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. “You learn from experiences, and I suppose that’s where I color most of my music, from experiences. [But] part of it is reaching into oblivion for things that don’t exist.” — Pharrell Williams

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.
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 main theme and message 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 choices, 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).

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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.”

**Focused Lyric-Writing Day**
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!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title: ____________________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verse 1 topic: __________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hook (in the chorus): __________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse 2 topic: __________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hook (in the chorus): __________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse 3 topic: __________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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).
Handout

Brainstorm Wheel

LESSON 8

Name: _____________________________  Date: ________________________

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

PEOPLE IMPORTANT TO YOU

THINGS YOU ENJOY

THINGS YOU DISLIKE

IMPORTANT CAUSES

PLACES YOU LIKE TO GO

Focused Lyric-Writing Day
Handout

Songwriting Template

LESSON 8

Name: ___________________________  Date: ___________________________

Verse 1

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Chorus

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Verse 2

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Bridge (optional)

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Verse 3

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________
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:
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

Third verse (concludes the story):
_____________________________________
_____________________________________
_____________________________________

Repeat chorus