

# GOING FOR A SONG

## TODAY YOU WILL...

- >LEARN ABOUT THE LINKS BETWEEN POETRY AND MUSIC
- >IDENTIFY POETIC TECHNIQUES IN SONG LYRICS
- >UNDERSTAND THE TONE OF A SONG BY ANALYSING KEY LYRICS

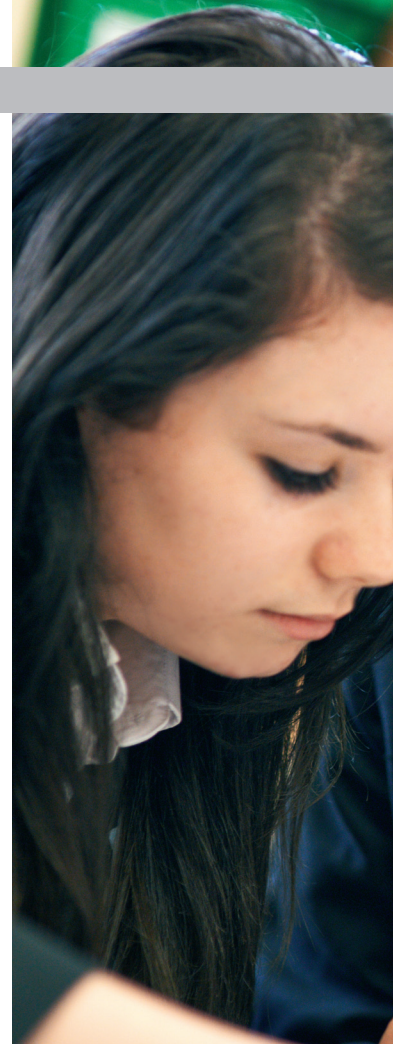
### YOU WILL NEED...

- >SOME CHOICE SONG LYRICS
- >>POETRY GRID SHEETS
- A COMPUTER AND INTERNET CONNECTION FOR ACCESS TO [WWW.WORDLE.NET](http://WWW.WORDLE.NET)
- >POST IT NOTES

Encouraging them to analyse music that they love is a brilliant way of getting students excited about poetry, says the National Literacy Trust's Susie Musgrove...

At the National Literacy Trust we've just run a fantastic poetry competition in partnership with the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society, which you may have read about in the Feb/March issue of *Teach Secondary*. The challenge, called *Write On*, was all about engaging young people with poetry and making it relevant to them.

We worked with some English teachers to put together a series of lesson ideas exploring ways to do this – and applying learners' critical skills to song lyrics proved to be as effective a method as it was popular. **NB:** this lesson assumes that students already have an understanding of poetry and poetic techniques.



## STARTER ACTIVITY

As students enter the room, project the lyrics of the chorus of the song *MOSH* by Eminem on your whiteboard, using the heading "War Poetry":

*Come along follow me as I lead through the darkness  
As I provide just enough spark that we need to proceed  
Carry on, give me hope, give me strength  
Come with me and I won't steer you wrong  
Put your faith and your trust as I guide us through the fog  
To the light at the end of the tunnel  
We gonna fight, we gonna charge, we gonna stomp, we gonna march  
Through the swamp, we gonna mosh through the marsh  
Take us right through the doors*

Ask your students to guess the title and author of the 'poem', prompting them with questions about the tone and subject of the poem and the language used. Then reveal the answer, if they don't themselves. If you're not sure about the appropriateness of Eminem in your classroom you could use an

alternative, such as *I Will Wait* by Mumford and Sons or *Set Fire to the Rain* by Adele and use the heading 'Love Poetry'. This activity should get your students thinking about the similarities between song lyrics and poetry.

## + KEY RESOURCE

Discover free resources to support your students' literacy skills at [collinsreading.com](http://collinsreading.com) with special offers, ideas to support your teaching, free samples, competitions and much more. An exciting blog provides suggestions for engaging and motivating students to read, alongside articles on individual titles, including *The Hobbit*, *War Horse*, *Private Peaceful*, *Skulduggery Pleasant* and many more. You can also discover more about Read On – the brand new series to support struggling readers to reach Level 4, which includes titles by bestselling authors, Catherine MacPhail, Benjamin Zephaniah and Alan Gibbons.





