

## **“Ballad of the Green Berets”**

### **The Basics**

#### **Time Required**

2-3 class periods

#### **Subject Areas**

US History

Post World War II U.S., 1945-1970

#### **Common Core Standards Addressed:**

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12

#### **Authors**

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### **The Lesson**

#### **Introduction**

The Vietnam War aroused strong passions both for and against U.S. military involvement (as it still does today). The first song selected for this 50 minute lesson celebrates the courage of those who are willing to fight for their country; the second song, in addition to being a rousing anti-war protest, illustrates the growing importance of the African-American voice as Americans debated the ideas of patriotism and protest in the 1960's and 1970's.

#### **Guiding Questions**

How has the concept of patriotism changed over time?

How is patriotism understood today?

#### **Learning Objectives**

The Big Idea of this lesson is that all wars in American history have been met with support and dissent. America's music is rich in patriotism and protest. A corollary to this is that perspective is relevant. Protesters usually think of themselves as patriotic.

#### **Preparation Instructions**

Songs used in this lesson:

“Ballad of the Green Berets”

“War”

#### **Lesson Activities**

Activity #1-“Ballad of the Green Beret” (1965) by Barry Saddler and Robin Moore

1. Students will be required to write down three ideas about what defines a hero. After completing this writing, students share their ideas in a class discussion. In that discussion, students need to differentiate between celebrities and heroes.
2. Distribute and discuss the lyrics of “Ballad of the Green Beret.” Have students write two lines from the song that reflect heroic qualities.
3. Analyze the song further. What’s the “mood” of the song? Describe the tone of in terms of approach. Is it a patriotic song? Is it a protest song? Is it both? Explain your answer. Does the song portray Green Berets in a positive or negative light? Use the lyrics of the song to explain your answer.

Activity #2-Teacher provides notes on the rise of draft resistance. Some of the main points to be emphasized:

- Student political groups hold a “We Won’t Go” conference in Chicago in 1966. Protesters urged to picket induction centers and burn or turn in draft cards
- Leaders risked prosecution by the Justice Department-punishment included 5 years imprisonment and/or a \$10,000 fine. The goal was to clog the judicial system with so many cases that conscription would be slowed or completely stopped.
- 1967-Half of all college students called themselves “hawks.”
- Linked to the “peace and love” counterculture, the movement starts to grow.
- April 15, 1967-Between 250-thousand and half a million people march against the war in New York City.
- Stop the Draft Week in October ’67-nearly 1000 draft cards collected to present to the Justice Department. 75-thousand gather on the steps of the Pentagon.

**\*\*ONCE THE ABOVE NOTES ARE DISTRIBUTED, STUDENTS LISTEN TO THE SECOND SONG, “War” sung by Edwin Starr and complete the song analysis steps listed below\*\*\***

1. After listening to “War,” students compare and contrast the mood of the song with “The Ballad of the Green Beret.” What three adjectives could be used to describe the mood and tone of “War?”
2. In both songs, women play a secondary role. Contrast the role of the young wife in “Ballad of the Green Beret” with the mother in “War.”
3. How are the soldiers in both songs portrayed differently? Use specific lyric references to explain your answer.
4. Select two lyrics from Starr’s song that demonstrate his most effective arguments against armed conflicts.
5. How would a Green Beret respond to the lyric “Life is too short and precious to spend fighting wars these days?”
6. What lyrics does Starr use to describe the result of the Vietnam War experience for young men?
7. How do the words “Good God Y’all” and “Good God Now” enhance the message of the song?

**Extending the Lesson**

1. Feelings about the Vietnam War can be found beyond the lyrics of songs when it comes to the African-American soldier's experience during this armed conflict. Compare and contrast the views of:
  - Harold Bryant, who enlisted in 1965 and said "America should have won the war but they wouldn't free us to fight... they could have put us all shoulder to shoulder and had us march from Saigon all the way up to the DMZ. Just make a sweep...." with the views of
  - boxing champion Muhammad Ali who stated: "I ain't got no quarrel with the Viet Cong," and refused induction into the army in 1967 on the grounds that it violated his first amendment rights to free exercise of his religion. Have students research what happened to Muhammad Ali and find two other similar examples. Also you could debate whether Muhammad Ali was a patriot based on his actions at this time.
2. Describe the issue of military recruitment on high school campuses. Use the article from the March 13, 2006 edition of the *New York Times Upfront Magazine* and the article March 6, 2006 edition of *Junior Scholastic Magazine* for information.
3. Discuss whether those who refuse to fight in Iraq are deserters or resisters. See article from CBS News, July 23, 2006, "Officer Faces Court Martial for Refusing to Deploy to Iraq."
4. Compare John Kerry's criticisms of the war with veterans who disagree with those views.
5. Watch selected performances from the "Woodstock" documentary, such as "Hendrix's Star Spangled Banner" or Country Joe's "Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag", for example. Have students work together to create their own song lyrics related to America's current military involvement.
6. Show students examples of protest posters from the Vietnam era. Have students create their own posters related to current military involvement.
7. Discuss the tenets of "Just War theory" (a centuries-old framework for judging wars created by St. Augustine) as they relate to both the Vietnam and the Iraq experiences.
8. Compare and contrast the ideas about civil disobedience in Dr. Martin Luther King Junior's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1963) to Justice Charles E. Whittaker's "Mass Disobedience Endangers Nation" (July 29, 1965). Discuss situations when civil disobedience is warranted and if there are circumstances when it might not be justified. Review the first amendment and discuss civil disobedience either as refusal to participate in laws or systems that are unjust vs. the legitimacy of violating a reasonable law to correct a larger evil.
9. Choose from the following additional songs for further analysis of patriotism and protest during the Vietnam era:

"Blowin' In The Wind"

"Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag"

"The Fightin' Side of Me"

"Still in Saigon"-Charlie Daniels (1982)

"Bring 'Em Home"-Pete Seeger/Bruce Springsteen (1996/2006)

10. Discuss symbolic speech and relate to dance styles of the 1960's (basic, more African beat, isolated, introspective) to the serious nature of the times.

### **Resources**

#### **Lyrics**

“Ballad of the Green Berets” available at

<http://greenberetcd.com/ballad.html>

“War” available at

<http://www.edwinstarr.info/index.php>