Language Arts Through Lyric Writing - Course Overview

Success One Charter School | 129 E. Walker St. Orland, CA
Instructor: | 530-865-9041

Course Description:

This course is designed to teach Language Arts Skills through a five-unit series exploring song writing. No music background is required, as the focus is on writing lyrics. Each unit is delivered through a workbook that takes approximately 15 hours to complete. The intended grade level is 9-12. Some of the content for this course has been adapted for independent study from curriculum provided by The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum.

Course Materials:

All instructional materials will be provided as workbook packets. Since the focus of this course is lyric writing, students will be asked to listen to song examples using the internet. Students will need internet access to youtube or another streaming service to listen to song examples.

Course Requirements: There are no prerequisites to enroll in this class.

Course Structure:

This course is divided into 5 units. One packet equals one unit worth of coursework. Students can take units individually for per-unit credit (ex completing units 1-3 would be worth 3 credits). However, it is highly recommended to complete units in order.

Assessments: Assessments will include short answers, multiple choice quizzes, and applied creative writing following specific structure.

LANGUAGE ARTS THROUGH SONGWRITING
Learning Outcomes: Students will demonstrate an understanding of the following concepts by the end of this course:

- Analysis of song structure.
- The importance of selecting a memorable song title and effectively communicating lyrical message.
- Rhyming schemes.
- Basic knowledge regarding music publishing and copyright.
- How to write lyrics to a song, including drafting and edits.

Course Outline:

1. Unit 1 - Song Structure
2. Unit 2 - Title and Message
3. Unit 3 - Rhyming
4. Unit 4 - The Blues
5. Unit 5 - Focused Lyric Writing

Some tips for the student to get an A grade in this course:

- Read everything - in order.
- Answer all parts of the short-answer questions. Some questions have two parts and ask for evidence or ask "why."
- The end-goal in completing the 5th Unit is to write the lyrics to your own song - it's a good idea to keep a songwriting notebook to jot any song ideas you get along the way.

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Unit 1: Song Structure

Brainstorm

In the space below, list as many of your favorite songs as you can in two minutes. List at least 5 songs.

Prep Questions (4)  (4 pts)

Answer the following questions in your own words. There's no wrong answer, but you must answer every question.

1. Why do you think people write songs?
2. What makes a good song?

3. Music is subjective... Why do you think some songs appeal to some people more than others?

4. What skills are needed to be a good songwriter?
ACTIVITY

Songs are often written by someone different than the performer. In this activity, you're going to research (using the internet) the songwriter for 3 of the songs in your brainstorm list.

* Allmusic.com is an excellent source for finding song credits.

For each song, find out the: (5 pts)

1. Name(s) of the songwriter(s).

2. Name of the performer.

3. Then find out two other songs by the songwriter, writing down the song title and performer of each song.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SONG</th>
<th>PERFORMER</th>
<th>SONGWRITER</th>
<th>OTHER SONG 1</th>
<th>OTHER SONG 2</th>
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Activity Reflection (5 pts)

- Was the songwriter different from the performer for any of the songs you selected?

- People often co-write songs. Did any of the songs you researched have multiple songwriters?

- What do you think would be most challenging about writing an original song?
Activity - Songwriter Quotes

Read the following quotes from professional songwriters.

In the space below each quote, write one sentence on what each quote teaches you about what it takes to write a song. There are 7 quotes, so you should write at least 7 sentences.

(7 pts)

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. “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

5. “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

6. “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

7. “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
Lesson 2: Parts of a Song

In this section, we’re going to learn about song structure.

Parts of a Song:

• 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. [Many pop songs include a *pre-chorus* that transitions from the verse to the chorus.]

• 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.]
Most modern pop songs most always use the following basic structure:

![Song Structure Diagram](https://flypaper.soundfly.com)

- This is the most common structure, but that doesn't mean that all songs follow this sequence. For example, not all songs have a bridge and some songs don't even have a chorus!

Prep Questions (5)  (5 pts)

- Why do you think this format is such a common song structure?

- Can you think of a song that doesn't follow this structure?

- Can you think of a song where the title is different from the book?

- Do you think the title of a song is important? Why?
Practice: Parts of a Song (Part 1)

1) Listen to the song, “Don’t Laugh at Me” (written by Allen Shamblin and Steve Seskin; performed by Mark Wills), and identify the parts of the song by filling in the blanks on the “Don’t Laugh at Me” Student Lyric Sheet on the next page.

*Youtube is a great resource for listening to music for free if you don’t have access to an on-demand music streaming service. Just search for Don’t Laugh at Me Mark Wills on youtube.com

2) Then answer the following questions (6): *(6 pts)*

- 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.
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.

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

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.

FILL IN THE BLANKS

The _______________ appears in the chorus and states the main idea of the song.

Each _______________ has the same words.

The _______________ have different words but the same tune.

The chorus summarizes the main idea or _______________ of the song.

The verses give supporting _______________ about the main idea of the song.

The _______________ introduces a slightly different idea.
It is shorter than the verses and chorus.

The _______________ is the part of the song that is repeated often and easily remembered. What do you think it is in this song?
Practice: Parts of a Song (Part 2)

1. In the space on the next pages, write down the lyrics to two of your favorite songs. (These songs should be appropriate for school use.)

2. Label the following parts on the lyrics:
   - Title
   - Verse
   - Chorus
   - Bridge
   - Hook

   • Hint: Remember that the definitions for song structure terms are on page 7!
   • For your reference, an example for labeling song structure is on the next page. If your song includes a pre-chorus, you can label it separately or as part of the verse. Also, not every song has a bridge.
"Meanwhile Back At Mama's" (Tim McGraw with Faith Hill)

VERSE

Meanwhile back at Mama's
The porch lights on, come on in if you wanna
Suppers on the stove and beer's in the fridge
Red sun sinkin' out low on the ridge
Games on the tube and Daddy smokes cigarettes
Whiskey keeps his whistle wet
Funny the things you thought you'd never miss
In a world gone crazy as this

VERSE

Well I found a girl and we don't fit in here
Talk about how hard it is to breathe here
Even with the windows down can't catch a southern breeze here
One of these days gonna pack it up and leave here cause

CHORUS

Meanwhile back at Mama's
The porch lights on, come on in if you wanna
Suppers on the stove and beer's in the fridge
Red sun sinkin' out low on the ridge
Games on the tube and Daddy smokes cigarettes
Whiskey keeps his whistle wet
Funny the things you thought you'd never miss
In a world gone crazy as this

