The Beatles

Summary

The End of a Dream When John Lennon was killed in 1980, many people were sad because they had hoped the Beatles would play together one more time.

Early Days This section describes the family background of each of the Beatles and how they began singing together.

From Liverpool to Hamburg The Beatles went to play in clubs in Germany, for six or seven hours every night.

In the Cavern One of the Beatles – Stu Sutcliffe – decided to stay in Hamburg. The others came back to Liverpool and became famous locally through their concerts at The Cavern. Brian Epstein became their manager and made them much more professional. They had difficulty, though, getting a recording contract.

On their Way Ringo Starr joined the band and they released their first single, Love Me Do.

Beatlemania Very successful records led to the Beatles having a mass following of excited fans.

America was Ours By 1964 the Beatles were at the top in Britain. Then they went to the United States and were a massive success.

Up and Up The Beatles made their first film, A Hard Day’s Night.

Here to Stay Yesterday, written and performed by McCartney alone, was a great hit in 1965.

The King and the Queen The Beatles each received an MBE (Medal of the British Empire), amidst much controversy.

Rubber Soul The Beatles tried out new subjects for their songs, and more complex music.

‘Beatles go home!’ A concert visit to the Philippines led to the Philippine government being very angry with the Beatles.

The Sound of the Future The album Revolver allowed the Beatles to try out new ideas. George Harrison wrote more songs.

Burning Records Lennon’s statement that the Beatles were ‘more popular than Jesus’ caused a huge controversy.

The End of Touring The group decided to stop their concert tours and only work in the studio.

The Most Famous Album in the World The new album, Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band marked a radical change in pop music, and took over 700 hours in the studio to record.

Life and Death The Beatles began to study with an Indian mystic. Their manager, Brian Epstein, died.

On the Bus The Beatles went to India to study meditation. In Britain, without Epstein, they had serious problems running their business affairs.

A New Album and a New Love In 1968, Lennon divorced his wife and decided to live with the artist Yoko Ono. Other Beatles felt Ono was too present in the recording studio. They wrote and recorded the very varied songs on The White Album.

An Unhappy Film and Two Weddings Let it Be, the Beatles’ last film, showed the everyday life of the band. McCartney and Lennon both got married.

The Last Album Despite problems in the band, they recorded the album Abbey Road in July 1969, which was to be their last.

Differences of Opinion The band split up in 1970.

Life after The Beatles Each of the Beatles carried on working in solo careers.

At the Top Again In 1995 the three surviving Beatles made a single around tapes of an unreleased song which Lennon had left.

Background and themes

Liverpool The Beatles came from Liverpool, a port on the north-west coast of England. This coast looks out to America and in the 1950s when the Beatles were growing up, Liverpool was one of the first places in Europe to hear the latest sounds of Buddy Holly and Elvis Presley, which were brought in on records by ships from across the Atlantic.
Liverpool is very proud of the ‘Fab Four’ as they came to be known. Liverpool airport has been re-named John Lennon Airport and a life-sized statue of him was unveiled in the city centre in 2002 by Yoko Ono.

The Sixties: For western Europe the decade of the 1960s was known as the ‘swinging’ decade. The world was waking up from the dark years after the Second World War. The economy was starting to improve and people had money to spend. In particular, teenagers were beginning to experience a new identity. A huge gap opened up between this new generation and their parents. Teenagers wanted freedom. They wanted to find out about themselves. They wanted to be individuals and, above all, they wanted their own culture. Life became much less formal. It was also a time when teenagers had money to spend on entertainment and clothes, and their entertainment was pop music. Education became available to more people and the world was suddenly full of students, rejecting their parents way of living and inventing their own. With lyrics like ‘All you need is love’, the Beatles captured the spirit of the young age.

The relationship between the Beatles, with their very different personalities, is an important theme in this story. McCartney and Lennon wrote most of the band’s songs. They were both strong characters and their rich and creative partnership often became stormy as they matured in different ways. Their different talents could both complement and antagonise each other. They produced great works together when they got on well and great works apart when they were angry with each other. Many fans would say that the two never produced such good work apart as they did together, despite being together for less than a decade. Together they created mainstream rock music. They took ordinary words and ideas, and gave them mystery and magic.

Touring quickly became increasingly difficult and soon impossible for the Beatles. No one had done what they did before: playing with basic sound equipment in front of thousands of screaming fans.

Back in Liverpool they loved performing in the Cavern where they knew the audience. They joked with their friends, improvised and learned to play as they performed. Then the big tours started. They played a short set to a different audience every night. The songs were always the same so they got bored. And they couldn’t hear what they were playing because of the screaming. ‘The noise of the people just drowned everything,’ said Starr. And they became prisoners wherever they went. Even the police who were protecting them wanted their autographs. After only four years on the road and at the height of their success, they stopped touring. Beatlemania made their lives impossible.

