THE INDIGENOUS ROOTS OF ROCK AND ROLL

Est. Time: 45 - 60 minutes
Subjects: Art, General Music, History/Social Studies
Age Range: Middle School
View the classroom lesson version here!
What does Link Wray’s biography say about how Native Americans lived in the first half of the 20th century, and what role did Wray’s upbringing have on his music?

In this lesson you will:

• Uncover the history of Link Wray and investigate how his Shawnee heritage influenced the creation of one of Rock and Roll’s most profoundly inspirational and enduring songs

• Analyze why “Rumble” had such a powerful effect on generations of musicians and listeners alike

• Compare Link Wray’s “Rumble” to the poem Nationhood by Laura Da’
Watch this video to learn about the creation and legacy of the song “Rumble.”
Think about or discuss with a friend:

- What is notable about the guitar sound of “Rumble”? Why do you think so many guitarists were influenced by that specific sound?

- How might you describe Wray’s demeanor on stage in the video clip? What about this might have influenced young musicians in the late 1950s?

- Though it is an instrumental song, “Rumble” was banned on many radio stations, including those in major cities such as New York and Boston. What about the song do you think some found so threatening?
Read this handout to learn about the history of Link Wray’s ancestral heritage - the Shawnee Tribe.
Think about or discuss with a friend:

• What do you imagine life for an “assimilating” Shawnee in the American South may have been like in the 19th and early 20th Century? Do you think Shawnee people would have easily fit in within existing communities? Why or why not?

• How do you think the history of the Shawnee affected American-born people with Shawnee heritage? How might their unique perspective shape their views of American society?
Watch this video to learn about the importance of guitar distortion.
Think about or discuss with a friend:

• How is this unique guitar sound described?

• Can you think of a song that features distorted guitar?

• Why might this unique sound be a desired quality for musicians?
Watch this video to go deeper into the inspiration behind “Rumble.”
Think about or discuss with a friend:

• What does D’Ambrosio suggest was the motivation behind “Rumble”?

• What does D’Ambrosio mean when he says “Rumble” was not “reductive, but proactive” in the face of discrimination?

• Do you think Wray would agree with D’Ambrosio’s argument that “Rumble” isn’t about fighting, but more about “disrupting” and “being active?”
Read the poem *Nationhood* by Laura Da’. Then consider or discuss with a friend:

- What were some of the venues that early Hip Hop parties were held in?

- Does it seem like these events were just for younger or older people, or do they seem to have been open to all?

- What do you see the people at these parties doing? Does it seem fun to you? Why or why not?
SUMMARY

• Link Wray came from a marginalized culture and created music of rebellion and angst

• He translated a lifetime of discrimination into the raw growl of his distorted guitar on “Rumble”

• Wray’s story typifies how early Rock and Roll was shaped by outsiders with new tools for expressing their world-view and experience through music
Create a playlist of songs about discrimination and rebellion. For each song, write a few sentences about each artists’ personal background and how you feel their experience of marginalization is captured in their music. The songs can be from any genre and don’t have to feature lyrics a la “Rumble.”

Because it evoked such strong emotions, “Rumble” is famous for being the only instrumental song banned on radio. Find another instrumental song, and discuss what emotion you think it evokes. How is it able to do this?
Share your work with us! Either you or an adult in your life can share your playlist with TeachRock on Instagram or Facebook, email to info@teachrock.org, or Tweet it to @TeachRock
Visit us at teachrock.org for hundreds of other free arts-rich resources for every age range and classroom.

Please check back to teachrock.org/distancelearning frequently as we will update the material daily!