

## **Songwriting and the National Standards for Arts Education**

*"What every young American should know and be able to do in the arts"  
National Standards for Arts Education*

The National Standards for Arts Education were published by the Music Educators National Conference in 1994 after their development by the Consortium of National Arts Education Associations (under the guidance of the National Committee for Standards in the Arts). This document outlines the basic arts learning outcomes integral to the comprehensive K-12 education of every American student.

The following standards are selected from the sections on Music K-4 and Music 5-8 as applicable to the teaching of songwriting in the classroom. (Note: Some of the Achievement Standards have been excerpted to include only the sections that apply.)

### **Grades K-4 Music**

**Content Standard #1:** Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music

***Achievement Standard:***

Students sing independently, on pitch and in rhythm, with appropriate posture, and maintain a steady tempo. Students sing expressively, with appropriate dynamics, phrasing, and interpretation. . . . Students sing in groups, blending vocal timbres, matching dynamic levels, and responding to the cues of a conductor.

**Content Standard #3:** Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments

***Achievement Standard:***

Students improvise short songs and instrumental pieces, using a variety of sound sources, including traditional sounds (e.g., voices, instruments), nontraditional sounds available in the classroom (e.g., paper tearing, pencil tapping), body sounds (e.g., hands clapping, fingers snapping), and sounds produced by electronic means (e.g., personal computers and basic MIDI devices, including keyboards, sequencers, synthesizers, and drum machines)

**Content Standard #4:** Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines

***Achievement Standard:***

Students create and arrange short songs and instrumental pieces within specified guidelines (e.g., a particular style, form, instrumentation, compositional technique). Students use a variety of sound sources when composing.

**Content Standard #9:** Understanding music in relation to history and culture

***Achievement Standard:***

Students identify various uses of music in their daily experiences and describe characteristics that make certain music suitable for each use.

**Grades 5-8 Music**

**Content Standard #1:** Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music

***Achievement Standard:***

Students sing accurately and with good breath control throughout their singing ranges, alone and in small and large ensembles. Students sing with expression and technical accuracy a repertoire of vocal literature with a level of difficulty of 2, on a scale of 1 to 6, including some songs performed from memory. Students sing music representing diverse genres and cultures, with expression appropriate for the work being performed.

**Content Standard #3:** Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments

***Achievement Standard:***

Students improvise simple harmonic accompaniments. Students improvise melodic embellishments and simple rhythmic and melodic variations on given pentatonic melodies and melodies in major keys. Students improvise short melodies, unaccompanied and over given rhythmic accompaniments, each in a consistent style, meter, and tonality.

**Content Standard #4:** Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines

***Achievement Standard:***

Students compose short pieces within specified guidelines (e.g., a particular style, form, instrumentation, compositional technique), demonstrating how the elements of music are used to achieve unity and variety, tension and release, and balance. . . . Students use a variety of traditional and nontraditional sound sources and electronic media when composing and arranging.

**Content Standard #9:** Understanding music in relation to history and culture

***Achievement Standard:***

Students describe distinguishing characteristics of representative music genres and styles from a variety of cultures.

**Reference:**

Music Educators National Conference. (1994). *National standards for arts education: What every young American should know and be able to do in the arts*. Available from [http://artsedge.kennedycenter.org/professional\\_resources/standards/nat\\_standards\\_main.html](http://artsedge.kennedycenter.org/professional_resources/standards/nat_standards_main.html)

## Songwriting and the Music Standards of Learning

*“ . . . To create compositions that transcribe their thoughts and emotions into concrete, musical forms of human expression.”*  
*Music Standards of Learning for*  
*Virginia Public Schools (p. 3)*

The Virginia Standards of Learning set clear, concise, measurable, and rigorous expectations for what teachers need to teach and students need to learn. The goal of music education is to empower students to experience music as a source of personal enrichment, as a vehicle for the constructive expression of human emotions, and as a unique intellectual discipline (Virginia Board of Education, 2000).

The Music Standards of Learning are organized into four strands: Perform, Create, Investigate, and Connect, which are specified in detail by grade level. Songwriting in the classroom provides unique and engaging experiences that relate to many different standards throughout the strands, but are especially pertinent to the ones under Create (one of the more difficult areas to address in the classroom).

This section suggests standards for each of the grade levels up through grades 6-8 that are appropriate for songwriting lessons.

### Kindergarten

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#### Perform

- K.1 The student will sing songs and play instruments.
1. Participate individually and in groups.

#### Create

- K.7 The student will employ creativity in a variety of music experiences.
1. N/A
  2. Use the voice in speech and song.

#### Connect

- K.11 The student will exhibit respect for the contributions of self and others in a music setting.
1. Contribute to a group effort of making music.
  2. Contribute to a group effort of listening to music.
  3. Participate in music activities that involve sharing, taking turns, and other ways of demonstrating good citizenship.

## Grade One

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### Perform

- 1.1 The student will sing songs and play instruments.
1. N/A
  2. Sing a variety of songs individually and in groups.
  3. Develop a repertoire of songs.

### Create

- 1.4 The student will employ creativity in a variety of music experiences.
1. N/A
  2. Use the voice in speech and song.

### Investigate

- 1.6 The student will recognize when music changes from one section to a contrasting section.
- 1.7 The student will recognize and describe sudden changes in expressive qualities of music.
1. Demonstrate changes in dynamics and tempo vocally, instrumentally, and with movement.

### Connect

- 1.11 The student will exhibit respect for the contributions of self and others in a music setting.
1. Contribute to a group effort of making music.
  2. Contribute to a group effort of listening to music.
  3. Participate in music activities that involve sharing, taking turns, and other ways of demonstrating good citizenship.

## Grade Two

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### Perform

- 2.1 The student will sing songs and play instruments.
1. N/A
  2. Sing a variety of songs, individually and in groups.
  3. Develop a repertoire of songs.

- 2.4 The student will read lyrics containing more than one verse and including words divided into syllables.

### **Create**

- 2.5 The student will employ creativity in a variety of music experiences.
1. N/A
  2. Create new verses to songs.
  3. N/A
  4. Create music to enhance songs, stories, and poems.

### **Investigate**

- 2.9 The student will identify melody patterns that move upward, downward, and remain the same.
1. Use the voice, instruments, and movement.

### **Connect**

- 2.10 The student will exhibit respect for the contributions of self and others in a music setting.
1. Contribute to a group effort of making music.
  2. Contribute to a group effort of listening to music.
  3. Participate in music activities that involve sharing, taking turns, and other ways of demonstrating good citizenship.

## **Grade Three**

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### **Perform**

- 3.1 The student will sing in tune with a clear tone quality.
1. N/A
  2. Develop a repertoire of familiar songs.

### **Create**

- 3.6 The student will employ creativity in a variety of music experiences.
1. N/A.
  2. N/A
  3. Create lyrics to familiar melodies.
  4. Create new verses to songs.

**Investigate**

- 3.7 The student will identify ABA form.
- 3.11 The student will demonstrate the melodic shape (contour) of a musical phrase using music terminology to describe how pitch levels may move upward, downward, or stay the same.

**Connect**

- 3.12 The student will exhibit respect for the contributions of self and others in a music setting.
1. Contribute to a group effort of making music.
  2. Contribute to a group effort of listening to music.
  3. Participate in music activities that involve sharing, taking turns, and other ways of demonstrating good citizenship.

**Grade Four**

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**Perform**

- 4.1 The student will sing in tune with a clear tone quality.
1. Sing with expression using indicated dynamics and phrasing.
  2. N/A
  3. Develop a repertoire of songs.

**Create**

- 4.5 The student will employ creativity in a variety of music experiences.
1. Improvise simple melodic and rhythmic accompaniments.

