

## **Mending Walls: Barriers in Communications**

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### **Rationale**

From Robert Frost's "Mending Wall" to Pink Floyd's "The Wall," humankind erects and maintains real and symbolic barriers to protect and defend opposing stances, beliefs and territories. The resulting lack of communication reinforces those barriers, often to detrimental effects. While writers, movie directors, and artists explore this theme frequently, perhaps the most accessible genre for students to study is contemporary music.

For this unit teachers may select from a variety of interdisciplinary selections including their own materials to best meet the objectives of the specific class. Opportunities exist for a multi-cultural, interdisciplinary approach that incorporates higher order thinking skills, multiple intelligences, and strands from the Ohio Model Competency-Based Language Arts Program.

### **Objectives**

The students will:

1. recognize thematic connections among the artistic genres of poetry, song, film, and art as they relate to barriers and effective communication.
2. articulate specific components of each work which contribute to its meaning (i.e. poetic devices, visual effects, musical instruments).
3. engage specific criteria for evaluation of each work.

### **Audience**

Through the selection of materials, this unit may be adapted for language arts, social studies, and humanities classes, grades 7-12.

### **Time Frame**

Approximate time frame is one week. If selected pieces are incorporated within an existing unit (dealing with communications, for example), it might take less time. If additional components are added, the unit may extend beyond one week.

### **Materials**

Depending upon which selections are made, the teacher may need:

1. selected poems, short stories, songs with lyrics, films, slides or pictures.
2. tape or CD players, movie projector or VCR and monitor, slide projector.

### **Procedures**

Teachers are encouraged to structure their lessons as they see fit. This unit might serve as a follow-up to an existing unit that involves these themes; it may be used as an introductory unit to stimulate interest in a topic; or it may be interwoven within an existing unit. The following is one possible organization of this unit.

**Day 1:** Introduce and discuss the concept of barriers. Distribute lyrics and play Pink Floyd's "Another Brick in the Wall (Part 2)." Discussion of the elements of the song that contribute to its effect may include the rhythm and tone of the music and the diction of the lyrics. The bleak economic conditions and the dead-end educational opportunities in England may be cited as inspiration for the attitude expressed.

**Day 2:** Show selected film clips from Pink Floyd's movie, *The Wall*. Discuss how the visual representation relates to the song. In what ways does the movie either mirror or differ thematically from the song? Does the movie's interpretation enhance or detract from our appreciation and interpretation of the song?

**Day 3:** Read and discuss Robert Frost's "Mending Wall." Discuss possible interpretations of what the wall suggests. Differentiate between the neighbor's and the narrator's view of the wall. Look for clues as to whose side Robert Frost may be supporting.

**Day 4:** Compare and contrast Frost's wall with Pink Floyd's wall. Include the reasons for the wall, how and what it divides, and the effects of each wall. Discussion should include barriers in communication. Evaluate the respective artistic merits of each work.

**Day 5:** Interdisciplinary discussions. As appropriate to the class, consider other related ideas.

1. Actual walls in history (i.e. Great Wall of China, Berlin Wall and what they represented physically, psychologically, and politically).
2. Barrier in communication in today's world (i.e. use of language, technology)
3. Examine examples of walls, barriers and isolationism in art or film
4. Play and discuss the Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby." This song is considered to be a masterful psychological portrait of two lonely people, cut off from most human contact. Discussion may include speculation of what barriers turned these individuals into loners.

## Evaluation

The final evaluation of the unit will evolve from a series of assessments made throughout the unit. Daily evaluations may include observation of student reaction, question and response, and assessment of homework and quizzes. Periodic evaluations may include in-class writing exercises or tests. Ideas for end-of-the unit writing assignments are outlined below. The final evaluation of this unit should answer two questions:

1. Does incorporating this unit increase the students' interest level?
2. Does the unit enhance the students' understanding of the current curriculum?

The conclusion of the unit may include an essay or paper reflecting the students' insights on the topic of barriers using higher-order thinking skills such as comparison/contrast, cause/effect, synthesis, or evaluation, or a creative project. Students would react to one of the following prompts:

1. Compare/contrast the purpose or effects of Pink Floyd's wall to that of "Mending Wall" and/or a barrier studied within the course (historical, political, artistic, etc.).
2. Discuss the different artistic portrayals by the print media vs. the video.
3. Evaluate which work was most effective or artistic in presenting its message.
4. Analyze the connections, similarities, and/or differences between Pink Floyd's artistic wall and Berlin's historical wall.
5. Discuss what social, economic, emotional, or other symbolic barriers exist in your school or community. What are the effects of such barriers?
6. Create an artistic rendering of a wall or barrier that conveys an attitude towards the subject.

### **Selected Recordings**

"Another Brick in the Wall (Part II)," (Pink Floyd, Columbia Records, 1979)

"Eleanor Rigby," The Beatles (The Beatles 1962-1966, Capitol Records, 1993)

Retrieved from: <http://www.rockhall.com/teacher/sti-lesson-16/>