

## 8) Focused Lyric-Writing Day

### OBJECTIVES

Students will reflect on the writing they have done over the course of the unit.

Students will write all or part of a song that incorporates what they have written and what they have learned in previous lessons.

### STANDARDS

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.5**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4**

### VOCABULARY

intellectual property, plagiarism

### PREPARATION

- Make copies of **Songwriting Checklist** and “**What If I’m Stuck?**” **Handout** for all students.
- Additionally, at your own discretion, make copies of the following templates and handouts according to the needs of your students:
  - For students who want or need additional support for outlining a song, make copies of **Songwriting Outline Handout**.
  - For students who may have problems generating song ideas or supporting details, make copies of **Brainstorm Wheel** and **Sensory and Emotion Brainstorm** (in Supplemental Materials).
  - For students who need extra support, make copies of **Songwriting Template** (in Supplemental Materials). **Note:** Providing this template to all students may result in formulaic songs.
  - For students who finish early and have time to write another song, make copies of **Story Song Template** (in Supplemental Materials).
  - For students who are writing a blues song, make copies of **Blues Song Template** (in The Blues lesson).

### FREE WRITE (5 minutes)

### DISCUSS HOMEWORK (2 minutes)

Divide students into pairs and ask them to share some strong imagery and supporting details from their writing.

### BRAINSTORM (3 minutes)

Divide class into pairs to review what they have learned about songwriting. Ask students to discuss what they intend to include in their songs. You should walk around and listen to student conversations, making sure they mention the following concepts from previous lessons. You may wish to briefly review some or all of them with the entire class, depending on the thoroughness of the conversations you hear:

- **Parts of a song:** A song must have a title, verses, a chorus, and a hook. Some songs have a bridge, which usually occurs before the last chorus and introduces a twist or new idea on the subject.
- **Title and hook:** In most songs, the title appears at least once in the chorus. The title is often the hook, the catchy phrase that makes the song easy to remember. The hook and the title usually communicate the theme.
- **Subject and theme:** The subject is the song’s topic. The theme is the message about that subject.
- **Rhythm and syllables:** Each line of the verse should have about the same number of syllables. Each line of the chorus should have about the same number of syllables. For songwriting novices, having between five and eight syllables per line produces the most successful songs.
- **Rhyme:** Most songs follow a rhyme scheme. Rhymes can be exact or approximate.
- **Details and images:** Lyrics paint mental pictures to communicate their theme and convey emotions.

**ACTIVITY (35 minutes)**

1. Ask students to reflect on their journal writing to prepare for their final songwriting day. By this point, students should have a bank of writing and ideas to draw inspiration from. Many students may have already started their songs.

2. Share the following information about plagiarism and songwriting before sending students off to write:

All songwriters draw inspiration from many different sources, including other songs and songwriters. Many songwriters create songs together by co-writing. It is fine to get inspiration or help from other songwriters and friends, but it is never okay to copy a song or part of a song and turn it in as your own work. If you copy all or part of a song and turn it in as your work, it is considered cheating, and you will receive a failing grade. If professional songwriters copy part of a song and sell it as their own work, they have committed **plagiarism**, and thus broken the law. Plagiarism is defined as the theft of **intellectual property**, which is any work that is the result of creativity; besides music, other examples of intellectual property include books, artwork, and inventions. People who commit plagiarism are breaking the law and can be sued by the material's original creators.

3. Give students the following prompt:

You have done a lot of writing over the last few days. For the next ten minutes, look through your journal and read over what you have done so far. Highlight or underline anything that you are proud of or anything that you think you want to use in your final song. When you are finished reflecting on your work, start working on your song.

**TEACHER TIP**

Allowing students to co-write their songs is an excellent way to support ESL students and students who are struggling alone. ESL students may also wish to write a song in their first language and try translating it into English.

4. Distribute and review the **Songwriting Checklist** and the “**What If I’m Stuck?**” **Handout**. Reserve most of class time for students to work quietly on their songs. Distribute additional templates and handouts, including the **Songwriting Template**, as needs arise. If The Blues lesson (See p.60) was taught, pass out the **Blues Song Template** to students who are writing a blues song. Students should be encouraged to write lyrics based on their song form preference. (Not every student should write a blues song.) If students finish quickly, they should write extra verses so they can pick the best ones for their final draft. Or they also may try to write an additional song. (For additional curriculum on story songs, see **Story Song Mini-Lesson** in Supplemental Materials.)

At this point, students will be in different stages of writing. Some will have completed an outline, some may have a verse and chorus, while others might have journal entries and an idea of what they want to write. Encourage students to use the Songwriting Checklist to help them move forward.

5. As you offer support to students, consider the following points of focus:

- The content of the song is most important.
- Songs should follow a standard structure.
- Students should attempt to rhyme so their song is catchy and memorable.
- Songs with a uniform pattern of syllables per line are easiest to be put to music.

