

TIN PAN ALLEY

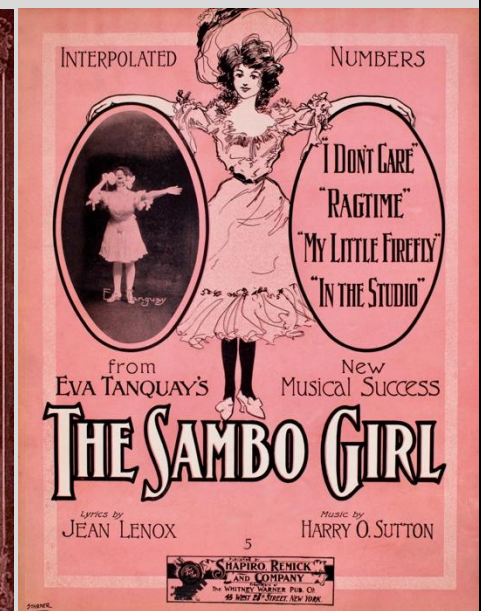
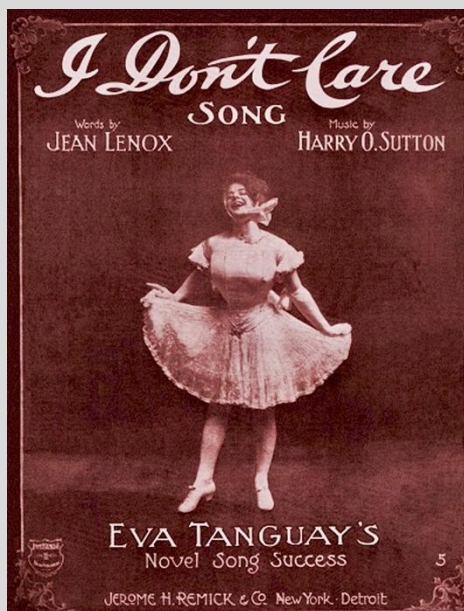
AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC PROJECT

Repertoire Series

I Don't Care

(1905)

Vocal, Core Music
High School



Music by **Harry O. Sutton**
Lyrics by **Jean Lenox**

Published by **Shapiro, Remick and Company, 45 West 28th Street, New York City**

This wraparound was developed by
The Tin Pan Alley American Popular Music Project Education Committee
aligned to New York City Public Schools'
Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Music

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The Tin Pan Alley American Music Project Repertoire Series aligns with the Strands and Benchmarks in the New York City Public Schools' *Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Music*, and explores teaching opportunities for American popular song repertoire wrapped around all five strands of learning in music:

- I. Music Making
- II. Music Literacy
- III. Making Connections
- IV. Using Cultural and Community Resources
- V. Careers and Lifelong Learning

Where appropriate, opportunities are highlighted to teach this music with CR-SE, SEL and DEI&B.

I Don't Care

Music by Harry O. Sutton, Lyrics by Jean Lenox

Published in 1905 by Shapiro, Remick and Company, 45 West 28th Street, New York City

Key Ideas/Considerations for this Song

- This is an iconic song about a woman asserting her voice in a world largely controlled by men in the early twentieth century, celebrating her individuality and dismissing of gender expectations.
- The lyrics question who is acceptable and can be included in mainstream society.
- The song incorporates melodic syncopations found in ragtime, though the song itself cannot be considered early jazz.

Enduring Understandings¹

- A song deemed to be iconic has significant cultural associations beyond the song itself.
- A song can both provoke social change and reflect social change.

Essential Questions²

1. What must happen over time to make a song a cultural icon?
2. Are songs effective catalysts to social change? Why?

STRAND I: Music Making

This selection's key characteristics ("big ideas") and technical considerations include:

- Tempo Change: "Slow" "Fast" in verse

¹ "Enduring refers to the big ideas, the important understandings, that we want students to 'get inside of' and retain after they've forgotten many of the details. . . . Enduring understandings go beyond discrete facts or skills to focus on larger concepts, principles, or processes." Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, (Alexandria VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum, 1998), 10.

