

THE 80s ARE BACK

Society and Culture (Stage 6) HSC Depth Study: Popular Culture

Introduction

The 80s exhibition is particularly relevant to the HSC Popular Culture Depth Study, featuring a wealth of material to help students develop an understanding of the nature of popular culture.

The exhibition will help students understand that popular culture is:

- associated with commercial product
- develops from a local to a national to a global level
- accessible to most consumers
- is constantly changing and evolving

Relevant outcomes

- H2** analyses relationships within and between social and cultural groups
- H3** accounts for cultural diversity and commonality within societies and cultures
- H4** evaluates continuity and change, and assesses social futures and strategies for change and the implications for societies and cultures
- H5** evaluates the influence of power, authority, gender and technology on decision-making and participation in society
- H7** applies appropriate language and concepts associated with society and culture
- H8** selects, organises and evaluates information and sources for usefulness, validity and bias

Key competencies

Students will examine and reflect on their own interaction with popular culture as they explore the interactions of an earlier generation. In doing so they

- will engage in **social and cultural research**
- will apply **content analysis methodology** to interpret the way the Powerhouse Museum has selected material and chosen to display it in the exhibition and investigate how this is further explored through the exhibition microsite.
- use **observation** as they take in their peers' reactions to 80s popular culture
- follow up this excursion by **interviewing** members of the 80s youth generation, striving to ascertain continuities and changes in popular culture. The 'Neo 80s' section of the exhibition will enhance this discussion.

Pre-visit activities

You can explore some of the focus studies and related questions outlined in these notes with your students prior to your visit by viewing as a group the exhibition slideshow, which can be found at, <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/the80sareback/index.php/education/exhibition-slideshow/>

In these notes you will find

- Exhibition map — page 2
- Focus study areas — page 3
- Focus study questions — page 6
- Unit of work — page 11

EXHIBITION FLOOR PLAN

The exhibition is divided into eleven sections:



