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. Some of their writing will become a song that they helped create. By the end of the unit, they will have generated lyrics that will be submitted to a professional songwriter, who will select some lyrics to set to music and perform the finished songs 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” Worksheet, 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. A staff member from the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum will provide a teacher survey link to share your tallied scores. Subsequent lessons will begin with free writing, which will be formally introduced in the second lesson.

Distribute the “Try a Song” Worksheet.

Share these instructions:

We are going to start by writing the words to a song. Don’t worry about whether you are doing it right or wrong. There are no wrong answers in this activity. Just do your best to get your ideas onto paper. For five minutes, write as much of your lyrics as you can. This should be your own song, not a song you know or have heard before.

Then for five minutes, answer these questions in as much detail as you can: What makes a song? What are its parts? What do all songs have in common?

TEACHER TIP

Students may feel overwhelmed with this first activity. Tell students that although they may have no idea what to write or how to write a song, that is OK. This is just a warm-up activity; they are not expected to write a perfect song in five 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 a minute.

Afterward, pair students and allow them to quickly 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 the following questions. After each question, let the groups share answers with the whole class.

- Who writes songs?
- Why do people write songs?
- What skills are needed to write a good song?
- What makes a good song?
- Are you familiar with any songwriters?
- Have you ever tried to write a song?

ACTIVITY (20 minutes)
1. Have students conduct Internet 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 Worksheet and review the instructions:

Read the following quotes from professional songwriters. After each quote, write what it teaches you about songwriting. Next, write one to three sentences in your journal about what you learned from reading the quotes.

If time allows, it may be helpful to do the first quote together, as an example. Depending on the age and reading level of the students, you may want to assign only a portion of the quotes. Reference material for songwriting quotes can be found in Supplemental Materials.