

# 9/11: COUNTRY MUSIC RESPONDS

Est. Time: 90 minutes

Subjects: Advisory, Social Studies/History

Age Range: Middle & High School


See the full lesson [here!](#)


★ *TEACHROCK* ★



How did Country musicians' responses to the September 11th terrorist attacks speak to the feelings of some Americans after the tragedy?

In this lesson you will:

- Identify the significance of 9/11 as an historical event
  - Examine the response to 9/11 in the United States
  - Explore how music can speak to the collective emotions of some people following tragedy
  - Examine the lyrics and context surrounding three Country music songs as representing the diverse ways the American people responded to 9/11
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Ask a friend or family member how much they know about the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001. Use the following questions as prompts, and feel free to create your own. Take notes as you conduct the interview.

- Do you remember where you were on September 11, 2001?
- Do you remember how you felt the day of September 11th, and the days following?
- What other things do you remember most during that time period?

If possible, pair with a classmate to share what each of you learned about 9/11.






**SEPTEMBER 11, 2001**

Watch [this video](#) of images showing the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11th.



Consider or ask a friend:

- If something similar happened recently in the area where you live, how do you think you might feel? Why?
  - Might there be different reactions to this type of tragedy? Why?
  - What might those different reactions be?
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Read the lyrics to Alan Jackson's "Where Were You When the World Stopped Turning?" [here](#) and then consider the questions on the following slide.

Use [this handout](#) to take notes on what you notice about the song.

**ALAN JACKSON**

Tracks 1-2:  
**Where Were You  
(When The World  
Stopped Turning)**

WORDS AND MUSIC BY  
ALAN JACKSON (ASCAP)

:13 / 4:58 / cold

First performed on  
the 2001 CMA Awards

PRODUCED BY KEITH ETEBALL

Where were you when the world stopped turning on that September day  
Were you in the yard with your wife and children  
Or working on some stage in LA  
Did you stand there in shock at the site of that black smoke  
Rising against that blue sky  
Did you stand out in anger, in fear for your neighbor  
Or did you just sit down and cry

Did you weep for the children who lost their dear loved ones  
And pray for the ones who don't know  
Did you help for the people who walked from the rubble  
And not for the ones left behind  
Did you burst out with pride for the red, white and blue  
And the heroes who died just doing what they do  
Did you look up to heaven for some kind of answer  
And look at yourself and what really matters

Chorus  
I'm just a singer of simple songs I'm not a real political man  
I watch CNN but I'm not sure I can tell you the difference in Iraq and Iran  
But I know Jesus and I talk to God  
And I remember this from when I was young  
Faith, hope and love are some good things He gave us  
And the greatest is love

Where were you when the world stopped turning on that September day  
Teacher, a class full of innocent children  
Or drinking drink some cold martini  
Did you feel guilty, "cause you're a survivor  
In a crowded room did you feel alone  
Did you call up your mother and tell her you loved her  
Did you dust off that Bible at home

Did you open your eyes faced, I never happened  
Close your eyes and not go to sleep  
Did you notice the sunset for the first time in ages  
Or speak to some stranger on the street  
Did you lay down at night and think of tomorrow  
Go out and buy you a gun  
Did you turn off that volume and make you're watching  
And turn on / Love Lucy reruns  
Did you go to a church and hold hands with some strangers  
Stand in line and give your own blood  
Did you just stay home and cling tight to your family  
Thank God you had somebody to love

Chorus  
Repeat Chorus

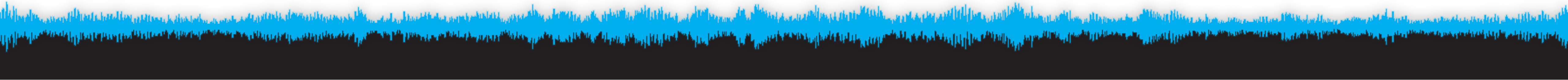
Where were you when the world stopped turning, on that September day

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by permission.