1. ON THE SCREEN



2. VIDEO AND COMPUTER GAMES



3. MUSIC



4. SUBCULTURES



5. PARTYING



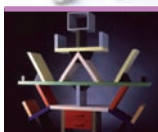
6. THE AIDS CRISIS



7. FASHION



8. FADS AND TOYS



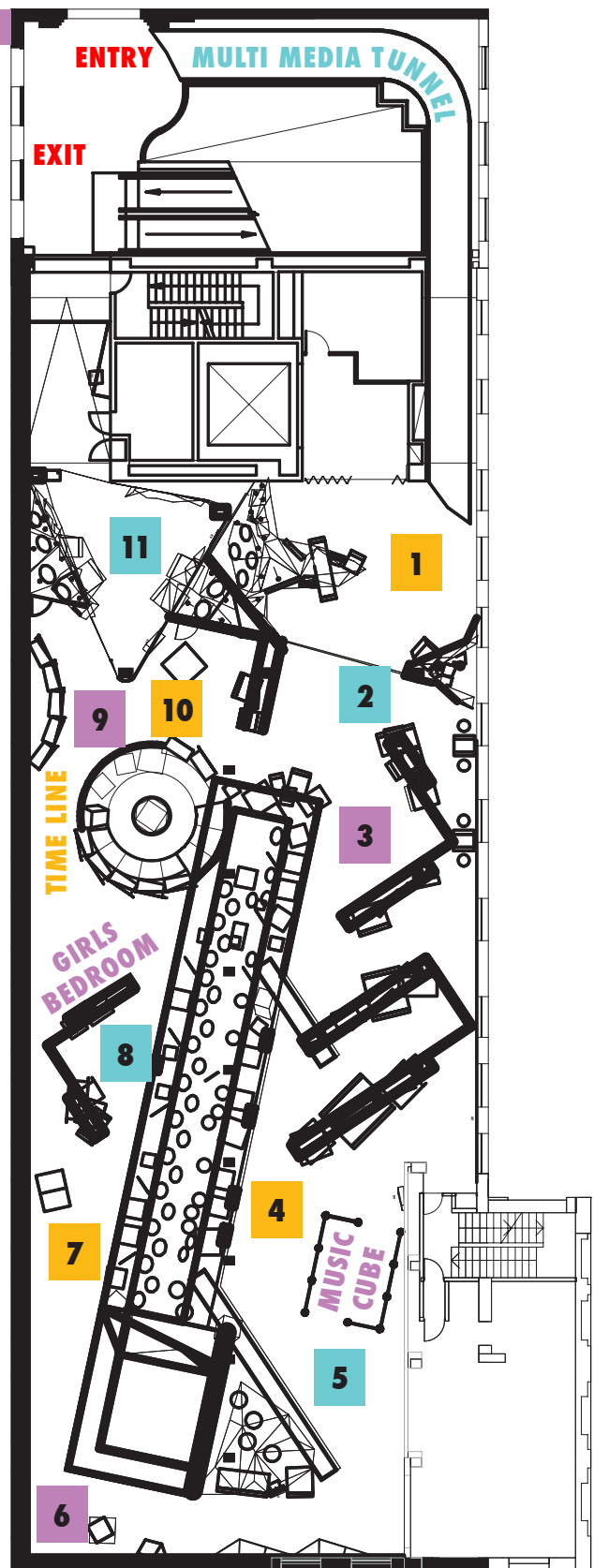
9. DESIGN



10. THE BIG EVENTS



11. THE NEO-80S



Focus study areas covered in exhibition

The following focus study areas are covered in the exhibition:

Exhibition sections/ focus study areas	Key ideas	Look for key focus study items including
On the screen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TV soaps • Films 	<p>The 80s were a coming of age for Australian cinema and television. New tax incentives encouraged investors to plough money into the industry and the result was not only a boom in production but a new confidence in the way Australia presented itself to the world. On the small screen American soaps like <i>Dallas</i> and <i>Dynasty</i> were a defining influence in 80s popular culture, while local soaps like <i>Neighbours</i> and <i>Prisoner</i> became overseas successes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clips — from a selection of Australian 80s movies • Guitar — featured in the film <i>Young Einstein</i>, played by Yahoo Serious • Posters — for Australian 80s films • Audiovisuals — clips from Australian soaps • Paraphernalia — costumes and posters etc from local and international soaps and miniseries
Video and computer games <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consoles • Arcade games • PCs • Gameboys 	<p>The 80s were the golden age of video games with innovations in graphics and concepts were constantly coming onto the market. By the middle of the decade the personal computer had moved games out of the arcade and into the home, introducing a generation of kids to cyberspace and setting the scene for the digital age. This section looks at some of the classics from these early days</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arcade games — including Space Invaders, Pac-Man, Donkey Kong • Portable games — Nintendo Game & Watch series • Computers — Commodore 64 Computer Tandy TRS-80, the first mass marketed computer and Apple Mac 128 • Consoles — Atari 2600 Console, Commodore 64 Computer
Music <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-punk/new wave • Inner city indie scene • Suburban pub rock • Synth pop and new romantic • Dance music 	<p>First there was post-punk and new wave ... then there was Madonna, Michael and MTV. The decade that began with a celebration of do-it-yourself indie styles also witnessed some of the slickest, biggest selling productions ever, as music became as much about the look as the sound. In the process a lot of Australian bands hit the big time at home and overseas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael Jackson — featuring the sequined jacket worn by MJ when he revealed his signature dance move, the moonwalk plus the glove he wore to collect Grammy awards for <i>Thriller</i> album in 1983 • 80s superstars — paraphernalia, instruments and costumes from International and Australian stars including Boy George, David Bowie, Nick Cave Men at Work, Midnight Oil and INXS (including handwritten lyrics by Michael Hutchence)

