



# SOUNDTRACKS

## SONGS THAT DEFINED HISTORY

### Toby Keith & The Chicks: Songs and Words During the War on Terror

#### OVERVIEW

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What were the different reactions to songs and comments by Country musicians about the September 11th terrorist attacks versus the Iraq War?

#### OVERVIEW

**(Note: this lesson contains words and imagery that may be considered disturbing or offensive. Teacher discretion advised.)**



Photo: Imperial War Museums

*In this lesson, students compare and contrast reactions to Toby Keith's song "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)" and Natalie Maines of The Chicks' comments opposing the Iraq War. Students will then consider why public reactions differed, and describe how The Chicks responded to the reaction they received.*

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 sent the United States reeling. As the nation absorbed and responded emotionally to the tragedy, songwriters soon began reflecting what many in the country were feeling. Within Country music, a variety of songs expressed a range of emotions. A particularly popular song in the genre was Toby Keith's "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)." Keith's lyrics were delivered through a menacing vocal performance that seethed with rage and plotted revenge. The tune's visceral vibe connected with many Americans and represented a rallying cry for retaliation.

In response to the September 11th attacks, the U.S. launched military airstrikes in Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. Known as Operation Enduring Freedom, the mission was to oust Al-Qaeda terrorist groups from the country and remove the Taliban-led Afghanistan government from power. Al-Qaeda had claimed responsibility for the attacks in the U.S. and the Taliban was an Islamic fundamentalist political organization that had gained control of the Afghanistan government and provided safe harbor for Al-Qaeda within the nation's borders. A large majority of Americans supported the U.S. government's military response. The war with Afghanistan has become the longest war in United States history, spanning 19 years. It continues to this day.

By September 2002, the Taliban government in Afghanistan had been driven from power and Al-Qaeda had been displaced in the region. U.S. President George W. Bush's administration then moved to invade Iraq and overthrow the government led by President Saddam Hussein. On the unsubstantiated premise that the Iraqi regime had a clandestine relationship with Al-

Qaeda and was stockpiling various types of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the Bush administration vociferously argued that the Iraqi government was an imminent threat to U.S. national security, American allies in the region, and peace around the world. This argument, and the evidence to support it, was heavily criticized by numerous organizations and foreign governments, including the U.S. Congress' 9/11 Commission, the United Nations, and many U.S. allies abroad. No WMD were ever found in Iraq.

While a large majority of Americans supported invading Iraq and going to war with the nation, a significant number of Americans did not. Protests began occurring around the country and in other nations. On February 15, 2003, anti-war rallies across the globe became the largest protest event in human history. Shortly before the U.S. invaded Iraq in March 2003, the Country music group The Chicks were performing a concert in London, England. During the concert, band member Natalie Maines told the crowd that the band did not support the looming Iraq War and "were ashamed that the President of the United States is from Texas," - noting both the band's and President Bush's home state.

The response to Maines' comments was immediate and explosive. Politicians, members of the news media, the Country music industry, and even fans of the band responded angrily and aggressively. Protests erupted where physical copies of The Chicks' albums were publicly destroyed. The band received biting criticism, often laced with overtones of misogyny, and in some cases, threats of violence.

Messages of support for The Chicks' right to express themselves did come from musicians Bruce Springsteen and Madonna. Country legend Merle Haggard lambasted the backlash, mentioning the loss of lives in previous wars and noting that Maines had simply been voicing an opinion. Haggard's support was particularly noteworthy since his song "Okie from Muskogee" had been co-opted as an anthem for those opposed to the anti-war movement during the Vietnam War.

While the group was taken aback by the scale and viciousness of the reaction, they soon responded in song. Released in 2006, "Not Ready To Make Nice" summarized The Chicks' feelings about what they had endured. It was a critique on the cruelty they had received and a statement about where the band stood.

In many ways, the community conflict that emerged out of the September 11th attacks and the Iraq War are characterized in Toby Keith's tribalistic tune, the backlash towards Natalie Maines' remarks, and the societal commentary the Chick's provided in their song.

## OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

### 1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The events that led to the Iraq War
- The definitions of “Patriotism,” “Chauvinism,” and “Jingoism”
- How feelings of anger and revenge from the September 11th attacks were expressed by Toby Keith in his song, “Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American).”
- How The Chicks experienced backlash due to their comments opposing the Iraq War
- How The Chicks responded to the backlash with the song “Not Ready to Make Nice”
- Why there were different reactions to Toby Keith’s song versus The Chicks’ comments opposing the Iraq War

### 2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE

- Students will be able to identify the different reactions to songs and comments about the September 11th terrorist attacks versus the Iraq War by reviewing charts and maps, watching video clips, examining lyrics, and participating in group discussions and activities.