## HOME LEARNING

+ Challenge students to find a song that has meaningful lyrics (Gangnam Style anyone?!) and create their own word cloud on Wordle, which they can then annotate with some analysis of the vocabulary and imagery and what this tells them about the tone and message of the song.

## INFO BAR

### + STRETCH THEM FURTHER

+ TEST YOUR STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE TONE OF A POEM BY ASKING THEM TO SET IT TO APPROPRIATE MUSIC. LEARNERS MUST TAKE A CHOSEN POEM, AND USING A PROGRAMME SUCH AS WINDOWS MOVIEMAKER OR ANIMOTO, PREPARE A VIDEO PRESENTATION OF THE POEM WITH AN APPROPRIATE SONG, I.E. ONE THAT REPRESENTS THE TONE OF THE POEM, RUNNING THROUGHOUT. (A NOTE ON COPYRIGHT: THE VIDEOS PRODUCED SHOULD BE USED INTERNALLY ONLY, AND NOT UPLOADED TO SHARING SITES AS THEY MAY USE MUSIC AND IMAGES THAT ARE COPYRIGHT PROTECTED.)

### + ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

YOU CAN FIND LOTS OF OTHER POETRY RESOURCES AND LESSON IDEAS AT [LITERACYTRUST.ORG.UK/WRITE\\_ON](http://LITERACYTRUST.ORG.UK/WRITE_ON). ALTHOUGH THE COMPETITION IS OVER, THESE RESOURCES HAVE LOTS OF GREAT ACTIVITIES AND IDEAS THAT YOU CAN PULL OUT AND USE TO COMPLEMENT YOUR TEACHING. THERE'S ALSO A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS ON RUNNING A POETRY SLAM IN SCHOOL – ANOTHER GREAT WAY TO ENGAGE YOUR STUDENTS WITH THE WORLD OF POETRY.

## MAIN ACTIVITIES+

### 1 SHALL I COMPARE THEE TO A HIP-HOP HIT?

Project the following quote on your whiteboard from Jay-Z's book, *Decoded*:

*"hip-hop lyrics – not just my lyrics, but those of every great MC – are poetry if you look at them closely enough."*

Ask your students whether they agree with this statement, and why. Steer them towards thinking about the techniques used (repetition, rhyme, alliteration, strong imagery etc). Ask a student or TA to scribe the ideas on the board around the outside of the quote.

### 2 HAD WE BUT WORDS ENOUGH AND RHYME?

Hand out the lyrics of the song used in the starter activity (you may need to censor some of the more colourful language if you're using *MOSH!*), divide the class into small groups and ask them to analyse the song as they would a poem, identifying key language and imagery as well as thinking about the subject and structure of the lyrics. You can find a poetry grid handout at the Trust's website [literacytrust.org.uk/write\\_on](http://literacytrust.org.uk/write_on) that your students can use to jot down their thoughts. Ask the groups to feed back on what they have discussed and what they think the overall tone of the poem is.

### 3 I WANDERED LONELY AS A WORD CLOUD...

While your students are completing activity two, go to [wordle.net](http://wordle.net) (I'm sure you're all familiar with this website, but for the uninitiated, Wordle is a great online tool that generates a word cloud from a piece of text, giving greater prominence to words that appear more frequently).

Paste in the lyrics that your students are analysing to create a word cloud of the song, which should produce a great visual illustration of how strong vocabulary and imagery, and tools like repetition of words can be used to convey the tone and message of a song, just as they can with poetry.



### + ABOUT THE EXPERT

**Susie Musgrove** is schools officer at the **National Literacy Trust**. She runs exciting competitions every term to inspire children to get involved in activities to improve their literacy. These are completely free and open to all UK schools, and every one is complemented by lots of free resources for teachers and librarians. Find out more at [literacytrust.org.uk/competitions](http://literacytrust.org.uk/competitions), and follow the National Literacy Trust on Twitter @Literacy\_Trust.

## SUMMARY

As a final activity, get your students to identify some songs that they know and categorise them by their tone (melancholy, angry, joyful) and message (for example war, love, political), justifying why they have chosen to group the songs in this way. Students can jot down their ideas on Post-it notes and stick them up on the whiteboard as they leave the room.