Exhibition sections/ focus study areas	Key ideas	Look for key focus study items including
Music (cont'd)	<p>By the mid 80s synth pop and electronic dance music was replacing the raw post punk sound; record companies cultivated Australian versions of these synth bands including ICEHOUSE, Pseudo Echo, The Reels, Mi-Sex and Real Life. Fans began moving away from live music in pubs and into the party and nightclub scene as electronic dance music and more sophisticated venues grew in popularity.</p> <p>In a world without the internet, poster art and fanzines flourished to spread the word. Also 2JJ and community radio played a big part in getting airtime for local indie bands.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inner city post-punk indie scene — posters and album covers from pioneer punk and post-punk bands including Radio Birdman and the Birthday Party; independent record labels including Phantom and Mushroom Records • New technologies — cassettes made music portable; followed by arrival of CDs • Suburban pub rock — Cold Chisel/Jimmy Barnes, The Church, Midnight Oil paraphernalia; posters and magazine covers • Synth and dance music — posters and album covers; new technologies used by these bands, eg Prophet 5 synthesiser used by ICEHOUSE
Fashion	<p>From the theatrical flourishes of Vivienne Westwood and Zandra Rhodes to Katharine Hamnett's slogan T-shirts; from Madonna's outer — underwear to Margaret Thatcher's bow tie blouses and power suits — the 80s saw as many fashion styles and statements as there were parties, boardrooms and protest marches where you could wear them. This section looks at a few of these fashion statements and what they tell us about the decade</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 'power suit' for men and women — upwardly mobile men and women dressing for success; tailored suits with broad shoulders the look of choice for women asserting their authority in the work place • Celebrity style — the influence of Madonna's style; Princess Diana's romantic and sloan ranger look; Hammer pants popularised by MC Hammer; Stay alive in 85' T-shirt, by Katharine Hamnett, bearing political slogans • The body beautiful — aerobics inspired leisure wear, the style driven by the obsession with the 'body beautiful' and a new emphasis on strong, fit women • Avant garde — Japanese and British designers challenging traditional ideas of fashion and glamour • Slide show — hair and fashion of the 80s

Exhibition sections/ focus study areas	Key ideas	Look for key focus study items including
Fads and toys <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Games • Barbie • Spin-offs 	<p>The 80s were the decade of conspicuous consumption and 'must have' products — for kids and adults alike. Cashed up parents were easy targets for marketing techniques that made Rubik's Cubes, Sylvanian Families and Strawberry Shortcake dolls essential items for Generation X kids. Merchandising spin-offs from television and movies expanded the 'must-have' mix. This section looks at a few of these quintessentially 80s items</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mind games — Rubik's Cube and Trivial Pursuit were international sensations selling millions • Cabbage Patch Kids — expensive and often hard to find adding to their desirability. • Barbie — reinvented in the 80s as a credit card-carrying executive and aerobics instructor • Star Wars — the huge success of the <i>Star Wars</i> films in the 80s fuelled sales of merchandise. • Teenage girl's bedroom — a typical bedroom from the 80s with fashion, film posters and accessories



Focus study questions

Society and Culture students are required to investigate popular culture in terms of its consumers, the organisations and people who control it, how it may be perceived differently, and how it may contribute to social change. Each of these aspects are evident in the *Back to the 80s* exhibition and a number of questions have been developed below for students to examine and consider while in the exhibition.

1. The creation of popular culture	Questions to consider	For example
Trace the origins of popular culture	Consider the evolution of musical and fashion styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music — post-punk independent bands growing out of the punk style of the 70s; the rise of dance music • Fashion — celebrity driven styles
Outline its development locally, nationally and globally	Consider how music, fashion and fads became international phenomena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music — the rise of local bands on the international scene, eg INXS, Men at Work • Fads & toys — Cabbage Patch doll an international phenomenon
Consider the role of mythology in the creation and perpetuation of popular culture	Consider the creation of stars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fashion — Princess Diana's fairytale romance and style • Music — superstars Michael Jackson and INXS
2. The consumption of popular culture	Questions to consider in the 80s exhibition	For example
Identify the consumers of popular culture	Consider who was buying the fashion clothing, going to see the bands and buying their products, playing games, watching the movies and the TV soaps?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fashion — men and women dressing for success; seeking the body beautiful; following celebrity style • Video & computer games — young people attracted to innovations in technologies and games

