



Building Schema: Exploring Content with Song Lyrics and Strategic Reading

Justin Stygles, MSAD #17 Oxford Hills School District

ABSTRACT

Teaching with song lyrics has many popular variations. The Common Core State Standards discourage pre-teaching, leaving students somewhat adrift. Song lyrics possess the potential to scaffold students' schema in select social studies topics. Using reciprocal teaching (Palinscar & Brown 1984) within the reading workshop students ponder provided song lyrics to activate schema, questions, and a purpose for reading social studies content. By analyzing student work, instructional needs are determined, to strengthen schema and position students to deeper reading with subsequent texts. In this example, students closely read the eighties rock-classic "Cherokee by Europe" (1987) to build a context and create understanding around the Trail of Tears.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Justin Stygles, NBCT, is a grade 5/6 Teacher in MSAD #17, Norway, Maine. He's taught at the intermediate level for eleven years. The content of this articles was presented at IRA 2014 in New Orleans, LA. Justin can be reached at justin.vocabularyteacher@yahoo.com

Lyrics are a staple of communication in American culture. From the *Star Spangled Banner* immortalizing Baltimore in 1814, to *My Old Kentucky Home*, from encoded slave chants to social activism, songs and their lyrics traditionally express emotions in a concise yet ambiguous manner. Students seem naturally attracted to song lyrics. Many lyrics are an open invitation for learners to explore perspectives, culturally significant events, and the underlying message of humanity.

Carefully chosen song lyrics contain an equal opportunity to use reading strategies, decipher text to create deep meaning, and explore the author's message or perspective, within the reading workshop. Song lyrics contain universal messages, metaphorical meanings, devoid of levels and lexiles labels, offering readers an alternative approach to reading instruction.

With the Common Core State Standards (2010) in place, the argument of pre-teaching and background knowledge has become a passionate topic among teachers. By reading and interpreting song lyrics, students can create background knowledge to social studies topics without extensive pre-teaching. This learning experiment demonstrates how students apply reciprocal teaching to develop schema and how student responses provide formative assessments to prepare for later learning.

Research

Bill Harp (1988) states, "Music and reading go together because singing is a celebration of language. Using songs to teach reading is consistent with the nature and purposes of language and puts readers in touch with satisfying meanings." (p. 326). John A. Smith (2000) validates the use of song lyrics to teach basic literacy. Rasinski, Homan, and Biggs (2009) explain the connection between song lyrics and fluency. Carol Lloyd (2003) may



have started the discussion about learning perspectives in song lyrics and the role of small-group discussion regarding student interpretations. McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) discuss lyrics and critical literacy suggesting,

students who engage in critical literacy become open-minded, active, strategic readers, who are capable of viewing text from a critical perspective. They understand that the information presented in texts, magazines, newspapers, song lyrics, and websites has been authored from a particular perspective for a particular purpose. (p. 56)

Song lyrics are regarded as appropriate instructional text vehicles, when establishing a foundation of critical awareness (Alvermann, 2002; Hinchman & Alvermann 2003; Molden, 2007). Alvermann (2003) reveals how student's reading engagement improved when introducing Robert Johnson's *Crossroad Blues* 1934), combined with reading and discussion of similar themed poems.

Instructional Premise

Song lyrics, as a reading instruction text, possess a recursive nature, meaning songs can be used before, during, and after the study of complimentary text(s) such as poems, short stories, primary documents or corresponding non-fiction book chapters. For three reasons lyrics, therefore, are suitable short texts with respect to the Common Core (CCSS, 2010) because:

- 1) Close reading (Reading Anchor Standard #1)
- 2) Analyze text structure (Reading Anchor Standard #5)
- 3) Multi-media analysis (Reading Anchor Standard #7)

A single song can be interpreted in several ways, through several contexts and yet, the author's purpose or reason for writing the song can be completely different. Song lyrics provide a forum for students to acquire, practice, and master reciprocal teaching within the reading workshop, via discussion, and as a scaffold to independent reading. For a reader, there are three “learning-to-read” opportunities that are available through lyrics:

- 1) Strategic reading, notably Reciprocal Teaching (Palinscar & Brown 1984)
- 2) Schema building (Semino, 1995)
- 3) Metaphor and themes

