

Additional Lessons

AN ACTIVITY GUIDE TO LYRIC WRITING FOR KIDS

For educators who are looking to extend the *Accentuate the Positive: Guide to Lyric Writing for Kids* programming, The Johnny Mercer Foundation is pleased to provide four additional lesson plans.

These lessons are to be used for classes who have received the original Accentuate the Positive programming. Using additional Johnny Mercer classics like "I'm an Old Cowhand," "Lazybones," "Too Marvelous for Words," and "Summer Wind," students will be exposed to different subject matter and will have further opportunities to continue practicing their craft of lyric writing while fulfilling National Core Standards. Songs were selected as a way to continue exploration of lyric writing and Johnny Mercer's contribution to the Great American Songbook. Enjoy!

Lesson 1: "I'm An Old Cowhand"
(in addition to "Accentuate the Positive")

Lesson 2: "Lazybones" (in addition to "Blues in the Night")

Lesson 3: "Too Marvelous for Words"
(in addition to "Hooray for Hollywood")

Lesson 4: "Summer Wind" (in addition to "Moon River")

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“I’m An Old Cowhand (From the Rio Grande)”

(1936) by Johnny Mercer

Lesson Overview

This lesson introduces the song “I’m An Old Cowhand.”

Within this lesson, the students will increase their understanding of the use of rhyme and slang in songwriting, learn the skill of alliteration, and develop personal lyrics using first person.

Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson students will be able to:

- 1 Know more about songwriter Johnny Mercer
- 2 Have more songwriting skills: Rhyme, Slang, Alliteration
- 3 Write lyrics for a song

Standards

Nat’l Core Arts - Music: Creating. Students will generate musical ideas, rhythms and will be encouraged to create their own melodies.

English/Lang Arts Standards: STRANDS--*Students Language Standards, Reading Standards for Information Text, for Literature, Standards for Speaking & Listening, and Writing Standards* will apply phonics and word recognition as well as writing personal opinionated texts using the figurative language concepts discussed in the lessons.

Time Required

One class period of at least 45-50 minutes

Lesson Preparation

Review: Ask students what they remember from past lessons of “Accentuate the Positive,” and review previous lessons as needed.

Materials:

Accentuate the Positive: Guide to Lyric Writing for Kids booklet

Whiteboard space for teacher/teaching artist

Writing paper and pencils

Resources:

The Johnny Mercer Foundation: www.johnnymercer.org

If needed, refer to the video of the educator workshop on the Accentuate the Positive webpage.

Johnny Mercer Collections at Georgia State University:

<http://library.gsu.edu/merc>

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Additional Lesson

Lesson Procedure

- 1 Introduce the concept of the song.**
 - a. Johnny Mercer lyrics often describe a particular character.

- 2 Play the song “I’m An Old Cowhand” and ask students to follow along with lyrics**

(see page 22 of the *Accentuate the Positive: Guide to Lyric Writing for Kids* booklet)

 - a. What character is Johnny Mercer describing?
 - b. What did we learn about this character from his lyrics?
 - c. Review understanding of lyrics – clarify definitions of words they may not understand.

- 3 Discuss the background of the song**

(see below: Information about “I’m An Old Cowhand”).

- 4 Circle the rhymes in the lyrics of “I’m An Old Cowhand.”**

(see page 22 of the *Accentuate the Positive: Guide to Lyric Writing for Kids* booklet)

- 5 Additional writing skills: Introduce term “Alliteration” and practice descriptive sentences about a “character” using writing skills.**

- 6 Brainstorm song ideas:**
 - a. What characters do they love?
 - b. What are descriptive qualities/adjectives about themselves?

- 7 Write the lyrics for a song using the brainstorming prompt.**

(Example: “I’m a smart doctor” or “I’m a dazzling superstar,”etc.)

 - a. Encourage students to experiment with rhyme/patter.

- 8 Have students share their work.**

- 9 Review the importance of copyright and have the students copyright their songs.**

Extension

- 1** Students could explore creating lyrics about a character from literature that’s relevant to the curriculum.

- 2** Have students bring in a photograph and describe the “character” in the photograph through lyrics.

