

A Touch of Grey: Personal Reflections on Teaching the Grateful Dead to Seniors¹

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ABSTRACT

This essay reflects on several occasions in which I was a facilitator introducing the music of the Grateful Dead to groups of senior citizens. Several themes emerge: First, there is the need to separate the facilitator's feelings as a convinced Deadhead from the inclinations of older individuals who know little about the Grateful Dead. Second, an indirect approach that emphasizes lyrics and accessible songs seems to have the best impact, if the goal is to encourage individuals to want to learn more about, and listen to, the Grateful Dead's music. Third, one should let students construct the framework of the information that they themselves feel they need. Finally, it takes a lot of preparation to be able to improvise in and around the structures students develop.

Keywords: Grateful Dead, popular culture, pedagogy

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INTRODUCTION

The Grateful Dead left an impressive corpus of music when they stopped performing in 1995 after the death of lead guitarist Jerry Garcia. There is literature on the pedagogy of teaching about the Grateful Dead, and the purpose of this reflective essay is to contribute to that literature. Kay Robin Alexander's 2003 essay on "Teaching the Dead: Process, Problems, Perspectives" (*Dead Letters*) is a good example of what does exist. Many recent annual meetings of the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus, an area within the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association, have included panels and presentations focusing on pedagogical questions concerning how best to teach about the Grateful Dead: Ray (2016), Petersen (2018), Trudeau (2014; 2017) and Adams (2019)

Most of the teaching experiences about the Dead in that literature were college or secondary school attempts by faculty to use the Dead as a motif in the study of some academic subject area – English or musicology, for example – often in a credit-earning situation. What is not addressed is student audiences that exist outside the academy and how that might differ from traditional academic audiences and the challenges and insights that arise in such non-academic teaching settings.

This paper offers a set of personal reflections on an area not covered by that literature: my experience has centered on teaching about the Grateful Dead to senior citizens. With the broad legitimacy of the Grateful Dead that we are witnessing in recent years, there will likely be more such efforts. Hopefully my reflections, while anecdotal, will help in that process.

My teaching about the Grateful Dead has never been in a credit-earning situation. I have taught short courses for adults, mostly senior citizens, in "life-long" learning programs, specifically in Providence, Rhode Island, and Athens, Georgia.. Both venues were happy to have a course proposal that differed somewhat from the usual list of senior-oriented courses. There were no serious academic overseers, in other words.

My goals in teaching what I like to call "Grateful Dead 101" was to introduce – or re-introduce in some cases – my students to the Grateful Dead phenomenon, particularly the music, as opposed to focusing on biographies of the personnel, the social scene during the rise of the Grateful Dead, drug use, etc. (I discuss this in more detail below.) Seniors in my courses ranged in age from sixty-something up to the early nineties, which means they were all more or less contemporary to the Grateful Dead while the Dead were still touring. My thinking has been that this course would attract individuals who might have heard about the Dead "back in the day" and who would enjoy being reconnected to their past experiences. The main questions in designing this course centered:

- first on how to achieve this (re)connection on each student's own terms, and
- second, how to accomplish this by means other than simply playing music I love for the duration while unconsciously assuming that the music would speak for itself.

As readers will see, the specific methods I used to achieve these objectives changed over several iterations of the course. For me, it's still an ongoing learning process.

BEGINNINGS

It turns out the seniors in Grateful Dead 101 had experiences all over the board. Yet it's important to note that most of these individuals were at least young adults by the 1960s, and were alive during the entire thirty year period the Grateful Dead performed. Relatively few had actually attended a show, and most of those who had were vague about the date, if not the place. So these seniors, the ones with the most direct experience with the Dead, were not Deadheads in any sense of the word. They maybe had seen a show and then gone their separate ways. Full stop.

Other seniors ranged from those who knew a song or two, through those who had heard the music back in the day but had forgotten about it, through those who had heard of the Dead – mostly newspaper

accounts about the scene, the camping, drug arrests, and the like – and finally to those who had never heard of the Grateful Dead but came to Grateful Dead 101 simply out of curiosity. I found that these loose categories of participants in Grateful Dead 101 brought different expectations to the course. These ranged from individuals, a small minority, who were happy to talk about their concert memories, to people who wanted to request specific songs to people who knew little or nothing and were open, albeit cautiously, to whatever I could provide.