As an example, my sixth-grade class uses the Rolling Stones's *Sweet Black Angel* (1971) to relate to *Nightjohn* by Gary Paulsen (1995) to introduce the tragedy of slavery. Originally about Angela Davis, the imprisoned Black Panthers leader, the song, upon close examination of the lyrics, can be applied to a number of situations regarding many attempts by African Americans to obtain freedom and equal rights because of the lyrics' metaphorical nature. Ambiguity within each line allows for a multitude of instructional situations and pathways for student to present their thinking and learning, whether discussing civil rights or slavery. A reflection of the experience is seen at the author's blog:

<http://mrstyleclass.blogspot.com/2013/04/sweet-black-angel-and-nightjohn-lyrics.html>

Appropriate Songs, Appropriate Text

Theoretically, such text is inappropriate for middle-grade readers. However, text complexity is not necessarily dependent on text level. “The most complex factor in a text is the transaction between the reader and the text” (Beers & Probst 2013, p. 34). Lyric



appropriateness can be measured with three determinants based more on transaction than reading level:

- 1) Level or lexile
- 2) Content and maturity
- 3) Figurative language, metaphorical meaning and ambiguity.

Most song lyrics do not fill all three categories perfectly for any given grade level. If you consider a song such as *Boomer's Story* (1972) made famous by Ry Cooder, lexiles are very low. *Boomer's Story* is a 540L, making the text appropriate for second grade. The lyrics are nearly appropriate for intermediate and middle school students based on themes, depending on schema students bring to the song. The ambiguity of text is appropriate for fifth-to-eighth graders because readers may not be ready to infer the context of the song. Initial reactions to the song might include a boyfriend who ditched a girlfriend. Some infer the song to be a biography about a hobo. Others feel this is a story an old man tells about his regrets. Access to metaphorical meanings and a variety of themes make lyrics an excellent choice to work at close or strategic reading, and interpretation skills.

Thought in contrast to CCSS grade-level bandwidth expectations, low-leveled text, like song lyrics are, consistent with certain models of instruction (Clay, 1998) because readers focus on strategic reading rather than word recognition or fluency. This practice provides students a comfort zone to explore ideas and express logically-based opinions.

Gallagher (2011) reveals how he uses Bob Dylan to link reading and writing. High schoolers can handle the more abstract nature Dylan offers. Intermediate students are safer waiting for such experiences. As fifth through eighth graders arrive at school singing the next hit, many of them seldom understand the lyrics. Lehman and Roberts (2013) discuss how they teach close reading and encourage student responses to lyrics with pop songs. In conservative school settings, such lyrics may be questioned from various sources. *Roar* by Katy Perry (2013) has gained the affection of people in many circumstances, from hospitals to classrooms, due to theme. Such songs are cross-cutting and relative in a variety of instructional situations. An example connecting reader to text by comparing character qualities can be found here: http://readingqueen14.blogspot.com/2014/01/i-got-eye-of-tiger_8.html.

Safely using lyrics implies that a teacher will only use lyrics that are defensible to the direct and indirect audience, including parents and administrators. This eliminates most pop music due to sexual connotations and explicit language. There is a reason songs are considered “adult contemporary.” Teachers need to be conscious of themes that are meant for instruction and themes that students might discuss outside of the classroom, which makes choosing the right song a challenge. Songs need to contain a message, a story that links to text and won't send students home whispering, “Did you hear what they said in that song?”

Building Schema, Exploring Themes

In the sixth grade classroom, we use songs to build schema. When the song is introduced to the class, students need space to work with any potential meanings to express their thoughts, develop a “sense” of the topic, even if thinking is “off-topic” in early stages. Because text worlds are constructed in the interaction between readers and the *language* of texts, it is important to consider the role of linguistic choices and patterns in the activation, instantiation and potential modification of schemata (Semino, 1995). If students are “in-the-ballpark” with a song, that is, they are expressing ideas related to a subject's central ideas and



themes, no written response is considered right or wrong.

When the class analyzes *Sweet Black Angel*, one question students respond to following the reading is, “Which character best represents an Angel?” From time to time, a student turns up an unexpected interpretation. Most students held the line that Mammy was the angel. Both chapter five of *Nightjohn* (1995) by Gary Paulsen and the Rolling Stones’ lyrics connected the female archetype through “have her in chains” connection. One student’s diverted thinking suggesting John took on the roll of the angel, linking evidence from the book with the song lyrics, thereby clarifying lyrics’ meaning. This “a-ha moment,” expressed with the class, revealed several crucial aspects of this instructional technique – no right or wrong answers, evidenced based answers, and an invitation to explore perspectives and possibilities.

