

# [Allegory of american pie by do essay](https://assignbuster.com/allegory-of-american-pie-by-do-essay/)

A Piece of the “ Pie”

Ask anyone what was the defining moment in the rock history of the 1960s was and all you will get is a one word answer: Woodstock. The three day rock festival that defined an era was only one of many music festivals of the 60s. But Woodstock has come to symbolize, “ an era of peaceful, free- loving, drug- taking hippie youth, carefree before harsher realities hit…” (Layman 40). The Woodstock festival ended a century filled with many metamorphoses of rocknroll, from the era of pop music to the rebirth of folk music to the invention of acid rock. But some cynics say that rocknroll died with the death of Buddy Holly before the 60s even began. One such person is Don McLean. The poet behind the haunting epic song about the death of danceable music, McLean wrote the ever popular song, “ American Pie” (appendix 1). The most important song in rocknroll history, “ American Pie”, is the song about the demise of rocknroll after Buddy Hollys death and the heathenism of rock that resulted. Although McLean himself wont reveal any symbolism in his songs, “ American Pie” is one of the most analyzed pieces of literature in modern society. Although not all of its secrets have been revealed, many “ scholars” of the sixties will agree that the mystery of this song is one of the reasons it has become so successful- everyone wants to know the meanings of its allegories.

Proof of “ American Pies” truth lies in the allegory of the song. Many People enjoy the song but have no idea what it means- Who is the Jester? What is the levee? When the deeper story is found, the importance of the song is unearthed. “ American Pie” is not only a song, it is an epic poem about the course of rocknroll in the sixties. The song is centered around the epics hero, Buddy Holly. Holly was a 50s rock and roller who experimented greatly with chords and beats. Many people say that if Holly hadnt died, no one would have needed the Beatles, who in their time also revolutionized rock. But in any sense Holly was a rock pioneer. He wrote his own songs and popularized the use of the two guitar, bass and drums line-up (Jordan). Holly directly influenced most of the most prominent folk and rock musicians of the 60s including Bob Dylan, the Beatles and many others. The Beatles name actually originated from Hollys band, the Crickets (Jordan).

In February of 1959 tragedy struck. Holly was on tour with a collection of performers, and he wanted to fly to the next stop instead of taking the bus. He chartered a plane and a pilot to fly him and two others to Fargo, North Dakota (Verse 1). Originally it was to be Holly, Waylon Jennings, and Tommy Allsup. But J. P. Richardson (“ The Big Bopper”) talked Jennings into giving him his seat and Allsup lost his seat to Richie Valens (“ La Bamba”) on a coin toss (Jordan). The pilot, Roger Peterson, was a visual pilot, and not certified to fly an instrument plane flight. But on the night of February 3, 1959 the plane when up during a flurry. The pilot lost control and while he believed he was steering up, the plane went straight down. When the plane crashed all four men died instantly (Jordan). The day that the plane crash henceforth became known as “ The day the music died”.

The chorus in American Pie is the main theme of the song. American Pie is the pure American art of rock and roll. The Chevy is the icon of America. The levee is the source of music and since the decline of original rock and roll, there is no water (or talent) in the levee: its dry. “ Thisll be the day that I die,” was taken from a Buddy Holly song entitled “ Thatll be the Day” and a line in the chorus read, “ Thatll be the day that I die,” (Kulawiec).

The next verse of American Pie, McLean demonstrates what happened after Hollys death. The birth of teen idols such as Frankie Avalon and Fabian arose. Although the verse seems positive, the narrator is left outside of the “ dance”. While you (The youth of America) were dancing in the gym with him (The teen idols) “…I knew that I was out of luck…”, because the love that he wanted from you was given to him (Jordan). Another line in this verse is important. “ Can you teach me how to dance real slow…” Slow dancing was important in the early days of rock and roll, but they lost popularity when acid rock and long guitar solos became popular (Kulawiec).

The third verse begins with the narrator in the present (1970). The “ moss grows fat on a rolling stone…” which could be Dylans song, “ Like a Rolling Stone,” or the band, the Rolling Stones, but either way the phrase is a negative one. The “ rolling stone” is not rolling and is stagnant, there for it is growing moss. The music is getting stale, or growing moss. Then McLean alludes that …” Thats not how it used to be…” referring back to the time of Buddy Holly (Jordan). The jester in this song is Bob Dylan. His songs are very cryptic and like a jesters riddles. The coat he borrowed from James Dean was from the cover of one of his albums where he is wearing the symbolic red windbreaker James Dean wore in Rebel Without a Cause (Kulawiec). The crown he stole is obviously from Elvis. Though Dylan had stolen the crown “…the courtroom was adjourned, no verdict was returned…” meaning that although the crown was his, there was no true king at that time. The quartet practicing in the parks…” were the Beatles and their growing fame in Europe before the British Invasion. One of the biggest plays on words is the in about “ Lenin read a book on Marx,” playing on the names of Vlademir Lenin and John Lennon. Not only do they have similarly names, but they both share the same ideals about communism (Jordan).

The fourth verse is the most important. It contains the most information on the demise of rock and roll of the song. “ Helter Skelter in a summer swelter” clumps together the British Invasion and the social unrest that the American students felt during the mid 1960s. Helter Skelter itself was a song made much later after the beginning of the British invasion, but it was just meant to show the cluster of events of the mid 60s. The social voice that came through in the folk-rock sound of Dylan, is now full of messages, many of them open, many of them hidden. The plain messages include the dangers of nuclear war, the Vietnam war, the evil capitalistic system. Associated with these social protest songs are the summer swelters: riots in LA , Detroit, and at the Democratic convention in Chicago; the Charles Manson murders (which Manson claimed were connected with the song Helter Skelter); the marches for civil rights and against the Vietnam War (Jordan).

The underlying message that McLean was trying to convey was that drugs were ruining the music. The Byrds sang a song called Eight Miles High, but they were falling fast and landed foul on the “ grass”, marijuana (Jordan), which was also the sweet perfume (Kulawiec). During the mid-60s the Beatles predominantly influenced rock music the most. Dylan is the “ jester on the sidelines in a cast,” the sidelines being the outside of the rock music scene and the cast being from a motorcycle accident he claimed to have which was keeping him out of the scene, which some say never happened (Jordan). The half time air was probably referring to the heavy drug use of the mid- 60s (half-time). The sergeants are either the Beatles Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band or the Army playing marching music because of the draft. And what was “ revealed” was that drugs, in this verse and in this corresponding era of rock and roll, was the final ruin of rock and roll. McLean has traced rock’s demise in stages: it was at its pinnacle in the Buddy Holly era, it fell to the Teen Idol era, then the social protest era, and seemingly it hit bottom in the self-destructive era of hippies and drug use (Jordan) .

The fifth verse is mainly about two things: Woodstock and The Rolling Stones. McLean is not too positive about his generation. The one place was obviously Woodstock, and his generation lost in space (high), had no time left to start again. After the peaceful festival there was a free concert given by the Rolling Stones at Altamont Raceway in California. While performing “ Sympathy for the Devil” where the devil is laughing at the terrible events that are going on, chaos broke out in the front of the arena and a young man was beaten and stabbed to death by the Hells Angels, the hired security guards for the Rolling Stones (on the advice of the Greatful Dead) (Kulawiec). Jack Flash is Mick Jagger, the lead singer of the Rolling Stones, and when he sat on a candle stick,” the candlestick was the Beatles Candlestick Park concert which was their last live concert (Jordan). So Jack finally burned out the Beatles flame to make room for their own popularity. McLean though is still just watching this from the sides, while his hands are, “…clenched in fists of rage,” McLean sees the good that the music was starting to do (Beatles) slip away again. When Satan is laughing at the flames “ climbing into the night,” could be symbolic of Jimi Hendrix burning his guitars on stage of the Monterey Pop Festival (Kulawiec).

The last verse is the sad conclusion of the epic. The speed of the music slows down and again it is about people dying. The “ Woman who sang the blues,” was Janis Joplin and when McLean asks her for some happy news and she just smiled and turned away, that meant that she was, in his mind, one of the last hopes for rock and roll, but by turning away it meant, symbolically, that she died. The sacred store is the record company. McLean is going there to ask for a contract for this song, but they say, “…the music wouldnt play,” the music wont make it because it is too folksy or perhaps too long, as it would have been since only half of the eight and a half minute song would have fit on one side of a 45, which was the measure for record sales in the 60s. The “ children” screaming are the 4 students killed at the Kent State University protest. The “ lovers” crying are the hippies lamenting the end of their era, and the “ poets” dreaming are musicians like Simon and Garfunkel and McLean himself writing new songs (Jordan). But there is no hope for rock and roll because, “…the church bells all were broken.” The three men McLean admired most, were “… The Father (Holly), Son (Valens), and the Holy Ghost (Richardson), were catching the train, which symbolized that they simply left (Kulawiec).

The effects of this song were tremendous. The song went to number one on the charts in 1972, about a year after its release. It was hard for it to get playing time on radio stations because it was so long and it wouldnt fit on one side of a 45 record. A few years after the songs release, Roberta Flack recorded the song, “ Killing Me Softly With His Song” which is a tribute to “ American Pie”. Thankfully for McLean, folk rock was only a phase of American pop music. And although folk and rock continued to blend in the 70s, like Neil Young, folk music as it was known in the early 60s became part of history rather than remaining a popular form (Layman 38). Another wave of music that arrived was “ acid rock”. Practiced by some groups like the Rolling Stones, Janis Joplin, The Greatful Dead, Jimi Hendrix, and Jefferson Airplane, this type of music would have most likely been abhorred by McLean (Gordon 379).

In Bob Dylans “ The Times they are a-Changin,” Dylan says

Come gather round people

Wherever you roam

And admit that the waters

Around you have grown

And accept it that soon

Youll be drenched to the bone.

If your time to you

Is worth savin

Then you better start swimmin

Or youll sink like a stone

For the times they are a-changin (Haskins 92)

The sixties were definitely a time of change. Socially, politically and musically, the sixties had one of the greatest impacts of the twentieth century. From gains of black equality during the civil rights movement, to the thousands of Americans fleeing to Canada to escape the draft, people were doing what they never thought possible- Like landing on the Moon. But wherever they went, the music of the decade was around them. Whether it was doo-wop, or folk or acid rock, it was there. Maybe rock and roll did die along with Buddy Holly that cold February night, but the alternatives that came in its place came plentifully. Even ska originated in the sixties. Although the Greatful Dead and the Jimi Hendrix Experience were not McLeans definition of rock and roll, it served its purpose- to entertain the masses(Gordon 380). And in no other place was that more evident than in a little town call Woodstock, where half a million people gathered to listen to the best music around and albeit, to get high. So until there is no more music at all, not just in one genre but in all the different types, I will finally agree with McLean, and Thatll be the day that I die.

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