<p>Identify the processes involved in consumption and the nature of the product</p>	<p>What did consumers do to involve themselves with these forms of popular culture?</p> <p>How was this influenced by its nature? eg watching TV, going out to watch live music, buying clothes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music — rise of inner city pub music, nightclubs and dance parties • Fashion — interpreting celebrity style based on magazines and MTV
<p>Consider aspects of continuity and change in consumption</p>	<p>What changes are there in the way people consume popular culture today?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music — vinyl records compared to CDs and iPods • Video & computer games — video games but no internet • On the screen — VCRs and videos compared to DVDs and digital TV
<p>Examine the role of the media in consumption and interaction</p>	<p>How important were TV, radio, magazines and newspapers in helping young people interact with and consume popular culture in the 80s?</p> <p>What other forms of media could you add to the list today?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music — the role of the music video and MTV in promoting music stars and fashion styles, eg Michael Jackson • Fashion — influence of magazines like <i>Stiletto</i> and <i>The Face</i> in promoting particular styles • On the screen — glamour soaps like <i>Dallas</i> and <i>Dynasty</i>
<p>Consider the roles of heroes and mythology</p>	<p>Were there any stories depicting the history, origins or heroes associated with types of popular culture, eg rock music genres?</p> <p>Could any significant people featured in this exhibition be described as 'heroes'? Why?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music — Michael Jackson, the superstar phenomenon • Music — legends from the punk era, eg Radio Birdman, the Saints • Fashion — Princess Diana
<p>Identify the associated paraphernalia</p>	<p>What products, fads, fashions, toys etc were associated with each type of popular culture?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fads & toys — spin-off toys, eg <i>Star Wars</i> figurines • Music — Michael Jackson merchandise; fanzines, posters etc

The role of technology in the interactive process	Consider the impact of the introduction of the Sony walkman, personal computers, electronic games and synthesised music.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music — walkman and cassettes made music portable; new technologies used in electronic music, eg Prophet 5 synthesiser • Video & computer games — PCs and gameboys brought games into the home • On the screen — VCRs and videos gave consumers more control over what they watched on TV
Examine the influence of business, marketing and/or advertising	<p>Who was driving the products associated with the various types of popular culture eg record companies or other corporations?</p> <p>Why was the marketing and advertising effective?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music — independent record labels; the role of MTV in creating superstars • Video & computer games — shift from consoles to PCs in early 80s

3. Control of popular culture	Questions to consider in the 80s exhibition	For example
Identify the stakeholders in the control of popular culture, including: media, groups, marketers, governments, family, peers	<p>Who had a special interest in the form and direction taken by the types of popular culture depicted in the exhibition?</p> <p>For example Consumers? Their families and peers? Government agencies? Companies who produced popular culture products? Media companies reporting and analysing popular culture?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music — from post-punk and growth of independent labels to MTV and the superstar phenomenon • Fads & toys — international marketing sensations like Cabbage Patch dolls
Consider the ownership of popular culture	<p>Which of these stakeholders had the most influence in shaping and directing these popular cultures?</p> <p>In the exhibition see if you can determine whether or not consumers would have felt 'in control'?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music — DIY ethic of post-punk bands vs major record companies and MTV • Fashion — many interpretations of mainstream style; avant-garde breaking down traditional notions of glamour

<p>Examine the issue of access, including: class, age, gender, location, ethnicity, sexuality</p>	<p>Which consumers were able to access the various types of popular culture?</p> <p>Who did not have access? Why not? Consider Barbie — does gender deny access?</p> <p>What about the various genres of popular music — does ethnicity, gender, sexuality or location enable or deny access?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fashion — designer labels vs high street fashion • Video games & computers — cost limited access to some new technologies in 80s • Music — Michael Jackson broke new ground for black musicians in commercial radio; female performers like Madonna promoted images of strong women with control over career
<p>Consider the role of official and unofficial censorship</p>	<p>Were aspects of some forms of popular culture denied to consumers, eg in film, video, gaming, music performance or lyrics?</p> <p>Who were the 'censors' — government agencies, media companies, parents, consumers themselves?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the screen — <i>Prisoner</i> and Kennedy Miller miniseries <i>The Dismissal</i> and <i>Vietnam</i> confront challenging social issues from recent history vs glamour soaps like <i>Dallas</i>
<p>Relate the control of popular culture to issues of power and authority</p>	<p>To have power is to be able to influence or control others, with or without their consent. Who was exercising power in terms of the examples of popular culture in the 80s exhibition?</p> <p>To have authority is to exercise power with people's consent. Can this idea be applied to popular culture in the 80s? How?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music — power of MTV to create celebrities • Music — post-punk DIY ethic breaking down control of major record labels in early 80s



