



SONGWRITING 101:

An Introduction to Words & Music

Grades 7-12

INTRODUCTION

This two-lesson unit is designed to prepare students to write lyrics. Songwriting 101 teaches students the basics of songwriting, including song structure and vocabulary, and establishes songwriting as a creative outlet to explore and process emotions, capture experiences, share stories, and express individuality. The program can be used to strengthen skills learned in traditional language arts units, as well as provide an interactive and collaborative writing experience with a professional songwriter.

Completing these lessons ensures that the Songwriting 101 workshop will be a productive co-writing experience. Please plan to teach this unit at least three weeks prior to your scheduled workshop to allow time to write and submit the outline.

Lesson 1 encourages students to think about what they already know about songwriting, while teaching the parts of a song. In Lesson 2, students brainstorm as a class and choose a specific song theme for the outline. Together, they will create a complete song outline that will be submitted to the songwriter prior to the workshop.

The Digital Resource Portal provides support materials for Songwriting 101, including song lyrics for classroom projection, music videos, songwriter biographies, and more. In addition to Songwriting 101 materials, the Portal includes lesson guides, tool kits, and other primary sources that bring the Museum into your classroom. Register for free access at www.CountryMusicHallofFame.org/Portal.

Songwriting 101 is a precursor to Words & Music, the Museum's flagship education program. A rigorous step-by-step lyric writing experience, Words & Music supports standards in English Language Arts and music, and culminates with an interactive performance by a professional songwriter who presents student lyrics as finished songs. For more information on Words & Music, visit CountryMusicHallofFame.org/WordsandMusic.



Johnny Cash



Dolly Parton



Chuck Berry

STANDARDS

COMMON CORE CURRICULUM STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5

Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words¹.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MUSIC
EDUCATION STANDARDS**Standard 6**

Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.

Standard 7

Evaluating music and music performances.

Standard 8

Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.

NATIONAL CORE ARTS AND ANCHOR STANDARDS

Anchor Standard #1

Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard #2

Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard #3

Refine and complete artistic work.

Anchor Standard #7

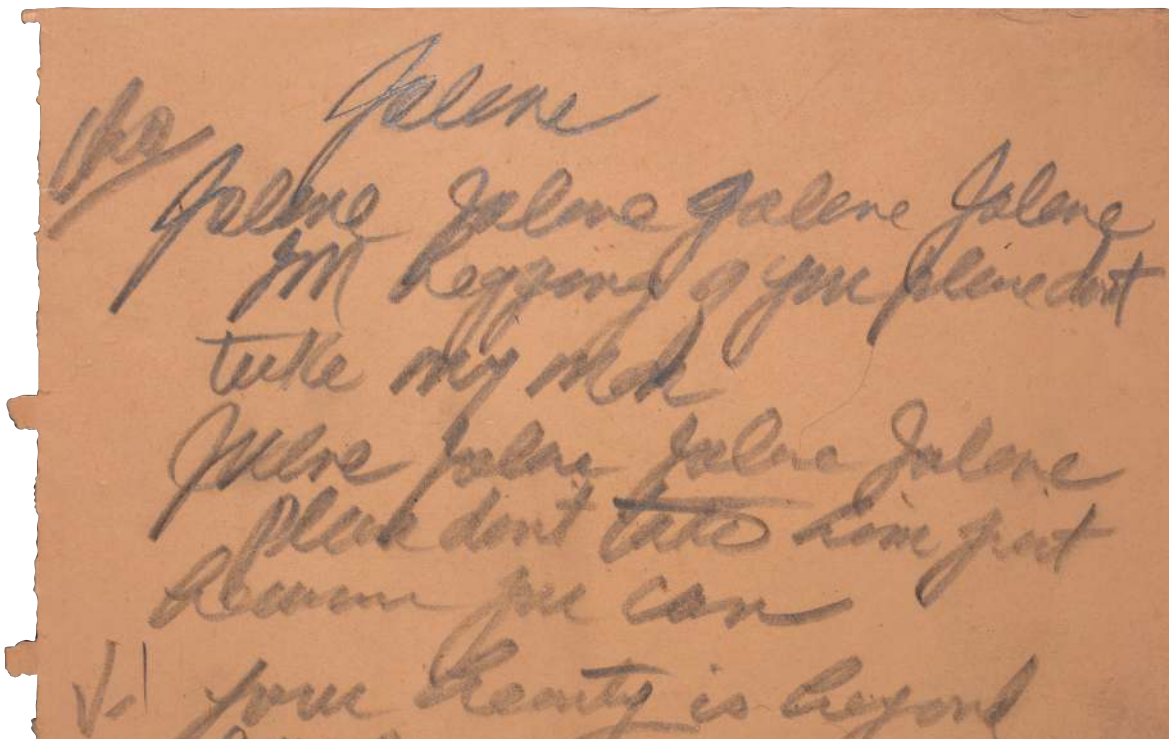
Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard #8

Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Anchor Standard #10

Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experience to make art.



Dolly Parton's original "Jolene" manuscripts, 1973 - 1974.

Lesson 1: Introduction to Songwriting

OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn and review the parts of a song.
- Students will analyze song lyrics and demonstrate their understanding of parts of a song and rhyming words.
- Students will define common human experiences and journal about examples.

VOCABULARY

Title	Verse
Theme	Chorus
Message	Bridge
Hook	Common Human Experience

PREPARATION

Select a song to use for the lesson based on your students' interests and grade level. Suggested songs for this unit include the following:

- "Check Yes or No," written by Danny Wells and Dana Hunt, recorded by George Strait
- "Don't Laugh at Me," written by Steve Seskin and Allen Shamblin, recorded by Mark Wills
- "White Horse," written by Liz Rose and Taylor Swift, recorded by Taylor Swift
- "The House That Built Me," written by Tom Douglas and Allen Shamblin, recorded by Miranda Lambert

LESSON

40-45 MINUTES

1. Lead a class discussion about songs.

Ask students to name some of their favorite songs. Ask them what they like about the songs. Notate the discussion as it occurs. Encourage the conversation until the list of songs represents a range of musical genres.

2. Review the parts of a song.

Ask students to list as many parts of a song as they can and write them down. See if your students can define the parts of a song correctly.

- The **title** is the name of the song.
- The **theme** is the main subject of the song.
- The **message** is what the song says about the theme.
- The **hook** is the part of the song that catches or "hooks" a listener's attention and makes the song easy to remember. The title and hook are often the same, and the hook is usually repeated throughout the song.
- The **verse** uses details to support the title, theme, and hook. Songs typically include multiple verses, which usually incorporate important information about the song's subject, such as who, what, where, when, why, and how.
- The **chorus** conveys the main subject of the song. The chorus is usually simpler than the verses, and it often contains the hook. The chorus summarizes the main subject while the verses provide the supporting details.
- The **bridge** introduces a twist that gives an unexpected perspective on the theme. It usually occurs toward the song's end, and it has a totally different melody from the verses and chorus. Not all songs have a bridge.

3. Share song lyrics with students.

Students should read the lyrics, and then follow along as a recording of the song is played. Have students circle the chorus and underline the hook and title. Discuss correct answers after everyone has completed the exercise.

4. Ask students to draw a box around rhyming words.

Once students have finished, work as a class to identify the song's rhyme scheme (e.g., ABAB, AABB, etc.). Inform students that the chorus, verses, and bridge (if there is one), may have different rhyme schemes.

5. Discuss theme and message further.

Reiterate that **theme** is what the song is about, and the **message** is what the song says about the theme. For example, the theme of “White Horse” is real world relationships versus fairytales. The message is that the singer can be independent and no longer wait for someone to show up and save the day. Finally, go back to the songs from the previous steps, identify the theme and message.

Student answers should include, but are not limited to the following:

The theme of “Check Yes or No” is love and long-lasting relationships. The message is that childhood sweethearts can stay in love.

The theme of “Don’t Laugh at Me” is empathy. The message is that we should not judge others because they are different from us.

The theme of “The House That Built Me” is home and growing up. The message is about remembering where you came from.

6. Discuss common human experiences.

Brainstorm a few examples of the most popular songs that are about **common human experiences**, which are actions, thoughts, or feelings that many people can relate to. Brainstorm a few examples as a class to make sure all the students understand the concept.

7. Homework or journal time

Have students brainstorm their own list of common human experiences and potential song topics.