BRIDGE

Oh I miss yeah a little dirt on the road, I miss corn grown in a row
I miss being somebody everybody knows, there everybody knows everybody
I miss those small town routes, walkin' around in muddy boots
The sound of rain on an old tin roof
It's time we head on back

CHORUS

Cause meanwhile back at Mama's
The for sale sign's goin' up and I'm gonna
dump this truck and the little I got
On a loan to own and a thirty-acre lot
Put supper on the stove and beer in the fridge
Goin' for broke and we're gonna be rich
Watch the sun settin' on the ridge
Baby tell me what you think about this
(Practice Labeling Song Structure - SONG 1) *(5 pts)*
(Practice Labeling Song Structure - SONG 2) (5 pts)
End of Unit Review Quiz

Directions: Answer the questions below  (5 pts)

1. The ________ is the part of the song that catches the listeners' attention and makes the song easy to remember.
   a) Verse
   b) Chorus
   c) Hook
   d) Theme

2. Songs typically include multiple different ________, which usually incorporate important information about the song's subject, such as who, what, where, when, why, and how.
   a) Verses
   b) Choruses
   c) Bridges
   d) Themes

3. The ________ conveys the main subject of the song, is usually simple, and often contains the song's title.
   a) Verse
   b) Chorus
   c) Bridge
   d) Theme

4. The ________ introduces a twist that gives an unexpected perspective on the theme (usually near the song's end).
   a) Verse
   b) Chorus
   c) Bridge
   d) Theme

5. Which of the following is the most common modern song structure:
   a) VERSE>CHORUS>BRIDGE>VERSE
   b) VERSE>CHORUS>VERSE>CHORUS>BRIDGE>CHORUS
   c) CHORUS>BRIDGE>CHORUS>VERSE>CHORUS
   d) CHORUS>CHORUS>VERSE>VERSE>CHORUS>CHORUS
Unit 2: Subject, Title and Message

In the previous unit, we learned about song structure. In this unit, we’re going to learn about a song’s message and creating an effective title.

Subject and Title

Most popular songs resonate with many people because those songs address common human experiences.

★ Remember that the title (the name of the song) is often the same as the hook. A hook is the part of the song that catches listeners’ attention. A song’s title often appears in the chorus.

In this unit, we will explore the connection between song titles and hooks

Brainstorm – Common Human Experiences

In the space below, list as many common human experiences as you can in two minutes. Try not to “overthink” your list, but just go with what first comes to your mind; focus on getting your ideas on paper.

Example: Falling in Love...
Brainstorm (Part 2) – Generating Ideas for Lyrical Subjects

In this journaling activity, quickly list what comes to mind for each prompt.

1. The first random memory that comes to mind.

2. Three things that you think about a lot.

3. Three objects or ideas that are important to you.

4. One happy memory that comes to mind.

5. One or two sad memories that come to mind.

6. The first funny memory that comes to mind.
Activity: Analysis – Song Title

Directions:

• Listen to the song, “The House That Built Me,” by Miranda Lambert
• Using the “The House That Built Me,” lyric sheet on the following page, answer the following questions (using full sentences):

1. How is the title used in this song?

2. Do you think this is memorable title? Why or why not?

3. Why—or why not—is this a successful title/hook/chorus?
The House That Built Me

Songwriters: Douglas Tom & Douglas Thomas Stevenson

I know they say you can't go home again
I just had to come back one last time
Ma'am, I know you don't know me from Adam
But these hand prints on the front steps are mine
Up those stairs in that little back bedroom
Is where I did my homework and I learned to play guitar
And I bet you didn't know under that live oak
My favorite dog is buried in the yard

I thought if I could touch this place or feel it
This brokenness inside me might start healing
Out here it's like I'm someone else
I thought that maybe I could find myself
If I could just come in I swear I'll leave
Won't take nothin' but a memory
From the house that built me

Momma cut out pictures of houses for years
From better homes and garden magazine
Plans were drawn and concrete poured
And nail by nail and board by board
Daddy gave life to momma's dream

I thought if I could touch this place or feel it
This brokenness inside me might start healing
Out here it's like I'm someone else
I thought that maybe I could find myself
If I could just come in I swear I'll leave
Won't take nothin' but a memory
From the house that built me

You leave home, you move on and you do the best you can
I got lost in this 'ole world and forgot who I am

I thought if I could touch this place or feel it
This brokenness inside me might start healing
Out here it's like I'm someone else
I thought that maybe I could find myself
If I could walk around I swear I'll leave
Won't take nothin' but a memory
From the house that built me
**Practice:** Subject and Title

In this activity, you’re going to practice creating song titles. Since the **title** is often part of the **hook**, a good title can help generate ideas for an entire song!

A good song title should:

1. Be Memorable
2. Be Original
3. Make The Reader / Listener Curious
4. Be of Interest
5. Use A Small Number Of Words

**Directions:** Look back at the list of topics you created at the beginning of this unit.

» You’re going to come up with **5 song titles based on some of those topics** (10 PTS)

*A title is usually a short phrase, but is sometimes just a single word. Let your mind wander to different words and phrases that pop up when you think of each topic. (Your title cannot be the same phrase as the topic.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Human Experience</th>
<th>Song Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: <strong>HAVING A ROMANTIC BREAKUP</strong></td>
<td>&quot;WITH OR WITHOUT YOU&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DRIVING IN A CAR</strong></td>
<td>&quot;I CAN'T DRIVE 55&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lesson 2: Message

In this section, we're going to learn about song's theme and message.

- The **message** is the underlying meaning the songwriter is trying to communicate about the theme.
- The **theme** is the main subject of the song.

**Activity Directions**

- **Listen** to the song, "Man in Black," by Johnny Cash while looking at the lyrics on the following page. You may notice that this song does not have a chorus — not all songs follow the same structure!
- **After listening to the song, answer 10 questions about the song's message & theme.**
"Man In Black" (Johnny Cash)

Well, you wonder why I always dress in black,
Why you never see bright colors on my back,
And why does my appearance seem to have a somber tone.
Well, there's a reason for the things that I have on.

I wear the black for the poor and the beaten down,
Livin' in the hopeless, hungry side of town,
I wear it for the prisoner who has long paid for his crime,
But is there because he's a victim of the times.

I wear the black for those who never read,
Or listened to the words that Jesus said,
About the road to happiness through love and charity,
Why, you'd think He's talking straight to you and me.

Well, we're doin' mighty fine, I do suppose,
In our streak of lightnin' cars and fancy clothes,
But just so we're reminded of the ones who are held back,
Up front there ought 'a be a Man In Black.

I wear it for the sick and lonely old,
For the reckless ones whose bad trip left them cold,
I wear the black in mournin' for the lives that could have been,
Each week we lose a hundred fine young men.

And, I wear it for the thousands who have died,
Believen' that the Lord was on their side,
I wear it for another hundred thousand who have died,
Believen' that we all were on their side.

Well, there's things that never will be right I know,
And things need changin' everywhere you go,
But 'til we start to make a move to make a few things right,
You'll never see me wear a suit of white.

Ah, I'd love to wear a rainbow every day,
And tell the world that everything's OK,
But I'll try to carry off a little darkness on my back,
'Till things are brighter, I'm the Man In Black.
After listening to “Man in Black” while looking at the lyrics, answer the following questions (10). *(10 pts)*

• You will need to read through the lyrics more than once in order to quote evidence lines to use as evidence for some of your answers.

• In “Man in Black,” what is Johnny Cash trying to say about the theme—what is the song’s message?

• What evidence from the song supports your position about the message?

• What can you infer from the lyrics about Johnny Cash’s views toward helping the poor and needy?

• What evidence from the song makes you think so?
• Is Johnny Cash contrasting his own choices with those of other people in society? With whom?

• What evidence from the song makes you think so?

• Can you think of some current popular songs that have a strong social message?

• Should songwriters think about the messages of their songs? Why or why not?
Lesson 3: Point of View

In a song, the perspective of the singer is called the **point of view**. This can influence the way listeners connect with the song. The point of view usually falls into one of the following roles:

1) **The Participant (first-person):**

   The audience hears the song through the perspective of the “I” character’s experience and feelings. These viewpoints can be personal, as if they are shared by the singers themselves, or they can be about another character.

   Examples: “Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away” from “Yesterday” by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, “I’m the train they call the City of New Orleans, I’ll be gone five hundred miles when the day is done” from “City of New Orleans” by Steve Goodman.

2) **The Advisor (second-person):**

   A common songwriting practice is to make listeners *part of the story* by referring to them as “you” in the lyrics.

   Example: “You’re so vain, you probably think this song is about you” from “You’re So Vain” by Carly Simon

3) **The Storyteller (third-person):**

   The storyteller sings about other characters and tells the listener what has happened, what is happening, and/or what will happen. This can be a fictional or historical account.

   Example: “Rubin Carter was falsely tried” from “Hurricane” by Bob Dylan

   • Bear in mind that a songwriter may combine elements from different points of view within the same song.
Point of View

• Read the excerpts from different songs below. In the first two examples, the singer’s point of view has been labeled with examples from the lyrics circled in the text.

• Practice: See if you can figure out the point of view in the 3rd and 4th examples

1. From “Nobody to Blame,” Chris Stapleton

She fired up my old hot rod
Ran it in the pond
Put sugar in my John Deere
I can’t even mow my lawn
And I got nobody to blame but me
I got nobody to blame but me
She built her a bonfire
With my old six string
Took all my good whiskey
And poured it down the drain
And I got nobody to blame but me

2. From “Where Were You (When The World Stopped Turning),” Alan Jackson

Where were you when the world stopped turning on that September day?
Were you in the yard with your wife and children
Or working on some stage in L.A.?
Did you stand there in shock
At the sight of that black smoke
Risin’ against that blue sky?
Did you shout out in anger
In fear for your neighbor
Or did you just sit down and cry?

3. From “Take a Back Road,” Rodney Adkins

So sick and tired of this interstate system
I need a curve and wind-a-twistin’
Dusty path to nowhere
With the wind blowing through my baby’s hair

Yeah, makes me wanna take a back road
Makes me wanna take the long way home
Put a little gravel in my travel
Unwind, unravel all night long

4. From “You Ain’t Woman Enough,” Loretta Lynn

You’ve come to tell me something you say I ought to know
That he don’t love me anymore and I’ll have to let him go
You say you’re gonna take him oh but I don’t think you can
Cause you ain’t woman enough to take my man

Women like you they’re a dime a dozen you can buy ’em anywhere
For you to get to him I’d have to move over and I’m gonna stand right here
It’ll be over my dead body so get out while you can
Cause you ain’t woman enough to take my man
End of Unit Review Quiz  (20 pts)

Directions: Let’s check your knowledge from the 1st & 2nd units. Answer the questions below by selecting the correct answer.

1. The ________ is the part of the song that catches the listeners’ attention and makes the song easy to remember.
   a) Verse
   b) Chorus
   c) Bridge
   d) Hook

2. Songs typically include multiple different __________, which usually incorporate important information about the song’s subject, such as who, what, where, when, why, and how.
   a) Verses
   b) Choruses
   c) Bridges
   d) Themes

3. The ________ conveys the main subject of the song, is usually simple; and it often contains the song’s title.
   a) Verse
   b) Chorus
   c) Bridge
   d) Theme

4. The ________ introduces a twist that gives an unexpected perspective on the theme (usually near the song’s end).
   a) Verse
   b) Chorus
   c) Bridge
   d) Theme
5. Which of the following is the most common modern song structure:
   
a) VERSE>CHORUS>BRIDGE>VERSE
b) VERSE>CHORUS>VERSE>CHORUS>BRIDGE>CHORUS
c) CHORUS>BRIDGE>CHORUS>VERSE>CHORUS
d) CHORUS>CHORUS>VERSE>VERSEL>VERSE>CHORUS>CHORUS

6. A song written in _______ point of view makes listeners part of the story by referring to them as “you” in the lyrics.
   
a) First person
b) Second person
c) Third person
d) Fourth person

7. In a song written from a __________ point of view, lyrics are personal, as if they are shared by the singers themselves.
   
a) First person
b) Second person
c) Third person
d) Fourth person

8. **True or False:** A song’s title must be taken from a line in the song.