ARISTA  
Arista Records  
ALAN JACKSON - WHERE WERE YOU WHEN THE WORLD STOPPED TURNING  
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Consider or ask a friend:

- How would you summarize the message of this song?
  - Who might be the intended audience for this song? How do you know?
  - What kind of tone or emotion does Jackson convey in this song? What specific lines in the song gives you that impression?
  - How does Jackson portray himself in this song? What specific lines in the song give you that impression?
  - What effect might Alan Jackson be trying to achieve in writing a song that is almost entirely built from questions?
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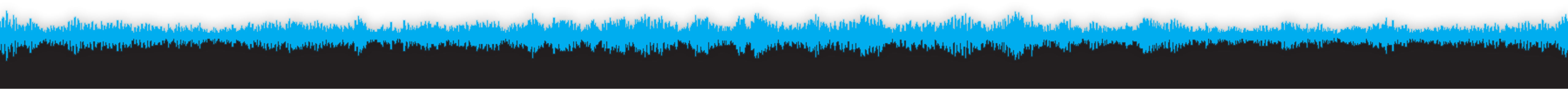
**“WHERE WERE YOU WHEN THE WORLD STOPPED TURNING?”**

Watch [this video](#) about Alan Jackson’s “Where Were You When the World Stopped Turning?”





Consider or ask a friend:

- In the clip, Beville Dunkerley says that following 9/11, Country musicians wrote songs expressing their own feelings. What lyrics do you think might most reflect Alan Jackson's feelings?
  - Dunkerley also argues that the song represents the "spirit and patriotism" of the American people. What about Alan Jackson's song might be read as being patriotic?
  - In the clip, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson refers to an old adage that "Country music is three chords and the truth." How might Alan Jackson be telling "the truth" in this song?
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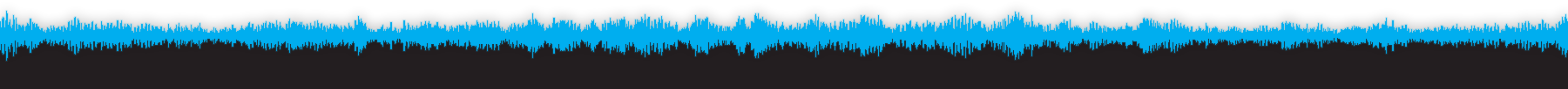
Read **the lyrics** to the second song, Brooks & Dunn's "Only in America" and then consider the questions on the next slide.

Continue to take notes on this song using **this handout**.





Consider or ask a friend:

- What is being described in this song?
  - What do you think this song's message might be? What lyrics lead you to this conclusion?
  - What kinds of people are being profiled in this song? Why might have the songwriters chosen to focus on these types of people? Was there a certain audience they were trying to reach out to?
  - What emotion do you feel is being conveyed in this song? What lyrics lead you to this conclusion?
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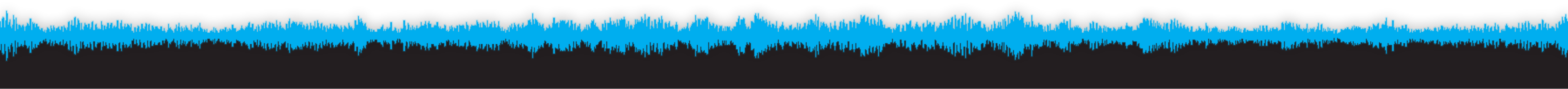


## “ONLY IN AMERICA”

Watch [this video](#) about Brooks & Dunn’s “Only in America”

