



## Song Chorus Analysis-Using Lit Tunes

### Overview:

Most modern songs incorporate a chorus that is repeated throughout the song. In many cases, the chorus of a song — like a thesis statement in academic writing — acts as a unifying force that holds together the ideas presented in each of the verses as it puts forth a statement about the song's overall meaning. The chorus usually conveys the songwriter's purpose for writing the song. A song's chorus serves as a guide to help the listener understand the songwriter's purpose and message just as a writer develops a theme in a piece of literature.

Examining a song and applying a classification system devised in cooperative learning activities can help students construct meaning as well as form an opinion on the function and purpose of a particular chorus. It is a logical process of academic investigation that quite naturally leads to the study of the thesis statement. Such skills empower students and help them gain new evaluation perspectives.



**NOTE:** The lesson author continues a discussion of the chorus-to-thesis-statement connection which is available for download. The document provides an in depth analysis of three types of statements — analytical, expository, and argumentative — that can be identified in these lessons. The document includes "Notes on Terminology" based on classroom experiences, "Evaluation Criteria" developed by students, and other valuable tips to help teachers make the most of these lessons. You can download "Notes for the Teacher" as a .pdf file by clicking on the musical note at the beginning of this paragraph.

### **Approximate time:**

Five 50-minute class periods

### **Standards:**

W.11-12.1a-e

W.11-12.2e-f

W.11-12.3

SL.11-12.1-3

### **Objectives:**

1. Utilize critical thinking skills.
2. Analyze lyrics to songs in an effort to identify poetic devices.
3. Identify themes in various songs.
4. Identify the tone of the songwriter and the point of view of the songwriter.
5. Identify rhetorical devices that are used to persuade listeners to see the point of view of the songwriter.






6. Analyze the theme and construct five paragraph essays that identify theme and create a thesis statement that reflects the student's opinion of what the themes in the piece of music are intended to be.
7. Students will make a claim which they will support with textual support from the song.
8. Students will write employ the writing process to draft expository, analytical and argumentative essays based on the lyrics of various songs.

### Goals:


The overall goal of this five-lesson series is to help students develop conceptual frameworks and critical thinking skills that will empower them to compose strong and effective thesis statements for their own writing. The lessons may also open the door to enlightening discoveries and discussions about the strategic use and abuse of rhetorical devices and the differences between academic and other modes of writing. By encouraging students to make connections between the function and purpose of a song's chorus and an academic paper's thesis statement, these lessons will foster the development and application of critical thinking skills. Later, students will experiment with transferring such skills to academic writing.


The lessons are designed to allow students to work independently, collaborate in small groups, and share their discoveries as a whole class. Students will listen to several pop tunes in order to examine, analyze, and evaluate the function of each song's chorus in relation to its verses. They will categorize the different purposes or ways a chorus can function within a song, and then develop criteria for determining whether a song's chorus achieves its purpose. They will discuss an essential question: Does the chorus function effectively or ineffectively? Finally, students will apply their terminology/classification system and their evaluation criteria to thesis statements in order to determine the similarities and differences between these two devices.

### Materials:

-  **MP3 player or CD player with speakers or headphones.** All students should be able to hear the demonstration songs, and students should be given the option to share their self-selected song with group members.
-  **Handouts featuring the lyrics for each of the demonstration songs.** Lyrics to "Born to Run" and "My Hometown" by Bruce Springsteen, "Redemption Songs" by Bob Marley, "True Colors" by Cyndi Lauper, "Mama Tried" by Merle Haggard, "Hope" by Twista and Faith Evans, and "The Bare Necessities" from Disney's *The Jungle Book* are available for download at the end of this lesson plan.
-  **Handouts of the homework assignment:** "Song Chorus — Independent Work," available for download at the end of this lesson plan.




 The teacher should consider making a guide sheet to help students begin thinking about the function and effect of a song's chorus. **The guide sheet can be adapted from "Notes for the Teacher."**

 **Another suggestion:** Provide handouts on writing an effective thesis statement and copies of student-authored essays for thesis examination, categorization, comparison, and evaluation.

**Preparation:**

Teachers should ensure that their students are familiar with and have some experience participating in Socratic Circle (Copeland, 2005) seminar discussions prior to participating in these lessons.

 **LitTunes has a primer about the Socratic Circle technique.** Please click the arrow for a printer friendly copy. \*URL provided below as well.

[http://www.corndancer.com/tunes/tunes\\_print/soccirc.pdf](http://www.corndancer.com/tunes/tunes_print/soccirc.pdf)

**For the first lesson**, the classroom should be setup for a Socratic seminar. For the remaining lessons, the classroom should be setup in a way that works for small groups but that can easily transition into a whole-class collaborative discussion.

**Procedure:**

**Day One:**

Arrange students for a Socratic seminar. Assign half the students to the inside circle and half the students to the outside circle. The inside circle will listen to and discuss the first two songs while the outside circle evaluates the performance of the inside circle. Then students should rotate — in other words, the inside circle will become the outside circle and vice versa. The second inside circle will then listen to and discusses the next two songs. For each song, students will discuss the meaning of the song, the purpose of the song, and the function or role of the chorus. Students might also discuss the intended audience, writer's or artist's point of view, and relevant cultural or historical contexts.

**Song Suggestions:**

 Bruce Springsteen's *Born To Run* and *Hometown*

 Bob Marley's *Redemption Songs*



- Cyndi Lauper's *True Colors*
- Merle Haggard's *Mama Tried*
- Twista and Faith Evan's *Hope*
- *The Bare Necessities* from the soundtrack *The Jungle Book*
- Gillian Welch's *Elvis Presley Blues* or *Annabelle*

**Homework:**

Students are directed to select a song to examine and discuss within a small-group setting during the next class. Students should be advised to select a song that is appropriate for a school setting and that contains an obvious chorus. Students will also need to complete a homework assignment, "Song Chorus — Independent Work." The assignment sheet is available for download at the end of this lesson plan.

**Day Two:**

Students should be given time at the beginning of class to complete their independent work. The rest of class should be devoted to small-group work with the teacher acting as guide, mentor, and facilitator. Students will share and discuss their songs with their group members. They will then use their recent experiences examining song choruses to develop key terms to help them categorize the different ways a chorus can function (or the different purposes a chorus can serve) within a song. They will also need to list some criteria suggestions that could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of a song's chorus. The teacher should move from group to group, acting as a guide, mentor, and facilitator.

**Day Three:**

After the students have worked in small groups and devised both categories and evaluation criteria, it is important to come together as a class to share each groups' ideas and perspectives. Each group should be given a chance to call out their ideas as the teacher records them on the whiteboard. The teacher should ask students to clarify terms or ideas that seem vague or unclear. Inevitably, the terminology of each group will be unique, but the majority of their ideas will be similar.

After all of the students' ideas are recorded on the board, the class should work together (with the teacher as mentor and guide) to make connections between and among these ideas. The goal of this collaborative exercise is for the class to create common terminology, categories, and evaluation criteria based on the ideas generated by the small groups.



**Day Four:**

It is important to revisit the demonstration songs that were introduced at the beginning of the lessons. Have the students put their newly developed terminology, categories, and evaluation criteria to work as they examine, classify, analyze, and evaluate the choruses of the demonstration songs. Gaining practice applying these terms will help them when they begin to work with thesis statements. Direct the students to work in their small groups. At the end of the period, students will share their process, experience, and findings with the class. The teacher should provide feedback for each group by recognizing accomplishments and offering some suggestions for improvement.

**Day Five:**

Students work in small groups to apply the terminology- categories and evaluation criteria to the analysis of an anonymous, student-authored, academic essay. After the students finish, each group member should write a short reflective paper describing their thoughts on the similarities and differences between a song's chorus and an academic essay's thesis statement.

**For homework**, students should be asked to apply the class's terminology/categories and evaluation criteria to one of their own essays.

**Summary:**

This assignment asks students to closely examine the role and function of a song's chorus and to explore the commonalities between song choruses and essay thesis statements. The five lessons help students develop critical thinking skills and important conceptual frameworks using song lyrics, a form of writing that students are passionate about and feel confident discussing.

The knowledge gained from these lessons will give students confidence in their thinking and analytical skills and provide foundational concepts for understanding thesis statements. Through their participation in individual and group work, students will recognize the significance of the chorus and gain a rich understanding of the different functions a chorus can have. They will also discover how a chorus' effectiveness is directly related to a songwriter's intended purpose. Students will learn to use classification systems to construct meaning and use criteria to evaluate effect. Finally, students will use their knowledge to understand the importance and function of a thesis statement as well as recognize the ways in which thesis statements differ based on the author's intended purpose.

*Lessons designed and written by Kelly Riley for LitTunes*

*A small amount of content has been added and some has been revised to suit the lesson needs for the Common Core Standards.*



## *The Socratic Circle*

### **What does Socratic mean?**

The word “Socratic” comes from the name Socrates (ca. 470-399 B.C.), a Classical Greek philosopher who developed a Theory of Knowledge.

### **What was Socrates' Theory of Knowledge?**

Socrates believed that the answers to all human questions and problems reside within us. Unfortunately, as human beings we are often unaware of the answers and solutions we possess. Socrates was convinced that the surest way to discover those answers and attain reliable knowledge was through the practice of disciplined conversation. He called this method the dialectic.

### **What does dialectic mean?**

Dialectic is the art or practice of examining opinions or ideas logically, often by the method of question and answer, so as to determine their validity.

### **How did Socrates use the dialectic?**

Socrates believed that through the process of dialogue, where all parties to the conversation were forced to clarify their ideas, the final outcome of the conversation would be a clear statement of what was meant. The technique appears simple but it is intensely rigorous. Socrates would feign ignorance about a subject and try to draw out from the other person his fullest possible knowledge about it. Socrates’ assumption was that by progressively correcting incomplete or inaccurate notions through discussion, one could coax the truth out of anyone.

### **What is a Socratic circle?**

A Socratic circle (also called Socratic seminar) is a process to try to understand information by creating the dialectic in class in regards to a specific text. In a Socratic circle, participants seek deeper understanding of complex ideas in the text through thoughtful dialogue, rather than by memorizing bits of information. A Socratic Circle is not debate. The goal of this activity is to have participants work together to construct

meaning and arrive at an answer, not for one student or one group to “win the argument.”

### **How does a Socratic Circle work?**

The ritualistic structure of a Socratic Circle is one that appears complex to participants at first, but ultimately that structure is what provides the students’ growth and ownership of the conversation. The basic procedure for a Socratic Circle is as follows:

1. On the day before a Socratic Circle is scheduled, the teacher hands out a short passage of text.
2. That night at home, students spend time reading, analyzing, and taking notes over the section of text.
3. At the beginning of class the next day, students are randomly divided into two concentric circles: an inner circle and an outer circle.
4. Students in the inner circle read the passage aloud and then engage in a discussion of the text for approximately ten minutes, while the outer circle observes the human behavior and performance of the inner circle.
5. Following this discussion of the text, the outer circle then assesses the inner circle’s performance and offers ten minutes of feedback for the inner circle.
6. Students in the inner and outer circle now exchange roles and positions within the classroom.
7. The new inner circle (the students who began in the outer circle) holds a ten-minute discussion and then receives ten minutes of feedback from the new outer circle.

Of course there are many variations to the time limits of each aspect of Socratic Circle, but maintaining the discussion-feedback-discussion-feedback pattern is essential.

## The Text:

Socratic Circle texts are chosen for their richness in ideas, issues, and values and their ability to stimulate extended, thoughtful dialogue. A text can be drawn from readings in literature, history, science, math, health, and philosophy or from works of art or music. A good text raises important questions in the participants' minds, questions for which there are no right or wrong answers. At the end of a successful Socratic Circle, participants often leave with more questions than they brought with them. (This is a good thing!)

## The Opening Question:

A Socratic Circle opens with a question either posed by the leader or solicited from participants. An opening question has no right answer; instead it reflects a genuine curiosity on the part of the questioner. A good opening question leads participants back to the text as they speculate, evaluate, define, and clarify the issues involved. Responses to the opening question generate new questions from the leader and participants, leading to new responses. In this way, the line of inquiry in a Socratic Circle evolves on the spot rather than being pre-determined by the leader.

## The Teacher:

The teacher's role in this process is four-fold: 1) to select the text for discussion, 2) to keep the discussion of the inner circle focused and moving, 3) to direct the feedback offered by the outer circle, and 4) to assess the individual student and the group's performance.

**First**, selecting a quality piece of text is crucial to the success of a Circle. The text should be insightful, thought provoking, and relevant to the lives of students.

**Second**, teachers should strive to interrupt the discussion of the inner circle as infrequently as possible. The teacher's job is to act as a facilitator or coach for the discussion, not as the discussion's leader. For example, if the discussion begins to drift off-topic the teacher might pose a question to the group to help refocus and stimulate additional conversation. Or if the comments of one student need to be clarified or repeated for the group's understanding, the teacher should assist in that endeavor.



**Third**, teachers should guide the discussion of the outer circle as they provide feedback and constructive criticism for the inner circle. One of the most successful ways to accomplish this process is to simply go around the circle and ask for initial observations. Once each student has offered an observation, the teacher can highlight particular points made and ask the group to brainstorm/predict solutions to any obstacle or problems noted following the cycle of reflective learning.

**Fourth**, the teacher should assess each individual student and the group's performance as a whole in some manner, whether formally or informally. The teacher may use a rubric and/or take on the task of scorekeeper or mapmaker (see below) but should also offer students verbal feedback at the conclusion of the discussion.

### **The Leader:**

Sometimes the leader is the teacher, oftentimes it is not. In a Socratic Circle, the leader plays a dual role as leader and participant. The leader consciously demonstrates habits of mind that lead to a thoughtful exploration of the ideas in the text by keeping the discussion focused on the text, asking follow-up questions, helping participants clarify their positions when arguments become confused, and involving reluctant participants while restraining their more vocal peers.

As a participant, the leader actively engages in the group's exploration of the text. To do this effectively, the leader must know the text well enough to anticipate varied interpretations and recognize important possibilities in each. The leader must also be patient enough to allow participants' understandings to evolve and be willing to help participants explore non-traditional insights and unexpected interpretations.

Assuming this dual role of leader and participant is easier if the opening question is one that truly interests the leader as well as the participants. Oftentimes, the role of the leader will move between participants within a group quite frequently and naturally.

### **The Participants:**

In a Socratic Circle, participants carry the burden of responsibility for the quality of the seminar. Good seminars occur when participants study the text closely in advance, listen actively, share their ideas and questions in response to the ideas and questions of

others, and search for evidence in the text to support their ideas. Eventually, when participants realize that the leader is not looking for right answers but is encouraging them to think out loud and to exchange ideas openly, they discover the excitement of exploring important issues through shared inquiry. This excitement creates willing participants, eager to examine ideas in a rigorous, thoughtful manner.

## 10 Suggestions for Participants in a Socratic Circle

1. Refer to the text when needed during the discussion. This is not a test of memory. You are not "learning a subject"; your goal is to understand the ideas, issues, and values reflected in the text.
2. Do not participate if you are not prepared. This should not be a bull session.
3. Do not stay confused; ask for clarification.
4. Stick to the point currently under discussion; make notes about ideas you want to return to.
5. Don't raise hands; take turns speaking.
6. Listen carefully.
7. Speak up so that all can hear you.
8. Talk to each other, not just to the leader or teacher.
9. Discuss ideas rather than each other's opinions.
10. You are responsible for the seminar, even if you don't know it or admit it.






For more information on Socratic Circles, check out LitTunes Author Matt Copeland's book on the topic: *Socratic Circles: Fostering Critical and Creative Thinking in the Middle and High School*.

**For the Student:****A Response to the Idea of a Socratic Circle**

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

For tomorrow you need to read and interact with the previous explanation of the Socratic Circle by marking your questions and reactions in the margin next to the text. Some people think of this as having a dialogue or conversation with the actual words on the page. It is extremely effective to use different colors to mark different ideas in order to organize your thoughts. Things you should consider doing include:

-  circling and then looking up any vocabulary words that you do not know
-  underlining key phrases
-  keeping track of the story or idea as it unfolds
-  noting word patterns, repetitions, or anything that strikes as confusing or important
-  writing down questions

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ CLASS HOUR \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

### Song Chorus — Independent Work

I. List the title and artist of your selected song below:

\_\_\_\_\_

*Title*

*Artist*

II. Write your song's chorus in the space below:

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III. Locate, print, and attach a copy of your song's lyrics to this packet. You will need to bring your completed packet plus a copy of your song's lyrics with you to class for small-group work. If you would like your group members to listen to your song, please bring a copy of your song in either CD or MP3 format.

IV. Respond to the questions listed below using complete sentences.

Context:

When was the song originally written, produced, or released?

Circle one

50s                  60s                  70s                  80s                  90s                  Early 2000s                  Present-day

2. What (if any) cultural issues, historical or current events are relevant to the song? Explain any significance.

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Audience:

3. What specific audience would you say the song is intended for?

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4. If you were asked to rewrite this song for a different audience, what would you have to change? Why?

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Genre:

5. What genre of music does your song represent? For example: rap, country, jazz, heavy metal, folk, pop, reggae, etc.

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6. List some of the conventions or typical characteristics of this genre (style of music). You might consider factors such as content or subject matter, tone, style, and language.

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7. How does your song conform to these conventions? Give at least one specific example.

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8. In what ways does your song break away from this musical genre's conventions? Give at least one specific example. Explain why you think the songwriter chose to break with genre conventions.

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9. In what ways (if any) do you think the song's genre influence the chorus?

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Stance:

10. What is the overall tone of the song? How do you know?

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11. What is the songwriter's attitude toward the subject matter? How do you know?

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12. What does the chorus reveal about the songwriter's/artist's perspective or stance in regard to the song's content or subject? Explain your answer.

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Purpose:

13. Examine your song's chorus in relation to each of the song's verses. Does the chorus have a similar relationship to each verse or does each verse add to or change the meaning of the chorus or does it offer a new perspective in regard to the chorus? In your response, be sure to provide at least one specific example.

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14. Write a short paragraph in which you respond to the following questions: How does the chorus function in the song? In other words, what is the purpose of the chorus? How does the chorus help listeners understand the song's overall meaning? Based on the chorus, what do you think the songwriter is trying to communicate to listeners with this song?

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