

# SUPPORTING SOBRIETY IN A MUSICAL COMMUNITY




Est. Time: 60-75 minutes

Subjects: Social Studies/History, SEL

Age Range: Middle & High School

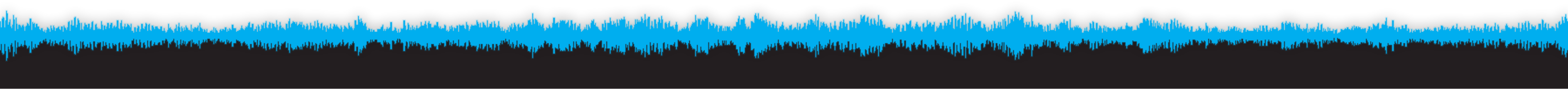
See the full lesson [here!](#)

★ *TEACHROCK* ★




Who are the Wharf Rats, and how do they exemplify the practices of sobriety, peer support, and community building within a musical fan culture?

In this lesson you will:

- Investigate the perils of peer pressure and destructive fan culture
  - Learn how the Wharf Rats divorced the relationship between drug use and musical fanship
  - Explore strategies to maintain sobriety
  - Study a successful template of community building and peer support
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Consider or ask a friend:

- Have you ever heard of Juice WRLD, Mac Miller, or Lil Peep? What do you know about them? Do they still record and perform? Why or why not?
  - What are your thoughts on the relationship between drugs and music? How is this relationship manifested through different musical mediums like live concerts, lyrics and music videos?
  - Can you think of any musical artists that promote drug use as a part of the concert experience?
  - Why, among some communities and artists, do drugs and music seem to be so closely connected?
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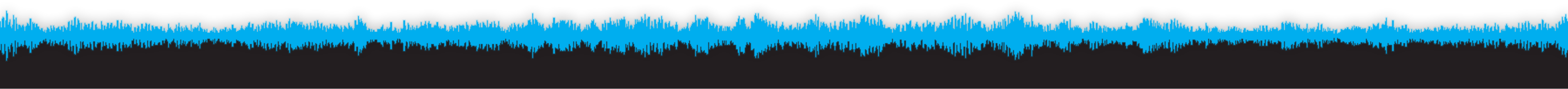


## THE ACID TESTS

Watch [this clip](#) to learn about the band the Grateful Dead's formative early concerts.



Consider or ask a friend:

- In the clip, Jerry Garcia says, “People came to the Acid Tests for the Acid Tests, not for us.” What does this quote tell you about the environment in which the Grateful Dead was first formed?
  - How did the group mentality of the Acid Tests inform the group mentality of Deadhead culture?
  - In what ways might it be challenging for a sober person to attend a Grateful Dead concert? What kind of support might be helpful for them if they wanted to attend?
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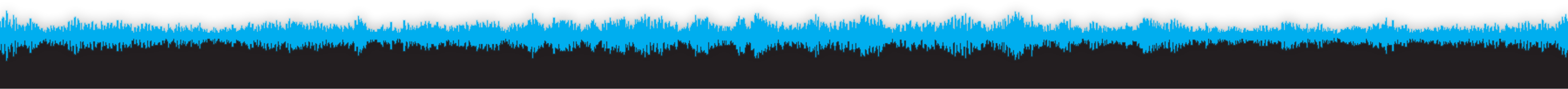
Born out of the countercultural revolution of the 1960's, the Grateful Dead and the Deadhead fan community has long been associated with drug use. But not all Deadheads used drugs.

Read [this handout](#) to learn about the formation of the Wharf Rats.





Think about or discuss with a friend:

- What is the purpose of the Wharf Rats? Why were they formed?
  - What does the Wharf Rats community say about the greater Deadhead community?
  - Why might it be important for the Wharf Rats to fly yellow balloons at a concert?
  - Why might it be important for members of the Wharf Rats to share their stories with others during concert breaks?
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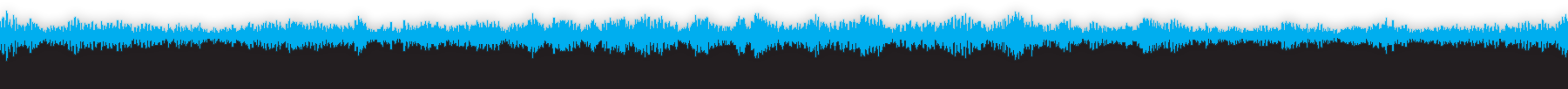
The Wharf Rats were named after a Grateful Dead song of the same name. [Click here](#) to read the lyrics to the Grateful Dead's "Wharf Rat."







Consider or discuss with a friend:

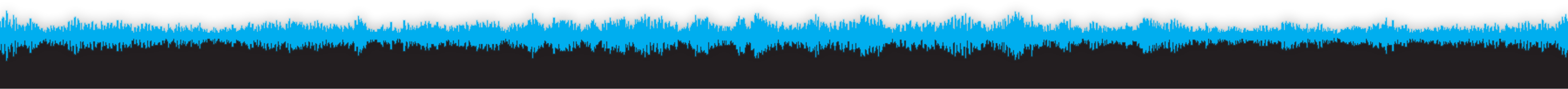
- Describe the character the song is about. What are his addictions and how have they affected him?
  - How does the Wharf Rats' experience with drugs differ from what was promoted during the Grateful Dead's "Acid Tests?"
  - How would you describe the mood of the song? Does the song end on a positive or negative note?
  - Why might it have been appropriate for sober Deadheads to adopt the name "Wharf Rat"?
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Examine the accompanying image of the pins worn by many Wharf Rats while attending Grateful Dead concerts.







