



Name: _____

Period: _____

AN INTRODUCTION TO CLOSE READING THROUGH SONG LYRICS: A Unit for the Middle- or High-School English Language Arts Class

The following unit is an exploration of the coming-of-age journey we must all take in life. What makes this unit unique is that it will be accomplished entirely by way of well-chosen song lyrics. By learning to read lyrics closely, students will begin to see how songs, too, share important stories and impart meaningful lessons. The songs selected for this lesson come from a variety of contemporary musical genres, further making clear to students the universality of the coming-of-age journey and the power of great song lyrics to express it. We will begin by listening and reading a song together. Next, students will select one of four songs to explore with a partner. Finally, an extension activity invites students to envision their own CD. As they accomplish this task, students will be displaying their understanding of our central theme, the coming-of-age journey, while reflecting on their own unique journey thus far in life. Students will be challenged to locate meaningful songs that express aspects of themselves, analyze these songs in terms of figurative language, word choice, narrative persona, and narrative development. I feel strongly that, through this unit, students will see firsthand the power of lyrics to express key aspects of this exciting but challenging time of life.

This lesson addresses the following Common Core Standards:

CCSELA Literacy RL7.1: Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSELA Literacy RL7.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSELA Literacy RL7.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.

CCSELA Literacy RL7.6: Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.

CCSELA Literacy RL7.7: Compare and contrast a written story, drama, or poem to its audio, filmed, staged, or multimedia version, analyzing the effects of techniques unique to each medium (e.g., lighting, sound, color, or camera focus and angles in a film).

CCSELA Literacy.WHST.6-8.1A: Introduce claim(s) about a topic or issue, acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.

CCSELA.Literacy.WHST.6-8.1B: Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text, using credible sources.

CCSELA.Literacy.WHST.6-8.1D: Establish and maintain a formal style.

CCSELA.Literacy.WHST.6-8.1F: Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.



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AN INTRODUCTION TO CLOSE READING THROUGH SONG LYRICS

Often, we have strong, immediate reactions to the music we hear on the radio or online, not just from the melodies or rhythms themselves, but because the lyrics, in some way, mirror what we are experiencing in our lives at the moment. After an argument with a friend, for example, every song may sound sad. Today, however, I want to show you how doing a close reading of a song's lyrics can lead us to see things we may have missed.



Learning Targets: In the course of our study of song lyrics, not only will you practice your close reading skills, but you will see how writers of every genre make choices that are personal, deliberate, thoughtful, and meaningful. Finally, through this study, you will create your own CD. Every choice you make will allow us to get to know you better.

Defining Terms

Close reading: the careful reading and rereading of a brief passage of text. Such a reading places great emphasis on noticing individual words, syntax, and the order in which sentences and ideas unfold as they are read.

Annotate: the act of adding notes to a text as a comment, question, or explanation.

TOGETHER

1. Listen to Echosmith's song, "Cool Kids" and follow along with the lyrics on the next page.

2. What is your first impression of the song? What is the mood?

3. What does it seem to be about?

4. Now, read the lyrics again. Pay attention to what the singer (the narrator of the song) says. Circle key words and phrases and make notes in the margins. This is called annotating, and we will be doing it all year! What words and phrases stood out to you? Why?

5. Next, pay attention to the change in pronouns. Why might the lyricist have done this? What might it mean?

6. As you read these lyrics again, what more did you discover? What new ideas do you have?

7. Do the “cool kids” really feel cool? How do you know?

8. After reading these lyrics closely, what do you think is the lyricist’s message?

We will do a close reading of this song together.

"Cool Kids"

By Echosmith

She sees them walking in a straight line, that's not really her style.
And they all got the same heartbeat, but hers is falling behind.
Nothing in this world could ever bring them down.
Yeah, they're invincible, and she's just in the background.
And she says,

"I wish that I could be like the cool kids,
'Cause all the cool kids, they seem to fit in.
I wish that I could be like the cool kids, like the cool kids."

