

Putnam Smith

Basic Lesson Plan, for Songwriting Artist in Residency

Residency Session Schedule

Three Sessions, 1 hour each (could be squeezed into 45 if necessary)

Session 1

1. Introduction (15 min)
 - A. introduce myself
 - B. introduce instruments: guitar, mandolin, and my great-grandfather's banjo. Questions: who knows what these instruments are? What are the differences between the instruments?
 - C. Play a song of mine (let students choose which instrument I will play).
2. Structure of a song (10 min)
 - A. Does anyone know what the chorus of a song is? Or the refrain?
 - B. Does anyone know what the verse of a song is?
 - C. Explain the features of a chorus (repetition/refrain) and a verse (the body, the story, the substance).
3. Listen to a song (15 min)
 - A. Handout lyrics to "This Land is Your Land" By Woody Guthrie, listen to a recording.
 - B. What is the chorus or refrain of this song?
 - C. What is the verse?
 - D. What else do you notice about this song? (rhyme & repetition!)
4. Features of a song (10 min)
 - A. Rhyme. What is rhyme? Why do songs use rhyme?
 - B. Repetition. What is repetition? Why do songs use repetition?
5. Begin writing OUR song! (10 min)
 - A. Explain that together WE will write our own song, based on the themes and words and ideas of a text that they have been studying.
 - B. Spell out the plan for the next couple sessions, let them know that they don't have to have any musical experience or ability at all.
 - C. Ask the students about the text.
 - i. What is the text about?
 - ii. What are some of the ideas/themes of the text?

Session 2

1. Icebreaker/Warm up game: "Sentence in a circle" (10 min)
 - A. Arrange students in 3-4 groups, sitting in a circle
 - B. Have each group form sentences, each student saying one word, going around the circle. When someone feels like they've completed a sentence, they say "Period."
 - C. Ask them why this might be a good warm-up activity before we sit down to start songwriting. (e.g., gets them thinking quickly, working together, using words, engaging the creative part of the brain - learning to 'think less')

- D. Explain that each group will be working together to write their own song: that together, they will write lyrics, and I will set music to it.
2. Generate word bank (10 min)
 - A. Ask students for words that relate to the text that they've been studying; words that are important to the text, or words that they've been talking about in class related to the text.
 - B. Write the words on the board to form a "Word Bank"
3. Themes and concepts (10 min)
 - A. Ask students: what are the ideas or themes of this text? (If necessary, I can tease this out of the words they've already listed in the word bank).
 - B. Have each of the groups (from the warm-up game) decide on one theme or concept that they want to focus on for their group's song.
4. Review Song Structure (5 min)
 - A. Ask them about the parts of a song that we learned about the day before
 - B. What's the difference between verse and chorus?
 - C. What else are important elements for songwriting? (Repetition & Rhyme)
5. Writing the Chorus (10 min)
 - A. As a group, choose a word from the word bank (or another word that works well!) to turn this line into a chorus:
 - i. Going down to _____ Town (Repeat 3X)
 - B. You can fill in the blank with any word that works for the Theme or Concept that your group wanted to write your song on.
 - C. However, you can't use an actual place to fill in the blank! This makes it a metaphor, poetry.
 - D. For example: Going down to *happy* town. Or going down to *spider* town.
 - E. Repeat this line 3 times, and *presto*, you have a chorus!
6. Begin writing the verses (15 min)
 - A. When writing the verses, use the following first line prompts, if they are helpful. Though you do not need to use them!
 - i. Don't wanna...
 - ii. Woke up this morning...
 - iii. I come from...
 - iv. Not gonna...(but I'm gonna)
 - v. May you never...
 - vi. I wish I were...
 - B. You must use at least 5 words from the word bank, somewhere in your verses!
 - C. You will be aiming for between 2-4 verses.
 - D. When your group has a chorus and 1st verse written, flag me down, and I will begin putting music to your song (and record the melody!).
 - E. Each group will choose:
 - I. An instrument for their song: banjo, guitar, or mandolin
 - II. A genre of music for their song: folk, country, rock, blues, punk

F. When/if you get stuck:

- Everyone take out a pen & paper
- When I say go, everyone chooses a first line prompt, and writes the first thing that pops into your mind. Remember: 'think less'! (Not what you are usually taught to do in school! But for art, sometimes that is important to do!)
- Tell them: "you have 30 seconds: And, go!"
- Then, everyone in the group shares what they wrote, and then as a group decide on which line or lines they want to use.
- Repeat as necessary!

Session 3

1. Spell out plan for the day
2. Get in groups from previous session, continue working on verses. Continue using techniques with scaffolding from Session 2.
3. I will come around and help with the verse writing, and also will keep working on the music for the song – relying on student counsel and feedback.
4. When the songs are finished, the students should practice singing the chorus.
5. At the end of the day, I will sing each group's song, with each group joining in on the chorus. Note that I will make a rough recording of these songs, though they may not be available immediately following the workshops.