

HOMEWORK

Songwriter Quotes

Name: _____ Date: _____

Read the following quotes from professional songwriters. In your journal, write one to two sentences about what each quote teaches you about songwriting. If you connect with a quote on a personal level, write a sentence to explain why.

After you have responded to all 14 quotes, synthesize the main points you have learned into one to two paragraphs.

1. “First of all, you have to trust yourself ... The other thing that you have to do—and you have to really be able to embrace it and accept it and really welcome it into your life with open arms—is failure. Be sure to welcome failure. Always say, ‘You’re OK with me, failure.’ Because then you have no fear.” —**Neil Young**

2. “I think the best songs are the most truthful and honest songs. And it's because it's stuff you can't actually say yourself.” —**Ed Sheeran**

3. “My advice to [songwriters]: I would recommend that they follow through if they have an idea. Follow through with it. Don’t quit halfway through like a baby. Go through the whole shebang and carry it through instead of quitting halfway.” —**Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys**

4. “ ‘You’ve Really Got a Hold on Me’ was inspired by Sam Cooke. I loved him. He had a song out at the time called ‘Bring It on Home to Me.’ It was a bluesy record, and I wanted to write something like that ... Imitation in songwriting is OK; it’s something I think every writer does.” —**Smokey Robinson**

5. “A pocket notebook is one of my main techniques. If I’m sitting on a plane or train, with nothing to do, I’ll leaf through it and see what’s there. I’ll read a headline in the newspaper and I’ll say, ‘That really hit the nail on the head’ ... If I’m lucky, I’ll say, ‘By gosh, that will make a good refrain for a song!’ ” —**Pete Seeger**

6. “I got in my head that my goal, as a songwriter, was to write songs for people who didn’t write songs—you know, somebody working at a bank or checking out groceries; the song that that woman, in particular, would write if she were to write a song.” —**Brandy Clark**

7. “Sometimes I’ll go out and say, ‘Whatever else I do today, I’m going to write down all the lines that seem interesting to me ...’ I’ll try to stay committed to that for a certain period of time. Because most of the time you don’t do that. The stuff that goes by, you think of and then say, ‘OK, I thought about it. Big deal. Who cares?’ Or you’ll hear something amusing and then forget that, too. Sometimes, I’ll make an effort to just go out and get that stuff and see if it means anything. And sometimes it does.” —**Bob Dylan**

8. “As a young songwriter, I put a lot of pressure on myself. I’d write a line and then aggressively backspace because I was like, ‘This isn’t a representation of you!’ or ‘This is weird!’ I felt like there wasn’t room for me to write a bad song or write something that didn’t necessarily fit with my vibe or whatever. I think if I were to go back I would be much easier on myself. Write all kinds of stuff, man ... ’cause I think that’s the only way you’re gonna learn about yourself as a writer.” —**Lorde**

9. “The rule is: Write bad songs, but write ’em. If you start writing bad songs, you start writing better songs, and then you start getting really good.” —**John Mayer**

10. “Some people don’t realize that [a song] needs to be edited. They think it’s good the way it is ... Some people think they’re done with a song when I think they should go back and revise it. Even sometimes I’ll think a song’s done, but I have friends I work with who will tell me to revise.” —**John Legend**

11. “When we [the Beatles] got to America, the first question was, ‘Who does the words? Who does the music?’ ... I said, I don’t know, [John Lennon] does them some days; I do them the other day. It depends really ... They said, ‘What’s your formula for hits?’ We said, ‘We hope we never find one, because it would get very boring.’” —**Paul McCartney**

12. “A good portion of being available to be a writer is that emotionally you keep yourself open as a human being, you keep yourself healthy, you get enough rest, you get enough good food. Because without that you won’t have enough energy, and writing takes an enormous amount of energy.” —**Janis Ian**

13. “I think anyone could do [songwriting]. I think a lot of people try to write songs that are a little out of reach. And they should just sit down and write what they know. And what they see.” —**Loretta Lynn**

14. “Songwriters, both lyricists and melody writers, are often plagued with the thing most often known as writer’s block ... I have found that the key to not being blocked is to not worry about it. Ever ... Trust that it will be there. If it ever was once and you’ve ever done it once, it will be back. It always comes back and the only thing that is a problem is when you get in your way worrying about it.” —**Carole King**

Extra practice: 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.