



# Creating a New Hit Song

A Study Guide for Grades 2-6

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## **THE COMPANY**

At Beth & Scott and Friends, we strive to educate and entertain children and adults through the writing and performance of original songs, shows and workshops. Beth and Scott Bierko, the owners and principal performers, are a husband and wife team of singer/songwriters and arts-in-education specialists. Since 1993, Beth & Scott have performed thousands of school assemblies and workshops for children. They are parents of two daughters, Helen and Stephanie. The roles of Beth & Scott are now shared by five wonderful actor/musicians.

## **THE PROGRAM**

**"Creating A New Hit Song"** is a workshop program where we work with individual classes in 45-60 min. sessions to teach the basics of songwriting and help each class create and record an original song on a subject of their choosing. By the end of the sessions, each class has created at least one verse and a chorus. After the program is finished, we send the school CDs and a lyric book for each classroom with all of the children's Hit Songs.

In the workshops, we emphasize: process over product; brainstorming; organizing ideas; editing/rewriting; good listening skills; and effective, respectful collaboration. An emphasis is also placed upon how the skills taught in this workshop can be applied to other writing projects.

To achieve the best results for your children, we recommend that the classroom teachers utilize some of the ideas listed on the following pages to prepare students for the workshop or as a follow-up to it. Numerous discussion questions and activities have been provided. Please feel free to choose those that are most appropriate for each class or make up other ideas of your own.

## **SONGWRITING ACTIVITIES**

### **Goals:**

1. To familiarize students with the crafts of songwriting and musical arranging.
2. To promote creative writing and unlock students' artistic potential.
3. To illustrate the benefits of collaboration.
4. To build students' musical knowledge and vocabulary.
5. To increase pride and community spirit within the school.

### **Discussion Topics:**

1. What kind of music do you like? Why?
2. Where do you think ideas for songs come from? Have you ever wanted to write a song? If you have tried to write one, what was that experience like?
3. Discuss the various uses of music throughout history (i.e. to entertain, to protest, to serenade, etc.)

### **Activities:**

1. **Poetry:** In many ways song lyrics are poems set to music. Have students read poetry aloud in class (and/or to themselves at home). This is a great way to familiarize them with the use of rhythm, meter, accent, and rhyme scheme as well as the rich use of language and vivid imagery - all essential elements of songwriting.

2. **The Rhyming Game:** Rhymes play an essential role in lyric writing. It is often like solving a puzzle, trying to find the right word to complete an idea and match the established rhyme scheme. Therefore, building a strong "rhyming vocabulary" is important. Have students play "The Rhyming Game" by choosing any simple word (i.e. you) and have each student think of a word that rhymes with it (i.e. shoe, new). Any student who cannot think of a rhyme or repeats one already given is eliminated. The student who lasts the longest, wins. An alternative version is to divide the class into teams. Each team gets a point for every rhyme they think of either aloud or written on paper. (Extra points may be given for multi-syllabic words, i.e. Kalamazoo.)

3. **Musical Styles:** Listening to music is one of the best ways to learn about it. It is interesting to expose children to a wide array of musical styles. Bring in an assortment of different styles of music (i.e. pop, rock, jazz, rap, classical, country, folk) or music from different eras (i.e. 40's, 50's, 60's, etc.). Discuss similarities and differences and influences from one style or era to another.

4. **Glossary:** Review the attached glossary of terms with the class to help them understand the vocabulary associated with songwriting.

5. **Favorite Songs:** Students may be more receptive to analyzing music they enjoy. Have students bring in their favorite songs. Play these songs in class and discuss them. What do they like about the song? What instruments are used? What is the message the artist is trying to express in the lyric? What style of music is it?

## **ACTIVITIES** (Continued)

6. **Find The Patterns:** Ask students to identify the song structure and rhyme scheme of songs they are familiar with. For example, the song "Jingle Bells" has a verse/ chorus/verse/chorus song structure and the verses have an ABAB rhyme scheme, meaning lines 1 and 3 rhyme and lines 2 and 4 rhyme.

7. **"Rewrite That Tune":** Take an existing, well known melody (i.e. "Happy Birthday") and working individually or in groups, have students write new lyrics to that melody. Be sure to emphasize the importance of matching the number of syllables to the tune and coming up with an appropriate rhyme scheme. You may have students choose their own subject or assign one to them.

8. **Famous Songwriters:** Have students research a famous songwriter or composer and present these biographies to the class or in a report. Be sure to include how the artist got started, whether he/she works alone or with a collaborator and why they chose this artist.

## **GLOSSARY**

**A Cappella** - Music sung without musical accompaniment.

**Accent** - Rhythmically significant stress in a line of verse or a lyric.

**Arrangement** - The planning of a composition for instruments and/or other vocalists other than those it was originally written for.

**Ballad** - 1. A narrative poem, often of folk origin and intended to be sung, consisting of simple stanzas and usually having a recurring refrain. 2. A popular song, especially of a romantic or sentimental nature.

**Brainstorming** - The process of taking a single topic or idea and thinking of as many ideas that relate to the subject as is possible.

**Bridge** - Also known as release or C section, this section of a song usually introduces a totally different musical idea and connects the verse to the chorus.

**Chord** - A combination of three or more notes sounded simultaneously to produce a harmony.

**Choreography** - The art of creating and planning a dance or movement, usually to music.

**Chorus** - A repeat of the primary statement of a popular song, sometimes called a refrain.

**Collaborators** - Those who work together, especially in a joint intellectual or artistic effort.

**Composer** - One who creates or produces a literary or musical piece.

## **GLOSSARY** (Continued)

**Harmony** - Chords played or sung against a melody in a way or combination that complements the melody and enhances it.

**Improvisation** - The art of creating, composing, or reciting without preparation.

**Lyrics** - The words of a song.

**Lyricist** - a writer of song lyrics.

**Melody** - 1. A pleasing arrangement or succession of sounds. 2. The tune of a song.

**Meter** - 1. A specific rhythm determined by the number of beats and the time value assigned to each note. 2. The rhythmic pattern of a stanza, determined by the kind and number of lines.

**Percussion** - An instrument, such as a drum, where the sound is made by one piece striking another.

**Rhyme Scheme** - The arrangement of rhymes in a poem or a stanza.

**Rhythm** - The repetitious sounds or pulses that give a song its feel, movement, groove or beat. (The foot-tapping part of a song.)

**Studio** - Facility where songs are recorded.

**Verse** - 1. A division of a metrical composition, such as a stanza of a poem or a popular song. 2. In any song pattern, the A section, which precedes and usually sets up the chorus.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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