Think about or discuss with a friend:

- What do you notice about these pins?
  - What do you think the phrase “One Show at a Time” means? Why is that phrase appropriate for the Wharf Rats?
  - What might have motivated the Wharf Rats to create these pins? What function do they serve?
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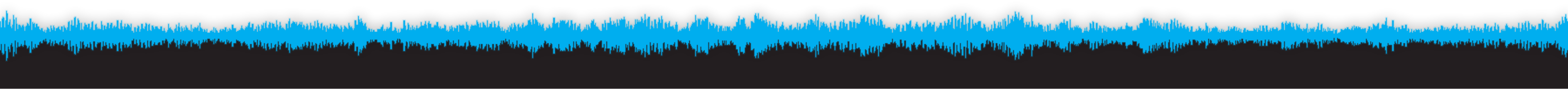
The Wharf Rats follow the principles of the non-religious sobriety support group Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Read more about the group and their principles [here](#).







Alcoholics Anonymous encourages its members to replace the concept of God, should they choose, with another “Power greater than ourselves.”

Think about or discuss with a friend:

- What might a Deadhead use to replace the concept of God as their “Power greater than ourselves” if they were to follow the AA 12-Step Program?
  - Which step of the 12-Step Program may have influenced the creation of the Wharf Rats?
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The Wharf Rats would watch shows together and hold meetings during the set break of each concert. These meetings, based on the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) rubric, gave members a chance to reiterate their pledges to sobriety, discuss mutual hardships and foment powerful relationships with other Wharf Rats.




The accompanying picture shows other sober support groups influenced by the Wharf Rats.




**SOBERCHELLA**




Think about or discuss with a friend:

- Why might have other groups adopted the Wharf Rats' model?
  - Based on these other support groups, do you think that the Wharf Rats concept is only applicable to the Grateful Dead?
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The Wharf Rats' legacy can be seen across all genres of live music in the modern age. Their rubric has been used to create similar support groups for fans of other bands who share the same goals. Support groups and safe spaces for concertgoers in recovery are a fixture in modern live-music culture, largely due to the successful and powerful legacy of the Wharf Rats.



# SUMMARY

- The Wharf Rats maintained sobriety in highly triggering environments through community building and peer support
- They married fan culture with purpose-driven commitment to personal and communal sobriety
- Their legacy exists in the generations of sober support groups that followed



# BE CREATIVE

Using **this sheet**, create a fictional Peer Support Group for an artist or festival of your choice.



# BE CREATIVE

Think about one of your favorite musicians or bands and answer these questions:

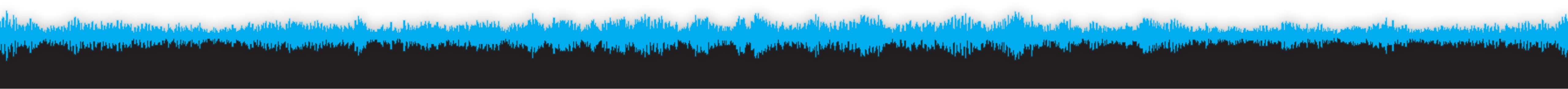
- Is drug culture represented in your artist's repertoire? In what ways?
- Do you advocate lyrics and behaviors that glorify drug culture? Do you feel pressured to participate in drug culture when listening to certain artists?
- Is it possible to enjoy the music while abstaining from drug culture?



# BE CURIOUS

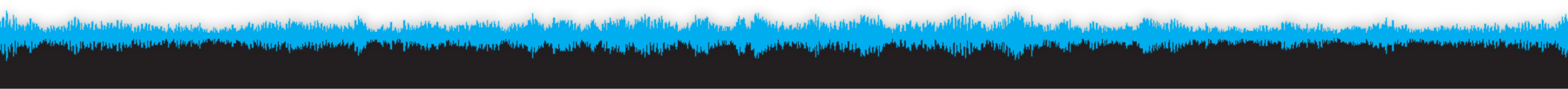
Read [this article](#) from *The Guardian*.

Consider or ask a friend:

- Do you think managers and other music industry figures also have a responsibility to keep artists sober and healthy? Why or why not?
  - What sort of practices or policies might the music industry develop to prevent drug use, addiction, and overdosing?
  - All of the artists featured in the article you read died from prescription drugs. What responsibilities do you think the pharmaceutical has in preventing recreational use of these drugs?
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# CONNECT

Share your work with us! Share your Peer Support Group sheet with TeachRock on [Instagram](#) or [Facebook](#), email to [info@teachrock.org](mailto:info@teachrock.org), or Tweet it to [@TeachRock](#)





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