Music of the Vietnam Era

A. Listen to the 17 Vietnam era songs included in this packet (use youtube) and read along with the lyrics.

1. For each of the songs, determine the following and record your answers in a separate word document:
   - Pro-war or anti-war? What is the message of the song? What lines stand out the most?

B. Use the following chart to identify the differences between Pro-War and Anti-War themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anti-War</th>
<th>Pro-War</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>War is legalized murder, trains killers</td>
<td>US soldiers defend freedom &amp; liberty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endless US Wars: War of 1812, Indian Wars, Mexican War, Civil War, WWI, WWII</td>
<td>US wars led to the end of slavery and have increased democracy worldwide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting wars causes genocide</td>
<td>Wars are fought to end genocide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War promotes Imperialism</td>
<td>War establishes borders that prevent imperialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count the casualties of war</td>
<td>Count the casualties of pacifism (not-fighting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devastation of war: landmines, atomic bomb, Agent Orange, napalm, cluster bombs</td>
<td>Innovation of war: space-program, atomic power, medical developments, aviation, internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military-industrial complex and the role of corporate interests in war-making</td>
<td>New employment and technological innovation, efficient systems of distribution created</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other methods of resolving conflict</td>
<td>Force is only used as a last resort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War creates internal division</td>
<td>War maintains national security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War betrays American ideals</td>
<td>Wars defend American ideals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Afterward, answer the following reflection questions in a separate word document, 1 paragraph each:

1. Why do you think so much music was written about the Vietnam War?
2. Most of these songs were anti-war; do you think most people were anti-war? Why or why not?
3. What do you think about songwriters who never served in the army writing anti-war songs?
4. Do you believe these songwriters are patriotic or not? Explain your reasoning.
5. Of all the songs, which one do you think is...
   - ... the most persuasive (convincing) overall?
   - ... has the most powerful, clever, unique or memorable lines?
   - ... would be the most popular today?
   - ... your favorite overall? Why?
1) I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixing-To-Die Rag
Country Joe & The Fish - (1965)

Well, come on all of you, big strong men,
Uncle Sam needs your help again.
He's got himself in a terrible jam
Way down yonder in Vietnam
So put down your books and pick up a gun,
We're gonna have a whole lotta fun.

(Chorus)
And it's one, two, three,
What are we fighting for?
Don't ask me, I don't give a damn,
Next stop is Vietnam;
And it's five, six, seven,
Open up the pearly gates,
Well there ain't no time to wonder why,
Whoopee! we're all gonna die.

Well, come on generals, let's move fast;
Your big chance has come at last.
Now you can go out and get those reds
'Cause the only good commie
Is the one that's dead
And you know that peace can only be won
When we've blown 'em all to kingdom come.

(Chorus)

Come on Wall Street, don't be slow,
Why man, this is war au-go-go
There's plenty good money to be made
By supplying the Army with the tools of its trade,
But just hope and pray that if they drop the bomb,
They drop it on the Viet Cong.

(Chorus)

Come on mothers throughout the land,
Pack your boys off to Vietnam.
Come on fathers, and don’t hesitate
To send your sons off before it's too late.
And you can be the first ones in your block
To have your boy come home in a box.

(Chorus)
2) **Eve of Destruction**  
*Barry McGuire – (1965)*

The eastern world, it is explodin',  
Violence flarin', bullets loadin',  
You're old enough to kill but not for votin',  
You don't believe in war, but what's that gun you're totin',  
And even the Jordan river has bodies floatin',  
But you tell me over and over and over again my friend,  
Ah, you don't believe we're on the eve of destruction.

Don't you understand, what I'm trying to say?  
And can't you feel the fears I'm feeling today?  
If the button is pushed, there's no running away,  
There'll be no one to save with the world in a grave,  
Take a look around you, boy, it's bound to scare you, boy,  
And you tell me over and over and over again my friend,  
Ah, you don't believe we're on the eve of destruction.