² Essential Questions are genuine questions that real people seriously ask, either in their work or in their lives- not a "teacherly" question asked only in schools. They are meant to be explored, argued, and continually revisited (and reflected upon) and have various plausible answers. Often the answers these questions, raise new questions, spark or provoke thought and stimulate students to engage in sustained inquiry and extended thinking. Essential Questions lead to transferable ideas within (and sometimes across) disciplines.

- 2/4 time
- ♪ ♪ ♪ rhythm

Instructional Unit Sequence:

1. Verse
2. Chorus
3. Lyric study of multiple verses and choruses
4. Study Tanguay's career in historical context
5. Rhythmic analysis of first 8 bars of chorus mm. 21-28, identifying syncopations
6. Rhythmic analysis of second 8 bars of chorus mm. 29-36, identifying syncopations
7. Rhythmic and harmonic comparisons with Lenox and Sutton's "Ragtime" from *The Sambo Girl* (1904) and pieces by Scott Joplin, "Maple Leaf Rag" (1899), "Maple Leaf Rag - Song" (1903), possibly "The Cascades" (1904)

Suggested unit time: 7-8 lessons

Structural considerations and technical challenges

- **Key of C is a little high**
Ab or A Major is better for the female voice
- **Verses**
 - Some words are oddly set in verse 2 and in performance might be better sung or spoken out of rhythm.
 - Lyrics must be contextualized to the era in which they were written:
 - Some verses are topical to events in 1904/1905 e.g. Verse & Chorus 5 & 6 are about Alton Brooks Parker running for president against Theodore Roosevelt in 1904.
 - Verse 1's reference to "clever race descendant" needs further study in context. Verse 8 and chorus 8 contain a derogatory word, "Jap," that is unacceptable today.

STRAND II: Music Literacy

Key Music Literacy Considerations:

- Italian terms are not used in the sheet music, but they should be reviewed and perhaps assigned by the students themselves. Suggested terms are below:
- Slower
- "Acting" song: the changing tempi is dependent on the message and/or story told in the lyrics.
- Below is a list of musical vocabulary words and terminology that pertain to this selection:

Rubato, Colla Voce	Accompanist should follow the singer and match the singer's tempo in the echoing "I don't care" figure of the verse.
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Moderato or Adagietto	Slower part of verse
Allegro	Fast part of verse
Vivace	"Faster" chorus
Bravura or Larghezza	Slower, broadly sung final 8 measures

STRAND III: Making Connections

"I Don't Care" is so tied to Eva Tanguay that it is impossible to study the song without examining her career and performances. Tanguay's career and personal life embodied the philosophy of "I Don't Care" and she demonstrated savvy use of media to further propel herself and her song to greater fame. Her self-invented persona tied to her songs is an early example of the provocative popstar whose constructed image is as important as her music, modern examples being Madonna, Katy Perry and Lady Gaga.³

Music History:

- "I Don't Care" was first performed in 1904, though not copyrighted until 1905. It was introduced by Canadian-born vaudeville star Eva Tanguay in the musical, *The Sambo Girl*, which toured, beginning September 3, 1904,⁴ and opened on Broadway, October 16, 1905.
- The song was a sensation, presenting a woman with outspoken views, disregarding societal norms and refusing to be subordinated in a patriarchal society.
- Tanguay's presentation of herself on stage further challenged norms of what was a respectable image of women in this period. Appearing in her act with wild, messy hair, often wearing outlandish clothes and making suggestive poses onstage, the fame and admiration she achieved broke barriers and pushed the envelope for what was acceptable for women both on stage and in society.



Eva Tanguay, circa 1904, private collection.⁵

³ Jonathan Goldman, "Eva Tanguay's Racial And Gender Iconoclasm And The Making Of 'Personality,'" The Gotham Center For New York City History, April 15, 2021. <https://www.gothamcenter.org/blog/eva-tanguays-racial-and-gender-iconoclasm-and-the-making-of-personality>

⁴ "Eva Tanguay to Introduce 'Sambo Girl' to the Public at Wilkesbarre To-night," *The [New York] Morning Telegraph*, September 3, 1904, 10. Among the reported "twenty-eight musical numbers written specially for the production," were Lenox and Sutton's "I Don't Care" and "Ragtime," the latter listed as "A Ragtime Hit."

