

TEACHER'S GUIDE

The Academy Is—"About A Girl" Songwriting Skill—Finding Your Voice

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

- Use writing strategies to make lyrics more personal and original
- Evaluate and classify lyrics
- Support opinions

RESOURCES AND PREPARATION

- Guided Lyrics – Finding Your Voice
- Student Activity –Loop Writing Process

Additional Online Support:

- www.holtmcdougal.hmhco.com
- www.BlueNoseEd.com

Teach

1. **Finding Your Voice:** A writer's voice is her or his unique way of expressing his or her thoughts and feelings. Songwriting, like all other kinds of creative writing, relies upon writers discovering and using their own unique voices. The two best ways for aspiring songwriters to do this are 1) to become more aware of when other songwriters are using their own authentic voices, and 2) to become more comfortable with expressing their thoughts and feelings in voices that are uniquely their own.
 - Tell students that learning to write in one's truest voice does not happen by accident. It is the result of an ongoing process. Professional songwriters know that it is important to be uninhibited as well as self-critical—spontaneous one minute, and analytical the next.

EXAMPLE: In interviews, members of The Academy Is have emphasized that living through hard times has made them more willing to take chances in their music, and to use their music as a way to explore their truest thoughts.

2. **Teaching Students to Find Their Voice:** Remind students that finding their own voices comes from being able to distinguish what they *really* think from other things they have no strong feelings about. Remind them that, with all the pressures that are part of social life, it is often difficult to hear one's own true voice. That is why it is essential to learn writing strategies.

Another good way to get in the habit of recognizing one's own true voice is to learn to listen to and evaluate what sounds authentic in the work of other songwriters.

TEACHING NOTES

The Sound of Authenticity

Ask: Which songs sound most authentic and true to life? Which songs capture the unique experience of the singer in a dramatic and pleasing way? In which songs does the singer seem to be using his or her own voice?

Then, for the sake of contrast, ask: Which songs sound unrealistic or phony? What about these songs makes them seem unconnected from reality? When you listen to music, how do you distinguish between what seems authentic and what seems artificial? Are there times when you *prefer* to listen to music that seems artificial? What aspects of a song seem most important when expressing the singer’s unique voice? What qualities do the more authentic songs seem to share?

EXAMPLE: As you ask students these questions, draw the following chart on the board. Ask students to volunteer songs for each category. Also, ask them to provide specific evidence that supports or opposes the classification of a song in one category or another. Chances are students will disagree with each other during this exercise. That is OK. Feel free to put the same song in a variety of different categories. But encourage students always to base their judgments upon specific evidence.

The Sound of Authenticity: Evaluating the Voice of Songs

Songs That Sound Consistently True	Songs That Sound Mostly True	Songs That Sound Not Quite True	Songs That Sound Mostly Untrue
<p>Song Title: _____</p> <p>Evidence Supporting this Classification:</p> <p>A.</p> <p>B.</p> <p>C.</p>	<p>Song Title: _____</p> <p>Evidence Supporting this Classification:</p> <p>A.</p> <p>B.</p> <p>C.</p>	<p>Song Title: _____</p> <p>Evidence Supporting this Classification:</p> <p>A.</p> <p>B.</p> <p>C.</p>	<p>Song Title: _____</p> <p>Evidence Supporting this Classification:</p> <p>A.</p> <p>B.</p> <p>C.</p>
<p>Song Title: _____</p> <p>Evidence Opposing this Classification:</p> <p>A.</p> <p>B.</p> <p>C.</p>	<p>Song Title: _____</p> <p>Evidence Opposing this Classification:</p> <p>A.</p> <p>B.</p> <p>C.</p>	<p>Song Title: _____</p> <p>Evidence Opposing this Classification:</p> <p>A.</p> <p>B.</p> <p>C.</p>	<p>Song Title: _____</p> <p>Evidence Opposing this Classification:</p> <p>A.</p> <p>B.</p> <p>C.</p>

The Loop Writing Process

Point out that the best way for students to discover their own voices is through freewriting. The Loop Writing Process is a type of directed freewriting. It is different from most freewriting in that it includes the critical appraisal of what one has written. It encourages students to be spontaneous, but then to look over what they have written, and decide which parts of their writing sound most like themselves, and which do not.

EXAMPLE: Lead the students through the loop writing process.