Yeah, my blood's so mad, feels like coagulatin',  
I'm sittin'...  
Yeah, my blood's so mad, feels like coagulatin',  
I'm sittin' here, just contemplatin',  
I can't twist the truth, it knows no regulation,  
Handful of Senators don't pass legislation,  
And marches alone can't bring integration,  
When human respect is disintegratin',  
This whole crazy world is just too frustratin',  
And you tell me over and over and over again my friend,  
Ah, you don't believe we're on the eve of destruction.

Think of all the hate there is in Red China!  
Then take a look around to Selma, Alabama!  
Ah, you may leave here, for four days in space,  
But when your return, it's the same old place,  
The poundin' of the drums, the pride and disgrace,

You can bury your dead, but don't leave a trace,  
Hate your next door neighbor, but don't forget to say grace,  
And you tell me over and over and over again my friend,  
You don't believe we're on the eve of destruction.

No, no, you don't believe we're on the eve of destruction.

**Songwriters:** P. F. Sloan
3) **Fortunate Son**  
*Creedence Clearwater Revival – (1969)*

Some folks are born made to wave the flag  
Ooh, they're red, white and blue  
And when the band plays "Hail to the chief"  
Ooh, they point the cannon at you, Lord  
It ain't me, it ain't me, I ain't no senator's son, son  
It ain't me, it ain't me, I ain't no fortunate one, no

Some folks are born silver spoon in hand  
Lord, don't they help themselves, oh  
But when the taxman comes to the door  
Lord, the house looks like a rummage sale, yes  
It ain't me, it ain't me, I ain't no millionaire's son, no  
It ain't me, it ain't me, I ain't no fortunate one, no

Some folks inherit star spangled eyes  
Ooh, they send you down to war, Lord  
And when...  
Some folks inherit star spangled eyes  
Ooh, they send you down to war, Lord  
And when you ask them, "How much should we give?"  
Ooh, they only answer "More! More! More!" yoh  
It ain't me, it ain't me, I ain't no military son, son  
It ain't me, it ain't me, I ain't no fortunate one, one  
It ain't me, it ain't me, I ain't no fortunate one, no no no  
It ain't me, it ain't me, I ain't no fortunate son, no no no

Songwriters: John C Fogerty
4) **For What It’s Worth**  
**Buffalo Springfield – (1967)**

There's something happening here  
What it is ain't exactly clear  
There's a man with a gun over there  
Telling me I got to beware  

I think it's time we stop, children, what's that sound  
Everybody look what's going down  

There's battle lines being drawn  
Nobody's right if everybody's wrong  
Young people speaking their minds  
Getting so much resistance from behind  

It's time we stop, hey, what's that sound  
Everybody look what's going down  

What a field-day for the heat  
A thousand people in the street  
Singing songs and carrying signs  
Mostly say, hooray for our side  

It's time we stop, hey, what's that sound  
Everybody look what's going down  

Paranoia strikes deep  
Into your life it will creep  
It starts when you're always afraid  
You...  

Paranoia strikes deep  
Into your life it will creep  
It starts when you're always afraid  
You step out of line, the man come and take you away  

We better stop, hey, what's that sound  
Everybody look what's going down  

Songwriters: Stephen Stills
5) War
   Edwin Starr – (1970)

War, huh, yeah
What is it good for
Absolutely nothing
War, huh, yeah
What is it good for
Absolutely nothing
Say it again, why’all

Oh, war, I despise
’Cause it means destruction of innocent lives

War means tears to thousands of mothers eyes
When their sons go to fight
And lose their lives

(Chorus x2)

it ain’t nothing but a heart-breaker
(War) friend only to the undertaker
Oh, war it’s an enemy to all mankind
The point of war blows my mind
War has caused unrest
Within the younger generation
Induction then destruction
Who wants...

it ain’t nothing but a heart-breaker
(War) friend only to the undertaker
Oh, war it’s an enemy to all mankind
The point of war blows my mind
War has caused unrest
Within the younger generation
Induction then destruction

