

1) What Is Songwriting?

OBJECTIVES

Students will explore their preconceptions about songwriting.

Students will gain knowledge about what it takes to write a song.

STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7

VOCABULARY

co-write

PREPARATION

- Make copies of **“Try a Song” Handout**, **Pre-Assessment rubric**, and **Songwriter Quotes Homework**.
- Make copies of **Pre-Unit Assessment Rubric** (in Supplemental Materials) to complete as you review each student's work. This will be used, for comparison, at the end of the unit to assess each student's progress.
- Reserve computers or computer lab for Internet research.

INTRODUCTION TO WORDS & MUSIC

Before starting the Words & Music lessons, share with students that throughout this unit they will be completing a variety of creative writing assignments. By the end of the unit, they will have generated lyrics that will be submitted to a professional songwriter, who will set some of the lyrics to music and perform a selection of them in a workshop and Q&A for the class.

SONGWRITING PRE-ASSESSMENT (10 minutes)

Students will start this lesson by completing the **“Try a Song” Handout**, a pre-assessment to measure what they already know about songwriting. **Use the pre-assessment rubric from the Supplemental Materials to score your students' work. A staff member from the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum will provide a teacher survey link to share your tallied scores.** Subsequent lessons will begin with free writing, which will be formally introduced in the second lesson.

Share these instructions:

We are going to start by writing the words to a song. Before you write lyrics, answer the following questions in as much detail as you can: What makes a song? What are its parts? What do all songs have in common? Then spend five minutes writing lyrics. Don't worry about whether you are doing it right or wrong. There are no wrong answers. Just do your best to get your ideas out onto paper. This should be your own song, not a song you know or have heard before.

TEACHER TIP

Students may feel overwhelmed with this activity. If they say they have no idea what to write or how to write lyrics, assure them that there are no wrong answers. This is just a warm-up activity; they are not expected to write a perfect song in ten minutes. As long as they get something down on paper, they should feel good about their work.

BRAINSTORM (2 minutes)

Prompt: In your journal, list as many of your favorite songs as you can in two minutes.

Give students 10-15 seconds to share one or two of their favorite songs with one another.

GROUP DISCUSSION (8 minutes)

Divide students into groups of four or five and give them 30 to 60 seconds to discuss each of the following questions. After each question, let the groups share answers with the whole class.

- Who writes songs?
- Why do people write songs?
- Why do people like songs?
- What skills are needed to write a good song?
- What makes a good song?
- Are you familiar with any songwriters?
If yes, share some of your favorites with your group.
- Have you ever tried to write a song?
- What makes songs the same as poems?
What makes them different?

ACTIVITY (20 minutes)

1. Have students conduct Internet research on two or three of their favorite songs from their brainstorm lists. For each song, they should research and record in their journals:

- Name(s) of the songwriter.
- Name of the performer.
- Two other songs by the songwriter, writing down the song title and performer of each song.

2. Allow students to share any surprising findings from their research. Draw out the following points:

- People who perform songs are not always the people who write them.
- Many songwriters write for a variety of artists and musical genres.
- People often **co-write** songs, which means that two or more people work together to write a song.

TEACHER TIP

Students may need guidance as they research the composers of their favorite songs. Some helpful tips for successful Internet searches include:

- Type the title of the song followed by the word “songwriter.” For example: “I Heard It Through the Grapevine songwriter.”
- Allmusic.com is an excellent source for finding song credits. Wikipedia is also acceptable for this informal research assignment.

WRAP-UP REFLECTION (5 minutes)

Ask students to answer the following questions in their journals:

What makes you excited about writing a song? What makes you nervous about writing a song?

HOMework

Distribute the **Songwriter Quotes Homework** and review the instructions:

Read the following quotes from professional songwriters. In your journal, write one to two sentences on what each quote teaches you about what it takes to write a song. There are 14 quotes, so you should write at least 14 sentences. If you connect with a quote on a personal level, explain why in one of your sentences. After you have done this for each quote, synthesize what you have learned overall about songwriting into one to two paragraphs.

If you want a challenge, pick two to four of your favorite quotes, and look up a few songs by these songwriters. Read the lyrics and listen to the songs, if you have access to them. Pay attention to what you like or dislike about the lyrics.

If time allows, it may be helpful to do the first quote together, as an example.

Source material for songwriting quotes can be found in the Appendix.



Brandy Clark included a dozen original songs on her acclaimed debut album, 12 Stories. The Band Perry, Miranda Lambert, and Kacey Musgraves have recorded her material, too.