I thought about the course as one of creating opportunities. My objective was to provide enough information so that participants could, if they wished, pursue the music on their own when the course was over. This meant more than simply providing web links to Internet Archives or other such doorways into our world. And because I wanted the students to leave the course with their own expectations met, the initial pedagogical question became, in effect, where to begin. If “the band,” that is, personnel, lifestyles, the overall social scene, etc., did not turn out to be appealing, I hypothesized that maybe at least the music would provide the students with a good vehicle for more learning after the course finished.

So I planned to emphasize the music, with only brief passing glances at personnel, iconography, drug use, or the concert scene itself. I felt there would be time for any or all of those topics, and others as well, if interest warranted. If a senior, after hearing and enjoying a particular song were to ask, “Who are these guys?” I could answer with slides, anecdotes, and the rest of it. But no need to start that way. The initial emphasis would be on music. To repeat the objectives in different words, I wanted to use Grateful Dead music as the vehicle to stimulate senior citizens, to let them become motivated to look more closely at the Grateful Dead and to have some skills to use when they did that,

I had little vested interest in the outcomes; I was not worried about tenure or being re-hired – none of it. And if none of the seniors turned into Deadheads after Grateful Dead 101, so be it. I meant to give it my best shot, once I could figure out where to aim.

As I approached delivery day for Grateful Dead 101, I recalled reading that the members of the Grateful Dead felt on many concert occasions that they needed to make a strong effort to engage the audience. I felt exactly the same. The topic deserves nothing less. So even though there was nothing at stake – in terms of tenure or promotion, for example -- I did want to provide an engaging experience, to awaken the interest of seniors who had little or no prior exposure to the Dead.

How to design a course to achieve these modest goals? One can detect here the traditional academic approach we professors live within our subject areas. I went back and forth on a few course outlines, without much confidence in any of them. Eventually I was rescued by some wise colleagues in the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus who suggested I emulate the band: rehearse a lot of material and then be flexible once on stage. Improvise if appropriate. In fact, improvisation within a loose overall pragmatic approach would become my *modus operandi*.

But as with the Dead on stage, there needs to be structure within that looser approach. “Wharf Rat” may have had improvised sections throughout, but there’s a basic structure to the song. Dead shows, at least after 1971, tended to have two sets with a break, and over the years, certain songs migrated to either the first or the second set, with a few songs that could appear in either set, like the “China>Rider” combination, “Playing in the Band,” or “Uncle John’s Band.” In other words, there is ample room for flexibility, but within an overall design aimed at opening doors for the Seniors.

To put those thoughts differently, it’s all well and good to adopt, *a priori*, an improvisational approach to introducing students to the music of the Dead, but there is still a fair amount of work to be done to make this something more than simply playing a dozen songs and letting the seniors digest the music on their own. In other words, I needed to make some decisions about how to proceed through this material, while at the same time remaining flexible, very flexible, in case improvisation was called for.

I really want to stress the flexibility dimension: introducing seniors to the music of the Dead is very different from any course I taught during my career as a college professor. Very different. To put this succinctly, as a college professor, I rarely made any substantive changes in a course syllabus once the term had begun. Moreover, my college students were essentially being taught what was important, based on my professional decisions. For Grateful Dead 101, there was basically no syllabus *per se*. Instead, there was a lot of material and an approach based on flexibility.

DECISIONS

I made several decisions before starting the earliest iterations of Grateful Dead 101, and these changed over time with the success, or questionable impact, of the course. Decisions ranged from logistical – how many sessions to schedule, what was the upper limit of participants I would allow to register, for example – to content and organization. I will focus more on the latter, the meat of the course.

First of all, as mentioned above, I decided early on I would stress the music, not the personnel, not the social, cultural, or political scenes of the Sixties and Seventies. I intuited early on that my seniors would be less interested in those aspects of the scene. My objectives for the course did *not* include re-creating those kinds of experiences or scenes. Yet I'm as nostalgic as the next Deadhead, so I had to draw on my professorial professionalism in order to prevent myself from turning Grateful Dead 101 into a trip – no pun intended – down memory lane.

At the same time, parenthetically, I noticed that when I did present that kind of anecdotal information to classes, always in response to a student question or observation, those few students who had seen a show live usually got a gleam in their eye as they recalled the scene, the crowd, and the rest of it. But that was definitely a minority reaction. I therefore didn't reject this nostalgic information out of hand. It was available, as all our stories are, should a situation call for it. I mention this as an illustration of what an improvisational approach can look like.