(Chorus x2)

it ain’t nothing but a heart breaker
(War) it’s got one friend that’s the undertaker
Oh, war, has shattered many a young mans dreams
Made him disabled, bitter and mean
Life is much to short and precious
To spend fighting wars these days
War can’t give life
It can only take it away

(Chrous x2)
6) Masters of War
Bob Dylan – (1963)

Come you masters of war
You that build all the guns
You that build the death planes
You that build all the bombs
You that hide behind walls
You that hide behind desks
I just want you to know
I can see through your masks

You that never done nothin’
But build to destroy
You play with my world
Like it’s your little toy
You put a gun in my hand
And you hide from my eyes
And you turn and run farther
When the fast bullets fly

Like Judas of old
You lie and deceive
A world war can be won
You want me to believe
But I see through your eyes
And I see through your brain
Like I see through the water
That runs down my drain

You fasten all the triggers
For the others to fire
Then you set back and watch
When the death count gets higher
You hide in your mansion’
As young people’s blood
Flows out of their bodies
And is buried in the mud

You’ve thrown the worst fear
That can ever be hurled
Fear to bring children
Into the world
For threatening my baby
Unborn and unnamed
You ain’t worth the blood
That runs in your veins

How much do I know
To talk out of turn
You might say that I’m young
You might say I’m unlearned
But there’s one thing I know
Though I’m younger than you
That even Jesus would never
Forgive what you do

Let me ask you one question
Is your money that good
Will it buy you forgiveness
Do you think that it could
I think you will find
When your death takes its toll
All the money you made
Will never buy back your soul

And I hope that you die
And your death’ll come soon
I will follow your casket
In the pale afternoon
And I’ll watch while you’re lowered
Down to your deathbed
And I’ll stand over your grave
’Til I’m sure that you’re dead

Pro-war or anti-war?
Overall message?
Notable lines?
7) **The Dawn of Correction**  
*The Spokesman – (1965)*

The western world has a common dedication  
To keep free people from Red domination  
And maybe you can't vote, boy, but man your battle stations  
Or there'll be no need for votin' in future generations  

So over and over again, you keep sayin' it's the end  
But I say you're wrong, we're just on the dawn of correction  

There are buttons to push in two mighty nations  
But who's crazy enough to risk annihilation?  
The buttons are there to ensure negotiation  
So don’t be afraid, boy, it’s our only salvation  

So over and over again, you keep sayin' it's the end  
But I say you're wrong, we're just on the dawn of correction  

You tell me that marches won't bring integration  
But look what it's done for the voter registration  
Be thankful our country allows demonstrations  
Instead...  

You tell me that marches won't bring integration  
But look what it's done for the voter registration  
Be thankful our country allows demonstrations  
Instead of condemnin', make some recommendations  
I don't understand the cause of your aggravation  
You mean to tell me, boy, it's not a better situation?  

So over and over again, you keep sayin' it's the end  
But I say you're wrong, we're just on the dawn of correction  

You missed all the good in your evaluation  
What about the things that deserve commendation?  
Where there once was no cure, there's vaccination  
Where there once was a desert, there's vegetation  
Self-government’s replacing colonization  
What about the Peace Corp. organization?  
Don’t forget the work of the United Nations  

So over and over again, you keep sayin' it's the end  
But I say you're wrong, we're just on the dawn of correction

**Think about:**  
This song is a reply to another famous Vietnam-era song, “Eve of Destruction.” How do these lyrics of argue against the theme of “Eve of Destruction”?
8) Vietnam Blues
   Dave Dudley – (1966)

