



SONGWRITING 101:

An Introduction to Words & Music

Grades 3-6

INTRODUCTION

Songwriting 101 teaches students the basics of songwriting, including song form 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.

Songwriting 101 begins with two pre-lessons that prepare the class for their co-write session through the creation of a song outline. The pre-lessons encourage thinking about what students already know about songwriting while teaching them about the specific parts of a song. The post-lesson reinforces what students learned and allows them to reflect on the songwriting experience. We recommend teaching these lessons three weeks before the songwriter workshop to allow time to write and submit the outline.

The Digital Resource Portal provides free 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. Access the portal 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 www.CountryMusicHallofFame.org/WordsandMusic.



Johnny Cash



Dolly Parton



Chuck Berry

STANDARDS

COMMON CORE CURRICULUM STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1

Engage effectively in collaborative discussions with diverse partners.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.5

Refer to parts of stories, dramas, and poems when writing or speaking about a text, using terms such as chapter, scene, and stanza; describe how each successive part builds on earlier sections.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2

Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5

Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

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.

Standard 9

Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

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

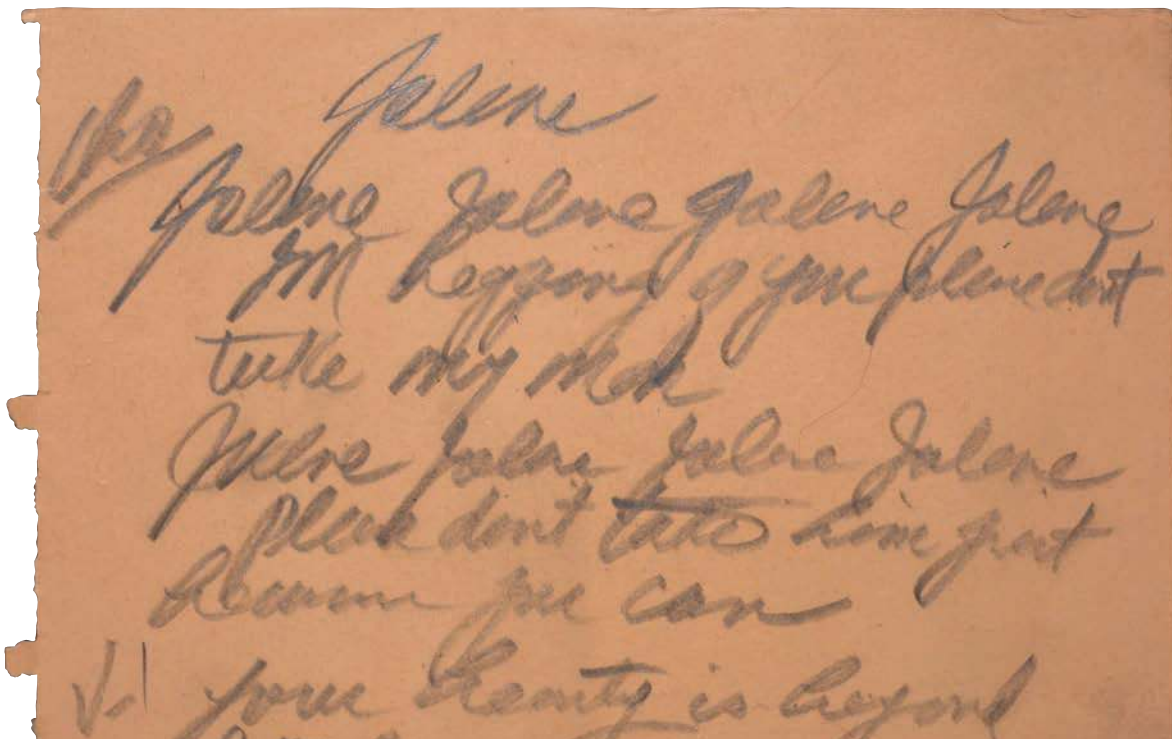
Perceive and analyze artistic work.

