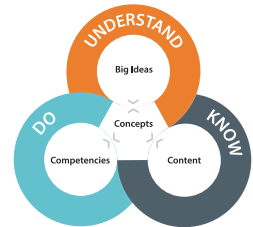


## Free Feeling: Tom Petty, Cannabis and Music as Craft

Tom Petty (1950-2017) was an award-winning American musician and lyricist long associated with cannabis and other drugs. This lesson revolves around Tom Petty's song *You Don't Know How it Feels* (1994), which provides a rich opportunity to build drug literacy while exploring the connections between experiences, relationships, emotions, thoughts and actions.

The song, with its reference to rolling a joint and sharing it with friends, sparked controversy at the time. This provides an opportunity to explore issues like censorship and artistic freedom. And the history of Tom Petty and his long-time band, the Heartbreakers, provides further opportunity to explore the impacts drug use can have on life, work and relationships.

In each case, the use of dialogue rather than the transmission of the "right message" is likely to lead to greater understanding. The instructional strategies provided are examples of how this could be achieved.



### Instructional strategies

1. Introduce students to the Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers' song "You Don't Know How It Feels" by providing them with a copy of the [handout](#) (or play the [video](#) while students follow the lyrics in the handout). Then, in groups or as a class, invite students to explore the lyrics. You might use questions such as the following.
  - The song begins with the line, "Let me run with you tonight." What does the singer mean? What is he asking or hoping for? Why do you think that? What elements in the song lead you to your conclusion?
  - What does the singer mean by "I woke up in between / A memory and a dream"? What else in the song suggests this meaning to you?
  - What emotions does the song express? How are these emotions related to his past relationships with friends or family? Explain.
  - In the refrain, the singer always comes back to "let's get to the point / let's roll another joint." Why? What point does rolling a joint make? Is smoking cannabis helpful in dealing with the situation the singer is in? What are some other ways the singer might have responded?
  - The singer expresses the need to go somewhere. Where does he want to go? What makes you think that? Discuss how smoking cannabis, or the other ways suggested above, might help someone get there, or not.



2. Remind students that in 1994 “You Don’t Know How It Feels” was censored on the radio because of its references to cannabis. Then facilitate a discussion about censorship. If there has been a recent story in the news about censorship you might draw that in as well. You could use questions like:

- Why do you think some people find it threatening to talk/sing openly about drugs?
- Are there any benefits in talking publicly about taboo subjects? What happens if we don’t talk about them? Give examples.
- Is there any subject that is too threatening to talk about publicly? Where do you draw the line? Why? If there are limits, how should we deal with situations where someone goes too far?

3. According to the movie “*Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers: Runnin’ Down a Dream*” (available on Netflix), the band went through ups and downs over the decades, including a period of heavy use of drugs that interfered with the serious business of making music. Ultimately, the musicians got back on track, maintained their relationships and continued making music together except for one member who lost his way with heroin. After sketching out this history or watching a few clips from the movie (note: the movie is nearly 4 hours long but there are several key moments related to drug use in the second half of the film, such as 154:00 to 147:00, 36:40 to 35:00, 30:15 to 23:00), you could facilitate a class discussion using questions like:

- How might the heavy use of cannabis or other drugs affect a person’s ability to work? How might it affect their relationships?
- Some people seem to be able to quite easily make changes to their thinking and behaviours in order to function better at work or in their daily lives (quit smoking, cut down on drinking, etc.). Some people seem unable to make such changes, even when it results in losing

relationships with close friends or threatens a successful career. How can we explain this? What do you think people need in order to make healthy changes?

- What would you say or do if you thought a friend was losing their way with cannabis or another drug?

4. Invite students to explore Tom Petty’s drug-related ideas and behaviours via his songs, videos, movies, articles and interviews. Have them express what they learn in the form of an essay on a topic such as:

- Explore how drugs influenced the artistic career of Tom Petty (positively, negatively or both)
- Describe the role(s) drugs played in the life of Tom Petty (or another artist)

## Drug literacy

### Big ideas

- ✓ Drugs can be tremendously helpful and also very harmful
- ✓ We can learn how to control our drug use by reflecting on the different ways people have thought about drugs, exploring stories from various cultures and listening to each other

### Competencies

- ✓ Explore and appreciate diversity related to the reasons people use drugs, the impact of drug use and the social attitudes toward various drugs
- ✓ Assess the complex ways in which drugs impact the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and societies



- ✓ Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs
- ✓ Develop personal and social strategies to manage the risks, benefits and harms related to drugs

- ✓ Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts
- ✓ Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world
- ✓ Respond to text in personal, creative, and critical ways

## Links to Curriculum

### English Language Arts 8/9

#### Big ideas

- ✓ Language and text can be a source of creativity and joy
- ✓ Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world
- ✓ Texts are socially, culturally, and historically constructed
- ✓ Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens

#### Competencies

##### **Comprehend and connect (reading, listening, viewing)**

- ✓ Access information and ideas for diverse purposes and from a variety of sources and evaluate their relevance, accuracy, and reliability
- ✓ Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking
- ✓ Synthesize ideas from a variety of sources to build understanding
- ✓ Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts

##### **Create and communicate (writing, speaking, representing)**

- ✓ Exchange ideas and viewpoints to build shared understanding and extend thinking
- ✓ Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful literary and informational texts for a variety of purposes and audiences
- ✓ Assess and refine texts to improve their clarity, effectiveness, and impact according to purpose, audience, and message
- ✓ Transform ideas and information to create original texts

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