I was out on the leave at the time just duckin' the fog
Nosin' around like a hungry dog
In that crazy place called Washington DC
I saw a crowd of people on the White House lawn
All carrying signs about VietNam
So I went over to see what was goin' on
It was a strange looking bunch
But then I never could understand some people
Oh a fellow came to me with a list in his hand
He said we're gatherin' names to send
The telegram of sympathy then he handed me a pen
I said I reckon this is goin' to kids and wives
My friends over there who're givin' their lives
He said ah ah buddy this is goin' to Ho-Chi-Min
I said Ho-Chi who
He said Ho-Chi-Min people's leader North VietNam
Oh I wasn't really sure I was hearin' him right
I though I'd better move before I got in a fight
Cause my ears were hurtin' and my ball started hit my lick
Then I thought of another telegram that I've just read
Tellin' my buddy's wife that her husband was dead
It wasn't too long till I was feelin' downright sick
Another held the sign that said we won't fight
I thought to myself boy ain't that right
To leave a lot of our soldiers die instead
I said it's a shame that every man who
Ever died up there that far off land
Was dyin' for that you wouldn't have to wake up dead
Course he looked at me like I was kinda crazy
Just another warmonger
Oh I left that place and I went downtown
And hit first bar that I'd found
To cool myself off and pacify my brain
You see I was on orders to VietNam
Little old place just north to Saigon
Had about an hour to catch myself a plane
So all I mean to say is I don't like dyin' either
But man I ain't gonna crawl

Songwriter: Krist Kristofferson
9) Ballad of the Green Berets
Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler – (1966)

Fighting soldiers from the sky
Fearless men who jump and die
Men who mean just what they say
The brave men of the Green Beret

Silver wings upon their chest
These are men, America’s best
One hundred men will test today
But only three win the Green Beret

Trained to live off nature’s land
Trained in combat hand to hand
Men who fight by night and day
Courage take from the Green Beret

Silver wings upon their chest
These are men, America’s best
One hundred men will test today
But only three win the Green Beret

Back at home a young wife waits
Her Green Beret has met his fate
He has died for those oppressed
Leaving her his last request

Put silver wings on my son’s chest
Make him one of America’s best
He’ll be a man they’ll test one day
Have him win the Green Beret

Think about:
A US serviceman who served as a medic in Vietnam performed and helped write this song. How might the performer’s frame of reference affect the message of the song? Does this frame of reference make the song’s message more or less believable?
10) Goodnight Saigon
Billy Joel – (1982)

We met as soulmates
On Parris Inland
We left as inmates
From an asylum
And we were sharp
As sharp as knives
And we were so gung
ho to lay down our lives

We came in spastic
Like tameless horses
We left in plastic
As numbered corpses
And we learned fast
To travel light
Our arms were heavy
but our bellies were tight

We had no homefront
We had no soft soap
They sent us playboy
They gave us bob hope
We dug in deep
And shot on sight
And prayed to Jesus Christ
with all of our might

We had no cameras
To shoot the landscape
We passed the hash pipe
And played our Doors tapes
And it was dark
So dark at night
And we held onto each other
Like brother to brother
We promised our mothers we’d write

(Chorus)
Remember Charlie
Remember Baker
They left their childhood
On every acre
And who was wrong
And who was right
It didn’t matter
in the thick of the fight

We, held the day
In the palm of our hands
They, ruled the night
And the night, seemed to last
as long as six weeks
On Parris Island
We held the coastline
They held the highland
And they were sharp
As sharp as knives
They heard the hum of the mortars
They counted the rotors
And waited for us to arrive

Pro-war or anti-war?
Overall message?
Notable lines?

Think about:
Billy Joel did not serve in Vietnam. Based on what you know about the Vietnam War as well as the other songs, do you think he depicts what the soldier’s experience in Vietnam was like?
11) Universal Soldier  
Buffy Sainte-Marie – (1964)

He's five-foot-two and he's six-feet-four  
He fights with missiles and with spears  
He's all of thirty-one and he's only seventeen  
He's been a soldier for a thousand years

He's a catholic, a Hindu, an Atheist, a Jane  
A Buddhist and a Baptist and Jew  
And he knows he shouldn't kill  
And he knows he always will kill  
You'll for me my friend and me for you

And he's fighting for Canada,  
He's fighting for France  
He's fighting for the USA  
And he's fighting for the Russians  
And he's fighting for Japan  
And he thinks we'll put an end to war this way

And he's fighting for democracy,  
He's fighting for the reds  
He says it's for the peace of all  
He's the one who must decide  
Who's to live and who's to die  
And he never sees the writing on the wall

But without him how would Hitler have  
condemned him at Dachau  
Without him Caesar would've stood alone  
He's the one who gives his body  
As the weapon of the war  
And without him, all this killing can't go on

He's the universal soldier  
And he really is to blame  
His orders come from far away no more  
They come from him and you and me  
And brothers, can't you see  
This is not the way we put an end to war?

