

WARM UP

1 Do you listen to English and American music and artists?

## MUSIC GENRES

American and English music styles and artists have often had a great influence on each other: rock and roll, RnB, disco, punk, house and hip hop to name just a few. Britpop and grunge, however, were two styles that remained distinctly British and American.

### GRUNGE

Grunge was a genre of rock music that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Seattle, Washington, USA. It took influences from punk, heavy metal, and indie rock and had a raw sound with a lot of guitar distortion. The song lyrics were often about disenchantment with life, social alienation, and a desire for freedom.

At the beginning of the 1990s grunge bands like Soundgarden, Alice in Chains, Nirvana and Pearl Jam began to have mainstream success. Nirvana's album *Nevermind* (released September 1991), in particular the single *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, was a massive success and helped popularize grunge in the USA and internationally with a reported 30 million copies sold worldwide. Pearl Jam's album *Ten* (released August 1991) reached number two in the American Billboard chart.

Live performances by grunge bands were full of energy, relying on the band and the music rather than light shows and special effects. Grunge music also led to the fashion style of the same name, influenced by the unkempt look of performers like Kurt Cobain (singer and guitarist in Nirvana) and grunge fans who wore casual, scruffy outdoor clothing such as flannel shirts and combat boots.

### BRITPOP

In the early to mid-1990s Britpop artists, influenced by British guitar sounds of the 1960s and 70s, wrote about topics that were considered purely British and relevant to their generation. The music style with its catchy songs was considered as a reaction against the grunge music that was arriving from the States and, in fact, it did not have a huge commercial success in the USA.

Britpop bands included Suede, Pulp, Blur and Oasis but it was the latter two that really dominated the market. In 1994 Blur released their album *Parklife* which had a strong retro feel from the 70s and Oasis released *Definitely Maybe*, again with a retro feel reminiscent of John Lennon. The two bands were often seen as rivals and this was exaggerated by the media who emphasised their differences in origins and class: Oasis from the north of England, Blur from the south. This culminated in both bands releasing singles on the same day in 1994, with Blur's single *Country House* reaching number one in the charts and Oasis's *Roll With It* number two. Oasis, however, went on to have greater commercial success, particularly with the album *(What's the story) Morning Glory?* (1995) which sold 4 ½ million copies in the UK.



If you don't know these bands, find some of their songs on the Internet. Which do you prefer? Why?

ACTIVITIES

### READING COMPREHENSION

2 Read the texts and complete the table.

	country	date	musical influences	lyrics	prominent bands	albums/singles	other facts
GRUNGE	USA – Seattle						
BRITPOP							

### SPEAKING

3 Discuss these questions in pairs.

- How popular are UK and US artists in your country?
- Have UK and US music genres and artists influenced your country's music scene?
- Have any music genres from your country been exported abroad?
- Are artists from your country successful in other parts of the world?
- Do you think that listening to music in English helps you learn English? Why/Why not?