## ACTIVITIES

### ENTRY TICKET ACTIVITY

1. Briefly interview your parents, guardians, caregivers, and/or anyone you think may be old enough to remember specifics about the September 11th terrorist attacks in the United States and the Iraq War. Ask them the following questions while taking notes of their responses:
  - What do you remember about the September 11th terrorist attacks in the United States?
  - What do you remember about the Iraq War?
  - Do you remember the two events being connected? In what way?

### MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Ask students to report on their interviews.
2. Considering the information gathered from the interviews and reports to the class, ask students:
  - What do you know about the Iraq War? When did the war begin?
  - Where is Iraq in the world? (*If needed, display **Image 1, Map of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East** at the front of the classroom.*)

- Do you know the reasons President George W. Bush’s administration gave for going to war with Iraq?
- Was the war related to the September 11th terrorist attacks in the United States? If so, in what way?
- How did your interviewee(s) feel about these events?

### PROCEDURE:

1. Tell students that in this lesson they will be comparing and contrasting how different songs and comments by musicians represented the various feelings U.S. citizens had about the September 11th terrorist attacks and the Iraq War. They will also consider the different ways people reacted to the songs and comments made by certain musicians.
2. Display **Image 2, September 11th Attacks - Newspaper Headline**, then ask students:
  - What do you know about the events of September 11, 2001? (Inquire if students know where the attacks took place, then ask why those locations may have been chosen.)
  - How do you think the attacks may have made Americans feel? (Note student responses in a place that can be seen by the entire classroom.)
  - Why might Americans have responded this way?
3. Tell students that shortly after the attacks on 9/11, musician Toby Keith released the song, “Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American).” Tell students that they will be reading the lyrics and watching a video clip about the song, and encourage them to take brief notes about the feelings and themes expressed in these materials.
4. Pass out **Handout 1 - Toby Keith “Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue” Lyrics** to each student. Ask students:
  - From whose perspective are the lyrics written?
  - Who are the lyrics addressing?
  - What emotions might Toby Keith be expressing in his song?
  - What are some messages you might find in the lyrics?
  - Considering the events of September 11th, why might the song have connected with Americans at the time?
5. Play **Clip 1, “Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American).”** Ask students:
  - Why might Americans have had “patriotic feelings” and wanted to strike “out at the rest of the world” after the September 11th attacks?
  - Why might Toby Keith feel confident to “take a stand” on how America should react to the attacks on September 11th?
  - What are your thoughts about Toby Keith’s statement, “I’m not gonna lay down. And I’m not gonna shut up.”?
  - As journalist Dan Rather alluded to in his comments, what may have been the “dangers” of the themes and emotions Toby Keith expressed in his song?

6. Show **Image 3, Definitions of Patriotism, Chauvinism, Jingoism** and tell students to take brief notes of the definitions for future reference. Ask students:
- Are you familiar with these words? If so, which ones?
  - What feelings might you have towards these words?
  - Can you hear characteristics of these words and their definitions in the lyrics to Toby Keith's song? What characteristics do you hear? Which lyrics in particular strike you as patriotic, chauvinistic, or jingoistic?
  - In what ways might these words and their definitions align with the U.S.'s response to the September 11th attacks?
  - Do you agree with Dan Rather's description of the song as having elements of "chauvinism" and "jingoism"?
7. Ask students to think of an experience that upset them that they could not change. Have students create a self-portrait reflecting how they felt during this upsetting experience. Provide students with the following guidelines for the activity:
- Write their experience at the top of their paper.
  - Create their self-portrait in the center of the paper styled to characterize their feelings.
  - On the left side of the paper, list healthy reactions to their experience.
  - On the right side of the paper, list unhealthy reactions to their experience.
8. Allow adequate time for students to do the activity. When completed, have students share and explain their self-portraits to the classroom. After all students have shared, ask the classroom:
- Were there any self-portraits that had emotions and reactions similar to those expressed in Toby Keith's song?
  - Were those reactions organized as "healthy" or "unhealthy"? Why?
9. Pass out **Handout 2 - From 9/11 to Invading Iraq**. Ask students:
- What action did the U.S. government take in response to the September 11th terrorist attacks? Was the action supported by a majority of Americans?
  - What action did the U.S. then take in 2002 after removing the Taliban from power in Afghanistan? What cause did the U.S. give for taking this action?
  - What terrorist group did the U.S. link to the Iraqi regime as part of its explanation?
  - What was the response to the U.S. government's argument for invading Iraq?
  - Did the U.S. government find WMD in Iraq?
10. Display **Image 4, Iraq War Begins - Newspaper Headline**, then ask students:
- When did the Iraq War begin?
  - How do you think Americans felt about the war? (*Note student responses in a place that can be seen by the entire classroom.*)
  - Why might Americans have felt this way?

