



WORDS & MUSICSM

TEACH LANGUAGE ARTS THROUGH LYRIC WRITING



TEACHER'S GUIDE
FOR GRADES 7-12



***We're always together
Always forever
Nothing can stop us now
When I'm with you the sky turns blue
Feels like I'm floating on a cloud***



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***“I was twelve
when I
learned my
first three
chords on
guitar and
wrote my
first song.
My life
changed
forever...
Music became
the way I
told my
stories.”***

— Taylor Swift



Since 1979, the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum has been helping students tell their stories through its innovative Words & Music program. Over 40 years, nearly 150,000 students have learned how to write song lyrics while developing key skills in language arts. Not only does Words & Music teach core curriculum but it also connects young people to Nashville’s music community, pairing participating classes with songwriters who turn students’ work into finished songs that are performed in an interactive workshop. Revised in 2022, this lesson guide adds even more academic rigor, imaginative teaching approaches, and interdisciplinary connections to an already innovative program, with the intent of inspiring new generations of students to express themselves through creative writing.

Overview

Welcome to *Words & Music: Teach Language Arts Through Lyric Writing*. This unit plan helps your class explore the art of lyric writing through ten complete lessons. Aligned with Common Core Standards, this interdisciplinary unit also can be tied to history, literature, math, music, and visual arts. This unit also promotes social and emotional learning (SEL) by providing opportunities for students to demonstrate social and emotional competencies to lesson activities.

The lessons in this guide are designed to encourage collaborative, exploratory learning that can be tailored to a variety of learning styles and levels. Whenever possible, students should be encouraged to try out new ideas and share them with one another. The lessons also reinforce what you are already teaching and can be used to replace any creative writing unit.

The Words & Music unit is composed of ten 45-minute lessons. The lessons are cumulative, each one building on the next, so none should be skipped. The final project, writing a polished set of lyrics, combines everything students have learned in previous lessons. Final lyrics are sent to the museum to share with a professional songwriter, who will select a few works to set to music. Ultimately, students will hear the songwriter perform some lyrics as finished songs.

Though lyric writing is short-form creative writing, it requires no less ability than any other kind of creative writing. Of course, it also is just part of the task of songwriting, along with musical composition. Students will gain a firsthand knowledge of the skill necessary to craft art that is memorable, evocative, and appealing—a skill that, in the hands of a seasoned lyricist, can create great music.

Prior to teaching Words & Music for the first time, educators are strongly encouraged to attend a Words & Music professional development training. For a list of upcoming trainings, please visit CountryMusicHallofFame.org/Professional-Development or email Schools@CountryMusicHallofFame.org.

A digital version of this guide is available in the Teacher Resource Portal at CountryMusicHallofFame.org/WordsAndMusic along with additional supplementary materials and lessons.

METHODOLOGY

The intent of this unit is to give students a positive experience with creative thinking and writing, and to provide an outlet for personal expression. Though students will have the opportunity to hear and discuss recorded music, the primary purpose of the unit is to develop language-arts skills. Writing well takes practice; students will be asked to produce a large quantity of work. Writing well also requires the development of creativity. Many of the assignments use a broad prompt to allow for the greatest variety of student ideas, but you should feel free to refine the prompts to encourage maximum creativity. You also can alter approximate instruction times, included with each lesson, according to your classroom needs.

In addition to writing, students will analyze other song lyrics. In many cases, students will find that the songs they admire do not conform to all of the rules taught in this guide. Students should be reminded that many great artists in a variety of disciplines studied and followed the rules before choosing to break them.

The ultimate goal of Words & Music is for students to complete a song lyric; however, not all lessons are focused on this goal. Throughout the lessons, students will write a great deal, generating a large amount of content. Students should be reminded often that their writing could become part of their final song, but the majority is intended as practice. You may want to tell students during each activity to be looking for a final topic. Some students may know what they want to write about in the first lesson; others might not know until the end.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

This unit meets a variety of ELA Common Core State Standards, which are listed at the beginning of each lesson. All of the lessons incorporate collaboration with peers (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1) and writing routinely over extended and shorter time frames (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10), so these standards are not listed at the beginning of every lesson. A full list of standards, including National Core Arts Anchor Standards and National Association for Music Education Standards, is located in the Appendix.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

Words & Music is primarily a creative writing unit, but many topics in the songwriting curriculum have connections to other subjects, such as history, literature, math, music, and visual arts. This guide notes opportunities to connect with peers in other subject areas to explore collaboration.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Each lesson includes activities, discussions, free writing, and song selections that connect to Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), including:

- Acquiring and applying the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities.
- Managing emotions and achieving personal and collective goals.
- Feeling and showing empathy for others.
- Establishing and maintaining supportive relationships.
- Making responsible and caring decisions.

Throughout the unit, students will have many opportunities to write about and express their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. As lyric writing often brings out difficult subject matter and personal experiences, teachers should create a safe environment by setting classroom expectations for being kind and respectful to others during discussions.

Student choice is essential to creative lyric writing. Students should decide a song topic for themselves, drawing on ideas from their journal writings.

MATERIALS

Ideally, students should have a spiral-bound journal (for free writing, brainstorming, and journaling prompts) and a folder or binder (for handouts and worksheets). For classroom instruction, you will need to access recordings of the songs that appear in the lessons. Some homework requires students to access recordings of songs for listening and analysis projects. All recordings are located in the Teacher & Student Resource Portal at CountryMusicHallofFame.org/Education/Teacher-Resource-Portal.

Most lessons require photocopying worksheets, templates, lyric sheets, and/or rubrics for in-class use. Materials are identified in boldface in the introductory boxes that begin each lesson. The names of the materials reappear in boldface in the body of the lesson, indicating when to use them in class. Each lesson also includes an accompanying PowerPoint presentation, which can be used for synchronous and asynchronous instruction. All materials and PowerPoint files can also be found in the Teacher and Student Resource Portal.

FREE WRITING

Every lesson includes time for free writing, which is intended to:

- Allow students to open their minds and enter into a creative spirit.
- Create a bank of ideas that students can draw from as they begin writing their songs.
- Teach students to write consistently and continuously for the time allotted.
- Encourage students not to feel inhibited by spelling, grammar, and other conventions.

BRAINSTORMING

Each lesson also includes a brainstorming session for individual, partner, or group work. Brainstorms begin with a prompt to students. These sessions, intended to last no longer than five minutes, should:

- Be completed in the students' writing journal.
- Add to the bank of ideas that students can draw from when writing songs.
- Allow students to experience spontaneous thought, which is necessary in any creative pursuit.

TEACHER TIPS

Each lesson includes teacher tips that offer additional clarification and guidance for key topics. Many tips derive from feedback gathered from teachers and songwriters who have participated in Words & Music or assisted with the writing of this guide.

VOCABULARY

Vocabulary words are listed at the beginning of each lesson, and then introduced in **boldface** within the body of the lesson.

SPOTLIGHT AND SUPPLEMENTAL LESSONS

“Spotlight” lessons (p.87), included in the Appendix, allow students to delve deeper into the craft of songwriting. Some students will have experience writing songs or will show a natural aptitude for it. Spotlight activities are intended to be independently completed by these advanced students at suggested times throughout the unit. These lessons can also be used as supplemental lessons for your entire class.

The Blues (p.60) is a supplemental lesson that explores the history and elements of traditional blues songs. The lesson is intended to be taught between lessons 7 and 8, and provide students another song form option when writing their final lyrics. (Note: Not every student should write a blues song, so the songwriter workshop can present a wide variety of songs.)

ESL AND STRUGGLING STUDENTS

While all students should attempt to work alone, co-writing can be a powerful tool for supporting students who are struggling, and it is acceptable for students to co-write for the final song project.

Since the primary goal of the unit is to develop creative thinking and writing skills, English-language learners should be encouraged to do their free writing and initial creative work in their first language. This will provide bilingual students with opportunities to make connections between two languages through a creative-thinking process. Students then can translate their writings into English, which will further support their English development. Point out to students that many successful songs are written in one language and then translated and recorded in another.

Note: Rhyming may be too challenging for students who are translating their work into English. Translations will be acceptable if they do not rhyme.

ASSESSING STUDENT WORK

Assessment opportunities in this unit include free writing, in-class work (assignments and participation), homework, lyric revision worksheets, and the final song lyrics. Suggested grade weighting for the unit is indicated in parentheses:

1. A pre-assessment is included in Lesson 1 to capture a baseline of student knowledge of lyric writing. **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.**

Note: *Words & Music* is grant-funded and dependent on Teacher Evaluation and Student Reflections in order to secure funding. The Museum appreciates your efforts in reporting accurate data so this award-winning program can be available to you and your students for free or low cost.

2. Free-writing activities (10%) are intended to be assessed as a completion grade. They should not be assessed for content or for proper grammar, spelling, or punctuation.
3. In-class work (25%), including brainstorming, class discussions, partner work, and worksheets, is part of every lesson. In-class work provides students with a daily opportunity to learn from their peers as well as share their work with a larger audience. Showcasing their ideas and writing also encourages students to be invested in the creative process. In-class worksheets reinforce the key information in each lesson. They can be graded to gauge student understanding of the concepts.
4. Homework (25%) can be collected and used as a daily grade.
5. Lyric revision worksheets (10%), including the songwriting checklist (Lesson 8) and the partner revision worksheet (Lesson 9), exhibit student understanding of the key concepts of lyric writing. They should be weighted separately from the other worksheets because they assess cumulative comprehension.

6. Final song lyrics (30%) are the main summative assessment. **Use the post-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.**

Note: Conventions are notably absent from rubrics because lyrics are not required to follow the conventions of standard English. Use your discretion in correcting spelling and grammar; assess errors only in terms of whether they interfere with the meaning of the writing assignment.

Abridged Unit Plan

The Abridged Unit Plan is designed for teachers who have limited time with students and cannot teach the full ten-lesson unit. The five lessons are cumulative, featuring select activities from each lesson and culminating to the final project where students write a polished set of lyrics. Further adjustments may need to be made depending on the length and frequency of the class.

DAY	TITLE & LESSON PLAN	LESSON	ASSESSMENTS & HANDOUTS
Day 1	What is Songwriting / Parts of a Song		
	1. Introduction to Words & Music	Lesson 1	
	2. Songwriting Pre-Assessment	Lesson 1	"Try a Song" Worksheet (Pre-Assessment)*
	3. Brainstorm	Lesson 1	
	4. Group Discussion	Lesson 1	
	5. Activity #1–3	Lesson 2	"This" Student Lyric Sheet
	6. Homework	Lesson 2	Song Structure Practice Homework
Day 2	Title and Hook / Subject and Theme		
	1. Free Write**	Lesson 3	
	2. Discuss Homework	Lesson 3	
	3. Brainstorm	Lesson 3	
	4. Activity #2–6	Lesson 3	"The House That Built Me" Lyric Sheet
	5. Activity #1	Lesson 4	"Man in Black" Worksheet
	6. Homework	Lesson 4	
Day 3	Rhythm and Syllables / Rhyme		
	1. Free Write	Lesson 6	
	2. Discuss Homework	Lesson 5	
	3. Brainstorm	Lesson 6	
	4. Activity #1–3	Lesson 6	"I Hope You Dance" Lyric Sheet
	5. Activity #1 and 4	Lesson 5	"Bridges" Lyric Sheet
	6. Homework	Lesson 6	
Day 4	Creating Strong Images		
	1. Free Write	Lesson 7	
	2. Discuss Homework	Lesson 7	
	3. Brainstorm	Lesson 7	
	4. Activity #1–6	Lesson 7	
	5. Homework	Lesson 7	"I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" Lyric Sheet
Day 5	Focused Lyric Writing Day / Revision		
	1. Free Write	Lesson 8	
	2. Discuss	Lesson 8	
	3. Brainstorm	Lesson 8	
	4. Lesson #1–5	Lesson 8	Songwriting Checklist Handout
	5. Activity #3 and 5	Lesson 9	Partner Revision Handout
	6. Submitting Lyrics	Lesson 9	Final Song Lyrics (Final Assessment)*
	7. Evaluating the Program	Lesson 9	* See Lesson 10 for more details

* See Pre-Unit Assessment Rubric and Final Lyric Assessment Rubric in Supplemental Materials (p.74–75)

**See Free Write instructions and Teacher Tip in Lesson 2 (p.14)

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 online 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. 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.

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, that is okay. 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 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 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.

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

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.

2) Parts of a Song

OBJECTIVES

Students will demonstrate an understanding of new vocabulary and concepts related to parts of a song.

Students will listen to songs and identify their elements.

STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5

VOCABULARY

bridge, chorus, hook, outline, subject, theme, title, verse

PREPARATION

- Make copies of **“This” Student Lyric Sheet** and **Song Structure Practice Homework**.
- Locate audio or video version of “This” performed by Darius Rucker.
- For students interested in writing story songs, make copies of **Story Song Template** (in Supplemental Materials).

FREE WRITE (5 minutes)

Every day, students will spend five minutes free writing. During this time, they do not need to worry about conventions like spelling or punctuation. Encourage students to:

- Write about anything that is on their minds.
- Focus on writing for the entire five minutes.
- Keep their pen or pencil moving the whole time.

TEACHER TIP

Students may feel overwhelmed when they first start free writing. They may feel like they do not know what to write. The following ideas may help:

- Do the free write with the students and read yours aloud as an example of the different shapes a free write might take.
- Remind students that as long as they are writing something, they are doing well.
- Remind students that the most important thing about free writing is simply getting words onto the page.
- Allow students to volunteer sharing their free writes. Create a safe environment by setting classroom expectations for being kind and respectful to others as their peers share personal experiences. By sharing, students will develop social and emotional learning competencies such as self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills.

DISCUSS HOMEWORK (5 minutes)

Ask students to share their responses to the songwriter quotes. Point out common themes as students share what they learned about what it takes to be a songwriter.

BRAINSTORM (5 minutes)

Prompt: In your journal, write everything you know about the parts of a song in one minute.

Afterward, divide the class into small groups and ask each group to compile a master list.

Ask groups to share their findings with the class. Make note of which parts the students mention so you can prepare for the next activity.

ACTIVITY (30 minutes)

1. Review or introduce the parts of a song, but do so briefly. Do not provide information that reiterates what students have already demonstrated they know. Each of these parts will be discussed in more detail in the second part of the activity, so students need to have only a cursory understanding at this point.
 - The **title** is the name of the song.
 - The **subject** is the topic of the song.
 - The **theme** is the message of the song.
 - The **hook** is the part of the song that catches, or “hooks,” a listener's attention and makes the song easy to remember. The title and hook are often the same, and the hook is usually repeated throughout the song. The title, theme, and hook should work together to let listeners know what the song is about.
 - The **verse** communicates the details of the song's subject, such as who, what, when, where, why, and how. Songs usually have multiple verses.
 - The **pre-chorus** is a short section that serves as a transition from the verse to the chorus. It further explains the verse and sets-up the theme, or message, of the chorus. The pre-chorus lyrics can be the same each time (like the chorus tends to be) or it can change (like the verse). The pre-chorus usually has a different melody from the verse and chorus. Note that not all songs have a pre-chorus.
 - The **chorus** is the part that is repeated throughout the song. It is usually simpler than the verses, and it often contains the hook. In ancient Greek plays, a group of singers, called a “chorus,” appeared between every act to summarize what had just occurred on stage.
 - The **bridge** introduces a twist or new idea on the subject. It usually occurs toward the end of the song, and it has a different melody from the verses and chorus. Note that not all songs have a bridge.
2. Distribute **“This” Student Lyric Sheet**. Listen to the song as a class and ask students to identify the song parts by filling in the blanks on the lyric sheet. Then listen to the song again, pausing as directed on the Teacher's Lyric Sheet to discuss song structure and parts as a class.
3. Share this information with students:

Songwriters usually organize the content of their songs in some way, and the most common form is an outline. This is an abbreviated approach to how essay writers organize their ideas into paragraphs and a thesis statement.

Ask students the following questions:

- What was the main idea of the song “This”?
- How was that communicated in the chorus?
- What was verse 1 about? Verse 2? The bridge? What was the purpose of the pre-chorus? Provide textual evidence for your answers.

Once students have generated responses, use them to model an outline on the board for “This.”

Give students the following prompts to practice outlining a song:

- Pick a topic for a practice song. This does not have to be the topic of your final song.
- Write a title, which can be a word or a phrase that has to do with the topic selected.
- Write a song outline. As you organize your ideas, think about what you learned from listening to “This.”

