

GREEN DAY'S ★ ★
american
IDiot
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
the groundbreaking **BROADWAY** musical

March 13–April 22, 2012
Ahmanson Theatre

Welcome

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Center Theatre Group is excited to have you and your students join us for Green Day's *American Idiot*. A great play raises questions about the human condition, and a great educational experience allows students an opportunity to reflect upon those questions and begin to discover their own answers. To that end the material in Center Theatre Group's Student Discovery Guide and Educator Resources raise questions: questions about the power and purpose of music, the courage it takes to feel deeply, the hard work needed to succeed. Our goal is to provide you with a variety of entry points into *American Idiot* so that you can choose what best suits you and your students.

The Educator Resources and Student Discovery Guide are companion pieces, designed to help you prepare your students to see the play and to follow-up the performance with options for discussion, reflection and creativity.

We have organized the Educator Resources into the following sections:

Student Discovery Guide

The Student Discovery Guide provides students with background information about the play and the subject matter, as well as questions for individual reflection. Written to be student-driven, the Discovery Guide helps prepare your students for the performance.

About This Play

This section includes a detailed synopsis of the play.

Comprehension

This section includes background information about the subject matter of the play. We have selected the information that most directly connects to or informs what happens in the play. This section furthers and deepens the background information provided in the Student Discovery Guide. This section can be shared before the play and/or discussed after the performance. It can also be used to provide research topics for your classroom.



L.A.'s Theatre Company

Ahmanson Theatre
Mark Taper Forum
Kirk Douglas Theatre

601 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Connection

This section provides ways to explore connections between the ideas presented in the play, the students' lives, and the world we live in. Structured thematically, each section contains questions and exercises that may be used for reflection, discussion, and/or writing prompts both before and after the performance.

Creativity

This section provides opportunities for your students to use theatre to explore and express. Theatre activities are included that examine both specific artistic aspects of the production, as well as delve deeper into the ideas and questions raised by the production. The activities and information in this section can be used both before and after the performance.

We know the hard work and dedication that it takes to bring students to see theatre. These materials are designed to support you in making the most of that experience. We applaud your passion for sharing theatre with your students, and thank you for sharing your students with all of us at Center Theatre Group. We look forward to seeing you at the theatre!

About Green Day's *American Idiot*

Table of Contents	
WELCOME	1
ABOUT GREEN DAY'S AMERICAN IDIOT	3
COMPREHENSION	7
CONNECTIONS	20
CREATIVITY	31
SOURCES	68
CREDITS	69

Synopsis

*"To live and not to breathe
Is to die in tragedy
To run, to run away
Is to find what you believe."*

Time: "At some point in the recent past."

Location: Jingtowntown, USA, a typical American suburb

Johnny, Tunny and Will are living a "do-nothing-go-nowhere suburban life." Their daily routine: TV, beer, pot, cigarettes, bullshitting, messing around on their guitars, hanging out at the 7-11, and constant, mind-numbing boredom. But tonight at the 7-11, things are different. Johnny challenges his friends take action, to get out of the suburbs and go somewhere that isn't stagnant. He goes a step further and buys three bus tickets, scheduled to leave immediately for the city. Tunny and Will are psyched to go, but when Will finds out his girlfriend Heather is pregnant, he watches them leave without him.

On the bus, Johnny and Tunny are empowered and are sure they're on the brink of something major. They declare, "I beg to dream and differ from the hollow lies/This is the dawning of the rest of our lives." But it doesn't turn out that way. Tunny in the city is as lonely and angry as Tunny in the suburbs. A commercial on TV offers him a solution—become an American soldier and fame and adoration are yours! That's just what he needs. He enlists.

Johnny finds another way of coping. St. Jimmy appears to him, a drug dealer and the antithesis of everything in Johnny's suburban life: chaos, power, anarchy, violence, escape, freedom to do whatever he wants and not care or feel anything. Johnny embraces St. Jimmy's lifestyle, and his drugs. In a moment of drug-induced abandon, Johnny approaches his dream girl, Whatsername. As Johnny and Whatsername start to develop a relationship, St. Jimmy steps up his game. He knows the girl is a threat; if Johnny falls in love, he'll turn his back on St. Jimmy. Unwilling to let that happen, St. Jimmy seduces Johnny with heroin, and Johnny in turn convinces Whatsername to do it with him.



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Back in Jingtown, Will isn't faring much better. True, he did the right thing by staying home. Unfortunately, throughout Heather's pregnancy, and even after the baby is born, Will is so completely checked out, he may as well not be there at all. Smoking pot and watching TV all day, rarely leaving the couch, he pushes Heather too far. She packs her things and moves out with the baby.

Tunny's experience in the military has been very different from the fantasy he saw on television. He is critically injured in combat, and is admitted to the hospital with other wounded soldiers. They are all in excruciating pain, fighting for their lives. In a morphine-induced haze, Tunny meets his very own dream girl, Extraordinary Girl, who provides him warmth and hope in an otherwise bleak situation.

Despite St. Jimmy's best efforts to numb Johnny to all emotions, Whatsername works her way into Johnny's heart. He writes her a love song, and so moved by this new feeling, he resists St. Jimmy for the first time. St. Jimmy won't have it, and comes at Johnny with a vengeance. He inflames Johnny's paranoia, makes him desperate for a fix. Johnny's weak—he gives in and shoots up. Whatsername sees him freaking out and tries to comfort him. It's useless.

Whatsername leads Heather and Extraordinary Girl in pleading with their men to stop fighting so hard for all the wrong things, to accept the love they're being offered. Johnny and Will are too far-gone, and they resist. Now completely under St. Jimmy's control, Johnny writes Whatsername a heartless break-up note and takes off. Will's paranoia convinces him that Heather's life is better without him, and that everyone is laughing at him behind his back.

All three of the guys are in ruins, physically and mentally. Despite their best efforts to run away from pain and unpleasant emotions, they're miserable. Separated by thousands of miles, they nonetheless come to the same conclusion—it's time for them to wake up and get their lives together.

Johnny breaks free of his addiction. St. Jimmy, who is so powerful when Johnny meets him, can't survive the loss and commits suicide. Johnny tries to make his life work in the city, he even gets a "real" job. But he's not a nine-to-five guy. And there isn't anything else in the city worth staying for. He sells his guitar to buy a bus ticket—he's going home.

It's been a year since Johnny, Tunny and Will decided to break free of their boring, stagnant lives in the suburbs. They were seeking the same thing—something worth fighting for, worth living for—but went about it in three very different ways. Johnny rebelled, choosing a life of drugs and chaos. Tunny thought he'd find his place in the world by fitting in to something larger, the military. While Will always resented having to stay home, he thought that having done the right thing would give him some peace. Their paths have one major thing in common—an unwillingness to feel deeply enough to look a problem in the face and do something about it.

The guys reunite at the neighborhood 7-11, the spot where their journeys began. The location is the same, but they are transformed. Johnny's sober. Tunny has two new supports in his life—a prosthetic leg and an Extraordinary girlfriend. Will has begun to make peace with Heather, and wants to be a part of his kid's life. They embrace each other, and are in turn welcomed with open arms by their old friends from the neighborhood.

Time passes and Johnny reflects on where he's been and where he is now. Thinking of Whatsername, and what he could have had with her, he realizes, "Regrets are useless...She's in my head...If memory serves me right/ I'll never have to turn back time/ forgetting you but not the time." He will find another love, but Whatsername, and everything he learned from that experience, are always with him. He doesn't ever have to go to that dark place, or make those same mistakes again. He may have gone back to the suburbia he once found so miserable, but he's a different person. He, Tunny and Will, are finally ready to feel.

From Punk Album to Broadway Musical— the creation of Green Day's *American Idiot*

While director Michael Mayer was creating his Tony Award winning rock musical *Spring Awakening*, he often turned to Green Day for inspiration. He was particularly drawn to their 2004 rock opera *American Idiot*, playing songs from it for his creative team to demonstrate the unique sound he was striving for. Even then, Mayer knew he wanted to bring *American Idiot* to the stage. He invited Green Day to a performance of *Spring Awakening*. After seeing it, the band members were as inspired by Mayer's work as he had been by theirs. Billie Joe, Mike, and Tré had always been intrigued by the theatrical potential

of their album and had often played the entire rock opera in concert to wildly receptive audiences. But they knew it would need adaptation to succeed in a traditional theater setting. In rock opera, the story is told entirely through songs that are unified by theme, characters, and loose narrative. Unlike musical theater, which uses both spoken words and songs to support plot and character development, the lyrics of a rock opera are more like poetry than dialogue. Rock opera plot is often non-linear, prioritizing mood over specific events.

American Idiot already had a solid emotional arc, centered around three characters: Jesus of Suburbia, St. Jimmy and Whatsername. Mayer knew that the story's structure had the potential to support a fuller narrative. Work began in 2009 with the addition of music supervisor Tom Kitt, who had just won Tony Awards for Best Original Score and Best Orchestration for the rock musical *Next To Normal*. With Billie Joe's support, they created Johnny's best friends Will and Tunny, Heather, and Extraordinary Girl, and added a few songs—from Green Day B-sides, *21st Century Breakdown*, and another song that had never been recorded—to establish and propel the plot forward.

The production needed to bridge the gap between authentic punk and musical theater. With Kitt, Mayer preserved Green Day's unique sound, and Billie Joe's enigmatic vocal style that is both aggressive and vulnerable at the same time. To further maintain the authenticity of the punk sound, a band plays live on stage, "As loud as is tolerable," per Mayer's instructions.

The stage musical *American Idiot* has all the right components—one of the most successful bands in the world, a Tony Award®-winning director and music supervisor, and a cast made up of singer-actor-dancers with extraordinary skills and enthusiasm. But these individual parts alone are not what make it work. Collaboration is at the heart of *American Idiot*. The artists are not only great at what they do and innovators in their own right; they also recognized and respected each other's exceptional talent, were open to each other's ideas, and didn't get in each other's way. This selfless give-and-take comes through their work, off the stage, and into the audience, who can feel that they've been part of something truly special.

Comprehension

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

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Suburbia

*“City of the dead
At the end of another lost highway
Signs misleading to nowhere
City of the damned
Lost children with dirty faces
No one really seems to care.”*
—Tunny, “City of the Damned,” *American Idiot*

According to the 2010 Census, 43% of Americans live in the suburbs. But what are they, exactly? The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a suburb as a) an outlying part of a city or town, and b) a smaller community adjacent to or within commuting distance of a city. The word’s origin is Latin, from the roots “sub-“ (near, below) + “urbs” (city). In the United States, suburbia has long been seen as the embodiment of the American Dream—a detached, single-family home you own, a yard, a garage, and neighbors who will loan you a cup of sugar when you need it.

Of course, that dream is not exclusive to this country, or even this time period. It seems part of human nature is to crave space, privacy, and quiet. A letter written in cuneiform on a clay tablet to the King of Persia in 539 B.C. celebrates, “Our property seems to me the most beautiful in the world. It is so close to Babylon that we enjoy all the advantages of the city, and yet when we come home we are away from all the noise and the dust.”

Suburbs around the world are often times the most economically depressed areas within a metropolis. France’s *banlieues*, or Sweden’s “concrete suburbs” are examples of this. American suburbs started out similarly. Two hundred years ago, living in a suburb meant that work in the city was difficult, if not impossible, to get to. And since most city jobs paid better than rural jobs, the suburbs were often home to the poorest residents.

That began to change in the 19th and 20th centuries. Dramatic advances were made in transportation technology, including the 1885 invention of the gasoline-fueled combustion engine, better and wider roads, and electric railway (trolley) systems. These improvements made it possible—for those who could afford it—to commute to work with relative ease.

The growth of American suburbs exploded at the end of World War II. Almost overnight, the demand for housing became extreme. The more than 10 million returning GIs were eager to settle down and start families. After their experiences in war, they wanted quiet and privacy, and needed houses cheaply and quickly. The robust economy, new interstate highways, and newly affordable cars, meant that they no longer had to stay in the cramped apartments they often shared with the rest of their family in the middle of cities.

At the same time, large numbers of African-Americans were migrating out of harshly segregated southern cities to newly desegregated northern cities, in hopes of finding better jobs, schools, and homes. White families who were uneasy about integration, and who could afford it, moved out of the cities. This phenomenon is often referred to as “white flight.”

