



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“Heroes and Role Models:  
John Lennon”**

**by Sophie Silverstein  
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Just what is the difference between role models and heroes? Heroes do something you admire, but you do not necessarily want to emulate them -- a role model is someone you look up to and want to be like.

John Lennon was a role model in the 1960s for both his music and politics during a politically and socially unstable era. He is my role model and hero today for several reasons-- because he was determined to be an artist and performer, as I am; because he used his fame and popularity to spread peace during the Vietnam War; and because he was true to himself and loyal to his family. He embodied many of my own values: determination, having and following dreams, friendship, and loyalty.

It has been nearly thirty years since John was tragically killed by a crazed fan, but he remains famous to this day. His legacy lives on through his music, (his songs are an inspiration to me) and through his life's work. But when he was born in Liverpool, England in 1940, he was just another middle class English boy, not the type anyone would expect to grow into a world-renowned figure.

As a young boy, John's often absent mother sent him to live with his aunt and uncle, an event that shaped his concept of family, as he later depicted in his song *Mother*, in which he sang:

*Mother, you had me but I never had you -- I wanted you but you didn't want me,*

*Father, you left me but I never left you -- I needed you but you didn't need me.*

While attending grammar School, John started a band called the Quarrymen. Then he met Paul McCartney and the Beatles were born. The band broke up in 1970, with John going solo, recording songs with his wife Yoko Ono until his death in New York at the hands of Mark David Chapman as he entered his home, the Dakota on 72nd Street.

John Lennon and the Beatles exemplify for me that success does not come overnight. His work ethic shows me that I can realize my own aspirations if I work hard enough at it. When the Beatles first started out in 1961, they performed about three hundred times, for almost nobody, in the Cavern Club in Liverpool and in Hamburg, Germany. They were not yet skilled musicians. They were totally raw. But they practiced and practiced until they knew how to play their instruments. This commitment inspires me. Learning how they cut their teeth through so much thankless work in difficult conditions made me realize how hard I have to work.

John is also hero to me because of his work for peace during a time of war. On the day he married Yoko in 1969, the newlyweds held a “bed-in for peace” in the presidential suite in the Amsterdam Hilton instead of going on a honeymoon. They stayed in bed and they refused to leave the bed until the U.S. left Vietnam. The bed-in failed to accomplish anything other than generate publicity, but John and Yoko stuck with it. Forbidden from enter the U.S., they took their bed-in to Montreal, where they recorded “Give Peace a Chance” along with many famous musicians. It became a huge hit and an anthem of the peace movement.

Along with his determination and his devotion to Yoko, even though she was a little wacky, I also admire how used his popularity and wealth to spread his ideals to a world he imagined where could live in peace. As he sings in the appropriately titled *Imagine*,

*You may say that I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one*

*I hope someday you'll join us and the world will be as one.*

Along with the bed-in and the songs “Imagine” and “Give Peace a Chance”, John also put up billboards declaring, “War is over, if you want it.” and repeated that message in “Happy Christmas (War Is Over)”. And when he was named a Member of the British Empire by the Queen of England, he returned the medal because of Britain’s involvement in Biafra, where famine was killing thousands of people trapped in the middle of a civil war, as well as for Britain’s support of the U.S. in Vietnam. He made plans to hold a huge peace festival, but these plans deteriorated, so he recorded the album “Instant Karma!” and edited hours of abandoned tapes to create the Beatles' last original release, *Let It Be*.

But John was not perfect, and that, in my mind, makes him an even better role model. Role models need not be perfect -- recognizing and avoiding their flaws make them even better models. While John did much good, he was also a drug abuser and a well-known jerk at times, constant using profanity and making many blatant generalizations.

His song “Cold Turkey” is tells about his withdrawal from heroin. This is not something I look up to at all, though I do applaud John for overcoming his addiction. If he had avoided drugs, he might have been able to accomplish even more. But even with these flaws, I admire John for his persistence in sticking to his values, despite political pressure from the Nixon administration and even with all the heat he took from Beatles fans who blamed Yoko for breaking up the band. He stuck with her to the end.

I also admire John’s belief system. His song “God” reflects some of my own beliefs. John sang that he does not believe in religion, superstition, pop culture, or government interference in people’s lives.

*I don't believe in magic, I don't believe in bible,*

*I don't believe in kings, I don't believe in Beatles,*

*I just believe in me, Yoko and me.*

I feel similarly. I do not believe in superstitions or a higher being, but I do believe in myself and my abilities and my family the same way John believed in himself and the woman he loved. John reiterated his personal belief in himself and his wife and family shortly before his death when he made a

huge comeback with his album *Double Fantasy*. In the best-known song from that album, “Starting Over”, he sang of these values:

*It's time to spread our wings and fly*

*Don't let another day go by my love*

*It'll be just like starting over*

John’s new start was cut down by one of the very things he spent so much time and energy fighting -- a gun. But his values live on. New generations can start over with him as an inspiration, as I hope I do.