8th Grade – Unit I

1950’s

Discuss the following. Be able to point out 2 important items that you think the class should know about and how they might influence the music of this time period.

1. The end of World War II brought thousands of young servicemen back to America to pick up their lives and start new families in new homes with new jobs. With an energy never before experienced, American industry expanded to meet peacetime needs. Americans began buying goods not available during the war, which created corporate expansion and jobs.  Growth everywhere.  The baby boom was underway...

Facts about this decade ---  
Population: 151,684,000 (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census)\*  
Unemployed:  3,288,000  
Life expectancy:   Women 71.1,  men  65.6  
Car Sales:  6,665,800  
Average Salary:  $2,992  
Labor Force male/female: 5/2  
Cost of a loaf of bread:  $0.14  
Bomb shelter plans, like the government pamphlet *You Can Survive*, become widely available

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2. **Important Historic and Cultural Events**   
1950 - Pres. [Harry Truman](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/ww2/index.html" \t "_blank)  ( 'til 1952) approves production of the hydrogen bomb and sends air force and navy to Korea in June.   
1951 - [Transcontinental television](http://www.att.com/history/television/) begins with a speech by Pres. Truman.    
1953 - 1961[Dwight D. Eisenhower](http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/de34.html)  is president.    
1952 - The [Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952](http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.eb1d4c2a3e5b9ac89243c6a7543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=f3829c7755cb9010VgnVCM10000045f3d6a1RCRD&vgnextchannel=f3829c7755cb9010VgnVCM10000045f3d6a1RCRD) removes racial and ethnic barriers to becoming a U.S. citizen.    
1953 -  [Julius and Ethel Rosenberg](http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROSENB.HTM" \t "_blank) are electrocuted for their part in W.W.II espionage.    
1953 - Fighting ends in [Korea](http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/korea.asp).    
1954 -  [U. S. Senator Joseph McCarthy](http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Have_you_no_sense_of_decency.htm" \t "_blank) begins televised hearings into alleged Communists in the army.    
1954 - [Racial segregation is ruled unconstitutional](http://brownvboard.org/content/background-overview-summary) in public schools by the U.S. Supreme Court.    
1955 -  [Rosa Parks](http://www.grandtimes.com/rosa.html" \t "_blank) refuses to give up her seat on a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama.    
1955 - The [American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations](http://www.aflcio.org/About/Our-History/Labor-History-Timeline) merge making the new AFL-CIO an organization with 15 million members.    
also in 1955  [Dr. Jonas Salk](http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/sal0bio-1)  developed a vaccine for  polio   
1956 - [The Federal Highway Act](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/rw96e.cfm) is signed, marking the beginning of work on the interstate highway system.    
1958 - [Explorer I](http://www.nasm.si.edu/exhibitions/gal100/exp1.html), the first U.S. satellite, successfully orbits the earth.    
1958 - The first domestic jet-airline passenger service is begun by [National Airlines](http://www.centennialofflight.gov/essay/Commercial_Aviation/Opening_of_Jet_era/Tran6.htm) between New York City and Miami.    
1959 - [Alaska](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/BARTLETT/49state.html) and [Hawaii](http://www.hawaiiscene.com/50thState.htm) become the forty-ninth and fiftieth states.

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### 3. ART & ARCHITECTURE:

**"*Painting is a state...self-discovery. Every good artist paints what he is." Jackson Pollock***

There was a fresh artistic outlook after World War II ended and the artistic world reflected this outlook. [Abstract expressionism](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/abex/hd_abex.htm) like [Jackson Pollock](http://www.nga.gov/feature/pollock/pollockhome.html) , [Barnett Newman](http://www.barnettnewman.org/chronology.php) , [Willem de Kooning](http://www.usc.edu/schools/annenberg/asc/projects/comm544/library/artists/DeKooningWillem.html) ,  [Clyfford Still](http://www.the-artists.org/artist/Clyfford-Still" \t "_blank) and  [Franz Kline](http://www.npg.si.edu/exh/rebels/painters.htm) received official recognition at the New York [Museum of Modern Art](http://www.moma.org/about_moma/history/index.html).  These artists, referred to as the [New York School](http://www.artknowledgenews.com/209), were generally experimental.  Other abstract artists rebelled against the self-absorption of the New York School and delved into [existentialism](http://wilderdom.com/personality/L10-1Existential.html).   [Mark Rothko](http://www.nga.gov/feature/rothko/rothkosplash.html) used large scale color blocks to create an overpowering material presence. Painters like [Robert Rauschenberg](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/rauschenberg_r.html)  and  [Jasper Johns](http://www.moma.org/exhibitions/1996/johns/" \t "_blank) , also abstract artists, did not want the viewer to rely on what he saw to interpret a painting.  African American artists [John T. Biggers](http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/5aa/5aa200.htm),  [Romare Bearden](http://www.beardenfoundation.org/" \t "_blank) and [Henry Clay Anderson](http://www.stevenkasher.com/html/exhibinfo.asp?exnum=645) presented a different  view of American life.

