolina in my mind

Dark and silent late last night,
I think I might have heard the highway call
Geese in flight and dogs that bite
And signs that might be omens say
I'm goin', goin'...I'm gone to Carolina in my mind
Yes, I'm gone to Carolina in my mind

Station 5: Jackson Browne, "Before the Deluge" (1974)

Some of them were angry
At the way the earth was abused
By the men who learned how to forge her beauty into power
And they struggled to protect her from them
Only to be confused
By the magnitude of her fury in the final hour
And when the sand was gone and the time arrived
In the naked dawn only a few survived
And in attempts to understand a thing so simple and so huge
Believed that they were meant to live after the deluge



“I’m gonna camp out on the land and try to set my soul free.”

“Woodstock,” Joni Mitchell



“Where did all the blue skies go? Poison is the wind that blows from the north and south and east.”

“Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology),” Marvin Gaye



“We are stardust, we are golden, and we’ve got to get ourselves back to the garden.”

“Woodstock,” Joni Mitchell



“Look at Mother Nature on the Run, in the 1970’s.”

“After the Gold Rush,” Neil Young



“Oil wasted on the oceans and upon our seas, fish full of mercury.”

“Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology),” Marvin Gaye



**“Hey Farmer, Farmer, put away that DDT now, give me spots on my apples,
but leave me the birds and the bees, please!”**

“Big Yellow Taxi,” Joni Mitchell



“Can’t you see the sunshine? Can’t you just feel the moonshine? Ain’t it just like a friend of mine...”

“Carolina in My Mind,” James Taylor



**“Some of them were angry at the way the earth was abused,
By the men who learned how to forge her beauty into power.”**

“After the Deluge,” Jackson Browne



“They took all the trees, put ‘em in a tree museum. And charged all the people a dollar and a half just to see ‘em.”

“Big Yellow Taxi,” Joni Mitchell