Think about:
Sainte-Marie said of the song: "It's about individual responsibility for war and how the old feudal thinking kills us all."

Sainte-Marie has said she approached writing the song from the perspective of a student writing an essay for a professor who did not see eye-to-eye with her perspective, hoping to present him with a different point of view.
12) I Ain't Marching Anymore  
Phil Ochs – (1965)

Oh I marched to the battle of New Orleans  
At the end of the early British war  
The young land started growing  
The young blood started flowing  
But I ain't marchin' anymore  
For I've killed my share of Indians  
In a thousand different fights  
I was there at the Little Big Horn  
I heard many men lying  
I saw many more dying  
But I ain't marchin' anymore  

It's always the old to lead us to the war  
It's always the young to fall  
Now look at all we've won  
With the saber and the gun  
Tell me is it worth it all  
For I stole California from the Mexican land  
Fought in the bloody Civil War  
Yes I even killed my brother  
And so many others  

And I ain't marchin' anymore  
For I marched to the battles of the German trench  
In a war that was bound to end all wars  
Oh I must have killed a million men  
And now they want me back again  
But I ain't marchin' anymore  

For I flew the final mission in the Japanese sky  
Set off the mighty mushroom roar  
When I saw the cities burning  
I knew that I was learning  
That I ain't marchin' anymore  

Now the labor leader's screamin'  
When they close the missile plants  
United Fruit screams at the Cuban shore  
Call it, "Peace" or call it, "Treason"  
Call it, "Love" or call it, "Reason"  
But I ain't marchin' any more

13) Draft Dodger Rag  
Phil Ochs – (1965)

Oh, I'm just a typical American boy  
From a typical American town  
I believe in God and Senator Dodd  
And a-keepin' old Castro down  
And when it came my time to serve  
I knew "better dead than red"  
But when I got to my old draft board, buddy,  
This is what I said:  

Chorus  
Sarge, I'm only eighteen,  
I got a ruptured spleen  
And I always carry a purse  
I got eyes like a bat, and my feet are flat,  
And my asthma's getting worse  
Yes, think of my career, my sweetheart dear,  
And my poor old invalid aunt  
Besides, I ain't no fool, I'm a-goin' to school  
And I'm working in a defense plant  

I've got a dislocated disc and a wracked up back  
I'm allergic to flowers and bugs  
And when the bombshell hits, I get epileptic fits  
And I'm addicted to a thousand drugs  
I got the weakness woes, I can't touch my toes  
I can hardly reach my knees  
And if the enemy came close to me  
I'd probably start to sneeze  

(Chorus)  
Ooh, I hate Chou En Lai,  
And I hope he dies,  
One thing you gotta see  
That someone's gotta go over there  
And that someone isn't me  
So I wish you well, Sarge, give 'em Hell!  
Kill me a thousand or so  
And if you ever get a war  
Without blood and gore  
I'll be the first to go

Pro-war or anti-war? Overall message? Notable lines?
14) We Gotta Get Out of This Place  
**The Animals - (1965)**

In this dirty old part of the city  
Where the sun refused to shine  
People tell me there ain't no use in tryin'

Now my girl you’re so young and pretty  
And one thing I know is true  
You'll be dead before your time is due, I know

Watch my daddy in bed a-dyin'  
Watched his hair been turnin' grey  
He's been workin' and slavin' his life away  
Oh yes I know it

(Yeah!) He's been workin' so hard  
(Yeah!) I've been workin' too, baby  
(Yeah!) Every night and day  
(Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah!)