The first American suburb was created by real estate lawyer and investor, William J. Levitt. Levittown, NY, on Long Island began construction in 1947, and by 1951 had 17,447 homes. Land and building materials were cheap at the time. In order to generate large numbers of homes quickly and affordably, Levitt & Sons, Inc. took an assembly-line approach to building homes that left little room for variety. The homes came in five different models that differed only in the shade of the exterior paint, roofline, and window placement. These “cookie cutter” houses, became one of the most defining characteristics of American suburbs.

Suburbs have other things in common as well. Like Levittown, suburbs are often built by a single real estate developer. In population they are much lower density than cities, and the homes typically have yards, something virtually non-existent in a metropolitan area. Local governance is common, often in the form of a Home Owners Association, a community group that makes rules about how a home can look, its size, style landscaping, and how it must be maintained. In addition, strict zoning laws clearly separate residential areas from retail and business—hence shopping and strip malls with huge parking lots.

Another common element among suburbs is congested traffic. Suburban living requires longer commutes, in both distance and time. Traffic is typically restricted to a few main through-roads or freeways, so it takes longer to go even short distances. The lack of public transportation and bike paths means suburbanites often don’t have any option other than their automobile.

In the first decade of the 21st century, American suburbs shifted away from the old stereotype of being occupied by only young, white, well-off families. They actually vary in many ways—rich and poor, industrial and residential, new and old—and often reflect a combination of working-class and minority families. Today, Asians and Hispanics combined make up a majority of those living in suburbs. Many suburban households are now composed of single people living alone or unmarried couples without children. In the recent economic recession, nationwide, poverty rates in the suburbs rose 53% (versus 26% in cities). Nationwide, 55% of the metropolitan poor live in suburbs. In Los Angeles, the poverty rate in the suburbs averages 20%.

Attitudes towards the suburbs have also changed dramatically. Now, qualities previously considered positive—quiet, space, uniformity, quality control—are perceived as boring, conformist, oppressive, and often hypocritical (where everything looks okay on the outside, but in reality is far darker.) Today's suburbs are no longer those of *Leave It To Beaver*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, or *Happy Days*. The modern take on suburbia is reflected in movies like *Edward Scissorhands*, *Nightmare on Elm St.*, and *Donnie Darko*, as well as television programs such as *The Sopranos*, *South Park*, *The Boondocks*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Weeds*, and *Suburgatory*.

Writer and satirist Dorothy Parker once quipped, “Los Angeles is 72 suburbs in search of a city.” But Los Angeles is not like other major cities. It’s spread out over a much larger area than the average city, has no single center for suburbs to surround, and is made up of pockets of residential neighborhoods in between urban areas. If a suburb is “a smaller community adjacent to or within commuting distance of a city,” what areas in Los Angeles are suburbs? Do you consider your neighborhood a suburb?

What is Punk Rock?

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition of the noun *punk* is, “a) a young inexperienced person, beginner, novice; b) a petty gangster, hoodlum, or ruffian.” In the 17th century, Shakespeare used it as a synonym for prostitute. In modern prison slang it refers to someone who is submissive. No matter how you look at it, the term doesn’t exactly have positive connotations. As a label for a lifestyle and musical style, it began popping up in the late 1960s. While no one knows for sure who said it first, a 1962 music review of the song “96 Tears” brought the term to the forefront, and was embraced by the then-unnamed genre.

Defining the word is much easier than defining the music. Punk's sound is incredibly diverse, creating countless subgenres and fusions. Glam punk, hardcore punk, pop punk, riot grrrl, ska punk, and skate punk are only a few of the more well known subgroups. Along with 2 Tone, Celtic punk, Chicano punk, Christian punk, cowpunk, folk punk, horror punk, Oi!, punk blues, Taqwacore, and many more, it seems punk rock can give voice to infinite beliefs and points of view.

Within that tremendous variety, there are a handful of characteristics common to the punk aesthetic. The sound is typically loud, fast, and rough. It usually consists of a simple drum kit, over-amplified electric guitar, driving electric bass support, and aggressive vocals that are as much shouting as they are singing. Subject matter ranges from politics to love to boredom and beyond, and often reflects alienation, social discontent, and a complete rejection of conformity. The messages, while ranging broadly in agenda, are always subversive, rebellious, and anti-establishment. Accessibility is at the heart of punk philosophy. Music isn't just for people who know how to play instruments, have pretty voices, or record deals; energy counts as much as virtuosity. The end result is powerfully atmospheric, where anything goes and anyone can form a band.

Before there was a punk scene, a handful of rock bands in the 1960's and early 70's were cultivating qualities that would greatly influence the seminal bands of the punk genre. Iggy Pop and The Stooges perfected a shocking stage act that involved spasmodic body contortions, self-mutilation, raw sexuality, calls for anarchy, and hurling insults at the audience. The Velvet Underground, managed by Andy Warhol, pushed amplifier feedback and guitar distortion to the limit. The aggressive instrumentation, f-you attitude, and onstage destruction of The Who; the political, blue-collar, violent sound of MC5; the drag-influenced wardrobe and make-up, sleazy lyrics, and extravagant lifestyle of the New York Dolls—these elements would soon be adapted and combined, in one form or another, by the first punk bands.

The Ramones' self-titled first album was released in 1976, marking what many consider the birthday of punk rock as we know it. Touring England to promote the album, the band played what was to be a key gig in punk rock history on July 5, 1976. In the audience were members of two bands whose image and style would leave an indelible mark on punk—the Sex Pistols and The Clash. Their albums, *Nevermind the Bollocks* and *London Calling*

respectively, expressed their outrage at the unstable economy and widespread unemployment in the U.K. They took the Ramones' frenetic, rough, untrained sound, their leather, t-shirt, and torn jeans uniform, and added radical left-wing politics and a nihilistic attitude.

At the same time, the punk scene continued to grow in the United States. Bands were forming that would take the sound to a faster, louder, often more violent, place. Washington, D.C.'s Bad Brains, the Dead Kennedys from San Francisco, and Southern California's Black Flag, Bad Religion, Circle Jerks, and Suicidal Tendencies were the first hardcore punk bands, and would go on to influence other punk, metal, and rock bands as well.

Hardcore dominated the music scene from the late 1970s into the mid-1980s. During the 1990s bands heavily influenced by, and often self-described as, punk rock, were labeled as alternative. Groups like Sonic Youth and the Pixies were reaching broader audiences, but no band made a greater splash than Nirvana. They may have put grunge on the map, but the band's aesthetic and philosophy was all punk. Kurt Cobain wrote, "Punk is musical freedom...saying, doing, and playing what you want." After the huge success of their second album *Nevermind*, mainstream audiences and major record labels began to seek out the next Nirvana, and punk experienced a major revival.

In the mid-90's, punk music would achieve levels of commercial success never dreamed of by the punk underground. 1994 in particular was a huge year for the genre. Independent label Epitaph released *Punk in Drublic* by NOFX (whose bassist Fat Mike would found the Rock Against Bush tour and punkvoter.com ten years later), *Let's Go* by Rancid, and *Smash* by The Offspring. All three ended up earning gold record status (certified by the Recording Industry Association of America as having sold at least 500,000 copies). In fact, *Smash* ultimately sold 12 million copies worldwide, making it the best selling indie-label album of all time. Bad Religion's *Stranger Than Fiction* also went gold. Perhaps the largest punk album that year, though, was Green Day's first major label release, *Dookie*. It produced five hit singles, reached number two on the Billboard 200, charted in seven countries, won Green Day their first Grammy, and ultimately sold over 15 million copies (and counting).

In the years immediately following, punk bands continued to have a strong presence in popular music. Rancid – which included ex-members of Operation Ivy, a hardcore/ska band that hugely influenced the California punk revival—

released...*And Out Came the Wolves* in 1995, reaching gold status. Sublime's 1997 self-titled album went platinum, selling over one million copies. That same year, Green Day's *Nimrod* debuted on the charts at number ten. It didn't reach the heights of *Dookie*, but it brought the band recognition nonetheless, particularly with the track, "Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)." It won MTV's Best Alternative Video and showed up on the popular television shows *Seinfeld* and *ER*. The following year Columbia Records released The Offspring's *Americana*. The album hit number two on the charts, and its single, "Pretty Fly (For a White Guy)" was illegally downloaded a record setting 22 million times. The skyrocketing popularity of hip-hop and alternative rock quieted the punk explosion in the late 1990's and early 2000's. But in 2004 that would all change. Green Day's *American Idiot* was like nothing anyone had ever heard—a punk-rock-protest-opera. It garnered both critical acclaim and popular success, hitting number one on the Billboard 200, and earning six-times platinum status in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. The Grammys recognized the album's importance with five nominations in 2005, awarding it Best Rock Album. "Boulevard of Broken Dreams" won the Grammy for Record of the Year in 2006. National Public Radio includes the album among what they consider the decade's fifty most important recordings. *Rolling Stone Magazine* placed *American Idiot* at number 22 on their list of the decade's best albums. In addition, "American Idiot" is number 47 and "Boulevard of Broken Dreams" holds number 65 on their 100 Best Songs of the 2000's.

2007 was a particularly prolific year. Releases by bands from the 1990's punk revival—including Green Day (under pseudonym Foxboro Hot Tubs), Sum 41, and Reel Big Fish—joined new works from some of punk's originators. Bad Brains' *Build a Nation*, Bad Religion's *New Maps of Hell*, the Dead Kennedys' *Milking the Sacred Cow*, NOFX's *They've Actually Gotten Worse Live*, and The Stooges' *The Weirdness* all came out that year. Green Day's *21st Century Breakdown* came out in 2009, selling 215,000 in three days.

Today, punk rock is as robust as ever. Bad Religion released their twenty-second album, *The Dissent of Man*, in 2010. Punk vanguards Blondie and the New York Dolls both put out new work in 2011—*Panic of the Girls* and *Dancing Backwards in High Heels*. Green Day has earned international superstardom. Anti-Flag, Blink-182, Less Than Jake, My Chemical Romance, Reel Big Fish, Sum 41, and countless others are making sure that punk stays relevant and doesn't lose its place in the American collective consciousness.

That's unlikely to happen, though, now that Blondie, The Clash, Patti Smith (whose award was presented by Zack de La Rocha of Rage Against the Machine), the Sex Pistols, The Stooges (presented by Billie Joe Armstrong) and the Ramones have joined the Velvet Underground in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. The Warped Tour, a festival celebrating extreme sports and punk music of all subgenres, is now international, traveling as far as Australia and Japan. Coachella's 2012 lineup includes seminal British pop punk band Buzzcocks, now thirty-six years into their career, along with Public Image, Ltd., formed by Sex Pistols lead singer Johnny Rotten. Also on the bill are Off! led by Keith Morris from Black Flag and Circle Jerks, flower punks Black Lips, and Swedish hardcore band Refused. Even toy manufacturer Mattel recognizes punk's place in pop culture—Goth Punk Barbie sports a lace-up corset and boots; Rockabilly Barbie bears an uncanny resemblance Patricia Day, lead singer of Swedish punk band HorrorPop (who is suing the company, claiming they used her likeness without permission). In 2010 Mattel honored Debbie Harry and Joan Jett with Barbies made in their image (and with their permission). 2011's Tokidoki Barbie dons a short pink bob, tiny pink mini-skirt, and leopard print tights.

Not everyone welcomes punk's current prominence. Conservative, parent and watchdog groups sounded the alarm after seeing Tokidoki Barbie's arm, neck, chest and back tattoos, fearing they would encourage young girls to want their own body art. These groups, and others, are still disturbed by the speed, volume, frankness, passion and "I don't care what you think of me" attitude fundamental to punk—they have been for over forty years, and they probably always will be.

Much of the grumbling over punk's place in pop culture, however, comes from within the punk community itself. The resounding rejection of conformity and D.I.Y./anything-goes ethic seems to have a critical byproduct: suspicion of anything and anyone who is even moderately accepted by the mainstream. On blogs, message boards, and forums the debate over who is and is not punk can go on for months and include hundreds of posts. At the heart of the issue is the question—is it possible to sell millions of records, to sell out large concert venues, without selling out? It's a question that isn't likely ever to be answered.

