

Beat Culture and the Grateful Dead

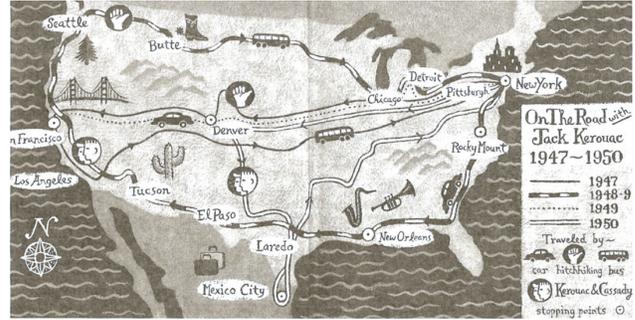
OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did beat writers like Jack Kerouac influence the Grateful Dead's music?

OVERVIEW

Note to teacher: *The handout in this lesson contains descriptions of drug use. Our hope is that the language used, which quite often details the repulsive nature of addiction rather than glamorizing it, will paint a realistic, and not desirable picture of drug use. However, we suggest reviewing the handout and making a plan for using it with your classroom before working with the lesson.*



In post-WWII America, a radical new movement took over the literary world. Anchored by writers like Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs, the Beat Generation, as they came to be known, viewed conventional American culture with disillusionment. They embraced things like free sexuality and drug use, explorations of Eastern religion, and a shirking of materialism in favor of a liberated lifestyle. One of the era's most definitive works, Jack Kerouac's 1957 novel *On the Road*, explores these themes through a semi-autobiographical road trip across America.

By the 1960s, the ideals expounded by the Beats were perhaps no better exemplified in musical culture than by the Grateful Dead. For their 30-year career, the Grateful Dead embraced the liberating, always-on-the-move lifestyle promoted by works such as Kerouac's *On the Road*. The band eschewed industry conventions by becoming a perpetual "road band," gaining a reputation not through chart hits, lavish studio recordings, or flashy media appearances, but via ceaseless touring and adventurous, inclusive, and always-changing live performances.

In this lesson, students will examine how the Grateful Dead exemplified the countercultural ideals promoted by Beat Generation writers by watching clips from *Long Strange Trip*, reading passages from Beat Generation writers, and brainstorming the ways the Grateful Dead's approach to music was inspired by the Beat Movement.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- Beat figures Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Diane Di Prima, Neal Cassady, Joyce Johnson, and Herbert Huncke
- The band the Grateful Dead, and the influence Beat Culture had upon them
- How Jack Kerouac and the Grateful Dead rejected social norms

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE

- Students will be able to define the ideals of the Beat countercultural movement by examining the philosophical and aesthetic connections between Beat writers and the Grateful Dead.

ACTIVITIES

PRE-TICKET ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):

1. This lesson works best if students are in the process of reading Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*.

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Show **Image 1, *On the Road* Scroll**. Tell students that this was Jack Kerouac's first draft for *On the Road*. Ask students:
 - Do you think this is how most authors create a first draft? Why or why not?
 - What might have inspired Kerouac to take such an unconventional approach to writing a novel? (*Encourage students to consider the ways an unconventional writing process might lead to an unconventional novel.*)
 - Writers in Kerouac's time used typewriters, which require the manual insertion of each page. How might have writing onto a continuous scroll affected how Kerouac composed *On The Road*?
 - Kerouac envisioned his writing style as "spontaneous prose." What do you think this means? In what ways might it be different from how other authors often compose? How might have writing on a long scroll helped Kerouac achieve "spontaneous prose"?
 - What challenges might have writing on a scroll presented compared to writing on a single piece of paper? What about compared to today's standard of writing on a computer? How might have confronting such challenges helped Kerouac as a writer?
 - How might Kerouac's notion of "spontaneous prose" inspire other means of expression, such as art or music?

PROCEDURE:

1. Play **Clip 1, Dennis McNally, Jack Kerouac, and Jerry Garcia**. Ask students:

- Based on what you learned in this clip, who are the Grateful Dead?
- How did Dennis McNally become involved with the band? What did he share in common with singer Jerry Garcia?

2. Tell students they will examine the specific ways beat writers such as Jack Kerouac inspired Jerry Garcia. Arrange students into groups. Pass out one page from **Handout 1 - Introduction to Beat Writers** to each group. Tell the class that Kerouac was a member of the Beats, a countercultural literary group in the 1950s that drew inspiration from one another. Ask each group to read their page as a group, then ask each group:

- What beat figure did you read about?
- Why was this figure important to the Beat Movement?
- What kinds of topics did they write about?
- Based on the excerpt you read, could you describe this figure's writing style?
- What role did the writer play in Jack Kerouac's life?
- How might the writer have influenced Jack Kerouac's writing style?
- What similarities did you notice between the excerpt you read and *On The Road*?