⁵ From the private collection of Beth Touchton. Reprinted in Andrew Erdman, *Queen of Vaudeville: The Story of Eva Tanguay* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 6.

- On stage, Tanguay created and fostered an indeterminate ethnic identity, playing off of white suspicion and even fear of "mixed race."⁶ "I Don't Care" as both a song and a cultural credo challenges and dismisses racism and societal norms from the perspective of the outsider.
- The musical, *The Sambo Girl*, is one of the first Broadway musicals to embrace ragtime as a plot point. Eva Tanguay played Carlotta Dashington, an "outspoken, enterprising American"⁷ who has traveled to Paris to buy forty dresses and teach the French about ragtime.⁸ Ragtime, a predecessor to jazz music and characterized by syncopated patterns over a 2/4 beat, was an authentic African American form of music that was both reviled and revered, like Tanguay herself, by a white American culture discovering this music for the first time at the turn of the century.
- It is noteworthy that this song was conceived by a female songwriter, Jean Lenox. In 1908, Lenox recounted how she and her husband and songwriting partner Harry O. Sutton⁹ came to write "I Don't Care" for Tanguay:



Jean Lenox, photo in *New York Star*, April 5, 1909

We were both ambitious, and between us we came to the conclusion that song writing might be made profitable if we could solve the mighty problem of getting a singer of note to place our efforts before the public. Our first opportunity came unexpectedly. I had been introduced to Miss Eva Tanguay, as a "writer," . . . With my heart thumping at my audacity I murmured "song writer," and . . . she asked me to write her something. A weak feeling came over me . . . Miss Tanguay, who seemed to regret her hasty commission, remarked "I don't care so long as it's good." That night with the words "I don't care" ringing in my ears, I sat up late—very late—and evolved my first lyric . . . Wise ones have told me that to write that lyric I must have known Miss Tanguay all her life.¹⁰

Jean Lenox also performed "I Don't Care" on the vaudeville stage,¹¹ but her career as a songwriter was far more successful. It would take the "cyclonic"¹² effect of Eva Tanguay to make the song an iconic ode to taboo breaking.

⁶ Goldman.

⁷ Erdman, 67.

⁸ "Miss Eva Tanguay in the Sambo Girl" [Typescript, transcribed by W. L. Hunsaker, 36 pages], 5. Eva Tanguay Papers, Acc.2005.100 – Box 1 Professional – Scripts, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation.

⁹ William Christopher O'Hare, and Bill Edwards, "Jean Lenox: A September 2019 Update: Part of the Pearing/Lenox Mystery Solved." <https://www.sueattalla.com/blog/jean-lenox-and-harry-o-sutton>

¹⁰ Jean Lenox, March 14, 1908, *Music Trade Review*. Edwards, Bill, "Georgina May (Campbell) (Keller) Irwin." *Ragtime Piano*. Web. 2 January 2022. <http://ragpiano.com/comps/jlenox.shtml>

¹¹ Erdman, 72.

¹² Stories and ads for her vaudeville act throughout her career regularly announced "Cyclonic Eva Tanguay." "A Cyclonic Girl," *Brooklyn Citizen*, January 13, 1908; "Things Theatrical: Eva Tanguay," *Fort Plain Standard*, April 13, 1914; "Cyclonic Eva Tanguay at Lynbrook Theatre," *The Rockaway News*, June 10, 1925; and "Cyclonic Eva Tanguay in Fanchon & Marco's 'Stars of Yesterday,'" [Advertisement], *The Evening Star*, Washington D.C., March 28, 1932, B-16.