We gotta get out of this place  
If it's the last thing we ever do  
We gotta get out of this place  
'cause girl, there's a better life for me and you

Now my girl you're so young and pretty  
And one thing I know is true, yeah  
You'll be dead before your time is due, I know it

Watch my daddy in bed a-dyin'  
Watched his hair been turnin' grey, yeah  
He's been workin' and slavin' his life away  
I know he's been workin' so hard

(Yeah!) I've been workin' too, baby  
(Yeah!) Every day baby  
(Yeah!) Whoa!  
(Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah!)

We gotta get out of this place  
If it's the last thing we ever do  
We gotta get out of this place  
Girl, there's a better life for me and you  
Somewhere baby, somehow I know it

Songwriters: Barry Mann / Cynthia Weil

Think about:  
This became the de facto anthem of many Vietnam GI's during the war. Fun fact: it was also hugely popular during High School proms of the era as well.
15) Okie from Muskogee  
Merle Haggard – (1970)

We don't smoke marijuana in Muskogee  
We don't take our trips on LSD  
We don't burn our draft cards down on Main Street  
We like livin' right, and bein' free  

We don't make a party out of lovin'  
We like holdin' hands and pitchin' woo  
We don't let our hair grow long and shaggy  
Like the hippies out in San Francisco do  

I’m proud to be an Okie from Muskogee,  
A place where even squares can have a ball  
We still wave Old Glory down at the courthouse,  
And white lightnin’s still the biggest thrill of all  

Leather boots are still in style for manly footwear  
Beads and Roman sandals won’t be seen  
Football's still the roughest thing on campus  
And the kids here still respect the college dean  

And I’m proud to be an Okie from Muskogee  
A place where even squares can have a ball.  
We still wave Old Glory down at the courthouse  
And white lightnin’s still the biggest thrill of all  
And white lightnin’s still the biggest thrill of all  
In Muskogee, Oklahoma, USA.

16) Hello Vietnam  
Johnnie Wright – (1968)

Kiss, me goodbye and write me while I'm gone  
Good, bye, my sweetheart, Hello Vietnam.  

America has heard the bugle, call  
And you know it involves us, one an all  
I don't suppose that war will ever end  
There's fighting that will break us up a gain.  

Good bye, my darling, Hello Vietnam  
A hill to take, a battle to be won  
Kiss me goodbye and write me while I'm gone  
Good bye, my sweetheart, Hello Vietnam.  

A ship is waiting for us at the dock  
America has trouble to be stopped  
We must stop Communism in that land  
Or freedom will start slipping through our hands.  

I hope and pray someday the world will learn  
That fires we don't put out, will bigger burn  
We must save freedom now, at any cost  
Or someday, our own freedom will be lost.  

Kiss me goodbye and write me while I'm gone  
Good bye, my sweetheart, Hello Viet nam.
17) My Son  
Jan Howard – (1968)  

My son my son I pray that you’ll come home to me my son my son  
It seems only yesterday the most important thing on your mind  
Was whether you’d make the baseball team or get the new school jacket  
Like all the other kids had  

And I remember how your eyes lighted up when you got your first rod and reel  
For that big fishing trip just you and your dad  
And I remember wiping the tears away when you hurt yourself on your sled  
In those days it seems the house was filled with laughter and joy  
Filled with your friends and they were all such good boys  
And then came the day that you walked down the aisle  
To receive that all important diploma  

I was so proud but I couldn’t believe that tall young man was my son my wonderful son  
And then I remember the little girl that was always around kinda tagging after you  
She’s not so little anymore but she’s still around who knows maybe someday  
Then you received the call that I guess we knew would come someday  

But it came so quick and now you’re so very far away  
In the land that until a short time ago I didn’t even know was there  
I know the time will pass you’ll be home again  
But until that time my darling take care take special care  
My son my son I pray that you’ll come home to me my son my son  

("My Son" was originally a letter Howard wrote to her son when he was a soldier during the Vietnam War. Three weeks after the single was issued, her son was killed in battle.)