Building Schema: Instructional Outline

Many times the purpose of a song is to create a context (schema) for students, a scaffold into topics they may not have experience with. One example is demonstrated through a study on the Trail of Tears. Most likely, students have had little experience with this topic, other than class discussions related to Native Americans. Two former pop songs are possible by the 1980’s hairband Europe’s *Cherokee* (1987) or the 1960’s pop sensation Paul Revere and the Rider’s *Indian Reservation* (1971). Lyrics can be obtained from several lyric websites. (For example, <http://www.metrolyrics.com>) Before students read the lyrics, the teacher makes adaptations for purpose and content. For example, in *Cherokee*, repeated choruses are deleted. (This depends on whether or not the song’s meaning is changed, thus a repeated chorus takes on a new meaning.) Utterances, including “yeah’s,” “ahh’s,” bearing no meaning are eliminated. Subsequently, *Indian Reservation* is eliminated due to derogatory references.

Students are introduced to Europe’s *Cherokee* because the lyrics develop a story line with lyrics that readily connect to non-fiction passages. Measuring *Cherokee* against previously mentioned appropriateness standards, the lyrics, rewritten into narrative receives a 650 lexile, roughly two years below grade-level. There is no suggestive or offensive material that might lead students to make inappropriate connections or lead to discriminatory discussions. Linguistics are not incredibly ambiguous, rather each line is straightforward with tangible connection to primary sources. There is no figurative language permitting complete focus to center on building background knowledge. However, a tense shift appears. In the first stanza, the song read *they had*. In the final stanza, the lyrics change to *they have*, showing a passage of time. The teacher should observe students reaction to the change and potential interpretations. Evidence may appear in written strategies, conversation, or written responses.

Using the gradual release model, the song is broken up by stanzas to scaffold readers’ independence. Teacher modeling shows how students should approach the lyrics using reciprocal teaching. The second stanza is read aloud as students attempt to apply strategies through guided practice. Small-groups are formed in the third stanza for students who need quick support or need a forum to express their thinking orally, before writing. Student work independently on stanza four, reading alone and adding another set of strategies for the stanza. Assessment occurs during the last two stanzas to determine “in-the-ballpark” understanding and strategic reading application.

To begin the process, the teacher reads the lyrics aloud and model strategic thinking. Effective practice is to demonstrate on-the-spot thinking. During modeling, the teacher needs to be as sincere as possible, that is, at-that-moment thinking, since a few students always insist the teacher knows the answers. Demonstrating analysis of a stanza typically spans five



minutes.

On the second stanza is our foray into guided practice. Again, the teacher reads the stanza aloud. Students then try each of the strategies. Since there are typically four lines in a stanza, the teacher guides students by pondering possibilities resulting in stating one prediction, asking one question, and make attempting to clarify metaphorical terms or ambiguous concepts. For example, the teacher may ask students, “What is confusing in this stanza? Are you confused by...? If so, what do you think that phrase means? Write that down as a clarification.” (More attempts at each strategy are acceptable; fewer suggests teacher intervention needed.) Finally, the teacher initiates a mini-conversation reviewing the stanza, leading students to write a summary.

With the third stanza students attempt to work in small-groups, in the same manner as described above. Students in this instructional situation are at the edge of their zone of proximal development. Support is critical. Small-groups are determined by assessment from guided practice stanza. Some are devised by tables collaborating. Students who show visible distress, confusion, or simply raise their hand and say, “I don't know what is going on,” are invited to work with guidance to boost confidence. Typically, support is needed with clarifying and summarizing. This is an important acknowledgement because the content is still new. Readers believe there must be right or wrong answers; shifting this paradigm is a challenge. Students tend to shy away from clarifications because they “don't know” what words mean or what is going on in a line. Since the construction of ideas is the main instructional objective, supporting students moving towards “in-the-ballpark” thinking is more valuable than judging relevancy. Asserting guidance through small groups prompts students to make reasonable attempts to summarize or clarify what a phrase or word means, confidently. Teachers need to support students because this action positions the readers for maximized learning in forthcoming reading.

Students work independently on the fourth stanza. Most students have taken control of their learning process by this point. The teacher prioritizes conferences with individuals who struggled in small groups or have not received teacher interaction. Often, these students need acknowledgement that what they come up with is a compliment to their thinking and a step in building confidence. Mental or observational notes should be taken to determine who needs additional support (i.e. the next day) or re-teaching to enable equal access to later learning.

