



FEATURE

The Art of the Lyric

Meets National Core Arts Anchor Standards 2, 7, and 9

OBJECTIVES

- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work (Cr2)
- Perceive and analyze artistic work (Re7)
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work (Re9)

MATERIALS

- *Music Alive!* magazines (October 2016)
- Computer or mobile device with Internet access
- *Music Alive!* Classroom Worksheet #12: Staff Paper (download at musicalive.com)
- Piano

START

Have students read “The Art of the Lyric” on pages 6–9. Then go over the following words. [This reinforces comprehension and vocabulary.]

INSIGHTS—deep understandings of people or things

AMPLE—enough

PROFICIENT—skilled at something

INITIAL—occurring at the beginning

INHERENT—existing in something

DEVELOP

▶ **1. Play “Goodbye Pork Pie Hat”** by Joni Mitchell (Hear the Music playlist **track 2** at musicalive.com).

ASK

- **What type of music is this?** (Jazz.)
- **What instruments do you hear in the beginning?** (Fretless electric bass, soprano saxophone, and drums.)
- **Does what they’re playing sound pre-composed or improvised?** (Improvised.)
- **How can you tell?** (The freeness of the rhythms, irregularity of the phrases, etc.)
- **Are the chords simple triads or something more complex?** (More complex—there are several seventh chords with extensions. [Demonstrate a few on the piano.]
- **What do you think the lyrics are about?** (The lives of famous musicians—For example, “Charlie” refers to Charles Mingus, who composed the music of the piece. [Joni Mitchell, the singer, added the lyrics.] “Lester” refers to Lester Young, a saxophone great.)
- **Can you picture what Joni Mitchell is singing about?** (Subjective.)
- **Do you think the music fits the lyrics? Why or why not?** (Subjective.)

▶ **2. Play “Boondocks”** by Little Big Town (Hear the Music playlist **track 3** at musicalive.com).

ASK

- **Which genre does this song fit into?** (Country.)
- **What instruments do you hear in the song’s intro?** (Dobro, a type of metal guitar that in this case is played with a slide, and acoustic guitar.)

- **Do you find yourself listening more to the music or to the lyrics?** (Subjective.)
- **What is the song about?** (Feeling proud about growing up in a rural area.)
- **Can you remember the first few lines of the chorus?** (“I feel no shame/I’m proud of where I came from/I was born and raised in the boondocks.”)
- **Would you say this is a memorable chorus?** (If students can recall the chorus after listening to the song once, yes.)
- **What’s an obvious way in which the music is connected to the lyrics?** (Country is a type of music that came about in the rural south, so traditional country instruments like the guitar and banjo, not to mention the vocal harmonies, fit the message in the lyrics.)
- **Do you feel as if you’re in the countryside when you listen to the song?** (Subjective.)

▶ **3. Play “So Good”** by B.o.B. (Hear the Music playlist **track 4** at musicalive.com).

ASK

- **Which genre does this song fit into?** (Hip-hop.)
- **Do the instruments sound acoustic or electronic?** (Electronic.)
- **Why do you think the verses are rapped and the choruses sung?** (The changes keep the listener engaged: The verses offer the listener some interesting rhythms while the choruses provide a nice melodic change of pace.)
- **What are the lyrics about?** (The narrator imagines going on adventures with a woman who he views as high-class.)
- **Hip-hop is full of references. Did you hear any in this song?** (Artists like Michelangelo, Picasso, and Da Vinci; schools like Harvard and King’s College, etc.)
- **In your opinion, which of these three songs has the most interesting lyrics—and why?** (Subjective.)
- **In your opinion, which song had the most interesting music?** (Subjective.)

CLOSE

Give the students copies of the staff paper worksheet and have them write simple songs based on their own recent observations using some of the techniques suggested in the articles. The songs should have a melody line and chord symbols. Have the students share their songs with the class.

ASSESS

- **Did the students read the article?**
- **Did they talk about the listening selections?**
- **Did they compose their songs and share them?**