3. Show students **Image 2, On the Road Excerpts**, and read aloud each excerpt as a class. Then, as a class brainstorm a

list of values, both positive and negative, that Jack Kerouac and other Beat writers embraced, based upon the excerpts in handout 1 (the list might include values such as freedom, nonconformity, or hedonism). While brainstorming, encourage students to think about *On the Road* as well as the excerpts they read in their groups. Write the values discussed in class on the board. Ask students:

- How are the values that Beat writers embraced represented in their writing? How is it represented in *On the Road*?
- How might these values have been represented in other artistic practices, such as visual art or music?

4. Play **Clip 2, "Being Alive Means to Continue to Change."** Ask students:

- In the clip, how does Jerry Garcia define "being alive?"
- Based on Garcia's emphasis on change and spontaneity, what might have a Grateful Dead concert sounded like?

5. Show **Image 3, Grateful Dead Set Lists**. Ask students:

- What is being depicted on this image?
- Where did these three concerts take place? What was the time frame for these three concerts? How many concerts did Grateful Dead perform per day?
- What do you notice about the songs presented between these three concerts?

6. Inform students that this information comes from a website which allows fans to catalog the songs the band played at every concert,

including a space for people to make comments. Ask students:

- What observations might you make about Grateful Dead fans, based on their comments? What might they like about the band?
- Why might the fans be so dedicated to cataloging the Grateful Dead's concerts, and archiving recordings of their many concerts?
- Based on the evidence presented in this image, how might the Grateful Dead live by Jerry's idea that to be constantly changing is to be alive?
- In what ways does the Grateful Dead's approach to playing concerts relate to the ideals set forward by the Beat Generation?

SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Return to the list of values the class brainstormed earlier in class. Ask students:

- Do you see any values in this list that could equally be associated with the Grateful Dead?
- How might have ideals of the Grateful Dead and the Beat Generation be similar?
- Both the Beats and the Grateful Dead valued spontaneity and freedom, but many of the Beat writers were addicted to drugs. Jerry Garcia died due to complications from drugs and alcohol. In what ways could drugs be associated with freedom? Based on the excerpts you read today, in what ways might drugs be associated with bondage?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Write two essays about a memorable trip you once took. Write the first essay in "spontaneous prose," or a stream-of-consciousness style. For the second essay, take what you wrote in the first one and edit it into a shorter, more structured piece. What did you like or not like about this process? What do you like and dislike about each of your essays? How do the different approaches to writing affect your final product?
2. Watch the video "Diane Di Prima Reads Revolutionary Letters #29 & #19" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3ml197fm3g&feature=youtu.be>). Write a poem and recite it in a similar style as the video. Then, write a brief reflection on the ways performing a poem differs from writing one.
3. One of William Burroughs' preferred writing strategies involved the "cut-up," a creative writing project perhaps first described by 20th Century Romanian poet Tristan Tzara. Following the Tzara's instructions below, create your own cut-up poem.

To make a Dadaist poem:

- *Take a newspaper.*



- *Take a pair of scissors.*
- *Choose an article as long as you are planning to make your poem.*
- *Cut out the article.*
- *Then cut out each of the words that make up this article and put them in a bag.*
- *Shake it gently.*
- *Then take out the scraps one after the other in the order in which they left the bag.*
- *Copy conscientiously.*
- *The poem will be like you.*
- *And here are you a writer, infinitely original and endowed with a sensibility that is charming though beyond the understanding of the vulgar.*

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.

Craft and Structure 5: Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

Craft and Structure 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.

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 (K-12) (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.

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.

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.



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)

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 4: Individual Development and Identity

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

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

Core Music Standard: Responding

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.

RESOURCES

VIDEO RESOURCES

- *Long Strange Trip* - Dennis McNally, Jack Kerouac, and Jerry Garcia
- *Long Strange Trip* - "Being Alive Means to Continue to Change"

HANDOUTS

- Handout 1 - Introduction to Beat Writers

Lesson Materials



Image 2, *On The Road* Excerpts



As we rode in the bus in the weird phosphorescent void of the Lincoln Tunnel we leaned on each other with fingers waving and yelled and talked excitedly and I was beginning to get the bug like Dean. He was simply a youth tremendously excited with life, and though he was a con-man, he was only conning because he wanted so much to live and to get involved with people who would otherwise pay no attention to him. He was conning me and I knew it (for room and board and “how-to-write,” etc.), and he knew I knew (this has been the basis of our relationship), but I didn’t care and we got along fine—no pestering, no catering; we tiptoed around each other like heartbreaking new friends. I began to learn from him as much as he probably learned from me. **-Chapter 1**

No, sir, I never gave a man more than two chances." I sighed. Here we go. We went to the offending room, and Sledge opened the door and told everybody to file out. It was embarrassing. Every single one of us was blushing. This is the story of America. Everybody’s doing what they think they’re supposed to do. So what if a bunch of men talk in loud voices and drink the night? But Sledge wanted to prove something. He made sure to bring me along in case they jumped him. They might have. They were all brothers, all from Alabama. We strolled back to the station, Sledge in front and me in back. **-Chapter 11**

“Where do you live, Ponzio?” I asked.

“Nowhere, man. I’m supposed to live with Big Rosey but she threw me out last night. I’m gonna get my truck and sleep in it tonight.”

Guitars tinkled. Terry and I gazed at the stars together and kissed. “Mañana,” she said. “Everything’ll be all right tomorrow, don’t you think, Sal-honey, man?”

“Sure, baby, mañana.” It was always mañana. For the next week that was all I heard—mañana, a lovely word and one that probably means heaven. **-Chapter 13**

Image 3, Grateful Dead Set Lists

<p>01/02/70, Early Show Fillmore East (NYC) Mason's Children Casey Jones Black Peter Mama Tried Hard To Handle Cumberland Blues Cryptical Envelopment Drums The Other One Cryptical Envelopment Cosmic Charlie</p>	<p>01/02/70, Late Show Fillmore East (NYC) Uncle John's Band High Time Dire Wolf Easy Wind China Cat Sunflower I Know You Rider Good Lovin' Me And My Uncle Monkey And The Engineer Dark Star St. Stephen The Eleven Turn On Your Love Light</p>	<p>01/03/70, Early Show Fillmore East (NYC) Morning Dew Me And My Uncle Hard To Handle Cumberland Blues Cold Rain And Snow Alligator Drums Jam And We Bid You Goodnight Jam Jam Alligator Reprise Caution (Do Not Stop On Tracks) Jam Feedback</p>	<p>01/03/70, Late Show Fillmore East (NYC) Casey Jones Mama Tried Big Boss Man China Cat Sunflower I Know You Rider Cryptical Envelopment Drums The Other One Cryptical Envelopment Cosmic Charlie Uncle John's Band Mason's Children Black Peter Dire Wolf Good Lovin' Drums Good Lovin' Dancin' In The Streets St. Stephen Midnight Hour</p>
<p>Selected Comment: Mason's, h2h, Cumberland, all great. TIFTOO>cosmic Charlie total acid rock.</p>	<p>Selected Comment: Fantastic show to kick off one of my favorite years. . .Nearly had one of those flashbacks they've been promising us during this DARK STAR, one of the best you'll ever hear.</p>	<p>Selected Comment: My first Grateful Dead show, on my birthday! One thing you missed. They played Saint Stephen-Midnight Hour, for the encore. You left out St. Stephen. Pigpen was incredible!</p>	<p>Selected Comment: Im starting my archive i have a good number of things but really no early stuff can any one point me in a direction i know of torrents already.</p>

Handout 1 - Beat Writers

Allen Ginsberg

American poet, writer, and activist, Allen Ginsberg was one of the foremost voices of the Beat Generation. While a student at Columbia University, Ginsberg met Lucien Carr after hearing him play a record of composer Johannes Brahms in his dorm room. Carr went on to introduce Ginsberg to Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, and Neal Cassady, and the core group of Beat writers was formed.



Ginsberg attained national prominence after the publication of *Howl and Other Poems* in 1956. “Howl” was a sprawling poem which openly discussed homosexuality and drug use, while critiquing the materialistic, capitalist culture brewing in the United States. The publishers and booksellers of “Howl” were arrested for publishing the book and put on trial for obscenity charges — which they beat, on the basis of the poem’s “redeeming social importance.” Ginsberg is represented in *On The Road* as the character Carlo Marx.