This is an example of a student outline:

Title: Beach Trip

Verse 1 topic: Things I love about going to the beach

Chorus theme: How much I love the beach

Verse 2 topic: Things I like to do at the beach

Verse 3 topic: Why I don't want to leave the beach

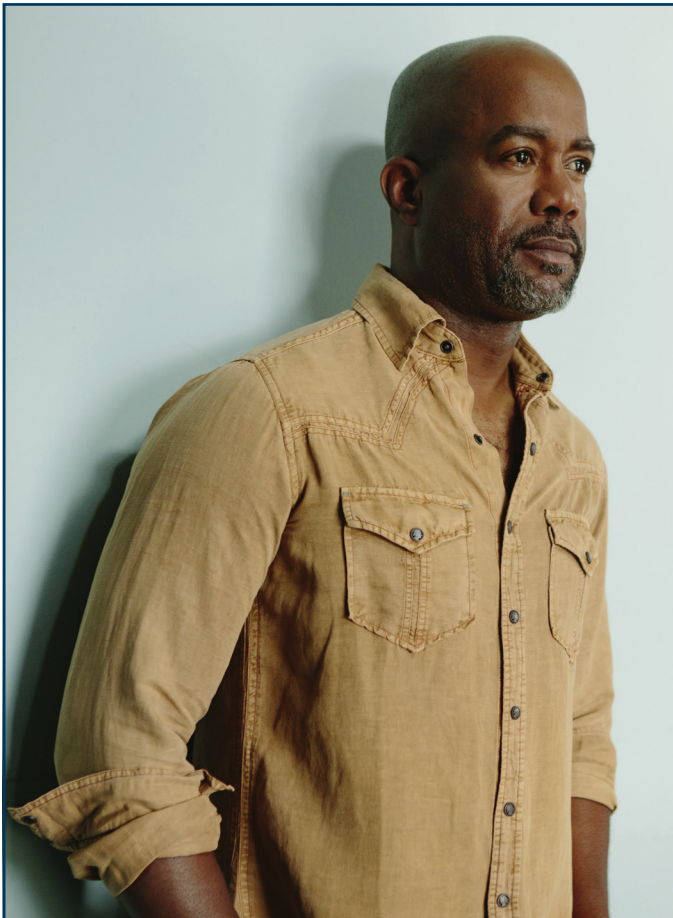
Note: Some students may wish to write an outline for a story song, in which the beginning, middle, and end of a story make up the verses, and the theme of the story is communicated in the chorus. See **Story Song Mini-Lesson** in Supplemental Materials.

HOMEWORK

Distribute the **Song Structure Practice Homework** so students can apply what they have learned about structure to a song of their choice. Remind students to choose songs appropriate for school use. Review the directions:

Print out or write down the lyrics to one of your favorite songs. Label its parts, and then identify the song's theme. Cite evidence from the text to support your answer about the theme. Pay attention to how the songwriter's ideas are organized, and use what you have learned about song structure to outline the song.

If you want a challenge, pick two or three more songs and outline them as well.



Darius Rucker first attained multi-platinum status in the music industry as the lead singer and rhythm guitarist of award-winning Hootie & the Blowfish. Since reintroducing himself as a country artist, he has had hit singles including “Come Back Song,” “This,” “Alright,” “It Won't Be Like This For Long,” and “Don't Think I Don't Think About It.”

ANSWER KEY TO “THIS” STUDENT LYRIC SHEET

- Song Parts (top to bottom): Verse, Pre-Chorus, Chorus, Verse, Pre-Chorus, Chorus, Bridge, Chorus
- Fill in the Blank: 1. Title, 2. Chorus, 3. Verses, 4. Theme, 5. Subject, 6. Bridge, 7. Hook, 8. Pre-Chorus

TEACHER'S LYRIC SHEET

This*Kara Dioguardi / Frank Rogers / Darius Rucker*

Got a baby girl sleeping in my bedroom
 And her mamma laughing in my arms
 There's a sound of rain on the rooftop
 And the game's about to start
 I don't really know how I got here
 But I'm so glad that I did
 And it's crazy to think that one little thing
 Could have changed all of this

Maybe it didn't turn out like I planned
 Maybe that's why I'm such, such a lucky man

For every stoplight I didn't make
 Every chance I did or I didn't take
 All the nights I went too far
 All the girls that broke my heart
 All the doors that I had to close
 All the things I knew but I didn't know
 Thank God for all I missed
 'Cause it led me here to this

Like the girl that I loved in high school
 Who said she could do better
 Or the college I wanted to go to
 Till I got that letter
 All the fights and the tears and the heartache
 I thought I'd never get through
 And the moment I almost gave up
 All led me here to you

I didn't understand it way back when
 But sittin' here right now, it all makes perfect sense

Every stoplight I didn't make
 Every chance I did or I didn't take
 All the nights I went too far
 All the girls that broke my heart
 All the doors that I had to close
 All the things I knew but I didn't know
 Thank God for all I missed
 'Cause it led me here to this

How I cried when my mamma passed away
 And now I got an angel looking out for me today
 So nothing's a mistake

Every stoplight I didn't make
 Every chance I did or I didn't take
 All the nights I went too far
 All the girls that broke my heart
 All the doors that I had to close
 Everything I knew but I didn't know
 Thank God for all I missed
 'Cause it led me here to this
 It led me here to this

Pause the song when you see this symbol: 

BEFORE LISTENING

Discuss the **title** of the song.

1. Ask students what they think this song is going to be about, based on the title.
2. Prompt students to look for places where the title appears as they listen to the song.

Prompt students to listen for the short **pre-chorus** that will transition to the chorus. Notice that the melody will change in the chorus.

DISCUSS CHORUS

1. Prompt students to discuss the **theme**. Ask for textual evidence for their ideas.
2. Instruct students that the theme is the message of the song.
3. Ask students to identify the **hook** (the part that is repeated or makes the song easy to remember).
4. Discuss whether the chorus is simpler than the verses.
5. Prompt students to notice that the title is found in the chorus.

Prompt students to listen to the way the music stays the same in the second **verse** even though the words change.

DISCUSS BRIDGE

1. Prompt students to notice the way the melody changes, and that the bridge is shorter than the verses and chorus.
2. Ask students to discuss the new or different idea presented in the bridge.

AFTER LISTENING

Discuss the way the verses contain supporting details for the **subject**. Ask students for textual evidence to support their ideas.

STUDENT LYRIC SHEET

This

Kara Dioguardi / Frank Rogers / Darius Rucker

Name: _____

Date: _____

Got a baby girl sleeping in my bedroom
And her mamma laughing in my arms
There's a sound of rain on the rooftop
And the game's about to start
I don't really know how I got here
But I'm so glad that I did
And it's crazy to think that one little thing
Could have changed all of this

Maybe it didn't turn out like I planned
Maybe that's why I'm such, such a lucky man

For every stoplight I didn't make
Every chance I did or I didn't take
All the nights I went too far
All the girls that broke my heart
All the doors that I had to close
All the things I knew but I didn't know
Thank God for all I missed
'Cause it led me here to this

Like the girl that I loved in high school
Who said she could do better
Or the college I wanted to go to
Till I got that letter
All the fights and the tears and the heartache
I thought I'd never get through
And the moment I almost gave up
All led me here to you

I didn't understand it way back when
But sittin' here right now,
It all makes perfect sense

Every stoplight I didn't make
Every chance I did or I didn't take
All the nights I went too far
All the girls that broke my heart
All the doors that I had to close
All the things I knew but I didn't know
Thank God for all I missed
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How I cried when my mamma passed away
And now I got an angel looking out for me today
So nothing's a mistake

Every stoplight I didn't make
Every chance I did or I didn't take
All the nights I went too far
All the girls that broke my heart
All the doors that I had to close
Everything I knew but I didn't know
Thank God for all I missed
'Cause it led me here to this
It led me here to this

FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. The _____ is often the same as the hook.
2. Each _____ has the same words.
3. The _____ have different words but the same tune.
4. The _____ is the message of the song.
5. The verses give supporting details about the _____, or topic, of the song.
6. The _____ introduces a slightly different idea. It is shorter than the verses and chorus.
7. The _____ catches a listener's attention and is usually repeated throughout the song.
8. The _____ is a short transition from the verse to the chorus.

WORD BANK

Bridge, Chorus, Hook, Subject, Theme, Title, Verses, Pre-Chorus

HOMEWORK

Song Structure Practice

Name: _____ Date: _____

Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Print out or write down the lyrics to one of your favorite songs. This song should be appropriate for school use.
2. Label the following parts on the lyrics:
 - Title
 - Verse
 - Pre-Chorus
 - Chorus
 - Bridge
 - Hook
3. What is the theme of the song? Why do you think so? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.
4. Paying attention to how the songwriter's ideas are organized, use what you have learned in class about song structure to outline the song.

Challenge: Pick two or three more songs and outline them, as well.

REMINDER

- The **title** is the name of the song and often appears in the chorus.
- The **theme** is the message of the song.
- The **pre-chorus** is a short transition from the verse to the chorus of the song.
- The **hook** is the part of the song that is repeated often and is easily remembered. The hook usually has all or part of the title in it.
- Each **verse** has different words but the same tune.
- Each **chorus** has the same words.
- The verses give supporting details for the **subject**.
- The **bridge** introduces a slightly different idea. It is often shorter than the verses and chorus.

3) Title and Hook

OBJECTIVES

Students will understand that most popular songs resonate with many people because the songs address common human experiences.

Students will explore the connection between song titles and hooks.

Students will practice writing song titles and hooks.

VOCABULARY

hook (review), title (review)

PREPARATION

- Make copies of “The House That Built Me” Lyric Sheet.
- Locate audio or video version of “The House that Built Me” performed by Miranda Lambert.
- For advanced students, make copies of “Spotlight on Chorus” (in the Appendix).

STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5

FREE WRITE (5 minutes)

DISCUSS HOMEWORK (2 minutes)

Allow students to share the lyrics of their selected songs with a partner, explaining why they labeled each song section and offering textual evidence.

BRAINSTORM (5 minutes)

Share with students that most popular songs are about common human experiences, which are actions, thoughts, or feelings that many people can relate to. Brainstorm a couple examples as a class to make sure all students understand the concept.

For the main brainstorm activity, students will work alone and then in groups of four or five. Review the directions:

In your journal, write down as many common human experiences as you can in one minute. Afterward, you will break into groups to compare your lists. The goal is to come up with experiences you think your classmates are also writing down, so keep that in mind with this exercise. Try not to “overthink” your list, but just go with what first comes to your mind; focus on getting your ideas on paper.

After the one-minute brainstorm, divide the class into groups, and review these directions:

You now have two minutes to compare lists with your group, circling anything on your list that you have in common with another group member’s list.

Allow students to share some of their most common experiences with the whole class.

ACTIVITY (30–35 minutes)

1. Remind students that the **title** (the name of the song) is often the same as the **hook**. A hook is the part of the song that catches listeners' attention. A song's title often appears in the chorus.

Students will generate ideas for the subject of their lyrics and turn a subject into a title. To begin, ask students to list the following items in their journals:

- The first random memory that comes to mind.
 - Three things that you think about a lot.
 - Three objects or ideas that are important to you.
 - The first two happy memories that come to mind.
 - The first two sad memories that come to mind.
 - The first funny memory that comes to mind.
2. Share with students:
 - Song titles often come from things heard in daily life. This can be a cool phrase, a line in a movie or TV show, an overheard comment, or something repeated all the time.
 - Titles may or may not include the subject of the song. For example, the song “Stuck with U,” performed by Ariana Grande and Justin Bieber, is actually about being stuck with someone and cherishing the time together, while the song “Cardigan,” performed by Taylor Swift, is not just about a cardigan but about looking back on a young lost love.
 3. Ask students to share other examples of song titles that may or may not include the subject of the song.
 4. Use these examples and previous ones to explore the connection between the title and the hook. Remind students that the title often appears in the hook.
 5. Distribute **“The House That Built Me” Lyric Sheet**. Prepare students to listen to the song by doing the following:
 - Discuss the title. What do students think the song will be about? What does the phrase “the house that built me” mean? Is it a phrase that the songwriters likely made up, or is it a phrase that they likely heard somewhere and then wrote a song about it?
 - Ask students to listen to the way the title will show up in the chorus.
 6. Listen to “The House That Built Me” and discuss:
 - How is the title used in this song?
 - What makes this title memorable? (There is no correct answer to this question, so responses will vary. Facilitate this discussion to draw out different opinions.)
 - Why—or why not—is this a successful title/hook/chorus?
 - Discuss the relationship between the title, hook, and chorus. (This discussion should reinforce that the title, hook, and chorus are related to each other. The hook usually occurs in the chorus, and all or part of the hook usually appears in the title.)

TEACHER TIP

Continue to remind students that while they are learning “the rules” of song structure, many songs do not follow these rules. Still, it is important to know the general pattern that many songs follow in order to understand when and how to bend or break those patterns.

7. Practice writing titles.

Prompt: Look back at the list of topics you created in your journal at the beginning of class and pick three to practice writing titles. Try to write a title that corresponds with each of the topics you pick. Remember, a title can be a word or a phrase. Let your mind wander to different words and phrases that pop up when you think of each topic. You may want to brainstorm about each topic and jot down a lot of ideas. Then pick one that you think could sound catchy as a hook.

TEACHER TIP

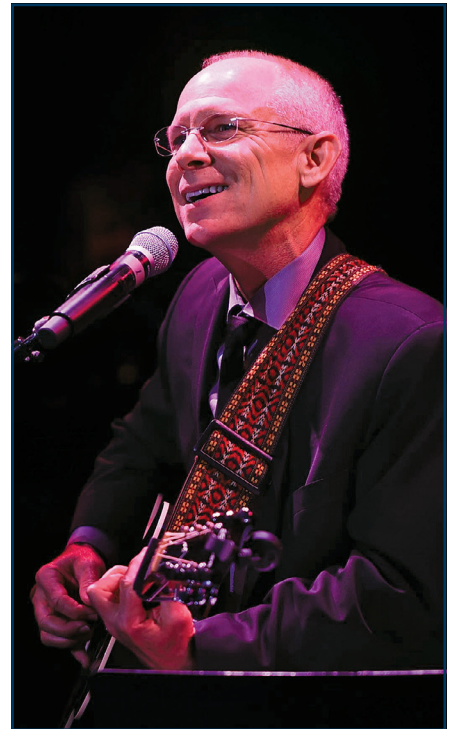
If students get stuck, encourage them to write down ideas that might seem random or only loosely related to their topic. Song titles can come from a variety of places and inspirations. Using a Spider Map or other mind-mapping technique may help students think of ideas.

For advanced work on titles, see “Spotlight on Chorus” in the Appendix.

HOMEWORK

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

Titles can come from everyday conversations you overhear, a cool or popular phrase, a line in a movie or TV show, or something that your family or friends say all the time. For the rest of the school day and tonight when you go home, use your journal to record anything catchy you hear. Remember to listen in the hallways, the cafeteria, the sports field, the mall, and on your way home. A good song title can come from anywhere! Write down as many possible titles as you can. You will share your favorite titles with the class tomorrow.



Miranda Lambert (center) drew on her own childhood memories when she recorded “The House That Built Me,” an award-winning ballad written by Tom Douglas (left) and Allen Shamblin (right).

The House That Built Me

Tom Douglas/Allen Shamblin

I know they say you can't go home again
I just had to come back one last time
Ma'am I know you don't know me from Adam
But these handprints on the front steps are mine
Up those stairs in that little back bedroom
Is where I did my homework and I learned to play guitar
And I bet you didn't know under that live oak
My favorite dog is buried in the yard

I thought if I could touch this place or feel it
This brokenness inside me might start healing
Out here it's like I'm someone else
I thought that maybe I could find myself
If I could just come in I swear I'll leave
Won't take nothing but a memory
From the house that built me

Mama cut out pictures of houses for years
From *Better Homes and Garden* magazine
Plans were drawn and concrete poured
Nail by nail and board by board
Daddy gave life to Mama's dream

I thought if I could touch this place or feel it
This brokenness inside me might start healing
Out here it's like I'm someone else
I thought that maybe I could find myself
If I could just come in I swear I'll leave
Won't take nothing but a memory
From the house that built me

You leave home, you move on, and you do the best you can
I got lost in this old world and forgot who I am

I thought if I could touch this place or feel it
This brokenness inside me might start healing
Out here it's like I'm someone else
I thought that maybe I could find myself
If I could walk around I swear I'll leave
Won't take nothing but a memory
From the house that built me

4) Subject and Theme

OBJECTIVES

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

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

STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.3

VOCABULARY

point of view, subject, theme (review)

PREPARATION

- Make copies of “**Man in Black**,” “**Jolene**,” and “**You Ain’t Woman Enough**” Lyric Sheets.
- Locate audio or video versions of “Man in Black” performed by Johnny Cash, “Jolene” performed by Dolly Parton, and “You Ain’t Woman Enough” performed by Loretta Lynn. (**Note:** Johnny Cash’s first televised performance of “Man in Black” may be found via an online search. For a rock version of “Jolene,” locate The White Stripes’ cover version.)
- For advanced students, make copies of “Spotlight on Point of View” (in the Appendix).

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 include 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 heard by millions of people on the radio, stereo, online, and television. Titles should be appropriate for school use.



Dolly Parton was singing on radio and TV shows in Knoxville, Tennessee, by the time she was ten. She has received the National Medal of Arts, the Kennedy Center Honors, and a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award for her work and contributions to the arts.

