

Musical Poetry

How can a poem transform into a song?

Grades 6-8 Lesson: Musical Poetry

Grade Band: 6-8

Arts Subject: Music

Other Subject: English & Literature

SUMMARY

In this 6-8 lesson, students will explore “singable” picture books. They will analyze rhyme and musical meter in poetry. Students will write musical note poems to create a singable picture book.

PREPARATION

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Explore singable picture books.
- Discuss song as a form of poetry.
- Analyze rhythm and meter in poetry.
- Set a poem to music.
- Create a picture book incorporating a “singable” poem

Standards Alignment

National Core Arts Standards

[MU:Cr2.1.6a](#) Select, organize, construct, and document personal musical ideas for arrangements and compositions within AB or ABA form that demonstrate an effective beginning, middle, and ending, and convey expressive intent.

[MU:Cr2.1.7a](#) Select, organize, develop and document personal musical ideas for arrangements, songs, and compositions within AB, ABA, or theme and variation forms that demonstrate unity and variety and convey expressive intent.

[MU:Cr2.1.8a](#) Select, organize, and document personal musical ideas for arrangements, songs, and compositions within expanded forms that demonstrate tension and release , unity and variety, balance, and convey expressive intent.

[MU:Cr2.1.6b](#) Use standard and/or iconic notation and/or audio/ video recording to document personal simple rhythmic phrases, melodic phrases, and two chord harmonic musical ideas.

[MU:Cr2.1.7b](#) Use standard and/or iconic notation and/or audio/ video recording to document personal simple rhythmic phrases, melodic phrases, and harmonic sequences.

[MU:Cr2.1.8b](#) Use standard and/or iconic notation and/or audio/ video recording to document personal rhythmic phrases, melodic phrases, and harmonic sequences.

Common Core State Standards



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[ELA-LITERACY.W.6.4](#) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

[ELA-LITERACY.W.7.4](#) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

[ELA-LITERACY.W.8.4](#) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

Recommended Student Materials

Editable Documents: *Before sharing these resources with students, you must first save them to your Google account by opening them, and selecting “Make a copy” from the File menu. Check out [Sharing Tips](#) or [Instructional Benefits](#) when implementing Google Docs and Google Slides with students.*

- [Song to Book Recommendations](#)
- [Criteria of Success: Set a Poem to Music](#)

Video

- [“Sunshine on My Shoulders” by John Denver](#)

Teacher Background

Teachers should pre-select a picture book that originated from a song. They should be familiar with standard notation and making melodic phrases from poetry.

Student Prerequisites

Students should be familiar with elements of poetry, word syllabication, basic music theory, and composition.

Accessibility Notes

Modify handouts, text, and utilize assistive technologies as needed. Allow extra time for task completion.

INSTRUCTION

Engage

1. Divide students into small groups. Distribute song-to-book examples for students to explore. For a list of recommended books see the [Song to Book Recommendations](#) resource. Have students read the books. Ask students: *What do you notice about the book? What elements of poetry did you find? Can poems become songs? What role do the illustrations play in this book?*

2. Sing the song from one of the books or play an audio version. Most picture books created from songs will have the original song at the end of the book or you can find the lyrics

on the web to share with students. While singing, clap to “hear” the rhythm. Ask students: *What is the time signature for this song? What key is it in? What did the composer do to make the words fit the time signature?* (Different words/syllables were assigned different note values to match the time signature, words may have been contracted or shortened to meet the rhythm, etc.)

Build

1. Analyze the first four lines of the children’s book/song/poem for rhythm. Using the example of “Sunshine on My Shoulders”:

Sunshine on my shoulders makes me happy (10 syllables)

Sunshine in my eyes can make me cry (9 syllables)

Sunshine on the water looks so lovely (10 syllables)

Sunshine almost always makes me high (9 syllables)

You may find it helpful to write the lyrics in syllable format. For example: Sun-shine on my shoul-ders makes me hap-py.

2. Engage students in a discussion about the patterns in the lyrics. Ask students: *What patterns do you notice?* (In this poem, there is a 10/9/10/9 rhythm established.) *Would this poem transfer easily to a musical time signature?* (In this poem, if each syllable was given an equal musical note, it would not transfer easily to a song.) It may be helpful to have students recite the poem aloud at this point, giving each syllable equal time, to hear how this would sound. (It should sound unnatural.)

3. Have students listen to the song, [“Sunshine on My Shoulders” by John Denver](#). *What did the composer (John Denver) do to transfer this poem into music?* (He gave some syllables/words more time than others.)

4. Analyze the time signature, count the beats per measure, view musical notation, and see how the poem was transferred into melodic form. Ask students: *What do you think came first, the poem or the music?* Tell students composers can work in a method that is best for them. Some start with the words. Some start with the melody. Some create both at the same time.

Apply

1. Explore more picture books originating from songs, children’s poetry, and nursery rhymes. Each student should select a children’s poem or nursery rhyme to set to music. If the student selects a nursery rhyme, they should not set it to a melody that is already known.

2. Have students analyze the first four lines of the poem or nursery rhyme for syllables and rhythm. They will write the lyrics on every third line of notebook paper, allowing space

between the lines for working on rhythm and musical notation. Each individual word should be broken into its syllables. For example, the word “lesson” would appear as “les-son.”

3. Confer with students about proper syllabication. Ask students: *Do your first four lines establish a rhythm or pattern? Will they transfer easily into song? What time signature might work best for your poem? What will you have to do to make the words fit each measure?*

4. Set the first four lines to music, using musical notes (length, not tones, at this point) to establish the rhythm for the musical time signature. For example, if the word in the student’s poem is to have two beats, he or she would place a half-note above the word. If two syllables of a single word would both receive one half beat, then one eighth note would be placed above each syllable.

As students complete the work on these first four lines, the instructor should check the work for understanding. Once the student has the first four lines completed, ask him or her to continue working on the poem using the same format as above. You may want to place a line limit on the original poem selected or have the student select verses for this lesson.

5. Distribute the [Criteria of Success: Set a Poem to Music](#). Create a melody for the poem. Working on notebook paper and using the musical notes assigned to each syllable of the lyrics, students should assign tonal values to each note. To do this, the student must first select the key in which he or she wishes to compose the song. For students with limited musical composition understanding, it may be helpful to restrict the students to the key of C. Students may find it helpful to create the melody using instruments in the classroom, such as a keyboard or piano, or work on a virtual keyboard.

Reflect

1. Create a two-page singable picture book spread using a few or all of the lines from the song. Students can refer to picture books that originated from songs for guidance or inspiration. Using two sheets of blank paper per student, students may work either vertically or horizontally on the paper. The two pages can be joined using transparent tape.

2. Present the book and sing the song to an audience.

Credits

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