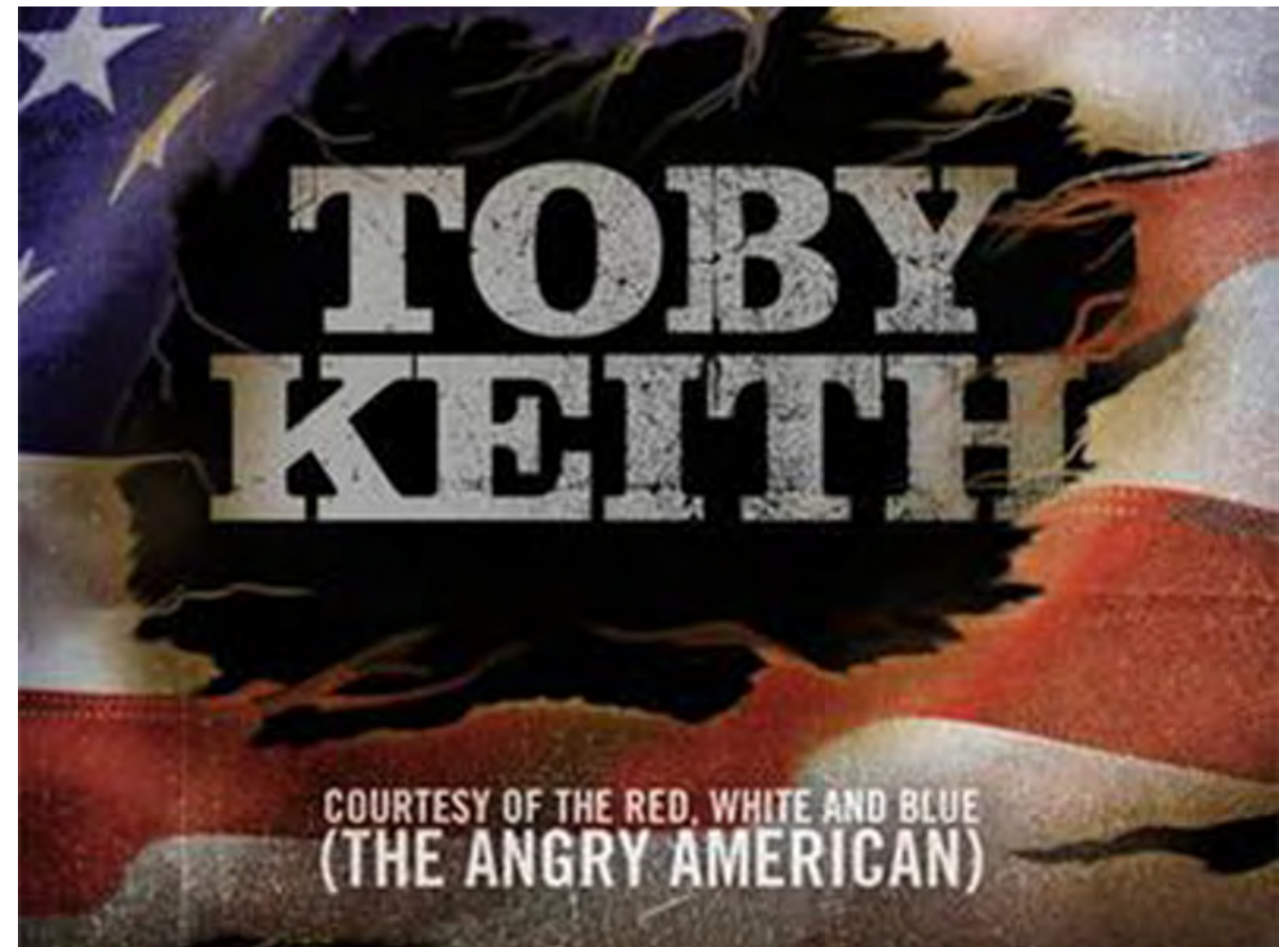


Consider or ask a friend:

- Was “Only in America” written in response to 9/11?
  - Why might the song have been appropriate to perform shortly after 9/11? How might the song have taken on new meaning following 9/11?
  - What might Kix Brooks mean when he said the song became “sacred ground?”
  - In the clip, Ronnie Dunn mentions “Only in America” is an “apolitical song.” Looking at the lyrics in the handout, why might the song be considered universal or apolitical?
  - What kinds of people are being profiled in this song? Why might have the songwriters chosen to focus on these type of people? Was there a certain audience they were trying to reach out to?
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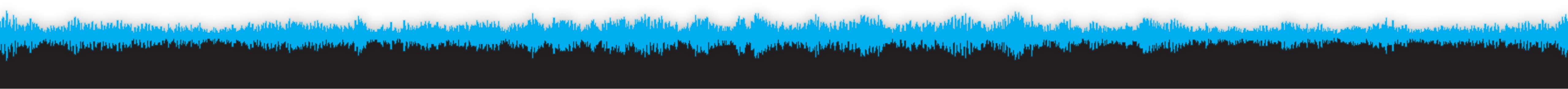
Read **the lyrics** to the third song, Toby Keith's "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)" and then consider the questions on the next slide.

Again, take notes on the song using this **handout**.