- List 3 common human experiences you might share as a class.
- List 3 things you think about a lot.
- Write down a funny memory that comes to your mind.
- Write down a happy memory that comes to your mind.
- Write down a sad memory that comes to your mind.

TIP:

The goal is to come up with things you think other people are also experiencing. Try not to “overthink” your list. Just go with what first comes to your mind.



Lesson 2: Song Topic and Outline

OBJECTIVES

- Students will review theme and message and share their common human experiences with the class.
- Students will analyze their common human experiences as a class and use them to brainstorm a song topic
- The class will create a song outline using their chosen topic.

VOCABULARY

Outline
Theme (review)
Message (review)
Common Human Experience (review)

PREPARATION

This is a group-write, so you will need a large space, white board, chalkboard, projector, etc. to write student ideas and document your class brainstorm.



Custom-painted Royal typewriter used by Cindy Walker to compose her hit songs.

LESSON

40-45 MINUTES

1. Review the parts of a song.

Review what students learned in lesson one, focusing on the definitions of theme, message, and common human experiences.

2. Have students share from their homework or journal.

Record their topics on the board and notate repeating or similar themes. You can do this by color-coding related words or by putting common topics in an organized chart.

BRAINSTORM EXAMPLE:

LOSS

Family pet dying
Losing a grandparent
Breaking up with a girl/boyfriend

SCHOOL

Homework
Recess
The cafeteria

SUMMERTIME

Swimming
Family vacations
Summer camp
Hot days
Eating watermelon and hotdogs

3. Pick a song theme.

With the students' ideas on the board, point out the theme that has the longest list of related topics and make it clear to the students which common human experiences are the most prevalent in their class. Use this grouping to sum up one main idea for your final song theme and erase the others.

NOTE:

In the example above, summertime would be your main idea and song theme.

4. Brainstorm details, stories, or characteristics of the chosen theme.

Erase the other topics from the board, leaving just the chosen theme. Ask the class to brainstorm more descriptive words, activities, feelings, or ideas related to this subject, and add them to the list. You cannot over-brainstorm. Stop when there is a substantial list of ideas on the board.

5. Make a song outline.

Explain that a song outline is a rough sketch of what the lyrics will communicate. Outlining a song is a useful way to help writers organize their thoughts. Using the main idea and details the students came up with, make an outline of your song together as a class.

SONG OUTLINE EXAMPLE:

Verse 1 Topic: Things I like about summertime.

Verse 2 Topic: Places I go in the summertime.

Chorus Main Subject: How much I love summertime.

Verse 3 Topic: Things I do during the summer.

Bridge Topic (optional): How much longer until summertime?

NOTE:

Remind the students that their co-writer may not follow this outline perfectly, but it will be a good start for song ideas.

Turn in your outline to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum and include school name, grade level, and teacher name. The song outline is due at least two weeks before the scheduled songwriting workshop.

It can be submitted via

Email:

Make sure the outline is in the format above and attach to an email.
lyrics@countrymusichalloffame.org

Mail:

Words & Music
 Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum
 222 Fifth Avenue South
 Nashville, TN 37203



SCHOOL PROGRAM FUNDERS



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Lyric Sheet

Check Yes or No

Dana Oglesby / Danny Wells

It started way back in third grade
I used to sit beside Emmylou Hayes
A pink dress, a matching bow and her ponytail
She kissed me on the school bus, but told me not to tell

Next day I chased her 'round the playground
Across the monkey bars, to the merry-go-round
And Emmylou got caught passing me a note
Before the teacher took it, I read what she wrote,

“Do you love me, do you wanna be my friend?
And if you do, well then don't be afraid to take me by the hand
If you want to, I think this is how love goes
Check yes or no.”

Now we're grown up and she's my wife
Still like two kids with stars in our eyes
Ain't much changed, I still chase Emmylou
Up and down the hall, around the bed in our room

Last night I took her out in a white limousine
Twenty years together, she still gets to me
Can't believe it's been that long ago
When we got started with just a little note,

“Do you love me, do you wanna be my friend?
And if you do, well then don't be afraid to take me by the hand
If you want to, I think this is how love goes
Check yes or no.”