- 3** Students could create the accompaniment music for the song.

1

Lesson Evaluation

Teacher observation of participation.
Evaluation of song lyrics using a rubric.
Student self-evaluation of process and project.

Information about “I’m An Old Cowhand (From the Rio Grande)”

- 1 Music and lyrics written by Johnny Mercer in 1936.
- 2 Mercer could not play the piano or read music, but he still managed to write the music for some of his songs.
- 3 Featured in Paramount’s 1936 film *Rhythm on the Range*.
- 4 It was performed in the film and made popular by vocalist Bing Crosby.

From the book ***Skylark: The Life and Times of Johnny Mercer***:
The song was written in 15 minutes on the back of an envelope while Johnny and Ginger Mercer were driving across the country.

Citation: Furia, Philip. Skylark: The Life and Times of Johnny Mercer. 1st ed., St. Martin's Press, 2003.

From the book ***The Complete Lyrics of Johnny Mercer***:
Mercer remembered: “Between movie assignments Ginger and I took a trip down to Savannah in a little car. We took three days out of six just to cross Texas, and I saw all those guys down there in those spurs and ten-gallon hats driving cars around. That struck me as kind of funny and so I thought maybe I should put it all into a song. Bing put the song into a picture, and I really think he saved my Hollywood career because I began to get more offers after that.”

Citation: Mercer, Johnny, and Robert. Kimball. The Complete Lyrics of Johnny Mercer. 1st ed., Alfred A. Knopf, 2009.

Additional Lesson

2

“Lazybones”

(1933) by Johnny Mercer and Hoagy Carmichael

Lesson Overview

This lesson introduces the song “Lazybones.” Within this lesson, the students will gain a better understanding of collaboration and syllabication, explore rhyme, and how to develop character lyrics.

Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson students will be able to:

- 1 Know more about songwriter Johnny Mercer
- 2 Gain an understanding of composer/lyricist collaboration
- 3 Have more songwriting skills: Syllabication, Rhyme
- 4 Write lyrics for a song

Standards

Nat'l Core Arts - Music: Students will generate rhythmic phrases within a given structure that conveys expressive intent. Another core standard is satisfied when students are encouraged to present and share their creative musical work that conveys intent and demonstrates craftsmanship.

English/Lang Arts Standards: : STRANDS--*Language Standards, Reading Standards for Information Text, for Literature, for Foundational Skills, Standards for Speaking & Listening, and Writing Standards.* During the writing portion of the workshop, students will utilize phonological awareness by analyzing the syllabic structure and patterns within the material. They will also be encouraged to write their thoughts in story form through song structure using personal experiences.

Time Required

One class period of at least 45-50 minutes

Lesson Preparation

Review: Ask students what they remember from past lessons of “Blues in the Night,” and review previous lessons as needed.

Materials:

Accentuate the Positive: Guide to Lyric Writing for Kids booklet

Whiteboard space for teacher/teaching artist

Writing paper and pencils

Resources:

The Johnny Mercer Foundation: www.johnnymercer.org

If needed, refer to the video of the educator workshop on the Accentuate the Positive webpage.

Johnny Mercer Collections at Georgia State University:

<http://library.gsu.edu/merc>

Lesson Procedure

- 1 Introduce concept that sometimes lyricists and composers are different people.**
 - a. Explain that students will be putting personal lyrics into Johnny Mercer music just like they did for Harold Arlen’s music in the “Blues in the Night” lesson.

- 2 Play the song “*Lazybones*” and ask students to follow along with lyrics**
(see page 22 of the *Accentuate the Positive: Guide to Lyric Writing for Kids* booklet)
 - a. What is the message of the song?
 - b. Review understanding of lyrics – clarify definitions of words they may not understand.

- 3 Discuss the background of the song**
(see below: Information about “*Lazybones*”).

- 4 Circle the rhymes in the lyrics of “*Lazybones*.”**
(see page 22 of the *Accentuate the Positive: Guide to Lyric Writing for Kids* booklet)

- 5 Familiarize students with the melody of the song.**
 - a. Call and Repeat—Sing/Speak in rhythm the lyrics on page 22 of the *Accentuate the Positive: Guide to Lyric Writing for Kids* booklet.