Excerpt from “Howl”

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked,
 dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,
 angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the
 machinery of night,
 who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness
 of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz,
 who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan angels staggering on
 tenement roofs illuminated,
 who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light
 tragedy among the scholars of war,
 who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene odes on the windows of
 the skull,
 who cowered in unshaven rooms in underwear, burning their money in wastebaskets and
 listening to the Terror through the wall. . .

Joyce Johnson

Like many of the writers of the Beat Generation, Joyce Johnson's career is marked in many ways by her rebellion against the social norm—a position made all the more difficult given her status as a woman in mid-century America. Johnson was born in New York City in 1935. At age thirteen, she began living largely independently of her parents, and entered into Barnard College at sixteen years old. Three years later, she began working for a literary agency. Johnson's first novel, *Come and Join the Dance*, was published in 1962, when she was twenty-six. The novel's frank treatment of the lives of women in the 1950s, including their sexual experiences, broke many taboos in 1950s America, and today it is considered an important contribution in Beat Literature. Johnson has since published two additional novels, a memoir, a collection of letters, and a variety of articles and essays. As an editor, she played a primary role in the publication of famous books related to the Civil Rights and New Left movements, including works by Amiri Baraka, Harold Cruse, and Abie Hoffman.



In 1957, Johnson was introduced by Allen Ginsberg to Jack Kerouac, initiating a relationship that lasted two years. After Kerouac's death in 1972, Johnson played a vital role in getting his novel *Visions of Cody* published. Later she would write a biography of Kerouac entitled *The Voice Is All: The Lonely Victory of Jack Kerouac*.

Excerpt from "My Decors"

Apart from weekends, national holidays, and periods of unemployment, I worked by night, after returning from whatever office job was paying the rent. In fact, after I began frequenting the enticing Cedar Tavern, where a whole nocturnal world of painters, poets, dancers, and jazz musicians—broke, brilliant, and boozy—opened up to me, I sat down to write later and later. This was the "real life" I'd longed to be part of and I didn't want to miss any of it, even though I should have been devoting every spare minute to my book. Shortly before I moved downtown, I'd been stunned when the editor-in-chief of Random House offered me a contract after reading the 50 pages I'd managed to produce in the workshop he taught at the New School. I felt embarrassed about my contract. Since I'd gotten it when I was only 21, I hadn't suffered very long, while most of the writers and painters I was meeting had experienced years of rejection for their avant-garde works. I was sure they'd think I hadn't earned my lucky break, and since I doubted they would be very interested in what a young woman was writing, I didn't talk much about it. My novel was not avant-garde, though my editor thought he'd seen something new in it. It had been inspired by a remark by one of my Barnard College professors, a man who taught writing to his female students while actively discouraging them from pursuing it. "Oh, you girls have such uninteresting little lives," he'd scrawled on one of my papers, making me instantly determined to write a book that would prove him wrong.

Neal Cassady

Neal Cassady was an American counterculture icon most well-known for his role in promoting psychedelic drugs and a nomadic lifestyle. Together with author Ken Kesey, he was a part of the iconic Merry Pranksters, a group that pursued a cross-country bus journey immortalized in journalist Tom Wolfe's book *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. In 1945, he moved to New York City, where he developed a close relationship with Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. Cassady appears as himself or character influences in a number of Beat generation writings. In *On The Road*, he serves as inspiration for Dean Moriarty.



In 1950, Cassady wrote a 18-page letter to Kerouac known as “The Joan Anderson Letter.” The prose in that letter is considered to have greatly inspired Kerouac’s writing style in *On the Road*.

Excerpt from “The Joan Anderson Letter.”

Oh, unhappy mind; trickster! O fatal practicality! I was wearing really filthy clothes but had a change promised me by a friend who lived at 12th and Ogden Sts. So as not to hangup my dwarf cabbie savior when we went to see his buddyboss next A.M., my foolish head thought to make a speedrun and get the necessary clean impediments now. Acting on this obvious need—if I was to impress my hoped-for employer into hiring me—I promised to hurry back, and left. Where is wisdom? Joan offered to walk with me, and I turned down the suggestion reasoning it was very cold and I could make better time alone, besides, she was still pretty weak, and if she was to work tomorrow the strain of the fairly long walk might prove too much—no sense jeopardizing her health. Would that I'd made her walk with me, would that she'd collapsed rather than let me go alone, would anything instead of what happened! Not only did the new promise for happiness go down the drain, and I lost Joan forever, but her peace was to evaporate once and for all, and she herself was to sink into the iniquity reserved for a certain type of beaten women!

Diane Di Prima

With Allen Ginsberg, Di Prima was one of the most celebrated poets to come out of the Beat Movement. Di Prima began writing at age seven, and made the decision to become a poet at age fourteen. In 1951, she dropped out of Swarthmore College to join the bohemian community in New York's Greenwich village, where she came to meet Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac.

At age 24, Di Prima published her first book of poetry, *This Kind of Bird Flies Backwards*, and has gone on to write dozens of books. In addition, Di Prima co-founded the New York Poets Theater and the Poets Press, opening up places for the work of Beat and other poets and playwrights. Like many writers of the Beat Generation, Di Prima's work is known for its open discussion about issues such as sexuality, class and counterculture—so much so that she has been charged by the FBI multiple times in her career for publishing “obscene” material.



“The Window”

you are my bread
and the hairline
noise
of my bones
you are almost
the sea

you are not stone
or molten sound
I think
you have no hands

this kind of bird flies backward
and this love
breaks on a windowpane
where no light talks

this is not time
for crossing tongues
(the sand here
never shifts)

I think
tomorrow
turned you with his toe
and you will
shine
and shine
unspent and underground

William S. Burroughs

William S. Burroughs was an American author and visual artist most known for semi-autobiographical works, largely drawn from his experiences with heroin, that helped shaped the Beat scene. Burroughs followed his friend Lucien Carr to New York City, becoming friends with Allen Ginsberg and sharing an apartment for a time with Jack Kerouac. Burroughs struggled with addiction throughout his life, a fact he made clear in his written work since his first publication, *Junkie: Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict*. In *On the Road*, Burroughs is represented by the character Old Bull Lee.



Excerpt from *Junkie: Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict*

One day I was walking down San Juan Létran and passed a cafeteria that had colored tile set in the stucco around the entrance, and the floor was covered with the same tile. The cafeteria was unmistakably Near Eastern. As I walked by, someone came out of the cafeteria. It was a type character you see only on the fringes of a junk neighborhood.

As the geologist looking for oil is guided by certain out-croppings of rock, so certain signs indicate the near presence of junk. Junk is often found adjacent to ambiguous or transitional districts: East Fourteenth near Third in New York; Poydras and St. Charles in New Orleans; San Juan Letrán in Mexico City. Stores selling artificial limbs, wig-makers, dental mechanics, loft manufacturers of perfumes, pomades, novelties, essential oils. A point where dubious business enterprise touches Skid Row.

There is a type person occasionally seen in these neighbor-hoods who has connections with junk, though he is neither a user nor a seller. But when you see him the dowser wand twitches. Junk is close.

Herbert Huncke

Hustler, burglar, addict, and philosopher of the streets, Herbert Huncke served as an inspirational figure for the Beat generation writers, an example of the hedonistic danger of living on the edges of civilized society. In 1939, Huncke hitchhiked to New York City, and soon became a mainstay in the city's counterculture. Equally comfortable among the Columbia-educated Beats as the junkies on the street, Huncke spent his life in and out of jail, and survived selling drugs, prostituting himself, committing burglaries, and being a con-man. All the while, he wrote in great detail about life in the New York City underground. In the final years of his life, he lived in an apartment in the Lower East Side, with his rent being paid by members of the Grateful Dead. In *On The Road*, Huncke is the inspiration for Elmer Hassel. He coined the phrase "Beat" in conversation with Jack Kerouac, defining it as having no money and few prospects. Kerouac took the term to apply it to his generation.



Excerpt from "Florence"

She called me to please bring over a bag and the works and please hit her because I knew how impossible it was for her to hit herself. I made the run, delivered the bag, cooked up the fix, and hit her. She had taken several Doraphen, and when the stuff hit her, she sort of zonked out. I shook her and made some kind of contact, asking if she had taken goof-balls, and she lied and said that she hadn't. I couldn't get hung up with her at that point, going over and shooting her up, having her collapse, with doubt in mind about whether she'd Oded or not. She staggered over, [dog] Pooka by her side, and stood in front of the building rocking back and forth, staggering away finally to Avenue A. This all settled into a regular routine, and then one afternoon she had convulsions. It was my first experience with a physical condition where there was a violent muscular contortion, a stiffening on the body, quivering rigidity, gurgling, gasping for breath, dribbling streams of saliva hanging from the lips, jerking, straining black eyes, fear and confusion. I held her. I spoke with her. I pleaded with her, tried placing a silver spoon on her tongue—something about no swallowing her own tongue. I cradled her in my arms, trying every way to calm her and to help her. . .