## TEACHER TIP

Here are some of the most common obstacles students encounter and strategies for overcoming them:

**Not enough ideas:** Refer students back to their journals for more ideas. Provide **Brainstorm Wheel** (in Supplemental Materials) to students to generate more ideas. Provide **Sensory and Emotion Brainstorm Handout** (in Supplemental Materials) to help students generate more supporting details.

**Too many ideas:** Remind students to focus on one subject and then add in supporting details about that theme.

**Ideas are scattered or disorganized:** Encourage students to approach their one theme in three different ways. Provide the **Songwriting Outline Worksheet** to students who are struggling with organizing their ideas.

**Song looks more like a paragraph:** Praise students for having so many ideas and details. Prompt students to try dividing the ideas found in their paragraph into four lines for the verses and four lines for the chorus. Remind students that each line should have the same number of syllables.

**Generally “stuck”:** Remind students who feel genuinely overwhelmed that their song does not have to be the best ever written and that it takes lots of time and practice to become a good songwriter. Every song or part of a song that they write will make them better at writing their next song.

Provide the **Songwriting Template** (in Supplemental Materials) only to students who need extra support.

## HOMEWORK

By the end of the class period, students should have at least one verse and a chorus. For homework, students should attempt to finish their songs. A finished song will mean something different for each student, but let students know they will share their songs with the class during the next lesson. If students finish their chorus and all their verses, they should write extra verses for their homework. Or they also may try to write another song.



*Bob Dylan built his name as a folk singer in New York City with tunes like “Blowin’ in the Wind.” His rock career exploded in 1965 with the electrified track “Like a Rolling Stone.”*

## HANDOUT

**Songwriting Checklist**

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

☐ I have chosen a theme or story for my song. It is: \_\_\_\_\_☐ I have written a title. It is: \_\_\_\_\_☐ I have written an outline (optional).☐ I have written at least one verse.☐ My verses provide the details of my song. One detail is: \_\_\_\_\_☐ I have written a chorus.☐ My chorus communicates the theme of my song.☐ My title appears somewhere in my chorus.☐ I have written a bridge (optional).☐ My song follows a rhyme scheme.☐ This is my rhyme scheme: \_\_\_\_\_☐ The lines in all of my verses feature a uniform pattern of syllables.

- How many syllables are in each line of Verse 1? \_\_\_\_\_
- How many syllables are in each line of Verse 2? \_\_\_\_\_
- How many syllables are in each line of Verse 3? \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Each line in my chorus follows a uniform pattern of syllables.

- How many syllables are in each line of the chorus? \_\_\_\_\_

## HANDOUT

**What If I'm Stuck?**

Here are helpful strategies if you get stuck during your songwriting:

1. **Cut yourself some slack:** There are no mistakes in the creative process! Try not to judge your ideas, especially during the brainstorming and writing stage. Follow where your ideas lead you. You can always change what you've written later if you don't like it.
2. **Don't forget to outline your song:** Outlining what you want to say in each verse and in the chorus will help you organize your thoughts. It also will help you keep the "big picture" in mind as you're concentrating on word choice, descriptions, and all the other details. Your teacher has a **Songwriting Outline Handout** for further help.
3. **Change your starting point:** Some people start with the chorus; others start with the first verse or even a random place in the song. You may not even know where you are starting, but if you're stuck, try starting somewhere else.
4. **Daydream:** Let your mind wander a little as you think about your topic. What images, stories, people, or memories come to mind? Close your eyes and imagine yourself in the situation.
5. **Forget the beat:** Don't worry too much about making your lyrics fit the rhythm if it is tripping you up. There are lots of ways to say the same thing, so just get your ideas down on paper. Then you can always go back later and make the words fit the rhythm.
6. **Get help!** Ask for feedback and help from other students (just remember to be respectful of classmates' writing time).



*Paul McCartney and John Lennon's melodic music for the Beatles charmed fans globally. The partnership is credited with dozens of songs, including "Can't Buy Me Love" and "Help."*

## HANDOUT

**Songwriting Outline**

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

1. What is your title? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your hook? (It could be the same as your title.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. What details will you put in your verses to support the theme?

Here are some ideas for details; each verse should include only one:

- Specific things you like about your topic
- How you feel about your topic
- What you do with your topic
- How you interact with your topic
- When you first saw your topic
- How your topic changed you
- Physical qualities of your topic
- Someone your topic makes you think of
- Create your own!

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Verse 1 topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Hook (in the chorus): \_\_\_\_\_

Verse 2 topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Hook (in the chorus): \_\_\_\_\_

Verse 3 topic: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Write four lines for each verse and four lines for the chorus. The chorus should include the hook and/or title in at least one line. Remember that each line should have about the same number of syllables (usually between five and eight).