9. **True or False:** Every song includes a bridge

10. **True or False:** Musicians can only perform songs that they have written.
Unit 3 - Rhythm, Syllables and Rhyming

In the previous unit, we learned about the importance of a song's title and message. In this unit, we're going to learn about syllable count as it relates to lyrical rhythm and explore rhyming schemes.

* By this point in the songwriting class, you should begin sketching out some song ideas in a songwriting notebook; even if it is just some basic ideas, titles or a few lines.

Rhythm and Syllables

Songs are a combination of words and music. For lyrics to fit with music, songwriters need to have a strong understanding of rhythm and syllables.

- **Rhythm** is a pattern of sounds and silences
- **Syllables** are the parts that a word is naturally divided into when it is pronounced

* Songwriters pick words and phrases that fit within a consistent pattern of syllables. In short, they make their words fit a rhythm.

Syllables Further Explained...

A syllable is a single, unbroken sound of a spoken (or written) word. Syllables usually contain a vowel and accompanying consonants. Sometimes syllables are referred to as the 'beats' of spoken language. The number of times you hear a vowel (a, e, i, o, u) in a word is equal to the number of syllables a word has.

Examples:
- **Cat** has one syllable (words of one syllable are monosyllabic)
- **Water** has two syllables (wa / ter)
- **Computer** has three syllables (com / pu / ter)
- **Category** has four syllables (cat / e / gor / y)
Rhythm & Syllables: Practice

Directions: Read or sing the following lyric excerpts from well-known songs aloud. One of the lines will have two options. Circle the correct version and cross out the line that sounds incorrect. (Hint: Remember you can listen to songs on youtube!)

1) from…Beat It — Michael Jackson

Just beat it (beat it) beat it (beat it) No one wants to be defeated

OR

Just beat it (beat it) beat it (beat it) No one wants to lose when they get in a fight

2) from…Amazing Grace — John Newton

Amazing grace, How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now I am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

OR

Amazing grace, How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once in a lot of trouble, but now everything's ok,
Was blind, but now I see.

3) from…The Star Spangled Banner — Francis Scott Key

And the rocket's red glare
The bombs exploding everywhere
Gave proof through the night
That our flag was still there

OR

And the rocket's red glare
The bombs bursting in air
Gave proof through the night
That our flag was still there

4) from…Ain't No Mountain High Enough — Marvin Gaye

Ain't no mountain high enough
Ain't no valley low enough
Ain't no river wide enough
To keep me from getting to you, babe

OR

Ain't no mountain high enough
Ain't no valley low enough
Ain't no water stream that is wide enough
To keep me from getting to you, babe
Syllable Count: Analysis

In this activity, we're going to analyze the syllable count in each lyrical line for several songs.

Directions:

1. **Listen to the song**, "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," by Hank Williams — while looking at the lyric sheet on the following page.
   
   - Notice that the syllable count is marked next to each line.

2. **Count the syllables in each line for the verses** in the next 2 song examples on the following pages.
   
   - Mark the syllable count to the left of each line, just like in the example.
"I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" (Hank Williams)

Hear that lonesome whippoorwill
He sounds too blue to fly
The midnight train is whining low
I'm so lonesome I could cry

I've never seen a night so long
When time goes crawling by
The moon just went behind the clouds
To hide its face and cry

Did you ever see a robin weep
When leaves began to die?
Like me, he's lost the will to live
I'm so lonesome I could cry

The silence of a falling star
Lights up a purple sky
And as I wonder where you are
I'm so lonesome I could cry

-Hank Williams is considered one of the all-time great American country music singer/songwriters. He recorded 55 singles that reached the top 10 of the Billboard Country & Western Best Sellers chart, including 12 that reached No. 1. Some of his most well-known hits include: "Your Cheatin' Heart," "Hee Haw Lookin','" and "I'll Never Get Out of This World Alive."
"I Don't Need Your Rockin' Chair" (George Jones)

Songwriters: Billy Yates, Frank Dycus & Kerry Kurt Phillips

[Chorus:] I don't need your rockin' chair
Your Geritol or your Medicare
Well I still got Neon in my veins
This grey hair don't mean a thing
I do my rockin' on the stage
You can't put this possum in a cage
My body's old but it ain't impaired
Well I don't need your rockin' chair

I ain't ready for the junkyard yet
Cause I still feel like a new corvette
It might take a little longer but I'll get there
Well I don't need your rockin' chair

[Chorus:] I don't need your rockin' chair
Your Geritol or your Medicare
Well I still got Neon in my veins
This grey hair don't mean a thing
I do my rockin' on the stage
You can't put this possum in a cage
My body's old but it ain't impaired
Well I don't need this rockin' chair

Retirement don't fit in my plans
You can keep your seat I'm a gonna stand
An Eskimo needs a Fridgedaire
Like I need your rockin' chair

[Chorus:]
"Come Back Song" (Darius Rucker)

I woke up again this morning
And wouldn't you know it... pouring rain
I went and burned a pot of coffee
And like us I poured it down the drain

[Chorus]  'Cause I didn't know I needed you so
And letting you go was wrong
And baby I know you got your radio on
So this is my my bad, come back song

I know I said I wouldn't miss you
But now I'm saying I'm a fool
You're on the feel good side of leaving
And I'm the backside of a mule

[Chorus]  'Cause I didn't know I needed you so
And letting you go was wrong
And baby I know you got your radio on
So this is my my bad, come back song

And now I'm laying down without you
In this king size empty bed
And I wish I had my arms around you
But I'll just dream of you instead

(Chorus)
Rhythm & Syllables — Summary

Fitting lyrics uniformly into a certain rhythm is an integral part of songwriting.

While you probably won’t master this skill in just one lesson, let’s summarize some of the main takeaways:

• The verses and chorus should follow a general pattern of syllables.

*You probably noticed that the lines in each verse for the songs we looked at were not always the exact same syllable count!

• It is acceptable for lines to have a varied number of syllables as long as the lines can be easily spoken within a uniform beat. In other words, each line of the song should fall into a rhythm. A way to check this is to count syllables.

• A good guideline is to keep the syllable count in each line of a verse or chorus within approximately three syllables of the counts in the other lines of the verse or chorus.

• A word can be sustained for extra syllables in a lyrical line, if need be; however, you should test it by reciting it out loud. Example - *Come Back Song:* “*(rest)* I woke up again this morning”

• A pause, or a “rest,” can count as a syllable; however, you should try reciting it to see how it sounds. Example - *Come Back Song:* “Cause I didn’t kn - o - w I needed you so”
Lesson 2: Rhyming

Rhymes occur when words at the end of two or more lines in a song share the same or a similar sound.

Rhymes can be exact or approximate:

- An **exact rhyme** has the same ending sound. "Last," "past," and "fast" are examples of exact rhyme.

- An **approximate rhyme** sounds like a rhyme, depending on how the artist sings the words, though the words do not have exactly the same ending sounds. "Age," "fade," and "play"—which all share the same vowel sound—are examples of approximate rhyme.

**Songwriting Tip:** Rhymes should support the meaning of the song. Avoid selecting words just because they rhyme. It is better to have a word that does not rhyme than to use a word that does not make sense.

**BRAINSTORM (2 minutes)**

In your the space below, write as many words that rhyme with "top" as you can in 30 seconds. Your rhyming words do not have to be only one syllable long. For example, "hip-hop" rhymes with "tip-top" or just "top."

Now see how many words you can rhyme with "time" in 30 seconds. You can use exact or approximate rhymes. GO!
A rhyme scheme describes the pattern of rhyming words in a song.

To help you identify the rhyme scheme in these songs, use the first two letters of the alphabet. “A” is used for the first line, and any other lines that rhyme with it are also labeled “A.” When you come to a line that does not rhyme with “A,” label it “B.” All lines that rhyme with this line will be labeled “B,” as well. When you encounter the next rhyming sequence, return to “A,” and then “B,” and so on. You should circle words that are exact rhymes and underline words that are approximate rhymes.

Some popular rhyming schemes used in popular songs include: AABB | ABAB | ABCB

Examples:

...from “Bye Bye Bye” by NSYNC.
Don’t want to be a fool for you A
Just another player in your game for two A
You may hate me but it ain’t no lie B
Baby bye bye bye B

...from “Fix You” by Coldplay
When you try your best but you don’t succeed A
When you get what you want but not what you need A
When you feel so tired but you can’t sleep A
Stuck in reverse B

...from "Much Too Young (To Feel This Damn Old)” by Garth Brooks
This ol’ highway’s getting longer A
Seems there ain’t no end in sight B
To sleep would be best, but I just can’t afford to rest C
I’ve got to ride in Denver tomorrow night B

...from “Boy Named Sue” by Johnny Cash
Well my daddy left home when I was three A
And he didn’t leave much to Ma and me A
Just this old guitar and an empty bottle of booze B
Now, I don’t blame him ’cause he run and bid C
But the meanest thing that he ever did C
Was before he left, he went and named me “Sue” B

★ One more thing about rhyming: Occasionally, you might encounter lyrics that do not follow any kind of rhyming scheme! This is sometimes called free verse. Norteño is an example of a genre whose lyrics often do not rhyme.
**Rhyming Schemes: Practice**

**Directions:** Label the rhyming scheme in the following excerpts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>...from “Me &amp; Bobby McGee” by Kris Kristofferson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Busted flat in Baton Rouge, waiting for a train</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was feeling near as faded as my jeans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobby thumbed a diesel down just before it rained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And rode us all the way to New Orleans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>...from “Grenade” by Bruno Mars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would go through all this pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a bullet straight through my brain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I would die for you, baby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But you won’t do the same</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>...from “Sweet Baby James” by James Taylor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a young cowboy, he lives on the range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His horse and his cattle are his only companions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He works in the saddle and he sleeps in the canyons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiting for summer his pastures to change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>...from “Farther Along” (Trad.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farther along we’ll know all about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farther along we’ll understand why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheer up my brother, live in the sunshine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We’ll understand it all, by and by</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>...from “Hallelujah” by Leonard Cohen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Now, I’ve heard there was a secret chord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That David played, and it pleased the Lord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But you don’t really care for music, do ya?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It goes like this, the fourth, the fifth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The minor fall, the major lift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The baffled king composing hallelujah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>...from “Mr. Mudd &amp; Mr. Gold” by T. Van Zandt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The wicked king of clubs awoke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was to his queen turned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His lips were laughing as they spoke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His eyes like bullets burned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sun’s upon a gambling day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His queen smiled low and blissfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let’s make some wretched fool to play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plain it was she did agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rhyming Schemes: Practice

Directions: In the space below write four lines with the rhyming scheme: ABAB. Then write four lines using the rhyming scheme: AABA.

ABAB

AABA
Song Analysis: Putting it All Together

1. In the space on the next pages, write down the lyrics to two of your favorite songs. (These songs should be appropriate for school use.)

2. Label the Syllable Count for every line in each verse.

3. Label the Rhyming Scheme for the verses and chorus.
   - Write the syllable count to the left of each line and the rhyming scheme to the right of each line; just like in the previous examples.
(Analysis - Syllables and Rhyming Scheme - SONG 1)
(Analysis - Syllables and Rhyming Scheme - SONG 2)
End of Unit Review Quiz

Directions: Let’s check your knowledge from the 3rd Unit. Answer the questions below by selecting the correct answer.

1. A(n) ________ sounds like a rhyme, depending on how the artist sings the words, though the words do not have exactly the same ending sounds. (Examples: “Age,” “fade,” and “play”)
   A) exact rhyme
   B) approximate rhyme
   C) syllable count
   D) line rhythm

2. ________ is a pattern of sounds and silences.
   A) Syllable count
   B) Rhyming schemes
   C) AABB
   D) Rhythm

3. ________ are the parts that a word is naturally divided into when it is pronounced.
   A) Syllables
   B) Rhymes
   C) Ticks
   D) Exact rhymes

4. True or False: The Syllable Count for verses in songs will always match exactly.

5. True or False: Song lyrics must always rhyme.
Unit 4 - Blues Music

This unit borrows curriculum from The Country Music Hall of Fame, as well as PBS.org

The Blues is a quintessential American music that has influenced many genres from country & bluegrass to rock & hip-hop. In order to get some context, let's learn a little about the history of the Blues.

Blues Music - A Brief History & Terms

Blues songs often tell stories of misfortune, regret, and overcoming bad luck. This style of music has its roots in African American history. In the 1800s, enslaved individuals would collectively sing work songs as they were forced to work long, hard days often in fields. A song leader would sing a short improvised melody (call), and the workers would answer with a single repeated melody (response). Enslaved people also sang hollers, which sounded a lot like work songs, but were sung alone, rather than as a group.

