



Lesson Plan: Personalizing the Song Lyrics

INTRODUCTION

The inspiration for the lyrics of *When I Sing* were the thoughts and ideas of the Elites, the girls' choir of Auburn Junior High School in Auburn, AL. Composer Rosephanye Powell invited them into the process of creating the lyrics for the song she was commissioned to compose by the American Composers Forum for their ChoralQuest® series. After a brief introduction to the original lyrics, students will write their own thoughts about the messages in the song.

NATIONAL CORE STANDARD

Connect #10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make music.

LEARNING GOAL

Students will examine the song's lyrics, identify the song's messages and big ideas through peer discussion, then express their thoughts and opinions in a short, written communication.

MATERIALS

- Recording of *When I Sing*
- Electronic display or paper copies of the lyrics
- Markers, paint, individual sheets of paper or large poster paper to tape on the wall
- Optional for background: [YouTube video](#) in which Powell relates how the poetry and music came about for *When I Sing*

PROCESS

Students Will:

1. Read the song lyrics posted on chart paper or the screen. Teacher will tell students that another group of singers wrote these lyrics along with Powell.
 - Read the lyrics out loud as though reading a poem, using expressive voices, and clear, strong pronunciations.
2. Move into small groups, each group with an assigned section of lyrics. They will hear an outline of their task:
 - Read their section of text, consider and discuss what the words mean to them.
 - Think and talk about **their own** reasons for singing:
 - WHY do they sing?
 - WHERE & WHEN do they sing?
 - WHAT does singing mean for them? What are they expressing?
 - HOW does it feel when they sing?
 - Remind them to take notes.

3. Reconvene and share some of the ideas that came up in their discussions about a) the song lyrics and b) what singing means to them.

4. Put their ideas and any messages they might want to send about singing into writing, using one of these options:

- Tell the World What You Think!

Make a graffiti wall in the choir room or hallway. Students will write short graffiti messages about what's important about singing; WHY, WHERE, WHEN, and HOW it feels. Key phrases from "When I Sing" can also be added as well as images, pictures, and graphics. Use sturdy paper and bold colored markers. Design key words that will stand out (**leap** out) to observers. Either write on sheets of paper that can be attached to the wall, or right on a large sheet of poster paper. Cover as much space as you can.

- Write Additional Lyrics for "When I Sing"

Take any of your ideas and organize them into a new verse for Powell's song. Start with the phrase, "When I Sing..." Use your lyrics when you are circle singing.

- Write a Letter to a Friend

Describe a piece your choir is learning, "When I Sing." In your letter, talk about the music and the meaning of the text, the words you like best, and musical sections or sounds that are your favorites.

- Write a Tweet

...about "Never Give Up!" What can you say in 140 characters about the piece and about singing? Use words from your tweet when you are circle singing.



Example of a Graffiti Wall created by students

Graffiti (noun)

Messages in words and/or images drawn in a public place expressing a variety of thoughts, causes, ideas. Sometimes done without permission.

ASSESSMENT SUGGESTION

Informally assess students' engagement in the process and their understanding of the text by observing how they use their own spoken and written words to express their ideas. Collect written work as evidence of their understandings.

EXTENSIONS

- Use the student work to write program notes for *When I Sing* and connect with the "Write Your Own Program Notes" lessons.
- Post the student writing on the wall near where you are singing *When I Sing* in a concert. Hang the graffiti wall where audience members can see and read the text.
- Print some of the tweets in your program.

When I Sing

When I sing, I feel wonderful.
I feel joy. I feel peace. I feel love.
When I sing, life is beautiful; like a bird that is soaring high above.

When I sing there's no anger, there's no trouble; there is only love.
When I sing, when I sing, when I sing.

As I sing with those around me,
Our voices become one.
Like the moon and the tide, work together.
We sing together.
Our harmonies and rhythms work together as one voice.

When we sing, all is wonderful.
We have joy. We have peace. We have love.
When we sing, life is beautiful; like a bird that is soaring high above.

When we sing, there's no anger, there's no trouble, only love.
When we sing, when we sing, when we sing

Text created in collaboration with the girls' chorus, the Elites,
of Auburn Junior High School, Auburn, AL.