ACTIVITY (35 minutes)

1. Students will do a close reading of song lyrics to explore the concept of **theme**. A song's theme is the message the songwriter is trying to communicate about the **subject**, which is the song's main topic. Distribute the **"Man in Black" Lyric Sheet**, and then play a recording by Johnny Cash. Note that this song does not have a chorus, reminding students that not all songs follow a traditional structure. Students may wish to briefly discuss this fact. Ask students to discuss each of the following questions with a partner, then open up the discussion to the whole group:
 - In "Man in Black," what is the subject and what is the theme? (Students may have different answers to this question, which could lead to a lively class discussion. Opinions about the theme will probably settle around the idea of standing up for the underdog.)
 - What evidence from the song supports your position about the theme?
 - What can you infer from the lyrics about Johnny Cash's views toward helping the poor and needy?
 - What evidence from the song makes you think so?
 - Is what Johnny Cash expresses a personal or political viewpoint—or is there a difference between the two? Why or why not?
 - Is Johnny Cash contrasting his own choices with those of other people in society? Who?
 - What evidence from the song makes you think so?
 - How is this song like or unlike other songs you have studied up to this point?
 - Which popular songs today have a strong social message?
 - Should songwriters think about the themes of their songs? Why or why not?
 - What opinions do you have about the kinds of themes that are popular in the music you listen to?

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTION OPPORTUNITY

Though "Man in Black" has become a timeless classic, it touches on a variety of social and political issues prevalent when the song was written in 1971. You may wish to seek out a history colleague to help supplement or continue the discussion. Or students with an interest in history may want to consider writing a song about a historical event or from the viewpoint of someone in history.

2. Distribute the **"Jolene"** and **"You Ain't Woman Enough" Lyric Sheets**. Play both songs for the class. Ask students to respond in pairs to the following prompts and write their answers in their journals:
 - What is the subject of "Jolene"?
 - What is the theme of "Jolene"? What is your evidence?
 - What is the subject of "You Ain't Woman Enough"?
 - What is the theme of "You Ain't Woman Enough"? What is your evidence?
 - Underline or highlight evidence in the lyrics of both songs to support your conclusions about the songs' themes.

3. Students will notice that “Jolene” and “You Ain’t Woman Enough” are different songwriters’ responses to similar situations. This will give you the opportunity to introduce the concept of **point of view**. Share this information with students:

In a song, the perspective of the singer is called the point of view, which can greatly influence the way listeners connect with the lyrics. Both “Jolene” and “You Ain’t Woman Enough” fall in the category of second-person point of view because they are statements addressed to someone else. “Man in Black” falls in the category of first-person point of view, because its lyrics express personal sentiments in a state of inward reflection. Songwriters also can write from a third-person point of view, which is a narrator telling listeners a story.

4. If time allows, give students the following prompt to write a reflection in their journals:

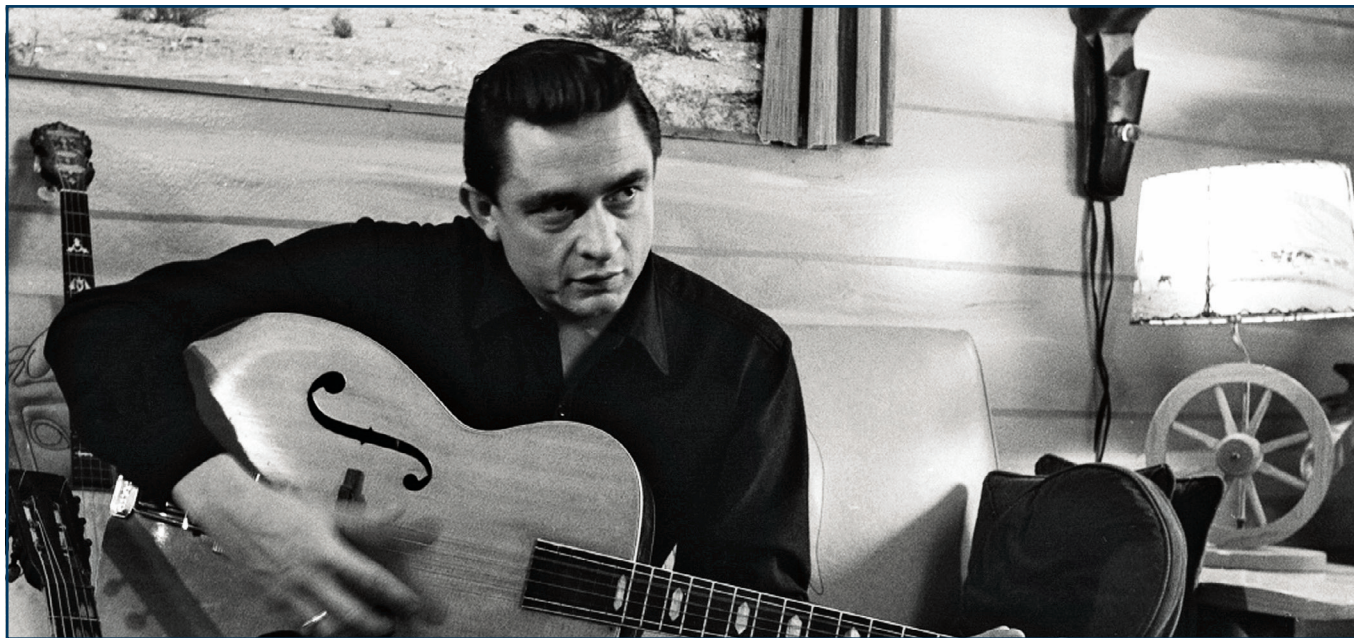
Think about the songs that you like to listen to. What are the common subjects? What are the common themes? What kinds of themes would you like to include in your songwriting? In which point of view would you want to express them?

For advanced work on point of view, see “Spotlight on Point of View” in the Appendix.

HOMEWORK

Ask students to complete the following tasks. They may write in their journals or type their response and print it out.

1. Choose one of your favorite songs and listen to it. Write one to three sentences about how the songwriter communicates the subject.
2. Pick one of these two prompts:
 - Review your previous writings and select a subject to write more about. The writing does not have to be in the form of a song; it could be in the form of a story, a poem, a thoughtfully done comic strip, a song, or an essay. Just focus on getting your ideas onto paper. Include a title that reflects the subject of whatever you write.
 - Pick a song that has a strong message and write a song with an opposing message — just as “Jolene” and “You Ain’t Woman Enough” express opposing messages.



Johnny Cash became known as the “Man in Black” because of his distinctive stage wear. That nickname inspired Cash to write a song to express his viewpoint on social issues.

LYRIC SHEET

Man in Black*Johnny Cash*

Well, you wonder why I always dress in black
Why you never see bright colors on my back
And why does my appearance seem to have a somber tone
Well, there's a reason for the things that I have on

I wear the black for the poor and the beaten down
Livin' in the hopeless, hungry side of town
I wear it for the prisoner who has long paid for his crime
But is there because he's a victim of the times

I wear the black for those who've never read
Or listened to the words that Jesus said
About the road to happiness through love and charity
Why, you'd think He's talking straight to you and me

Well, we're doin' mighty fine, I do suppose
In our streak of lightnin' cars and fancy clothes
But just so we're reminded of the ones who are held back
Up front there ought 'a be a Man in Black

I wear it for the sick and lonely old
For the reckless ones whose bad trip left them cold
I wear the black in mournin' for the lives that could have been
Each week we lose a hundred fine young men

And, I wear it for the thousands who have died
Believin' that the Lord was on their side
I wear it for another hundred thousand who have died
Believin' that we all were on their side

Well, there's things that never will be right I know
And things need changin' everywhere you go
But 'til we start to make a move to make a few things right
You'll never see me wear a suit of white

Ah, I'd love to wear a rainbow every day
And tell the world that everything's okay
But I'll try to carry off a little darkness on my back
'Til things are brighter, I'm the Man in Black.

LYRIC SHEET

Jolene*Dolly Parton*

Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, Jolene
 I'm begging of you please don't take my man
 Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, Jolene
 Please don't take him just because you can

Your beauty is beyond compare, with flaming locks
 of auburn hair
 With ivory skin and eyes of emerald green
 Your smile is like a breath of spring, your voice is
 soft like summer rain
 And I cannot compete with you, Jolene

He talks about you in his sleep and there's nothing
 I can do to keep ...
 From crying when he calls your name, Jolene
 And I can easily understand how you could easily
 take my man
 But you don't know what he means to me, Jolene

Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, Jolene
 I'm begging of you please don't take my man
 Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, Jolene
 Please don't take him just because you can

You could have your choice of men, but I could
 never love again
 He's the only one for me, Jolene
 I had to have this talk with you, my happiness
 depends on you
 And whatever you decide to do, Jolene

Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, Jolene
 I'm begging of you please don't take my man
 Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, Jolene
 Please don't take him even though you can
 Jolene, Jolene



Dolly Parton addresses "Jolene" to a red-headed woman who is trying to steal her man. Instead of using anger in her lyrics, Parton begs the woman to leave her husband alone.

LYRIC SHEET

**You Ain't Woman Enough
(To Take My Man)***Loretta Lynn*

You've come to tell me something you say I ought to know
That he don't love me anymore and I'll have to let him go
You say you're gonna take him oh but I don't think you can
'Cause you ain't woman enough to take my man

Women like you they're a dime a dozen you can buy 'em anywhere
For you to get to him I'd have to move over and I'm gonna stand right here
It'll be over my dead body so get out while you can
'Cause you ain't woman enough to take my man

Sometimes a man's caught lookin' at things that he don't need
He took a second look at you but he's in love with me
Well I don't know where that leaves you oh but I know where I stand
And you ain't woman enough to take my man

Women like you they're a dime a dozen you can buy 'em anywhere
For you to get to him I'd have to move over and I'm gonna stand right here
It'll be over my dead body so get out while you can
'Cause you ain't woman enough to take my man
No you ain't woman enough to take my man



Loretta Lynn writes from a feisty, straightforward point of view. In "You Ain't Woman Enough," she tells a woman who's flirting with Lynn's husband, "You better get out while you can."

5) Rhythm and Syllables

OBJECTIVES

Students will examine the connection between the number of syllables in a line of a song and the song's rhythm.

Students will demonstrate the ability to apply what they learn about rhythm and syllables to their own songs.

STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4

VOCABULARY

rhythm, syllables

PREPARATION

- Make copies of **"Bridges" Lyric Sheet**.
- Locate audio or video version of "Bridges" performed by Mickey Guyton.
- For advanced students, make copies of "Spotlight on Syllables" in the Appendix.

FREE WRITE (5 minutes)

DISCUSS HOMEWORK (4 minutes)

Divide the class into pairs to share their creative writing from Question 2 in the homework. Students should identify the subject and theme of their partner's journal entry, supporting their conclusions with textual evidence.

BRAINSTORM (1 minute)

Prompt: In your journal, spend one minute defining rhythm and identifying where you hear rhythm.

ACTIVITY (35 minutes)

1. Offer a reminder that songs are a combination of words and music. For lyrics to fit with music, songwriters need to learn about these terms and concepts:
 - **Rhythm** is a pattern of sounds and silences.
 - **Syllables** are the parts that a word is naturally divided into when it is pronounced.
 - Songwriters pick words and phrases that fit within a consistent pattern of syllables. In short, they make their words fit a rhythm.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTION OPPORTUNITY

This lesson is an excellent time to connect with other teachers to supplement student understanding of rhythm. The following subjects provide opportunities for connection:

Music: meter, rhythm, phrasing

Math: patterns, fractions

Literature: meter, poetry

Note: Math and music teachers could collaborate in a lesson about the mathematical aspects of rhythm and time signatures in music.

2. To illustrate the importance of lyrics that match a rhythm, read or sing the following lyrics aloud. Then read the second set of lyrics with the added syllables. Students should be able to hear that something about the rhythm sounds wrong.

THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER *Francis Scott Key*

And the rocket's red glare
The bombs bursting in air
Gave proof through the night
That our flag was still there

And the rocket's red glare
The bombs exploding all over the place
Gave proof through the night
That our flag was still there

WE WILL ROCK YOU *Brian May (of Queen)*

We will, we will rock you
We will, we will rock you

We will, we will rock you
We will, we will beat you really bad

TEACHER TIP

Allow students to have fun with this activity. Let them add syllables to other lyrics so that they sound funny. Make the point that songwriters can squeeze in words, if need be, but that certain phrases fit better than others.

3. Discuss the purpose of the rhythmic choices that songwriters make by using the following questions as a starting point:
- How does the rhythm of the songs in the previous exercise connect with the meaning of the lyrics?
 - How does the rhythm the writer chooses affect the mood of the song?
4. Distribute the “**Bridges**” **Lyric Sheet**.
- Ask students to count the syllables for the first verse and write the total at the end of each line. **Note:** Count the syllables as they would be pronounced when sung. For example, “every,” which has three syllables, would usually be sung with two syllables: “evry.”
 - Pair up students to count the syllables for the remainder of the song.
 - Ask students to compare the second and third verse to the first verse. Underline or highlight any words that slightly change the rhythm and add more syllables.
 - Initiate a class discussion on the pattern of syllables, pointing out that, while the pattern might not be identical from verse to verse, it is usually close to the same. Also point out that when there are more (or fewer) syllables, the rhythm also changes.

TEACHER TIP

Students might mistake the rhythm of lyrics with the rhythm or beat of a song, particularly when thinking of rap or hip-hop songs that are driven by intricate or intense beats. Students might focus on creating a beat rather than creating lyrics that fit a beat. While a song’s beat and its lyrics are interrelated, students should focus on the lyrics for this activity.

Fitting lyrics uniformly into a certain rhythm is an integral part of songwriting. While students will not master this skill in just one lesson, it is essential that they understand:

- The verses and chorus should follow a pattern of syllables.
- It is acceptable for lines to have a varied number of syllables, as long as the lines can be easily spoken within a uniform beat. In other words, each line of the song should fall into a rhythm. A way to check this is to count syllables. A good guideline is to keep the syllable count in each line of a verse or chorus within approximately four syllables of the counts in the other lines of the verse or chorus.
- A word can be sustained for extra syllables, if need be; however, students should test it by reciting it out loud.
- A pause, or a “rest,” can count as a syllable; however, students should try reciting it to see how it sounds.

5. If there is extra time, allow groups who have finished the worksheet to rewrite words to the first verse of a popular song, maintaining the same rhythm.

For advanced work on rhythm, see “Spotlight on Syllables” in the Appendix.

HOMEWORK

Choose three songs to analyze. Locate the lyrics in an online search. You may choose songs that you like, songs that you dislike, or a combination of both. Then complete the following assignments:

1. In your journal, copy the first verse and the chorus of each song. Number the lines, and then count and write down the number of syllables in each line. For example:

SONG 1		SONG 2		SONG 3	
Verse		Verse		Verse	
Line 1: 8 syllables	Chorus	Line 1: 6 syllables	Chorus	Line 1: 6 syllables	Chorus
Line 2: 8	Line 1: 4 syllables	Line 2: 8	Line 1: 8 syllables	Line 2: 6	Line 1: 6 syllables
Line 3: 8	Line 2: 4	Line 3: 6	Line 2: 8	Line 3: 6	Line 2: 6
Line 4: 8		Line 4: 8	Line 3: 8	Line 4: 8	Line 3: 6
		Line 5: 9	Line 4: 8	Line 5: 8	Line 4: 8
		Line 6: 4			

2. From this exercise, what did you learn about the kinds of syllable patterns you like or dislike?
3. Write a verse and chorus that uses each of the three patterns you discovered. This writing (and all writing for this unit) could become part of your final song or you could just use it as practice.

LYRIC SHEET

Bridges*Victoria Banks / Emily Doty / Mickey Guyton / Karen Kosowski*

You're on your side and I'm on mine
And in between this great divide
There's fire in the streets
People on their knees

Holding bibles and breaking glass
Guns and armor, tears and gas
If smoke is all we see
How we supposed to breathe?

What if we took these stones we've been
throwin'?
What if we laid 'em down?
What if we forget all that we know and
Make some common ground
What if I reach for you, you reach for me, and
close the distance?
What if that space between changed if we
started building
Bridges, bridges, bridges

I know you're scared and so am I
But that don't mean we shouldn't try
It ain't just black or white
It's down to wrong or right

What if we took these stones we've been
throwin'?
What if we laid 'em down?
What if we forget all that we know and
Make some common ground
What if I reach for you, you reach for me, and
close the distance?
What if that space between changed if we
started building
Bridges, bridges, bridges

We're gonna need more than prayers and
wishes
To build those bridges, bridges, bridges
It's gonna take way more work to fix it
Gotta build those bridges, bridges, bridges

We gotta take these stones we've been throwin'
We gotta lay them down
We gotta forget all that we know and
Make some common ground
What if I reach for you, you reach for me, and
close the distance?
What if that space between changed if we started
building
Bridges, bridges, bridges
Bridges, bridges, bridges
Gonna build those bridges, bridges, bridges
Bridges, bridges, bridges



Texas native Mickey Guyton released her debut EP, Unbreakable, in 2015. Her single "Black Like Me" was nominated for Best Country Solo Performance at the 2021 Grammy Awards.

6) Rhyme

OBJECTIVES

Students will determine rhyme scheme.

Students will identify exact rhyme and approximate rhyme.

Students will demonstrate the ability to apply rhyme scheme to their own songs.

STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5

VOCABULARY

approximate rhyme, exact rhyme, free verse, rhyme scheme, tag

PREPARATION

- Make copies of “**I Hope You Dance**” and “**Me and Bobby McGee**” Lyric Sheets.
- Locate audio or video versions of “I Hope You Dance” performed by Lee Ann Womack. Locate two versions of “Me and Bobby McGee,” the first performed by either Roger Miller or Kris Kristofferson and the second performed by Janis Joplin. **Note:** “Me and Bobby McGee,” written by Kris Kristofferson and Fred Foster, is a song that has been recorded and/or performed by many artists. Roger Miller originally recorded it, and Kristofferson's recording expanded its popularity, as well. Janis Joplin's version is the best known, though she changed some of the lyrics from the original. Kenny Rogers, Gordon Lightfoot, Pink, and many others have also performed the song. If possible, please allow time to play at least two versions for students.
- For advanced students, make copies of “Spotlight on Rhyme” (in the Appendix).