Popularity today: The Beatles are still popular in the twenty-first century both with musicians and fans. You can hear their influence in the music of each new generation of pop stars, today; for example, in the music of Robbie Williams and Oasis. A survey of the top 100 albums of all time by a British music magazine in May 2000 had the Beatles’ 1966 album Revolver at number one and four other Beatles albums in the top twenty. When a compilation album of Beatles’ number one hit singles, called 1, was released in 2001, it went to number one in the charts and earned millions of pounds.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1. Discuss: What do your students know about the Beatles? Divide the class in two. Ask teams alternate questions. Give two points for each right answer.
   a. Which country did the Beatles come from?
   b. Which city did they come from?
   c. What were their names?
   d. Complete this album title – Sergeant Pepper’s …
   e. Which Beatle was shot in New York in 1980?
   f. When did the Beatles play together – 1950s, 1960s, 1970s or 1980s?
   g. Which Beatle died in 2002?
   h. Which two Beatles wrote most of the Beatles’ songs?
   i. Which Beatle started the group Wings in 1971?
   j. Which Beatle wrote Imagine?

2. Discuss: Ask students to discuss the photograph on page 1. Guide them with the following questions. Where do you think this is? What is written on the paper? Who can you see on the photo? What has happened? Who has left the flowers?

Pages 1–11

3. Correct the description: Ask your students to look at the photograph on page 6. Guide them with the following instructions. I am going to read a description of the photograph. Some of the sentences are wrong. Write the description and make it right.
   We can see the four Beatles in the photograph. They are in Italy. They don’t look relaxed. Three of them are holding guitars. They are wearing formal jackets and have long hair. Behind them you can see trees and countryside. Ringo is holding his drum sticks.
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4 Role play: Put the students into pairs. One of them is Lennon and the other is Sutcliffe. Ask them to prepare and role play a conversation between the two in Hamburg. Sutcliffe announces and explains his decision to stay in Hamburg with Astrid. Lennon gives reasons why Sutcliffe should come back with the group to Liverpool. Ask some of the pairs to play out the conversation in front of the class.

5 Solve: Type out the lyrics to the first verse of five or six famous Beatles’ songs. Cut each verse up into strips, with one line on each strip. Divide the class into five or six groups. Give each group a cut-up verse. Groups put their verse into the right order as quickly as possible. Each group can read their verse aloud to the class. Talk about what the words mean.

6 Write: Imagine you were in the Cavern in Liverpool, listening to the Beatles, before they became famous nationally. Write a letter to a friend in London telling them about the new band. Say what is different about them. Say what you like and do not like.

Pages 12–16

7 Role play: Divide your students into groups of three. Give them the following instructions. It is 1964. Two of you are Beatles (you can choose which ones). The third person is an American journalist. Many American readers do not yet know very much about the Beatles. Prepare and role play an interview. The journalist asks about the group’s origins and its future plans. The Beatles answer, and try to be funny.

8 Research and present: The Beatles were only one of the British groups to become popular in the United States in the early sixties. Journalists spoke of ‘a British invasion’. Ask your students to find out (at home) about some of the other groups. Ask them to present the groups in class, and the lyrics of their most famous songs.

Pages 17–25

9 Interview: Students work in groups of three. Two are the Beatles. The third is a television interviewer. It’s the end of 1966. The interviewer can use the information on pages 20 and 22 to ask the Beatles individual questions as well as questions about the group. Give groups time to prepare questions and answers and then act out their interviews for the rest of the class.

10 Research and present: Ask your students to work in pairs. Each pair should choose a Beatles song. At home they should research the song and its lyrics. Then each pair presents their song to the class, and explains the lyrics.

11 Role play: Divide your students into pairs. Guide them with the following instructions. It is 1966. You are going to discuss the controversy about The Beatles (page 21). One of you will criticise Lennon for what he said, which, you say, will make many people angry. The other person defends him. Prepare your arguments for a few minutes, then role play this discussion.

Pages 26–35

12 Write: The students are journalists and they are going to interview the Maharishi after the Beatles have visited him. Ask each student to write two interesting questions to ask the Maharishi. With the class, choose the ten most interesting questions and write them on the board.

13 Role play: Ask the students to work in pairs. Guide them with the following instructions. One of you is a journalist. The other is the Maharishi, teacher of Indian philosophy and meditation. Role play an interview, using the questions prepared by the class.

14 Listen: Write out the lyrics of one of the simpler Beatles songs. Omit every fifth word. Ask students to listen to the song several times, and complete the lyrics.

15 Radio: Ask your students to imagine they are radio journalists. They have just heard the news that The Beatles are going to do one more big concert together. They should prepare in pairs, then announce the news on the radio, and interview an ‘expert in popular music’ about this exciting news.

Pages 36–41

16 Write and role play: Work with the students to prepare questions. Then ask them to work in pairs. Student A is Yoko Ono. Student B is a journalist who is going to interview her about her life with Lennon.

After reading

17 Write and present: Students work in pairs or small groups. They invent a band and write biographical notes for it – name of band, names of band members, instruments, type of music, hits, and stories about their behaviour on- and off-stage. In turn, pairs/groups tell the class about their band.

18 Balloon debate: Guide the students with the following instructions. Imagine we are in a balloon. We are going down and someone must be thrown into the sea. You are all characters from the history of British popular music. Each of you must give reasons why you should stay in the balloon. Choose your character from this list or suggest another one. Prepare at home for the debate in the next class. At the end of the debate the class votes on who should be eliminated.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.