

1) What Is Songwriting?

OBJECTIVES

Students will explore their preconceptions about songwriting.

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

VOCABULARY

co-write

PREPARATION

- Make copies of “**Try a Song**” Worksheet, **Pre-Assessment rubric**, and **Songwriter Quotes Worksheet**.
- Reserve computers or computer lab for Internet research.

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.W.7

Conduct short, as well as more sustained, research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

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. Some of their writing will become a song that they helped create. By the end of the unit, they will have generated lyrics that will be submitted to a professional songwriter, who will select some lyrics to set to music and perform the finished songs 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” Worksheet, 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. **Scores will be submitted to the Museum following the unit using the Online Teacher Evaluation at www.surveymonkey.com/r/WordsMusicTeacher.** Subsequent lessons will begin with free writing, which will be formally introduced in the second lesson.

Distribute the “**Try a Song**” Worksheet.

Share these instructions:

We are going to start by writing the words to a song. Don’t worry about whether you are doing it right or wrong. There are no wrong answers in this activity. Just do your best to get your ideas onto paper. For five minutes, write as much of your lyrics as you can. This should be your own song, not a song you know or have heard before.

Then for five minutes, answer these questions in as much detail as you can: What makes a song? What are its parts? What do all songs have in common?

TEACHER TIP

Students may feel overwhelmed with this first activity. Tell students that although they may have no idea what to write or how to write a song, that is okay. This is just a warm-up activity; they are not expected to write a perfect song in five 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 a minute.

Afterward, pair students and allow them to quickly 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 the following questions. After each question, let the groups share answers with the whole class.

- Who writes songs?
- Why do people write songs?
- What skills are needed to write a good song?
- What makes a good song?
- Are you familiar with any songwriters?
- Have you ever tried to write a song?

ACTIVITY (20 minutes)

1. Have students conduct online 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 artist who performed the song.
 - 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 online 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 Worksheet** and review the instructions:

Read the following quotes from professional songwriters. After each quote, write what it teaches you about songwriting. Next, write one to three sentences in your journal about what you learned from reading the quotes.

If time allows, it may be helpful to do the first quote together, as an example. Depending on the age and reading level of the students, you may want to assign only a portion of the quotes. Reference material for songwriting quotes can be found in Supplemental Materials.

WORKSHEET

Try a Song

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. 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?

PRE-ASSESSMENT

2. Try to write your own song in the next five to ten minutes. Don't worry about whether you do it right or wrong.
This should be your own song, not a song you know or have heard before.

SONG TITLE: _____

VERSE

CHORUS

VERSE

WORKSHEET

Songwriter Quotes

Name: _____ Date: _____

Read the following quotes from professional songwriters. After each quote, write what it teaches you about songwriting. Next, write one to three sentences in your journal about what you learned from reading the quotes.

1. “First of all, you have to trust yourself ... The other thing that you have to do ... 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. “I would recommend that they [songwriters] follow through if they have an idea. 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. “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**

5. “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**

6. “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**

7. “I think anyone could do it [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**