FREE WRITE (5 minutes)

DISCUSS HOMEWORK (3 minutes)

Divide students into pairs to review what they wrote.

Prompt: What syllable patterns did your partner use? What songs were used for models?

BRAINSTORM (2 minutes)

Prompt: In your journal, write as many words that rhyme with “top” as you can in 30 seconds. Your rhyming words do not have to be only one syllable long. For example, “hip-hop” rhymes with “tip-top” or just “top.” Share a few of your favorites with a partner.

ACTIVITY (35 minutes)

1. Explain that rhymes occur when words at the end of two or more lines in a song share the same or a similar sound.

Rhymes can be exact or approximate:

- An **exact rhyme** has the same ending sound. “Last,” “past,” and “fast” are examples of exact rhyme.
- An **approximate rhyme** sounds like a rhyme, depending on how the artist sings the words, though the words do not have exactly the same ending sounds. “Age,” “fade,” and “play”—which all share the same vowel sound—are examples of approximate rhyme.

TEACHER TIP

Emphasize throughout the lesson that rhymes should support the meaning of the song. Students should avoid selecting words just because they rhyme. It is better to have a word that does not rhyme than to use a word that does not make sense.

2. Distribute “I Hope You Dance” Lyric Sheet. Read the following prompt:

A **rhyme scheme** describes the pattern of rhyming words in a song. To help you identify the rhyme scheme in these songs, use the first two letters of the alphabet. “A” is used for the first line, and any other lines that rhyme with it are also labeled “A.” When you come to a line that does not rhyme with “A,” label it “B.” All lines that rhyme with this line will be labeled “B,” as well. When you encounter the next rhyming sequence, return to “A,” and then “B,” and so on. You should circle words that are exact rhymes and underline words that are approximate rhymes.

3. Play the audio or video version of “I Hope You Dance,” performed by Lee Ann Womack. Ask students to review their rhyme scheme analysis as they listen, paying close attention to how Womack’s singing emphasizes the rhyme scheme.

After the song has played, discuss the rhyme scheme as a class.

4. Distribute “Me and Bobby McGee” Lyric Sheet. Play “Me and Bobby McGee,” as performed by either Roger Miller or Kris Kristofferson. Ask students to be attentive to how the singing emphasizes the rhyme scheme. Point out a creative example of rhyme in the last two lines of the first verse, where “time” rhymes with the first syllable of “finally,” even though the two words share only a long vowel sound. Play the Janis Joplin version and note that she took artistic license with the original lyrics.

After the song has played, divide the class into pairs or groups, assigning them to:

- Determine the song’s rhyme scheme.
- Make note of approximate rhymes.
- Compare how each artist sings (if playing multiple versions of the song).

TEACHER TIP

Students may take note of the lengthy musical riff on the end of “Me and Bobby McGee.” This is called a **tag**. Separate from the main body of the song, a tag is a musical idea that extends the ending. A tag complements the song and is often improvised by the singer rather than written into the lyrics by the songwriter.

5. Share the following resources to help students with rhyming:

- Internet sites, such as rhymezone.com and rhymers.com, offer rhyme searches.
- A thesaurus, either online or in the library, is a resource for synonyms.
- A rhyming dictionary can be found in libraries and book stores.

6. Ask students to write four lines with one of the following rhyme schemes: AABB, ABAB. **Note:** You may want to mention that some songs are written in **free verse**, which means that they do not follow a rhyme scheme. Students may mistake free verse as an easier technique, but oftentimes, it is more difficult.

If time allows, students should try more rhyme schemes.

For advanced work on rhyming, see “Spotlight on Rhyme” in the Appendix.

HOMEWORK

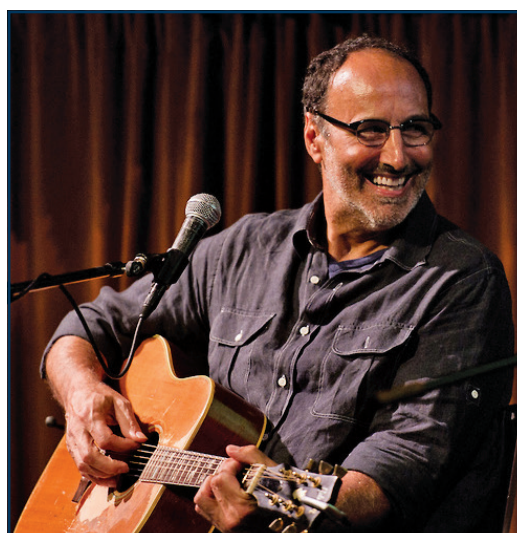
Give students the following prompt:

Pick two songs that you enjoy, but that you have not selected for previous assignments. Make sure the lyrics follow a rhyme scheme. Locate the lyrics for both songs.

1. In your journal, write down the rhyme scheme for each. Are the rhyme schemes the same or different? Explain.
2. Write part or all of a song that uses what you have learned about rhyming. To get inspired, look back at what you have written so far in your journal. Remember that your rhymes can be exact or approximate. Also remember to pick words that fit what you want to say, not just words that rhyme. You can use the Internet, a thesaurus, or a rhyming dictionary to help find rhyming words. What you write in this assignment could be part of your final song or it could just be for practice.



Kris Kristofferson (left) got the idea for “Me and Bobby McGee” from his publisher, Fred Foster (above). Janis Joplin’s version of the song became a pop hit after her death in 1970.



Mark D. Sanders (above) and Tia Sillers (right) co-wrote the inspirational ballad “I Hope You Dance,” recorded by Lee Ann Womack. Sillers is pictured with her husband, songwriter Mark Selby.

LYRIC SHEET

I Hope You Dance*Mark D. Sanders/Tia Sillers*

I hope you never lose your sense of wonder
 You get your fill to eat but always keep that hunger
 May you never take one single breath for granted
 God forbid love ever leave you empty-handed

I hope you still feel small when you stand
 beside the ocean
 Whenever one door closes I hope one more opens
 Promise me that you'll give faith a fighting chance
 And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance

I hope you dance, I hope you dance

I hope you never fear those mountains in the distance
 Never settle for the path of least resistance
 Livin' might mean takin' chances but they're worth takin'
 Lovin' might be a mistake but it's worth makin'

Don't let some hell-bent heart leave you bitter
 When you come close to sellin' out reconsider
 Give the heavens above more than just a passing glance
 And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance

I hope you dance, I hope you dance

I hope you dance, I hope you dance

(Background vocals)

*Time is a wheel in constant motion always
 rolling us along*

*Tell me who wants to look back on their years
 and wonder where those years have gone*

I hope you still feel small when you stand
 beside the ocean
 Whenever one door closes I hope one more opens
 Promise me that you'll give faith a fighting chance
 And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance

Dance, I hope you dance

I hope you dance, I hope you dance

I hope you dance, I hope you dance

*Time is a wheel in constant motion always
 rolling us along*

*Tell me who wants to look back on their
 years and wonder where those years have gone*

[Repeat]

REMINDER

Rhyme scheme is the pattern of rhyming words at the ends of lines.

Exact rhymes have the same ending sounds, like "last" and "past."

Approximate rhymes sound similar to each other, like "age" and "fade."

LYRIC SHEET

Me and Bobby McGee*Kris Kristofferson/Fred Foster*

Busted flat in Baton Rouge, headin' for the trains
Feelin' nearly faded as my jeans
Bobby thumbed a diesel down just before it rained
Took us all the way to New Orleans,

I took my harpoon out of my dirty red bandanna
And was blowin' sad, while Bobby sang the blues
With them windshield wipers slappin' time and Bobby clappin' hands
We finally sang up every song that driver knew.

Freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose
And nothin' ain't worth nothin' but it's free;
Feelin' good was easy, Lord, when Bobby sang the blues
Feeling good was good enough for me
Good enough for me and Bobby McGee.

From the coal mines of Kentucky to the California sun
Bobby shared the secrets of my soul
Standing right beside me, Lord, through everything I done
And every night she kept me from the cold.

Then somewhere near Salinas, Lord, I let her slip away
Lookin' for the home I hope she'll find
And I'd trade all my tomorrows for a single yesterday
Holdin' Bobby's body next to mine.

Freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose,
And nothin' left is all she left for me
Feelin' good was easy, Lord, when Bobby sang the blues
And buddy, that was good enough for me
Good enough for me and Bobby McGee.

7) Creating Strong Images

OBJECTIVES

Students will explore the difference between showing and telling.

Students will understand the concept of painting a mental image in songwriting.

Students will demonstrate the ability to create strong images.

STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.5

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7

VOCABULARY

abstract, imagery, images, metaphor, sensory details, simile, theme (review)

PREPARATION

- Make copies of **“I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry” Lyric Sheet**.
- Locate audio version or live performance of “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry,” written by Hank Williams.
- For advanced students, make copies of “Spotlight on Images” (in the Appendix).

FREE WRITE (5 minutes)

DISCUSS HOMEWORK (2 minutes)

Allow students to share their favorite rhymes with the class. (**Note:** This pertains to the second part in the homework assignment.)

BRAINSTORM (6 minutes)

This exercise will help students become more aware of the details that their senses constantly pick up.

Prompt: In your journal, list as many details about your current surroundings as you can in 30 seconds. Try to move past the obvious things you see and try to find tiny details that someone else might not notice.

Ask students to raise their hands if they listed anything other than a visual detail (a sound, a smell, a feeling, or a taste) in their list. Share with students that we often rely on visual details, but using all five senses creates even stronger images.

Prompt: For the next 30 seconds, close your eyes and listen. Pay attention to every little sound. Open your eyes and list as many sounds as you can in 30 seconds.

Repeat this prompt for each of the other senses (smell, taste, touch), allowing 30 seconds to think with eyes closed and 30 seconds to write. If students have trouble with smell and taste, ask them to list memorable aromas or tastes that they have experienced recently.

Ask students to share some of their details with the class.

ACTIVITY (30–35 minutes)

1. Share this information with students:

Every waking moment, we absorb a tidal wave of information through our senses, often without recognizing the various pieces that make up what we are experiencing. But when we concentrate on each sense, we are able to identify the **sensory details**, the individual sights, sounds, tastes, aromas, and touch sensations that allow us to take in our surroundings. When we isolate these details and describe them in vivid and expressive language, we can stir mental pictures, or **images**, in our listeners' minds. We know this already from the fiction we all read and enjoy. Whether spoken, read, or sung, words have the power to fire our imaginations, involving us in someone else's senses, memories, and feelings, almost as if we are experiencing them, too. Sensory details are the most powerful tool to create the images that evoke our emotions. When we use images in writing, it's called **imagery**.

2. Ask students to think of a time they felt one of the following emotions: sadness, joy, calm, or anger. Allow a few students to share their experience with the class. Urge them to try to tell the story without using the actual word for the emotion they are recalling (sadness, joy, etc.).

3. Share this information with students:

When you hear stories like this that communicate feelings, it's easy to picture them in your mind. These images allow you to show your audience an emotion instead of simply telling them you were sad, happy, angry, or calm. Songwriters use images to show emotions to their listeners instead of directly stating, "I feel angry," or "I felt sad." Images support the theme, which is the message of the song. So when you use a strong image in your writing, it shows your audience more about your subject than if you just told them about it. Remember that it's always more powerful to show, rather than tell.

4. Share this information, as well:

Two figures of speech, **simile** and **metaphor**, also can be used to create strong imagery in your lyrics. A simile is a descriptive comparison that uses "like" or "as." For example, "He was as fast as a whirlwind on the basketball court," or "The sun rose like a neon tangerine." A metaphor makes similar comparisons without using "like" or "as." Notice how similes and metaphors compare two unlike things that share a similar feature. For example, "He was a whirlwind on the basketball court," or "At dawn, the sun was a neon tangerine."

5. Distribute **"I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" Lyric Sheet**, then play the song. Note that it is considered a landmark song in country music. Hank Williams wrote it in 1949, when most popular songs did not contain similar poetic images. It is, for instance, the oldest recording on *Rolling Stone* magazine's list of the "500 Greatest Songs of All Time." Divide students into pairs to pick out descriptive imagery, including metaphors, and strong, active verbs. Use the following questions to lead a class discussion:

- How does Hank Williams set a mood with his description of familiar images?
- How do the verbs contribute to the power of the images?
- Pick one of these images to examine more closely. What emotion or feeling is the image communicating?
- What does Williams mean by "Did you ever see a robin weep" and "The moon just went behind the clouds to hide its face and cry"? We know robins don't weep, and neither does the moon. What feeling is he creating by using these images?

TEACHER TIP

Imagery can be realistic or **abstract**. Unlike realistic imagery, abstract images are not based on tangible external reality. “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry” uses more abstract imagery than realistic imagery. Students may benefit from a discussion of this distinction. For an example of more realistic imagery, see any of the following songs: “Long Ride Home” by Patty Griffin, “Southern Comfort Zone” by Brad Paisley, or “Automatic” by Miranda Lambert. Unlike those songs, “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry” has no chorus, though the title phrase repeats.

6. Give students the following writing prompt, incorporating long pauses when asking them to imagine or recall information:

Close your eyes and imagine a room that is familiar to you. Let your mind wander to a few different memories that have taken place in this room. Now open your eyes and list the following details about the room in your journal. List as many details as you can, and try to move past obvious characteristics.

- **Sight:** What things can you see, big and small?
- **Smell:** What odors and aromas are usually present in the room?
- **Sound:** Think back to a few memories or one specific memory you had in this room. Do you remember any sounds? If it is a downstairs room, can you hear anything upstairs? If it is an upstairs room, can you hear anything downstairs? What about typical house noises—creaky stairs, a ceiling fan?
- **Taste:** Do you have any memories in which you have tasted something in this room? What was it?
- **Touch:** What textures do you associate with this room? Do you recall touching anything with your hands or feet? What did that feel like?
- **Emotion:** What feelings are associated with this room in your memories? Do you have happy memories? Anxious memories? A little of both? What other emotions come to mind?

7. Give students the following writing prompt:

In your journal, write a paragraph or poem retelling your memory. Use as many of the details from your list as you can. Your writing should include at least one detail from each of your five senses plus your emotion for a total of six details. You may complete this assignment as part of your homework.

8. If time allows, share with students that songwriters choose details and images carefully to evoke feelings in their listeners. Read aloud these lyrics written by a student who participated in the Words & Music program:

Sitting on the porch

Listening to the breeze

Watching the street scorch

Feel so at ease

Ask the class:

- What kind of mental images do you see when you hear these words?
- What senses does the writer involve?
- What kind of emotion does the imagery create?

Now read aloud the second verse of the student’s song:

Sitting on the porch
On a cold and dreary day
Listening to the storm
That just won’t go away

Ask the class:

- What is different about the images in this verse?
- How does this lyric relate differently to your senses than the first verse?
- How is the emotion different from the first verse?
- What other senses could you use to build on the imagery in these two verses?

For advanced work on images, similes, and metaphors, see “Spotlight on Images” in the Appendix.

HOMEWORK

Give students the following prompt:

Examine the lyrics of some of your favorite songs. Find at least one that uses images to paint a mental picture. Copy it down in your journal and highlight at least four of these images in the lyrics. Pay attention to the kinds of images that are powerful to you. Think about how you could use these sorts of images in your own work.

Next, pick one of the following words and think of a situation in your life when you felt that emotion:

Happiness	Fear
Sadness	Joy
Friendship	Worry
Anger	Calm

For example, here’s a situation for joy: “My brother is in the army, and he’s been away for six months. But last week, there was a knock on our front door. When my mom opened it, there he was. I ran to him, and he scooped me up. We hugged and cried.”

Write a paragraph, poem, or song retelling your memory. Use all of your five senses to paint strong mental pictures.

LYRIC SHEET

I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry*Hank Williams*

Hear that lonesome whippoorwill
He sounds too blue to fly
The midnight train is whining low
I'm so lonesome I could cry

I've never seen a night so long
When time goes crawling by
The moon just went behind the clouds
To hide its face and cry

Did you ever see a robin weep
When leaves begin to die
That means he's lost the will to live
I'm so lonesome I could cry

The silence of a falling star
Lights up a purple sky
And as I wonder where you are
I'm so lonesome I could cry



Hank Williams wrote about intense heartbreak in songs like "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry." Although he died young, in 1953, he remains one of country music's most celebrated songwriters.

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).

9) Revision

OBJECTIVES

Students will learn about the revision process as it relates to songwriting.

Students will revise their songs to meet Words & Music program standards.

Students will prepare their songs for submission to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum.

STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.5

VOCABULARY

cover songs, metaphor (review), point of view (review), revision, simile (review)

PREPARATION

- Make copies of **Partner Revision Handout**.
- Make copies of **Songwriter Manuscripts** (in the Supplemental Materials). **Note:** You may choose to project these rather than photocopying.
- Reserve computers or computer lab for students to type their songs.
- Make copies of **Final Lyric Assessment Rubric** (in Supplemental Materials) to use in your evaluation of each student's final work.
- For advanced students, make copies of "Spotlight on Verses" in the Appendix.

