

# Greta Thunberg, Music, and the Climate Crisis

## OVERVIEW

### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How have musicians helped spread climate activist Greta Thunberg's activism?

### OVERVIEW

*In this lesson, students investigate Greta Thunberg's efforts in fighting the climate crisis by examining the ways musicians have covered, remixed, or sampled a speech she delivered before the United Nations in 2019. They then consider the larger social role musicians might play in spreading political or social messages. Finally, students are given the opportunity to imagine their own covers, remixes, or original pieces based upon quotes from other young climate activists.*



In October, 2018, the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC, released a report which arguably changed the course of history. In no uncertain terms, the scientists that created the report warned that drastic social and economic changes are required within 12 years in order to mitigate the worst effects of a warming climate, which include not only a rising coastline and more extreme weather events, but also the collapse of ecosystems, global food and water shortages, and the extinction of millions of species. While the report presented a dire outlook if the world continued to release greenhouse gases at current rates, it also gave room for hope: humanity has all the technology and science it needs to drastically curb such emissions that cause global warming. All that is lacking is the will.

Just a few months before the report was published, 16-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg began leaving school every Friday to protest in front of the parliament building in Stockholm. Inspired by the example of the March For Our Lives movement organized by students after the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, Thunberg stood alone in front of the Parliament building, holding up a sign that read “Skolstrejk för klimatet”: “School Strike for Climate.” Thunberg’s demand of the government was to address the climate change like the crisis it is.

On the first day of the strike Thunberg sat alone. On the second day, a single person joined her. Soon however, inspired by her example, young people from across the world became climate activists, developing their own organizations to demand local, regional, and national governments start addressing the climate crisis. The numbers grew, and around a year later, in September 2019, an estimated 400 million people around the globe participated in the Global



## Climate Strike.

Musicians, too, have been inspired by Thunberg's example. Artists including Janelle Monáe, Billie Eilish, and Camila Cabello have expressed admiration for Thunberg. Bebe Rexha dedicated her song, "You Can't Stop The Girl" to Thunberg, and Thunberg collaborated with the band The 1975 on a self-titled song. Around the same time as the Global Climate Strike, Thunberg delivered a scathing speech before the U.N., castigating the gathered world leaders for not doing enough to address the climate crisis. In turn, the speech inspired remixes, samples, and covers, including a Death Metal song, a fan-made Fatboy Slim Mashup (which was later played by the artist himself at a performance), and a cover by singer Megan Washington.

The climate crisis is one of the most significant challenges humanity has ever faced, and Greta Thunberg is the first to admit she alone cannot solve the problem. Indeed, Thunberg often stresses the absurdity of her position as both a child and a role model for climate action, and is often vocally uncomfortable with her recent celebrity. Yet the fact that her message spread so rapidly, from a singular protest in Copenhagen to a global protest of millions, is a testament to the rate at which the will to address climate change is growing and strengthening.

Thunberg won't likely be the only young climate activist to garner global attention: already activist like Irsa Hirsi, Xiye Bastida, Kevin Patel, Daphne Frias, Feliquan Charlemagne, and Vic Barrett increasingly amplifying the message. Each have their own stories to tell, and each have as much to lose as Thunberg—perhaps more.

## OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

### 1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The differences between sampling, remixing, and covering a song or audio source
- The work of climate activist Greta Thunberg
- Greta Thunberg's 2019 U.N. speech
- The way music can help spread social messages to a larger audience
- The work of other young climate activists across North America

### 2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to investigate how music contributes to social movements by investigating musical covers, samples, and remixes of climate activist Greta Thunberg's 2019 U.N. speech.

## ACTIVITIES

### MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. On the board, write the words “Remixing,” “Covering,” and “Sampling” in three equally spaced columns. Ask students:
  - Have you ever seen any of these words on the board? If so, where?
  - Have you heard a remix, cover or sample? Can you think of any specific songs that use samples, or could be described as a remix or cover?
  - What do the three words on the board have in common? (For example: they are all techniques in musical production.)
  - How are the words on the board different? Do they describe different processes or techniques?
2. Gather students into groups of 3-5, and give each group 3 sticky notes. Ask each group to brainstorm and write a definition of each term on the sticky note (for instance, students might write “a Youtuber singing a song they didn’t write” as an example of “covering.”) (*Note to teacher: rather than using sticky notes, you can alternatively ask student groups to simply write their definition directly onto the board.*)
3. Once finished, have students place their sticky notes in the appropriate column on the board. Then read through each definition. Discuss:
  - Are the groups definitions of each technique similar, or different? In what ways?
  - Could the class come to a consensus on how to define the technique of sampling, covering, and remixing?
4. Show **Image 1, Grove Music Dictionary Definitions of Sampling, Remixing, and Covering**. Discuss:
  - How do these definitions compare to the definitions created in class?
  - What does “transposed” mean, in the definition for sampling? (In this definition, transpose refers to transferring something to a different place or context.)
  - For what reason might a musician want to cover a song that isn’t theirs?
  - For what reason might a musician want to remix a song?
  - For what reasons might an artist want to sample sounds from another recording?

- Is it possible to cover, sample, or remix audio that isn't music—for example a speech, soundscape, or sound effect? Have you ever heard this done? Where? Why might an artist want to do this?

