

# THE BLACK ORIGINS OF PUNK

Est. Time: 30-60 minutes

Subjects: General Music, English Language Arts

Age Range: Middle School and High School

Contributing Author: Krystal McRae

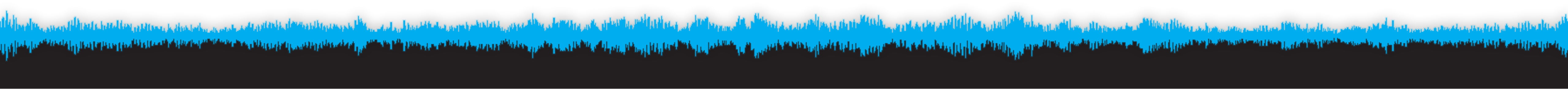
[View the classroom lesson version](#)

★ *TEACHROCK* ★




How did the bands Death, X-Ray Spex, and Bad Brains define Punk on their own terms?

In this lesson you will:

- Identify some of the stylistic characteristics of Punk and write Punk lyrics based upon those characteristics
  - Examine the history of Black people in Punk music
  - Discuss some of the earliest Black Punk bands of the 1970s and 1980s, and their contributions to Punk music and culture
  - Explore the music and biographies of Death, X-Ray Spex, and Bad Brains
- 



Consider or ask a partner:

- Have you ever heard the word “punk”? What comes to mind when you hear the word “punk?”
  - What do you think a typical Punk musician looks like? What do you think Punk music sounds like?
- 