Protest Music—Then & Now

“Music has the power to cross borders, to break military sieges and to establish real dialog.”

—Zack de la Rocha, lead singer of Rage Against the Machine

Protest songs have been a key element of American political expression. Partly because of music’s innate ability to communicate on a deeply emotional level, and partly because of the sacredness of our First Amendment, American protest music has played an important role in social causes throughout our history.

Early American folk songs were often about slavery. Combining spirituals and biblical themes with field and work songs, the protest songs of the 1800’s inspired and informed. Fredrick Douglas credits “Run To Jesus” with giving him the courage to escape the plantation that owned him in 1838. Songs like “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” became the anthem of the Underground Railroad, and provided coded instructions for fleeing slaves. The “drinking gourd” refers to the Big Dipper constellation. Other coded words described signposts and geographical markers along the escape route.

In the first half of the twentieth century, protest music continued to focus on racism and racial injustice, as well as workers’ rights, women’s suffrage, and the widespread poverty caused by the Great Depression. Some of those songs became popular hits. Bing Crosby’s “Brother Can You Spare A Dime” released in 1932, made it to the top of all the popular music charts, and became one of the best selling albums of its time. Billie Holiday’s 1939 single “Strange Fruit,” which exposes the barbaric practice of lynching, became her best selling album.

Perhaps the best-known American protest song arose shortly after. “We Shall Overcome” was sung publicly for the first time in 1945 by members of the Negro Food and Tobacco Union during a strike. The ideas it communicated—the courage to stand up to unjust authority and solidarity among those who shared a common cause—resonated deeply, and the song rapidly became the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement.

In the 1940's and 50's, folk singer-songwriters Woodie Guthrie and Pete Seeger, began their careers. Guthrie, who wrote "This Land in Your Land," famously toured with a sticker on his guitar that proclaimed, "This Machine Kills Fascists." Seeger went on to write hundreds of protest songs and is still going strong today. Together, these two musicians became the godfathers of modern protest music and helped bring folk music to mainstream America. Their work would inevitably inspire the next, and most prolific, generation of politically active musicians.

In the 60's and 70s', the Vietnam War and Civil Rights movement gave songwriters plenty to write about. Folk music was the most prolific, led by Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. But artists of other genres made their voices heard, as well. James Brown's "Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud," and Aretha Franklin's "Respect" encouraged audiences to be proud of who they were and to stand up for themselves. Jimi Hendricks' rock 'n roll cover of Dylan's "All Along the Watch Tower," Marvin Gaye's R&B anthem "What's Going On," Edwin Star's funk classic "War," and Nina Simone's forthright spiritual "If You Miss Me From the Back of the Bus," criticized war, racism, and social injustice.

The momentum of the 1960's and early 70's eventually slowed. The Vietnam War ended in 1975 and music labels and radio stations were increasingly owned and run by large, conservative, corporations. In that climate, fewer political songwriters were getting record deals or much air time. Americans turned to musicians from overseas to fill the void. John Lennon produced his most political work at this time, with wife Yoko Ono. Heavy metal band Black Sabbath put out "War Pigs" in 1971, the same year folk singer Cat Stevens' song "Peace Train" achieved gold record status. Albums from British punk giants The Sex Pistols, *Anarchy in the UK* (1976), and The Clash, *London Calling* (1977), introduced American audiences to the beginnings of the punk movement.

The shift away from folk and traditional rock continued over the next fifteen years, as punk, rap, and hip-hop began to generate some of the most direct and overtly political albums of the canon. The Dead Kennedys' "Holiday in Cambodia" aggressively criticized both American self-righteousness and the tyranny of Eastern totalitarianism. Rage Against the Machine, with its unique fusion of punk, hip-hop, and thrash, confronted racism, economic inequality, and lambasted media as a puppet of the corporate agenda. Bad Religion's

album *Recipe For Hate* was number 14 on Billboard's Heatseekers chart, and criticized the dangers of revisionist history, American exceptionalism, and blindly accepting what both the media and government tell you.

Some of hip-hop and rap's most provocative songs, by those who would become figureheads of the genre, also came out at this time. In "The Message," Grand Master Flash chronicled the frustrations of life in the ghetto. NWA railed against racial profiling in "F*** the Police," and Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" was a rallying cry to stand up to those who abuse their power.

In the early 2000's, protest music had new sources of material due to the geopolitical climate post-9/11, the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and anger towards then-president George W. Bush—particularly after the controversial 2004 Presidential Election. Protest song veterans Neil Young, Bruce Springsteen, U2, the Beastie Boys, and Pearl Jam spoke out against injustices ranging from economic disparity and the casualties of war, to lock-step "We're Number One!" patriotism, and the erosion of civil liberties.

Newer voices were also being heard. Pink wrote "Dear Mr. President," an open letter to George W. Bush. John Mayer's "Waiting for the World To Change," articulated a common feeling of being powerless to effect change. Bright Eyes expressed concern over the eroding separation of church and state in "When the President Talks to God." While Indie rockers Arcade Fire lamented the power of the media in "Windowsill."

In 2004, right around the time Green Day released their epic punk-protest-opera *American Idiot*, Eminem took aim at President Bush and his administration in "Mosh," and urged his listeners to vote in the upcoming election. That same year, Prince's album *Musicology* included tracks like "United States of Division," pleading for the end of war and divisive politics, and "Dear Mr. Man," about the increasing inaccessibility of resources for Americans most in need.

Country music also hasn't been silent. Over the years country greats Willie Nelson, Merle Haggard, and Emmylou Harris have released songs supporting workers' rights and the antiwar movement. In 1992, Garth Brooks recorded "We Shall Be Free," expressing his vision of a more kind, tolerant, and equal America. After Dixie Chicks lead singer Natalie Maines criticized George W. Bush during their 2003 European tour, the band was essentially blacklisted.

Their songs were pulled from many major radio stations and their albums burned by fans. 2006 saw their rebuttal with the album *Taking the Long Way*, most notably on tracks like “Not Ready to Play Nice.”

As the first decade of the twenty-first century came to a close, and the second began, protest music didn’t lose any steam. In 2008, Green Day released 21st *Century Breakdown*, their second rock opera, and perhaps most ambitious album—musically and politically—to date. Kanye West put out “Diamonds for Sierra Leone,” calling attention to the blood diamond trade. In 2010 rap artist M.I.A., who has been politically active throughout her recording career, released “Born Free” taking aim at violence and oppression. Modern folk-rock musicians like Billy Bragg, Michelle Shocked, and Ani DeFranco have continued to maintain the legacies of Guthrie, Seeger, and Dylan.

In 2011, the Occupy Wall Street movement inspired a new batch of protest songs specifically addressing the economic crash and unequal distribution of resources in our country. Spoon’s peppy “The Underdog” was released in 2007, but captured the feeling of the 99% so accurately, it could be heard blaring from OWS camps across the nation. In 2011, Michael Piffinton & Joe Ax covered Aloe Blacc’s soulful single from the previous year, “I Need A Dollar,” which powerfully addresses the impact of the recession. Tom Waits’ “Talking at the Same Time,” The Decemberists’ “This is Why We Fight,” and tUnE-yArDs’ “My Country”—which rewrites the chorus of the national anthem to include “How come I cannot see my future within your arms?”—all criticize the current economic situation and champion bottom-up resistance. It seems that the tradition of American protest music is still going strong, and not about to slow down any time soon.

Rock Opera

A rock opera is an album of songs that together tell a story and are unified by theme, characters, and narrative. Like traditional opera, the story is told entirely through song. Unlike musical theater, which uses both spoken words and songs to support plot and character development, the lyrics of a rock opera are more like poetry than dialogue. The plot is often non-linear, prioritizing mood over specific events.

The golden era of rock opera was between 1969 and 1979. The Who released *Tommy* in 1969, which was considered the very first rock opera (and certainly

the first to bill itself that way). In the decade that followed, they would release their second rock opera, *Quadrophenia*. During this time The Kinks also composed, released and performed five rock operas, while Pink Floyd performed their opus, *The Wall*, for the first time. Performances of these operas bridged rock concert and theatrical conventions, often including elaborate special effects, dramatic staging, full costumes, and added singers and musicians to play additional roles. Many of these have since been adapted for both the stage and screen (*Tommy* has even been done as a ballet), but with the re-writes necessary to support a more formal plot.

Interest in the rock opera has surged in recent years, led by the success of Green Day's *American Idiot* (both the album and the stage musical) and their follow-up, *21st Century Breakdown*. Along with punk, country, and metal opera albums, rap operas like Lupe Fiasco's *The Cool*, R. Kelly's *Trapped in the Closet*, and Dr. Dre's greatly anticipated *Detox*, have ensured the genre's continued growth and expansion. This is also reflected on the stage, with successes like *Spring Awakening*—which swept the 2007 Tony Awards by winning eight out of eleven nominations—and *In the Heights*, the 2008 hip-hopera that won four Tonys and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama the following year.

Connections

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section provides ways to explore connections between the ideas presented in the play, the students' lives, and the world we live in.

Structured thematically, each section contains questions and exercises that may be used for reflection, discussion, and/or writing prompts both before and after the performance.

American Idiot and Media Literacy

*Don't want to be an American idiot
Don't want a nation under the new media*

ANDREW TURNS OFF HIS TV.

ANDREW:
Hey, can you hear the sound of hysteria?

AND DECLAN

DECLAN:
*The subliminal mind f*** America.*

What do the members of Green Day mean by the term “American Idiot?” Why is the term pointed at Americans, as opposed to other citizens of the world?

The main character in the musical, *American Idiot*, is fed up with the state of his life and goes in search of a more meaningful existence. Johnny’s dissatisfaction is partially fed by meaningless television programming. In the opening song, the media is described as “the sound of hysteria,” and “propaganda.” The characters sing of the media as messing with their minds in a subliminal manner. Johnny decides he needs to step away from it and seek out other life experiences.

For the character of Tunny, the media has the exact opposite effect on his life. He decides to enlist in the army because of television commercials he has been watching about the subject. The information he engages through the media colors his thinking, and he chooses to act because of what he has been watching and how it makes him feel.

- What does it mean to be literate?
- What do you think of when you hear the word “literacy”?

Oxford Dictionary defines “literate” as:
“having or showing education or knowledge, typically in a specified area”

Dictionary.com defines “literacy” as:

1. able to read and write
2. having or showing knowledge of literature, writing, etc.; literary; well-read.
3. characterized by skill, lucidity, polish, or the like: *His writing is literate but cold and clinical.*
4. having knowledge or skill in a specified field: *literate in computer usage.*
5. having an education; educated.

Merriam-Webster online defines “literate” in this way:

- 1 a : educated, cultured
b : able to read and write
- 2 a : versed in literature or creative writing: literary
b : lucid, polished <a *literate* essay>
c : having knowledge or competence <computer-*literate*>
<politically *literate*>

What does it mean to be literate about the media?

What is “media literacy?”

The Media Awareness Network answers the question in this way:

Media literacy is the ability to sift through and analyze the messages that inform, entertain and sell to us every day. It’s the ability to bring critical thinking skills to bear on all media—from music videos and Web environments to product placement in films and virtual displays on NHL hockey boards. It’s about asking pertinent questions about what’s there, and noticing what’s not there. And it’s the instinct to question what lies behind media productions—the motives, the money, the values and the ownership—and to be aware of how these factors influence content.

Being media literate means being knowledgeable about the media that one engages.

Other Definitions (from The Center for Media Literacy):

- Media: any tool or technology used for sending and/or receiving messages.
- Mass Media: any tool or technology used for sending and/or receiving messages from a central source to many receivers; usually only one-way communication is possible.

- Media Text: any message sent via media; could be words, pictures, sounds—or multimedia

When cultivating critical thinking about media for ourselves and with our students, the Center for Media Literacy offers very specific questions to ask about the media that we engage:

FIVE KEY QUESTIONS OF MEDIA LITERACY:

1. Who created this message?
2. What techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently from me?
4. What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why was this message sent?

