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ZOOM

in on america

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"ONE WHO SINGS WITH HIS TONGUE ON FIRE..."



Bob Dylan in 1963 AP Photo)

In this issue: Bob Dylan Wins Nobel Prize in Literature

Zoom in on America

THE FIRST MUSICIAN TO WIN THE NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE

On October 13, 2016 the Swedish Academy issued a press release announcing that the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature is awarded to Bob Dylan “for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition.” Nobel prize winners are invited to Stockholm on December 10 to receive their awards from King Carl XVI Gustaf and to give a speech during a banquet. It is not yet known whether Bob Dylan will show up at the ceremony, but millions of his fans are looking forward to it.

Take a little Bob Dylan quiz:

1. How many songs has Bob Dylan composed?

- a. between 50 and 100
- b. more than 450
- c. over 1000

2. Did Bob Dylan compose these songs?

Look at the list below and write *Yes* or *No*.

- a. *Like a Rolling Stone*
- b. *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*
- c. *Blowin’ in the Wind*
- d. *Knocking on the Heaven’s Door*
- e. *Scarborough Fair*
- f. *Forever Young*
- g. *Señor*
- h. *The Times They Are a-Changin’*
- i. *Division Bell*
- j. *Subterranean Homesick Blues*
- k. *Every Grain of Sand*

3. Is Bob Dylan these things? Look at the choices below and write *Yes* or *No*.

- a. composer
- b. performer
- c. singer
- d. poet
- e. painter
- f. writer
- g. poet-songwriter
- h. sculptor

4. In which of the films below has Bob Dylan appeared?

- a. *Don’t Look Back*, 1965
- b. *Eat the Document*, 1966
- c. *A Space Odyssey* 1968
- d. *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, 1973
- e. *Concert for Bangladesh*, 1972
- f. *Rolling Thunder*, 1977
- g. *Renaldo and Clara*, 1978
- h. *The Blues Brothers*, 1980
- i. *The Last Waltz*, 1978
- j. *Hearts of Fire*, 1987
- k. *Masked and Anonymous*, 2003



A sign outside of the Cosmopolitan in Las Vegas congratulates Bob Dylan, Thursday, October 13, 2016, after he won the 2016 Nobel Prize in literature. (AP Photo/John Locher)

“ONE WHO SINGS WITH HIS TONGUE ON FIRE...”

For his fans, Bob Dylan has not only been a singer and a poet-songwriter but a symbol of non-conformism, a lone wolf unafraid of following his own path in a quest for a better world and understanding of what life is about. Indeed, the success he has achieved, spanning no less than six (!) decades, is phenomenal. It also is a proof that the combination of music and poetry is a means that appeals to humans in a way deeper and more profound than any other means of communication.

Bob Dylan was born Robert Allen Zimmerman in Duluth, Minnesota, in 1941. In the late 1940s he moved with his parents to Hibbing, a smaller city in the same state. After high school he briefly attended the Minnesota University. It was then that he changed his birth name Zimmerman to Dylan, likely derived from the poet Dylan Thomas. After he left college he went to New York City where he stayed in Greenwich Village, a beatnik enclave popular with artists.

As a child he wrote poetry, and in the 1950s he began to listen to country music, especially Hank Williams. He started playing the guitar when he was in high school. His influences included black music, such as the gospel rock of Little Richard. He taught himself piano, guitar, and harmonica by ear. At University he was inspired by folksinger Woody Guthrie, a singer and songwriter who was immersed in the folk tradition and whose lyrics had political undertones. His best known song is *This Land Is Your Land*.

Bob Dylan's first album was released in 1962. Only two of the folk songs in the album were written by him. How-

ever, the next album he made the following year consisted almost entirely of his own songs of protest and apocalyptic vision.

One of the most famous songs marking the beginning of his career was *Blowing in the Wind*. Like many other songs which he composed, it was sung by many other singers.

In the 1971 article in *The New York Times* Anthony Scaduto, Dylan's biographer, wrote: "For millions of the young, Dylan has been a poet of the streets, crying out in pain against society's indifference and stupidity; his voice, his words, his visions gave substance to their radicalization."

