



THE ROOTS OF PROGRESSIVE ROCK

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did Progressive Rock's incorporation of classical traditions and countercultural values help to forge a unique Rock genre in the late 1960s?

OVERVIEW

Progressive Rock, or simply "Prog," emerged in Britain during the late 1960s from a specific set of musical, social and technological trends. Early Prog Rock drew on many sources, combining elements of Rock and Roll, Psychedelic Rock, Jazz, Folk, and Classical music. What set Prog apart was its grounding in Western symphonic tradition and its reliance on instrumental virtuosity, which had previously been considered the province of Classical and Jazz players and other "legitimate" musicians. There was nothing light or trivial about early Prog, which demanded to be taken seriously as an art form worthy of the same respect accorded to Classical music and Jazz.



Reflecting the influence of Western Classical music, Prog albums -- and sometimes even songs, such as Yes's "Starship Trooper" (1971) -- were divided into sections or movements (I. "Life Seeker"; II. "Disillusion"; III. "Würm"). A single Prog track might last 12 or 15 minutes -- a far cry from the three-minute song that had long been the Pop music industry standard. Yet at the same time that it mined Classical influences, Prog drew on the 1960s counterculture and its rejection of mainstream values and explorations of alternative conceptions of identity and time.

Progressive Rock was made possible by several important technological and artistic developments. The introduction of the 33 1/3 rpm "Long Play" (LP) record in 1948 allowed for up to 23 minutes of music on each side, considerably more than the 3-5 minutes a 78 rpm disc could hold. The change enabled classical musicians to record an entire symphony on a single record. As the 60s progressed, advancements were made that culminated in growing use of multitrack recording as well as a less complex editing process. Beginning with the Beatles' watershed 1967 album Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, many Rock bands began to conceive of albums as extended, conceptual, interconnected works rather than collections of disconnected songs.

At the same time, the rise of free-form FM radio in the United States and related programming styles in the United Kingdom allowed disc jockeys broad latitude to explore and play longer-form Rock music. In turn, advances in instrument technology, such as the invention of the Moog synthesizer, allowed for increased musical experimentation. Both would figure into the rise of Prog Rock.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The historical origins of Progressive Rock
- The basic elements of Progressive Rock, including the incorporation of musical forms derived from Western Classical music, an emphasis on instrumental virtuosity, and incorporation of countercultural themes that challenged conventional notions of time and space
- The technological changes that gave rise to Progressive Rock, including the possibilities of the 33 1/3 “Long Playing” (LP) album, the invention of the Moog synthesizer, and the rising popularity of FM radio
- The specific contributions of such Progressive Rock artists as Yes and Genesis

2. BE ABLE TO (SKILLS):

- Connect music to the historical context from which it emerged
- Common Core: Students will read primary and secondary source articles across a range of reading levels and analyze videos, photographs and music to gather information and evidence (CCSS Reading 2; CCSS Reading 10; CCSS Speaking and Listening 2)
- Common Core: Students will take a position on the merits of Progressive Rock after first evaluating the reviews and arguments presented in the nonfiction texts. (CCSS Reading 8; CCSS Writing 1; CCSS Writing 8)

ACTIVITIES

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY:

1. Distribute or display Handout 1: Track Listings, which lists the songs on two popular 1960s albums, the Kinks’ self-titled debut album (1964) and King Crimson’s *In the Court of the Crimson King* (1968). Discuss:

- How many songs are on each album?
- What differences do you notice about the song titles? Their lengths?
- Based on the titles, can you predict what the songs on the Kinks album are about? On the King Crimson album?
- Why would artists begin composing longer songs? What are some of the differences in the overall effect of a song that lasts 10 minutes versus a song that lasts two minutes?

Play the video clips of the Kinks’ “You Really Got Me” and “The Musical Box,” by the Prog Rock band Genesis. Have students write five adjectives to describe each performance.

PROCEDURE:

1. Divide students into pairs. Explain that they will work with their partners to investigate the origins of Progressive Rock and evaluate three early examples of the genre.
2. Distribute Handout 2: Technology and the Rise of Progressive Rock, which students will use to investigate the technological changes that helped inspire Prog. Allow pairs sufficient time to examine the materials in the handout and answer the questions.
3. Distribute Handout 3: Artistic Influences on Progressive Rock. Allow groups sufficient time to discuss the source material in the handout and answer the discussion questions. (Note to instructor: The documents on this handout are at a high reading level and may be somewhat difficult for students of lower reading abilities. In such cases, the instructor may wish to have students read and discuss these documents together as a class, in order to clarify any difficult vocabulary and ensure student understanding. In addition, if students are unfamiliar with Classical music, the instructor may wish to take a few moments to play short excerpts from such popular classics as Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* or Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, which are readily available on the Internet.)
4. Distribute Handout 4: Music Analysis Template. Explain to students that you will play video excerpts of three Prog songs. As they listen, students should work with their partners to see if they can hear elements of Classical and/or church music, examples of different movements or sections, displays of musical virtuosity (particularly in the form of instrumental solos), and evidence of countercultural influences in each song. They should record their findings on the template. The songs are:
 - The Nice, "Rondo," 1968 (first recorded in 1967)
 - Yes, "Starship Trooper," 1984 (first recorded in 1971)
 - Genesis, "The Musical Box," 1972 (first recorded in 1971)
5. Play the three videos and allow each pair sufficient time to discuss and record their answers on the template.

SUMMARY ACTIVITY:

Reconvene the class as a whole and discuss:

- After listening to all three tracks, what words would you use to describe them?
- What were the most distinctive features you identified on each of these three tracks?
- Based on what you have heard, what would you identify as the defining characteristics of Progressive Rock?
- Do you agree with Steve Hackett's description of this as "music without prejudice and music without limits"? Why or why not?
- Ask students to read and respond to the two *Rock's Backpages* articles on Prog, "Genesis: Short on Hair, Long on Gimmicks," from 1974, and "Rush: Fly By Night," from 1975. Ask them how they would counter these largely negative pieces.

HOMework:

Progressive Rock has received both acclaim and criticism from music critics. A popular joke in the 1970s asked, “How do you spell ‘pretentious’? E-L-P,” referring to the Progressive Rock band Emerson, Lake and Palmer. For some listeners, Prog’s complexity and virtuosity—the very things that Progressive Rock artists embraced—smack of pretense and bombast. For homework, write a one-page reaction to the joke. Do you find Prog pretentious, or do you appreciate its merits? Be sure to support your answer with specific references to the readings and videos in this lesson.

WRITING PROMPT:

Why is Progressive Rock called “progressive?” What are its defining features, and what were its originators trying to express? What technological and artistic changes and ideas made Progressive Rock possible?

STANDARDS

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

College and Career Readiness Reading Anchor Standards for Grades 6-12 for Literature and Informational Text

Reading 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Reading 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.

Reading 10: Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

College and Career Readiness Writing Anchor Standards for Grades 6-12 in English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects

Writing 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Writing 8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening for Grades 6-12

Speaking and Listening 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media

and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)

Theme 2: Time Continuity, and Change

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 8: Science, Technology, and Society

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

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 11: Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.

RESOURCES

VIDEO RESOURCES

- The Nice – Rondo (1968)
- Genesis – The Musical Box (1972)
- Yes – Starship Trooper (1984)
- The Kinks – You Really Got Me (1965)

FEATURED PEOPLE

- Emerson, Lake and Palmer
- Genesis
- Yes

HANDOUTS

- Handout 1: Album Track Listings
- Handout 2: Technology and the Rise of Progressive Rock
- Handout 3: Artistic Influences on Progressive Rock
- Handout 4: Music Analysis Template