CML has also developed the following concepts to create understanding regarding media;

FIVE CORE CONCEPTS:

1. All media messages are ‘constructed.’
2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
3. Different people experience the same media message differently.
4. Media have embedded values and points of view.
5. Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

Perspective

Everyday, we are inundated with messages coming from various media sources. Our lives are saturated with ideas, opinions, thoughts, slogans, images, and stories that come from billboards, radios, televisions, computer screens, cellphones, ipods. Every one of the messages that we encounter has been created by a person, or group of people, and the main purposes in communicating these messages are to activate our feelings and influence our thinking. These people/groups of people may have different reasons for desiring to influence our thinking (they might want us to buy their product, or adopt their political, social, religious philosophy, they may want to purely teach or inform us). But their intention is to get inside of our minds and influence how we think and feel.

Being media literate (critically thinking about these messages that we encounter) helps us to navigate our media saturated world.

EXERCISE:

For the next five days, when you wake up in the morning:

- Start the day by getting in touch with your own thoughts, your own ideas, your own words, your own thinking.
- Do this before you talk to another human, before you turn on a computer, radio, itouch, cellphone, television or any other electronic devise that might deliver a message to you.
- Do this before you read an advertisement, hear the lyrics of a song, read someone else's writing, have a conversation.
- Do this by placing a journal next to your bed, so you are ready to write immediately upon awakening. (The journal could be as simple as a single subject spiral notebook. It could be your computer, but make sure the first thing you do when you boot it up is to go to your word processing software. No email or facebook.)
- When you wake up, begin to write down the first thoughts that come to mind.
 - ◇ Write about what you expect to encounter during your day.
 - ◇ Write about what happened the day before.
 - ◇ Write about your dreams.
 - ◇ Write about certain challenges you are having.
 - ◇ Write about things in life that you are grateful for.
 - ◇ Write about *anything*, as long as that writing originates from *your* brain, and expresses what *you* are thinking and feeling.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What are the effects, if any, of conducting this activity in your life?
- How do you think media messages influence, or keep us disconnected from, our own perspectives and stop us from cultivating our own thinking?

FOR THE CLASSROOM:

- Begin class with a writing prompt. Ask the students to write about what is going in their minds at the moment they start they class.
- Do not have the writing be about the content of the classroom. Have the writing be about the content of the student's brains. Have them get in touch with their perspectives, opinions, feelings, experiences, challenges, joys, problem-solving strategies, stories, etc.

- Emphasize that this is a freewrite. Communicate that correct grammar and spelling are not the goals and that they will not be graded on those aspects. This exercise is purely for them to get in touch with, explore, and create their own unique, original perspectives.

Do this for one full week (or more) of classes.

Conduct discussion about this activity. When debriefing about the writing, students may be asked what they are writing about, but they should never be made to reveal the content if it makes them uncomfortable.

They should also be asked about their experiences of the process:

- Is this type of writing shedding any light on certain aspects of their lives? If so, how?
- Is this type of writing boring? Why?
- Is this type of writing creating any clarity for them? Why?
- Is this type of writing creating new ideas, or helping them to excavate ideas/thoughts/feelings that were already there?
- What is the value in participating in this type of writing exercise?
- Has anything surprised you about participating in this exercise?

Media Saturation

Take a look at the messages posted around your school, on posters, bulletin boards, notices, etc.

What kinds of information do these messages contain? Pay attention to images as well as words.

Why is this information being presented to you? To inform, persuade, entertain, inspire?

Are they pleasing to look at? Was there any thought behind the design of the media?

What kinds of messages inspire you?

What kinds of messages do you think would inspire students at your school?

What kinds of messages do you think would inspire faculty and staff at your school?

With your class, create a list of messages that are inspiring to you and messages that might inspiring to all members of your school community (students, faculty and staff).

- These could be quotes from famous people.
- These could be quotes from the journaling students are creating.
- These could be messages that are created through class discussion and collaboration.
- The messages could be communicated through word or image or both.

Create media that contains these inspiring messages: posters, signs, collages, drawings, paintings, videos, installations, photos, sound recordings.

Post them around school (with permission, of course). Post them next to other messages for contrast. Post them in places where interesting conversation might be created. Post them in places that need beauty and inspiration. Post them where they will inspire and uplift students. Post them where they will inspire and uplift teachers and administrators.

Saturate your school community with positive media messages. Post with the purposes of uplifting, inspiring, and creating critical thought.

Adopt a neighborhood and do the same.

Media, Self and Society

What images come to mind when you consider stereotypes in media ? How do these images affect you?

What is the difference between what media represents and what society actually consists of?

How can we overcome the power these stereotypes have on us? How can we dismantle these images and portray accurate representations of humanity? How would things shift if media reflected the truth of what it means to be a human being? How are you personally affected by media? How are your loved ones and community affected by it?

What role does the pressure of society and media play in *American Idiot*?

Create a book

The goal of the book is to empower the reader using words and images to identify stereotypes, how they impact society, and then create a transformation showing accurate representation of society. These images can be taken from magazines, old books, the internet and any other source. Your book should be bound.

1. First half. Find images that represent stereotypes that media perpetuates. Accompany the images with writing (can be written in any form) that gives voice to these pressures, describing in detail how youth and society are affected by the infiltration of these images.
2. The Bridge. This is the part of the book between the stereotypes and the accurate representations of society. You can use this part of the book to explore the power we have to change these portrayals. Be creative with how you approach the Bridge. You can even use just an image such as a door or window.
3. The Second Half of the book consists of images that you feel *truly* represent our society. These images should reflect the reality of what it means to be a human being, dismantling the stereotypical images used in media. The text accompanying these images should do the same, allowing the reader to fully understand your perspective on *what society really consists of versus what media portrays*.
4. Create a cover. Give your book a title.

She's a Rebel: Women in Punk Rock and the Riot Grrrls Movement

Lyrics to "She's a Rebel"

*She puts her makeup on like graffiti on the walls of the heartland
She's got her little book of conspiracies right in her hand
She is paranoid, endangered species headed into extinction
She is one of a kind, well, she's the last of the American girls
She's a rebel, she's a saint
She wears her overcoat for the coming of the nuclear winter
She's the salt of the earth and she's dangerous
She is riding her bike like a fugitive of critical mass*

*She's a rebel
 Vigilante
 She's on a hunger strike for the ones who won't make it for dinner
 She's the one that they call old Whatsername
 She makes enough to survive for a holiday of the working class
 She's a symbol of resistance
 She's a runaway of the establishment incorporated
 And she's holding on my heart like a hand grenade
 She won't cooperate, well, she's the last of the American girls*

American Idiot, the musical and the album, contain a character called Whatshername. Green Day had the song “Rebel Girl” in mind when they created her. The all-female punk rock group, Bikini Kill, headed by musician, Kathleen Hanna, wrote “Rebel Girl”. In addition, Hanna appears as a guest vocalist on the *American Idiot* album, performing in the song “Letterbomb.” Green Day described Whatshername as “holding on my heart like a hand grenade.” This lyric was the inspiration for the now infamous icon that we associate with the band.

Billie Joe Armstrong and the members of Green Day obviously admired their female punk rocker counterparts, Kathleen Hanna and the members of Bikini Kill. Let’s take a closer look at their involvement in the punk rock scene. Bikini Kill was an American punk rock band that was formed in Olympia, Washington in October of 1990. It is widely considered to be the pioneer band of the Riot Grrrl movement.

Riot Grrrl was a musical and political movement that began in the Pacific Northwest in the 1990’s. The Riot Grrrl message emphasized female empowerment. It was a part of the DIY (Do It Yourself) feminist movement, which is defined below:

“DIY (do-it-yourself) feminism is an umbrella term fusing together different types of feminism. Drawing on genealogies of punk cultures, grassroots movements, and the technologies of late capitalism, this movement meshes lifestyle politics with counter-cultural networking. It takes as its focus everyday acts of resistance and power. DIY feminism disrupts complacent beliefs that feminism and social change are no longer on the agenda of young people.”
 (From the Spanish feminist art collective, Erreakzioa-Reacción)

The Riot Grrrl movement desired that female musicians be viewed and treated as equals in the music scene. It dealt with many women's issues that are often seen as taboo such as surviving rape and sexual abuse, eating disorders and a healthy body image.

The term "riot girl" originates from the title of a zine published by members of Riot Grrrl bands such as Bikini Kill and Bratmobile.

A "zine", or "fanzine" is similar to a magazine, but there are major differences. A zine is created and published *by* fans, not *for* fans. It is a countercultural alternative to established print media. Zines are defiantly homemade and include images and text that are Xeroxed, cut-and-pasted, and collaged. The Riot Grrrl zines offered women participating in the movement a place to express themselves and to make political statements that were not censored by corporate media. The zines were a forum to address personal experiences with, and political and social ramifications of, sexism, mental illness, body image and eating disorders, sexual abuse, rape, racism, domestic violence, and homophobia. Women and girls creating the zines were able to address and change derogatory terms used against them.

Zines are distributed in an informal manner, passed around amongst colleagues, friends, and interested parties. They usually have a small circulation of about 5000 or less, and are not sold for profit.

New York University's Fales Library now houses a Riot Grrrl collection. The collection includes zines published by Kathleen Hanna and Bikini Kill:

<http://www.nyu.edu/library/bobst/research/fales/riotgrrrltest.html>

In the book, *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World: Writings from the Girl Zine Revolution*, Anne Magnuson (actress, musician, writer, performer) wrote in the forward:

"When I think of how much benefit my teenage self could have gained from all the multitude of zines that have proliferated over the past decade, I weep for all the lost potential. Except for Joan of Arc and Anne Frank, the thoughts of teenage girls have rarely been taken seriously. "

The *New York Times* published an article entitled “A Feminist Riot That Still Inspires,” that chronicles a relatively recent Kathleen Hanna tribute show at the infamous Knitting Factory in Brooklyn, New York. The article also tells the story of Kathleen Hanna’s involvement in the Riot Grrrl movement. This event created an opportunity for young female musicians to perform music inspired by Hanna and her various collaborators. Hanna also took the stage herself with her new group, The Julie Ruin.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/05/arts/music/the-riot-grrrl-movement-still-inspires>

EXERCISES:

Student Zine

Publish a zine in your class. Choose a topic, or several topics, that students are interested in. Create content for the zine, or zines, by having students express through writing, images, collage, etc. Distribute the zine throughout the school community.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

- Compare and contrast homemade zines and commercial magazines. A Venn diagram might be useful for this exercise.
- When you hear the word “feminism,” what comes to mind?
- Do you have mostly positive or negative associations with the word “feminism”? What has influenced your thinking?
- Why do you think the members of Green Day had such admiration for Kathleen Hanna and the members of Bikini Kill?
- Some men consider themselves to be feminists. Do you think the members of Green Day consider themselves feminists, or only admirers of women participating in feminist movements?

Creativity

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section provides opportunities for your students to use theatre to explore and express.

Theatre activities are included that examine both specific artistic aspects of the production, as well as delve deeper into the ideas and questions raised by it. The activities and information in this section can be used both before and after the performance.

Cultural Mapping

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will gain knowledge of similarities and differences in their classmates.
- Students will be introduced to *American Idiot* and begin to reflect on the play.

EXERCISE:

Ask the students to move the desks to the side and stand in a circle. Describe the room as a map of the world. Identify Los Angeles in the space. Have students who were born in Los Angeles gather in that place. Have the other students group themselves according to their birthplace (north, east, south, or west of Los Angeles). Each group must determine two additional things that they have in common. Report back to the whole class. (Example: The members of the “north” group all like pizza and are the oldest in their families.)

Repeat activity using other divisions such as:

- Oldest, middle, youngest, only child.
- Speak one language, two languages, etc.
- Quotes from the production:

(Ask each student to stand by the quote that most intrigues them. Discuss in the group why they chose that quote. What intrigues them about it?)

- “Do you know what’s worth fighting for, When it’s not worth dying for?”
- “Words get trapped in my mind/Sorry if I don’t take the time/To feel the way I do”
- “We are the kids of war and peace/ From Anaheim to the Middle East”
- “WAKE UP!”
- “Television dreams of tomorrow”

Tableau/Frozen Picture

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will practice using their bodies to communicate an idea or theme.
- Students will reflect on the varied interpretations of the theme.
- Students will reflect on *American Idiot* through a physical exploration of its themes.