4. Different perceptions of popular culture	Questions to consider	For example
Identify and consider the acceptance, resistance to, and rejection of popular culture	Find examples of popular culture in the exhibition that would have been resisted by some people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music — youth culture rejected by older people; suburban pub rock vs inner city/ new wave music • Fashion — new romantics vs punk style; yuppie style vs alternative look
Identify tensions between producers, owners and participants	Is there any evidence or suggestion in the exhibition that the producers, controllers and consumers of popular culture might not have agreed on the nature and direction of their popular culture?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music — independent record labels vs major labels; 2JJ vs commercial radio • Subcultures — alternatives to mainstream popular culture

5. Contribution of popular culture to social change	Questions to consider	For example
Identify the positive and negative aspects of popular culture that have become a part of society	What aspects of 80s popular culture are recognisable in your experience of popular culture today? Which of these might be described as 'positive' and which 'negative'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music — success of Michael Jackson opened up bigger audiences for black musicians • Fashion — power dressing helped women gain respect and authority in work place
Identify ways in which popular culture may have contributed to social change.	Has 80s popular culture contributed to changes in the way society is structured and organised, perhaps in terms of young people and the ways they organise themselves and interact with others? Or has society remained essentially the same (social reproduction)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music — Indigenous bands, Midnight Oil etc combining politics with music; post-punk DIY ethic • Video & computer games — introduced a generation of kids to the digital age
Identify and describe the role of popular culture in their own lives and in the macro world	Compare and contrast what you have seen in the 80s exhibition with your own experience of popular culture. What aspects can be described as relating to the macro world?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The neo 80s — contemporary fashion and music

Unit of work

Popular Culture in the 80s

2 weeks

Outcomes

- H2** analyses relationships within and between social and cultural groups
- H3** accounts for cultural diversity and commonality within societies and cultures
- H4** evaluates continuity and change, and assesses social futures and strategies for change and the implications for societies and cultures
- H5** evaluates the influence of power, authority, gender and technology on decision-making and participation in society
- H7** applies appropriate language and concepts associated with society and culture
- H8** selects, organises and evaluates information and sources for usefulness, validity and bias

Syllabus link

What were the features of popular culture in the 80s?

Significance

How were my parents influenced by the popular culture of the 80s?

How does this compare with my experience today?

Higher order thinking

Who was in control of popular culture in the 80s?

Has this changed today?

How important is popular culture in the context of a wider definition of culture and its encompassing society?

Teaching and Learning Strategies

- Contextualisation: identify recognised aspects of 80s popular culture in a broader context of popular culture from the 50s to the present
- Mind map: possible popular culture focus studies evident from an overall consideration of 80s society and culture.
- Research: group or individual research on one of the identified focus studies, eg fashion, music, fads, films, TV soaps.
- Diary writing: write a diary from the perspective of a teenage girl or boy in the 80s, making reference to aspects of popular culture (use the teenage girl's bedroom in the exhibition for inspiration).
- Table: construct a table showing who would have accepted or rejected the various forms of popular culture in the 80s and suggesting reasons why.
- Brainstorm: organise and record a class brainstorm and discussion about who were the stakeholders in one 80s popular culture and who would have been in control

Resources

- *The 80s are back* exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum
- *The 80s are back* exhibition microsite <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/the80sareback/>
- Pre-visit exhibition walkthrough <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/the80sareback/index.php/education/exhibition-slideshow/>
- Subcultures audiovisuals from the exhibition <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/the80sareback/index.php/category/remembering-the-80s/subcultures/>
- Howitt, B. My Generation
- Howitt, B. Rock Through History
- <http://eightiesclub.tripod.com/>
- <http://www.80s.com/>

Synthesis

Assess the contribution of 80s popular culture to social change.



Above: part of the 'Music' section in *The 80s are back* exhibition.

Page 5: images Powerhouse Museum collection.

Page 9: fashion images by David Mist; Michael Jackson image courtesy Everett Collection/Headpress Pty Limited.


For more information on the exhibition
The 80s are back, visit the Powerhouse Museum's website www.powerhousemuseum.com/the80sareback/

For more information about education support or your booking, contact Bookings at the Powerhouse Museum:
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