

Songwriting Residency and Writing Skills

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The process of songwriting offers students an opportunity to sharpen their general writing skills in a number of important ways. From the initial creative impulse which begins to define what a song will be about to the finished musical form, students will be writing, reflecting and rewriting as they explore each essential ingredient of this age-old skill of communicating ideas through song.

At every step, there will be exercises for the students to brainstorm both individually and collectively, and to write down their creative ideas in a way that naturally and sequentially leads to the desired end. The path that is taken from an original idea defining the song's subject and intent to its final polished form will require specific guided exercises in each of the following areas of writing development:

Vocabulary building: A chosen subject for the song will elicit a list of vocabulary words which help to define and describe what needs to be communicated in the song. From this list, ideas will be generated for possible phrases and verse lines.

Sentence structure and meter: There are many, many ways to express the same idea, sometimes even using the same group of words. Students will find themselves re-structuring phrases to fit a chosen meter for the song's verses. This process will expand the students' ability to express themselves in different ways to communicate a particular idea or sentiment.

Imaginative description: Students will be encouraged to find new and accurate ways to describe any given subject by choosing the best option from a list of possibilities. This exercise will help students become aware of the varying shades of meaning elicited by their descriptions, and to find the best one suited to the song's intent.

Metaphor and simile: Students will naturally learn about and expand their use of simile and metaphor in the process of writing around, through and about their song's desired content. There will be exercises in the use of the words 'like' and 'as', as well as practice with the concept of metaphor.

Alliteration and assonance: The fun part of songwriting is coming up with words which not only get the ideas across but also fit together to create interesting and sometimes surprising sound combinations which augment the song's musicality. The use of repeating consonant and/or vowel sounds is a poetic device which the students will learn about and explore as their song develops.

Rhyming: Since most songwriting does fall into poetic form, rhyming will become a natural part of the writing process as well. Clever rhyming schemes are fun and often become one of the most useful engines driving the song's progress and structure.