Interdisciplinary (connection to other subject areas):

Social Studies

Jim Crow and defining of People of Color

- Jim Crow laws, a collection of state and local statutes that legalized "racial" segregation,¹³ took their name from a character in an 1828 minstrel song, "Jump Jim Crow."¹⁴ The popularity of minstrel shows across the United States also created America's first popular sheet music industry, laying the groundwork for the Tin Pan Alley era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Racist tropes and stereotyped dialects were pervasive in minstrel music and "coon" songs. The popularity of these types of songs ensured their prolific publication during the Tin Pan Alley era, 1890-1920, even written by African American songwriters.
- *The Sambo Girl* musical was created to build on the fame Eva Tanguay achieved from singing a coon song, "My Sambo."¹⁵ She was known during that time as the "Sambo Girl," which Tanguay herself described to her fans as "the offspring of a dark person and a mulatto."¹⁶ By embracing an indeterminate ethnic identity, Tanguay flirted with an explosive issue of being labeled Black herself, though there is no evidence she ever explicitly claimed African American heritage or was challenged by segregation laws when she toured the South.
- Jim Crow laws and "Black codes," devised to repress African Americans and the political gains afforded to them by the 15th Amendment during Reconstruction, expanded in the twentieth century to codify the "one drop" rule, stating that anyone with the smallest percentage of African American blood would be considered black and subject to segregation laws, regardless of their skin color. This culminated with the passing of Virginia's Racial Integrity Law in 1924, and these legal restrictions remained in place throughout many states until 1967, when the Supreme Court struck down Virginia's law prohibiting inter-racial marriage in "Loving v. Virginia" and similar one-drop laws as unconstitutional.



Thomas D. Rice dancing in blackface as "Jim Crow." Print, 1836
Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library

¹³ "Jim Crow Laws," History.com September 11, 2018. <https://www.history.com/topics/early-20th-century-us/jim-crow-laws> This summary is taken from this article, which is similar to general accounts of the history of Jim Crow.

¹⁴ Jonathan Holloway, "The History of Minstrel Shows and Jim Crow," <https://glc.yale.edu/outreach/teaching-resources/teacher-professional-development-programs/past-teacher-development-15>

¹⁵ Erdman, 55.

¹⁶ Ibid., 73. The term "Mulatto" and laws aimed to segregate anyone deemed to be of "mixed race," go back to a Virginia case, "In Re Mulatto" in 1656. Christine B. Hickman, "The Devil and the One Drop Rule: Racial Categories, African Americans, and the U.S. Census," *Michigan Law Review*, 95 (5), 1174.

SEL (Social Emotional Learning) Connections¹⁷

Self-esteem; self-awareness; resilience; social-awareness; and/or conflict-resolution skills.

Caring is a prime element of SEL. One can sense the frustration and the freedom of being able to publicly declare, "I don't care," but it can make others feel uncomfortable too.

1. What do you find funny about this song and how does humor disarm the "in your face" statement that the singer does not care?¹⁸
2. How do you express things you don't care about in a way that also acknowledges to others who might care about the same things?

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities¹⁹

"I Don't Care" may resonate with Students with Disabilities for those who identify as and assert their power as outsiders. This song can provide a stimulating jumping off point for meaningful conversations about acceptance in a society that often overlooks people with disabilities.

STRAND IV: Using Cultural and Community Resources

- Important recordings to know
Eva Tanguay, "I Don't Care," Nordskog Records 3002, recorded in 1922.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zte2sDJ0rys>
Judy Garland, "I Don't Care," MGM Records, 1949.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxxvIE-sCEc>
- Internet video clips / other media
"I Don't Care" performed by Judy Garland from *In the Good Old Summertime*, Dir. Robert Z. Leonard, (MGM, 1949). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yfKxbDG78LM>
"Judy At the Palace Medley" [Garland sings "I Don't Care" at 4:53 in a Tin Pan Alley vaudeville song tribute to Nora Bayes, Sophie Tucker, Fannie Brice and Eva Tanguay] *The Judy Garland Show*, [Episode 22,] CBS, February 23, 1964.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFAVURK9mZE>

¹⁷ Social And Emotional Learning (SEL) is defined by CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) as an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships. For more information visit: NYCPS SEL InfoHub <https://infohub.nyced.org/in-our-schools/programs/race-and-equity/social-emotional-learning> and Toolkit Resources: <https://indd.adobe.com/view/12bbe88e-696b-497b-8582-7338d3785ce4>