## PROCEDURE

1. Tell students that in class they will explore how covering, sampling, or remixing might be a way to spread a social or political message.
2. Show **Image 2, Greta Thunberg**. Ask students:
  - Do you recognize the person speaking in this photograph? Who is she?
  - What do you know about Greta Thunberg? Why has she become so well known?
3. Pass out **Handout 1 - Greta Thunberg's 2019 U.N. Speech** to each student. Read the biography at the beginning of the handout aloud as a class. Then, read Thunberg's 2019 speech to the U.N. aloud. Ask students:
  - Where did this speech take place? What is the U.N.? (*The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945. Made up of 193 Member States, the U.N. takes action on "issues confronting humanity in the 21st century, such as peace and security, climate change, sustainable development, human rights, disarmament, terrorism, humanitarian and health emergencies, gender equality, governance, food production, and more."*)
  - How would you describe the mood of this speech? Why might Thunberg be portraying this mood?
  - Why might have Thunberg chose to begin the speech with the notion that she shouldn't be at the U.N.? Why might she feel that way?
4. Tell students that Thunberg's speech before the U.N. attracted a lot of attention, including from musicians. Have students return to their groups, and set up three viewing stations around the classroom.
  - In Paragraph 3, how does Thunberg describe her concerns? What does she accuse the U.N. leadership to be overly concerned with?
  - In Paragraph 3, why might Thunberg describe "eternal economic growth" as a "fairy tale?"
  - In Paragraph 3, Thunberg describes herself as "one of the lucky ones." What might she mean by this? (*Note to teacher: if needed, make students aware that Thunberg lives in Sweden, and is the child of a fairly well-known singer and actor.*)
  - Throughout the speech, Thunberg often uses the term "us." Who might she be referring to when she says that?
  - What is Thunberg referring to in Paragraphs 6-12? (*She is referring to the timetable needed to curb global greenhouse emissions causing global warming, as established by scientists at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC].*)
  - What is she accusing the U.N. leadership of in Paragraph 11? How might she be using irony in this accusation?
  - How does she end her speech? How would you summarize Thunberg's message to the U.N.?

While watching the videos and reading the handouts, encourage student groups to take notes on whether each song is best described as covering, remixing, or sampling Thunberg's U.N. speech, and what motivated the artists to create the piece of music.

- **Station 1: John Meredith, "How Dare You"**
- **Station 2: Kiffness/Fatboy Slim, "Right Here, Right Now"**
- **Station 3: Megan Washington/Robert Davidson, "Crystal Clear"**

5. After groups have visited each station, ask students:

- Which of the pieces of music would best be described as a remix? Why?
- Which of the pieces of music would best be described as a cover? Why?
- Which of the pieces of music would best be described using a sample? Why?
- Were any of the pieces of music you heard a combination of different techniques? Which techniques specifically?
- According to the handouts you read, what motivated each artist to create their piece of music?

## SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Ask students:

- In what ways might the remixes, covers, and samples you heard in the songs help Greta Thunberg's cause? In what ways might they be less relevant?
- How might the titles of the three pieces represent different aspects of Thunberg's speech? Do you think each artist was trying to emphasize a different aspect of the speech?

2. Pass out **Handout 2 – Profiles of Young Climate Activists**, and show **Image 3, Spreading the Message Activity**. Ask students to complete the handout, either individually or in groups, and share with the rest of the class.

3. Discuss with students:

- Why might have Greta Thunberg received more media attention than many of the scientists who first identified the harm caused by global warming?
- Why might have Greta Thunberg received more media attention than many of the activists listed in Handout 2?



## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Bring your musical idea to life! With your modern band group, orchestral ensemble, or using music production software such as Garageband, realize the musical idea you outlined in Handout 2. Send songs to [info@teachrock.org](mailto:info@teachrock.org)!
2. Choose a country outside of North America, and investigate what sort of climate actions might be taking place there. Are there any well known youth activists or activist groups? What sort of issues are they taking up? Write a brief profile on either a group or an individual activist from your chosen country. Examples might include Brazil, Australia, Rwanda, Indonesia, and India.
3. Explore the ways musicians are participating in fighting climate change by going to [musicdeclares.net](http://musicdeclares.net) or another site. Write a brief summary on the ways musicians are addressing the climate crisis.
4. Read the Gizmodo article "It's Kids vs. the World in a Landmark Climate Complaint," (<https://earth.gizmodo.com/its-kids-vs-the-world-in-a-landmark-new-climate-lawsuit-1838343565>) then consider the question: do you think the children activists have a case in claiming pollution and the emission of greenhouse gases constitutes breaking the rights of children? Why or why not?



## 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.

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.

Reading 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

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.

Reading 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. College and Career Readiness

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

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.

Production and Distribution of Writing 4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge 7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

#### *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 2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.



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.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

### *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 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

Theme 9: Global Connections

Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION**

### *Core Music Standard: Creating*

Imagine: Generate musical ideas for various purposes and contexts.

Plan and Make: Select and develop musical ideas for defined purposes and contexts.





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

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



## RESOURCES

### VIDEO RESOURCES

- Jonh Meredith, “How Dare You”
- Fatboy Slim, “Right Here, Right Now”
- Megan Washington, “Crystal Clear”

### HANDOUTS

- Handout 1 -Greta Thunberg’s 2019 U.N. Speech
- Handout 2 - Profile of Young Climate Activists
- Station 1: “How Dare You”
- Station 2: “Right Now, Right Here”
- Station 3: “Cyrstal Clear”