

# Listening & Discussion Questions

## Rock Music History and Appreciation

### The 1960s: Psychedelic Rock

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#### Guiding Question

How did psychedelic rock turn music into an experience?

#### Conceptual Progression

Counterculture → Altered Experience → Expanded Time → Expanded Emotion → Expanded Mind → Expanded Sound

These questions guide classroom listening, discussion, and short written responses in Rock Music History and Appreciation. Activities frequently follow a **Notice** → **Interpret** → **Connect** progression, moving students from close musical observation toward interpretation and broader historical and cultural connections.

[WR] = Short Written Response

#### General Listening Questions

*Usable for any song*

- 1) What stood out to you?
- 2) What mood or emotion is expressed?
- 3) What in the music helps express that mood or emotion?

#### Counterculture and Psychedelic Rock

- 1) **Connect:** Why might some young people in the late 1960s have become dissatisfied with mainstream American society?
- 2) **Interpret:** What might it have meant to “drop out” of mainstream society?
- 3) **[WR] Connect:** Was “dropping out” a retreat from social responsibility—or another form of protest? Explain.

#### The San Francisco Scene

- 1) **Connect:** Why might San Francisco have become an important center for psychedelic music and counterculture?
- 2) **Connect:** If young people were rejecting traditional social expectations and seeking new experiences, **what kind of music might reflect those values?**
- 3) **Interpret:** How might experiencing music at a loud, extended live concert be different from hearing a three-minute song on the radio?
- 4) **Connect:** How might improvisation, loud volume, distortion, and extended performances reflect countercultural ideas about freedom and experimentation?

## **Listening Lens**

*As we listen to psychedelic rock, consider three dimensions:*

**Time:** Is it stretched, repetitive, or extended?

**Sound:** Are distortion, feedback, tone, or effects important?

**Experience:** Does the music feel immersive or trance-like?

### **“White Rabbit” by Jefferson Airplane**

*Continuous crescendo; repetition; Alice in Wonderland imagery; altered consciousness*

- 1) **Notice:** What happens to the intensity of the music as the song progresses?
- 2) **Interpret:** How do repetition and the continuous build affect your sense of tension or expectation?
- 3) **Interpret:** How do the Alice in Wonderland images in the lyrics contribute to the song's strange or altered atmosphere?
- 4) **Connect:** How does the music itself—not just the lyrics—suggest an altered state of consciousness?
- 5) **[WR] Connect:** Does this feel more like a song you observe from the outside—or an experience the music pulls you into? What in the music creates that effect?

### **“Chushingura” by Jefferson Airplane**

*Electronic sound; feedback; texture; experimentation beyond conventional song form*

- 1) **Notice:** What sounds do you hear that seem unusual for a rock recording?
- 2) **Interpret:** If melody and lyrics are no longer the main focus, **what are you listening to instead?**
- 3) **Connect:** What does this suggest about what psychedelic musicians believed could count as music?

### **“Viola Lee Blues” by the Grateful Dead**

*Repetition; extended improvisation; altered sense of musical time*

- 1) **Notice:** What musical ideas remain consistent, and what gradually changes?
- 2) **Interpret:** How does repetition affect your sense of time as you listen?
- 3) **Interpret:** Does the repetition become boring, hypnotic, immersive, or something else? Why?
- 4) **Connect:** How does improvisation change the experience from hearing a tightly structured three-minute rock & roll song?
- 5) **Connect:** Why might extended improvisation have appealed to musicians and audiences associated with the counterculture?

### **“Dark Star” by the Grateful Dead**

*Extended improvisation; open-ended form; collective musical exploration*

- 1) **Notice:** How easy or difficult is it to tell where you are in the music?
- 2) **Interpret:** What happens to your listening when there is less emphasis on predictable verses and choruses?
- 3) **Connect:** Does an extended improvisation like this feel more like a finished musical object—or a musical journey unfolding in real time?
- 4) **Connect:** How might that kind of musical freedom reflect countercultural values?