He sees them talking with a big smile, but they haven't got a clue.
Yeah, they're living the good life, can't see what he is going through.
They're driving fast cars, but they don't know where they're going.
In the fast lane, living life without knowing.
And he says,

"I wish that I could be like the cool kids,
'Cause all the cool kids, they seem to fit in.
I wish that I could be like the cool kids, like the cool kids.
I wish that I could be like the cool kids,
'Cause all the cool kids, they seem to get it.
I wish that I could be like the cool kids, like the cool kids."

And they said,
"I wish that I could be like the cool kids,
'Cause all the cool kids, they seem to fit in.
I wish that I could be like the cool kids, like the cool kids.
I wish that I could be like the cool kids,
'Cause all the cool kids, they seem to fit in.
I wish that I could be like the cool kids, like the cool kids.
I wish that I could be like the cool kids,
'Cause all the cool kids, they seem to get it.
I wish that I could be like the cool kids, like the cool kids."

Whoa [3x]

Like the cool kids



PARTNER ACTIVITY

As you and your partner do a close reading of **one** of the following song lyrics, keep in mind that all writers, lyricists included, have messages they want to send out into the world, but they want us to do some of the work. They want us to read closely and pay attention to details. The more carefully we pay attention, the more the writer's message will be revealed.

1. Select **one** of the following four songs to study.

Which song did you choose? _____

Who is the lyricist? _____

2. Read your lyrics all the way through to get an overall impression. Additionally, you may listen to the song on your cell phone.
3. Read again, this time with a highlighter and a pencil close by. Circle key words and make notes in the margins. Discuss your findings with your partner.
4. What is the overall mood of this song?

5. Describe the persona of the singer/narrator.

6. Does the lyricist use any figurative language? (Look for metaphors, similes, personification, symbols, allusions, etc.) Quote your example below. Add the line number where you found this figurative language in parentheses.

7. Analyze this figurative language. What is being compared? How does it enhance the song's message?

8. Does the lyricist employ any unique words? Look for a word with multiple meanings or a word used in a surprising way. Quote your example below. Add the line number where you found these words in parentheses.

9. Analyze this word choice. What made it surprising, interesting, or thought-provoking?

10. What is the lyricist's overall message?

11. What else did you discover that surprised you?

“Fifteen”

By Taylor Swift

You take a deep breath and you walk through the doors
It's the morning of your very first day
You say hi to your friends you ain't seen in a while
Try and stay out of everybody's way

It's your freshman year and you're gonna be here
For the next four years in this town
Hoping one of those senior boys will wink at you and say
"You know, I haven't seen you around before"

'Cause when you're fifteen and somebody tells you they love you
You're gonna believe them
And when you're fifteen feeling like there's nothing to figure out but
count to ten, take it in
This is life before you know who you're gonna be
Fifteen

You sit in class next to redheaded Abigail
And soon enough you're best friends
Laughing at the other girls who think they're so cool
We'll be outta here as soon as we can

And then you're on your very first date and he's got a car
And you feeling like flying
And your mama's waiting up and you're thinking he's the one
And you're dancing 'round your room when the night ends
When the night ends

'Cause when you're fifteen and somebody tells you they love you
You're gonna believe them
And when you're fifteen and your first kiss
Makes your head spin around
But in your life you'll do things greater than
Dating the boy on the football team
I didn't know it at fifteen

When all you wanted was to be wanted
I wish you could go back and tell yourself what you know now

Back then I swore I was gonna marry him someday
But I realized some bigger dreams of mine
Abigail gave everything she had to a boy who changed his mind
We both cried

'Cause when you're fifteen and somebody tells you they love you
You're gonna believe them
And when you're fifteen, don't forget to love before you fall
I've found time can heal most anything
And you just might find who you're supposed to be
I didn't know who I was supposed to be
Fifteen

la la la la la
Your very first day
Take a deep breath girl
Take a deep breath as you walk through the doors

“Outcast”

By Kerrie Roberts

Since I can remember, guess I been a problem
Never had a filter, never been the popular one
To sugar coat what I know is undeniable
I just can't hide it, I wear it like a letter

Everywhere I go, everyone is talking
I can feel them staring, they hope I'm just pretending
And giving up my power, caving into pressure
I'm not living for them, I live for something better

I'm not good enough, I'm not what they want
But let me tell you what, I know who I am
So just throw me out for not fitting in
I will stand my ground and be an outcast

So what if I'm an outcast?
So what if I'm an outcast?