**Investigate**

- 4.10 The student will distinguish between major and minor tonality.
- 4.11 The student will use music terminology to describe various styles of music.
1. Place musical examples into broad categories of style.

**Connect**

- 4.12 The student will exhibit respect for the contributions of self and others in a music setting.
1. Contribute to a group effort of making music.
  2. Contribute to a group effort of listening to music.

3. Participate in music activities that involve sharing, taking turns, and other ways of demonstrating good citizenship.

## **Grade Five**

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### **Perform**

- 5.1 The student will sing in tune with a clear tone quality.
1. Demonstrate beginning choral behaviors and skills in group singing.
  2. Sing a varied repertoire of music alone and with others.

### **Create**

- 5.4 The student will employ creativity in a variety of music experiences.
1. N/A
  2. Create non-traditional notation.

### **Investigate**

- 5.5 The student will identify and explain music forms of rondo and theme and variations.
- 5.9 The student will place music examples into broad categories of style.
1. Use music terminology to compare and contrast a variety of music styles.
  2. Explore how vocal style contributes to the quality and enjoyment of musical selections.
  3. Explore and perform a variety of music styles.

### **Connect**

- 5.10 The student will exhibit respect for the contributions of self and others in a music setting.
1. Contribute to a group effort of making music.
  2. Contribute to a group effort of listening to music.
  3. Participate in music activities that involve sharing, taking turns, and other ways of demonstrating good citizenship.

## Grade Six - Eight

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### Perform

MS.1 The student will participate in a variety of music experiences as a means of studying the elements of music.

1. Perform music with the voice and instruments.

### Create

MS.4 The student will employ creativity in a variety of music experiences.

1. N/A
2. Improvise melodies, rhythms, and harmonies.
3. Compose melodies, rhythms, and harmonies.
4. Create arrangements of known melodies using traditional or non-traditional sound sources, including computer-related technology.

### Investigate

MS.6 The student will investigate music sounds, forms, styles, and genres through listening, discussing, writing, and performing.

### Connect

MS.8 The student will demonstrate appropriate performance behavior as a participant and/or listener.

1. Exhibit respect for the contributions of self and others within a music setting.

### Reference:

Virginia Board of Education. (2000). *Music Standards of Learning*. Available from <http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/Music/musicl.html#music>

## Songwriting and the English Standards of Learning

*“ . . . Allows students to learn and to use knowledge to make meaningful connections between their lives and academic disciplines.”*  
*English Standards of Learning for*  
*Virginia Public Schools (p. 2)*

Although the closest match for songwriting is found with the Music Standards of Learning, since a significant part of songwriting is the writing of lyrics (words), there are many connections with the standards set for the teaching of English as well. The goals of the English Standards of Learning are to teach students to read and to prepare students to participate in society as literate citizens, equipped with the ability to communicate effectively. Songs are an unusually effective medium of communication, and learning to write songs can incorporate many of the English standards.

Standards for kindergarten through eighth grade are organized in three related strands: Oral Language, Reading, and Writing. This section identifies connections and suggests standards for each of the grade levels up through eighth grade that are appropriate for songwriting lessons.

### Kindergarten

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#### Oral Language

- K.1 The student will demonstrate growth in the use of oral language.
- a) Listen to a variety of literary forms, including stories and poems.
  - b) Participate in choral speaking and recite short poems, rhymes, songs, and stories with repeated patterns.
  - c) N/A
  - d) N/A.
  - e) Recognize rhyming words.
  - f) Generate rhyming words in a rhyming pattern.
- K.2 The student will use listening and speaking vocabularies.
- a) N/A
  - b) Use words to describe/name people, places, and things.
  - c) Use words to describe location, size, color, and shape.
  - d) Use words to describe actions.
- K.4 The student will hear, say, and manipulate phonemes (small units of sound) of spoken language.
- a) Identify orally words that rhyme.
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## Grade One

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The student will continue to develop an understanding of character, setting, main idea, and story sequence in a variety of texts.