EXERCISE:

Divide students into pairs. Student A is the artist. Student B is the statue. Have student A create a statue out of B on the theme of “the future”.

Examples: Flying cars, world peace, destroying the environment, graduating from college. Statues can be realistic or symbolic, personal or global. Have each student title their statue and present to the class. Repeat exercise with B as the artist and A as the statue.

Repeat with the themes of numbness, love, rage, escape, suburb, city, music, friendship, television.

Have each student sculpt an image that represents one of these themes. Discuss what these ideas mean to your students and what these ideas meant to the characters in *American Idiot*. Are they similar or very different?

Orchestra

EMOTIONAL ORCHESTRA

Divide students into groups of three. Give each group an emotion found in *American Idiot*: Rage, Apathy, Anxiety, Love, Boredom, Numbness, Connection, Fear, Loneliness etc.

Each trio should create a sound and movement that best expresses that emotion. That sound and movement is their instrument. Tell the group that they are going to create an emotional orchestra and that you will be the conductor. Practice pointing at each group to “hear” their emotional instrument. Let them know when you are pointing at them they should continue their sound and movement until you stop. Let them know that

sometimes you will point at a single instrument, two instruments or the whole group. Practice hand signals for softer, louder, faster, slower, chaos! Conduct the orchestra. Repeat with student conducting.

CITY AND SUBURB ORCHESTRA

Repeat the above activity but have each trio create a sound and movement that represents a sound you would hear in the city and a sound you would hear in the suburbs. Choose a student to conduct the orchestra. Discuss the sounds they chose for the different settings.

The Dramatic Web

MATERIALS:

Markers

Flip-Chart Paper

Ball of yarn or string

A list of diametrically opposite words specific to *American Idiot* (e.g. rage/love, numbness/feeling, heart/hand grenade, young/old, city/suburbs)

DIRECTIONS:

Divide students into an even number of groups

Give each group a single word and ask them to list as many words as possible to describe or define their assigned word using flip-chart paper

Gather in a circle with several sheets of flip-chart paper spread on the ground in the center

Select one group to begin sharing their list. Give the ball of yarn to a member of that group. Have the other groups listen for any overlap with their list. When a group hears a word that overlaps with one on their list, they call out “stop” and share the overlapping word. The first student holds on to one end of the ball of yarn and passes the rest of the yarn to the student who called out stop. That student pinches the string and begins to read the words on their list. The activity is repeated as another group hears an overlap. As the string is passed from group to group, a web is created.

After several rounds, look at the web and reflect. Explain that the center of this web, where diametrically opposite things overlap, is where drama lives and theater is created!

Your Own Costume Change: Then, Now & Next

DISCUSSION:

We meet three friends in *American Idiot*: Will, Johnny and Tunny. The three young guys aren't kids anymore. But they aren't adults yet either. They are struggling to grow up and make choices about what to do with their lives.

They each make a different decision. One goes to the 'big city', one becomes a soldier, and one stays home.

HERE ARE 3 WEIRD QUESTIONS:

- What clothes & hair do you wear to go to the big city?
- What clothes & hair do you wear to fight in a war?
- What clothes & hair do you wear to stay home?

Costume designers find answers to questions like these. The answers help them decide what clothes or costumes that actors will wear on stage. The costumes help us believe that *American Idiot's* Johnny is in the big city, Tunny becomes a soldier and Will stays home and smokes pot. The costume clothing can tell us where the character is, who they are and what they are doing.

The costume designer for *American Idiot* is Andrea Lauer.

Check out her design sketches for the *American Idiot* characters:

<http://www.andrealauerdesign.com/American-Idiot>

Lauer cut out magazine pictures and other images to create collages about the characters. Other costume designers may create sketches in a notebook, just like a fashion designer.

Sometimes, they use a paper template, called a "croquis." It looks a lot like a paper doll that you can draw on.

DEFINITION:

cro·quis

[kroh-**kee**; Fr. kraw-**kee**]

noun, plural **-quis**

a rough preliminary drawing; sketch.

During the play, the characters make choices that take them to different to places. So they change costumes. In real life, we change all the time. And so do our clothes or every day costumes.

ACTIVITY:

In this activity, you get a chance to design 3 costumes. Imagine you were creating a rock opera about your life. In this story, we see one actor portraying you during three times in your life:

1. THEN: You as a child
2. NOW: You as you are now
3. NEXT: You as what you hope to be in the future

How would you dress the actor portraying you on stage? How would you style their hair and create their make-up (if any)?

MATERIALS:

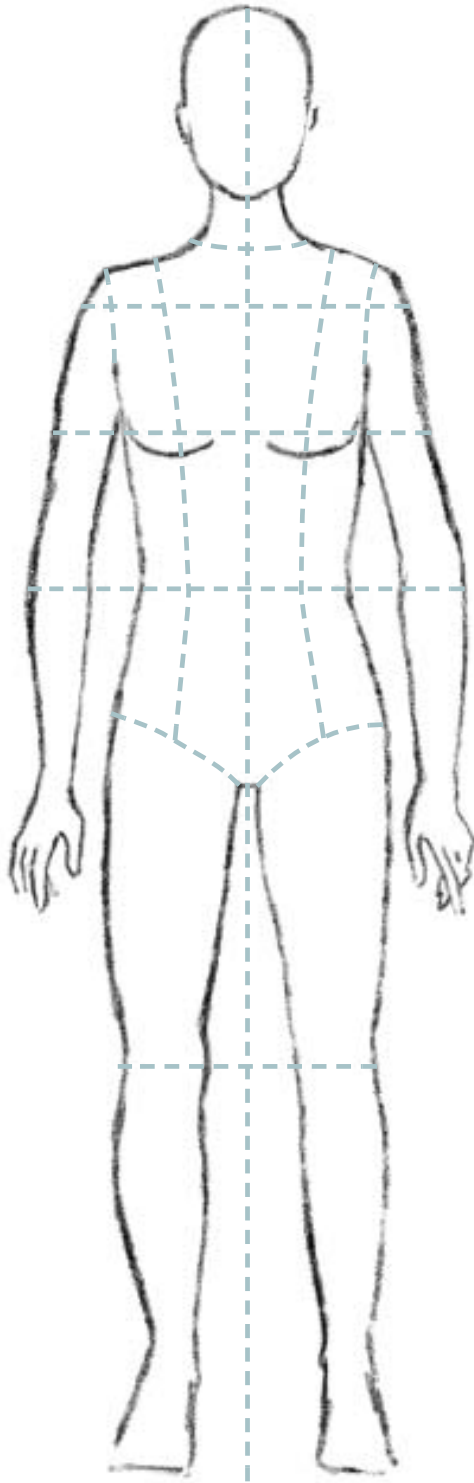
Several Xerox copies of croquis forms (see below). Colored pens, pencils, paints. Glitter. Glue. Feathers. Strips of fabric.

INSTRUCTIONS:

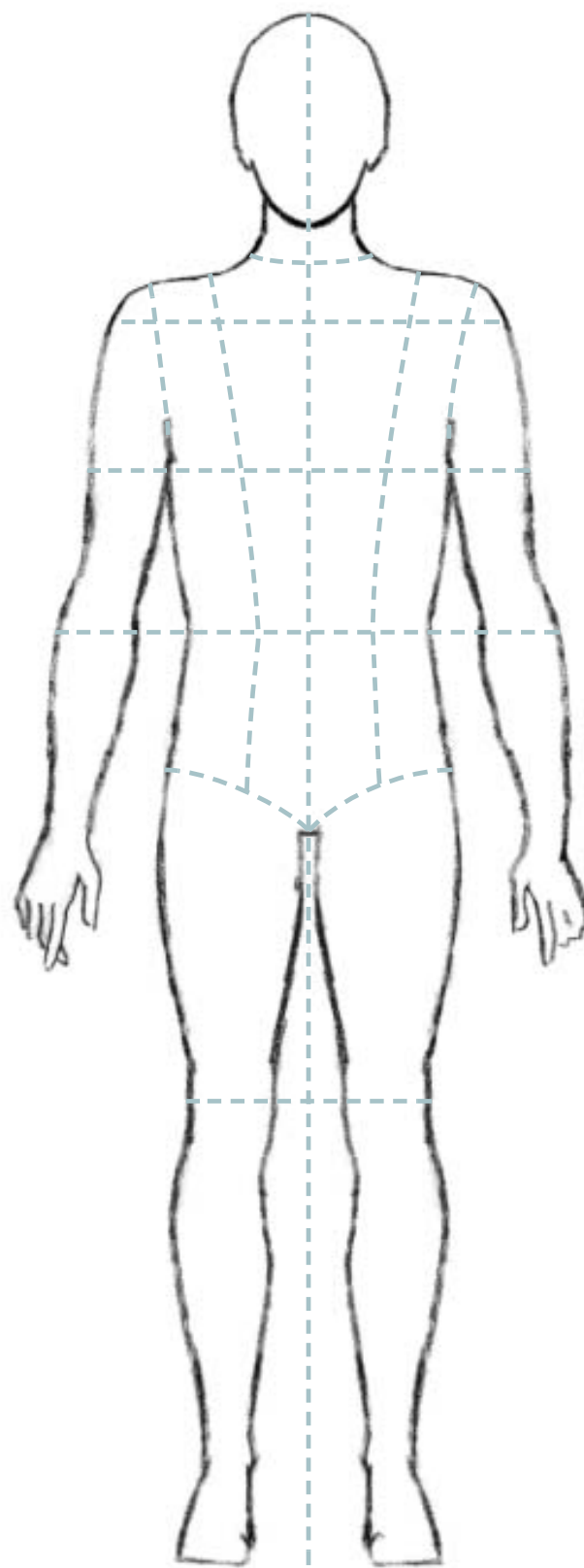
Select 3 croquis templates. You can choose 3 of the same templates or mix up the sizes to suggest someone is growing.

Use the art supplies in any way you want to create 3 costumes that an actor could wear to play you as a child (THEN), as a current student (NOW), and lastly as what you hope to be in the future (NEXT).

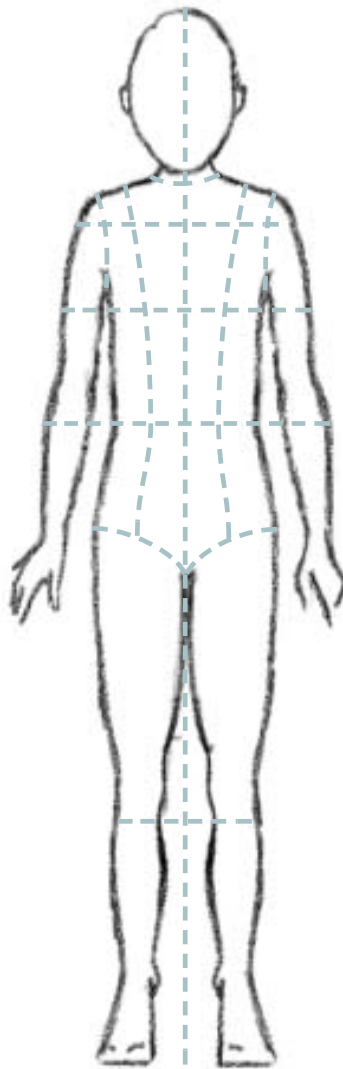
It can be a messy or a clean design. Your choice. No right or wrong. Have fun!



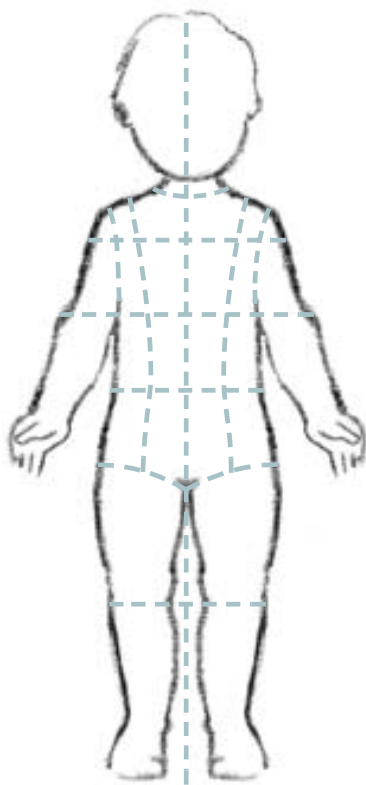
AVERAGE WOMAN



AVERAGE MAN



CHILD, 6-9 YEARS OLD



TODDLER

3-Minute Rock Opera

DISCUSSION:

We hope you enjoyed designing your 3 costumes. Now, we will take those costume design croquis and use them to create a super-short rock opera.