Work Songs

A probable root of the blues, work songs were extensively documented by folklorists during the early portions of the 20th century, although their roots arguably go as far back as West Africa. Work songs help synchronize the rhythm of group tasks, with a single leader calling out a line that is then copied or responded to by the group (see "call and response"), typically in time with their work motion (e.g., chopping with an axe or digging with a shovel).
Jim Crow

A term arguably arising from a minstrel performer of the early 19th century, Jim Crow more generally refers to the laws and regulations that arose in the South following post-Civil War Reconstruction. Through the mandated segregation established by these laws, African Americans were systemically prevented from achieving economic, political, and cultural power and equality. The term is used to refer to both the oppressive laws (e.g., a law enforcing separate train cars for whites and blacks), as well as the general time period during which they were predominate (from approximately the mid-1870s through the 1960s).

The Great Migration was a mass movement during the first half of the 20th century, during which millions of African Americans from primarily rural locations in the Southern United States moved to urban locations, particularly in the North. The migration occurred in two major waves, each centered around the World Wars, during which a great need for industrial workers arose in Northern (and later Western) cities. Although this promise of reliable employment attracted many, as did the hope for living conditions that were better and less oppressive than those in the South, it was not always found. However, the cultural impact of the Great Migration upon those who moved, and the cities to which they moved, was and continues to be dramatic.
ACTIVITY

Listen to the following songs:

- Vera Hall, "Trouble So Hard" early 1900s
- Skip James, "Hard Time Killin' Floor Blues" 1930s
- Chris Thomas King, "Da Thrill Is Gone From Here" early 2000s

Answer the following questions based on your response to those songs:

1) What do the songs suggest about the condition of the people who sang them and listened to them?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2) What did the singers and listeners of these songs value?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3) Why do you think these singers choose their subjects and approaches to those subjects? What does that tell you about their outlook or perspective?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Blues Styles

The origins of blues music can be traced to the Mississippi Delta during the late 1800s and early 1900s. From there, it spread to other areas of the country, where the sound evolved due to musicians adding musical elements popular in their regions.

Examples of different blues styles across the United States include:

(The Mississippi) Delta Blues are considered the oldest style of blues, originating in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Most Delta blues records feature singers accompanying themselves on guitar (usually acoustic). Usually, they play a basic repeated musical pattern, known as 12-bar blues. (See Part II for more information.) The lyrics typically used an AAB line pattern and were often about failed relationships, life on the road, and other emotional topics. In Mississippi, blues music venues were train stations, street corners, barns, and other informal locations.

*Example: “Death Letter Blues” by Son House*

Perhaps no other region combines as many styles into their blues music as Texas Blues. In the early 1900s Texans often kept elements of the Mississippi Delta Blues (i.e., AAB line pattern and 12-bar blues) and combined it with their own folk and spiritual tunes. Singers like Blind Lemon Jefferson found a way to accompany long, free form, holler-like melodies with freely strummed guitar chords. Additionally, Texas blues musicians added in musical elements from around the world, including Latin rhythms and polkas.

*Example: “Match Box Blues” by Blind Lemon Jefferson*
Many Memphis Blues musicians moved from the Mississippi Delta to escape the oppression of field work. Memphis offered opportunities for black businesses and entertainment on its famous Beale Street. Musicians could also perform at house parties, corner saloons, traveling tent shows, or in jazz bands. In order to compete with large performance ensembles (like W.C. Handy's band), artists often performed as a duo and developed a distinct musical sound where one guitar played high treble chords and melodies while the other played low bass lines—a sound still present today. Example: "Beale Town Bound" by the Beale Street Sheiks duo

St. Louis Blues soaked up diverse music styles from the Mississippi Delta, ragtime from local artist Scott Joplin (composer of "Maple Leaf Rag" and "The Entertainer"), and jazz influences from New Orleans. In 1914, W.C. Handy published his song "St. Louis Blues," which would become one of the most popular blues songs in history. Example: "St. Louis Blues" by Bessie Smith

When you think of Chicago Blues, think of a bigger band and electricity! This style developed in the 1950s and added several instruments to the typical Delta blues style, including electric guitar, bass guitar played with an amp, a piano, a miked harmonica, and sometimes a horn section (trumpet, trombone, and saxophone). Example: "Trouble No More" by Muddy Waters
Blues Styles Review

Directions: Write three key phrases that come to mind for each blues style based on the descriptions you read.

Delta Blues

Texas Blues

Memphis Blues

St. Louis Blues

Chicago Blues
Blues Form & Lyrical Structure - Lyrical Analysis Part 1

Directions: Read the "Cross Road Blues" Lyric Sheet, and listen to a recording of the song by Robert Johnson. Then answer the questions on the following page. Your answer may be opinion-based, but you'll need to include reasons to support your answers.

Robert Johnson - Cross Roads Blues Lyrics

I went to the crossroads, fell down on my knees
I went to the crossroads, fell down on my knees
Asked the Lord above, have mercy now, save poor Bob if you please

Standin' at the crossroads, tried to flag a ride
Whee-hee, I tried to flag a ride
Didn't nobody seem to know me, everybody pass me by

Standin' at the crossroads, risin' sun goin' down
Standin' at the crossroads baby, the risin' sun goin' down
I believe to my soul now, po' Bob is sinkin' down

You can run, you can run, tell my friend Willie Brown
You can run, you can run, tell my friend Willie Brown
That I got the crossroad blues this mornin', Lord, baby I'm sinkin' down

I went to the crossroad, mama, I looked east and west
I went to the crossroad, babe, I looked east and west
Lord, I didn't have no sweet woman, ooh well, babe, in my distress

Robert Johnson (1911-1938) was an American blues musician from the Mississippi Delta. Johnson is widely accepted as one of the greatest guitarists of all time and has influenced blues and rock & roll musicians like Muddy Waters, the Rolling Stones, and Eric Clapton.
1. What is the theme or main subject of the song? 

2. What feeling is conveyed in this song? What evidence from the song supports your position?

3. What do you think the artist means when he refers to “the crossroads?” Is it figurative, literal, or both?

4. How is the form or structure of this song different than songs you listen to today?
Blues Lyrical & Musical Structure

The Legend of Robert Johnson
"Cross Road Blues" (also known as "Crossroads") was written and recorded by Robert Johnson in 1936. The song has become part of the mythology surrounding Robert Johnson, referring to the place where he supposedly sold his soul to the devil in exchange for his musical talents. When blues artists, like Johnson, sing about having the "blues," it means they feel sad, regretful, down on their luck, or betrayed. Although blues music often deals with personal struggles, it’s also about overcoming hard times, saying how you feel, venting your frustration, and having fun while doing it!