### Oral language

- 1.1 The student will continue to demonstrate growth in the use of oral language.
  - a) N/A
  - b) Tell and retell stories and events in logical order.
  - c) Participate in a variety of oral language activities, including choral speaking and reciting short poems, rhymes, songs, and stories with repeated patterns.
  
- 1.2 The student will continue to expand and use listening and speaking vocabularies.
  - a) Increase oral descriptive vocabulary.
  
- 1.4 The student will orally identify and manipulate phonemes (small units of sound) in syllables and multisyllabic words.
  - a) N/A
  - b) N/A
  - c) Create rhyming words orally.

## Grade Two

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The student will expand vocabulary by speaking and listening effectively in classroom discussions.

### Oral language

- 2.1 The student will demonstrate an understanding of oral language structure.
  - a) Create oral stories to share with others.
  - b) Create and participate in oral dramatic activities.
  - c) Use correct verb tenses in oral communication.
  - d) Use increasingly complex sentence structures in oral communication.
  
- 2.2 The student will continue to expand listening and speaking vocabularies.
  - a) Use words that reflect a growing range of interests and knowledge.
  - b) Clarify and explain words and ideas orally.
  - c) Follow oral directions with three or four steps.

- d) Give three-step and four-step directions.
  - e) Identify and use synonyms and antonyms in oral communication.
- 2.3 The student will use oral communication skills.
- a) Use oral language for different purposes: to inform, to persuade, and to entertain.
  - b) Share stories or information orally with an audience.
  - c) Participate as a contributor and leader in a group.
  - d) Summarize information shared orally by others.

### **Grade Three**

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The student will use effective communication skills in group activities.

#### **Oral language**

- 3.1 The student will use effective communication skills in group activities.
- a) N/A
  - b) Ask and respond to questions from teachers and other group members.

#### **Writing**

- 3.9 The student will write descriptive paragraphs.
- a) N/A
  - b) N/A
  - c) Group related ideas.
  - d) Include descriptive details that elaborate the central idea.
  - e) Revise writing for clarity.

### **Grade Four**

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The student will continue to increase communication skills in large- and small-group settings. In addition, the student will plan, draft, revise, and edit narratives and explanations.

## Oral language

- 4.1 The student will use effective oral communication skills in a variety of settings.
- N/A
  - Contribute to group discussions.

## Writing

- 4.7 The student will write effective narratives, poems, and explanations.
- N/A
  - N/A
  - Organize writing to convey a central idea.
  - Write several related paragraphs on the same topic.
  - Utilize elements of style, including word choice and sentence variation.
  - Write rhymed, unrhymed, and patterned poetry.

## Grade Five

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The student will continue to increase communication skills used in learning activities. In addition, the student will plan, draft, revise, and edit writings to describe, to entertain, and to explain.

### Oral language

- 5.1 The student will listen, draw conclusions, and share responses in subject-related group learning activities.
- Participate in and contribute to discussions across content areas.

### Writing

- 5.8 The student will write for a variety of purposes: to describe, to inform, to entertain, and to explain.
- N/A
  - Organize information.
  - N/A
  - Use precise and descriptive vocabulary to create tone and voice.

## Grade Six

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The sixth-grade student will be an active participant in classroom discussions. The student will present personal opinions, understand differing viewpoints. . The

student will also plan, draft, revise, and edit narratives, descriptions, and explanations, with attention to composition and style.

### **Oral language**

- 6.1 The student will analyze oral participation in small-group activities.
- a) Communicate as leader and contributor.

### **Writing**

- 6.6 The student will write narratives, descriptions, and explanations.
- a) N/A
  - b) Establish central idea, organization, elaboration, and unity.
  - c) Select vocabulary and information to enhance the central idea, tone, and voice.
  - d) N/A
  - e) Revise writing for clarity.