Many young Americans in the 1960s became disillusioned with the older generation and the status quo. Faced with the war in Vietnam, which cost the lives of so many young soldiers, they were against war and racial segregation. They wanted justice and equality for all. Dylan's song *The Times They Are a-Changin'* appealed to many young Americans who wanted to break with the past.

The lyrics say that parents don't really know their daughters and sons, who have rejected older values. The language of the song is poetic, but at the same time it is colloquial. It was also then that Dylan grew a habit of wearing a harmonica supported by a shoulder brace.

In the 1963 Newport Folk Festival Dylan was joined by Joan Baez, Pete Seeger, Theodore Bikel, the folk trio Peter, Paul, and Mary, and the Freedom Singers, an African-American group, and they all sang *We Shall Overcome*



(Above) Folk singers Joan Baez, left, and Bob Dylan entertain over 80,000 people gathered at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California on Sunday afternoon, June 6, 1962. The event, a nuclear disarmament rally titled "Peace Sunday," featured music, speeches and prayers. The rally was held just one day before the United Nations started its special session on disarmament in New York. (AP Photo/Lennox McLendon)



(Right) Bob Dylan and his wife Sara leave Heathrow Airport in London to fly home to Los Angeles, September 2, 1969. (AP Photo)

as a grand finale. The song was the anthem of the civil rights movement. That same year the folk revival linked closely with the civil rights movement and they sang during a march on Washington.

But Dylan did not feel comfortable in his role of a leader. He also wanted to avoid being identified with only one specific kind of music. His next album *Another Side of Bob Dylan* contained love songs rather than protests songs.

Increasingly, he became skeptical of political engagement attitude. In the book *Arrested Development: Pop Culture and the Erosion of Adulthood* by Andrew Calcutt, Dylan is quoted as saying: "What Joan Baez is doing, and all those people demonstrating, they're not gonna save the world. It's not true they can change men's hearts... Nobody's gonna learn by somebody else showing them or teaching them. People have to learn by themselves."

Dylan distanced himself from folk music and the protest movement. His next album, *Bringing It All Back Home*, is a journey back to his musical roots. It is in this album that he combined folk with rock music.

His next record, *Highway 61 Revisited*, showed a new Dylan and although the album was criticized by purists who did not accept any additions to folk, it gained him an even greater audience of those who were enchanted to the beat. Dylan decided to mix organ with guitar in a style of folk-rock.

Many critics believe his best work is this integration of folk and rock. The lyrics too are the finest poetry, full of images and allusions, mystical and apocalyptic.

