

## 4) Subject and Theme

### OBJECTIVES

Students will understand the relationship between the theme, title, hook, and chorus of a song.

Students will use textual evidence to determine the subject of a song.

Students will use textual evidence to determine the theme about the subject.

### VOCABULARY

subject, theme (review)

### PREPARATION

- Make copies of **“On the Road Again” Worksheet** and **Subject and Theme Worksheet**.
- Locate audio or video versions of “On the Road Again,” performed by Willie Nelson; “Forever and Ever, Amen” performed by Randy Travis; and “Love Hurts” performed by Emmylou Harris and Rodney Crowell. Note: Another option for “Love Hurts” is the Everly Brothers version.

### 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.9

Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.3

Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

### FREE WRITE (5 minutes)

### DISCUSS HOMEWORK (4 minutes)

Divide students into pairs to spend one minute sharing their favorite titles. Next ask students to pick one of their favorite titles and share it with the whole group. Students may wish to say where they heard the title.

### BRAINSTORM (1 minute)

**Prompt:** In your journal, write down the titles of as many popular songs as you can think of in one minute. A popular song is one that has been heard by millions of people on the radio, stereo, Internet, and/or television. Titles should be appropriate for school use.



Since the mid-1950s, Willie Nelson has written hundreds of songs, including “Crazy,” “Night Life,” and “On the Road Again”—timeless classics that have been recorded by dozens of artists. The Texas native was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1993.

**ACTIVITY (30–35 minutes)**

1. Students will explore the relationship between the title and the subject of a song. Remind students that the **subject** is the topic of the song. Ask students to share some of their favorite popular-song titles and write six to eight on the board. For each song ask:
  - What is the subject of this song?
  - Is that subject reflected in the title? How?
  - Is the title ever sung in the song?
  - In what part of the song does that happen?
2. Distribute the **“On the Road Again” Worksheet** that includes song lyrics by Willie Nelson and discussion questions. Play the song for the class. Divide the class into pairs to discuss the following questions, then open up the discussion to the whole group:
  - What is the subject of this song?
  - What evidence from the song supports your position? (Guide students toward noticing that the chorus, hook, and title all work together to communicate the subject, which is being on the road.)
  - The **theme** is the message of the song. What is the theme? What does Willie Nelson think about being on the road? (For example, he could have written a song about how he hates being on the road or how the road makes him lonely.)
  - What evidence from the song supports your position?
  - What do the lyrics imply about how Willie Nelson feels when he is not on the road?
  - What evidence from the song makes you think so?

**TEACHER TIP**

Students will probably answer that Willie Nelson likes being on the road, but try probing to get more specific answers. An example of a more complete answer would be that he looks forward to getting on the road again because, to him, the road means playing music with his friends and seeing new places.

3. Students will do a deep reading of two songs and explore their themes and messages. Distribute the **Theme and Message Worksheet**. Listen to “Forever and Ever, Amen” and “Love Hurts,” and then divide the class into pairs to work on the Subject and Theme Worksheet. Review the directions:

Read along on the lyric sheets as you listen to “Forever and Ever, Amen” and “Love Hurts.” Then answer the questions found on the last page of the worksheet.

**HOMEWORK**

Read the following prompt for students to complete as a journal entry:

Look over your previous writing and find a subject to write more about in your journal. If you can't think of a subject, look back at the lists you created in lesson two, and use one of those to write more about. Your writing can take the form of an essay, a story, a poem, a thoughtfully drawn comic strip, or song lyrics. Just focus on getting your ideas on paper. Remember to include a title that reflects the subject of whatever you write.

## WORKSHEET

## “On the Road Again”

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Listen to “On the Road Again.” Read along using the lyric sheets.
2. Discuss the questions with a partner, then share your answers with the whole class.

**On the Road Again***Willie Nelson*

On the road again  
 Just can't wait to get on the road again.  
 The life I love is making music with my friends  
 And I can't wait to get on the road again.

On the road again  
 Goin' places that I've never been  
 Seein' things that I may never see again  
 And I can't wait to get on the road again.

On the road again  
 Like a band of gypsies we go down the highway  
 We're the best of friends  
 Insisting that the world keep turning our way

And our way is on the road again.  
 Just can't wait to get on the road again.  
 The life I love is makin' music with my friends  
 And I can't wait to get on the road again.

On the road again  
 Like a band of gypsies we go down the highway  
 We're the best of friends  
 Insisting that the world keep turning our way

And our way is on the road again.  
 Just can't wait to get on the road again.  
 The life I love is makin' music with my friends  
 And I can't wait to get on the road again.  
 And I can't wait to get on the road again.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- What is the subject of this song?
- What evidence from the song supports your position?
- The theme is the message of the song. What does Willie Nelson think about being on the road?
- What evidence from the song supports your position?
- What do the lyrics imply how Willie Nelson feels when he is not on the road?
- What evidence from the song makes you think so?

## WORKSHEET

**Subject and Theme**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Listen to “Forever and Ever, Amen” and “Love Hurts.” Read along below.
2. Answer the questions found on the second page of the worksheet.

**Forever and Ever, Amen***Paul Overstreet / Don Schlitz*

You may think that I'm talking foolish  
 You've heard that I'm wild and I'm free  
 You may wonder how I can promise you now  
 This love, that I feel for you, always will be

You're not just time that I'm killing  
 I'm no longer one of those guys  
 As sure as I live this love that I give  
 Is gonna be yours until the day that I die – oh, baby

I'm gonna love you forever, forever and ever, amen  
 As long as old men sit and talk about the weather  
 As long as old women sit and talk about old men

If you wonder how long I'll be faithful  
 I'll be happy to tell you again  
 I'm gonna love you forever and ever, forever and ever, amen

They say time takes its toll on a body  
 Makes a young girl's brown hair turn grey  
 But honey, I don't care, I ain't in love with your hair  
 And if it all fell out, well, I'd love you anyway

They say that time can play tricks on a memory,  
 make people forget things they knew.  
 well, it's easy to see it's happening to me  
 I've already forgotten every woman but you – oh, darling

I'm gonna love you forever, forever and ever, amen  
 As long as old men sit and talk about the weather  
 As long as old women sit and talk about old men

If you wonder how long I'll be faithful  
 well, just listen to how this song ends  
 I'm gonna love you forever and ever, forever and ever, amen.

**Love Hurts***Boudleaux Bryant*

Love hurts, love scars  
 Love wounds and mars  
 Any heart, not tough  
 Nor strong enough  
 To take a lot of pain  
 Take a lot of pain  
 Love is like a cloud  
 Holds a lot of rain

Love hurts  
 Love hurts

I'm young, I know  
 But even so  
 I know a thing or two  
 I've learned from you  
 I've really learned a lot  
 Really learned a lot  
 Love is like a stove  
 Burns you when it's hot

Love hurts  
 Love hurts

Some fools rave of happiness  
 Blissfulness, togetherness  
 Some fools fool themselves, I guess  
 But they're not foolin' me

I know it isn't true  
 Know it isn't true  
 Love is just a lie  
 Made to make you blue

Love hurts  
 Love hurts  
 Love hurts

## WORKSHEET

**Subject and Theme (continued)**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**SUBJECT AND THEME QUESTIONS:**

1. What is the subject of “Forever and Ever, Amen”?

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2. What is the theme of “Forever and Ever, Amen”? What is your evidence?

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3. What is the subject of “Love Hurts”?

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4. What is the theme of “Love Hurts”? What is your evidence?

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5. Underline evidence in the lyrics of both songs to support your answers for questions 2 and 4.