Part of the 1950's boom in [consumerism](http://www.salon.com/media/media961217.html) included housing.  People could afford single family dwellings and suburbia was born. A small suburban community called [Levittown](http://www.blue-dragons.com/preserve/dahs1997/levittown.htm) was built by William Levitt for returning servicemen and their families.   An influence of [Frank Lloyd Wright](http://www.franklloydwright.org/)  is seen in the popular [Ranch style house](http://www.ranchrevival.com/history_ranch_style_house.htm).   Designers like [Bauhaus](http://www.cs.umb.edu/~alilley/bauhaus.html) , who helped create the [International style](http://www.jahsonic.com/InternationalStyle.html) , influenced [Ludwig Mies van der Rohe](http://www.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/iit/iit.html), [Philip Johnson](http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/joh0bio-1) , [Charles and Ray Eames](http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/eames/preview.html) and [Eero Saarinen](http://www.nps.gov/jeff/planyourvisit/architect.htm" \t "_blank).   [Louis Kahn](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa267/kahn.html), architect of  the Salk Institute, was a noted architect during this period.

**BOOKS & LITERATURE**

America had just begun her recovery from World War II, when suddenly the Korean Conflict developed. The USSR became a major enemy in the Cold War.   Senator Joseph McCarthy claimed to know that Communists had infiltrated the United States government at the highest levels.  Americans were feeling a sense of national anxiety.  Was America the greatest country in the world?  Was life in America the best it had ever been?  As the decade passed, literature reflected the conflict of self-satisfaction with '50s Happy Days and cultural self-doubt about conformity and the true worth of American values.

Authors like [Norman Vincent Peale](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/tupperware/filmmore/ps_peale.html) , [The Power of Positive Thinking](http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/Psychology/guidepo/peale.htm) *,* or [Bishop Fulton J. Sheen](http://www.archbishopsheencause.org/)  -[*Life is Worth Living*](http://www.americancatholictruthsociety.com/articles/sheen.htm)*,*indicate power of the individual to control his or her fate. The concern with conformity is reflected in David Riesman's*The Lonely Crowd*,  [John Kenneth Galbraith](http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/conversations/Galbraith/galbraith1.html)  -[*The Affluent Society*](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,893998,00.html)*,*[William H. Whyte's](http://www.english.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/whyte-main.html)  The Organization Man*,*[Ayn Rand](http://www.aynrand.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_ayn_rand_index" \t "_blank) - *Atlas Shrugged* , and  [Sloan Wilson's](http://www.theweeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/005/188stpcq.asp) *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit.* A new group of authors appeared on the scene in the form of the [Beats](http://www.bluesforpeace.com/beat.htm), or the beat generation or some called them beatniks.  Best known of these are Jack Kerouac - [Kerouac's works](http://www.litkicks.com/Lists/KerouacWorks.html) - *On the Road*, *Dharma Bums*, *The Town and The City*, *Mexico City Blues*(poetry),[Lawrence Ferlinghetti](http://www.beatmuseum.org/ferlinghetti/lawrenceferlinghetti.html)  [A Coney Island of the Mind](http://www.litkicks.com/Texts/ConeyIsland20.html) *, Pictures of a Gone World,* and Allen Ginsberg  [Howl](http://www.idiom.com/~wcs/howl.html) (Poetry). [Gregory Corso](http://www.terebess.hu/english/corso.html) , [Neal Cassady](http://www.beatmuseum.org/cassady/NealCassady.html) , [Michael McClure](http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/mcclure/mcclure.htm) , [Gary Snyder](http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/s_z/snyder/snyder.htm), [William S. Burroughs](http://www.litkicks.com/WilliamSBurroughs) were other beat authors giving voice to the [anti-establishment](http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Anti-establishment) movement.

[Science Fiction](http://classics.jameswallaceharris.com/Lists/ByYear.php) became more popular with the actual possibility of space travel, Ray Bradbury wrote [The Martian Chronicles](http://www.raybradbury.com/books/martianchronicles-hc.html).  [Isaac Asimov](http://www.asimovonline.com/)  wrote [*I, Robot,*](http://books.google.com/books/about/I_Robot.html?id=2vnbMzYXBQsC) and other books about worlds to be discovered.  Established authors continuing to write included [Tennessee Williams](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/tennessee-williams/about-tennessee-williams/737/) -*The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*;  [Robert Penn Warren](http://www.robertpennwarren.com/firstpage.htm) -*World Enough and Time*;  [Carl Sandberg](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poet.html?id=5975) -*Complete Poems*;  [Herman Wouk](http://www.english.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/caine-mutiny-text.html) -*The Caine Mutiny;*J. D. Salinger-[The Catcher in the Rye](http://www.lonestar.edu/library/kin_CatcherRye.htm);  [Truman Capote](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/capote_t.html) *-*[*The Grass Harp*](http://www.capotebio.com/works/grass_harp_the_novel.php)*;*[John Steinbeck](http://www.steinbeck.org/MainFrame.html)- [*East of Eden*](http://www.lonestar.edu/library/kin_EastOfEden.htm)*;*[Edna Ferber](http://www.apl.org/history/ferber/edna.bio.html)-*Giant*;  [James Michener](http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/mic0bio-1)-*The Bridges of Toko Ri, Hawaii;*[Thomas Costain](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,816663,00.html)-*The Silver Chalice;*[Eudora Welty](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/americancollection/ponder/timeline.html)  -*The Ponder Heart*;  [William Faulkner](http://www.mcsr.olemiss.edu/~egjbp/faulkner/wftown.html)-*The Town;*[Lorraine Hansbury](http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/Chap8/hansberry.html)*- A Raisin in the Sun;*[Langston Hughes](http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/g_l/hughes/hughes.htm)*-  Laughing to Keep from Crying;*[James Baldwin](http://www.randomhouse.com/features/baldwin/bio.html)*-  Go Tell It on the Mountain.*