ACTIVITY:

In this activity, you get a chance to create a 3-minute rock opera using your 3 croquis costume characters:

1. THEN: You as a child
2. NOW: You as you are now
3. NEXT: You as what you hope to be in the future

MATERIALS:

A music stand. A standard classroom laptop and projector. Speakers to play music from a laptop or mp3 player. 3 song files. A camera phone or a digital camera.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Day One:

Work with a partner. Together, look at your 3 croquis costume designs. For each croquis, think of a song that you already have at home that might go with the design. Don't overthink it. Whatever song comes to mind first.

Take a sheet of paper. Draw three columns. In the first column at the top, write "Then". In the Second column, "Now" and in the last column "Next." Underneath those words, write "Song:" followed by the name of each corresponding song name that represents the croquis costume design. Underneath the song row, write "Text:" followed by the corresponding writing prompts below—this is will be a free-write area we will use to create some spoken words.

It should look something like this:

THEN	NOW	NEXT
Song:	Song:	Song:
Text:	Text:	Text:
When I was young I loved_____	Right now I think a lot about_____	In the future, I really hope that I_____

There are now 3 writing prompts in the table. The teacher offers a one-minute free write for each prompt.

Working together, the students then take separate digital pictures of each croquis. The pictures are loaded into a simple slide show program on the main classroom computer that is hooked up to a projector. Teacher assistance required.

Day Two:

Students bring in 3 songs on a CD or thumb-drive. With partner and teacher assistance, the songs are loaded into a simple music player on the main classroom laptop and arranged in order.

Creating the simple rock opera.

(Allow some rehearsal time so partners can try out this simple performance once before sharing with the class.)

The storytelling student stands at the front of the classroom and nods to his/her partner who is controlling the laptop. The partner projects the first croquis image “THEN” and plays the first song. After hearing the song for about 30 seconds—the partner turns down the volume so the song becomes an underscore, the sharing student reads the first text “When I was young.”

The partner then projects the second croquis image “NOW” and plays the second song. After hearing the song for about 30 seconds the partner turns

down the volume so the song becomes an underscore, the sharing student reads the second text “Right now I think.”

The partner then projects the third and final croquis image “NEXT” and plays the third song. After hearing the song for about 30 seconds the partner turns down the volume so the song becomes an underscore, the sharing student reads the third and final text “In the future.” At the end of the text, the sharing student says “Thank you” to the audience and the partner turns up the volume on the final song to button up the opera.

The audience applauds.

*OPTIONAL LOW-TECH ALTERNATIVE:

Instead of taking pictures and using a projector, the 3 croquis can simply be placed one by one on a music stand. The partner can simply change the croquis by hand on the music stand when it’s time to switch between “THEN”, “NOW” and “NEXT.”

After-September Poetry Jam To Wake Up

(A series of activities that can be explored any time of year!)

As Green Day and the *American Idiot* Musical demonstrate, to write poetry and song lyrics one must be awake, aware and alive.

When Green Day’s new album material, *Cigarettes and Valentines*, was stolen, the band asked themselves if the missing tracks represented their best work. Guitarist Billie Joe Armstrong said that the band members couldn’t honestly look at ourselves and say, “That was the best thing we’ve ever done.” So they decided to move on and do something completely new. This was the birth of *American Idiot*. It seems their album material being stolen woke them up to write about and give voice to what, in their estimation, was really going on with themselves and what they observed was really going on in society.

*“Summer has come and passed
The innocent can never last
Wake me up when September ends
Like my father’s come to pass
Seven years has gone so fast
Wake me up when September ends*

*Here comes the rain again
Falling from the stars
Drenched in my pain again
Becoming who we are*

*As my memory rests
But never forgets
What I lost
Wake me up when September ends*

*Summer has come and passed
The innocent can never last
Wake me up when September ends...*

*...Wake me up when September ends
Wake me up when September ends
Wake me up when September ends*

JOHNNY:

Time to wake up."

Excerpt: 19. WAKE ME UP WHEN SEPTEMBER ENDS; *American Idiot*

Below are a series of writing sessions with the goal of your students performing a poetry jam/festival of their original material or creating poems and lyrics for their own music/poetry jam album or musical.

The activities are designed to be utilized in this sequence or to mix and match as you see fit with your students.

EXERCISE #1:

WARM UP TO WAKE UP!

*"To live and not to breathe
Is to die in tragedy..."*

v. Tales Of Another Broken Home; *American Idiot*

Warming up to get your breath going is scientifically known to wake up the brain and the body and therefore one's creativity, one's imagination.

AIM:

To wake up one's creativity and to build the ability to express it. To apply the warm ups to writing and speaking skills to support the practice of writing and voicing exactly what one means with the use of imagery, color, thoughts, feelings, simile, and metaphor.

Always ask the students to work within their own abilities and to learn to take responsibility for how they might need to modify or even sit out if the exercises cause pain or injury. Please use your judgment to modify and/or support your student's process. You know them best.

WARM UP #1:

To start, shake out the body one area at a time. This works well when the leader asks the students to "freeze" after shaking out a part of the body and then asks everyone to shake out the next area. Isolating each section of the body creates an experience of awareness of the different areas of the body and a sense of being in charge of one's body. Actors learn to isolate areas of the body and acquire great body and movement awareness to create characters to tell stories well. Writers can benefit in the same ways for their creative process.

- Hands first, then whole arm, then the upper body while keeping the lower part of the body quiet.
- Then, while balancing, circle each ankle one at a time, then, shake out each leg one at a time, and eventually from the waist down while keeping the upper body quiet.
- Then, shake out the entire body.

WARM UP #2:

This position is designed to open up the breathing to encourage spontaneity and aliveness in the body and therefore, the imagination.

- With knees slightly bent, feet shoulder's width apart for stability, clasp the hands together at waist level, elbows slightly bent.
- Tilt the hips forward (to prevent a sway back) and take the effort into the thighs and bend the knees/legs a bit deeper.
- With shoulders down and relaxed, begin to bring clasped hands up above the head and allow the eyes to follow the hands. Keep the neck as long as possible as the head tilts up and back.

- Soften the jaw and allow the lips and teeth to part as breath moves freely in and out of the mouth and nose.
- Soften behind the eyes to relax and breathe deep into the belly.
- Relax the belly and buttocks, and expand the ribs when breathing deeply.
- Exhale on a “sigh of relief” to begin to warm up the vocal cords.
- Stay in this position and continue to breathe deeply for up to two minutes.
- Feel the long open channel from the mouth down to your belly that is your wind pipe and respiratory system at work.
- Arms and legs may shake or tremor a bit, allow it to shake loose tension—see if you can relax into this shake and allow the rhythm of the breath to change.
- When coming out of the position, twist and allow one arm at a time to lower, to be easy on the back. Then roll down the spine vertebrae by vertebrae, tucking the chin first. Knees are still bent and hang with head, neck, arms and shoulders relaxed/released.
- From this position, breathe into the hips, lower back and ribs.
- Eventually roll up vertebrae by vertebrae, draw your spine in your mind’s eye, gradually coming to standing. Your chin will be the last to come up.
- Really feel your feet making contact with the floor and balance, then, gently shake it out for a few moments and notice how you feel. Notice your breathing now.

WARM UP #3:

This Brain Gym exercise is designed to get the right/left brain synapses all firing! This is great to do in preparation for a creative session.

- Again, bring your feet shoulder’s width apart with knees slightly bent.
- Stretch your arms out in front of you in an easy way. Your hands to waist level out in front of you, palms down.
- Curl your fingers to close your hands, leaving your thumbs out.
- Turn your hands so your thumbs are up and side by side.
- Using your thumbs, draws shapes and lines in the air, while being sure they always mirror each other. So for example, the thumbs start by moving towards each other on the same line/level and then move right and left apart, on the same line/level. Then, perhaps, you take them up, both together at the same rate and down again, together at the same rate.

- Have fun drawing and changing rhythms as well!
- After 1-3 minutes, bring this exercise to a close and gently shake out your whole body again.

Utilize these warm ups before each creative writing session to warm up and wake up the artist within!

EXERCISE #2:

So Tell Me When It's Time...It's Time!

JOHNNY: *Are you asleep?*

SHE IS.

...good. I wrote this for you.

*Words get trapped in my mind
Sorry if I don't take the time
To feel the way I do
Cause the first day you came into my life
My time ticks around you
But then I need your voice
As a key to unlock all
The love that's trapped in me
So tell me when it's time...*

*...I feel lonely for
All the losers that will never
Take the time to say
What's really on their mind
Instead they just hide away
Yet they'll never have
Someone like you to guide them
And help along the way
Or tell them when it's time
To say I love you
So tell me when its time
To say I love you.
Excerpt: 15. *When It's Time*; *American Idiot**

AIM:

To take the time to explore the writer's voice. Also, the aim is to offer a space for the trapped creativity in the mind and heart to spill out onto the page. And the aim is to allow a place "to take the time to say, what's really on their mind" so as not to just hide away.

WRITING PROMPT #1:

What are you waiting for? Explore and describe in your journal or on paper, that place within, where you know you are waiting for something...something you dream of...something you want to be different...someone you want to be with... or perhaps, the knowing you're waiting for something but you don't know yet what that something is.

- Finish these sentences, fill in the blanks. The blank lines provided are to suggest where to fill in with your own words/expressions. Do not let the length of the line limit your imagination. Be sure to describe any image, thoughts, colors, or feelings that you experience. Use imagery, and perhaps, memories to describe and support what you are experiencing or seeing in your mind's eye:
 - ◇ I am waiting for _____ and _____ will happen.
 - ◇ I am waiting for _____, this dream of mine, to _____.
 - ◇ I am waiting for _____ to be different.
 - ◇ I am waiting for _____ and she/he _____.
 - ◇ I am waiting and it feels like _____.
 - ◇ (Now describe/expound upon any one of these sentences to develop your poem/song or prose.)
 - ◇ After taking time to finish the sentences, remove as many words as you can to distill the writing down to its essence. Feel free to move the order of the phrases around to form your poem and/or lyrics or prose.
 - ◇ You have the first piece, the start of your own body of work/poems, album, or musical!
 - ◇ Have the students read their writings aloud. If time permits, use selected writings to create tableaux in small groups.

TUNNY:

*“Starry nights
City lights coming down over me
Skyscrapers and stargazers in my head
Are we, we are
Are we, we are the waiting unknown
This dirty town was burning down in my dreams
Lost and found, city bound in my dreams
And screaming*

TUNNY LEAVES THE HOTEL, IN HIS UNDERWEAR. A THRONG OF PEOPLE APPEAR, ALSO UNDRRESSED AS THEY WOULD BE IN A PHYSICAL EXAMINATION AS PART OF THEIR RECRUITMENT INTO THE MILITARY. THE FAVORITE SON IS THERE, IN UNIFORM. HE WALKS UP AND DOWN, EXAMINING THE RECRUITS.

ALL:

*Are we, we are
Are we, we are the waiting
And screaming*

*Are we, we are
Are we, we are the waiting*

TUNNY APPROACHES THE FAVORITE SON.

*Forget-me-nots and second thoughts
Live in isolation
Heads or tails and fairy tales in my mind
Are we, we are
Are we, we are the waiting unknown
The rage and love, the story of my life
The Jesus of Suburbia is a lie
And screaming*

*Are we, we are
Are we, we are the waiting*

And screaming
And screaming

The waiting unknown
And screaming
The waiting unknown
6. *We Are The Waiting; American Idiot*

WRITING PROMPT #2:

As Tunny approaches the Favorite Son, he eventually sings about “fairy tales in my mind...The Jesus of Suburbia is a lie...” What does this song describe and suggest?