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 share what they already know about songwriting and build on this understanding.
- Students will apply new vocabulary and concepts related to parts of a song.
- Students will formulate ideas for a song topic through brainstorming.

VOCABULARY

Title	Verse
Theme	Chorus
Message	Bridge
Hook	

PREPARATION

- Make copies of the “Happy People” Student Lyric Sheet.
- Make sure each student has a notebook or a blank piece of paper and something to write with for brainstorm activity.
- Locate a recording of “Happy People” by Little Big Town to play for the class.

TEACHER NOTES

Students may be more focused on the lyrics of the song if they listen to recording without viewing the music video.

Other songs that also work well for this activity include “Lost in the Middle of Nowhere” by Kane Brown (featuring Becky G) and “Rainbow” by Kacey Musgraves. Teacher and Student Lyric sheets are not provided for these selections.

ACTIVITY

40-45 MINUTES

Brainstorm

Prompt: Write everything you know about the parts of a song in one minute. Afterward, divide the class in to small groups and ask each group to compile a master list. Ask groups to share their findings with the class. Make note of which parts the students mention so you can prepare for the next activity.

1. Review or introduce the parts of a song.

Do this briefly as they will be discussed in more detail in the second part of the activity.

- 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.

NOTE:

The title, theme, and hook should work together to let listeners know what the song is about.

- 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.

2. Share song lyrics with students.

Distribute the “**Happy People**” **Student Lyric Sheet**. Listen to the song as a class and ask students to identify the song parts by filling in the blanks on the lyric sheet. Then listen to the song again, pausing as directed on the **Teacher’s Lyric Sheet** to discuss song structure and parts as a class. Discuss correct answers after everyone has completed the exercise.

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

Once students have finished, explain that the **rhyme scheme** describes the pattern of rhyming words in a song. To help identify the rhyme scheme in these songs, instruct students to use the first two letters of the alphabet. “A” is used for the first line, and any other lines that rhyme with it are also labeled “A.” When you come to a line that does not rhyme with “A,” you will label it “B.” All lines that rhyme with this line will be labeled “B” as well. When you encounter the next rhyming sequence, return to “A,” and then “B,” and so on. 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.

4. Discuss theme and message further.

Mention that theme is what the song is about, and **message** is what the song says about the theme. Finally, go back to the song you have been analyzing and identify the theme and message.

NOTE:

The theme of “Happy People” is happiness. The message is that happiness is something that we all have to work towards, and that in order to be happy, we have to make others happy along the way.



Lesson 2: Song Topic and Outline

OBJECTIVES

- Students will analyze their common interests and 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)

PREPARATION

- This is a group-write, so you will need a large space, white board, projector, etc. to write student ideas and document your class brainstorm.
- Make sure each student has a notebook or a blank piece of paper and something to write with for the brainstorm activity.



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

ACTIVITY

40-45 MINUTES

1. Discuss

Share with students that the most popular songs are about what people have in common, such as what interests, experiences, and emotions others can relate to.

2. Brainstorm

Have students brainstorm a list of common human experiences. This list will eventually lead to 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.

TEACHER TIP:

The goal is for students to come up with common experiences. Encourage students not to “overthink” their list and to go with what first comes to mind.



Little Big Town Grammy win 2016

3. Have students share their brainstorm topics.

Record their responses on the board and notate repeating or similar themes. Topics can be organized by color-coding or by using an organizational 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

4. 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.

5. 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, feels, or ideas related to this subject, and add them to the list. Stop when there is a substantial list of ideas on the board.

6. 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, create an outline of the 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.

7. Prepare students for the Songwriting 101 session.

Let students know that the songwriter will collaborate with the class on content of the song, the style of music, and other aspects of songwriting.

Students should prepare questions to ask the songwriter at the end of the program.

Post-Lesson: Song Topic and Outline

POST-LESSON

15 MINUTES

1. Lead a class discussion or assign a writing exercise on the following questions to reflect on their songwriting experience and the songwriting workshop.

