Theme and Message

OBJECTIVES
Students will understand the relationship between the theme, title, hook, and chorus of a song.
Students will use textual evidence to determine the central theme of a song.
Students will use textual evidence to determine the artist’s message about the central theme.

STANDARDS
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9 Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

VOCABULARY
message, theme (review)

PREPARATION
- Make copies of “On the Road Again” Worksheet and Theme and Message Worksheet.
- Locate audio or video versions of “On the Road Again,” performed by Willie Nelson; “Forever and Ever, Amen” performed by Randy Travis; and “Love Stinks,” performed by J. Geils Band.

FREE WRITE (5 minutes)

DISCUSS HOMEWORK (4 minutes)
Divide students into pairs to spend one minute sharing their favorite titles. Next ask students to pick one of their favorite titles and share it with the whole group. Students may wish to say where they heard the title.

BRAINSTORM (1 minute)
Prompt: In your journal, write down the titles of as many popular songs as you can think of in one minute. A popular song is one that has been heard by millions of people on the radio, stereo, Internet, and/or television. Titles should be appropriate for school use.
ACTIVITY (30-35 minutes)

1. Students will explore the relationship between the title and the theme of a song. Remind students that the theme is the main subject of the song. Ask students to share some of their favorite popular-song titles and write six to eight on the board. For each song ask:
   • What is the theme of this song?
   • Is that theme reflected in the title? How?
   • Is the title ever sung in the song?
   • In what part of the song does that happen?

2. Distribute the “On the Road Again” Worksheet that includes song lyrics by Willie Nelson and discussion questions. Play the song for the class. Divide the class into pairs to discuss the following questions, then open up the discussion to the whole group:
   • What is the theme or main subject of this song?
   • What evidence from the song supports your position? (Guide students toward noticing that the chorus, hook, and title all work together to communicate the main theme, which is being on the road.)
   • The message is what the song says about the theme. What is the artist’s message about this theme? What does Willie Nelson think about being on the road? (For example, he could have written a song about how he hates being on the road or how the road makes him lonely.)
   • What evidence from the song supports your position?
   • What do the lyrics imply about how Willie Nelson feels when he is not on the road?
   • What evidence from the song makes you think so?

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

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

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

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

Look over your previous writing and find a theme to write more about in your journal. If you can’t think of a theme, look back at the titles you wrote on the Writing Titles and Hooks Worksheet or in yesterday’s homework, and use one of those to write more about. Your writing can take the form of an essay, a story, a poem, a thoughtfully drawn comic strip, or song lyrics. Just focus on getting your ideas on paper. Remember to include a title that reflects the theme of whatever you write.