Unlike most popular or country music that follow a verse-chorus-verse-chorus-bridge-chorus music form, blues songs like "Cross Road Blues" typically use multiple verses and no chorus. Traditional blues songs typically follow a three-line verse with an AAB line pattern, which is sung over a basic repeated musical pattern called 12-bar blues. This form of blues typically has the following lyrical elements:

A. Line 1 – State the problem, situation, or issue.
A. Line 2 – Repeat the first line.
B. Line 3 – Response to the first two lines, which:
   - States a solution or consequence.
   - Is often phrased as a two-part answer separated by an implied "but" or "therefore."
   - Is longer in length than the first two lines.
   - May contain up to the same number of syllables as the first two lines.
   - Rhymes with the first two repeated lines.

12-bar blues refers to a chord progression that is 12 bars (or measures) long. It can be divided into three four-bar segments that follow the AAB line pattern of a verse.
Blue Lyrics - Brainstorm Activity

Journal - In the space below, write about a time when you were at a crossroads (literal or figurative). What did it look like? What decision(s) did you have to make? What were the consequences of your choices?

Blues Lyric Practice - In the space below, practice writing a blues lyric in the AAB verse format - following the format described on the previous page.
Blues Form & Lyrical Structure - Lyrical Analysis Part 1

**Directions:** Read the lyrics to “I Can’t Quit You Baby,” and listen to the version recorded by Willie Dixon. Then answer the questions on the following page.

**Willie Dixon - I Can’t Quit You Baby Lyrics**

Well, I can’t quit you, baby
But I got to put you down a little while
Well, I can’t quit you, darling
But I’ve got to put you down a little while
Well, you done made me mess up my happy home
Made me mistreat my only child

Ah, when you hear me moanin' and groanin'
Whoa, you know it hurts me way down inside
Whoa, when you hear me moanin' and groanin'
You know it hurts way down inside
Oh, when you hear me howlin'
Ooh, you know my love will never die, alright

Well, when you see me cryin' baby
Don't let my tears fall in vain
Well, when you see me cryin', darlin'
Please don't let my tears fall in vain
Lord, I don't know what to do
You know my heart is filled with pain
Alright, alright

*Willie Dixon (1915-1992) is considered the father of modern Chicago blues and served as a crucial link between the blues and rock & roll. In addition to writing more than 500 songs, he wrote, produced, arranged, and played bass on sessions for Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters, and others.*
1) How does this style of blues differ from Robert Johnson’s “Cross Road Blues”?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2) What story is being told and what message is conveyed?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3) What is the conflict explored in this song?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4) What specific lines from the song communicate conflict or struggle?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Activity - Write a Blues Song - Now it's time to try writing your own blues song! Don't worry, we'll use a template to apply what we've learned about the AAB blues lyric structure.

🌟 Songwriting tip: Although blues music often deals with personal struggles, it's also about expressing feelings, venting frustration, and having fun while doing it! For your blues song, you do not need to draw from dark or traumatic experiences — your blues song could be about anything!

Song Title:

1ST VERSE

A

A

B

2ND VERSE

A

A

B

3RD VERSE

A

A

B
End of Unit Review Quiz

Directions: Let's check your knowledge from the 4th Unit. Answer the questions below by selecting the correct answer.

1. While seeking the promise of reliable employment and less oppression, many African Americans moved north or west during the ____________.
   A) Jim Crowe Movement
   B) Civil War
   C) Great Depression
   D) Great Migration

2. This style of blues music is known for having larger bands and electrified instruments.
   A) Delta Blues
   B) Texas
   C) Memphis
   D) Chicago

3. In this style of blues music, artists often performed as a duo where one guitar played high treble chords and melodies while the other played low bass lines.
   A) Delta Blues
   B) Texas
   C) Memphis
   D) Chicago

4. This style of blues music is usually acoustic and is considered the oldest style of the blues - going back to the late 1800s.
   A) Delta Blues
   B) Texas
   C) Memphis
   D) Chicago

5. This sub-genre of blues music is known for combining many styles of music; even including Latin rhythms and polkas.
   A) Delta Blues
   B) Texas
   C) Memphis
   D) Chicago
6. Blues is thought to have developed out of work songs going all the way back to:
   A) Mexico
   B) Africa
   C) Ireland
   D) Asia

7. The term __________ generally refers to the laws and regulations that arose in the South following post-Civil War Reconstruction; when African Americans were systemically prevented from achieving economic and political equality because of segregation.
   A) Axe Gang
   B) Jim Crow
   C) Great Migration
   D) Race Record

8. _Lyrics_ in traditional blues songs typically follow a three-line verse with an ____ rhyming pattern.
   A) ABC
   B) ABAB
   C) AAB
   D) ABB

9. _Music_ in a traditional blues song typically follows a pattern called ________.
   A) 4 Bar Blues
   B) 8 Bar Blues
   C) AAB
   D) 12 Bar Blues
Unit 5 - Focused Lyric Writing

In this unit, you will put everything you’ve learned the previous four units into practice and write the lyrics to an original song. Don’t worry if that sounds daunting! There will be preparatory guidance in the following pages to help you reach your song’s final draft.

Review

Let’s briefly review what you’ve learned in the previous workbooks.

In your own words, write at least one sentence explaining each concept listed below.

1. Parts of a song:
2. Title and hook:
3. Theme and message:
4. Rhythm and syllables:
5. Rhyme:
6. Details and images:
Song Writing Concepts - Review

Read the description of the songwriting concepts listed below. Compare these with what you wrote on the first page. How well did you remember them?

- **Parts of a song:** Your 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 most successful songs.

- **Rhyme:** Your song should follow a rhyme scheme. Rhymes can be exact or approximate. Rhyme schemes for choruses are sometimes different than the verse.

- **Details and images:** Lyrics paint mental pictures to communicate their theme and convey emotions.
Songwriting Copyright - Inspiration vs. Plagiarism

A brief word about copyright and intellectual property before drafting your song...

