

Middle School Music - Songs and Lyrics

Compelling Question	
What is More Important in a Song...the Music or the Lyrics?	
Standard	Perceive and analyze artistic work. Analyze how an artwork's form (e.g., use of repetition, contrasting patterns, phrases, and themes) supports the composer's intention. (5-6.M.R.07) Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. Identify influential music from different periods and how they impacted music at the time and potentially today. (5-6.M.Co.11)
Disciplinary Practice	Analyze music and lyrics of songs.
Staging the Question	Talk to students about their favorite songs. Ask them why they like it? Are they drawn to the song because of the melody or the lyrics? Show the students lyrics to a song about inequality. Ask the students to discuss the lyrics to decide how the song should sound. (Happy, sad, slow/fast, etc.) Play the song for the students and ask them to comment.

Supporting Question
How do the lyrics and music work together?
Formative Performance Task
Play one of the selected songs for your group. Discuss with other members of the group how the lyrics worked with the music. Have students write their thoughts then share with the group. Have students fill out a worksheet with leading questions.
Featured Sources
Lyric sheets and recordings to three songs. “Blackbird” by the Beatles “Freedom” by Beyonce “A Change is Gonna Come” by Sam Cooke

Summative
Performance
Task

ARGUMENT STEMS

What is more important in a song...the music or the lyrics? Construct an argument using specific claims and relevant evidence from sources.

EXTENSION

1. Have students select one song (from pre-set list) and find other artists who perform it.
2. Students discuss how another artist's song rendition makes the lyrics more or less engaging in the music.
3. Students discuss which artist did they found to be more effective in conveying the true meaning of the song?

What is More Important in a Song...the Music or the Lyrics?

Overview

Inquiry Description

This inquiry prompts students to examine the various ways music and lyrics work together to create a song. By investigating the lyrics and the song separately, students can decide which may be more important and why. This inquiry focuses on the disciplinary practice of working with lyrics and melody. Students use primary and secondary sources to analyze how different songs styles/genres can make lyrics more compelling.

Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question **What is more important in a song...the music or the lyrics?** students work through supporting question(s), formative performance task(s), and featured source(s) to construct an argument supported by evidence. The featured sources reflect different music styles, lyrics, and opinions about whether the lyrics or music were more important in conveying song meaning.

Staging the Compelling Question

To introduce the inquiry, teachers may guide students in examining lyrics to songs (about inequality, race, wealth, or any other topic), for meaning and content. Teachers should talk to students about their favorite songs. Ask them why they like it? Are they drawn to the song because of the melody or the lyrics? Show the students lyrics to a song about inequality (like Beyonce's *Freedom*). Ask the students to discuss the lyrics to decide how the song should sound. (Happy, sad, slow/fast, etc.) Play the song for the students and ask them to comment.

Supporting Question

The supporting question “How do the lyrics and music work together?” directs students’ attention to specific lyrics that present a view of the social issue named in the song, which students may draw upon when answering the compelling question.

Students examine two sources: a lyric sheet from [lyrics.com](https://www.lyrics.com), and an original recording by the song artist. (Multiple artists could apply and students are free to choose the one they like best.) These sources introduce different perspectives and allow students to consider if the lyrics are more important than the music or music is more important than the lyrics.

Prior to hearing the music, teachers may need to explain music vocabulary so students have a grasp of how to describe musical elements. If we had the exact words to describe music, we wouldn’t need it, but students can get close in describing tempo, major/minor, melody, and the overall feel of a song.

Students will be directed to listen to more than one version of a single song, or students may choose a single lyric and compare their findings with peers who chose music over lyrics. The formative performance task helps students organize their thoughts by listing various factors that lead to the music and lyrics working in tandem.

Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined the role music and lyrics play in songs. Students should be expected to demonstrate the breadth of their understandings and their abilities to use evidence from multiple sources to support their claims. In this task, students construct an evidence-based argument using sources to answer the compelling question **What is more important in a song...the music or the lyrics?** Teachers might direct students to divide into groups or pairs and select a pro or con stance on lyrics vs. music. Teachers might also have students make lists on the board about pro and con elements of music vs. lyrics.

Students’ arguments will likely vary, but could include any of the following:

- * The music is more important to a song because no one will read poetry.
- * The lyrics are more important to a song because it wouldn’t be a song if it didn’t have words.
- * They are both equally important because the music makes people listen to the song but the lyrics make them think about it.

As an extension task, students may be asked to find different versions of the same song by other artists. (Teacher will supply list of pre-set songs by multiple artists. Students examples may be considered.) Students will discuss how another artist's song rendition makes the lyrics more or less engaging in the music. Which artist did they find more effective in conveying the true meaning of the song.

Featured Sources

Source A: Selected Songs (ex. "Freedom", Beyonce. <https://youtu.be/Fm302oiUaSk>)

Source B: Lyric Sheets