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, theme, title, verse

PREPARATION
• Make copies of “Don’t Laugh at Me” Student Lyric Sheet and Song Structure Practice Homework.
• Locate audio or video version of “Don’t Laugh at Me” performed by Mark Wills.
• 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.

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 **theme** is the main subject of the song.
   - The **hook** is the part of the song that catches, or “hooks,” listeners’ 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** uses details to support the title, theme, and hook. Songs typically include multiple verses, which usually incorporate important information about the song’s subject, such as who, what, where, when, why, and how.
   - The **chorus** conveys the main subject of the song. The chorus is usually simpler than the verses, and it often contains the title. In ancient Greek plays, a group of singers, called a “chorus,” appeared between every act to summarize what had just occurred on stage. In much the same way, the chorus of a song summarizes the main subject while the verses provide the supporting details.
   - The **bridge** introduces a twist that gives an unexpected perspective on the theme. It usually occurs toward the song’s end, and it has a totally different melody from the verses and chorus. Not all songs have a bridge.

2. Distribute “**Don’t Laugh at Me**” 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 with students this information:

   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. Think of the title and hook as a thesis statement, the chorus as a combination of the introduction and the conclusion, and the verses as the body paragraphs.

   Ask students the following questions:

   - What was the main idea of the song “Don’t Laugh at Me”?
   - How was that communicated in the chorus?
   - What was verse 1 about? Verse 2? Verse 3? The bridge? Provide textual evidence for your answers.

   Once students have generated responses, use them to model an outline on the board for “Don’t Laugh at Me.”

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 “Don’t Laugh at Me.”
This is an example of a student outline:

**Title**: Beach Trip

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

**Chorus main idea**: 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.

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*Steve Seskin often takes a philosophical perspective when he writes. His many hit singles include Mark Wills’s “Don’t Laugh at Me” and Tim McGraw’s “Grown Men Don’t Cry.”*
Don't Laugh at Me

*Allen Shamblin / Steve Seskin*

I'm a little boy with glasses
The one they call the geek
A little girl who never smiles
’Cause I’ve got braces on my teeth
And I know how it feels
To cry myself to sleep.

I'm that kid on every playground
Who's always chosen last
A single teenage mother
Tryin’ to overcome my past
You don’t have to be my friend
Is it too much to ask?

Don't laugh at me, don't call me names
Don't get your pleasure from my pain
In God's eyes we’re all the same
Someday we’ll all have perfect wings
Don't laugh at me.

I'm the cripple on the corner
You pass me on the street
I wouldn't be out here beggin’
If I had enough to eat
And don't think I don't notice
That our eyes never meet.

I lost my wife and little boy
Someone crossed that yellow line
The day we laid ‘em in the ground
Is the day I lost my mind
Right now I’m down to holdin’
This little cardboard sign.

[Chorus:]
I'm fat, I'm thin, I'm short, I'm tall
I'm deaf, I'm blind, hey aren't we all?

[Chorus:]

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

Prompt students to notice that the melody will change in the chorus.

**DISCUSS CHORUS**

1. Prompt students to notice the repetition of the title in the chorus.
2. Prompt students to discuss the main idea conveyed by the chorus. Ask for textual evidence for their answers.
3. Instruct students that this main idea is the *theme* of the song.
4. Ask students to identify the *hook* (the part that is repeated or makes the song easy to remember).
5. Point out that the chorus of the song is simpler than the verses.

**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 main subject presented in the chorus. Ask students for textual evidence to support their ideas.
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.
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.
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):

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

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Repeat chorus

Third verse (concludes the story):

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Repeat chorus