- 6 Break down the syllabic structure as a class for each lyric line of the song.**

- 7 Brainstorm song ideas:**
 - a. What are things you want to avoid?
 - b. What would you rather be doing?
 - c. What problems do you have when you procrastinate?

- 8 Write the lyrics for a song using the brainstorming prompt. This can be executed as an individual or group writing activity.**
TOPIC: Encouraging someone not to be a procrastinator.
(Example: How do you encourage someone from putting off on doing their homework?)
 - a. Encourage students to experiment with rhyme/patter.

- 9 Have students share their work.**

- 10 Review the importance of copyright and have the students copyright their songs.**

Extension

- 1** This lesson can be used to analyze the time period in which the song was written (e.g. the Great Depression).

- 2** Students could create the accompaniment music for the song.

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Additional Lesson

Lesson Evaluation

Teacher observation of participation.
Evaluation of song lyrics using a rubric.
Student self-evaluation of process and project.

Information about “Lazybones”

- 1 Johnny Mercer collaborated with 230 composers
- 2 Written with Hoagy Carmichael in 1933
- 3 First big hit for Mercer.
- 4 It was recorded by Ted Lewis, Mildred Bailey, and Louis Armstrong (among others).
- 5 At one point, it sold 15,000 copies a day and 350,000 in a three-month time span.
- 6 The term “Lazybones” found itself attached to recreational products to promote sales.
- 7 As a result of the popularity of the song, Paul Whiteman hired Mercer to be a vocalist in his group.

From an interview with **Willis Conover**,
Mercer said this about writing “Lazybones.”

Mercer: "Lazybones" took a year, took a year and a half. Took forever. Took . . . oh God, it took a long time. It was my first song that was a big song. It was with Hoagy. I didn't know much about writing. I learned a lot from him. I learned a lot after that song from other writers. We had the first 16 bars the first afternoon we worked on it. Then we got . . . oh, it must have been a month later that we got the middle part. And then, oh it must have been three or months later that I got an ending which I thought was all right and we had it penciled in. And then Hoagy came up with the surprise line, you know, "you never heard a word I say" which was marvelous. Well of course, I got the credit for it because my name was on the lyric. But then after that we had to write the verse. It took about a year and finally, of course, it was worth it because it was a great big hit and got me started. I'm grateful to Hoagy for it too.

Citation: M011_MercerJ-ConoverW, Johnny Mercer Oral History Project, Popular Music and Culture Collection, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library

From the book ***The Complete Lyrics of Johnny Mercer:***

Adolf Hitler banned the song outright. His regime was concerned about the popularity of “race” songs and considered that “Lazybones” encourages idleness and does not conform to Nazi ideals.

Citation: Mercer, Johnny, and Robert. Kimball. The Complete Lyrics of Johnny Mercer. 1st ed., Alfred A. Knopf, 2009.

3

“Too Marvelous for Words”

(1937) By Johnny Mercer and Richard Whiting

Lesson Overview

This lesson introduces the song “Too Marvelous for Words.” Within this lesson, the students will gain an understanding of how specificity aids in songwriting, explore patter, and review the use of adjectives in storytelling and songwriting. They will put these skills to use in a personal or class song about people/places they love.

Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson students will be able to:

- 1 Know more about songwriter Johnny Mercer
- 2 Have more songwriting skills: Specificity, Rhyming/Patter, etc.
- 3 Write lyrics for a song

Standards

Nat'l Core Arts: Creating & Interpretation. Not only are the students going to be creating lyrics as a group this time, they will be encouraged to listen to existing Johnny Mercer music and interpret the material demonstrating their knowledge of expressive qualities like dynamics and tempos as well as make interpretations based on what they hear.

English/Lang Arts Standards: : STRANDS--*Language Standards, Reading Standards for Information Text, for Literature, Standards for Speaking & Listening, and Writing Standards.* Students will create lyrics using specific nouns, adjectives, and verbs to express historical and social contexts and experiences. They will be reviewing historical people, places, and things from the 1950's using Johnny Mercer material and then applying the use of specificity with people, places, and things of today.