- What did you enjoy about writing a song?
- The next time you write a song, will you work alone or in a group? Why?
- Was songwriting easy or hard for you? Explain your answer.
- What skills are important to have to be a successful songwriter? How would you define success?
- Do you think all songwriters write hit songs? Explain your answer.
- Would you rather be a songwriter, a singer, or both? Explain your answer.

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:

Please make sure the outline is in the format above and attach to an email.

Lyrics@CountryMusicHallofFame.org



SCHOOL PROGRAM FUNDERS



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Teacher Lyric Sheet

Happy People

Hailey Whitters / Lori McKenna

Happy people don't cheat
 Happy people don't lie
 They don't judge or hold a grudge
 They don't criticize
 Happy people don't hate
 Happy people don't steal
 Cause all the hurt sure ain't worth
 All the guilt they'd feel


If you wanna know the secret
 Can't buy it, gotta make it
 You ain't ever gonna be it
 By takin' someone else's away
 Never take it for granted
 You don't have to understand it
 Here's to whatever puts a smile on your face
 Whatever makes you happy people

Happy people don't fail
 Happy people just learn
 Don't think they're above the push and shove
 They just wait their turn
 They always got a hand
 Or a dollar to spare
 Know the golden rule what you're goin' through
 Even if they've never been there

If you want to know the secret
 Can't buy it, gotta make it
 You ain't ever gonna be it
 By takin' someone else's away
 Never take it for granted
 You don't have to understand it
 Here's to whatever puts a smile on your face
 Whatever makes you happy people

These days it ain't always easy to find
 They're the ones who you want standing
 by your side
 No time for greed, if they need some,
 give 'em a slice
 And we'll all be happy people

Well life is short
 And love is rare
 And we all deserve to be happy while we're here

Pause the song when you see this symbol: 

BEFORE LISTENING

Discuss the **title** of the song.

1. Ask students what they think this song is going to be about, based on the title.
2. Prompt students to look for places where the title appears as they listen to the song.

Prompt students to notice that the melody will change in the chorus.

Prompt students to listen to the way the music stays the same in the second **verse** even though the words change.

DISCUSS CHORUS

1. Prompt students to discuss the main idea conveyed by the chorus. Ask for textual evidence for their answers.
2. Instruct students that this main idea is the **theme** of the song.
3. Ask students to identify the **hook** (the part that is repeated or makes the song easy to remember).
4. Point out that the chorus of the song is simpler than the verses.

DISCUSS BRIDGE

1. Prompt students to notice the way the melody changes and that the bridge is shorter than the verses and chorus.
2. Ask students to discuss the new or different idea presented in the bridge.

Student Lyric Sheet

Happy People

Hailey Whitters / Lori McKenna

Name: _____

Happy people don't cheat
 Happy people don't lie
 They don't judge or hold a grudge
 They don't criticize
 Happy people don't hate
 Happy people don't steal
 Cause all the hurt sure ain't worth
 All the guilt they'd feel

If you wanna know the secret
 Can't buy it, gotta make it
 You ain't ever gonna be it
 By takin' someone else's away
 Never take it for granted
 You don't have to understand it
 Here's to whatever puts a smile on your face
 Whatever makes you happy people

Happy people don't fail
 Happy people just learn
 Don't think they're above the push and shove
 They just wait their turn
 They always got a hand
 Or a dollar to spare
 Know the golden rule what you're goin' through
 Even if they've never been there

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These days it ain't always easy to find
 They're the ones who you want standing
 by your side
 No time for greed, if they need some,
 give 'em a slice
 And we'll all be happy people

Well life is short
 And love is rare
 And we all deserve to be happy while we're here

FILL IN THE BLANKS

The _____ appears
 in the chorus and states the main
 idea of the song.

Each _____ has
 the same words.

The _____ have
 different words but the same tune.

The chorus summarizes the main idea
 or _____ of
 the song.

The verse gives supporting

 about the main idea of the song.

The _____
 introduces a slightly different idea. It
 is shorter than the verses and chorus.

The _____
 is the part of the song that is repeated
 often and easily remembered. What
 do you think it is in the song?