Consider or ask a friend:

- What is being described in this song?
  - What emotion do you feel is being conveyed in this song? What lyrics lead you to this conclusion?
  - What is this song advocating? What do you think Toby Keith's intent is in this song?
  - What do you think this song's message might be? What lyrics lead you to this conclusion?
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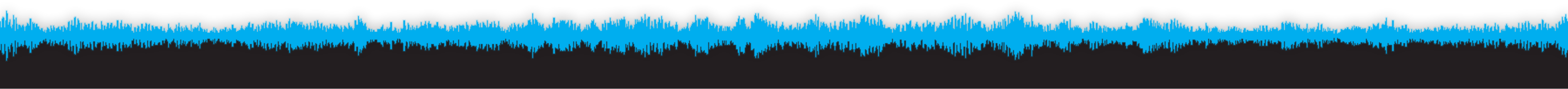
## “COURTESY OF THE RED, WHITE AND BLUE”

Watch [this video](#) about Toby Keith’s “Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)”

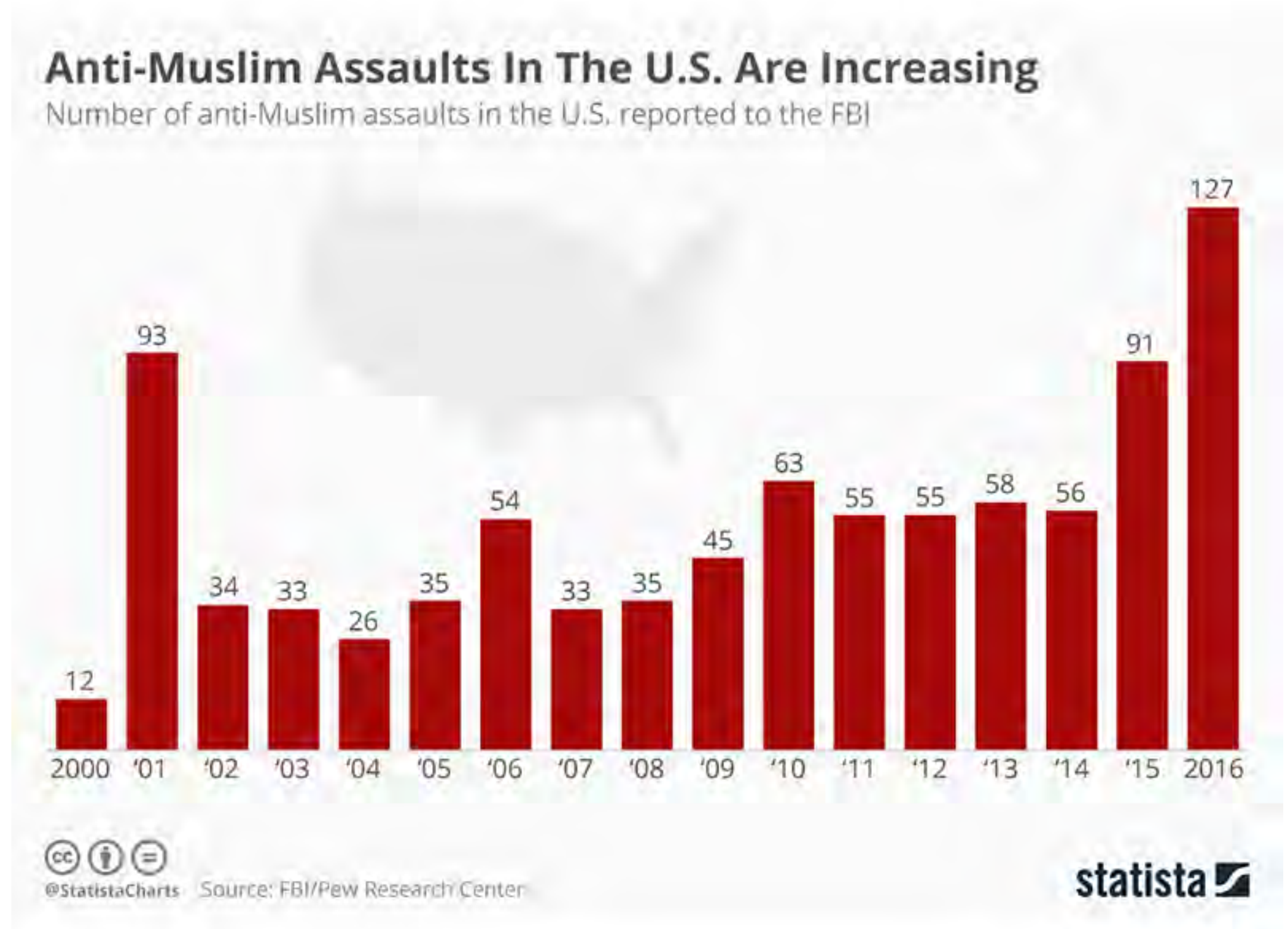




Consider or ask a friend:

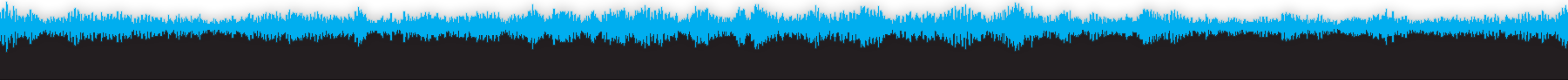
- How might this song be considered a “rallying cry,” as described by Dan Rather?
  - What about the lyrics or feeling of the song might lead people to consider it patriotic?
  - According to the clip, what kind of feelings did this song speak to?
  - In what ways might the song be considered “polarizing,” as Beville Dunkerley argues?
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Considering the comments in the videos you watched characterizing American feelings and attitudes after 9/11, review this statistical graph of anti-Muslim assaults reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and compiled by Pew Research. After reviewing the data, consider the questions on the following slide.






With all of the songs you've listened to in mind, consider or ask a friend:

- What happens to the number of hate crimes towards the Muslim community after 9/11?
  - Why might the Muslim community have been targeted for attacks after 9/11?
  - Considering the comments of those interviewed in each video clip, what feelings might these songs elicit?
  - Might there be a correlation between the feelings a person experiences and their subsequent actions?
  - Over a sixteen year time span on the chart, when did hate crimes increase dramatically? What events were happening in the U.S. during this time that may have engendered this increase?
  - How might the statements and expressions a person hears from political leaders, celebrities, family, and friends influence their attitudes and actions?
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Look at all of the notes taken on the handout. If possible, pair with another classmate to share and discuss what has been discovered. Consider these questions:

- Did the three songs express different messages, or similar messages? What were those messages?
  - Did the songs express different emotions, or similar emotions? What were those emotions?
  - How might have each of the songs spoken to the emotions people felt after 9/11?
  - Do you think one song's message or emotional content is more appropriate after 9/11 than another's? Why?
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# SUMMARY

- The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States killed nearly 3,000 people and wounded another 6,000
- A wide-variety of musicians responded to the tragedy with song
- In Country music, a number of songs reflected the diversity of emotions Americans were feeling in the wake of the terrorist attacks
- Notable songs representing that time were Alan Jackson's "Where Were You When the World Stopped Turning?", Brooks & Dunn's "Only in America", and Toby Keith's "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)"



# BE CURIOUS

Watch the entire **CNN Soundtracks “September 11th” episode**. Analyze another song featured in the episode. Does this song represent the feelings people might have had after 9/11? In what way? Present your findings in summary form to your class via a video or audio recording.



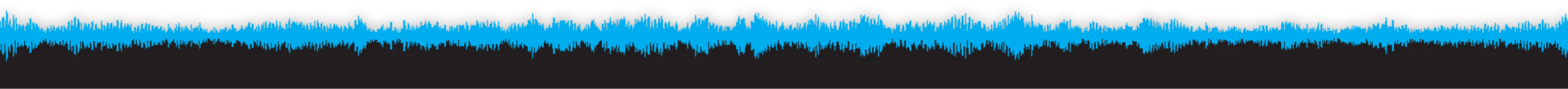
# BE CREATIVE

It has been said that tragedy can bring out the best and worst in people. Conduct archival research on the top news stories three months following the attacks on September 11th. Which stories arise that seem positive? Which are negative? Create a collage of those contrasting stories, highlighting large text headlines, photographs, and imagery. Share your work with your class either via a video presentation or as an image.



# CONNECT

Share it with us! Either you or an adult in your life can share your work with TeachRock on **Instagram** or **Facebook**, email to **info@teachrock.org**, or Tweet it to **@TeachRock**







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