

## Lesson One: Pre-writing for Lyrics

**Grade level:** Any elementary grade level

**Group size:** Small or large group (30 maximum)

**Subject areas:** Language arts and music

**Standards of learning:** Select from appropriate lists (attached)

**Goal:** Students will apply pre-writing to the songwriting process

**Materials:** Chart paper and markers or board with chalk or markers

**Objective:** Students will collaboratively select a topic and share ideas to be developed into original song lyrics

*(Note: Writing lyrics is closely related to the writing of rhyming poetry with a regular meter. Teachers are encouraged to use techniques from their creative writing curricula throughout the lyric-writing process. The fact that students are writing a song, however, rather than a poem, will create a new level of interest.)*

### Procedures:

1. Suggesting ideas for the topic. If the song is intended to correlate with particular content in the curriculum (such as a social studies theme), the teacher may assign the topic. If no such connection is planned, ask the students for ideas for a song topic. Write all the possibilities down for the class to see.

2. Choosing the topic. Students may vote (you might allow them to vote for as many ideas as they want) or the teacher can select the topic.

*(Note: Although the group songwriting process is a collaborative experience, it is a good idea to establish right away that all final decisions rest with the teacher. It is also important, however, for the teacher to respect and show appreciation for all sincere contributions by students, even when ideas are not actually utilized.)*

3. Developing central images and ideas. Ask students for ideas related to the main topic and write these on the board/chart paper as quickly as possible. The ideas do not have to relate to each other in any way at this point. Encourage ideas based on concrete, sensory-based images.

*(Note: No selections are made at this time, other than screening out--forgetting to write--any ideas that are totally inappropriate or potentially offensive. It is helpful to have an assistant to act as a scribe, preferably someone who can write very quickly. Students often get excited and lively during this fast-paced activity.)*

4. Developing connecting images and ideas. Select a word from step #2

and use the technique of clustering to expand upon the idea, providing supporting details and making connections that might lead to metaphors and similes. Write as students dictate and allow the thought process to flow freely in diverse directions. Repeat this process several times with words that seem to be key images to the theme. (See example below and sections on clustering and metaphor in “Paul Reisler on Songwriting.”)

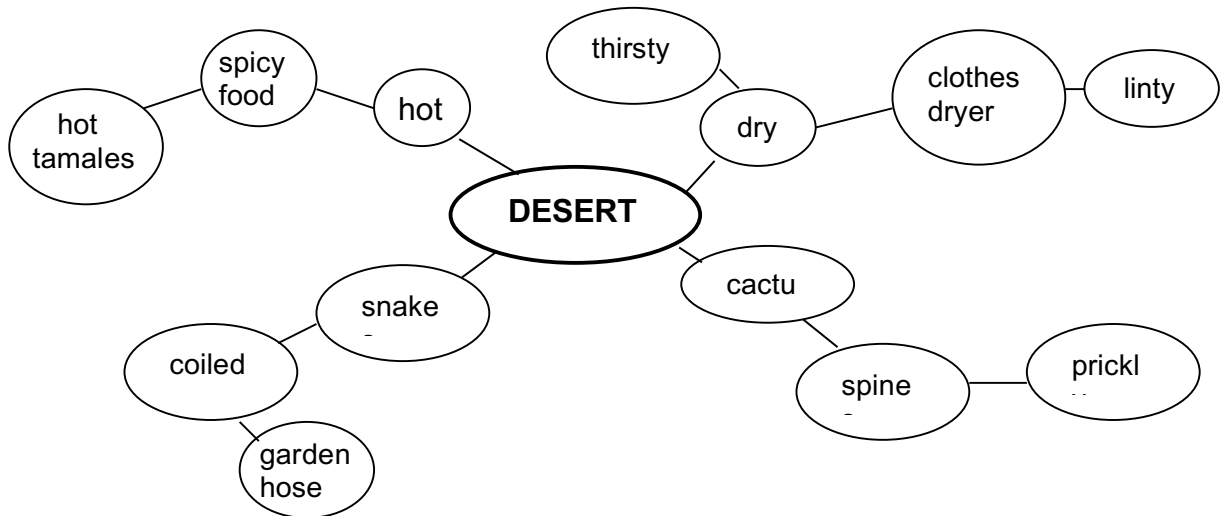


Figure 2. Clustering on the central idea of “desert.”

5. Developing a list of possible rhymes. After compiling an extensive list of ideas and images related to the topic, select some key words that are candidates for words to use at the end of lines. (The actual lyric lines have not been written yet, however.) Make some lists of possible rhymes; for example, the list for *hot* might include *not*, *shot*, *brought*, *thought* and so on. A rhyming dictionary or computer program (see *Rhyme Wizard* or *MasterWriter* in “Resources”) would be helpful for this purpose. Select rhymes that seem to fit together in concept so that they will be useful when it comes time to put the song together. (See the section on rhyming in “Paul Reisler on Songwriting.”)

*(Note: No doubt additional rhymes will be needed or will occur to the group as the lyrics are written, but having some rhymes identified ahead of time allows the drafting of the lyrics to flow with fewer interruptions for rhyme-searching.)*

**Closure:** To conclude this lesson on pre-writing, review all the lists and clusters that have been created. Point out words to the students that you feel suggest strong sensory-based images. Add any additional words and ideas that occur to the group as you review. Explain that these collections of ideas and images will be the raw material for the song lyrics, which will be written in the next lesson. Optional: Read

aloud an image-filled poem or sing a familiar song with the class to leave them with the sense of the wholeness of a completed creative work.

**Assessment:** Review the lists, looking for an adequate number of ideas for each. Also note how well students collaborated during this pre-writing lesson.

**Modifications for lower grades/special needs/LEP students:** Pre-determine the song topic. Begin each list with some “seed” ideas. When creating the list of rhymes, have students choose from a prewritten list of words, some of which rhyme and some of which don’t.

**Modification for upper grade/gifted and talented/honors students:** Allow students to work individually, with a partner, or in small groups on the prewriting activities, rather than writing collectively in one large group. Under these circumstances, the teacher will need to circulate and act as an advisor instead of whole-group facilitator.