¹⁸ "I Don't Care" became inseparably tied to Tanguay and her stage persona for the rest of her career. In protest, Tanguay introduced a song "I Really Care After All," but her audiences still clamored for the song that made her famous. Frederick James Smith, "I Do Care! Says Eva Tanguay," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, January 27, 1915, 30. The sheet music for "I Really Care After All" is in the Eva Tanguay Papers, Accession 2005.100, Personal and Professional Papers series, 1898-1938, Box 5, Musical Scores, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation.

¹⁹ New York City Public Schools' Arts Office has resources for music teachers to provide meaningful instruction with special considerations. Please visit WeTeachNYC to view and download the *Music: Arts and Students with Disabilities Compendium*. <https://www.weteachnyc.org/resources/resource/music-and-students-with-disabilities-resource-compendium/>

- Local performances / venues / cultural institutions
 - Field trip to 28th Street, between Broadway and 6th Avenue, to view the buildings that housed the former publishing houses of Tin Pan Alley, especially 45 West 28th Street where "I Don't Care" was published by Shapiro, Remick and Company in 1905.
 - Visit to the Palace Theater, the premier venue on the Keith-Albee vaudeville circuit, where every variety performer dreamed to play if they wanted to achieve fame. Eva Tanguay headlined there from 1915-1918,²⁰ and Judy Garland brought vaudeville back to the Palace in 1951 for a 19-week stint in which she sang "I Don't Care," in her tribute program and won a special Tony award for her performance. Garland would repeat her vaudeville triumph there again in 1956 and in 1967. After a nine year, two billion dollar renovation, the Palace reopened for live Broadway programming in 2024.



**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEI&B)
Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education (CR-SE)²¹**

How can purposeful practices in CR-SE and SEL advance students' learning in the arts; guide students to a better understanding of themselves and peers; and engage them in their thinking about power, equity, and anti-oppression?

Eva Tanguay celebrated diversity by celebrating herself as being outside cultural norms: a social outcast; an indifferent and independent woman in a male-dominated world; and of an indeterminate ethnic class who probably didn't belong in the social circles in which she moved. And as far as the 'B' goes in DEI&B, Eva Tanguay would declare she didn't care if she belonged or not.

- By dismissing perceptions and conventions in "I Don't Care," Eva Tanguay shocked and fascinated audiences in 1904. As a white woman, she could get away with her scandalous dismissal of societal rules and judgements from those who made them, perhaps more easily than a woman of color.
- Her behavior and appearance on the stage also caused people to question her whiteness based on their own biases. Tanguay was aware of this and played off this questioning in her wild performance of the song.²² When she sang about the appearance of her hair and its color, ethnicity is not specifically addressed but it is implied that should people question her whiteness, she wouldn't care about that either.

²⁰ "Eva Tanguay: Topics in Chronicling America," Timeline, Library of Congress. <https://guides.loc.gov/chronicling-america-eva-tanguay>

²¹ CR-SE (Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education) Framework is outlined and available for download at <https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/crs/culturally-responsive-sustaining-education-framework.pdf>

²² "Tanguay simultaneously evoked and manipulated existing racial ideologies to elicit publicity through the lens of savage primitivism." Kathleen B. Casey, "Sex, Savagery, and the Woman Who Made Vaudeville Famous." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 36 no. 1 (2015), 98.

Similarly to Eva Tanguay's era over a century ago, today's popular culture is perhaps overly concerned with labeling and categorizing.

- Someone who does not conform, and often does not wish to conform to societal norms and expectations defies labeling.
- Thus labeled an "outsider," a unique individual may feel unwelcome or alone among certain groups of people. Asserting one's identity within a group can be difficult.

Questions for class discussion:

1. What does this song make you feel about yourself and your own identity?
2. Are there expectations or judgements you have experienced that you dismiss and why?
3. To those who seek to label you, what would you want them to know about you?
4. Are there other people in your life who embrace an "outsider" identity and how might you explain this song to them?

