

So You Want to Write a Pop Song

This Lesson is for High School General Music Classes

•TIME-FRAME-

This lesson will take place over three to four class periods.

Lesson 1: Learning pop song structures and the musical elements that go into making a great pop song.

Lesson 2: Writing pop songs/beginning recording of songs

Lesson 3-4: Recording original songs and presenting to the class.

•OBJECTIVE-

- Students will learn about song format (ABABCB, ABAB, etc.)
- Students will learn about song construction through the use of rhyme, melody and rhythm
- Students will write and record an original piece of music using
- Garageband (this is based on the assumption that they have had a previous lesson in learning to use Garageband).

•PURPOSE-

As part of a unit on popular music and its construction as well as its role in society through the decades, students will understand the nuts and bolts of creating their own music, the elements that set the great songs apart regardless of time period.

•MATERIALS NEEDED-

- Full computer lab with enough work stations for every two students
- Garageband and Internet access on each computer
- One midi keyboard per station
- Microphone
- Projector
- Powerpoint presentation of song structures (with words from examples in class separated into their basic format)
- www.rhymezone.com
- Handouts with lyrics to song examples with various song formats, rhyme structure and for lyrical subject matter and value
 - “She Will Be Loved” by Maroon 5 (ABABCB)
 - “Satisfaction” by the Rolling Stones (ABABABA)
 - “She’s Always A Woman” By Billy Joel (AACACA) (tag line)
 - “All You Need is Love” by The Beatles (AABABB)

•ANTICIPATORY SET-

As students enter the classroom, “All You Need Is Love” by The Beatles is playing. Copies of several song lyrics are passed out, to

later be used as part of class discussion in recognizing song formats.

•PROCEDURE-

- When the song ends, teacher will begin discussion with students about constructing pop songs. During discussion, teacher should go back to the song to illustrate examples. Be sure to touch on each of the following: Melody, rhythm, lyrics, tempo. What makes the song catchy? Ideas to touch on: Keeping the chorus simple, keep in mind the listener, recognition, hooks, the bridge as a departure.
- Move into discussion on song structure, showing Powerpoint presentation of the various types of song formats. Explain to students that several of those formats are represented in the handout, that as a group, we will break down each song and listen as well for the elements that set these songs apart, regardless of when they were written.
- Have students on handout mark the separate sections in this song, first by ABABCB, etc., format, and within that, sections of songs as discussed in Powerpoint presentation (verse, prechorus, chorus, bridge, solo, etc.). Go over as class and listen to the songs, discuss melody, instrumentation, rhythm, etc.
- Teacher will explain to students that they are going to begin to write their own songs, keeping in mind rhyming structure, lyric and melodic content (be sure to touch on appropriateness in school). In order to help move the activity along, teacher will offer several different ideas for subject matter (Each songwriting group will choose one). At this point, workstations will be available to students so they can write in whichever way is most comfortable for their creativity (laying down rhythm tracks first, keyboards, sitting and writing lyrics, using www.rhymezone.com to help them along if necessary). Again, this is based on the assumption that they have had a previous lesson in learning to use Garageband. If not, teacher should insert a group activity (another full lesson) in learning Garageband, perhaps beginning as a class to write and record a song. Students will write and record their songs.

•CHECK FOR STUDENT UNDERSTANDING-

- Teacher will check for student understanding of pop song forms during the class activity of listening and breaking down each song into the correct format.
- Teacher will check for student understanding of songwriting by circulating through the class as students write their lyrics, listening and offering guidance where necessary.

- Teacher will check for student understanding of using Garageband by circulating through the classroom to help and troubleshoot as students record their songs.

•CLOSURE-

Students will share their songs with the class, describing what format they chose to use by comparing it to the pop song (used in class) with the same format.

•EXTENSIONS-

- Teacher will post students songs on Departmental Web Site.
- Each student will receive a full-length CD of all of the songs created in class following a discussion of copyright and downloads.