

The Original “Going Viral”

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Could a musical group “go viral” before the internet?

OVERVIEW

Can a band with slow record sales, little radio airplay, and no number one singles ever become successful? Just ask the Grateful Dead.

Born from the countercultural Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco in the 1960s, the Grateful Dead eschewed music industry conventions for their entire career. They couldn’t be bothered with posing for photographs or creating the short radio-friendly recordings considered essential to growing a band’s presence. Rather, the Grateful Dead devoted their energies almost entirely to live performance. They spent a small fortune developing a sound system that would deliver pristine sound quality to their audiences, and created a performance model that ensured each and every concert was unique.



Photo: David A. DeNoma

This dedication to live performance over media appearances and studio albums proved enormously successful for the band. With an ever-changing set list and frequent on-the-spot improvisations, the Grateful Dead provided concertgoers with an experience that could not be replicated. And in response, fans kept coming back, knowing they would hear something new every concert. Soon, an entire fanbase known as “Deadheads” were following the band as they toured around the country, attending the concerts, night after night.

So passionate were the Deadheads that they began religiously recording every concert they attended. Against the recommendations of managers and label executives, the Grateful Dead allowed this activity at concerts, and again, their decision proved beneficial. Fan-recorded cassette tapes were soon collected, traded, and passed along as social currency among fans, like audio business cards to new listeners. While official album sales might have been slow for a nationally touring Rock band, new audiences increasingly arrived at Grateful Dead concerts after hearing concert tapes, intrigued by what was soon becoming a cultural phenomenon. Fifteen years into their career the Grateful Dead had yet to penetrate the top 50 spots on the Billboard singles chart, but they were playing to arenas packed with devoted fans.

In this lesson, students explore what it means to “go viral” and consider the ways the Grateful Dead may have created a “viral” sensation before the internet age by viewing and discussing clips from *Long Strange Trip* and conducting a class brainstorming activity.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The idea of "going viral" and how something goes viral in contemporary society
- How the Grateful Dead provided a unique experience at every concert
- The effects of tape trading on The Grateful Dead's "Deadhead" following
- How tape trading benefited The Grateful Dead financially through ticket sales

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE

- Students will be able to draw connections to how tape trading of The Grateful Dead's live performances have similar characteristics to a video that has "gone viral" in contemporary society.

ACTIVITIES

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Ask students:

- What does it mean to "go viral"?
- Can you name any musicians, celebrities, or something else that has become popular due to "going viral?"
- What are different outlets that you might associate with something going viral?
- The Merriam Webster dictionary defines viral as "quickly and widely spread or popularized especially by means of social media." Might something have "gone viral" before social media? How do you think it might have happened? How would people have passed it to each other?

PROCEDURE:

1. Show **Image 1, Grateful Dead Logos**. Ask students:

- Do you recognize these logos? If so, where have you seen them?
- What do these logos lack that might immediately tell you what they represent?

2. Tell students that these logos signify the band the Grateful Dead. Show **Image 2, Billboard Album Charts**. Ask students:

- Besides the Grateful Dead logo, do you recognize the band logos shown in the illustration? What bands are being represented? (From left to right: The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Eagles, and the Grateful Dead.)
- In the chart, what do the different color records denote?
- Based on the chart alone, what might you conclude about the popularity of the Grateful Dead, in comparison to the other bands on the chart?

3. Display **Image 3, Grateful Dead Live** and tell students that this photograph was taken at the "Farewell" concert featuring the surviving members of the band in 2015. Ask students:
 - How does this image contrast with the idea the sales chart may have given you?
 - How might the Grateful Dead have amassed such a sizable fanbase even without a similarly large history of album sales? (Remind students that Grateful Dead gained popularity before the internet.)
4. Show **Image 4, Grateful Dead Setlists**. Tell students this information comes from a website that allows fans to compile the songs the band played at every concert, and leaves room for people to make comments. Ask students:
 - What is being depicted on this handout?
 - What do you notice about the songs presented between these three concerts?
 - What about these concerts might give the Grateful Dead a devoted fan base?
 - What observations might you make about Grateful Dead fans, based on their comments? What might they like about the band?
5. Play **Clip 1, Al Franken on "Althea."** Ask students:
 - What might make the Grateful Dead interesting to Franken?
 - Why might Al Franken be motivated to listen to, as he says "A Million Altheas"?
 - At the end of the clip, Franken jokes that "only Deadheads talk this way." What intrigues Deadhead about the Grateful Dead?
6. Play **Clip 2, Tapers**. Ask students:
 - Franken's interview was interspersed with footage of cassette tapes. Did they look like commercially produced tapes? Where might they have come from?
6. Play **Clip 2, Tapers**. Ask students:
 - What might motivate Deadheads to record the concerts they attend?
 - The clip mentions that the band's record company did not approve of fans recording the live shows. Why might they have disapproved of Grateful Dead concert recording?
 - How did the band feel about the tapers? What was their initial motivation for allowing recordings to be made?
 - Why did the band's decision to allow recordings turn out to be "visionary"?
 - What might you do at a concert today that would be similar to what these fans were doing? (Note to teacher: Encourage students to consider how they might record and post videos from a concert on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
 - How might the creation of live recordings grow the Grateful Dead's audience?
7. Play **Clip 3, Nick Paumgarten on Tape Trading**. Ask students:
 - How did Nick Paumgarten say "his generation" discovered the Grateful Dead?
 - For Paumgarten, what is the appeal of listening to these tapes?