A second early decision was less about raw material and more about my interpretation, or treatment of my students' responses. I opted for a very subjective pedagogical approach, one that assumes there is meaning behind the observations my students made. I would make no attempt to systematically collect data about what was behind their observations, but I would, on the other hand, explore them in at least a little depth. This subjective approach is the basis of q-methodology, which seeks to operationalize the subjective responses of individuals.² To put this differently, the conscious pedagogical approach did not include very much "objective truth" at all. Instead, my goal was to let seniors construct their own sense of the meaning of, and their reactions to, the music. Once that was done, or while the process was ongoing, I'd try to provide some tools, such as web links, photos, and listening highlights.

CHOOSING MUSIC

How then to choose the music? I began with a rational calculation. Those seniors in Grateful Dead 101 who had attended a show might have been open to any individual song in the Dead's repertoire, but these individuals were relatively few in my courses. And moreover, I reckoned, the fact that they attended one or two shows and didn't go back might well mean that they in fact did not enjoy every song they heard. Seniors with very little or no exposure to the band were far more typical in my classes, so I decided to craft things for those people, not the experienced few. The experienced few would likely enjoy anything I did anyhow.

One of the great characteristics of Grateful Dead music is the variety of roots and genres one hears. There is folk, country, western, blues, gospel, jazz, bluegrass, psychedelic space music, old-timey and vaudeville

² For a more formal illustration of this methodology in the context of Grateful Dead Studies, see Deetz and Trudeau (2014)

tunes, avant garde, and world music, and probably more. I decided to begin with something seniors could relate to as people who had lived through the '60s and '70s, namely folk music. Everyone knows folk music: Baez; Dylan, sort of; Peter, Paul, and Mary; and so on. Even "pop-folk," like the Kingston Trio.

So early on, after the first one or two iterations of Grateful Dead 101, I learned to start with "Ripple" or "Peggy-O" –non-threatening, more conventional songs in terms of the musical structure, as opposed to extended jamming. There were, legend has it, lots of Deadheads who got off the bus around 1970 because the Dead were spending less concert time on free-form improvisations and more time on songs with beginnings and ends. Most people who got on the bus after 1970 appreciate the jams, but also like most of the songs. Even though most of those Deadheads would likely enjoy the second set of a typical show more than the first, the fact is that the first set is the first set, the opening set.

I decided I needed to go with the first set type of music first, or I would lose my audience. The Grateful Dead are famous for their jams and the way they extended songs with elaborate improvisation. For Deadheads, this is the magic of a concert. But for newbies, perhaps particularly for seniors, the jams might not work at first. By first set music I simply mean relatively shorter songs structured with a clear beginning and ending, a manageable set of stimuli. As much as I enjoy "Caution: Do Not Stop on Tracks," I reasoned it, or other songs like it, might not be the best song to start with, in a room of seniors with little or no prior exposure to the band. Better to start with "Peggy-O" or "Ripple."

Turning back to "Peggy-O." I could relate background about the song, its British roots, "Fennario" as an alternate title and fictional place, and the Dead's appropriation of the song by having Sweet William buried in Louisiana, as opposed to Scotland. I turned up the volume on the song – I had my iPod and my Bose Dock handy or played music directly off my laptop. I put the lyrics up on the screen and sat back to enjoy the song. When it was over, I would ask for comments. This is where the feedback loop comes into play. Their questions and observations became the grist for the flexibility I mentioned above.

Comments from the participants became an important part of each class meeting. There are stories to the effect that the Dead always fed on the audience, listened to feedback, and the rest of it. I can attest that it was absolutely essential for my attempt to get seniors to appreciate the Dead's music. Among other things, there was surprise: "I thought the Grateful Dead were screaming rockers." But when the music was non-threatening, other avenues opened up. I realized how many things I was taking for granted when musically inexperienced seniors asked me questions like: "What's a jam?" "What's a cover song?" "What is 'lead bass'?"