Again, finish any or all of these sentences and continue in detail. The blank lines provided are to suggest where to fill in with your own words/expressions. Do not let the length of the line limit your imagination. Be sure to describe any image, thoughts, colors, or feelings that you experience. Use imagery, and perhaps, memories to describe and support what you are experiencing or seeing in your mind’s eye:

- My forget-me-nots are_____like_____.
- My second thoughts are_____like_____.
- The fairy tales in my mind_____.
- My Jesus of Suburbia is as a_____.
- I lost my innocence when_____.
- I felt like an idiot when_____.

FURTHER DESCRIBE:

- Where have you experienced a loss and/or loss of innocence?
- Where and when did you realize what you had been experiencing suddenly felt like a lie or that you had taken on a belief or norm that is no longer true for you?
- Explore and write about the areas of your life where maybe you feel like an idiot.
 - ◇ Now describe/expound upon any one of these sentences to develop your poem/song or prose.
 - ◇ Again, after taking time to finish the sentences, remove as many words as you can to distill the writing down to its essence. Feel free to move the order of the phrases around to form your poem and/or lyrics or prose.

- ◇ You have the second piece of your own body of work/poems, album, or musical!
- ◇ Have the students read their writings aloud. If time permits, use selected writings to create tableaus in small groups.

WRITING PROMPT #3:

In the album and musical of *American Idiot* rage versus love is an overarching theme. Billy Joe Armstrong says, "...you can go with the blind rebellion of self-destruction, where St. Jimmy is. But there's a more love-driven side to that, which is following your beliefs and ethics. And that's where Jesus of Suburbia really wants to go..."

Again, finish any or all of these sentences and continue in detail. The blank lines provided are to suggest where to fill in with your own words/expressions. Do not let the length of the line limit your imagination. Be sure to describe any image, thoughts, colors, or feelings that you experience. Use imagery, and perhaps, memories to describe and support what you are experiencing or seeing in your mind's eye:

- I want to go where_____.
- I believe in_____.
- My principles are_____.
- My rules of conduct are_____.

FURTHER DESCRIBE:

- Where do you want to go?
- What part of you has a revolutionary spirit, where you are outside or beyond the established system or principles and where does this spirit lead you?
 - ◇ Now describe/expound upon any one of these sentences to develop your poem/song or prose.
 - ◇ Again, after taking time to finish the sentences, remove as many words as you can to distill the writing down to its essence. Feel free to move the order of the phrases around to form your poem and/or lyrics or prose.
 - ◇ You have the third piece of your own body of work/poems, album, or musical!
 - ◇ Have the students read their writings aloud. If time permits, use selected writings to create tableaus in small groups.

WRITING PROMPT #4:

In *American Idiot*, there is a series of letters where Johnny explores all that he is waking up to, his rage and love, his friends, his family, his life. Below are prompts to support for the students to write love letters to wake up parts of themselves.

Again, finish any or all of these sentences and continue in detail. The blank lines provided are to suggest where to fill in with your own words/expressions. Do not let the length of the line limit your imagination. Be sure to describe any image, thoughts, colors, or feelings that you experience. Use imagery, and perhaps, memories to describe and support what you are experiencing or seeing in your mind's eye:

- Dear (self),_____.
- I am waking up_____parts of myself.
- I feel as if_____.
- I don't want to sell out_____like_____.
- I'm waking up and I_____.
- I'm not waiting, I'm_____.
- This is my love letter to myself and I_____.
- This is my (a feeling)_____.
- This is my (a feeling)_____.
- This is my (name of school)_____.
- This is my (name of city)_____.
- This is my life.
 - ◇ Now describe/expound upon any one of these sentences to develop your poem/song or prose.
 - ◇ Again, after taking time to finish the sentences, remove as many words as you can to distill the writing down to its essence. Feel free to move the order of the phrases around to form your poem and/or lyrics or prose.
 - ◇ You have the fourth piece of your own body of work/poems, album, or musical!
 - ◇ Have the students read their writings aloud. If time permits, use selected writings to create tableaux in small groups.

JOHNNY:
*And that was that.
Or so it seemed.
Is this the end
Or the beginning?
All I know is,
She was right.
I am an idiot.*

*It's even on my birth certificate.
In so many words.*

*This is my rage
This is my love
This is my town
This is my city
This is my life*

Create your own classroom wake up poetry jam then give voice to your school with an after-school poetry festival!

- Have the students start by compiling their pieces.
- Encourage them to find an order and theme that is emerging from their pieces.
- Offer time to rewrite with their theme in mind, if necessary.
- Then, designate a class period to share the work.
- Perhaps there is a student who would be the DJ/MC of the poetry jam. If so, have your DJ/MC introduce each poet/lyricist/writer.
- Have each student take a turn to read their work.
- Have each student select one piece to post in a special area of the classroom or hallway and make a class project of organizing an after-school poetry festival to share the work more widely. Make a school-wide call for poets/lyricists/writers and poems/lyrics/writings to be shared at the festival.
- Again, elect DJ/MC's and perhaps music (excerpts from *American Idiot*) can play at the start, finish and at the breaks.
- Encourage each poet/lyricist/writer to speak in a theatre voice, but if necessary, set up a PA system for sound and microphones.
- Celebrate the voice of each poet/lyricist/writer!

- With enough interest, perhaps there is room at your school to create a poetry/lyrics/writing club, if there isn't one already, for the students to continue their writing process!

*...Summer has come and passed
The innocent can never last
Wake me up when September ends...*

*...Wake me up when September ends
Wake me up when September ends
Wake me up when September ends*

JOHNNY:

Time to wake up."

Excerpt: 19. WAKE ME UP WHEN SEPTEMBER ENDS; *American Idiot*

The Four Circles: Writing Exercise

Students chose their favorite character and write through that character's eyes in the Four Circles. We are all relating in the Four Circles at any given time. The objective of the exercise is to deeply explore the character's perspective on themselves and their surrounding world. Choose a moment in the character's life when they are faced with extreme adversity. Different characters can be chosen for different circles. How do they feel? What are their fears? What do they need?

CIRCLE NUMBER ONE

The character **writes to themselves** with the intention of better understanding themselves and their situation. They write to gain clarity and understanding so they can move forward freely.

Example: A letter Heather writes to herself in the urgent situation of Will's total apathy as a partner and father.

Dear Heather,

I have no idea why you had a child with a man so afraid and incapable. I must find it in my heart to forgive you for that choice. I know I can make it in this world. There must be something better out there for me...just

don't know what that could be. Fear of the unknown must not hold me back from leaving. Both you and this child deserve more. It is time to have more faith in myself than ever before. I must start to make plans to leave here and build a new life. This is one of the hardest moments ever, but I have to believe I can make it through. I love myself and want to see my baby and I safe and happy. I can do this.

All my Love,

Heather

CIRCLE TWO

A character addresses **one other person**. For example, Heather can write a letter directly to Will regarding their relationship and her feelings about his lack of presence and commitment to himself and their life together. This letter must be written from the heart, fully expressing the character's thoughts and feelings.

CIRCLE THREE

The character addresses **a group of people**. It could be society, family, drug addicts, mothers, etc. For example, perhaps Tunny writes a letter to all soldiers regarding the demands and terror of war.

CIRCLE FOUR

A character addresses **the universe**, world or "higher power" depending on their beliefs. For example, perhaps Heather writes a letter asking the universe to help her have the strength and clarity to leave Will and find a better situation for her and the baby.

Variation: The Four Circles Exercise as Yourself

CIRCLE ONE

Write a letter to yourself addressing all you wish to communicate. Your letter can include accomplishments you are proud of, fears you wish to overcome, dreams you want to accomplish and anything else that needs to be communicated.

CIRCLE TWO

Chose someone in your life that you sincerely wish to address. The letter can be something you would or would not actually give that person. Allow yourself to express your true thoughts and feelings—exactly what you would say to that person if you did not have to hold back. Be daring!

CIRCLE THREE

This is an opportunity for you to address a community. For example, this letter can include the people of Skid Row, the United States government, the Humane Society, your soccer team...any group of people you feel truly compelled to write to and express your feelings, thoughts, and point of view.

CIRCLE FOUR

This letter can be written to the universe, world, or whatever “higher power” you may believe in. You can also use this opportunity to ask for any help or guidance you may need with any particular aspect of your life.

Numbing Out/Feeling Alive

Expression through Movement

Group Discussion. What is numbing out? Why do people numb out? How do the ways we as individuals numb out here in the United States affect our society as a whole? What are we taught growing up about numbing out? What does media portray in regard to numbing out ?

This exercise explores how society rejects individualism and encourages consumerism and stereotypes. *American Idiot* explores how society’s expectations affect our feelings about ourselves and what we feel comfortable expressing. As a result, many people numb themselves to deal with the pain of rejection. In this activity we explore how the body, mind and spirit react to truth vs. stereotypes.

The students form groups of three. The group identifies media and societal pressures that make them collapse in or “numb out” including image, career expectations, and stereotypes creating three tableaux pictures of the circumstance. Next, each group creates three tableaux pictures of a positive aspect of life that makes them feel fulfilled and alive. For example, this can include education, art, friendship, love, or sports: anything the group collectively finds fulfilling.

A journal response to the activity: What is the difference in energy between the two explorations? How does your body posture shift in response to each? How do your thoughts shift? Where can you access more of what is fulfilling? How do societal pressures influence how you engage or disengage from what feels right to you? What makes you “numb out”? What makes you come alive and be fully engaged?

Role Models and Life Plans

PART 1 DISCUSSION:

With students divided into small groups, ask them to consider and discuss the following:

- What makes a role model and identify ALL of the qualities you would want in such a person?
- Identify at least five role models for young people in today’s society
- Do they all have all of the qualities?
- Have each group share their list of role models with the rest of the class.

SCULPT THE PERFECT ROLE MODEL:

- Still in their groups, explain that each group will now show us what their idea of a perfect role model looks like.
- Start by having one student stand in a neutral pose in the center of their small group.
- Group members now (respectfully) shape the student into a pose that represents what the group agrees on as the ideal role-model (moving arms, legs, hands, feet and facial attributes to create a desired image)
- Group members fill in the rest of the scene around the role model, creating a complete tableaux or frozen picture.
- Groups share their tableaux with comments from the audience before sharing their own explanation.

PART 2 DISCUSSION:

With students still divided into small groups, ask them to consider and discuss the following: What does the future look like and how do you know?

- After a general discussion of the future, ask students to consider the following: If you could live on your own right now...
 - ◇ Where would you go
 - ◇ How would you pay for it?
 - ◇ What would life look like?

- Ask each group to create tableaux to show what their lives might look like if they lived on their own right now. How would the picture change in 10 years? 20 years?
- Share the tableaux and discuss the ways in which we learn about life and where we draw inspiration.

Information and the Media

Communication: One-Way versus Two-Way

Everyday, we are inundated with messages coming from various media sources. Our lives are saturated with ideas, opinions, thoughts, slogans, images, and stories that come from billboards, radios, televisions, computer screens, cellphones, ipods. Every one of the messages that we encounter has been created by a person, or group of people, and the main purposes in communicating these messages are to activate our feelings and influence our thinking. These people/groups of people may have different reasons for desiring to influence our thinking (they might want us to buy their product, or adopt their political, social, religious philosophy, they may want to purely teach or inform us). But their intention is to get inside of our minds and influence how we think and feel.

Being media literate (critically thinking about these messages that we encounter) helps us to navigate our media saturated world.

Much of the media we engage on a daily basis sends messages only one-way. This does not offer us opportunities to respond or question the information that has been communicated, and, therefore, creates limits that we are seldom aware of.

The following exercise demonstrates the difference between getting information from TV, radios, magazines, newspapers, and talking with a friend (two-way communication).

PARTNER ACTIVITY:

Students find partners. Each pair sits back-to-back, without touching each other. One partner (the sender) faces the board or chart paper, and the other (the receiver) faces the opposite direction. Below are their duties:

- Sender: He/She is responsible for looking at the design on the board or chart and for describing to his/her partner what to draw and how. Senders may not turn around and look at the drawing of their partners or of anyone else.
- Receiver: He/She faces away from the board. His/her task is to listen to the sender's description and draw the design as instructed, without turning around and looking at the design or at anyone else's drawing. The Receiver may not speak, ask questions, or make any sounds or signals.