So what if I don't look the part I'm supposed to play
What if I don't follow all the rules they make
They think I should be perfect, they love it when I mess up
No grace in case I blow it, a good girl shouldn't need it

I'm not good enough, I'm not what they want
But let me tell you what, I know who I am
So just throw me out for not fitting in
I will stand my ground and be an outcast

So what if I'm an outcast
So what if I'm an outcast
So slow and everybody's so fast
So what if I'm an outcast?

I try to play nice, I don't want to fight
But I won't be great when it sounds like I'm right
'Cause what I believe is what makes me strong
If I don't belong, I hold onto love

I try to play nice, I don't want to fight
But I won't be great when it sounds like I'm right
'Cause what I believe is what makes me strong
If I don't belong, I hold onto love

So what if I'm an outcast?
So what if I'm an outcast?

So slow and everybody's so fast
No matter what it costs I'll be an outcast

I'm not good enough, I'm not what they want
But let me tell you what, I know who I am
So just throw me out for I'm not fitting in
I will stand my ground and be an outcast

I'm not good enough, I'm not what they want
And let me tell you what, I know who I am
So just throw me out, I'm not fitting in
I will stand my ground and be an outcast

"Growing Up (Sloane's Song)"

By Macklemore
(with Ryan Lewis)
(feat. Ed Sheeran)

[Macklemore:]

They say boys don't cry
But your dad has shed a lot of tears
They say I should be a strong man
But baby, I'm still filled with fear
Sometimes I don't know who I am
Sometimes I question why I'm here
I just wanna be a good dad
Will I be? I have no idea
They say girls shouldn't be tough
And moms should raise their kids at home
But baby, I know that that isn't true
Cause your momma's the toughest person I know
I wanna raise you to be like her
And watch you show the world how to do it on your own
I'm still tryna figure out who I am
I don't wanna mess this up or do this wrong
I'm gonna be there for your first breath
I don't know if I'll be there for your first step
I can promise you that I'll try to work less
But the tour's routed, and I got this album
Put in so many hours, and I just want the outcome
To be something that I can look back and I can be proud of
Don't wanna be a dad that's living in FaceTime
But I've got a world to sing to and you at the same time
I won't spoil you, you can trust that
For your sweet sixteen, you get a bus pass
Had your heart broken? Been there, done that
I love you and I can't give you enough of that
Get back to community that raised you up
Read Langston Hughes, I suggest "A Raisin in the Sun"
Listen to Sam Cooke, a change gon' come
You put the work in, don't worry about the praise, my love
Don't try to change the world, find something that you love
And do it every day
Do that for the rest of your life
And eventually, the world will change

[Ed Sheeran:]

I'll be patient, one more month
You'll wrap your fingers 'round my thumb
Times are changing, I know, but who am I if
I'm the person you become
If I'm still growing up, up, up, up
If I'm still growing up, up, up, up
I'm still growing up

[Macklemore:]

I recommend that you read "The Alchemist"
Listen to your teachers, but cheat in calculus
Tell the truth, regardless of the consequence
And every day, give your momma a compliment
Take your girl to the prom
But don't get too drunk hanging out the limo
Slow dance with your woman in your arms
Sneak her in after but boy, you better tiptoe
Don't wake your mom up, do yoga, learn 'bout karma
Find God, but leave the dogma
The quickest way to happiness? Learning to be selfless
Ask more questions, talk about yourself less
Study David Bowie, James Baldwin and 2Pac
Watch the sun set with best friends from a rooftop
Wear a helmet, don't be stupid, jaywalk, but look before you do it
If it snows, go outside, build a jump, get some help
Get a sled, thrash the hill with your friends, 'til it melts
Go to festivals, camp, fall in love and dance
You're only young once, my loved one, this is your chance
Take risks, cause life moves so fast
You're only young once, my loved one, this is your chance

[Ed Sheeran:]