Time Required

One class period of at least 45-50 minutes

Lesson Preparation

Review: Ask students what they remember from past lessons of “Hooray for Hollywood,” and review previous lessons as needed.

Materials:

Accentuate the Positive: Guide to Lyric Writing for Kids booklet

Whiteboard space for teacher/teaching artist

Writing paper and pencils

Resources:

The Johnny Mercer Foundation: www.johnnymercer.org

If needed, refer to the video of the educator workshop on the Accentuate the Positive webpage.

Johnny Mercer Collections at Georgia State University:

<http://library.gsu.edu/merc>

Lesson Procedure

1 Play the song “Too Marvelous for Words” and ask students to follow along with lyrics

(see page 18 of the *Accentuate the Positive: Guide to Lyric Writing for Kids* booklet)

- a. What is the message of the song?
- b. Circle the rhymes.
- c. Review understanding of lyrics – clarify definitions of words they may not understand.

2 Discuss the background of the song (see below: Information about “Too Marvelous for Words”).

3 Introduce songwriting skills

- a. Explore specificity by identifying the lyrics that are adjectives and descriptive qualities of the person Mercer is describing in the song.
- b. Discuss the idea of patter and relate it to modern day genres like rap. Have students recite the “rap” on page 18 of the *Accentuate the Positive: Guide to Lyric Writing for Kids* booklet.

4 Brainstorm song ideas (This can be an individual or group writing activity):

- a. A person, place, or thing they love (that are just “*too marvelous for words*”)
 - o Specific adjectives and qualities that describe their chosen topic (noun)
- b. What do they love about their school?
 - o Specific adjectives and traits that are unique to their school.

5 Have students share their work (If doing this as a class, recite it as a class).

6 Review the importance of copyright and have the students copyright their songs.

Extension

1 Encourage students to use more songwriting skills like rhyme and alliteration (Example: “My Marvelous Mom” or “Fabulous Friend,” etc.)

- o They could also experiment with word play and using made-up words that embody the intention of the original word.

2 If using patter and rhyme, students could create the beat/rhythm accompaniment for the song.

3 Students could create the instrumental music for the song.

Lesson Evaluation

Teacher observation of participation.
Evaluation of song lyrics using a rubric.
Student self-evaluation of process and project.

Information about “*Too Marvelous for Words*”

- 1 Written with Richard Whiting in 1937
- 2 Featured in Warner Brothers’ 1937 film *Ready, Willing and Able*.
- 3 Initially recorded by Bing Crosby and stayed on the top of the charts for 10 weeks. Was also later recorded by notable vocalists such as Nat King Cole, Billie Holiday, and Frank Sinatra

From an interview with **Willis Conover**,
Mercer said this about writing “Too Marvelous for Words.”

Mercer: “Yeah, I wrote that with Richard Whiting. That was a just a phrase that was around you know and it fit his melody. That was the first big hit I had in Hollywood, well, after “Old Cowhand” which I wrote myself. But the first one I wrote with Dick Whiting, and it got us off to a pretty good start. I think it kept our job at Warner Brothers for a few years.”

Citation: M011_MercerJ-ConoverW, Johnny Mercer Oral History Project, Popular Music and Culture Collection, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library

From the book ***The Complete Lyrics of Johnny Mercer:***

Mercer had a difficult time with the lyrics for this song. At one point, he got angry and went home. Later that day, Whiting came by and gave him a Webster’s dictionary, which he used to finish the lyrics and even references it in the song.

Citation: Mercer, Johnny, and Robert. Kimball. The Complete Lyrics of Johnny Mercer. 1st ed., Alfred A. Knopf, 2009.

4

“Summer Wind”

(1965) by Johnny Mercer and Henry Mayer

Lesson Overview

This lesson introduces the song “Summer Wind.” Within this lesson, the students will gain an understanding of imagery, metaphors, and similes while creating personal lyrics about an environment they love.

Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson students will be able to:

- 1 Know more about songwriter Johnny Mercer
- 2 Have more songwriting skills: Imagery, Metaphors, Similes
- 3 Write lyrics for a song

Standards

Nat’l Core Arts: Creating. Not only are the students going to be creating lyrics as a group this time, they will be encouraged to listen to existing Johnny Mercer music and interpret the material demonstrating their knowledge of expressive qualities like dynamics and tempos as well as make interpretations based on what they hear.

English/Lang Arts Standards: : STRANDS--*Language Standards, Reading Standards for Information Text, for Literature, Standards for Speaking & Listening, and Writing Standards.* Students will create lyrics using specific nouns, adjectives, and verbs to express historical and social contexts and experiences. They will be reviewing historical people, places, and things from the 1950’s using Johnny Mercer material and then applying the use of specificity with people, places, and things of today.

Time Required

One class period of at least 45-50 minutes

Lesson Preparation

Review: Ask students what they remember from past lessons of “Moon River,” and review previous lessons as needed.

Materials:

Accentuate the Positive: Guide to Lyric Writing for Kids booklet

Whiteboard space for teacher/teaching artist

Writing paper and pencils

Resources:

The Johnny Mercer Foundation: www.johnnymercer.org

If needed, refer to the video of the educator workshop on the Accentuate the Positive webpage.

Johnny Mercer Collections at Georgia State University:

<http://library.gsu.edu/merc>

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Additional Lesson

Lesson Procedure

- 1 Introduce the concept of the song.**
 - a. Consider reading “Nature Lyrics” section in red
(see page 18 of the *Accentuate the Positive: Guide to Lyric Writing for Kids* booklet)

- 2 Additional Writing Skills: Imagery – painting pictures with words.**
 - a. Depending on grade and skill level, one can also include metaphors/similes.

- 3 Play the song “Summer Wind” and ask students to follow along with lyrics**
(see page 20 of the *Accentuate the Positive: Guide to Lyric Writing for Kids* booklet)
 - a. What is the message of the song?
 - b. Discuss imagery used in the song.
 - c. Review understanding of lyrics – clarify definitions of words they may not understand.

- 4 Discuss the background of the song**
(see below: Information about “Summer Wind”).

- 5 Review the five senses: Sight, sound, taste, smell, touch.**
 - a. Explore how using senses can aid in the use of imagery in personal lyrics.

- 6 Brainstorm song ideas:**
 - a. What are various environments they love?

- 7 Write the lyrics for a song. TOPIC: Choose an environment that you love and use your five senses to describe it.**

- 8 Have students share their work.**

- 9 Explain the importance of copyright and have the students copyright their songs.**

Extension

- 1** Students can practice incorporating many of the writing skills used in previous lessons in their personal lyrics – rhyme, alliteration, personification, specificity, imagery, metaphors, similes, etc.

- 2** Students could create the accompaniment music for the song.

Lesson Evaluation

Teacher observation of participation.
Evaluation of song lyrics using a rubric.
Student self-evaluation of process and project.

Information about “Summer Wind”

- 1 Music by Henry Mayer with original German lyrics by Hans Bradtke.
- 2 English lyrics by Johnny Mercer in 1965.
- 3 First recorded by Wayne Newton, and then later by Frank Sinatra in which it reached #1 on the *Billboard* chart in 1966.
- 4 This was Mercer's last major hit song.
- 5 The song was featured in an episode of *The Simpsons* and the film *Blade Runner 2049*

From the book **Skylark: The Life and Times of Johnny Mercer:** When Mercer first heard the German version of “Summer Wind”, his imagination took him back to his childhood in Savannah. The theme for his “Summer Wind” lyrics were the loss of love and youth. The song was a hit in the United States in a time where rock and roll acts like The Beatles and Bob Dylan were dominating the charts.

Citation: Furia, Philip. Skylark: The Life and Times of Johnny Mercer. 1st ed., St. Martin's Press, 2003.

From the book **Johnny Mercer: Southern Songwriter for the World:**

Mercer first came across the German song “Der Sommerwind” in 1965 when he heard Danish singer Grethe Ingmann perform it.

Citation: Eskew, Glenn T. Johnny Mercer: Southern Songwriter for the World. 2013.