- Why might listening to these tapes lead to interest in seeing the band live?
 - Can you compare collecting tapes to something that you collect from your favorite artist or group? What is it you collect, and why is it appealing to you?
 - Why might it be more beneficial for a band like The Grateful Dead to have their shows taped? Why would fans want to eagerly search this material out? (Note to teacher: Encourage students to consider the idea that from night to night the set list, song lengths, and quite possibly the style of each song may change.)
 - Do you think Grateful Dead tape traders could be considered similar to social media influencers? Why or why not?
8. Divide the class into groups and pass out post-it notes to each group. If possible, give each group a different color post-it note. At the front of the room, draw a 2-circle Venn diagram. One circle should be labeled "Viral: Pre-Internet" the other should be labeled "Viral: Modern Day."
 9. Ask student groups to collectively brainstorm and write on their post-it notes different ways a band or individual might "go viral," before and after the internet. While brainstorming, encourage them to consider ways of going viral outside of social media networks
 - (through word of mouth, live appearances, etc.) and the various media that facilitates going viral (images, photographs, phrases and idioms, etc.)
 10. Once the student groups have written a few ideas on their post-it notes, ask each group to read their responses aloud and place their post-it notes in the correct place on the Venn diagram.
 11. As a class examine the complete Venn Diagram. Ask students:
 - Based on the completed diagram, in what ways is the internet a requirement to going viral?
 - In what ways could a person or band "go viral" at a time before the internet?
 - Are there ways to go viral without the internet that might work today? What are they?
 - Optional: Take a picture of Viral Venn and share it with us on social media, or email it to info@rockandrollforever.org.

SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Ask students:
 - In what ways do you think the Grateful Dead's pre-internet virality is similar or different from how elements of culture "go viral" today?



EXTENSION ACTIVITY

1. Imagine you are part of a band. Based on what you learned from this lesson, consider the following points below, then write a business plan outlining strategies of ways to gain popularity as a band.
 - What practices would you borrow from the Grateful Dead for your own band to gain a loyal following?
 - How could you adapt the Grateful Dead's methods using modern technology?
 - Can the Grateful Dead's business practices still work, albeit being potentially decades old?

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.

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 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.

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.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge 9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

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 5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in a word meaning.

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 7: Production, Distributions, and Consumption

Theme 8: Science, Technology, and Society

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* - Al Franken on "Althea"
- *Long Strange Trip* - Grateful Dead Tapers
- *Long Strange Trip* - Nick Paumgarten on Tape Trading

Lesson Materials



Image 1, Grateful Dead Logos



Image 2, Billboard Album Charts

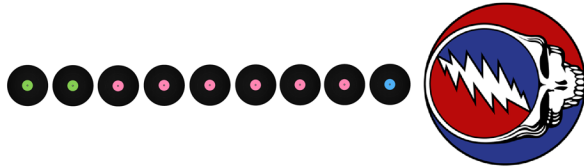
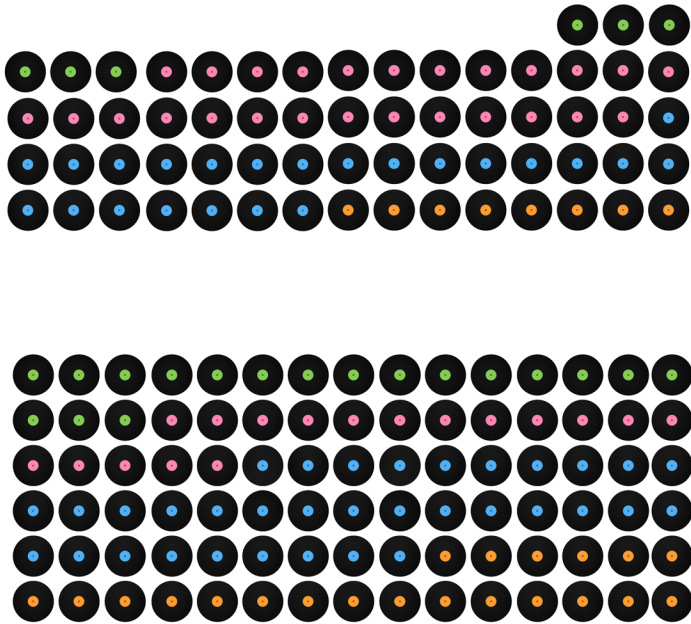
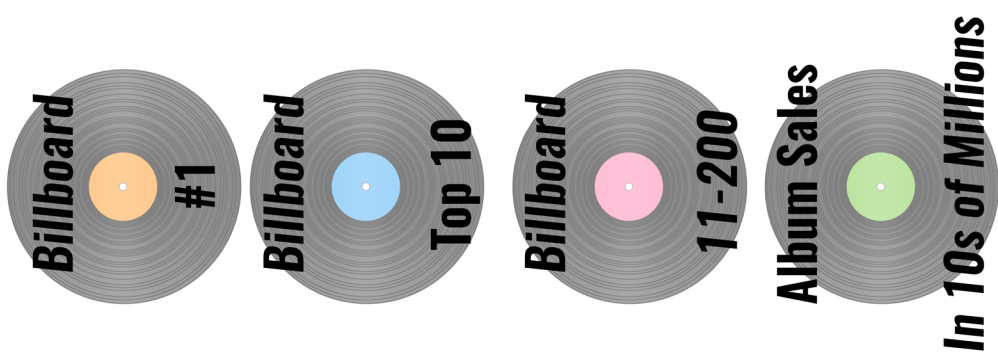


Image 3, Grateful Dead Live





Image 4, Grateful Dead Setlists

<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 incrdible!</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 tor-rents already.</p>
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