I'll be patient, one more month
You'll wrap your fingers round my thumb
Times are changing, I know, but who am I if
I'm the person you become
If I'm still growing up, up, up, up
I'm still growing up, up, up, up

[Ed Sheeran:]

I'll be patient, one more month
You'll wrap your fingers round my thumb
Times are changing, I know, but who am I if
I'm the person you become
If I'm still growing up, still growing up, still growing up
If I'm still growing up, still growing up, still growing up

[Ed Sheeran:]

I'm still growing up

I'm still growing up, ooh

I'm still growing up

I'm still growing up

"Letter to Me"

By Brad Paisley

If I could write a letter to me
And send it back in time to myself at 17
First I'd prove it's me by saying look under your bed
There's a Skoal can and a Playboy no one else would know you hid
And then I'd say I know its tough
When you break up after seven months
And yeah I know you really liked her and it just don't seem fair
All I can say is pain like that is fast and it's rare

[1st Chorus]

And oh you got so much going for you going right
But I know at 17 it's hard to see past Friday night
She wasn't right for you
And still you feel like there's a knife sticking out of your back
And you're wondering if you'll survive
You'll make it through this and you'll see
You're still around to write this letter to me

At the stop sign at Tomlinson and Eighth
Always stop completely don't just tap your brakes
And when you get a date with Bridgett make sure the tank is full
On second thought forget it that one turns out kinda cool
Each and every time you have a fight
Just assume you're wrong and daddy is right
And you should really thank Mrs. Bringman
She spend so much extra time
It's like she sees the diamond underneath
And she's polishing you 'til you shine

[2nd Chorus]

And oh you got so much going for you going right
But I know at 17 it's hard to see past Friday night
Tonight's the bonfire rally
But you're staying home instead because if you fail Algebra
Mom and dad will kill you dead
Trust me you'll squeak by and get a C
And you're still around to write this letter to me

You've got so much up ahead
You'll make new friends
You should see your kids and wife
And I'd end up saying have no fear
These are nowhere near the best years of your life

I guess I'll see you in the mirror
When you're a grown man
P.S. "go hug Aunt Rita every chance you can"

[3rd Chorus]

And oh you got so much going for you going right
But I know at 17 it's hard to see past Friday night
I wish you'd study Spanish
I wish you'd take a typing class
I wish you wouldn't worry, let it be
I'd say have a little faith and you'll see

If I could write a letter to me
To me

“Stereo Hearts”

By Gym Class Heroes

My heart's a stereo
It beats for you, so listen close
Hear my thoughts in every note

Make me your radio
Turn me up when you feel low
This melody was meant for you
Just sing along to my stereo

If I was just another dusty record on the shelf
Would you blow me off and play me like everybody else
If I ask you to scratch my back, could you manage that
Like it read well, check it Traviie, I can handle that
Furthermore, I apologize for any skipping tracks
It's just the last girl that played me left a couple cracks
I used to used to used to used to, now I'm over that
'Cause holding grudges over love is ancient artifacts

If I could only find a note to make you understand
I'd sing it softly in your ear and grab you by the hand
Keep it stuck inside your head, like your favorite tune
And know my heart's a stereo that only plays for you

My heart's a stereo
It beats for you, so listen close
Hear my thoughts in every note

Make me your radio
Turn me up when you feel low
This melody was meant for you
Just sing along to my stereo

Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh to my stereo
Oh oh oh oh so sing along to my stereo, let's go

If I was an old-school, fifty pound boom box
Would you hold me on your shoulder, wherever you walk
Would you turn my volume up in front of the cops
And crank it higher every time they told you to stop
And all I ask is that you don't get mad at me
When you have to purchase mad D batteries
Appreciate every mix tape your friends make
You never know we come and go like we're on the interstate

I think finally found a note to make you understand
If you can hit it, sing along and take me by the hand
Keep myself inside your head, like your favorite tune
And know my heart's a stereo that only plays for you

My heart's a stereo
It beats for you, so listen close
Hear my thoughts in every note

Make me your radio
Turn me up when you feel low
This melody was meant for you
Just sing along to my stereo

Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh to my stereo
Oh oh oh oh so sing along to my stereo, let's go