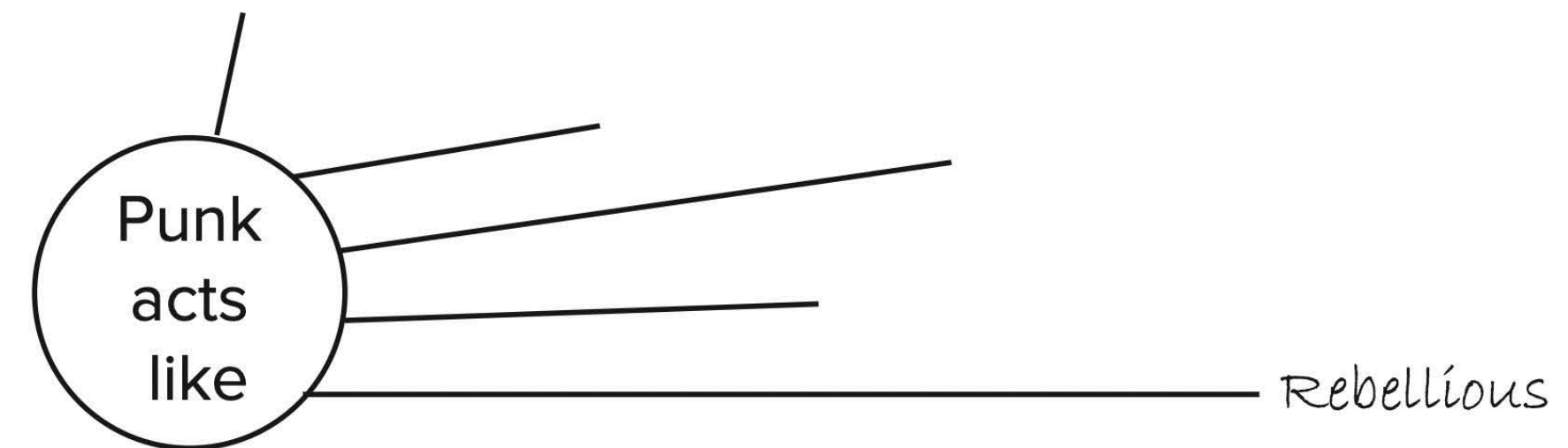
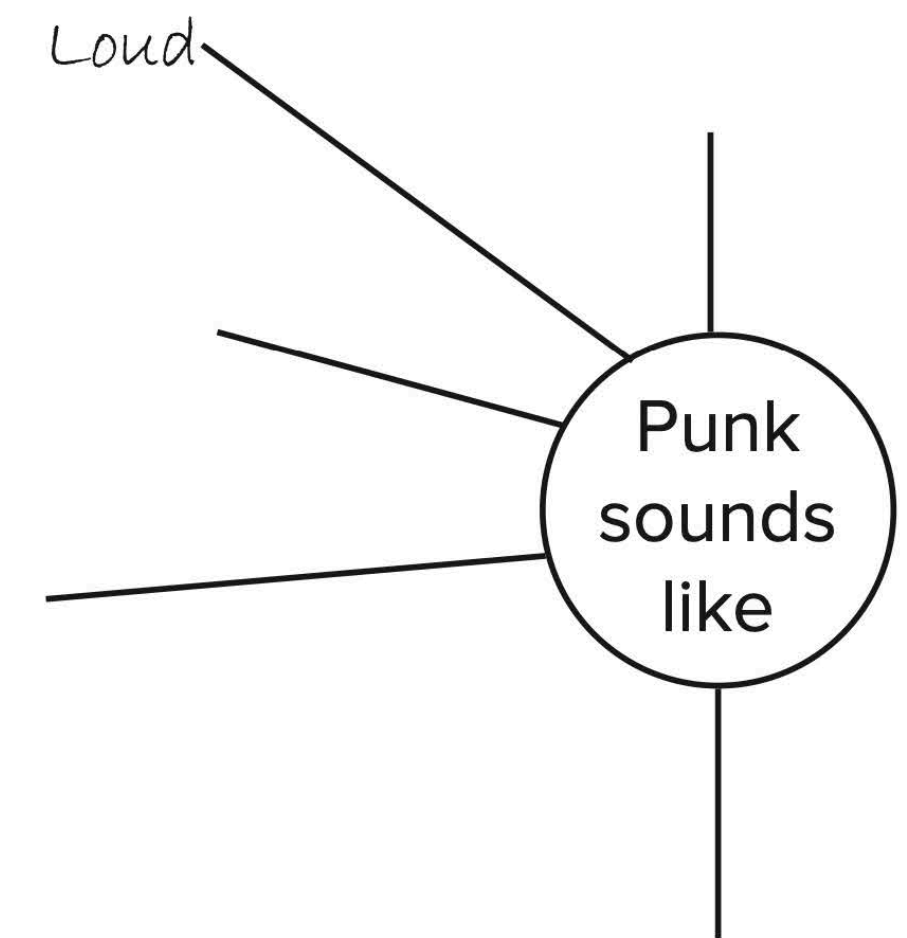
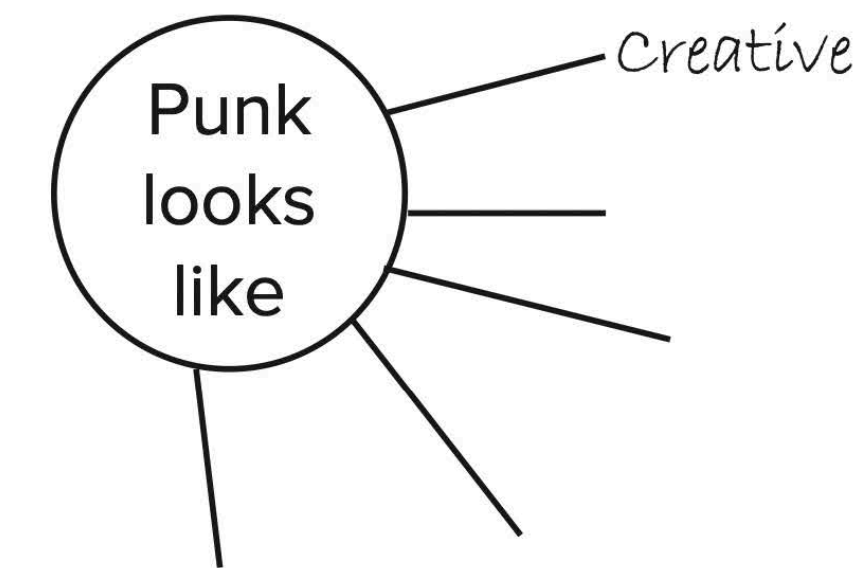


## THREE MUSICAL EXAMPLES OF PUNK ROCK

Watch [this video](#) of three different bands considered Punk, and take notes on what stands out to you about each performance.

Print out or replicate **this handout** by hand. Based on what you saw in the previous video, fill out the rest of the handout. Watch **the video clip** again if needed.

If you can, compare what you wrote on the handout with a classmate or friend's handout.





In this lesson, you will be exploring the bands featured in the video clip you watched: Death, Bad Brains, and X-Ray Spex.

Before exploring Death, X-Ray Spex, and Bad Brains, it is important to recognize some of the pioneers of Rock and Roll who helped set the groundwork for later pioneers.



Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton version of Blues singing is often considered to have helped develop the Rock and Roll sound. She is perhaps most well known for the single "Hound Dog," which was No. 1 on the R&B chart for seven weeks, and would later be covered by Elvis Presley.

**Watch this clip of "Hound Dog"** by Big Mama Thornton with Buddy Guy.






Another architect of Rock and Roll, Little Richard was one of the most successful crossover artists of the genre. He achieved his breakthrough with “Tutti Frutti,” a frenzied, cleaned-up version of an obscene ditty that he’d learned years before. “Tutti Frutti” instantly established Little Richard as one of the first Black American performers to appeal to a racially integrated fan base, reaching No. 2 on Billboard’s R&B chart and crossing over to the Pop chart in both the U.S. and the U.K.