FREE WRITE (5 minutes)

BRAINSTORM (5 minutes)

Review the two figures of speech, **simile** and **metaphor**. Explain that a simile is a descriptive comparison that uses "like" or "as." A metaphor makes similar comparisons without using "like" or "as."

Prompt: For the final brainstorm, work with a partner to write down as many similes and metaphors as you can in three minutes.

For the remaining time, allow students to share their favorite similes and metaphors with the class.

ACTIVITY (35 minutes)

1. Share with students:

Just like any other style of writing, songwriting requires **revision** to make the song the best it can be. To revise lyrics, songwriters may do something as simple as swapping out a few words, or they might rewrite whole verses or the chorus. They have to be brave enough to accept feedback from other people and to consider changing words and phrases they may have thought were perfect. Professional songwriters often keep revising their work, even up to the last minute. Bob Dylan, for example, originally wrote the song "Tangled Up in Blue" in the third-person **point of view**, from the perspective of someone else. But then decided to change it to first person—from the "I" point of view—when he recorded it.

TEACHER TIP

Encourage students to try writing their songs from a different point of view. A third-person perspective (in the voice of someone else) can allow students more creative license than writing in first person (as themselves). See "Spotlight on Point of View" in the Appendix.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTION OPPORTUNITY

Students interested in history may enjoy writing from the perspective of a person involved in a historical event, such as a Civil War battle or the sinking of the Titanic. You may wish to collaborate with a history teacher to create a point-of-view lyric-writing exercise.

2. Share examples of **Songwriter Manuscripts** (in Supplemental Materials) that demonstrate revision.
3. **Preparing students for the songwriter workshop:** Remind students that one reason they will want to polish their work is that the Words & Music unit culminates in a workshop experience with a professional songwriter. The writer will set a selection of student lyrics to music, performing those fully formed songs for the class. Prepare students for this experience by letting them know:
 - Not all students' songs will be arranged and performed by the songwriter.
 - This is a co-writing experience, since the professional songwriter is putting the students' lyrics to music. Therefore, the professional may take creative license with some of the lyrics or structural elements to make the words work better with music.
 - It is not uncommon for lyrics to be set to a variety of musical styles. Artists sometimes record **cover songs**, or remakes, arranging the same lyrics to fit jazz, rock, country, or another musical genre. Students should be encouraged to embrace this concept if their musical vision for their lyrics differs from the choices made by the professional songwriter.

TEACHER TIP

To further explore the concept of cover songs, introduce the song "I Will Always Love You," which was written and originally recorded by Dolly Parton and then later recorded by Whitney Houston. Play Parton's version, followed by Houston's version, and discuss their similarities and differences. Students may know other examples of cover songs that could enrich the discussion.

4. Distribute and review the **Partner Revision Handout**.

Students should take ten to fifteen minutes to thoughtfully complete the revision handouts. Remind them to take their task seriously; their objective is to offer constructive feedback that will improve their partner's work, not tear it down.
5. After students finish the **Partner Revision Handout**, they should follow its guidance and, if need be, make final changes to their song. They should then type or neatly print their lyrics and turn them in according to the deadline you set, following these **guidelines for submission to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum**:
 - Lyrics must be typed or clearly printed (typed is preferred).
 - Lyrics should adhere to the following formatting requirements:
 - 12-point font, 1.5 spaced
 - Left justified (flush left)
 - Chorus indented once
 - Bridge indented twice

- Each set of lyrics should contain the following header information:
 - Student name(s)
 - Teacher name(s)
 - School name
 - Date
 - Grade level

Students may include a note to the professional songwriter, if they have a preferred song style. (This issue is also addressed in the last question on the **Partner Revision Handout**.)

TEACHER TIP

If students finish early, ask them to write in their journal five to ten similes or metaphors that could fit in their song. They may want to revise their lyrics to include one or more of these new images.

For advanced work on revision, see “Spotlight on Verses” in the Appendix.

HOMEWORK

Depending on the deadline you set, students may complete their revisions at home.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTION OPPORTUNITY

Speak to the visual art teacher about a joint project that would allow students to create album covers or other work to illustrate their lyrics.

SUBMITTING LYRICS

Lyrics are due at least two weeks before the scheduled Words & Music songwriter workshop. Compile the lyrics of each class into one document and attach it to an email. Send to Lyrics@CountryMusicHallofFame.org

EVALUATING THE PROGRAM

Your feedback is essential in our measurement of program outcomes to ensure Words & Music effectively meets your classroom needs and our program goals. We ask that you and your students complete the **Teacher Evaluation** and **Student Reflection** following the unit (see lesson 10).

- Your students should complete the **Student Reflection** after their lyric submission but before the songwriter workshop at www.surveymonkey.com/r/WordsMusicStudent.
- Please complete the **Teacher Evaluation** after completing the Words & Music unit and the songwriter session at www.surveymonkey.com/r/WordsMusicTeacher.

PARTNER REVISION HANDOUT

Part 1: Partner Review and Feedback

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Read your partner's song lyrics.
2. Underline all the words that rhyme at the end of lines.
3. Count the syllables in each line, and write the number at the end. Remember to count the syllables as a singer would pronounce it (for example, "every" would count as two syllables because it is sung "evry").
4. What is the subject? _____

5. What is the theme? _____

6. What evidence makes you think this is the theme? _____

7. What line or lines do you like best and why? _____

8. What line or lines could be more descriptive and would benefit from the use of a simile, metaphor, or sensory detail?

9. Reread the lyrics. Are there any phrases or lines that are clichés (already appear in many other popular songs)? If so, circle them.
10. Return the worksheet and the lyrics to the songwriter.

PARTNER REVISION HANDOUT

Part 2: Songwriter Feedback Response

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Did your partner find rhyming words at the end of most of your lines? Y / N

- If “no,” consider adding more rhyming words.

2. Look at the number of syllables per line in your verses. Is the number about the same from line to line? Y / N

- If “no,” consider rephrasing the lines.

3. Is the number of syllables about the same in all the verses? Y / N

- If “no,” consider rephrasing the verses.

4. Did your partner correctly identify the theme? Y / N

- If “no,” consider rewriting parts of your chorus to clarify your theme.

5. Check to make sure your song has the following elements.

- ☐ Title
- ☐ Chorus
- ☐ Hook
- ☐ Verse(s)

6. Did your partner identify a line or lines from your song that could be improved with an inventive simile, metaphor, or sensory detail? Y/N

- If “yes,” try using a simile, metaphor, or sensory detail to rewrite the line or lines. Remember to count your syllables again when changing a line.

7. Look for anything your partner circled as a cliché (overused line or phrase). Did you intentionally use a cliché? If not, try communicating it in a new or original way.

8. How do you imagine the music to your song? Would it be fast or slow? Would it be country, rock, blues, rap, jazz, samba, or something else? _____

10) Student Reflection and Careers in Songwriting

OBJECTIVES

Students will reflect on their songwriting experience.

Students will be introduced to careers in songwriting.

VOCABULARY

copyright, publisher, royalty

PREPARATION

- Ensure students have access to computers or devices. The internet is needed to complete both the online Student Reflection and the career research activity.
- Students will reflect on the lyric-writing process by completing the **online Student Reflection** at www.surveymonkey.com/r/WordsMusicStudent. A student handout with a QR code and website link is included for convenience.

- Teachers will complete the **online Teacher Evaluation** at www.surveymonkey.com/r/WordsMusicTeacher. If more than one teacher at your school taught the Words & Music lessons, each teacher should complete the online Teacher Evaluation.

STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions.

FREE WRITE (5 minutes)

GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

1. Ask students the following questions about their songwriting experience:

- Did you enjoy your songwriting experience? Why or why not?
- What was difficult about the songwriting process?
- What surprised you about songwriting?
- How did you feel when you completed your lyric? A sense of accomplishment? Surprised at what you created? Nervous to share your song with others?
- What did you learn about country music that you didn't know before?

REFLECTION (10 minutes)

Students will reflect on the lyric-writing process by completing the **online Student Reflection**

at www.surveymonkey.com/r/WordsMusicStudent. A student handout with a QR code and website link is included for convenience (see p. 59).

BRAINSTORM (2 minutes)

Prompt: In your journal, write down as many jobs or careers in music as you can think of in one minute. Underline or circle any careers that you think are related to songwriting. Share a few careers with a partner when you are finished.

ACTIVITY (20 minutes)

1. Students may wonder how songwriters make money. Explain to students that a **copyright** gives songwriters the legal right to reproduce, distribute, and perform their original songs. Songwriters can grant those rights to others, such as a music publisher. Many professional songwriters sign a publishing deal with a music publisher. **Publishers** help songwriters by getting their songs recorded or “cut” by recording artists, thus generating income when the songs are streamed, sold on CD or vinyl, or used in other ways like in commercials, television, movies, or video games. Music publishers share a portion of such income with the songwriters. The portion of the income paid to songwriters is called a **royalty**. When a song is recorded and used, there are many different people and companies who may receive part of the income, including not only the songwriter and publisher, but also the artist, record label, producer, mixer, manager, and others.

TEACHER TIP

Any original song written has automatic copyright protection from the moment it is created and put in a “tangible” form (such as writing down the lyrics or recording the song). When you write down your lyrics or record it, you have automatic copyright protection. A copyright is an automatic right upon creation; you do not need to register it with the United States Copyright Office (or mail it to yourself, etc.). Songwriters can mark their song lyrics with the copyright symbol (©) and include the date of creation. For more information, see www.copyright.gov.

2. Share the following with students:

There are many careers in the music business related to songwriting. Some careers are entirely creative—as in, jobs that involve the creation of music, which means writing the songs. For example, a staff writer is a songwriter who works for a publisher to create songs for commercial release. There are also other jobs that support and deal with the business aspects, like lawyers and accountants.

3. Have students conduct internet research on careers in the music business specific to songwriting.

Careers may include, but are not limited to:

- Entertainment Attorney
- Licensing Representative
- Lyricist
- Music Producer
- Music Therapist
- Music Teacher/Professor
- Performing Songwriter/Singer-Songwriter
- Publisher
- Recording Artist
- Song Plugger
- Staff Writer

Students should choose one career to research and record the following in their journals:

- Name of the career
- A description of the career
- Identify important skills and/or education needed for the career
- How does this career connect to songwriting?

WEBSITES

The following websites provide information on various careers in songwriting:

Berklee

www.berklee.edu/careers

This website provides a comprehensive list and thorough descriptions of careers related to songwriting in business, composition, design, education, health and wellness, performance, and production.

Careers in Music

<https://www.careersinmusic.com/music-careers/>

This website explores careers related to songwriting with information on salary, career path, experience and skills, and education and training. Students can also explore music career paths based on interest using a fun, interactive questionnaire. (See “What are you most interested in?” at the top of the website.)

4. Assign students to small groups, then assign each group an industry in music as listed on the websites (i.e., business, composition, education, health, performance, production, etc.). In each group/industry, students can choose or roll a die to decide who has which career in that industry. Students will research and present their career to their group. After each student has presented their career, students will discuss how all careers relate and work together in the music business.

TEACHER TIP

If time allows, students can create a presentation using computer software (like PowerPoint) to present their chosen careers to the class. If a student has a parent or relative in a related career, invite them to visit and discuss their job with the class.

HOMEWORK

Assign students to write questions in their journals to ask the songwriter during the upcoming workshop. Questions can be about lyric writing, playing an instrument, performing live, the music business, or other related topics. Encourage students to think of inquiring questions beginning with “who,” “what,” “when,” “why,” and “how.” Students should bring their questions to the songwriter workshop.

HELP US HELP YOU

Teacher feedback is essential in our measurement of program outcomes to ensure Words & Music effectively meets classroom needs and learning goals. Please complete the **online Teacher Evaluation** upon completion of the unit, after the songwriter session, at www.surveymonkey.com/r/WordsMusicTeacher (QR code to the right). All teachers who participated in Words & Music should complete the teacher evaluation. Thank you for sharing this request and the assessment link with any additional teachers at your school who instructed Words & Music. We greatly appreciate your efforts in reporting accurate data, enabling this award-winning program to continue to be free or low cost for you and your students for years to come.



CONTINUING OPPORTUNITIES

The following organizations provide opportunities for songwriters to interact with one another, get feedback on their songs, and further their songwriting pursuits:

SoundCloud

www.SoundCloud.com

This audio platform enables sound creators to upload, record, promote, and share original work.

Nashville Songwriters Association International

www.NashvilleSongwriters.com

This not-for-profit trade organization serves amateurs and professionals in all genres of music. Paid membership is required.

Tennessee Songwriters Association International

www.TennesseeSongwriters.com

This organization supports songwriters with a variety of services. Paid membership is required.

TAXI

www.Taxi.com

For a fee, TAXI connects artists, bands, and songwriters to people in the music business such as record company staff, publishers, and music supervisors.

Songwriter Forums

A variety of songwriter forums exist to offer advice and feedback.



Cindy Walker wrote songs for numerous cowboy movies in the 1940s. She composed lyrics on her typewriter, which is part of the collection of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum.



Student Reflection

Congratulations on writing a song! Reflect on the lyric-writing process by completing the **online Student Reflection** before the songwriter program. Scan the QR code or visit the website below:



www.surveymonkey.com/r/WordsMusicStudent

The Blues

SUPPLEMENTAL LESSON

The Blues is a supplemental lesson that is intended to be taught between Lessons 7 and 8 in the Words & Music unit.

OBJECTIVES

Students will explore the history and elements of traditional blues songs.

Students will apply their knowledge of blues to writing their own traditional blues lyrics.

VOCABULARY

blues, chorus (review), cover, genre, holler, rhyme (review), work song, verse (review), 12-bar blues

PREPARATION

- Make copies of the **Blues Styles Across the United States Worksheet**, **“Cross Road Blues” Lyric Sheet**, and **“I Can’t Quit You Baby” Lyric Sheet**.
- Locate audio or video versions of “Cross Road Blues” performed by Robert Johnson and “I Can’t Quit You Baby” performed by Willie Dixon.

STANDARDS

English Language Arts

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5

Tennessee Social Studies

AAH.26, AAH.31, AAH.35, TN.50

INTRODUCTION

The Blues lesson is divided into two parts. In **Part I: Blues History**, students will explore the history of blues styles across the United States. In **Part II: Blues Form**, students will analyze blues lyrics and learn how to write their own traditional blues lyrics. Depending on class time and needs, Part I and Part II can be taught together in one day or over two separate days.

BRAINSTORM (5 minutes)

Prompt: Think of times when you felt sad, heartbroken, disappointed, or treated unfairly. In your journal, list as many of these experiences as you can. Select one of these experiences and write a detailed account of it. Describe what happened, the way you felt, the way you dealt with it, and any other details relating to the experience.

TEACHER TIP

Allow students to volunteer sharing their journal entries. Create a safe environment by setting classroom expectations for being kind and respectful to others as their peers share personal experiences. By sharing, students will develop social and emotional learning competencies such as self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills.

GROUP DISCUSSION (5 minutes)

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

- What is the blues?
- Who writes blues songs?
- Why do people like blues songs?
- Are you familiar with any blues artists?
- What makes the blues different from other music genres or styles of music?

ACTIVITY**PART I: BLUES HISTORY** (20–25 minutes)

1. Distribute the Blues Styles Across the United States Worksheet. Students may use the worksheet to identify key words that best describe each blues style discussed in class. Share the information below with students. Refer to the Teacher Resource Portal for the audio/video examples and accompanying PowerPoint, which includes the history information below.

Blues songs often tell stories of misfortune, regret, and overcoming bad luck. This style of music has its roots in African-American history. In the 1800s, enslaved individuals would collectively sing **work songs** as they were forced to work long, hard days often in fields. A song leader would sing a short improvised melody (call), and the workers would answer with a single repeated melody (response). Enslaved people also sang **hollers**, which sounded a lot like work songs, but were sang alone, rather than as a group.

The origins of blues music can be traced to the Mississippi Delta during the late 1800s and early 1900s. From there, it spread to other areas of the country, where the sound evolved due to musicians adding musical elements popular in their regions.

Examples of different blues styles across the United States include:

The **Mississippi Delta Blues** are considered the oldest style of blues, originating in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Most Delta blues records feature singers accompanying themselves on guitar. Usually, they play a basic repeated musical pattern, known as **12-bar blues**. (See Part II for more information.) The lyrics typically used an AAB line pattern and were often about failed relationships, life on the road, and other emotional topics. In Mississippi, blues music venues were train stations, street corners, barns, and other informal locations.

Example: “Pony Blues” by Charley Patton

Perhaps no other region combines as many styles into their blues music as **Texas Blues**. In the early 1900s Texans often kept elements of the Mississippi Delta Blues (i.e., AAB line pattern and **12-bar blues**) and combined it with their own folk and spiritual tunes. Singers like Blind Lemon Jefferson found a way to accompany long, free form, holler-like melodies with freely strummed guitar chords. Additionally, Texas blues musicians added in musical elements from around the world including Latin rhythms and polkas.