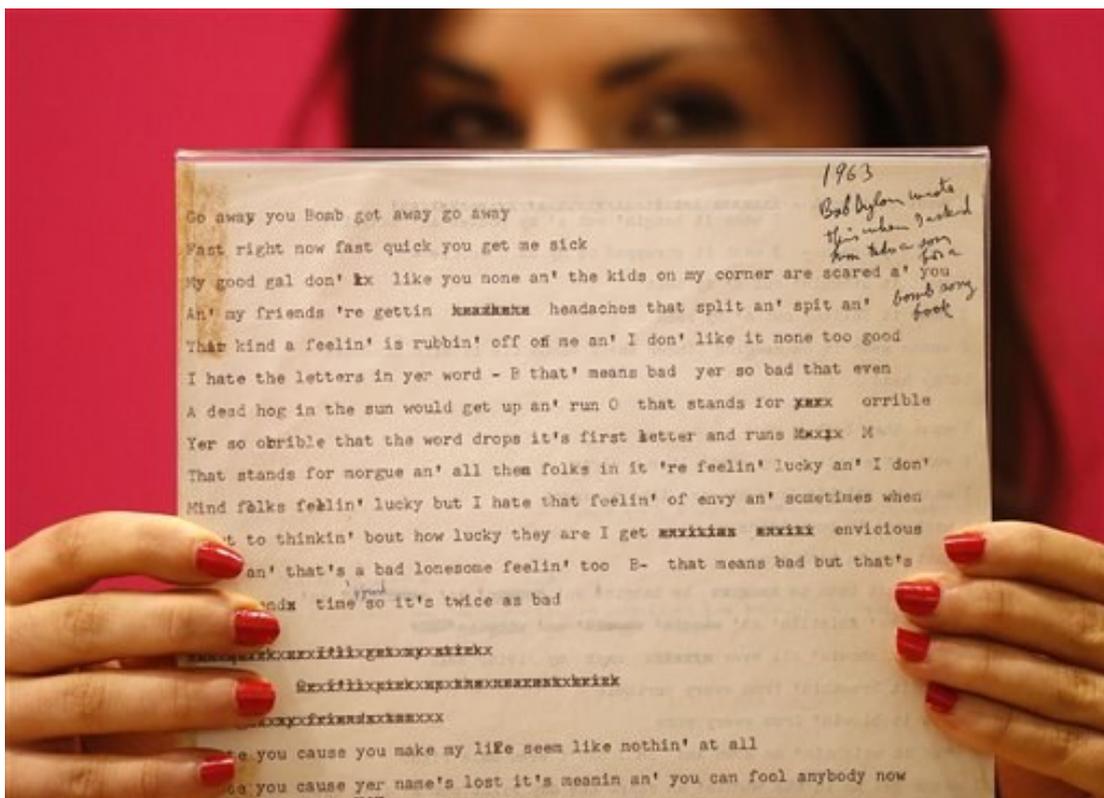
Dylan's poetry has been compared to that of Ginsberg, Whitman, Villon, Blake, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud. Ginsberg himself credited Dylan with having "altered the course of poetics in America. . . . Dylan has almost single-handedly brought language back to its original poetic form which is minstrelsy."

Dylan has always been an artist in transition and an individualist. No one has ever succeeded in placing him into some defined mold. Was it in an autobiographic tone that he sang his own words? "How does it feel? To be without a home?/ Like a complete unknown? /Like a rolling stone?"

On July 29, 1966 Dylan crashed his motorcycle and was in critical condition for a week. This near-death experience made a deep impact on the singer and brought him closer to his Jewish roots and spirituality.

Music has always been a tool of digging into one's own consciousness, a way to understand the world. A combination of music and poetry, such as Dylan's, has a potential to affect us so deeply that it can influence our way of thinking. This is true of the greatest musicians who are not afraid of following their own individual train of thought and who make an effort to analyze the surrounding world.

In *It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)*, Bob Dylan characterizes the sensitivity of an artist, or maybe, just his own: "While one who sings with his tongue on fire/ Gargles in the rat race choir/ Best out of shape from society's pliers/ Cares not to come up any higher/ But rather get you down in the hole/ That he's in."



Unpublished lyrics by musician Bob Dylan at the auction house Christie's in London in June 2013. The lyrics were part of the auction 120 years of Pop Culture, which showcased important memorabilia dating from every decade of the past century of popular culture from the ubiquitous industries of film and music. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein)

BOB DYLAN - AN ARTIST

Aside from music, Bob Dylan has been involved in creating visual arts. While on tour he frequently paints and draws. His observations of the environment and the people he meets are favorite motifs of his art. He combines a wide range of popular styles. By far the most popular of Dylan's prints is Train Tracks.

He has been making art since the 1960s, but it was only in 2007 that he exhibited it. An exhibition of The Drawn Blank Series was held in Chemnitz, Germany. It was followed by The Brazil Series shown at the Statens Museum for Kunst, in Copenhagen, in 2010–2011.

But Bob Dylan is not only a painter. He is also a sculptor. Recently, he has made an enormous iron gate sculpture for a Maryland Casino, which is a 26x15 foot archway that was welded together out of household objects.

For this kind of sculpture various antique fire arms, wheels, farm equipment, kitchen utensils, and even children's toys are welded together. The Maryland Casino gate, which will be on permanent exhibit later this year, is not the first iron sculpture of this kind. In 2013 another such work was exhibited at a London gallery. In the gallery brochure Dylan said: "Gates have a symbolic meaning for the artist. They can shut you out or shut you in. And in some ways there is no difference."



(Photos above) Visitors admire paintings by US singer Bob Dylan, part of his "New Orleans Series" collection, on display in Milan, Italy, in February 2013 (AP Photo/Antonio Calanni)

DYLAN'S AWARDS AND HONORS

It is not possible to list all the awards and honors which Bob Dylan has received throughout his six-decade music career. So let's just mention a few:

In May 2012 President Barack Obama presented the artist with a Medal of Freedom, which is the highest civilian award in the USA.

His music awards include eight career Grammys, an Academy Award and a Golden Globe award in 2001 for *Things Have Changed*.

For having made "creative contributions of outstanding artistic significance to the field of recording," Bob Dylan was awarded with a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1991.

In 1988 he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. On that occasion Bruce Springsteen commented that:

Bob [Dylan] freed the mind the way Elvis [Presley] freed the body. He showed us that just because the music was innately physical did not mean that it was anti-intellectual.... He invented a new way a pop singer could sound, broke through the limitations of what a

recording artist could achieve, and changed the face of rock and roll forever.

Bob Dylan released at least twenty-nine gold albums (selling over 500,000 units each) and thirteen platinum albums (selling over one million units each.)

Some of his albums received great acclaim. For example his 1997 album *Time out of Mind* received three Grammy Awards, including Album of the Year. In 2001 Dylan won both a Golden Globe and an Academy Award for *Things Have Changed*, which was his contribution to the *Wonder Boys* movie soundtrack. *Love and Theft* won a Grammy for Best Contemporary Folk Album in 2002. Dylan's writing was recognized by National Book Critics Circle that presents awards for the finest books published in English. Bob Dylan's *Chronicles: Vol. 1* was among Biography Finalists in 2004. The 304-page book was on the *New York Times* best-seller list for nonfiction books for 19 months.

Dylan has toured intensely, playing an extraordinary number of dates each year on what he once called and what his fans still refer to as "the Never Ending Tour."



In this May 29, 2012, photo, President Barack Obama presents rock legend Bob Dylan with a Medal of Freedom during a ceremony at the White House in Washington. (AP Photo/Charles Dharapak)

Activity Page

Exercise 1: SPEAKING: Who is your favorite singer?

Work with another student:

1. Prepare a short presentation about your favorite singer/band. Include interesting information about the history of their career and list the reasons why they appeal to you more than other singers/bands.
2. Present your favorite singer/band to your partner.
3. Invite him/her to ask you questions and answer them.
4. Now take turns and listen to your partner's presentation.
5. Ask your partner questions about his/her favorite musician.
6. Have a discussion on the importance of music in our life.

Exercise 2: DO YOU KNOW BOB DYLAN'S SONGS?

Read the lines from Bob Dylan's famous songs and match them with the titles of the songs on the right:

1. "How does it feel? To be without a home?/ Like a complete unknown?"
2. "While one who sings with his tongue on fire"
3. "Mama take this badge from me / I can't use it anymore"
4. "May you grow up to be righteous / May you grow up to be true"
5. "Come gather 'round people / Wherever you roam / And admit that the waters / Around you have grown"
6. "How many roads must a man walk down / Before you call him a man?"
7. "Señor, señor / Can you tell me where we're headin'"
8. "In the time of my confession, in the hour of my deepest need / When the pool of tears beneath my feet flood every newborn seed ..."

- a. *Forever Young*
- b. *Knocking on the Heavens' Door*
- c. *Señor*
- d. *The Times They Are a-Changin'*
- e. *Every Grain of Sand*
- f. *It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)*
- g. *Blowin' in the Wind*
- h. *Like a Rolling Stone*

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American Reference Center
U.S. Embassy Vienna
Boltzmannngasse 16
1090 Vienna

ViennaUSEmbassy@state.gov
or
<http://at.usembassy.gov>



Bob Dylan performs during the 2006 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival in New Orleans on April 28, 2006. (AP Photo/Jeff Christensen)