“Do you love me, do you wanna be my friend?
And if you do, well then don't be afraid to take me by the hand
If you want to, I think this is how love goes
Check yes or no.”

Check yes or no
Check yes or no
Check yes or no
Check yes or no

Lyric Sheet

Don't Laugh at Me

Allen Shamblin / Steve Seskin

I'm a little boy with glasses
The one they call the geek
A little girl who never smiles
'Cause I've got braces on my teeth
And I know how it feels
To cry myself to sleep.

I'm that kid on every playground
Who's always chosen last
A single teenage mother
Tryin' to overcome my past
You don't have to be my friend
Is it too much to ask?

Don't laugh at me, don't call me names
Don't get your pleasure from my pain
In God's eyes we're all the same
Someday we'll all have perfect wings
Don't laugh at me.

I'm the cripple on the corner
You pass me on the street
I wouldn't be out here beggin'
If I had enough to eat
And don't think I don't notice
That our eyes never meet.

I lost my wife and little boy
Someone crossed that yellow line
The day we laid 'em in the ground
Is the day I lost my mind
Right now I'm down to holdin'
This little cardboard sign

Don't laugh at me, don't call me names
Don't get your pleasure from my pain
In God's eyes we're all the same
Someday we'll all have perfect wings
Don't laugh at me.

I'm fat, I'm thin, I'm short, I'm tall
I'm deaf, I'm blind, hey aren't we all?

Don't laugh at me, don't call me names
Don't get your pleasure from my pain
In God's eyes we're all the same
Someday we'll all have perfect wings
Don't laugh at me.

Lyric Sheet

White Horse

Liz Rose / Taylor Swift

Say you're sorry, that face of an angel
Comes out just when you need it to
As I paced back and forth all this time
Cause I honestly believed in you
Holding on the days drag on
Stupid girl, I should have known (I should have known)

I'm not a princess, this ain't a fairy tale
I'm not the one you'll sweep off her feet, lead her up the stairwell
This ain't Hollywood, this is a small town
I was a dreamer before you went and let me down
Now it's too late for you and your white horse to come around

Maybe I was naïve, got lost in your eyes
And never really had a chance
My mistake, I didn't know to be in love
You had to fight to have the upper hand
I had so many dreams about you and me
Happy endings now I know

I'm not a princess, this ain't a fairy tale
I'm not the one you'll sweep off her feet, lead her up the stairwell
This ain't Hollywood, this is a small town
I was a dreamer before you went and let me down
Now it's too late for you and your white horse to come around

And there you are on your knees
Begging for forgiveness, begging for me
Just like I always wanted but I'm so sorry

'Cause I'm not your princess, this ain't a fairytale
I'm gonna find someone someday who might actually treat me well
This is a big world, that was a small town
There in my rear view mirror disappearing now
And it's too late for you and your white horse
Now it's too late for you and your white horse to catch me now

Oh, whoa, whoa, whoa
Try and catch me now
Oh, it's too late to catch me now

Lyric Sheet

The House That Built Me

Tom Douglas / Allen Shamblin

I know they say you can't go home again
I just had to come back one last time
Ma'am I know you don't know me from Adam
But these handprints on the front steps are mine
Up those stairs in that little back bedroom
Is where I did my homework and I learned to play guitar
And I bet you didn't know under that live oak
My favorite dog is buried in the yard

I thought if I could touch this place or feel it
This brokenness inside me might start healing
Out here it's like I'm someone else
I thought that maybe I could find myself
If I could just come in I swear I'll leave
Won't take nothing but a memory
From the house that built me

Mama cut out pictures of houses for years
From Better Homes and Garden magazine
Plans were drawn and concrete poured
Nail by nail and board by board
Daddy gave life to Mama's dream

I thought if I could touch this place or feel it
This brokenness inside me might start healing
Out here it's like I'm someone else
I thought that maybe I could find myself
If I could just come in I swear I'll leave
Won't take nothing but a memory
From the house that built me

You leave home, you move on, and you do the best you can
I got lost in this old world and forgot who I am

I thought if I could touch this place or feel it
This brokenness inside me might start healing
Out here it's like I'm someone else
I thought that maybe I could find myself
If I could walk around I swear I'll leave
Won't take nothing but a memory
From the house that built me