



Song Writing Resources

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Introduction

LYRICS: Our generation's rallying call.

"A change is gonna come." Sam Cooke sang these words at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, putting to music a dream of millions, an anthem of change, a call to action. Music has always served as a catalyst for social change. Songs can tell stories, evoke emotion, even deliver lessons. And they can be shared widely, containing messages that, in the digital age, can be delivered with instant gratification while reverberating across generations.

Competition Information

Dear writers, what issue is most pressing to your generation? In an original song, channel this urgency into music, to be sung and celebrated—a rallying call for listeners near and far. This month, write your own song of change, and record it if you'd like. We'll select a winner for best lyrics and best performance.

The 2023 Song Writing Competition runs from Monday, June 5, 2023 to Tuesday, June 20, 2023.

Writing Form: Lyrics

Subject Areas: Literature/English, Performance arts, Music, Creative Writing

Length: 50-500 words

Opens: Monday, June 5, 2023

Drafts due for Expert Review: Monday, June 12, 2023

Submissions Due: Tuesday, June 20, 2023

Begin with Books

Teacher’s Note: Picture books, with all their visual appeal and thoughtfully crafted writing, are a great way to introduce a topic of study in the secondary classroom—as recommended by [Read Write Think](#) and [WeAreTeachers](#). Consider using one of the following selections as a read-aloud in your class, and you may find that students respond positively to this entry point into writing. Sample discussion or reflection questions are listed below.

1. [Change Sings. A Children’s Anthem](#) by Amanda Gorman, with pictures by Loren Long.
(Read-aloud video found [here](#))
(Teacher’s Guide with a dedicated page for middle/high school classrooms found [here](#))
2. [She Sang for India: How M.S. Subbulakshmi Used Her Voice for Change](#) by Suma Subramaniam, illustrated by Shreya Gupta
3. [Woody Guthrie](#) by Bonnie Christensen
(Read-aloud video found [here](#))

Questions for Discussion or Reflection:

- *Why has song played an important role in protest movements? What sets it apart from other forms of artistic expression?*
- *How do each of these picture books model the objective of our competition?*
- *If there were a picture book to accompany your song, your “rallying cry for listeners near and far,” what images or important people would be featured in the book? How might these images and people make their way into your song lyrics?*

Listen and Respond

Teacher’s Note: Begin by showing your class one of the performance videos linked within the [entries from 2022](#) (must log in to view). Ask your students to read along with the written lyrics for each of the finalist’s entries as they listen to the performance. Then, as a group, discuss which parts of the song and which elements of the written lyrics are working well. Compile a list of tools and strategies (based on student observations and positive responses) that the class can refer back to for inspiration as they work on their own songs.

Find a Way into Songwriting

With so many songs already available in the world, it might seem daunting to create your own lyrics. But there’s always room for more music to be made, and always listeners waiting for the next hit! We have tips from experts to help you begin your songwriting process.

Consider your audience

On the Write the World blog, musicians [Paul Hankinson](#) and [Michael Lydon](#) each discuss the idea of writing songs for other people and the role of an audience in songwriting.

Focus on a key idea

[Paul Hankinson](#) believes that a simple idea is often the most impactful and memorable in a song.

Gather your music role models

Multi-instrumentalist and composer [Hankus Netsky](#) tells young writers to have “a repertoire of songs by songwriters they love and know those songs inside out.” He says these songwriters can “be all over the map stylistically” but that understanding what you love about these songs will help inform your own songwriting.

Begin with the melody...or with the lyrics!

Musician [Leo McFadden](#) explains how four chords accompany most pop songs; how you might begin with a melody or read your lyrics aloud until you can find a melody; and how one song can inspire another.

Understand the Structure of a Song

Step One: Choose a song that you enjoy and identify [the parts of a song](#) that are present within it.

Step Two: Analyze how each part of the song contributes to its overall meaning or effect on the listener, and see if you can determine what you enjoy most about each part of the song.

Step Three: As you begin your own songwriting process, consider the role each of these parts will play in your song and jot down ideas you have for lyrics for each part.

Write Reflections and Peer Reviews

Browse [songwriting entries from 2022](#) (must log in to view entries). Choose a song that captures your interest, and write a short reflection in response to these prompts:

- *Where did the song capture your attention?*
- *How did it make you feel?*
- *In which section did you think the lyrics or pacing could have been improved in some way—why?*

As you begin composing your song, consider these reactions! Reflecting on other writers’ lyrics will help you stay in tune with what you’re looking for—and what you would like to create—in your own original song.

As other young writers on Write the World begin to publish their 2023 songwriting entries, we encourage you to write a peer review, building upon your work in analyzing and reflecting upon others' lyrics. Remember to always share what's working in the song so the writer knows which lines are having a positive effect. By responding to the peer review questions and leaving annotated comments, you'll be providing feedback that the writer can incorporate into their next draft before final submissions are due.

Consider asking a classmate to complete a WtW peer review for you, too. Writers ask for feedback all the time, and knowing how others are hearing or interpreting your song draft can be really helpful to your writing process.