



Cynthia Weil

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<http://rockhall.com/education>

Lesson materials acquired from:

<http://rockhall.com/education/distance-learning/digital-classroom-1970s/carole-king/>

Saskatchewan Grade 9 Arts Education outcome addressed through the below lesson:

CH9.1 Investigate and discuss the role of artists in raising awareness or taking action on topics of concern.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In her interview, Cynthia Weil says that during the Brill Building era, it was assumed that women wrote lyrics and men played instruments. Ask your students to consider the consequences of these stereotypes on songwriters. How might Weil's reluctance to play piano affect her songwriting? What barriers might Carole King encounter as a musician and performer within that context?
- In the Brill Building era, writing songs was a job. Songwriters went to work every day and tried to write hit songs. They often did not know who would record the song and they weren't expected to write songs that reflected their own experience. Ask your students to brainstorm on how this song writing system would work for songwriters: what would their process be like? How would they write a song that could work for different musical groups? Can you think of a song that you like that seems to be written this way? Can you think of a song that seems to reflect a more personal expression of a singer/songwriter?

ACTIVITY: *Analyzing Songwriting*

This activity is designed to help students better understand the process of writing lyrics and music, and to consider how different audiences interpret lyrics.

- 1) Have students listen to two songs written by Cynthia Weil (you can access songs on Spotify, YouTube, or Grooveshark):
 - The Drifters, "On Broadway" (Weil, Mann, Leiber, Stoller) 1963
 - The Animals, "We've Gotta Get Out of This Place" (Weil, Mann) 1965
- 2) Ask students to analyze the lyrics. What is the song about? Does it have a story? Who are the characters? Where is it set? What emotions does it express? Who is speaking? Who is spoken to?
- 3) Have student describe the musical arrangement and instrumentation. What instruments do you hear playing? Do the lyrics of the songs match the musical accompaniment? Do the two aspects of the song complement one another or is there a tension between them?
- 4) Have students consider the role of audience interpretation. For example, "We've Gotta Get Out of This Place" was written by Weil and Mann in 1965, but it was not until 1969 that it became a hit for The Animals.

Vietnam and young people who felt stifled in their home town. What aspects of the song's lyrics allow for a number of different interpretations? Ask the students to interpret the lyrics of the song using current events. Work through the same exercise with "On Broadway." Do the lyrics seem as open to multiple interpretations?

5) Students can share their responses with the class, or write an essay comparing their interpretations of each song.



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Women *who* Rock



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ACTIVITY: "This Woman's Work" – Gender and songwriting

In this activity students will consider the issues women faced within the music industry by interpreting the lyrical content of a selection of hit songs written over the last 40 years.

1) Begin by having students listen to the songs listed below (you can access most of these songs on Spotify, YouTube, or Grooveshark), paying careful attention to the lyrics. You may want to have them listen without lyrics sheets and ask them what they are able to understand by simply listening.

2) Have students divide into pairs to analyze the five songs. Ask them to consider several general points: what is the theme or topic of the lyrics? Can they identify any interesting or clever uses of language in the song (i.e. metaphor, rhyme, word play, etc.)? In what ways do the music and words work together?

3) Next have students consider how the songwriter of each song portrays the role of women in society during a particular time period.

- Sara Bareilles, "Love Song" (Bareilles) 2007

Bareilles wrote this song in response to her record label's suggestion that she needed to produce a hit song, preferably a love song for her second album. On the surface it is certainly a love song, but have students listen carefully and consider what Bareilles might be saying to the record label in the lyrics.

- No Doubt, "Just a Girl" (Stefani, Dumont) 1995

When Gwen Stefani's brother Eric quit the band No Doubt she stepped forward as one of the band's primary songwriters. This gave her a chance to write lyrics about her own personal experiences. Fellow band member Tom Dumont said, "In the past, Eric was writing songs about his life and having Gwen sing them. Now we have Gwen singing and writing about her own experiences. It makes it more natural. She's a singer, she should sing about herself or sing what she wants to sing." Gwen wrote

role in the band. Have students attempt to identify the gender stereotypes in the song.

- Queen Latifah, “Ladies First” (Owens) 1989

This song features two lead rap parts, one by Queen Latifah (Dana Owens) and the other by Monie Love (Simone Riscoe). The two parts work in dialogue over a musical track that contains samples from classic R&B songs. Queen Latifah was taking the late 80s hip-hop music scene to task for its frequent sexist themes. Ask students to make a list of the changes Queen Latifah promotes in the lyrics.

- Aretha Franklin, “RESPECT” (Redding) 1967

The original version of this song was written and performed by Stax music artist Otis Redding. The song featured bravado lyrics by a man asking his woman for respect in his home. When Aretha Franklin recorded the song and flipped the lyrics around so that she was now insisting on respect from her man. This song quickly went on to become an anthem of both the Civil Rights Movement and the Women’s Liberation



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Movement during the late 1960s. Ask students to consider how the actual lyrics and the tone of the performance differ from Redding’s version.

- Lesley Gore, “You Don’t Own Me” (Madara, White) 1963

Although this song was written by two men, Gore’s performance made the song a powerful statement about relationships during the early 1960s. Have students compare this song to other pop songs sung by women at the time (ex. female girl groups of the 1960s).

- 4) Have student pairs present their analyses to the class. Ask the class to reflect on any similarities or differences. Do certain themes recur? What can be learned as we move musically from 1963 to 2007?



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