As students work independently with stanza four, the teacher should take a minute or two to check in with students, offering advice, prompting thinking, jotting notes indicating the types of responses students write, preferences towards strategies, and any “thinking” students choose to share. The written strategies are a formative assessment tool. Further, by walking around the room and reading responses, the teacher may take note of instructional needs students required before the final two stanzas or determine if students need invitations to small-group discussions.

Following stanzas two through four, students have a chance to converse with one another. Students expand thinking through conversation, sharing perspectives, which is essential to solidifying concepts and clarifying uncertain ideas. Students have clear discussion norms including posing their question to the group and soliciting possible answers from peers. Students share predictions, in which peers may agree or disagree with an explanation; express words or phrases they are confused by and seek clarifications. At the end, a quick whip around yields each person's summaries. Finally, a quick minute is spent in a whole class share where students have the choice to express their thinking. This segment reveals students' background



knowledge and allows students to agree with one another on ideas they have come up with. Afterward students respond to writing prompts to demonstrate their understanding.

To extend or modify students' interpretation of lyrics, music video adds a visual element, which elicits additional questioning, modify predictions, clarify inferences, and supplement summaries. This step is optional and entertaining for the students. Video is shown after the written responses so students' initial interpretations are not impacted. Once students can move past the appearance of 1980's leather-clad rockers, readers can focus on the director's use of apparitions in the background to show hostile removal of the Cherokees. Afterwards students revisit the writing prompts to explain how video impacted their interpretation.

Building Schema: Students in Action

Modeling.

The lesson begins with a think-aloud demonstration. On the page containing the lyrics to *Cherokee*, the following example is written on the right hand side of the page:

Q(uestion) = What were the promises? Who made the promises?

P(rediction) = The US Army is going to attack the tribe.

P(rediction) = The Indians were told they would not be harmed.

C(larifying) = "Mighty tribe" might be the Cherokees.

C(larifying) = "Winds of Change" must mean life changing events will happen

S(ummarize) = This stanza is about the Cherokee's lifestyle beginning to change because
of lies.

The song does not state who is involved in the Trail of Tears, unless presumed from the title. This sets students up to read non-fiction texts and discover more tribes involved. I model this thinking to show students the legitimacy of asking questions that guide thinking, making predictions to confirm or refute ideas, extending learning by clarifying concepts, and summarizing as a means of "chunking" information (Marzano, 2007).

For example, when the song speaks of "promises were lies," I model questioning with "What were the promises?" and "Who made the promises?" so students see that I am trying to parlay my curiosity and establish a purpose for reading related non-fiction texts.

The two predictions pose different levels of prediction. The first is considered an easy one for sixth graders, since the likely aggressor was the US Army. The second prediction is based on patterns in text and trends in history, as students are told. I model my thinking by explaining recollections from readings on the Holocaust or Cortez's conquest of the Aztecs, trying to encourage students to work from previously known themes in class studies or independent reading. The primary theme here is, when promises were made, they were broken and the promises became lies.

Two examples of clarifying are shown, like the predictions, to signal the variations of clarifications; establishing a safe entry point and a desired level of clarifying. My safe clarification is a linking "Mighty Indian Tribe" with the Cherokees simply to stay on topic. With the second clarification, "Winds of Change" knowing this is a common idiom, I bring special attention to this occurrence since students may recognize the phrases and subsequent meaning from other readings. I explain that *I think* "Winds of change" is a life-altering event. I connect students to our previous whole-class study of *Mary Poppins* (Travers, 1997), i.e. the



winds changed marking her arrival and departure. Therefore I *clarify* by writing about “life changing events.” As a note, the phrases in quotations indicate exact wording of the lyrics, showing students one method of quoting text.

Students learn to summarize by the model that only includes one statement. The summary is built by linking key ideas from each line in the stanza to create a central idea. The class is reminded that is this new learning and the summary statement is not wrong or right, but a synopsis of their current thinking. The summary statement serves as a baseline for future readings, in that the “thinking” becomes a concept that can be affirmed, discounted, or revised by acquiring more information.

Additionally, because reciprocal teaching is recursive in nature, summarizing can lead to predictions or questions, perhaps even a clarifications depending on the depth of the students’ thinking. The same can be said for clarifying. Once a concept is understood, more questions and predictions can surface; summaries shift. Summaries and clarifications should be a spring boards for “Aha moments.”

Guided practice.