The Loop Writing Process
After brainstorming for song ideas, have the students choose their favorite idea and write it at the top of a piece of paper.
Then, for five minutes, have them freewrite , using that song topic as a starting point. If they stray from the topic, or lose the thread of their thought, tell them that is fine, and just to keep going . The point is for them to keep their pens or pencils moving for five full minutes, and to allow themselves to write down everything that comes into their head in an uncensored fashion.
Next, have them silently read what they have just written. Tell them to circle the parts of their text that they like most —the parts they find most inspiring, the parts that most accurately reflect their concerns, and which “ sound the most like themselves .”
Finally, have them choose one of the parts they have circled , and write it at the top of a fresh sheet of paper. Then, using that idea as a starting point, have them freewrite for another five minutes . When the five minutes is over, once again, as before, have them evaluate what they have written, looking for passages in which they speak with their own unique voices. Repeat this process.
After going through this process a few times, have the students look back at all the parts of their writing that they have circled. Ask them: do those parts sound like you ? What has this taught you about finding your voice ?

3. **Guided Practice:** How to use the Guided Practice Worksheet

Step 1: Hand out a copy of the worksheet to each student.

Step 2: Guide students through the call-out questions. Encourage them to come up with more than one answer to each question.

Step 3: Encourage them to find their own voices. Have the students use the lyrics they find most realistic from the song as jumping-off points for freewriting.

QUICK CHECK Ask students to explain what “voice” means, and to run through the steps of the loop writing process.

GUIDED PRACTICE

The Academy Is—“About A Girl” Songwriting Skill—Finding Your Voice

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

Voice: Your unique way of expressing your thoughts and ideas in writing.

DIRECTIONS Read the lyrics to “About A Girl” by The Academy Is. What images, situations, and feelings seem most expressive of the singer’s own voice? How can this example help you write lyrics that are express your own life more directly?

The Academy Is “About a Girl”

One song about a girl
I can't breathe when I'm around her
I wait here everyday
in case she'll scratch the surface
she'll never notice

I'm not in love
This is not my heart
I'm not gonna waste these words
About a girl

Last night I knew what to say
but you weren't there to hear it
these lines, so well rehearsed,
tongue-tied, and over-loaded
you never notice

I'm not in love
This is not my heart
I'm not gonna waste these words
about a girl
I'm not in love
This is not your song
I'm not gonna waste these words
about a girl

to be loved, to be loved,
what more could you ask for?
to be loved, to be loved,

Finding Your Voice—1st Verse:

What parts of the first verse strike you as distinctive, personal, and unique? Does this verse remind you of anything from your own experience that you can use in a song?

Finding Your Voice--Chorus:

Choruses are often the most emotional parts of a song. Which specific emotions are being expressed in this chorus? How can you make your own choruses more emotionally expressive?

Everyone wants to be loved
to be loved, to be loved,
what more could you ask for?
to be loved, to be loved,

Everyone, I'm not in love
This is not my heart
I'm not gonna waste these words...

I'm not in love
This is not my heart
I'm not gonna waste these words
about a girl
I'm not in love
This is not your song
I'm not gonna waste these words
about a girl

Finding Your Voice—Last Verse:

How does the song end? Are the feelings at the end of the song the same that they are at the beginning? Can you also write songs in which the voice is capable of changes in emotion during the song?

Finding Your Voice—Using Other Songwriters’ Lyrics as Inspiration

DIRECTIONS: Read over the lyrics of The Academy Is’ “About A Girl” and circle the where the songwriter’s voice comes across most clearly. List these lyrics below. Then, next to the lyric, write a sentence that explains why you chose that lyric, and what it reminds you of from your own life that you could use in a song.

Lyrics from “About a Girl” that Sound Like They are In the Songwriter’s True Voice	Why I Chose This Lyric / Inspirations for My Own Music
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

YOU TRY IT! Songwriting Skill—Finding Your Voice

GOAL

Finding Your Voice: You can write better songs if your songs express your personal voice. You can learn to do this by becoming more spontaneous with your truest thoughts, and highlight what you really think, what is really “you.”

Loop Writing Process for Song Lyrics

Directions: Your best song lyrics are going to sound like your own personal and unique voice. To help you give free rein to your voice, use the loop writing process.

First, **brainstorm**—that is, quickly make a list of potential song ideas—to come up with a song idea that interests you. One way to do this is to make a list of topics (examples: family, nature, fitting in, friends, world events) and then jot down song ideas that those topics trigger in your imagination.

Then, using that song idea that as a springboard, **write for five minutes without stopping**, free-associating from that lyric.

Look back at those free-associations. Pick out what looks like potential lyrics that sound most like you. Then **use them for another round of free-association**.

Do this several times. At the end of the session, list all the lyrics you have written that sound most like you. **Don’t be surprised if you wind up having written the lyrics for a complete song!**

Starting Song Lyrics:

Free Associations Triggered by This Lyric:

Best Lyrics from 1st Block of Free Associations:

Free Associations Triggered by This New Lyric:

Best Lyrics from 2nd Block of Free Associations:

Free Associations Triggered by This New Lyric: