Soundtrack of Your Life: Reflective Writing and Personal Narrative

Overview: This creative writing lesson teaches thematic analysis and personal writing through music. This assignment combines a student's passion for music with a teacher's respect for the personal narrative. It's an invaluable combination for inspiring students to write. The assignment sets a positive tone at the beginning of school by having students share their lives with each other and with the teacher. Through the vehicle of the personal narrative, the teacher learns about each student's background through a first writing effort that unfolds in a safe, creative, and comfortable atmosphere. Of course, the personal narrative — particularly as it connects to music — also engages students in the emotional response to a creative work, which the teacher will expect from them when they respond to literature later in the school year. (Approximate time: Four 50-minute class periods.)

Standards:
- W.11-12.3-6
- W.11-12.9
- W.11-12.10
- SL.11-12.1a-d
- SL.11-12.3
- SL.11-12.6
- SL.11-12.7
- L.11-12.1-3

Objectives:
The students will:
- Listen to various pieces of music and identify the themes
- Analyze the elements of style in various pieces of music
- Evaluate the impact of the various uses of figurative language in the songs
- Identify social themes in the various songs
- Apply the themes in a wide range of songs to personal experiences
- Draft a narrative in which songs are alluded to in order to reveal personal themes at various stages of life
- Use figurative language
- Draft, edit, revise and share personal narrative told through songs and writing
- Write reflectively and personally

Materials:
The Soundtrack of Your Life assignment sheet includes blanks for songs and artists and an explanation of each required paragraph. It may also be necessary for students to consult their Compact Disc (CD) liner notes or Internet sites for lyrics.

The Green Book by Jeff Green is a great optional resource which provides a thematic categorization of over 20,000 song titles.
Procedure:

Setup:

Play music as the students are entering the classroom.

**Day One:** Distribute a copy of the lyrics and play Bon Jovi's, "It's My Life." Then, discuss the meaning and message of the song and the possible relationships to Jon Bon Jovi's life. Next, have the students discuss this song in relevance to their own lives. After the discussion, have the students choose eight major events — deaths, first car, entering high school — in their lives and then choose songs to accompany each event. Some students will need overnight to complete the list.

**Day Two:** Have the students collect the titles of at least eight meaningful songs that correspond to the events they selected on Day One. The songs should be of a school-appropriate nature. By using CD Liner notes, the Internet, and *The Green Book*, students will be able to find lyrics that fit their events. It is also helpful to encourage sharing of events in order for students to find songs that fit their musical tastes.

**Day Three:** Now that the students have created an "imaginary soundtrack" to their lives, have them write a reflective letter that explains why each event and song is included. Create examples or use examples from work by previous students to help explain the expectations of the assignment. Have the students follow the outline on the student handout for constructing the soundtrack of their life.

**Day Four:** *(Wait several days after Day Three for this part of the lesson.)* This is the day the writing assignment is due for presentation to the class along with a visual aide. Students need only share a small portion of their soundtrack; this helps everyone feel more comfortable in front of the class. As the students share their visual aides (usually CD cases of their soundtrack) everyone in the class begins to better understand their peers, which builds a positive classroom climate and mutual respect among

**Enrichment:**

Use this same "imaginary soundtrack" activity, but create the soundtrack to a novel your class is reading instead. This works extremely well because it challenges students to summarize the main ideas of each chapter with an individual song that captures or shares that same meaning. Other successful and creative ideas include a poster and presentation, an interview with the "rock star" (student), a CD release party, a mock concert, or a "behind the music" documentary.

**Printer Friendly Lesson Plan:**

CLICK the Mercury Records logo below for a printer friendly version of the Soundtrack of Your Life Lesson Plan.
Bon Jovi lyrics:
CLICK the musical note below for a printer friendly version of the lyrics to "It's My Life."

http://brainyflix.wordpress.com/
http://www.vocabahead.com/GRESATVocabularyVideos/TabId/59/VideoId/1002/Rescind.aspx
http://www.savethecomma.com/
http://www.umich.edu/~umfandsf/symbolismproject/symbolism.html/index.html
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