STRAND V: Careers and Lifelong Learning

- Career paths
 - Songwriter
 - Singer – Songwriter
 - Music Producer
 - Publicist
 - Entertainment Marketer
 - Social Media Manager

POSSIBLE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

1. Examining the rhythms in "I Don't Care" as illustrating popular music's transition to incorporate syncopations found in ragtime and early jazz. (See Instructional Unit Sequence for Strand 1 above.)
2. A comparative study of Tanguay's career as a pop icon with today's popstar counterparts in a music industry tied to persona. e.g. Lady Gaga, Katy Perry or Harry Styles.
 - i. What songs are iconic because they are tied to a popular star today?²³
 - ii. What makes these songs iconic in our culture, beyond both the song and the singer, and yet still cannot be wholly separated from a star performance?
3. Examine contemporary public opinions about race and ragtime from 1904 in primary sources²⁴ and compare the lyrics of Jean Lenox's "Ragtime" with that of "I Don't Care." In the chorus of "Ragtime," Lenox's lines include:

²³ A definitive answer in any discussion of current pop icons, however impactful, may be difficult to determine as iconic songs evolve and solidify in public consciousness over time. It may be more useful to look at songs indelibly tied to older stars with whom the students may still identify like Madonna and "Material Girl," Whitney Houston and "The Greatest Love of All" or even Judy Garland and "Over the Rainbow."

²⁴ Two historic newspaper sites may offer great primary source accounts in a study of ragtime. America's Historical Newspapers (Readex): users need an NYPL library card to use this online database <https://infoweb-newsbank->

*I don't care what the people say of me,
If they say I've no sense of dignity,
For their opinion I don't care a bit,
You see I'm the ragtime hit.*²⁵

- i. What lyrics directly challenge societal views of women in 1904?
- ii. How does Eva Tanguay's proclamation of "I Don't Care" resonate against the rise of Jim Crow laws and the codification of the "one drop" rule across many Southern states?

Consider Jean Lenox's lyrics in verse 1:

*You see I'm sort of independent, of a clever race descendant,
My star is on the ascendant, that's why I don't care.*

Reading this on the page and separated from Tanguay's stage depiction, the first line could be interpreted as upholding one race as more "clever," and thus preferred. In this era, one can reasonably assume a majority of Americans would have interpreted the preferred line of race descendants to be white.

But Tanguay's rendering of those lines physically challenged racial assumptions with her wild hair and rebellious behavior on stage, "not simply in how she moved or what she sang, but in *how* she sang . . . Tanguay presented audiences with a new ideal of racialized masculine femininity."²⁶

And Jean Lenox's references to hair color in verse 4:

You see my hair with me's a fixture, and it's [sic] color's not a mixture,

Tanguay's presentation could also slyly imply non-Caucasian hair.

4. Read Jean Lenox's account of being first introduced to Eva Tanguay. Why do you think she called her self-identifying as a "song writer" to be audacious? What does this say about women songwriters in her era?

POSSIBLE ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Students correctly identify and match syncopations found in "I Don't Care," "Ragtime" and "Maple Leaf Rag – Song"
2. Students write an essay, defending a song by a contemporary pop star as iconic and identify aspects of star persona and promotion connected to making the song a cultural phenomenon.

com.i.ezproxy.nypl.org/apps/readex/welcome?p=EANX and Old Fulton New York Post Cards, a free search engine for historic newspapers: <https://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>

²⁵ "'Ragtime' from Eva Tanquay's [sic] New Musical Success, *The Sambo Girl*," Music by Harry O. Sutton, Lyrics by Jean Lenox, Shapiro, Remick and Company, 1904. Retrieved from Lester S. Levy Sheet Music Collection at John Hopkins University. <https://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/collection/149/047>

²⁶Casey, 87.

3. Students reflect on contemporary pop music that has either contributed to or reflected social change and make comparisons to "I Don't Care," providing historical context.
4. Students make a class presentation on contemporary female composers and their place in the history of popular music with those who forged successful careers during the Tin Pan Alley era.

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