

**BIO: BOB DYLAN  
Classroom Guide**



In the early 1960s, he was a shy teenager with a beat-up guitar and a dream of meeting Woody Guthrie. Within a few short years, he took his place alongside his idol as one of the most important musicians of the 20th century. Born Robert Allen Zimmerman in 1941 in Duluth, Minnesota, he became an avid folk musician as a teenager, changed his name to Bob Dylan, and devoted his life to music. This feature-length profile delves into his back pages to tell Bob Dylan's extraordinary story, from his early albums through his induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and beyond.

In 1961, Dylan moved to New York City and immersed himself in the folk music scene. Just a few years later, he released the classic album entitled "The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan" featuring powerful antiwar songs such as "Blowin' in the Wind." This documentary follows the influential singer from his boyhood, through his rise to fame in the 1960s, and up through his contemporary status as a legendary performer and an active contributor to the American music scene. This program gives students an introduction to the man who has been called the "poet laureate" of American music.

**Curriculum Links:**

***BIO: Bob Dylan*** is appropriate for high school and college students and would be useful for American history, social studies, music and popular culture courses.

**Vocabulary:**

**Ask students to define the terms below using a dictionary or other reference resource.**

activist  
folklore  
impersonation  
liberation  
overtly

exemplify  
identity  
indelible  
mellifluous  
troubadour

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What was Dylan's childhood like, and how do you think it shaped his music?
2. Who was Woody Guthrie and what role did his music play in Bob Dylan's life?
3. Who were some of Bob Dylan's main influences musically?
4. Bob Dylan performed at the March on Washington for Civil Rights in 1963. What did he play and why was his appearance important?
5. One commentator calls Dylan an "individualist." What does that mean and do you agree with this assessment?
6. Why did Dylan attract so much criticism when he decided to "go electric"?
7. What do you think Dylan means when he calls his music "mathematical music"? Do you agree with his assessment?
8. Which of Dylan's albums do you think was most influential, and why?

### **Activities:**

**1. Changin' Times.** Bob Dylan is often associated with the 1960s, an era in which he made some of his most influential music, and also a time of great upheaval in the U.S. Ask students to create an illustrated timeline of major events during the 1960s, including some of Dylan's major albums and concerts. These timelines can be in PowerPoint format, on a poster or any other format. Students can include quotes, photos and other relevant images.

**2. Reporting Live.** Ask students to imagine they were a journalist covering the March on Washington, Dylan's infamous performance at the Newport Folk Festival, or another event. Then, have them write a short newspaper article about one of these events based on what they learned from this documentary or their own research.

**3. Words and Images.** During the 1960s, Bob Dylan carried a mystique. Many fans and reporters struggled to understand the meaning of Dylan's lyrics and the motivations behind his actions. Ask students to choose one of Dylan's songs and write a 1-page analysis of his lyrics. Students may also want to choose one of Dylan's album covers and analyze the imagery.

**4. Outside Ideas.** Bruce Springsteen once commented that "The '60s made room for outsiders and their ideas." Many people think that artists like Bob Dylan helped foster an environment in which outsiders became important figures in American culture. Ask students to write an essay about this quote, analyzing the role of "outsiders" during Dylan's era and today.

### **Websites:**

Learn more about Bob Dylan on Bio.com:

<http://www.biography.com/articles/Bob-Dylan-9283052>

Bob Dylan timeline and background from the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame:

<http://rockhall.com/inductees/bob-dylan>

Read more about the March on Washington on History.com:

<http://www.history.com/topics/march-on-washington>

Official Bob Dylan homepage

[www.bobdylan.com](http://www.bobdylan.com)

### **Books:**

Charters, Ann. *The Portable Sixties Reader*. Penguin Classics, 2002.

Dylan, Bob. *Chronicles: Volume One*. Simon & Schuster, 2005.

Farber, David and Beth Bailey. *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960s (Columbia Guides to American History and Cultures)*. Columbia University Press, 2001.

Kurlansky, Mark. *1968: the Year that Rocked the World*. Random House, 2005.