USING POWERPOINT

I used PowerPoint slides on many occasions to show pictures of the band personnel, as well as logos and iconography. I had learned from years as a college professor that PowerPoint slides need to be succinct: Concise bullet points should appear one at a time, not all at once. Never put lengthy text segments on the screen: for no matter what one is saying, people will look at the screen and will not hear what is being said.. Use graphics, not text. All that said, I know, as most fans of rock music know, that understanding the lyrics of live rock music is difficult. So I decided early on that I would show lyrics of songs on the screen while any song was played, which meant developing several dozen slides that could be called on at any moment, depending on how we were improvising in a particular class meeting.

In other words, I may seem to have violated my own prescriptions about PowerPoint slides, first by using them and second by filling them with the text of lyrics. On the one hand, this is improvisation in action. But keep in mind that these slides, other than the lyrics, were offered in response to student questions. I did not "lecture" from a prepared set of PowerPoint slides.

ACHIEVING BALANCE

To further illustrate the pragmatic, flexible approach I used in these courses, two strands of improvisation need to be covered simultaneously at this point. On the one hand, I realized I needed to make more things more explicit before they heard a song. Reinforcing this thought was the following experience, which occurred more than once: Seniors would ask this or that question about a song I played, say “Peggy-O,” and then after some discussion would ask to hear the song again. I was happy to comply, even if it meant we would not cover all I had wanted to cover in this early session on folk music. But the fact remained that some basic information needed to be imparted before they could listen to music with appreciation for what was going on. I resisted lecturing, but had to do a little of it, sometimes with PowerPoint, sometimes not.

Second, at the same time, I faced a quandary. Seniors who heard “Peggy-O” as a folk song often wanted to hear more folk songs by the Dead. The first time I faced this, I wasn’t as prepared as I would like to have been. I could think of “Jack-A-Roe,” but not many others off the top of my head. It wasn’t easy to act as improvisationally as I had expected subconsciously. I soon learned to add “Beat It On Down the Line,” or “Candyman,” “Going Down the Road Feeling Bad,” and other “old-timey” music, which allowed for discussions of the many American roots of Grateful Dead music. I did not, however, include in this “Viola Lee Blues,” a song I love, since I wanted to stay with accessible music for at least the first few class sessions. At this point, I can almost hear Deadheads grumbling “What’s wrong with “Viola Lee Blues”? The short answer: for me, nothing. But grumblers have to do what I managed to do: separate one’s Deadhead self from the needs of the task at hand, which is to get seniors to want to listen to more Grateful Dead music.

One of the things that fascinated many of my seniors was the degree to which the Dead were surrounded by statistics. This is probably due to me providing some data tidbit or other as I responded to their questions. It is said that there are more statistics about the Grateful Dead than about anything else except baseball. For “show and tell,” I offered a hands-on look at a volume of DeadBase, that magnificent compendium of information. I showed the seniors, just to illustrate how far this can go/has gone, by noting that “Beat It On Down the Line” begins with a different number of beats, sometimes four, sometimes five, etc., which is easy enough to illustrate with the first few seconds of three or four versions of “BIODTL.” More impressive is the table in DeadBase that shows the eleven versions of the song with the most opening beats, up to the record holder at forty-five beats (9/11/1985: Oakland, CA, Kaiser Convention Center) (Scott, 1995). Seeing this, not a few seniors must have thought followers of the Dead were strange creatures. Fair enough.

Being prepared with a lot of information about the topic at hand allowed for some interesting improvisation. The trick was always to use these diversions to reinforce a major point, namely that this was interesting music, with interesting roots, and with whimsical and outstanding musicality that was fun to listen to.

LYRICS³

In my experience, as I noted earlier, one of the most frustrating aspects of the whole genre of rock and roll music is the difficulty we often faced when trying to figure out the lyrics while listening to a song. I vowed early on to show the lyrics on a screen, as mentioned above, and rarely, if ever, played a Grateful Dead song without the lyrics being visible. This led to some interesting aspects of teaching Grateful Dead 101. The first and most obvious is that I had to have a roster of lyrics at hand for a lot of songs, just in case someone wanted to go down a particular road. In these days of Internet wonders, one can find the lyrics to any song pretty quickly, but I personally don’t like searching for stuff while I’m live in a classroom. So I prepped several dozen songs, just in case.

³ Lyrics for all Grateful Dead songs are accessible via several sources, including Trist and Dodd (2005), Hunter (1990), and on the Internet at [Dead.net/song/song title](http://Dead.net/song/song%20title) and several other websites.

