

Song Stories

Workshop suggestions from Henry Raby

www.henryraby.com

Here are a series of songs that tell stories, all roughly 3-4 minutes long.

They could either be played live through Zoom, or given as an exercise to complete outside sessions.

Use this document as you wish, take any prompts, use your own and I'd love any feedback from yourself or the participants.

With each song come a series of optional prompts and questions that the group could consider. It's always useful for participants to think about the relationship between the music and the lyrics. How are the feelings and emotions behind the songs portrayed in the energy of the music?

My Girl by Madness (One Step Beyond)

- Is the singer's girlfriend justified in being mad at him?
- How can you spend an hour on the phone and hardly say a word?
- Write a scene where the characters argue about seeing a film together
- Improvise a monologue where the girlfriend explains to her friend they spent an hour on the telephone and "hardly said a word."

Jolene by Dolly Parton (Jolene)

- The singer compliments Jolene, saying her "beauty is beyond compare," why is the singer being so civil and nice to Jolene?
- Why do you think Jolene can take the singer's man "just because you can?"
- Write a scene between the singer and her man when he says Jolene's name in his sleep
- Write a monologue from Jolene's perspective in response to the plea.

Up The Junction by Squeeze (Cool For Cats)

- Why does the singer think it could never happen between him and "the girl from Clapham"?
- The singer says he works 11 hours a day, but also that the "The devil came and took me from bar to street to bookie." What sort of personality do you think he has?
- Write a scene between the characters discussing their home and life

- Improvise a monologue where Stanley gives advice to the singer whilst he works 11 hours
- Write a monologue where the singer works out his future and makes the choice to sell the telly

Ivy (Live) by Grace Petrie (Queer As Folk Deluxe edition)

-Contains the word fuck

- Why does Grace namecheck the musicians and bands at Glastonbury, does it matter if we don't know who these artists are?
- Why is it important we visualise the festival and the motorway?
- Do you think Ivy will like hearing this song when she's older?
- Improvise the conversation between Grace and her sister on the phone
- Describe the the image of Grace driving as fast as she can up the M5
- Write a scene where an older Ivy is hearing the story for the first time

Fast Car by Tracy Chapman (self-titled)

- What does a fast car represent for the singer?
- Why is it important the song is written directly to the singer's partner?
- Write a scene where the singer and her partner plan their future of promotions and living in the suburb
- Improvise a monologue where the singer's father says his "body's too old for working"
- Write a monologue about the singer's boring day working at the convenience store

Fire Coming Out Of The Monkey's Head by Gorillaz (Demon Days)

- Why do you think the Happyfolk fail to notice the Strangefolk?
- What's wrong with the Strangefolk mining the mountain, don't we mine resources in the real world?
- Improvise a monologue from the Mountain called Monkey about the Strangefolk mining it
- Write a monologue where one of the Strangefolk notices the Happyfolk can't see them
- Describe the place where "All good souls come to rest" or the restless dreams

Rapunzel by Gecko (Volcano)

- How does Gecko twist the traditional folk tale?
- Can we sometimes be too focused on 'saving' people and not listening to people?
- What do you think the song means by "You want to save a girl from a tower / only to build more walls around her"?
- Write a scene between the man and the neighbour who owns the trampoline.
- Improvise a monologue of someone watching the story unfold from a distance.
- Write down Rapunzel's manifesto for life.

The Best Ever Death Metal Band In Denton by The Mountain Goats (All Hail West Texas)

- Why did the band deliberately choose to record the song so rough and unpolished?
- Why are the characters attracted to the darker side of music and lyrics?
- How will the band get their revenge by "outpacing" and "outliving"?
- Write a monologue where one of the characters imagines "stage lights and lear jets and fortune and fame."
- Write a scene between Cyrus and Jeff coming up with band names the bedroom
- Improvise a monologue where a teacher tells Cyrus he'll "never be famous"

Stranger On The Tube by Jess Silk (Don't Tell Me What To Sing About)

- What are the different views between the singer and the stranger?
- How is this encounter on the tube a metaphor for the wider issues in the UK?
- Why does Jess feel it's important to document this encounter in a song?
- Improvise a monologue of someone watching Jess trying to talk to this stranger
- Describe the protest, but from the inside
- Write a scene between the singer and the stranger after the protest

A Boy Named Sue by Johnny Cash (At San Quentin)

-Contains the word 'motherfucker' which is bleeped out of the Spotify version

- Why does the singer's father name his son Sue?
- What's the relevance of Johnny Cash performing his song in a prison?
- Write the singer's vow to "search the honkytonks and bars"
- Write a scene between the singer and someone who "would giggle" at his name Sue

- Improvise a monologue of someone observing the fight between Sue and his father

Long Live The Queen by Frank Turner (Love, Ire & Song)

- Why is it important for the singer to play with the traditional phrase “long live the Queen?”
- Why is singing and dancing so important to the singer and his friends?
- How does the song tread the line between positivity and sorrow?
- Write a letter from Lex to her friends telling them to dance and sing for her
- Write the conversation between the singer and Sarah where she informs him about Lex’s passing.
- Improvise a monologue of the singer’s thoughts as he sits on the train to visit Lex

Stay Free by The Clash (Give ‘Em Enough Rope)

-Note contains swear words shit and piss

- What are the locations in the story (The classroom/the club/the bus/the Crown/prison)
- What is the relationship between the characters, does the singer ever judge his mate?
- Why do the characters drift apart, why does one choose music and the other choose crime? Is it a choice?
- Improvise a monologue where the protagonist retells one of the nights where his mate “made me laugh, got me in bad fights”
- Write one of the letters the protagonist sends to his mate in prison and how he “practised daily in my room.”
- Write a scene where the two friends reunite at The Crown where they “hit the town.”