Example: “Match Box Blues” by Blind Lemon Jefferson

Many **Memphis Blues** musicians moved from the Mississippi Delta to escape the oppression of field work. Memphis offered opportunities for black businesses and entertainment on its famous Beale Street. Musicians could also perform at house parties, corner saloons, traveling tent shows, or in jazz bands. In order to compete with large performance ensembles (like W.C. Handy’s band), artists often performed as a duo and developed a distinct musical sound where one guitar played high treble chords and melodies while the other played low bass lines—a sound still present today.

Example: “Beale Town Bound” by the Beale Street Sheiks duo

St. Louis Blues soaked up diverse music styles from the Mississippi Delta, ragtime from local artist Scott Joplin (composer of “Maple Leaf Rag” and “The Entertainer”), and jazz influences from New Orleans. In 1914, W.C. Handy published his song “St. Louis Blues” which would become one of the most popular blues songs in history.

Example: “St. Louis Blues” by Bessie Smith

When you think of **Chicago Blues**, think of a bigger band and electricity! This style developed in the 1950s and added several instruments to the typical Delta blues style, including electric guitar, bass guitar played with an amp, a piano, a miked harmonica, and sometimes a horn section (trumpet, trombone, and saxophone).

Example: “Trouble No More” by Muddy Waters

PART II: BLUES FORM (20–25 minutes)

2. Distribute the “**Cross Road Blues**” **Lyric Sheet**, and listen to a recording of the song by Robert Johnson.

Have students discuss the following questions with a partner, then share their answers with the class:

- What is the subject and theme of the song?
- How is the theme reflected in the title?
- What do you think the artist means when he refers to “the crossroads?” Is it figurative, literal, or both?
- What feeling is conveyed in this song?
- What evidence from the song supports your position?
- How is the form or structure of this song different than songs you listen to today?



Robert Johnson (1911–1938) was an American blues musician from the Mississippi Delta. Johnson is widely accepted as one of the greatest guitarists of all time and has influenced blues and rock & roll musicians like Muddy Waters, the Rolling Stones, and Eric Clapton.

3. Share the following information with students:

“Cross Road Blues” (also known as “Crossroads”) was written and recorded by Robert Johnson in 1936. The song has become part of the mythology surrounding Robert Johnson, referring to the place where he supposedly sold his soul to the devil in exchange for his musical talents. When blues artists, like Johnson, sing about having the “blues,” it means they feel sad, regretful, down on their luck, or betrayed. Although blues music often deals with personal struggles, it’s also about overcoming hard times, saying how you feel, venting your frustration, and having fun while doing it!

Unlike most popular or country music that follow a verse-chorus-verse-chorus-bridge-chorus music form, blues songs like “Cross Road Blues” typically use multiple verses and no chorus. Traditional blues songs typically follow a three-line **verse** with an AAB line pattern, which is sang over a basic repeated musical pattern called **12-bar blues**. This form of blues typically has the following lyrical elements:

A. Line 1 – State the problem, situation, or issue.

A. Line 2 – Repeat the first line.

B. Line 3 – Response to the first two lines, which:

- States a solution or consequence.
- Is often phrased as a two-part answer separated by an implied “but” or “therefore.”
- Is longer in length to the first two lines.
- May contain up to the same number of syllables as the first two lines.
- Rhymes with the first two repeated lines.

12-bar blues refers to a chord progression that is 12 bars (or measures) long. It can be divided into three four-bar segments that follow the AAB line pattern of a verse.

4. Give students the following writing prompt:

In your journal, write about a time when you were at a crossroads (literal and/or figurative). What did it look like? What decision(s) did you have to make? What were the consequences of your choices?

5. Distribute the “**I Can’t Quit You Baby**” **Lyric Sheet** and listen to the version recorded by Willie Dixon.

Students will discuss the following questions in small groups, then discuss as a class:

- How does this style of blues differ from Robert Johnson’s “Cross Road Blues”?
- What story is being told and what message is conveyed?
- What is the conflict explored in this song?
- What specific lines from the song communicate conflict or struggle?

TEACHER TIP

If time allows, listen to “Crossroads” by Cream and “I Can’t Quit You Baby” by Led Zeppelin. Compare and contrast these recordings to the music examples covered in the lesson. Draw students’ attention to the similarities and differences in the lyrics, blues form, music instrumentation, and performance style. This activity also allows for discussion on cover songs and how artists sometimes record and perform other artists’ music. You can preface it by mentioning the British invasion in the 1960s, when British bands like the Rolling Stones were heavily influenced by American blues. British bands then brought the blues back to American audiences, but in a rock & roll music style.

6. Give students the following assignment:

In your journal, practice writing a blues lyric in the AAB verse format. Feel free to draw on the experience you wrote about during the brainstorm activity and the previous journal entry about your personal crossroads.

HOMEWORK

Distribute the **Blues Songwriter Quotes Worksheet** and review the instructions:

Read the quotes from professional blues songwriters. Underline or highlight any key words that explain the blues. Using at least one of the key words you identified, create your own definition or explanation of the blues.

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

TEACHER TIP

If time allows, it may be helpful to do the first quote together, as an example. Monitor students who research additional blues songs, as they may come across mature material.

FOCUSED LYRIC WRITING DAY

After teaching this lesson, students are ready for focused lyric writing and revision (see lessons 8 and 9). Students will apply what they have learned in the blues lesson to writing traditional AAB blues lyrics using the **Blues Song Template** or a traditional song lyric using the **Songwriting Template**. Students should be encouraged to write lyrics based on their song form preference. Note: not every student should write a blues song.

TEACHER TIP

Remind students that although blues music often deals with personal struggles, it's also about expressing feelings, venting frustration, and having fun while doing it! For their blues song, students do not need to write about death or traumatic experiences—students should feel free to write about anything!



Willie Dixon (1915–1992) is considered the father of modern Chicago blues and served as a crucial link between the blues and rock & roll. In addition to writing more than 500 songs, he wrote, produced, arranged, and played bass on sessions for Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters, and others.

WORKSHEET

Blues Styles Across the United States

Name: _____ Date: _____

Write two to three key words that best describe each blues style discussed in class.

MISSISSIPPI DELTA BLUES**TEXAS BLUES****MEMPHIS BLUES****ST. LOUIS BLUES****CHICAGO BLUES****THE BLUES**

LYRIC SHEET

“Cross Road Blues”*Robert Johnson*

I went to the crossroad, fell down on my knees
I went to the crossroad, fell down on my knees
Asked the Lord above “have mercy, save poor Bob, if you please”

Mmm, standin’ at the crossroad, I tried to flag a ride
Standin’ at the crossroad, I tried to flag a ride
Ain’t nobody seem to know me, everybody pass me by

Mmm, the sun goin’ down, boy, dark gon’ catch me here
Ooo-eee, boy, dark gon’ catch me here
I haven’t got no lovin’ sweet woman that love and feel my care

You can run, you can run, tell my friend, boy, Willie Brown
You can run, tell my friend, boy, Willie Brown
Lord, that I’m standin’ at the crossroad, baby, I believe I’m sinkin’ down



Robert Johnson (1911–1938) was an American blues musician from the Mississippi Delta. Johnson is widely accepted as one of the greatest guitarists of all time and has influenced blues and rock & roll musicians like Muddy Waters, the Rolling Stones, and Eric Clapton.

LYRIC SHEET

“I Can’t Quit You Baby”*Willie Dixon*

Well, I can’t quit you baby
But I got to put you down a little while
Well, I can’t quit you baby
But I got to put you down a little while
Well, you done made me mess up my happy home
Made me mistreat my only child

Ah, when you hear me moanin’ and groanin’
Whoa, you know it hurts me way down inside
Whoa, when you hear me moanin’ and groanin’
You know it hurts way down inside
Oh, when you hear me howlin’
Ooh, you know my love will never die, alright

Well, when you see me cryin’
Don’t let my tears fall in vain
Well, when you see me cryin’,
Darlin’, please don’t let my tears fall in vain
Lord, I don’t know what to do
You know my heart is filled with pain

Whoa, when you hear me howlin’, baby
You know it hurts way down inside



Willie Dixon (1915–1992) is considered the father of modern Chicago blues and served as a crucial link between the blues and rock & roll. In addition to writing more than 500 songs, he wrote, produced, arranged, and played bass on sessions for Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters, and others.

WORKSHEET

Blues Song Template

Name: _____ Date: _____

Song title: _____

FIRST VERSE

A. _____

A. _____

B. _____

SECOND VERSE

A. _____

A. _____

B. _____

THIRD VERSE

A. _____

A. _____

B. _____

FOURTH VERSE (optional)

A. _____

A. _____

B. _____

WORKSHEET

Songwriter Quotes

Name: _____ Date: _____

Read the quotes from professional blues songwriters. Underline or highlight any key words that explain the blues. Using at least one of the key words you identified, create your own definition or explanation of the blues.

1. “The blues are the roots and the other musics are the fruits. It’s better keeping the roots alive, because it means better fruits from now on. The blues are the roots of all American music. As long as American music survives, so will the blues.” —**Willie Dixon**
2. “White or black. Rich or poor. If you ever had your heart broken, you have the right to sing the blues!” —**Big Mama Thornton**
3. “The blues has lasted because the blues is about reality. Life is blue. Life ends. Sorrow is certain. Pain can’t be avoided. The blues lays it out. But as you sing the blues, and as you listen to the blues, something happens to you. In the middle of songs that have some of the saddest stories ever told, you feel more alive than ever. That’s the strength of the blues. That’s the miracle—watching the blues chase the blues away.” —**Jimmy Scott**
4. “If I was a rich man, had all the money I needed, and suddenly all that money left, my feeling would be what they call the blues.” —**Henry “Mule” Townsend**
5. “We write according to the facts of life, everyday life. If you live and die here, you got a part of the blues in you. Something you have to get up to do, it don’t work, that’s what the blues is all about. I think a person will have the blues as long as he lives, but some people just don’t want to bring it out like we do.” —**Buddy Guy**
6. “... The original blues songs are deep, emotional melodies, bespeaking a troubled heart.” —**Bessie Smith**
7. “There are happy blues, sad blues, lonesome blues, red-hot blues, mad blues, and loving blues. Blues is a testimony to the fullness of life.” —**Corey Harris**
8. “There’s a lot of things that give you the blues, that give me the blues, that give any man the blues: It’s somewhere down the line that you have been hurt someplace. I mean, it’s no certain type of hurtin’, but you have been hurt someplace and you get to playin’ the blues that reaches. And so that’s why when I sing the blues, I sing it with the big feelin’. I really means it.” —**John Lee Hooker**
9. “The blues? It’s the mother of American music. That’s what it is—the source.” —**B.B. King**

MY DEFINITION OF THE BLUES

The Blues Lesson Standards

<div>The Blues lesson addresses the following</div> <div>TENNESSEE SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS:</div>	
STANDARD	DESCRIPTION
AAH.26	Describe the economic, cultural, political, and social impact of African American migration within and from the South (e.g., Exodusters, Benjamin “Pap” Singleton, First Great Migration).
AAH.31	Describe the contributions of African Americans to the performing arts during this era (e.g., DeFord Bailey, Duke Ellington, Fisk Jubilee Singers, W.C. Handy, James Weldon Johnson, John Work III).
AAH.35	Describe highlights of African American culture of the 1930s and 1940s (e.g., Satchel Page and Negro league baseball, Cab Calloway, Mississippi Delta blues musicians).
TN.50	Describe major developments in country music (e.g., Grand Ole Opry, WSM, and the Carter family) and blues music (e.g., W.C. Handy and Bessie Smith) in Tennessee during this era.

Music and Arts Standards

Words & Music addresses the following

TENNESSEE MUSIC STANDARDS:

Foundation R1:	Perceive and analyze artistic work.
Foundation R2:	Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
Foundation Cn1:	Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to artistic endeavors.
Foundation Cn2:	Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context.

Words & Music addresses the following

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MUSIC EDUCATION STANDARDS:

Common Anchor #7:	Analyze how the structure and context of varied musical work inform the response.
Common Anchor #8:	Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators'/performers' expressive intent.
Common Anchor #10:	Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make music.
Common Anchor #11:	Relate musical ideas and works with varied context to deepen understanding.

Words & Music addresses the following

NATIONAL CORE ARTS ANCHOR STANDARDS:

Anchor Standard #1:	Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
Anchor Standard #2:	Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
Anchor Standard #3:	Refine and complete artistic work.
Anchor Standard #7:	Perceive and analyze artistic work.
Anchor Standard #8:	Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
Anchor Standard #10:	Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
Anchor Standard #11:	Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

Social & Emotional Learning Standards

Words & Music addresses the following

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS:

Self-Awareness:	1A. Demonstrate an awareness of my emotions. 1B. Demonstrate an awareness of my personal qualities and interests.
Self-Management:	2A. Understand and use strategies for managing my emotions and behaviors constructively.
Social Awareness:	3A. Demonstrate awareness and consideration of other people's emotions, perspectives, and social cues. 3C. Demonstrate an awareness and respect for human dignity, including culture and differences.
Relationship Skills:	4A. Use positive communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.
Responsible Decision-Making:	5A. Consider and use multiple factors in decision-making including ethical and safety factors, personal and community responsibilities, and short-term and long-term goals.

Supplemental Materials

MATERIAL	PURPOSE	WHEN
Pre-Unit Assessment Rubric	to be used with "Try a Song" Handout	Lesson 1
Final Lyric Assessment Rubric	to assess students' final lyrics	Lesson 9
Brainstorm Wheel	for students who have not yet found a topic for their song	Lesson 8
Songwriting Template	to support struggling songwriters	Lesson 8
Sensory and Emotion Brainstorm	to help students generate more supporting details	Lesson 8
Story Song Mini-Lesson	for classrooms wishing to explore story songs	Lesson 2,8
Story Song Template	for students writing a story song or students who finish early	Lesson 2,8
Songwriter Manuscripts	to illustrate revision	Lesson 9
Songwriter Quotes Sources	to reference sources of songwriter quotes	Lesson 1

Common Core Curriculum Standards

STANDARD	DESCRIPTION	LESSONS
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1	Read closely, make logical inferences, cite textual evidence to support claims	1,2,4,6,7,9
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2	Determine central ideas or themes of a text, analyze their development, summarize key points	1,2,4,9
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4	Interpret words and phrases as used in a text, analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone	5,6,7
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5	Analyze the structure of texts including how portions relate to each other and the whole	2,3,6
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words	7,10
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9	Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics, compare authors' approach	4
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.3	Apply knowledge of language to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening	4
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.5	Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meaning	7,8,9
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience	8
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5	Strengthen writing by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach	2,9
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7	Conduct short, as well as more sustained, research projects based on focused questions	1

THE FOLLOWING STANDARDS ARE ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES OF THE UNIT:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1	Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10	Write routinely over extended time frames and shorter time frames for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Pre-Unit Assessment Rubric • Lesson 1

Name: _____ Date: _____

Use this rubric to score student pre-assessments at the beginning of the unit. This rubric should be used to provide a baseline before beginning the Words & Music unit and is not intended for student feedback. At the end of the Words & Music unit, this rubric can be compared to the Final Lyric Assessment Rubric to assess learning. **Scores will be submitted to the Museum following the unit using the online Teacher Evaluation (see Lesson 10 for instructions).**

Note: Words & Music is grant-funded and dependent on Teacher Evaluations and Student Reflections in order to secure funding. The Museum appreciates your efforts in reporting accurate data so this award-winning program can be available to you and your students for free or low cost.

Level	Skill	Yes	No
1	Song has a title		
1	Song has a chorus		
1	Song has at least one verse		
1	Each line of the verse contains about the same number of syllables		
1	All verses contain the same number of lines		
1	Each line of the chorus contains about the same number of syllables		
1	Chorus repeats itself (is not different each time)		
2	If the songwriter intended to rhyme, the song maintains a consistent rhyme scheme		
2	Verses contain supporting details		
2	Title, chorus, hook, and theme relate to each other		
2	Song contains a theme		
3	Song demonstrates a grasp of exact and approximate rhyme		
3	Song includes one or more descriptive images, similes, or metaphors		

ASSESSMENT SCALE

Basic: Student achieves at least five Level 1 skills.

Proficient: Student achieves at least six Level 1 skills and at least three Level 2 skills.

Advanced: Student achieves all Level 1 skills, at least four Level 2 skills, and both Level 3 skills.

Final Lyric Assessment Rubric • Lesson 9

Name: _____ Date: _____

Use this rubric to evaluate the final lyrics at the completion of the Words & Music unit. **Scores will be submitted to the Museum following the unit using the online Teacher Evaluation (see Lesson 10 for instructions).**

Note: Words & Music is grant-funded and dependent on Teacher Evaluations and Student Reflections in order to secure funding. The Museum appreciates your efforts in reporting accurate data so this award-winning program can be available to you and your students for free or low cost.

Level	Skill	Yes	No
1	Song has a title		
1	Song has a chorus		
1	Song has at least one verse		
1	Each line of the verse contains about the same number of syllables		
1	All verses contain the same number of lines		
1	Each line of the chorus contains about the same number of syllables		
1	Chorus repeats itself (is not different each time)		
2	If the songwriter intended to rhyme, the song maintains a consistent rhyme scheme		
2	Verses contain supporting details		
2	Title, chorus, hook, and theme relate to each other		
2	Song contains a theme		
3	Song demonstrates a grasp of exact and approximate rhyme		
3	Song includes one or more descriptive images, similes, or metaphors		

ASSESSMENT SCALE

Basic: Student achieves at least five Level 1 skills.

Proficient: Student achieves at least six Level 1 skills and at least three Level 2 skills.

Advanced: Student achieves all Level 1 skills, at least four Level 2 skills, and both Level 3 skills.

Students who do not achieve at least five Level 1 skills should make additional corrections to the lyrics before submitting their work to the professional songwriter.

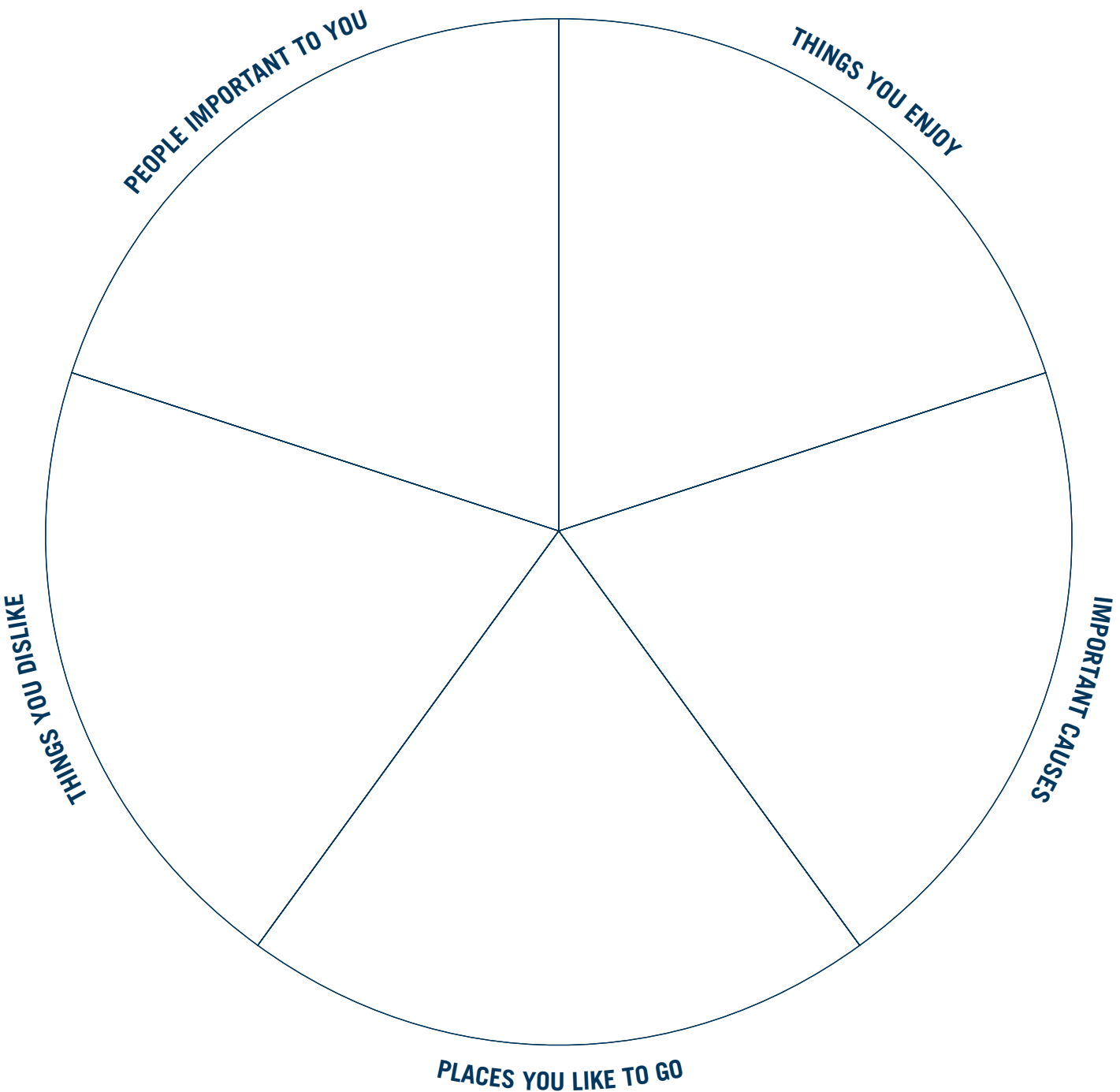
HANDOUT

Brainstorm Wheel • Lesson 8

Name: _____

Date: _____

Fill in the wedges of the pie chart below to help generate ideas for your song.



HANDOUT

Songwriting Template • Lesson 8

Name: _____ Date: _____

FIRST VERSE

_____	_____	:syllable
_____	_____	:syllable
_____	_____	:syllable
_____	_____	:syllable

CHORUS

_____	_____	:syllable
_____	_____	:syllable
_____	_____	:syllable
_____	_____	:syllable

SECOND VERSE

_____	_____	:syllable
_____	_____	:syllable
_____	_____	:syllable
_____	_____	:syllable

BRIDGE (OPTIONAL)

_____	_____	:syllable
_____	_____	:syllable
_____	_____	:syllable
_____	_____	:syllable

THIRD VERSE

_____	_____	:syllable
_____	_____	:syllable
_____	_____	:syllable
_____	_____	:syllable

HANDOUT

Sensory and Emotion Brainstorm • Lesson 8

Name: _____ Date: _____

Close your eyes and imagine yourself in your song. What sensory details could you include to paint a stronger picture for your listener? What emotions will you draw upon to create images? Remember to use all your senses to incorporate details into your song.

THINGS I SEE:**THINGS I FEEL FROM TOUCH:****THINGS I HEAR:****THINGS I SMELL:****THINGS I TASTE:****MY EMOTIONS/FEELINGS:**

Story Song Mini-Lesson • Lessons 2 and/or 8

OBJECTIVES

Students will analyze two story songs and apply their knowledge to writing one.

STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2

PREPARATION

- Make copies of **“Coat of Many Colors”** and **“Check Yes or No” Lyric Sheets** and the **Story Song Template** (optional).
- Locate audio or video versions of “Coat of Many Colors” performed by Dolly Parton and “Check Yes or No” performed by George Strait.
- Students should have a working knowledge of the terms “theme” and “plot.”

ACTIVITY

1. Share with students:

Among many types of songs, one popular form is the story song. In story songs, a songwriter crafts a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end.

2. Distribute **“Coat of Many Colors” Lyric Sheet** and listen to the song. Ask students to discuss the following questions in small groups, then discuss as a class:

- What is the main point or the moral of the story? Cite evidence from the text to support your opinions.
- What are the main points in the plot of the story?
- The lyrics of this song do not tell only the plot of the story—that would make for a boring song! How does Parton tell the story in a way that paints a picture? Cite evidence from the text to support your opinions.

3. Distribute **“Check Yes or No” Lyric Sheet** and listen to the song. Ask students to discuss the following questions in small groups, then discuss as a class:

- What are the main points in the plot of “Check Yes or No”? Cite evidence from the text to support your answers.
- How were these plot points organized to tell the story?
- What parts of the song tell the story?
- What parts of the song communicate the theme?
- What about the lines of the song that are not telling a story? What purpose do they serve?

Note: The following concepts should have emerged in the discussion. If not, share them with students:

- The verses usually contain the main plot points.
- The first verse usually conveys the beginning of the story, the second verse the middle, and the third verse the end.
- The theme of the story is usually communicated in the chorus.

4. Share the following journal prompt with students. After this activity, you may wish to distribute the **Story Song Template** for further explanation.

Think of a story that you could turn into a song. This could be from your memory, from your imagination, from history, or from another work of art like a book or a movie. Write the basic plot points of the story in three parts: the beginning, middle, and end. Next, write one sentence describing the theme of this story.

LYRIC SHEET

Coat of Many Colors*Dolly Parton*

Back through the years
I go wand'ring once again
Back to the seasons of my youth
I recall a box of rags that someone
gave us
And how my mama put the rags to
use.

There were rags of many colors
Every piece was small
And I didn't have a coat
And it was way down in the fall
Mama sewed the rags together
Sewing every piece with love
She made my coat of many colors
That I was so proud of.

As she sewed, she told a story
From the Bible, she had read
About a coat of many colors,
Joseph wore and then she said
Perhaps this coat will bring you
Good luck and happiness
And I just couldn't wait to wear it
And mama blessed it with a kiss.

My coat of many colors
That my mama made for me,
Made only from rags
But I wore it so proudly.
Although we had no money
I was rich as I could be
In my coat of many colors
My mama made for me.

So with patches on my britches
And holes in both my shoes
In my coat of many colors
I hurried off to school
Just to find the others laughing
And making fun of me
In my coat of many colors
My mama made for me.

And oh I couldn't understand it
For I felt I was rich
And I told 'em of the love
My mama sewed in every stitch
And I told 'em all the story
Mama told me while she sewed
And how my coat of many colors
Was worth more than all their clothes.

But they didn't understand it
And I tried to make them see
That one is only poor
Only if they choose to be
Now I know we had no money
But I was rich as I could be
In my coat of many colors
My mama made for me
Made just for me.



Dolly Parton wrote "Coat of Many Colors" about a humble jacket that was sewn by her mother because her family couldn't afford a new one. Parton says it is her favorite of the many songs she has written.

LYRIC SHEET

Check Yes or No*Dana Oglesby/Danny Wells*

It started way back in third grade
I used to sit beside Emmylou Hayes
A pink dress, a matching bow and her ponytail
She kissed me on the school bus, but told me not to tell

Next day I chased her 'round the playground
Across the monkey bars, to the merry-go-round
And Emmylou got caught passing me a note
Before the teacher took it, I read what she wrote,

“Do you love me, do you wanna be my friend?
And if you do, well then don't be afraid to take me by the hand
If you want to, I think this is how love goes
Check yes or no.”

Now we're grown up and she's my wife
Still like two kids with stars in our eyes
Ain't much changed, I still chase Emmylou
Up and down the hall, around the bed in our room

Last night I took her out in a white limousine
Twenty years together, she still gets to me
Can't believe it's been that long ago
When we got started with just a little note,

“Do you love me, do you wanna be my friend?
And if you do, well then don't be afraid to take me by the hand
If you want to, I think this is how love goes
Check yes or no.”

“Do you love me, do you wanna be my friend?
And if you do, well then don't be afraid to take me by the hand
If you want to, I think this is how love goes
Check yes or no.”

Check yes or no
Check yes or no
Check yes or no
Check yes or no

HANDOUT

Story Song Template • Lessons 2 and/or 8

Name: _____ Date: _____

Story songs devote a verse each to the beginning, middle, and end of a story.
The main theme is communicated in the chorus.

Song title: _____
(Remember, this will probably appear somewhere in your chorus as your hook.)

FIRST VERSE (introduces the story):

CHORUS (theme of the story; includes your hook):

SECOND VERSE (develops the story):

BRIDGE (optional; includes an unexpected twist or new information):

REPEAT CHORUS**SECOND VERSE** (develops the story):

REPEAT CHORUS

SONGWRITER MANUSCRIPTS • LESSON 9

"Chasin' That Neon Rainbow" (excerpt)*Alan Jackson and Jim McBride*

wanted
 to be
 for that
 bar
 bar
 singing
 in
 the
 kitchen
 singing
 in
 car
 human
 jukebox

Daddy won a radio
 Tuned it to a country show
~~I was rockin' to the rhythm of an old flat top guitar~~
 I was rockin' in the cradle
 To the ~~cradle~~ cryin' of a steel guitar
 Momma used to sing to me
 Taught me that sweet harmony
 Now she worries cause she never thought
~~I'd ever really take it this far~~
 I'm singin' in the bars
~~Chasin'~~ Chasin' that neon rainbow
 + livin' that honky tonk dream

 Chasin' that neon rainbow
 + livin' that honky tonk dream

SONGWRITER MANUSCRIPTS • LESSON 9

"Gentle on My Mind" (excerpt)

John Hartford

ITS KNOWING THAT YOUR DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN
 & YOUR PATH IS FREE TO WALK
 THAT MAKES ME TEND TO LEAVE MY SLEEPING BAG
 ROLLED UP & STASHED BEHIND YOUR COUCH
 & IT'S KNOWING I'M NOT SHACKLED BY FORGOTTEN WORDS
 AND BONDS, OR THE INK STAINS THAT HAVE
 DRIED UP ON SOME LINE
 THAT KEEPS YOU ON THE BACKROADS BY THE RIVERS
 OF MY MEMORIES, AND KEEPS YOU EVER
 GENTLE ON MY MIND

ITS NOT CLINGING TO THE ROCKS & IVY PLANTED
 ON SOME COLUMN NOW THAT BINDS ME
 OR SOMETHING THAT SOME BODY SAID, ^{BECAUSE THEY} ~~SOMEONE~~
 THOUGHT WE FIT TOGETHER WALKING
 ITS JUST KNOWING THAT THE WORLD WILL NOT BE
 CURSING OR ~~FORGETTING~~ ^{FORGIVING} IF I WALK ALONG
 THIS RAILROAD TRACK AND FIND
 THAT YOU'RE ^{MOVING} ~~STAYING~~ ^{ON} ~~THE~~ THE BACKROADS
 BY THE RIVERS OF MY MEMORY, EVER SMILING
 EVER GENTLE ON MY MIND

SONGWRITER MANUSCRIPT

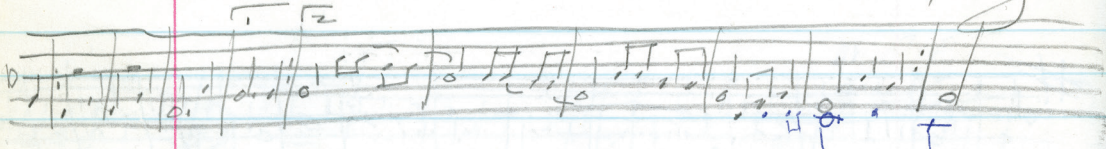
"Love Hurts" (excerpt) • Lesson 9

Boudleaux Bryant • Recorded by Emmylou Harris and Gram Parsons, and The Everly Brothers

98

Love Hurts

Boudleaux Bryant



Love hurts love scars
 " ^{wounds} ~~pains~~ and mars
 any heart not tough
 nor strong enough
 to take a lot of pain
 " " " " "

Love is like a cloud
 holds a lot of rain Love hurts

I'm young I know
 But even so
 I know the ~~score~~ a thing or two
 I've learned from you
 To take a lot of pain
 " " " " "

~~Love is like~~
 I've really learned a lot
 " " " "

Love is like a flame stove
 burns you when it's hot Love hurts

1st Everly Bros Album (1964?)
 Cat by Ray Robinson 1962 or 3
 1965

First Record

LESSON 1

Songwriter Quotes Sources

1. Neil Young: Interview with Jonathan Demme at 2012 Slamdance Film Festival (youtu.be/YLBwoU4KhBE)
2. Ed Sheeran: ABC News (abcnews.go.com), posted August 29, 2018
3. Brian Wilson: *Singer* magazine, 2002
4. Smokey Robinson: *American Songwriter*, September/October 2005
5. Pete Seeger: *American Songwriter*, March/April 1992
6. Brandy Clark: NPR interview with Melissa Block, aired Nov. 18, 2013
7. Bob Dylan: *Written in My Soul* by Bill Flanagan, 1986
8. Lorde: *Rookie* (www.rookiemag.com), posted Jan. 2, 2014
9. John Mayer: *World Cafe*, NPR, aired May 25, 2012
10. John Legend: *American Songwriter*, November/December 2005
11. Paul McCartney: Interview with David Frost, *Sir Paul McCartney ... Talking with David Frost*, PBS, 1997
12. Janis Ian: *Songwriters on Songwriting* by Paul Zollo, 2003
13. Loretta Lynn: *American Songwriter*, January/February 2011
14. Carole King: *Songwriters on Songwriting* by Paul Zollo, 2003



*Left: Smokey Robinson wrote Motown classics like “I Second That Emotion” and “Tears of a Clown.”
Right: Sam Cooke served as a major influence for Robinson by writing and singing such hits as “Bring It on Home to Me”.*

Spotlight Lessons

The following activities allow advanced students to delve deeper into the craft of songwriting on their own time. Spotlight activities should be copied and provided to advanced students as needed. Students should complete these lessons independently at the following junctures:

MATERIAL	WHEN TO USE
Spotlight on Chorus	At any time after Lesson 3: Title and Hook
Spotlight on Point of View	At any time after Lesson 4: Subject and Theme
Spotlight on Syllables	At any time after Lesson 5: Rhythm and Syllables
Spotlight on Rhyme	At any time after Lesson 6: Rhyme
Spotlight on Images	At any time after Lesson 7: Creating Strong Images
Spotlight on Verses	During revision stage



Dierks Bentley took a patriotic approach when writing “Home” with Brett Beavers and Dan Wilson. The single earned a Grammy nomination for Best Country Solo Performance.

Spotlight on Chorus

TITLE AND SWING LINES

In this lesson you will focus specifically on the chorus of a song. As you learned in Lessons 2 and 3, the chorus often incorporates the title as part of the hook.

When songwriters talk about where the title is placed in a chorus, they use the following terms:

- A title line (T) is any line that contains the title/hook.
- A swing line (~) is any line that does not contain the title/hook.
- A chorus form is the pattern of title and swing lines.