Allow time for senders to explain to receivers how to draw the design. When everyone has finished, the teacher covers the drawing while students, without talking or showing drawings, start a new sheet of paper. Teacher removes the cover and shows the same design.

This time, the sender tells the partner how to draw the design and the receiver is allowed to speak and ask questions so that the communication goes both ways. However, the receiver still may not look at the drawing on the board, or at other people's drawing.

Using a different design, have students switch roles so that everyone experiences both sides of sending and receiving one-way and two-way communication.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

What are the advantages and disadvantages of predominantly one-way communication versus two-way communication? (Can use analysis of the drawings to add to this discussion.)

When do media claim to offer two-way communication yet only offer a few more one-way choices?

Are letters to the editor in a newspaper two-way communication if the paper edits the letters and chooses which letters to publish or not?

Are talk shows two-way if all calls are screened?

Sample design to display to the class:



Brand Alphabet

We are often unaware of how easily and unconsciously we are affected by the media that we engage.

In 2000, artist Heidi Cody created a Brand Alphabet. It is an alphabet made up of letters taken from the labels of certain products in our country.

Display the alphabet for the students to see. Have them name the products that they identify from the letters.

The students will probably recognize many of the brands easily. Conduct discussion about their experiences:

- Why could you so easily name a product by seeing one letter from the label of that item?
- How many times have you seen the labels for these products?
- Where have you seen these products and their labels?
- What other products could you easily name if one letter of the label was placed before you?
- How did you become so familiar with these images?
- Why would the creators of these labels and images want you to become so familiar with these products?

Older Alphabet (by Heidi Cody):



Newer Alphabet (from http://everything-about-any-thing.blogspot.com/2008_11_01_archive.html)



Engagement Observation

The character of Will, one of Johnny and Tunny's best friends, ends up with many responsibilities early in life. Instead of engaging the important people in his life (his wife and child) he chooses drinking, pot smoking, and zoning out in front of the tube. These choices have lethal consequences for the quality of his life.

We know what it is like to engage media but have you ever stepped outside of yourself, your family and friends and observed someone engaging media? Choose one of the following scenarios to create in your classroom with student actors:

A family (mother, father, son, daughter) watching television together. Turn on a television in your classroom and have them watch a real show. Have them dress as the assigned family members. Maybe have them enjoying a snack or beverage as they watch the show, to give the scene authenticity.

Designate a particular area of your classroom or theater space to be a home. Within this home, certain family members are in a particular area utilizing a certain media device. Family members may be doing an activity alone, or with someone else:

- Watching television
- On the computer
- Playing a video game
- Texting
- Talking on the phone

Student actors are instructed not to break character, in order to offer the audience as authentic a scene as possible for them to observe.

Once the chosen scene has started, have the remaining class members silently walk around the action that is taking place. Give them ample time to take in the media users.

Create discussion from the students' observations and experiences:

- How did you feel about what you were observing?
- What surprised you about what you were observing? Did you have any new thoughts regarding media engagement?
- Did observing these scenes have you reflect on your own media engagement? If so, what thoughts occurred to you?

Advertising

American Idiot is an outpouring of emotional information based, in part, on Billy Joe Armstrong's reaction to specific events in history. The result is a visceral journey through the world of the play in which images in the media and advertising are used as sign-posts for the central characters and a social commentary about the effect those images and messages have on society as a whole.

Advertising is a big part of the information we receive on a daily basis. The images and messages sent out over the airwaves and across the pages of newspapers and magazines are at the very least pervasive, and quite possibly have a strong influence on our behavior and expectations of the lives we lead. The following exercises are designed to examine the how the media and advertising has influenced our own lives for better or for worse.

OBJECTIVE:

Students will use drama technique and critical writing and discussion to explore one of the central themes of *American Idiot* and discover how the play relates to their own lives.

Sucker Punch:

*Don't wanna be an American idiot
Don't want a nation under the new media
And can you hear the sound of hysteria
The subliminal mind fuck America
—American Idiot*

WHOLE GROUP DISCUSSION:

- Ask students what they see as the purpose of advertising.
- Ask students about what makes “effective” advertising.
- Ask for examples of popular advertisements students see on a daily basis. Are these effective? Why?
- Who controls the ads?
- Do we have a choice of what we like, what we want, what we buy?

SMALL GROUP WORK:

- With students in small groups, ask them to consider the most effective ads and create a list of the top three in each of the following category: Television, Radio, Print
- When each group has compiled a list of advertisements, they will choose their top choice in any category and recreate the ad either by acting it out, singing it, or creating a tableaux or frozen picture, to show a three dimensional image of the print ad.
- Share these with the rest of the group acting as an audience.
- Ask the audience for their reaction and what they think the message of the commercial is.

RE-INTERPRETING THE MESSAGE:

The web site www.theshiznit.com recently published an article entitled: “What if Movie Posters Told The Truth,” in which they reinterpreted a series of movie posters with what they saw as the “real” message beneath the words offered by the studios. Four of the posters are pasted below.

- Ask students to look at the provided movie posters, interpreted through the lens of an artist and discuss the new messages on the posters.



- Ask students to consider the ads they identified earlier and discuss/ translate the true nature of the message they delivered: Are they exactly what they appear to be?
- With these things in mind, ask students to create a new ad (print, television, radio, jingle) and deliver it with a translated slogan or message, which explains what they think, is really behind the campaign.

GOING ONE STEP FURTHER...GETTING WHAT YOU WANT:

- Back in their groups, ask students to consider a message they would want to send through advertising.
- Students should decide what their group wants (e.g., money, power, etc.)
- Once each group has identified their primary desire, they should think about a product or service that will help them get it.
- When a product or service is identified, have students design an advertisement using print, television or radio offering their product to the American people as if it is the answer to all their problems. Hidden underneath, however, is the real meaning of the commercial—to achieve their group's hidden desire.
 - ◊ An example of this is a fast food restaurant whose owner wants to get rich, so he/she cuts corners on health codes, uses the cheapest produce and meat products, and exempts himself from environmental and global responsibilities in order to offer the cheapest food possible, though he/she knows it to be harmful in a multitude of ways.
- Share the commercials and have the audience comment on what they think the group is selling.
- Have the advertisers reveal the sucker punch of the ad!

Closing Discussion: How are we influenced by advertisements?

WRITING PROMPTS:

An underlying theme in *American Idiot* is the pervasive nature of the media and the influence and power it seems to hold over people. The media sends out powerful messages over multiple platforms, but it is also often for sale to the highest bidder. The very nature of the media as a vehicle for advertising would seem to be in direct conflict with its true ability to report an unbiased version of the world's news and events. The characters in *American Idiot* want very much not to follow blindly, but rather to become their own people. However, they find that it is not so easy.

The following writing prompts are designed to allow students to examine and explore their own views about society and the media and the overlap that exists between the two.

PROMPTS:

- Where do you get your information about the world? How do you know it's true?
- What is an "American Idiot?"
- How can you avoid being an American Idiot?
- Who are you "connected" to? / How do you stay Connected? / Why?
- What is happiness? Is it possible?
- Can art make a difference in the world? How?

Gender Switch:

Have students perform songs and/or scenes from *American Idiot*, but reverse the gender roles; girls play the boys roles and vice versa. Create class discussion from this experience.

ROLE REVERSAL:

Let's take a look at the different couples in *American Idiot*:

JOHNNY AND WHATSHERNAME:

Johnny and Whatsername find each other in the city. They begin drug use together. Johnny can't kick his habit. He ends up leaving her because he cannot reveal his true, tender feelings for her. His addiction causes him extreme difficulty.

WILL AND HEATHER:

Will decides to stay home in suburbia with Heather, his girlfriend and mother of his child. He ends up very unsatisfied with his existence and uses television and drugs to escape his situation. Heather eventually ends up leaving him.

TUNNY AND EXTRAORDINARY GIRL:

Tunny becomes a wounded while serving in the military. He has a morphine-induced fantasy where Extraordinary Girl rescues him from his physical and emotional pain.

Are these couples/characters portrayed in situations that are stereotypical or unconventional? Explain.

EXERCISE:

Have students improvise the following scenes based on the situations in *American Idiot*.

- Whatshername wants Johnny to connect with her in a loving way. Johnny wants to stay in his drug-induced state instead of making himself vulnerable to her and connecting with her in a loving, authentic way.
- Heather wants Will to participate more fully in their relationship and more fully in the parenting of their child. Will wants will to continue to check out by sitting on the couch, get stoned and watching television.

DURING THE IMPROVISATION:

- Actors should pursue their desires fully.
- Switch gender roles: the girls play the boys roles and vice-versa.
 - ◇ When the girls are playing the guys' roles, they should play the scene from a guys's point of view and utilized tactics that they think a guy would use.
 - ◇ When the guys are playing the girls' roles, they should play they scene from a gal's point of view, utilizing the tactics they think a gal should utilize.
- Boal-Style:
 - ◇ Play the scenes with an attempt to seek solutions for the problems at hand.
 - ◇ If a student in the audience sees a better way to deal with the conflict the couple is having, have the student in the audience call out "Freeze." The actors stop what they are doing and remain frozen in the scene. The audience member enters the playing area, taps one of the scene members on the shoulder, signaling to that actor to exit the scene. This new actor replicates the frozen position of the replaced actor, and the scene begins from this point. The new actor tests out his/her new problem solving strategy.

POST-IMPROVISATION DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What challenges did you encounter when pursuing your desires?
- What did you experience when you switched roles?
- Do you think girls and guys, women and men, utilize different tactics when attempting to achieve what they want? Explain.
- Do you think girls and guys, women and men, desire different things in life?

- What other solutions did you imagine for this couple as the scene was being played out?
- What do you view as the true sources of their unhappiness? The true sources of their happiness?

Triptych

Meaning tri-fold, is traditionally a work of art that has three panels which are hinged together and can be folded shut or displayed open. The middle panel is typically the largest and it is flanked by two smaller related works, although there are triptychs of equal-sized panels. Generally, each panel stands on its own as a work of art, and together as a larger piece.

Our Triptych,

Is a musical one. Each student will create a playlist using three songs. Any number of themes can be used to help choose the music, so for our purposes, each student will pick a song that represents their public-self, their private-self and their dream-self. Each student will create a playlist of the three songs to share with the group.

Using the songs as inspiration, the students will then be broken up into groups to create tableaux of their public, private and dream-selves to show to the class.

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Media Literacy Resources for Teachers and Students

Documentary:

The Persuaders (from the PBS show, *Frontline*)
“Each year, legions of ad people, copywriters, market researchers, pollsters, consultants, and even linguists—most of whom work for one of six giant companies—spend billions of dollars and millions of man-hours trying to determine how to persuade consumers what to buy, whom to trust, and what to think. Increasingly, these techniques are migrating to the high-stakes arena of politics, shaping policy and influencing how Americans choose their leaders.”

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/persuaders/view>

Journal of Media Literacy Education
<http://www.jmle.org/index.php/JMLE/index>

Media Awareness Network
<http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/index.cfm>

National Association for Media Literacy Education

Credits

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Center Theatre Group's mission is to serve the diverse audiences of Los Angeles by producing and presenting theatre of the highest caliber, by nurturing new artists, by attracting new audiences, and by developing youth outreach and education programs. This mission is based on the belief that the art of theatre is a cultural force with the capacity to transform the lives of individuals and society at large.

EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Theatre is an enduring and powerful tool for communicating ideas, stories, emotions and beliefs that fuel the intellect, imagination and creative spirit. Center Theatre Group believes that stimulating awareness, creativity, dialogue and an inquisitive mind is integral to the growth and well-being of the individual and the community; and that nurturing a life-long appreciation of the arts leads inextricably to an engaged and enlightened society.

Center Theatre Group's education and community partnership programs advance the organization's mission in three key ways:

Audiences: Inspiring current and future audiences to discover theatre and its connection to their lives;
Artists: Investing in the training, support and development of emerging, young artists and young arts professionals who are the future of our field; and
Arts Education Leadership: Contributing to the community-wide efforts to improve the quality and scope of arts education in Los Angeles.

FUNDER CREDITS FOR GREEN DAY'S AMERICAN IDIOT

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