**Watch this clip of “Tutti Frutti”** by Little Richard.



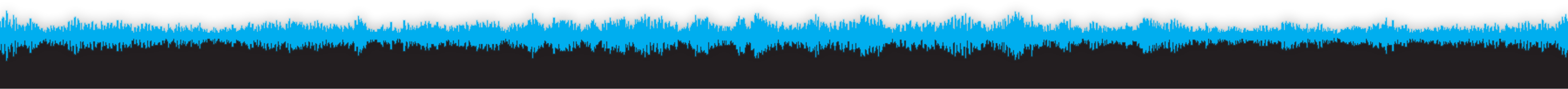


After watching the performances by Big Mama Thornton and Little Richard, consider or ask a friend the below questions. Feel free to consult the Punk Word Map you created as a guide.

- What might make Big Mama Thornton “Punk”?
  - What might make Little Richard “Punk”?
- 



Choose one or more of the following Black Punk groups to explore further. Watch a performance by the group and read the supplementary handout about each group's history, lyrics, and thoughts. Take notes on what you find interesting about the group, or use **this handout** as a guide.


- **Death**
    - **Materials Packet**
    - **Video**
  
  - **X-Ray Spex**
    - **Materials Packet**
    - **Video**
  
  - **Bad Brains**
    - **Materials Packet**
    - **Video**
- 



With a friend or classmate, share what you learned or found interesting about one or more of the bands you explored.

Then, looking back at the handouts, consider what challenges the Black Punk groups you explored might have encountered in their life and career.

Consider or ask a friend:

- What were some of the challenges the Punk musicians faced in the places they lived? Can you relate to these challenges? Why or why not?
- 

# SUMMARY

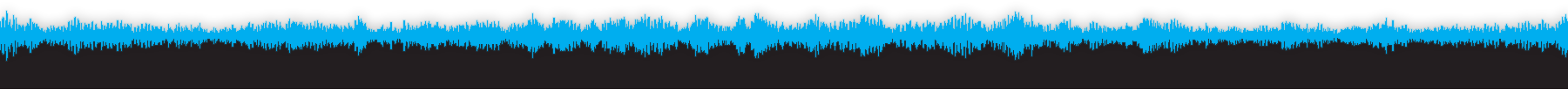
- Black Punk Bands such as Death, X-Ray Spex, and Bad Brains played a foundational role in creating the Punk sound and attitude
- In creating their own version of Punk music, each band had to confront preconceived notions and prejudices
- The Punk sound developed by these groups would not have been possible without the earlier musical innovations of people like Big Momma Thornton and Little Richard
- Punk music can evoke a wide range of emotions, ideas, and attitudes



# BE CREATIVE

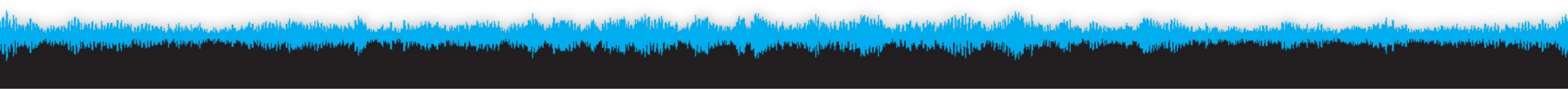
Use one or two of the words you wrote on the **Punk Word Map handout** as inspiration to write your own Punk lyrics. If it helps, consider the challenges faced by Death, X-Ray Spex, and Bad Brains, or your own challenges, while writing the lyrics.

After you have finished writing the lyrics, share the Punk Word Map handout with a friend or classmate, and recite your lyrics. See if your friend or classmate can guess which term on the handout inspired your lyrics.



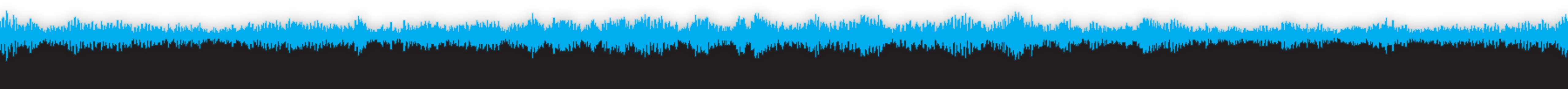
# BE CURIOUS

Explore the work of one of the below contemporary Black Punk Bands. Then create an infographic or write a one page paper comparing the band to one of the predecessors discussed in the class.

- The 1865
  - MAAFA
  - Proper.
  - Rebelmatic
  - Pleasure Venom
  - Blk Vapor
  - Oceanator
  - The Muslims
  - This Is Your God (TIYG)
- 

# 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**, tweet it to **@TeachRock**, or make an Instagram post and tag us **@teachrock.org**





★ *TEACHROCK* ★  
•ORG

