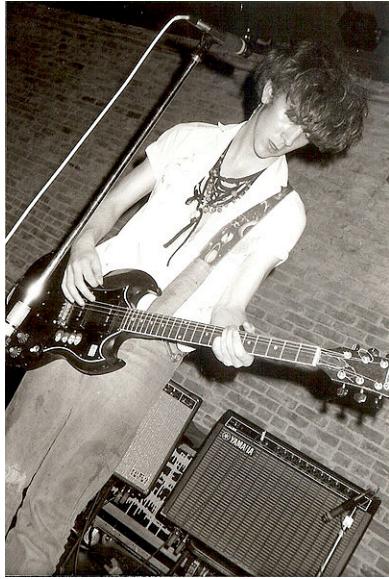


Grunge Documents

DOCUMENT 1



Source: Rachel Tillman



Source: P.B. Rage

Tom Price of U-Men, 1983

Nirvana, 1992

DOCUMENT 2

Unemployment in Grays Harbor County, Washington*

Year	Unemployment Rate
1990	9.3 percent
1991	11.5 percent
1992	11.8 percent
1993	14.4 percent

* Location of the suburb of Aberdeen, hometown of Nirvana founders Kurt Cobain and Krist Novoselic

DOCUMENT 3

Excerpt from "Grunge: A Success Story," by Rick Marin

The New York Times, Nov. 15, 1992

When did grunge become grunge? How did a five-letter word meaning dirt, filth, trash become synonymous with a musical genre, a fashion statement, a pop phenomenon? . . .

In 1988, a fledgling Seattle record label called Sub Pop released a three-boxed set called "Sub Pop 200." It was a compilation of bands like Nirvana, Soundgarden and Mudhoney, and it came complete with a 20-page booklet packed with pictures by Charles Peterson, the photographer credited with creating grunge's hair-sweat-and-guitars look. Sub Pop also sent a catalogue to the nation's alternative-rock intelligentsia describing its bands' punk-metal guitar noise as "grunge," the first documented use of the now-ubiquitous term. "It could have been sludge, grime, crud, any word like that," said Jonathan Poneman, a Sub Pop founder.

Grunge stuck, maybe because it so vividly evoked both the black-noise sound and the smelly-caveman look. Ratty rec-room chic has been hibernating since the 70's, emerging from the basement every so often in movies like "River's Edge," "Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure" and "Wayne's World."

This generation of greasy Caucasian youths in ripped jeans, untucked flannel and stomping boots spent their formative years watching television..., listening to old Black Sabbath albums and dreaming of the day they would trade in their air guitars for the real thing, so that they, too, could become famous rock-and-roll heroes.

A culture was born.

"Thrift" is a verb in Seattle. Flannel and leatherette, the boho-hobo staples of second-hand attire, are the basics of a nonfashion statement. A flannel shirt worn around the waist is a precaution against the Pacific Northwest's mercurial clime. Army boots slog effectively through mud. "It wasn't like somebody said, 'Let's all dress like lumberjacks and start Seattle chic!'" Mr. Poneman said. "This stuff is cheap, it's durable, and it's kind of timeless. It also runs against the grain of the whole flashy esthetic that existed in the 80's."

"Kurt Cobain was just too lazy to shampoo," said Charles Cross, the editor of the Seattle music monthly *The Rocket*, talking about Nirvana's lead singer. Mr. Cobain's matted sheep-dog mop became a much-emulated cut when his band's first single, "Smells Like Teen Spirit," hit last year. A native of Aberdeen, Wash., Mr. Cobain was also "dirt poor," Mr. Poneman said. He looked like (and was) a guy who slept on friends' couches or under a bridge, and bought his clothes at thrift shops.

DOCUMENT 4

“There's a feeling of burnout in the culture at large. Kids are depressed about the future.”

-- *Music critic Simon Reynolds, 1992, about Generation X*

DOCUMENT 5

“My generation's apathy. I'm disgusted with it. I'm disgusted with my own apathy too, for being spineless and not always standing up against racism, sexism and all those other -isms the counterculture has been whining about for years.

“No one, especially people our own age, wants to address important issues. They'd rather say, 'Nevermind, forget it.'”

-- *Nirvana guitarist/vocalist Kurt Cobain*

DOCUMENT 6



Kurt Cobain

DOCUMENT 7

Excerpt from “Seattle: Grunge City,” by Michael Azerrad *Rolling Stone Magazine, April 16, 1992*

The Seattle Phenomenon wouldn't have been possible without the network of college radio, fanzines and indie distributors that sprang up in the wake of punk rock; Minneapolis and Athens, Georgia, established the viability of regional scenes. Seattle's repressive liquor laws stifled live music, but recording was cheap; in the mid-Eighties, radio stations KCMU and KJET supported local bands, which were reviewed by the late *Backlash* and the *Seattle Rocket*, which remains the scene's respected commentator.

Mark Arm [of the band Mudhoney] chalks it up to "the two i's: isolation and inbreeding." Like Minneapolis, Seattle is a relatively isolated northern city with heavy precipitation and little to do except drink beer and jam in the basement; with the population barely topping half a million, everybody knows one another. While mid-Eighties alternative bands were busy aping R.E.M. and the Replacements, Arm says, "there was this one corner of the map that was busy being really inbred and ripping off each other's ideas."

Free of major-label attentions, musicians just made music to please their friends.

All this occurred in Seattle's thriving cultural environment, which boasts prominent art museums, an opera, a philharmonic and local luminaries such as Gus Van Sant, Matt Groening and Lynda Barry. A university town, Seattle is consistently rated one of the nation's most livable cities, and the low cost of living makes it easy to be in a band.

"You gotta understand Seattle," says native Duff McKagan, now bassist for Guns N' Roses. "It's grungy. People are into rock & roll and into noise, and they're building airplanes all the time, and there's a lot of noise, and there's rain and musty garages. Musty garages create a certain noise."

In Seattle, where no one honks his horn, to make noise is to make a statement. "People want things to be pretty and gentle and soothing here," says Grant Alden. "And if you look at the world differently and you rebel against that, you end up sounding like Mudhoney."

DOCUMENT 8

"Seattle was a perfect example of a secondary city with an active music scene that was completely ignored by an American media fixated on Los Angeles and New York."

-- Jonathan Poneman, co-owner of Sub Pop Records



Discussion Questions for Grunge

Working with your group, use the questions below for help in writing a three-paragraph review of early Grunge music. Your review should include specific information from all sources (video clips, pictures, articles, quotes, etc.) in the lesson.

1. What musical influences did Punk and Heavy Metal have on Grunge (for example, in its overall sound, instrumentation, vocal style, use of dynamics [loud and soft sounds])?
2. As you watch the videos and listen to the Grunge songs, what do they seem to be about? What ideas are the bands trying to communicate? If you could describe each song in a few words, what would they be and why?
3. Why might Grunge have resonated with teenagers in the early 1990s – particularly white, suburban youth? How might the way teens were represented in mass media, such as popular television shows, have helped lead to the rise of Grunge? What specific lyrics (and/or parts of the music video) might help explain this?
4. Why did plaid shirts become so closely associated with Grunge? What did they represent? What else about the appearance of the performers in the videos reflects the same themes?
5. What specific things about the environment in the Seattle area helped lead to the development of Grunge? What was the economic situation there in the early 1990s? What other aspects of Seattle culture and society helped influence the way Grunge looked and sounded?
6. What do Kurt Cobain's quotes suggest about the general outlook of many teenagers in the late 80s and early 90s?
7. What does Grunge music stand for? Does it stand for anything? What does the word “grunge” bring to mind? Why do you think this type of music is called Grunge? Is it an accurate label?