### **Optional Discussion/Debate – Jam vs. Hit Song**

- 1) Is a 20-minute improvisational jam more “authentic” to psychedelic counterculture than a three-minute radio hit? Why or why not?
- 2) Possible follow-up: Can music be commercially successful and still genuinely represent countercultural values?

### **Expanded Personal Expression**

- Joplin → Emotion
- Doors → Mind/Psyche
- Hendrix → Sound

### **“Piece of My Heart” by Janis Joplin / Big Brother and the Holding Company**

*Raw vocal intensity; vulnerability; expanded emotional expression*

- 1) **Notice:** What stands out about Joplin's vocal sound and delivery?
- 2) **Interpret:** Does her performance sound controlled, uncontrolled, or somewhere in between? What creates that impression?
- 3) **Interpret:** How does her vocal style intensify the emotions expressed in the lyrics?
- 4) **Connect:** How does this performance expand what personal expression in rock can sound like?

### **“Me and Bobby McGee” by Janis Joplin**

*Freedom; loss; personal expression; vocal transformation*

- 1) **Notice:** How does Joplin's vocal performance change as the song progresses?
- 2) **Interpret:** What does the line about freedom having “nothing left to lose” suggest about the relationship between freedom and loss?
- 3) **Connect:** How does the song's idea of freedom connect—or conflict—with countercultural ideals of personal freedom?

### **“Light My Fire” by the Doors**

*Extended instrumental section; altered musical time; atmosphere and inner experience*

- 1) **Notice:** What happens when the song moves away from the vocals into the extended instrumental section?
- 2) **Interpret:** How does the extended section affect your sense of time?
- 3) **Interpret:** Does the instrumental section feel like it's trying to take you somewhere—or encourage you to remain inside the musical moment?
- 4) **Connect:** Why might psychedelic musicians have wanted to stretch a conventional rock song in this way?
- 5) **Connect:** How does “Light My Fire” demonstrate the shift from rock as a **song** toward rock as an **experience**?

### “People Are Strange” by the Doors

*Alienation; distorted perception; outsider perspective*

- 1) **Notice:** What words or images in the lyrics create a sense of strangeness or alienation?
- 2) **Interpret:** Does the world actually become strange in the song—or does it seem strange because of the narrator's state of mind?
- 3) **Connect:** How does the song reflect psychedelic rock's interest in perception and inner experience?

### “Purple Haze” by Jimi Hendrix

*Distortion, feedback, guitar effects; altered perception; expansion of electric-guitar sound*

- 1) **Notice:** What sounds does Hendrix produce from the electric guitar that differ from the guitar playing we've heard earlier in the course?
- 2) **Interpret:** How do distortion, feedback, and other guitar effects contribute to the disoriented atmosphere of the song?
- 3) **Interpret:** How do the lyrics and guitar sound work together to suggest altered perception?
- 4) **Connect:** Is Hendrix simply playing the electric guitar differently—or **changing what listeners think an electric guitar can sound like?**
- 5) **[WR] Connect:** How does Hendrix use the electric guitar as a form of personal expression? Support your answer with something specific you hear.

### “Wild Thing” by Jimi Hendrix at the Monterey Pop Festival

*Performance as spectacle; destruction of the guitar; expanded meaning of rock performance*

- 1) **Notice:** What stands out about Hendrix's physical performance and interaction with the guitar?
- 2) **Interpret:** What might destroying and burning the guitar communicate to an audience?
- 3) **Connect:** At what point does this stop being simply a musical performance and become something closer to theater, ritual, or spectacle?
- 4) **Connect:** How does Hendrix expand not only the **sound** of rock, but the idea of what a rock **performance** can be?

### Synthesis – How Did Psychedelic Rock Turn Music into an Experience?

- 1) **Compare:** What did each of these artists expand—musical time, emotion, consciousness, sound, performance, or something else?
- 2) **Interpret:** Why were experimentation and personal expression so important to psychedelic rock?
- 3) **Connect:** How did psychedelic music reflect countercultural values such as freedom, individuality, rejection of convention, and exploration?
- 4) **[WR] Synthesis:** How did psychedelic rock turn music from something you simply listen to into something you experience? Use at least one specific recording and musical characteristic as evidence.