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 copy a song or part of a song and turn it in as your own work.

If you copy all or part of a song and turn it in as your work, it is considered cheating, and you will receive a failing grade. If professional songwriters copy part of a song and sell it as their own work, they have committed plagiarism, and thus broken the law.

Plagiarism is defined as the theft of intellectual property, which is any work that is the result of creativity; besides music, other examples of intellectual property include books, artwork, and inventions. People who commit plagiarism are breaking the law and can be sued by the material's original creators.

How do Songwriters make money?

One way songwriters make their living is through earning a royalty. This is the part of the profit from music sales that is paid to writers to compensate them for their work. When music consumers download pirated songs for free that otherwise are for sale on legitimate websites, they deprive songwriters of their income.
A **copyright** gives songwriters legal protection when their work is illegally downloaded. With a copyright, creators have the legal right to use and distribute their original intellectual property, thus enabling compensation. To protect profits, the music industry often files lawsuits to stop illegal downloads or collect payment from people who illegally download.

**Copyright** can also refer to legal protections granted to an author of an original work. Technically, copyright exists automatically in an original work of authorship once it is fixed (written down, typed, or recorded). However, this does not mean that it is registered with the U.S. Copyright office; which offers additional legal protections.

- **Things that cannot be copyrighted include:** titles, names, short phrases, and slogans.
- **For more information, visit copyright.gov**

A **publisher** is a business person or a company that enters into an agreement with a songwriter and works to get songs recorded by singers and used on television, in movies, or other media outlets. Royalties are usually split evenly between the songwriter and the Publisher.

Successful songwriters have several royalty income streams. They can earn money in the following ways:

**Mechanical Royalty** – Songwriters receive income when someone buys a recording of their song via digital download or on a CD, etc.

**Performance Royalty** – Songwriters receive income when their song is played on the radio, streamed via an online music service (such as Apple Music, Pandora, Spotify, and Rhapsody), heard in a public place (such as recorded music in a restaurant), or performed live at a concert.

- **BMI and ASCAP are performance rights organizations (PROs) that serve to protect the interests of songwriters.**

**Synchronization (sync) License** – Songwriters receive income when someone uses their song in a movie, television, show, or commercial.
Songwriting Ideas - Brainstorming Wheel

Hopefully you have been keeping a songwriting journal and already have some ideas for your song. Let's do some brainstorming, just in case you're still struggling to generate ideas for your song.

**Directions:** Fill in the wedges of the pie chart below to help generate ideas for your song.
Songwriting Ideas - Sensory and Emotion

Directions: 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:
Songwriting Outline

1. What is your title? ____________________________________________

2. What is your hook? (It could be the same as your title.)

3. What topics/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 your topic changed you
   - How you feel about your topic
   - Physical qualities of your topic
   - What you do with your topic
   - Someone your topic makes you think of
   - How you interact with your topic
   - When you first saw your topic

Verse 1 topic: ____________________________________________

Hook (in the chorus): __________________________________________

Verse 2 topic: ____________________________________________

*(Hook repeats in the chorus)*

Verse 3 topic: ____________________________________________

4. Now sketch four lines for one 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).

Verse:

Chorus:
Time to Write!

Directions: You are now going to write the first draft of your song. It should be handwritten, either in the space on the following page or written on notebook paper and turned in with this packet. Afterward, you will revise your draft before you turn in your final draft.

Guidelines:

- Your song must include a minimum of 2 verses and a chorus. (You could also include a 3rd verse and/or a bridge.)

- Your verses should follow a consistent syllable count and rhyming scheme.

- Plagiarism will result in a failing grade

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.
Song Title:
Revisions - You will now revise your lyrics in preparation for creating the final draft of your song. (5 pts)

Directions: Complete the checklist below to make sure that the lyrics you've written follow the guidelines that we've covered in the Language Arts Through Lyric Writing Curriculum.

☐ 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 two verses.

☐ 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.

   The Verse rhyme scheme is: ____________________________

   The Chorus rhyme scheme is: ____________________________

☐ Syllable Count: The lines in all of my verses feature a fairly close uniform pattern of syllables.

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Songwriting - Final Draft

Directions: After making revisions to your first draft, you will now complete the final draft for the lyrics of your song.

Requirements:

• Lyrics must be typed and printed.

• Lyrics should adhere to the following formatting requirements:

12-14 point font, 1.5 line spacing, left justified (flush left) Chorus indented once, Bridge indented twice.
End of Series Review Quiz

**Directions:** Let's check your knowledge from the Language Arts Through Lyric Writing Series. Answer the questions below by selecting the correct answer.

1. True or False: A song can only have one author (a single person).
   A) True
   B) False

2. Which of the following is the most common modern song structure:
   A) VERSE>CHORUS>BRIDGE>VERSE
   B) VERSE>CHORUS>VERSE>CHORUS>BRIDGE>CHORUS
   C) CHORUS>BRIDGE>CHORUS>VERSE>CHORUS
   D) CHORUS>CHORUS>VERSE>VERSE>CHORUS

3. ________ are the parts that a word is naturally divided into when it is pronounced.
   A) Syllables
   B) Rhymes
   C) Ticks
   D) Exact rhymes

4. Music in a traditional blues song typically follows a pattern called ________.
   A) 4 Bar Blues
   B) 8 Bar Blues
   C) AAB
   D) 12 Bar Blues

5. The ________ introduces a twist that gives an unexpected perspective on the theme (usually near the song's end).
   a) Verse
   b) Chorus
   c) Bridge
   d) Theme
6. A _______ is a business person or a company that splits a percentage of a songwriter’s royalties in exchange for getting songs recorded by singers and used on television, in movies, or other media outlets.
   A) Publisher
   B) Mechanical
   C) Performance
   D) Synch

7. Songwriters receive a _______ royalty when someone buys a recording of their song via digital download or on a CD, etc.
   A) Copyright
   B) Mechanical
   C) Performance
   D) Synch

8. Songwriters receive a _______ royalty when someone uses their song in a movie, television, show, or commercial.
   A) Copyright
   B) Mechanical
   C) Performance
   D) Synch

9. True or False: A song title can be copyrighted.
   A) True
   B) False

10. If professional songwriters copy part of a song and sell it as their own work, they have committed _________, and broken the law.
    A) Publishing
    B) Copyright
    C) Plagiarism
    D) Inspiration