Song Writing 101

By Evan Redsky

Students analyze songs examining mood, concept, figurative language and messaging, learn songwriting fundamentals, then compose original songs.

Overview

Throughout this lesson, students will analyze a variety of songs and examine elements such as mood, concept, figurative language and message. Students will learn about song writing basics from Evan Redsky, and then work to create their own original songs!

Duration

3-4 Hours

Materials

- Internet Connection and Projector
- "Brainstorming Web" Handout
- "Song Rubric"

Activate: Song Analysis

The day prior to this lesson, assign students the task of emailing you their favourite songs of all time. It is up to the teacher if you want to set some ground rules such as not picking songs with too much swearing or inappropriate content.

To begin this lesson, teachers are encouraged to play their favourite song for the class! Print out the lyrics so students can follow along.

Spend some time listening to your favourite song and students' favourite songs and discuss the following:

1. What is the mood of the song? What emotion(s) is the artist evoking in listeners?
2. What is the concept of the song? What is the song about?
3. What types of figurative language are used (similes, metaphors, hyperboles etc.)?
4. What is the message of the song (usually found in the chorus)?
5. What are some reactions to the song? Do you like it? Why or why not?

Inform the class that next they are going to learn about song writing from Indigenous singer/songwriter Evan Redsky!

Acquire: Song Writing 101 by Evan Redsky

Have students read "Song Writing 101" by Evan Redsky found on pages 72 - 81 of the Create to Learn textbook. Alternatively, students can watch his lessons here:
https://www.createtolearn.ca/tutorial/music-industry-basics

To debrief the reading, ask the class the following questions:

1. What are some of Evan's tips on finding inspiration?
2. What advise does Evan give about narrating a song?
3. What does Evan say about the chorus of a song?
4. What rhyme scheme does Evan us to structure his songs?
5. What is the arrangement of a song?

Apply: Song Writing

Inform students that they are now going to practice writing their own songs. A song is a type of poem that is written in a particular format – introduction, verse 1, chorus, verse 2 and then the chorus repeats.

Hand out the "Brainstorming Web" handout and have students brainstorm their ideas on this page. Inform them that they should begin either with the "Concept" or "Mood". "Mood" refers to the emotions they want to convey in their song. Do they want their song to be happy? Uplifting? Angry? Defiant? "Concept" refers to what the song will be about (ie. The topic of the song). From there, they can begin to tell a short story with the introduction and beginning in "Verse 1" and the middle and ending in "Verse 2". They can then move on to "Message" which will be the message in their chorus. Finally, they can brainstorm some types of "Figurative Language" they want to use in their song. Teachers can assign minimum number students have to include, such as four.

Allow students time to complete their "Brainstorm Web".

Distribute the "Song Rubric" before students start writing their songs. Once students understand how they will be graded, allow them time to write their songs.

Tip: Some students may want to have a beat in mind before they write their songs. There are many websites to find beats from that can be used royalty-free (although some are only free for a trial period and users have to create an account).

Examples of places to find free beats:
- Epidemic Sounds at www.epidemicsound.com
- Free Music Achieve at https://freemusicarchive.org/genre/Hip-Hop_Beats
- Soundcloud at https://soundcloud.com/freehiphopbeatsforyou

Assess: Song Rubric

Once students have competed their songs, have them post their songs to the blog! Teachers can use the "Song Rubric" to grade the songs. Alternatively, teachers can have students work in pairs to peer assess their songs.

Assessment Rubric

SONG RUBRIC

Category	EXCELLENT (12-15)	GOOD (10-12)	SATISFACTORY (7-9)	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT (0-7)
Mood	The song evokes strong emotions in the audience	The song evokes some emotion in the audience	The song attempts to evoke emotions in the audience	The song does not evoke emotion in the audience
Message (Chorus)	The chorus is very catchy and includes a strong message for the audience.	The chorus is catchy and includes a message.	The chorus is somewhat memorable.	The chorus is not memorable and does not share a message
Verses	The lyrics are outstanding and memorable. The lyrics follow a structure or rhyme scheme. The song tells a story that progresses through the verses.	The lyrics are strong and memorable. The lyrics follow a structure and rhyme scheme. The song tells a story.	The lyrics are good. The lyrics somewhat follow a structure or rhyme scheme. The story could progress more.	The lyrics do not follow a structure or rhyme scheme; the lyrics do not tell a story or progress throughout the song.
Figurative Language	A variety of figurative language is used throughout	Some figurative language is used throughout	A few examples of figurative language is used throughout	No figurative language is used in the song
Creativity	The song is outstanding, original and creative	The song is original and creative	The song is somewhat original or creative	The song lacks originality and creativity

Total = /75 marks

Curriculum Connections

British Columbia and Yukon

- English Language Arts Composition Grades 10, 11, 12

Alberta, Northwest Territories and Nunavut

- English Language Arts Grades 10, 11, 12: Uqausiliriniq Strand

Ontario

- English Language Arts Grades 9-10
- English Language Arts Grades 11-12