11. Play **Clip 2, The Chicks Dissent**. Then ask students:

- Referencing your notes on the definitions of “patriotism,” “chauvinism,” and “jingoism,” might characteristics of those terms be found in the U.S.’s actions in going to war with Iraq?
- What did the Bush Administration argue that the Iraq government had in its possession? Why might they have presented that argument?
- Why might some Americans have felt differently about a military response to the September 11th attacks versus going to war with Iraq?
- Should Natalie Maines have made her comments about the Iraq War and President George W. Bush? Why or why not?
- What do you think the reaction will be to her comments?

12. Play **Clip 3, Backlash against the Chicks**. Then ask students:

- What was the reaction to Maines’ comments about the Iraq War?
- Who criticized The Chicks in the clip? Did the criticism come from just media figures? Why might the reaction and criticism have been so strong?
- Do you see any connections to people’s reactions to Maines’ comments and the emotions expressed in Toby Keith’s song?
- Might gender have played a role in the response The Chicks received?
- Why might The Chicks have felt vulnerable?

- Were The Chicks the only individuals being told to “keep their mouths shut” and “watch what they say”?
- Besides the anger, hostility, and threats of violence against them, how did the Country music industry react to The Chicks’ public opposition to the Iraq War and comments about President Bush?

13. Show **Image 5, Opinion of the War with Iraq Poll**. Ask students:

- What data is being presented in this chart?
- When was the data collected and how does that time relate to the Iraq War?
- What conclusions might you draw from the data in this chart?
- Might the data explain the response The Chicks received due to their comments? Why?

14. Tell students they will read and discuss the lyrics for The Chicks song, “Not Ready To Make Nice” and then watch a video clip about it as a response to the reaction they received from their comment. Ask students to take brief notes about the feelings and themes expressed in the lyrics and the clip.

15. Pass out **Handout 3 - The Chicks, “Not Ready To Make Nice” Lyrics** to each student. Ask students:

- From whose perspective are the lyrics written?
- Who are the lyrics addressing?
- What specific experiences do the lyrics describe?



- What emotions are being expressed by the lyrics?
- What are some messages you might find in the lyrics?
- How did the audience react to their performance?
- Considering the anger, hostility, and threats of violence against them, why might The Chicks have written this song?

16. Play **Clip 4, “Not Ready To Make Nice”** and ask students:

- Why might those consulting The Chicks have suggested Natalie Maines apologize?
- How do The Chicks respond?

### SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Divide the class into groups and pass out sticky notes to each group. If possible, give each group a different color pack of sticky notes. At an appropriate place in the classroom, draw a 4-circle Venn diagram. Above the diagram should be the title, “Opinion of the Iraq War.” The circles should be labeled: “Favors, Strongly,” “Favors, Not Strongly,” “Opposes, Not Strongly,” and “Opposes, Strongly.”
2. Ask student groups to collectively brainstorm and write on their sticky notes the various people (national leaders, musicians, etc.) that were involved in this lesson. Have students also write on sticky notes the various emotions those people may have held that influenced their opinion of the Iraq War. Have students place sticky notes in the circles that correspond to the people and emotions they have brainstormed.
3. Once students have completed the activity, bring the class back together as a large group. Ask students:
  - Why were certain individuals placed in certain circles and connected to certain emotions?
  - Who were those people and what were the emotions they were connected to?
  - Were there certain people and emotions that easily corresponded to circles? Why?
  - Were there certain people and emotions that did not easily correspond to circles? Why?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. **Timeline Activity:** Have students research the Iraq War and create a single page, charted timeline of important events. Each timeline caption should have the date and title of the event, followed by brief text description of the event. Students may use these sources as options but are encouraged to find their own sources as well.
  - PBS NewsHour: A Look back at a Decade of Conflict in Iraq (<https://youtu.be/BCeAWgGphww>)
  - Council on Foreign Relations: Iraq War Timeline (<https://www.cfr.org/timeline/iraq-war>)
2. **The Costs of War Activity:** Have students visit the Costs of War website by the Watson Institute at Brown University, which details the long term effects of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Ask students to choose one of the three columns on the page and create an infographic that summarizes the information gathered from reading the text and examining the media about their chosen topic. Once completed, have students present their infographics and briefly share about the elements contained in their work.



## 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.

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 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.

### *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.

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.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

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 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

Theme 7: Production, Distributions, and Consumption

Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

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

### *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 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make music.

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

- *Soundtracks* - "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)"
- *Soundtracks* - The Chicks Dissent
- *Soundtracks* - Backlash
- *Soundtracks* - "Not Ready To Make Nice"

### HANDOUTS

- Handout 1 - Toby Keith, "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue" Lyrics
- Handout 2 - From 9/11 to Invading Iraq
- Handout 3 - The Chicks, "Not Ready to Make Nice" Lyrics