As the students work through the second stanza, guided practice, the lyrics are read aloud and they begin to write their own strategies with mild prompting. When prompting predictions, I asked, as an example, such as, “If they have no place to return, what will happen to the people?” Students replied:

- 1) They got kicked out of their homes and had to move.
- 2) I predict people will starve if they have no place to return.
- 3) They lost the battle for their land and their home and were homeless.

To prompt clarifications, I asked, “What is confusing you? What do you think the song is trying to say?” Students replied:

- 1) They had lost their faith means they had to give up hope on settlers.
- 2) Made the nation bleed is war
- 3) They moved out of a place and couldn't return

To summarize, I asked students “what do you think this stanza is about?” or “What would you tell someone this stanza is about?” Students wrote:

- 1) The white men have so much greed there is no place to go.
- 2) The Americans stole and tricked the Indians off their land because they were searching for gold and the Indians learned there was nowhere to return to.
- 3) The Indians traded land with the English and they got bad land and had no place to go.

Small-group and independent practice.

When students reached the third stanza, some worked independently, others in small groups. In the small-groups, students had the stanza read to them as this is one opportunity for students to concentrate mainly on their thinking, with prompting, before tackling the final stanza independently.

Looking at the responses as students worked in small-groups created a sense of who would need guided-reading type instruction following the lesson.



Student A: for example added the following in stanza three:

Q(uestion) = Why did the winds of change tell them the promises were lies?

P(rediction) = I predict they were scared of white soldiers.

C(larification) = American soldiers ordered them around.

S(ummary) = The Indians are being bossed around by white soldiers.

Student B:

Q(uestion) = What does that mean, they did not know that would happen?

P(rediction) = They will go to war

C(larification) = They looked for new land

S(ummary) = (Not included)

Student C: (note, Q, P, C, S are absent because the students did not use them or identify them with any particular stanza)

What were the Indians driven to?

Moons = months

During small groups and independent practice, mental and observational notes must be taken to determine next instructional steps. First, I need to see what students can come up with. The evidence shown above suggests Student C needs some support organizing his thinking. Students B & C need assistance in summarizing. Because this is the first reading of this text and perhaps the first (ever) exposure to this topic, I am essentially asking them to summarize something they have no knowledge of. Consequently, for all students, just by acknowledging what they come up with is a compliment to their thinking and a step in building confidence, a feeling students must have to engage in such work. Further instruction to develop background knowledge can be handled in more focused small-group instruction in following lessons. Overall, at the end of this lesson, most students have a plethora of information on the page to work with in future reading.

The takeaway for students is an attempt to closely read and self-monitor for meaning in an authentic context. Self-monitoring is one of the most important qualities of a lifelong reader (Fisher & Frey, 2013).

After this particular close reading process, students responded to two writing prompts, which served as a formative assessment tool. The prompts (shown in the next segment) seem simple. However, the intent is to leave the questions open enough for students to express what they know. Their responses provide bearing on the learning directions they are taking, what information they are retaining, or any specific interests students may be taking on this topic.

Assessing learning: Formative assessment prompts.

Students responded to the following two prompts:

- 1) What is the Trail of Tears?
- 2) What happened to the Cherokee?

The answer to the first question can provide provides an insight into the students' construction of learning. Starting this lesson with no working knowledge, this question provides a landmark, a glimpse into their current thinking. With this information, students can be organized into small group with non-fiction text to revise misconceptions or provide the



learning students are curiously hungry for.

The second question is more of an elaborate prediction. By this point students have developed an idea around the “Trail of Tears;” they know life was changed, and they are in despair. With this information, what could have happened? This becomes a major driving purpose for learning throughout the unit, through constant revision and expansion of knowledge. With this learning, students can develop understanding of themes including justice, genocide, prejudice, government authority, and human rights.

The following student responses answer the first prompt, “What is the Trail of Tears?”

A) White men said I will give you all land for gold and the Indians agreed and gave the gold and Indians traveled many moons and when they got to the place they had to learn English.

B) A path that the Indians walk after the war in misery. They walk the path to find a new place to go live but they couldn't find land.

C) The Trail of Tears is about the white men took the Indians land and forced them to live tin a certain spot and if they didn't listen they would be shot and killed. The Trail of Tears is also about war and how the Indians fought for their land.

Example A reflects the student’s prior knowledge from the Aztec unit and Cortez's quest for gold. The misconception in place is that the Indians gave gold, in turn receiving land. The instructional focus for this student will be introducing the Indian Removal Act of 1832, diaries from the expulsion, and independent reading of secondary sources to enrich this response.