## **Grade Seven**

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The seventh-grade student will continue to develop oral communication skills. The student will continue vocabulary development through a study of figurative language.

### **Oral language**

- 7.1 The student will give and seek information in conversations, in group discussions, and in oral presentations.
- a) Use oral vocabulary and style appropriate for listeners.
  - b) Communicate ideas and information orally in an organized and succinct manner.

### **Reading**

- 7.5 The student will read and demonstrate comprehension of a variety of fiction, narrative nonfiction, and poetry.
- a) Describe setting, character development, plot structure, theme, and conflict.
  - b) N/A
  - c) Describe the impact of word choice, imagery, and poetic devices.
  - d) Explain how form, including rhyme, rhythm, repetition, line structure, and punctuation, conveys the mood and meaning of a poem.

**Writing**

- 7.8 The student will develop narrative, expository, and persuasive writing.
- Apply knowledge of prewriting strategies.
  - Elaborate the central idea in an organized manner.
  - Choose vocabulary and information that will create voice and tone.
  - N/A
  - Revise writing for clarity and effect.

**Grade Eight**

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The student will continue development of vocabulary, with attention to connotations and figurative language

**Reading**

- 8.4 The student will apply knowledge of word origins, derivations, inflections, analogies, and figurative language to extend vocabulary development.
- Identify simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and analogy.
- 8.5 The student will read and analyze a variety of narrative and poetic forms.
- N/A
  - N/A
  - N/A
  - Compare and contrast the use of the poetic elements of word choice, dialogue, form, rhyme, rhythm, and voice.

**Writing**

- 8.7 The student will write in a variety of forms, including narrative, expository, persuasive, and informational.
- Use prewriting strategies to generate and organize ideas.
  - Organize details to elaborate the central idea.
  - Select specific vocabulary and information.
  - Revise writing for word choice, sentence variety, and transitions among paragraphs.

**Reference:**

Virginia Board of Education. (2002). *English Standards of Learning*. Available from <http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Superintendent/Sols/home.shtml>

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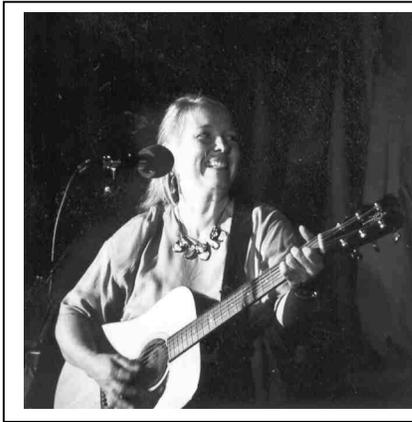
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**Sally dhruvá Stephenson, Ed.D.**, is an artist-educator with a wide range of experience in both fields. Her public school teaching experience includes Head Start, kindergarten, elementary gifted, and community education. Her doctoral dissertation is entitled “Portraits of the Songwriting Process in Elementary Classrooms.” Currently, she teaches in the Department of Educational Professions at Frostburg State University in Maryland and serves as the Curriculum Consultant for Kid Pan Alley™. She also performs as a singer-songwriter and has released two acoustic albums

of her original songs, “Jammer Without a Band” and “Tessitura.”

**Paul Reisler**, founder and Artistic Director of the Kid Pan Alley™ children’s songwriting project, is a composer, songwriter, performer, recording artist and co-founder of the music ensemble Trapezoid. He teaches songwriting workshops throughout the country for both children and adults and has performed in more than 3,000 concerts, workshops and festivals worldwide. As a recording artist, he has produced and recorded the Kid Pan Alley™ production “Tidal Wave of Song”, eight albums with Trapezoid, a duo album of instrumentals with Bobby Read of the Bruce Hornsby Band (“Birth of a River”) and more than two dozen albums with other artists including John McCutcheon, Sally Rogers, and others. He also performs and tours with Ki Theatre’s dramatic productions starring actress Julie Portman.