A second consequence of playing the songs with the lyrics showing is that I found that many of the seniors listened less intensively to the music because they were reading the screen. But it turns out that for me, at least, the real way to appreciate the performances of the Grateful Dead's music is to already know the lyrics so one can focus on the music as well as the lyrics. For the most part we did not have that luxury in Grateful Dead 101, so I learned to highlight one or more aspects of the music before playing a song. For example, I could tell them to listen to the bass playing lead, or to listen to how Garcia sings the word "love" in "Peggy-O," or to try to focus on the rhythm guitar at one point in the song, or to listen for the "Mind Left Body Jam" during the jam between "China Cat Sunflower" and "I Know You Rider." I'm not sure if the seniors were able to listen that attentively while they read the lyrics on a screen, but sometimes it worked, based on their comments. And it's relatively easy to add little hints like these to a lyrics slide, to help them become more active listeners while they read lyrics.

The third result of showing the lyrics was a pedagogical breakthrough. As was often the case with Grateful Dead performances, "Once in a while you can get shown the light, in the strangest of places if you look at it right," ("Scarlet Begonias"). Probably the best way to describe this is once again to use the analogy of a college professor: in spite of much of what I have said in these reflections up to this point, I realized I was still coming to the senior Grateful Dead course as "the expert."

The first couple of times I got "shown the light," I was surprised but chalked it up to the predispositions of the person making the comment. The comment was, in effect, that the lyrics they had seen in that day's class session were beautiful poetry. I heard this from retired English teachers and published writers, but as I say I ignored this pedagogically, for a while, until it hit me that if the way to get newcomers to appreciate the Grateful Dead was to start with music/songs, then the way to get seniors to appreciate the songs was to start with lyrics. And so by the time of what would have been the most recent iteration of Grateful Dead 101, canceled by the COVID-19 pandemic, I planned to put the lyrics on the screen and ask people to discuss what they meant to them, *before* listening to the song. (Try that yourself with "Ripple" or "Attics of My Life." The latter song, especially, has brought great emotion from many of my senior students, just as it has for me.)

GENRES AND JAMS

The different genres in Grateful Dead music weighed heavily in my approach to Grateful Dead 101. I tried to start with folk music, a genre I assumed would be familiar to the seniors enrolled in the exercise. It's difficult to imagine opening a course for seniors by playing for them "Viola Lee Blues" or "Alligator," or "Caution: Do Not Stop on Tracks." "Feedback" and psychedelic jams – such as "Dark Star" – are an acquired taste. And so instead of providing a chronological survey of essential Grateful Dead songs, I opted for basing the course on genres and started with the easiest to assimilate. Maybe with a younger audience these days, someone teaching Grateful Dead 101 might be able to start with something closer to hip-hop, for example, given the success of *Hamilton*. But for me, as mentioned earlier, it was folk music.

As far as jams, there are jams and then there are *jams*. Some jams are relatively structured and appear in segments within a song. Other jams are more free-form and might extend beyond any song. I didn't want to start Grateful Dead 101 with psychedelically inspired jams like those characteristic of the Dead in the 1960s. But as Deadheads know, improvisation is a major part of the Dead's music. I found after some iterations of Grateful Dead 101 that the way to bring the Dead's musical improvisation into the course – and thus show that jams were essential to appreciating the Dead – was to focus on jazz as a genre that seniors could relate to. My impression is that seniors are much more likely to be familiar with jazz forms than younger people are in the twenty-first century, so it seemed like a reasonable gambit.

Talking about improvisation in the Dead's music was fairly straightforward: I could point out different intros to songs, different solos most times the songs were played, different tempos for some songs, etc. It's

fairly easy, for example, to put together the first minute or so of, say, three versions of “Row Jimmy.” That song lets one riff about reggae influences and the ticky-ticky contrapuntal syncopation of its musical intro, while noting that a lot of what the band was doing was improvised on the spot after rehearsing the song off stage. And, of course, the lyrics to “Row Jimmy” offer a fascinating story of poor, working class people struggling to make it in this world. One can even explain that a juke box, back in the day, was a joint where people drank and listened to – or played – music. In other words, it’s easy to dress up the song and show the lyrics, prior to having the seniors listen to it.

With those kinds of introductory examples of musical improvisation in place, I then normally moved to longer examples. Two good songs for that purpose: “Playing in the Band,” and “Eyes of the World.” Anyone well versed in the Dead’s music would add others – “Estimated Prophet” or “Fire on the Mountain,” say – and I wouldn’t object. “Playing in the Band” usually has the one long jazz segment while “Eyes of the World” offers both varying guitar solos by Jerry Garcia but also, in the early years of its performance, a great outro that often featured Phil Lesh playing lead on the bass guitar.

Note two things here: One is that these songs are (more or less) contained songs with a structure around the improvised segments. And second, each is longer than most of my introductory students would likely tolerate early in the course. So I edited – heresy to some but necessary for pedagogical purposes here. For example, I started discussing “Playing in the Band,” with a focus on the metacantic nature of those lyrics: when Bob Weir sings “You just keep a turning while I’m playing in the band,” they sing about playing in the band while they are playing in the band (Trist and Dodd, 2005). Then I would then play the opening section of the song, having told the students to listen as the main motif of the song is carried over into the jazz segment in the middle of the song. Then I’d cut – I can hear readers groaning at this point – most of that jazz segment and pick up the song as the final verse and chorus reappeared, again showing them in advance how the motif starts to reappear in the late stage of the jazz segment of the song. I always stress that every version of “Playing” is different. If anybody challenges that, I urge them to listen to other versions: there are at least some 560 to choose from (Scott, 1995, p.182).⁴ Here’s the point: if one likes jazz, one can appreciate the Grateful Dead. If one thinks musically in jazz terms, one might well appreciate the Grateful Dead, even if the songs are longer than the folk songs we started with.

From that point on, it’s easy. We use folk music and jazz as two “metaphors” to get things started. Doing so allows us to introduce both the lyrics and the improvisational nature of the music. Each of these two facets reinforces the competence and skill of the musicians. Then it’s a question of picking songs and following similar paths, depending on the song. There are many genres to choose from, as mentioned earlier, plus country-outlaw music, maybe even Dixieland: to illustrate the Dead’s musical talent, not much can beat “Big River” from 8/13/75 (*One From the Vault*). Disco? It’s there if one must. Love ballads? Absolutely, and I refer the reader again to “Attics of My Life”. Even political songs: “Ship of Fools,” obviously, and perhaps the more aggressive “Throwing Stones.”

CONCLUSION

Several key points emerge from these reflections on teaching Grateful Dead 101 to seniors. First, to teach the Dead to inexperienced listeners, one must separate one’s Deadhead self from one’s role as a facilitator. In my career as a college professor I knew colleagues who were steeped in their chosen field of research who found it difficult to teach introductory courses. It takes a conscious decision to leave the intricacies behind, at least at the outset, in order to meet the needs of introductory students. An experienced Deadhead trying to introduce a group of people to the music of the Grateful Dead is in that exact situation. The pedagogical

⁴ Some of the earlier version of “Playing In the Band” did not include a jazz segment, but any version after 1972 will include some jazz.

objective should be to provide entry points so that interested students can develop their own skills after the course is over. The approach that worked best for me was to begin with the goal of letting students define their expectations and then provide material, and skills, to help them realize those expectations. Lead the horses to water, but also show them how to drink.

Second, one should focus on songs, which means focusing on lyrics and stories, doing this as much as possible before students listen to the song (with the lyrics visible as they listen to the music). The Dead's songs tell fascinating stories, and the band's musical talents were marvelous and worth appreciating. The objective here is to prepare students *before* they hear the song. As an instructor, it takes some preparation to think like this, but it's worth the effort. Again, to use the analogy of a college professor, we want students to be prepared, but often don't take active steps to help them learn how to prepare. I used lyrics, stories, and thoughts about musical genres to help students appreciate what they then listened to in our class meetings, or even outside of the classroom.

Third, a convinced Deadhead is likely to come to the course as the expert in the classroom, but in teaching Grateful Dead 101 to seniors, I have learned that being the expert means having a lot of material prepared while at the same time waiting for student initiatives, in the form of questions or observations, before providing any of the detailed knowledge one might bring to the course. Let the students structure the presentation of material they want, then provide the material.

Finally, these points illustrate one of the great paradoxes in teaching Grateful Dead 101. On the one hand, there should be a lot of preparation. Preparing a few dozen slides with lyrics and hints takes some effort. The great temptation is to use what's prepared, come hell or high water. But the other side of the paradox is this: being flexible and willing to improvise provide the best return in terms of what students need. I learned to prepare, including preparing to not use all that I prepared.

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