Example B: This student takes a literal understanding (trail = path). The question surrounding the students' understanding is, “Does the student realize the Cherokee were forced off the land?” The response, “They couldn't find land” reflects a misconception. Based on the answer, this student becomes a candidate for small-group instruction. In a small group, the students collaborate and closely read, with the teacher's guidance, a secondary source to rectify the interpretation. Next the students, with teacher support would return to the lyrics to generate deeper predictions, questions, clarify phrases, and write a richer summary statement before moving on to primary sources.

Example C: The student shows solid developing knowledge around the Trail of Tears. Conferring with the student showed that he connected the Cherokee to atlas (geography) work we had done two days prior. His remark about war refers to the Black Hawk war and other battles discussed in the atlas and recalled from the one-page blurb *Donner Dinner Party* (2013) about the Black Hawk war. This student is prepared to engage in independent exploration. Further instructional needs, i.e. “building on the known” will be met through conferring and peer collaboration.

The second prompt, “What happened to the Cherokee?” is meant for students to infer the suffering and inhumanity Indians endured in their travels. Although somewhat connected to the first prompt, because the Army drove the tribes along the “trail”, student responses indicate if students are focusing on the travel or the outcome of the journey. Examples of student responses are:

A) Based on this song, I think that the Cherokee tribe had to move by what the



government said because the Americans wanted the gold, like in the line, “The white man's greed, in search of gold, which means the white men wanted to get the gold which means money so they told the tribe that if they move to another place but when they did it was a really bad place and that the government tricked them.

B) Based on the song, the Cherokee got slaughtered, disrespected, and punished. I think the Cherokee tried to live free.

C) The Cherokee had to give their land to the white man but tricked the Cherokee so the Cherokees were left in despair with nowhere to go and nowhere they could turn. They also were driven hard by the plains.

Response A focuses on one lyric, essentially rewriting literal meaning of the lyrics. This response reflects need to explore possibilities. Small group instruction to connect with previous learning and reading may help this student become more comfortable to ponder hidden meanings behind the lyrics.

Response B is short and to the point. This student has the opportunity to expand on the terms he uses, such as disrespected and punished. The students could also explain what “live free” means and anticipate how the Cherokee lost that freedom.

Response C is another example of a student reworking the lyrics. The strength these students possess is answering literal comprehension questions with “right there” answers. With two of three examples demonstrating this same behavior, more lessons on inferring are needed, a focal point in proceeding small group instruction. Interestingly, the inability to infer is correlated to a lack of clarifying, suggesting students need further support considering possible interpretations or feeling free to logical construct potential text meaning.

However, despite lack of depth in the second prompt, students are in a perfect position to learn from non-fiction text. Instruction with lyrics is intended to build schema, not produce mastery. From this point, students will be taught and asked to look for connections in primary and secondary sources that embellish the lyrics encoded message. When the subsequent text studies are complete, students return to the lyrics and repeat the process. At that time, mastery will be assessed. The prompts will be re-administered measuring the learning, serving as tool for students to note their growth in interpretation skills and knowledge acquisition.

Conclusion

Sometimes to teach reading, we have to provide obvious, but unique opportunities. Thus, song lyrics are a perfect stepping stone to reading and meaning making. When reading song lyrics, students rarely think about *reading*, rather, they *think* about possibilities through strategic reading and exploration of concepts. Song lyrics, rich in messages and metaphorical meanings, provide an alternate path to learning. By using “easier” texts, readers build curiosity through lyrics, students find a new purpose for reading non-fiction – linking texts together to clarify, find answers, confirm predictions, and expand on knowledge base – an important scaffold and motivator when introducing, often “boring” social studies concepts and themes. Students, after learning a song, are empowered to read text with vigor.

Learning with lyrics allows students to paint a portrait of *their* understanding. Rather than fact-based, worksheet, or question/answer response investigations, students develop



hypotheses and beliefs about social studies topics and themes. When looking at the Trail of Tears through Cherokee, students learn about the inhumane ostracizing of Native Americans, while showing how they develop understanding. Perhaps this instruction opens an avenue for students to create a value system as citizens, who learn from history's mistakes, and make the future brighter.

Above all, students gain a sense of self and a belief they can read, a belief that thinking is open-ended, endless possibilities – the backdoor to the purpose of reading.



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