Focused Lyric-Writing Day

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

VOCABULARY
plagiarism

PREPARATION
Make copies of Songwriting Checklist for all students.

Additionally, at your own discretion, make copies of the following templates and worksheets according to the needs of your students:

• For students who want or need additional support for outlining a song, make copies of Songwriting Outline Worksheet.
• For students who need extra support in general, make copies of Songwriting Template (in Supplemental Materials).
  Note: Providing this template to all students may result in formulaic songs.
• For students who may have problems generating song ideas or supporting details, make copies of Brainstorm Wheel, Spider Map, and Sensory and Emotion Brainstorm (in Supplemental Materials).

STANDARDS
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.5
Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

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.

FREE WRITE (5 minutes)

DISCUSS HOMEWORK (1 minute)
Divide class into pairs so students can share a strong image from their writing.

BRAINSTORM (5 minutes)

Prompt: You have done a lot of writing over the last few days. For the next five minutes, look through your journal and underline anything that you are proud of or anything that you think you might want to use in your final song.
**ACTIVITY** (30-35 minutes)

1. Review the following concepts from previous lessons:

   - **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 an unexpected twist.

   - **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.

   - **Theme and message**: The theme is the song’s main subject. The message is what the song communicates about that theme. A song needs a message about one theme.

   - **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.

   - **Sensory details and images**: Lyrics paint mental pictures to communicate their theme and convey emotions.

2. Share the following information 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 OK to use a song or part of a song written by someone else and claim it as your own work. If you turn in someone else’s work as your own, it is considered cheating, and you will receive a failing grade. If professional songwriters steal all or part of someone else’s song and sell it as their own work, this is called plagiarism, and it is illegal. People who commit plagiarism can be sued by the material’s original creators.

**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.

3. Distribute and review the **Songwriting Checklist** to all students. Reserve most of class time for students to work quietly on their songs. If students finish quickly, they should write extra verses so they can pick the best ones for their final draft.

   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.

4. 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.
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 Worksheet and/or the Spider Map (also in Supplemental Materials) to help students generate more supporting details.

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

Ideas are scattered or disorganized: Encourage students to approach their one theme in a different way for each of the three verses. 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 about 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 are truly failing at their attempts.

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 be sharing their songs with a partner 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.

Dolly Parton is a member of the Country Music Hall of Fame, the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame, and the Songwriters Hall of Fame (New York). She has received the National Medal of Arts, the Kennedy Center Honors, and a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award for her work and for her contributions to the arts.