EXAMPLES

In the following examples, title lines are represented by a “T” and swing lines are represented by a “~”.

“We Will Rock You”, written by Brian May and recorded by Queen, is an example of a TTTT chorus form because the title is repeated in all four lines of the chorus.

- T We will, we will rock you.
- T We will, we will rock you.
- T We will, we will rock you.
- T We will, we will rock you.

“Delta Dawn”, written by Larry Collins and Alex Harvey and recorded by Tanya Tucker, is an example of a T~~~ chorus form because the title appears only in the first line.

- T Delta Dawn what’s that flower you have on?
- ~ Could it be a faded rose from days gone by?
- ~ And did I hear you say he was a meetin’ you here today
- ~ To take you to his mansion in the sky

The most common chorus forms are:

(~~~T)	(T~~~)	(~T~T)	(T~T~)	(T~~T)	(TTTT)	(TT)
~	T	~	T	T	T	T
~	~	T	~	~	T	T
~	~	~	T	~	T	
T	~	T	~	T	T	

Less common chorus forms are:

(TTT~)	(T~TT)	(TT~T)
T	T	T
T	~	T
T	T	~
~	T	T

Note: Choruses are not limited to four lines, but they are the most common.

ACTIVITY

Pick one or two songs you want to examine more closely. What chorus forms do they use? Write a chorus using a chorus form from one of your favorite songs or from one of the two charts.



Tanya Tucker scored a Top Ten country hit with “Delta Dawn” in 1972.

Spotlight on Point of View

In a song, the perspective of the singer is called the point of view. This can influence the way listeners connect with the song. The point of view usually falls into one of the following roles:

The Storyteller (third-person):

The storyteller sings about other characters and tells the listener what has happened, what is happening, and/or what will happen. This can be a fictional or historical account.

Example: “Rubin Carter was falsely tried” from the song “Hurricane” by Bob Dylan

The Participant (first-person):

The audience hears the song through the perspective of the “I” character’s experience and feelings. These viewpoints can be personal, as if they are shared by the singers themselves, or they can be about another character.

Examples: “Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away” from the song “Yesterday” by John Lennon and Paul McCartney; “I’m the train they call the City of New Orleans, I’ll be gone five hundred miles when the day is done” from the song “City of New Orleans” by Steve Goodman.

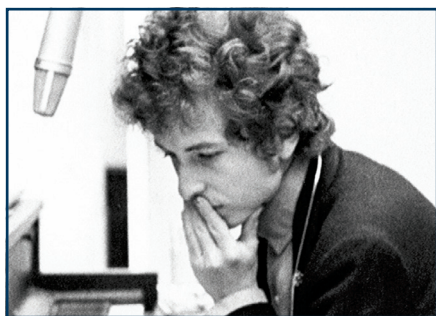
The Advisor (second-person):

A common songwriting practice is to make listeners part of the story by referring to them as “you” in the lyrics.

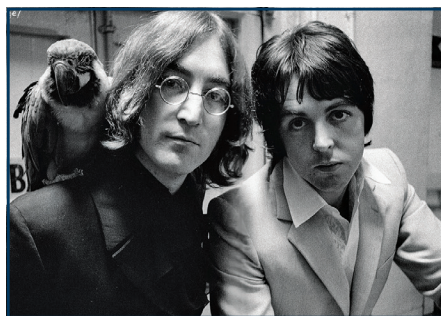
Example: “You’re so vain, you probably think this song is about you” from the song “You’re So Vain” by Carly Simon.

ACTIVITY

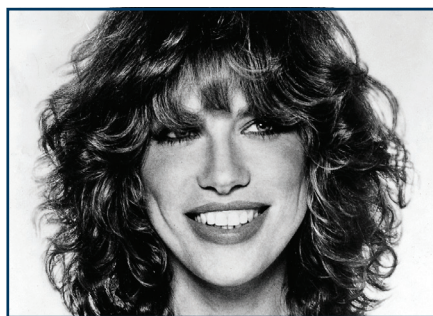
1. Pick a recorded song that you think has good lyrics. Write your own substitute lyrics by becoming one of the following character types:
 - If the song you selected is from the point of view of The Advisor, pretend you are the person being sung to and write a “reply” lyric.
 - If the song is from the point of view of The Storyteller, pretend you are one of the supporting characters mentioned in the song and write a song from The Participant point of view.
 - If the song is from the point of view of The Participant, imagine you are a character not mentioned in the song. Write as that character using The Participant point of view.
2. Pick one of your songs or one of your song ideas. Experiment with changing it to a different point of view.



Bob Dylan



John Lennon and Paul McCartney



Carly Simon

Spotlight on Syllables

In Lesson 5, you learned that lyrics usually follow a uniform pattern of syllables to fit the melody. In this lesson, you will examine the pattern of syllables in more detail by learning about stressed and unstressed syllables.

Our voices naturally emphasize certain syllables of words we speak. **Stressed syllables** are emphasized, while **unstressed syllables** are not emphasized.

EXAMPLES

In the following list of words, the bold syllables are stressed and the rest are unstressed. Reading the following words aloud will help you hear the difference between stressed and unstressed syllables.

Nouns: **c**ountry, **m**usic, **ba**nan**a**, **d**inosaur

Verbs: **r**acing, **t**raveled, **e**mit

Adjectives: **c**lever, **h**ungry, **h**appy, fantastic

Adverbs: **c**arefully, **h**opefully, **b**adly, **p**ossibly

Conjunctions: **b**ecause, **e**ither, **w**hether

Prepositions: through**o**ut, **u**ntil, **i**nto, **a**bout

Note:

- Every multiple-syllable word will have at least one stressed syllable.
- Most one-syllable nouns, verbs, and adjectives are stressed.
- Most one-syllable pronouns, conjunctions, and prepositions are unstressed.

ACTIVITY

1. Look at the stressed and unstressed syllables in the following verses from “Home”, co-written and performed by Dierks Bentley. Write a few lines that match the number of stressed and unstressed syllables in the example.

West, on a **p**lane **b**ound **w**est

I **s**ee her **s**tretching **o**ut **b**elow

Land, **b**lessed **m**otherland

The **p**lace where I was **b**orn

Scars, **y**eah she's **g**ot her **s**cars

Sometimes it **s**tarts to **w**orry me

'Cause **l**ose, I **d**on't **w**anna **l**ose

Sight of who we **a**re

2. Pick a verse from a recorded song you like. Analyze the verses and note which syllables are stressed and unstressed. Write a new verse and indicate the stressed and unstressed syllables.

Spotlight on Rhyme

In Lesson 6, you learned about rhyme scheme. In this spotlight, you will focus on songs where rhyme schemes differ between the verses and the chorus. For example, a song could have an “AABB” rhyme scheme in the verses but an “ABAB” rhyme scheme in the chorus. This creates added contrast between the verses and the chorus.

Note: Even if the rhyme scheme differs between the verses and the chorus, the rhyme scheme of the verses will usually stay the same. For example, if the rhyme scheme of verse 1 is “ABAB,” then it will probably also be the rhyme scheme of verses 2 and 3.

EXAMPLE

Notice how the lyrics of “Wide Open Spaces” follow an “AABB” rhyme scheme in all the verses, but an “ABAB” rhyme scheme in the chorus. As you read or listen to the lyrics, do you notice a greater contrast between the verses and the chorus because of the change? Locate the The Chicks recording and listen to how the rhymes are sung.



The Chicks, Emily Robison, Natalie Maines, and Martie Maguire (from left), have drawn on their Texas roots when choosing and composing songs. “Wide Open Spaces,” written by Susan Gibson, conveys the feelings of leaving your hometown behind.

Wide Open Spaces

Susan Gibson

Who doesn't know what I'm talking about	A
Who's never left home, who's never struck out	A
To find a dream and a life of their own	B
A place in the clouds, a foundation of stone	B
Many precede and many will follow	A
A young girl's dream no longer hollow	A
It takes the shape of a place out west	B
But what it holds for her, she hasn't yet guessed	B
She needs wide open spaces	A
Room to make her big mistakes	B
She needs new faces	A
She knows the high stakes	B
She traveled this road as a child	A
Wide eyed and grinning, she never tired	A
But now she won't be coming back with the rest	B
If these are life's lessons, she'll take this test	B
She needs wide open spaces	A
Room to make her big mistakes	B
She needs new faces	A
She knows the high stakes	B
(She knows the high stakes)	B
As her folks drive away, her dad yells, "Check the oil!"	A
Mom stares out the window and says, "I'm leaving my girl"	A
She said, "It didn't seem like that long ago"	B
When she stood there and let her own folks know	B
She needed wide open spaces	A
Room to make her big mistakes	B
She needs new faces	A
She knows the high stakes	B

ACTIVITY

Analyze the verses and choruses of a few of your favorite songs. What are the rhyme schemes they use? Do their verses have different rhyme schemes from the chorus?

Write a song that follows the same rhyme scheme as one of your favorite songs.

Spotlight on Images

SIMILES AND METAPHORS

In Lesson 7 you practiced creating strong images that show instead of just tell. Focusing on the senses is one way to ensure your lyrics are compelling and original. Similes and metaphors, both figures of speech that use comparisons, are another way you can illustrate your point in a colorful way.

Note: A simile is a comparison using “like” or “as.” A metaphor is a comparison that doesn’t use “like” or “as.”

EXAMPLES

The song “Red” by Taylor Swift uses both similes and metaphors.

The first verse features a series of similes:

Loving him **is like** driving a new Maserati down a dead-end street
Faster than the wind, passionate as sin, ending so suddenly
Loving him **is like** trying to change your mind once you’re already flying through the free fall
Like the colors in autumn, so bright just before they lose it all

Instead of saying “loving him is exciting but dangerous,” or “loving him is hard not to do,” or “loving him is beautiful but fleeting,” Swift uses similes to communicate each of these ideas through images.

- Look closely at the images Swift uses. How does each one communicate what loving him is like?

The chorus uses metaphors in lines 1, 2, 4, and 5 (and a simile in line 3):

Losing him **was** blue like I’d never known
Missing him **was** dark grey all alone
Forgetting him **was like** trying to know somebody you never met
But loving him **was** red
Loving him **was** red

- What is Swift saying by using these three metaphors? What does she mean that losing him and missing him were “blue” and “grey”, but loving him was “red?”

ACTIVITY

1. Pick the most basic way to describe an object or a feeling. (Example: Being in love feels exciting.)
2. Brainstorm something else that shares that same characteristic. (Example: Driving a fast car down a dead-end street.)
3. Make a comparison between the two by using either a simile or a metaphor. Remember, you often can make a simile into a metaphor by simply removing “like” or “as” from the comparison.

Note: Verbs are the great amplifiers of description, much more so than adjectives. Use descriptive verbs to breathe more life into a description.

Spotlight on Verses

POWER POSITIONS

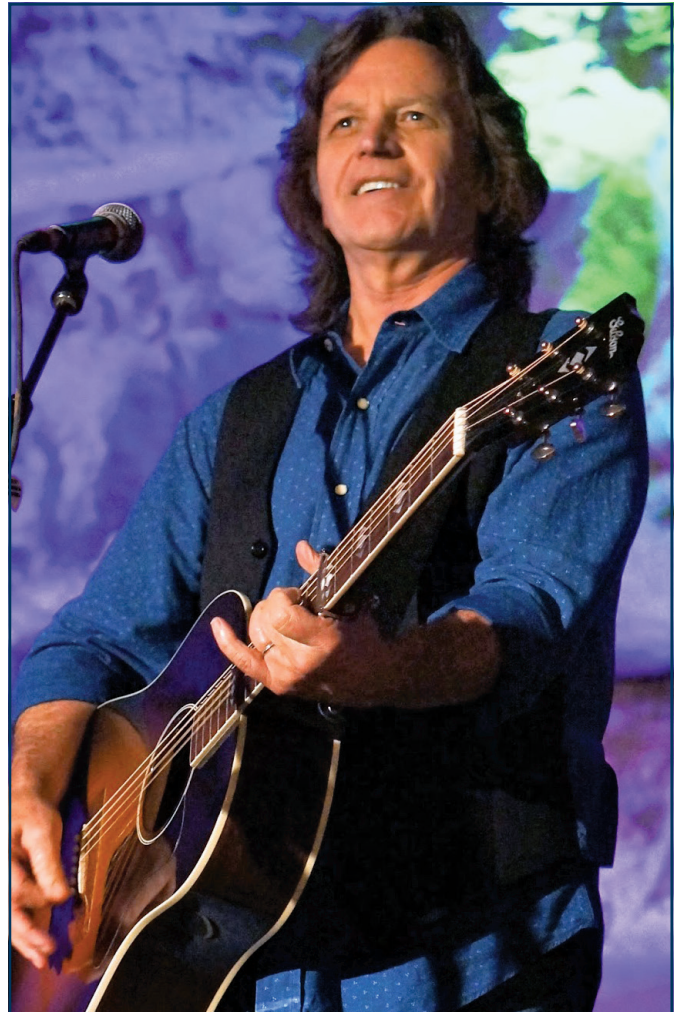
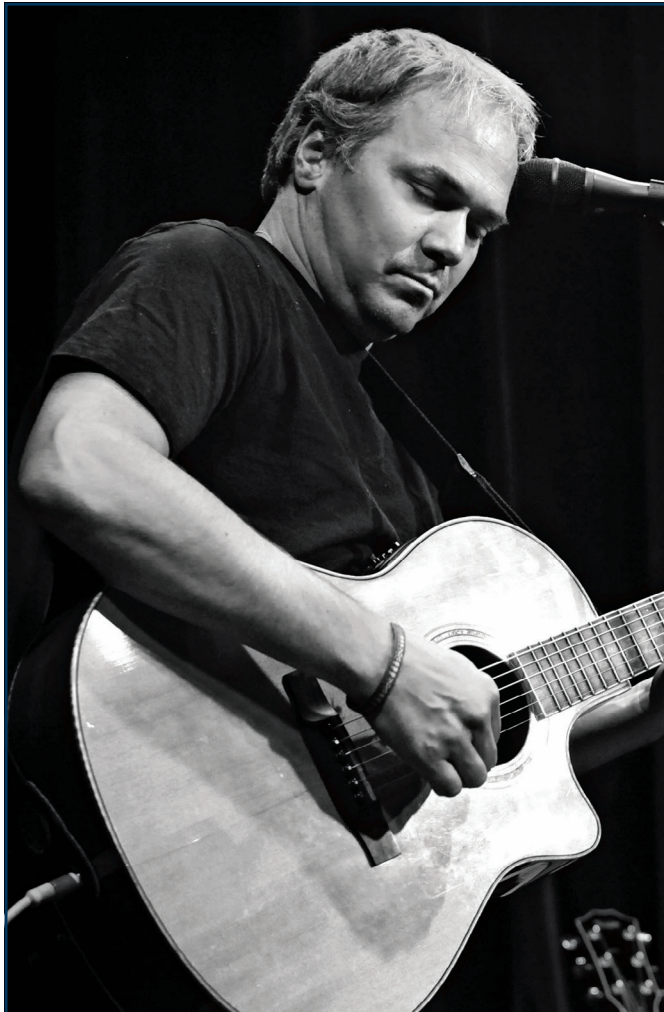
This lesson will give you another tool for examining your lyrics, as you revise your work in Lesson 9.

The brain processes information we hear differently than information we read. When we hear a song (versus reading a lyric), our brains place more emphasis on the first and last lines of a section. For this reason, the first and last lines of a verse are called power positions.

The power positions in a verse contain its main message and they complement each other. In this way, the verse should still make sense—even without the lines in between. In other words, the power positions contain the main ideas, and the middle lines fill out the details.

EXAMPLE

In “Bless the Broken Road,” the power positions are in boldface. Try reading all the lines of the verses. Then read just the power positions. Does the verse still make sense without the other lines? For an audio example of this song, locate the Rascal Flatts recording.



Marcus Hummon (left) and Jeff Hanna wrote “Bless the Broken Road” with Bobby Boyd. A #1 for Rascal Flatts, the ballad explains how breakups and broken dreams can lead to love.

Bless the Broken Road

Bobby Boyd/Jeff Hanna/Marcus Hummon

I set out on a narrow way many years ago

Hoping I would find true love along the broken road

But I got lost a time or two

Wiped my brow and kept pushing through

I couldn't see how every sign pointed straight to you

Every long lost dream led me to where you are

Others who broke my heart they were like northern stars

Pointing me on my way into your loving arms

This much I know is true ...

That God blessed the broken road

That led me straight to you

I think about the years I spent just passing through

I'd like to have the time I lost and give it back to you

But you just smile and take my hand

You've been there you understand

It's all part of a grander plan that is coming true

Every long lost dream led me to where you are

Others who broke my heart they were like northern stars

Pointing me on my way into your loving arms

This much I know is true ...

That God blessed the broken road

That led me straight to you

Yeah

Now I'm just rolling home into my lover's arms

This much I know is true...

That God blessed the broken road

That led me straight to you.

That God blessed the broken road

That led me straight to you.

ACTIVITY

1. Look at a verse you have already written or write a new verse. Examine the first and last lines, then answer the following questions:
 - Does their meaning connect in some way?
 - Does the verse still make sense with only the power positions?
 - Can you rearrange the lines to put better ones in the power positions?
2. Look at the verses of some of your favorite songs. Do they use power positions?

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