I only pray you never leave me behind (Never leave me)
Because good music can be so hard to find (So hard to find)
I take your hand and pull it closer to mine
Thought love was dead, but now you're changing my mind

My heart's a stereo
It beats for you, so listen close
Hear my thoughts in every note

Make me your radio
Turn me up when you feel low
This melody was meant for you
Just sing along to my stereo

Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh to my stereo
Oh oh oh oh so sing along to my stereo



YOUR MUSICAL INTRODUCTION



Due _____

Your musical choices tell us so much about you. They not only make clear your taste, but your influences, your experiences thus far in life, and your unique personality!

Your Task: Imagine that you have been asked to produce a CD that expresses **you**! To complete your musical introduction, you will compile, annotate, and write about three handpicked songs, and illustrate your CD's cover. Make deliberate choices as you put together your CD. This is a mock-up for what your CD would look like, so you do not have to make these pages actually fit a CD jewel case. Instead, use 8 ½" by 11 paper.

Defining Terms

CD: a small plastic disc on which music or other digital information is stored, and from which the information can be read using reflected laser light.

Liner notes: the text printed on a paper insert issued as part of the packaging of a CD or on the sleeve of a record.

Steps to Take:

- Assemble three songs that, in some important way, define you. They could be songs that mirror elements of your life (past or present), your influences, or that reflect aspects of your unique personality.
- Print the lyrics to each song and annotate them. Highlight key words and phrases and make notes in the margins. Your notes should include your questions, your personal connections, and your interpretations of the lyrics.
- Create liner notes. To do this, write a well-organized one-paragraph explanation for each of your three song's inclusion in your CD. What does the song mean? Why did you include this song? How does it reflect an aspect of you (your journey, thus far, in life, your influences, and/or your unique personality)? Make sure to analyze the lyricist's choice of words and his or her use of figurative language. Include a brief, well-chosen quote or two that supports your interpretation.
- Construct a cover for your CD. You can draw your visuals or use computer-generated art. These visuals will continue to tell us more about you. They should tie in to the songs you have selected.

- Create a dedication page. Who are the people who have guided you, thus far, toward making great choices in life? Who has believed in you all along? Remember them now with a thoughtful paragraph that explains what they have added to your life.
- Title your CD! Have fun, use your imagination, and be a bit symbolic. Make sure to have your CD title, your name, and your period number on your front cover.
- Edit and proofread your work carefully.
 - Make sure that your paragraphs avoid:
 - Run-on sentences
 - Sentence fragments
 - Problems of subject/verb agreement
 - Misspelled words
 - Make sure that your work reveals:
 - Strong analysis of the songs
 - Thoughtful connections to you
 - Engaging and precise word choice
 - Thoughtful and inviting visuals that symbolically represent your ideas



Student: _____

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Date: _____

MUSICAL INTRODUCTION CHECKLIST

Front Cover/Title Page _____

- Strong title that hints at the CD's message
- Strong visuals symbolically make clear the CD's message
- Student's name and period are clear
- This work is neat, engaging, and shows effort

Dedication Page _____

- Thoughtful discussion of the writer's influences
- Neat, engaging, and shows effort
- Writing is relatively free from mechanical mistakes (grammar, spelling, and punctuation)

Liner Notes/Three Paragraphs _____

- topic sentences introduce the songs and the composer and lyricist
- supporting details
 - song is analyzed; its message is clear
 - figurative language or unique word choice is analyzed
 - connection to the student is clear
 - brief quote from the song with a line number in parentheses adds to this analysis
 - discussion of the brief quote
- thoughtful conclusion
- transitional words and phrases move reader from one paragraph to the next
- tone is engaging
- word choice is thoughtful and precise
- writing is relatively free from mechanical mistakes (grammar, spelling, and punctuation)

Song Lyrics _____

- songs are well chosen and allow us to get to know you
- song lyrics are annotated thoughtfully

Packet _____

- "Cool Kids" is annotated and questions are thoughtfully answered
- Partner song is annotated and questions are thoughtfully answered

Please use this checklist to review your work. Then, staple it to the back of your packet.