Clustering song lyrics

Activity

Tell the Story

Objective

Like all activities in the Tell the Story module, this activity supports students to bridge the gap between source material and the creative expression of a story.

This activity specifically explores **story structure and storytelling technique**; In this case, through the art of song writing and performance.

Activity summary

Number of sessions: The number of sessions is variable depending on the numbers of participants and their skill level. It is expected to take a minimum of 5 sessions, but could take as many as required, as the songs can be developed. The activity could stop once the lyrics have been written but could be used to develop the musical accompaniment.

Participants will do a "clustering" activity to develop the ideas they found through their initial Find the Story activity. From this, structure, theme, and plot are developed. Lyrical and (potentially) musical hooks are decided. Rehearsals take place and a performance is designed.
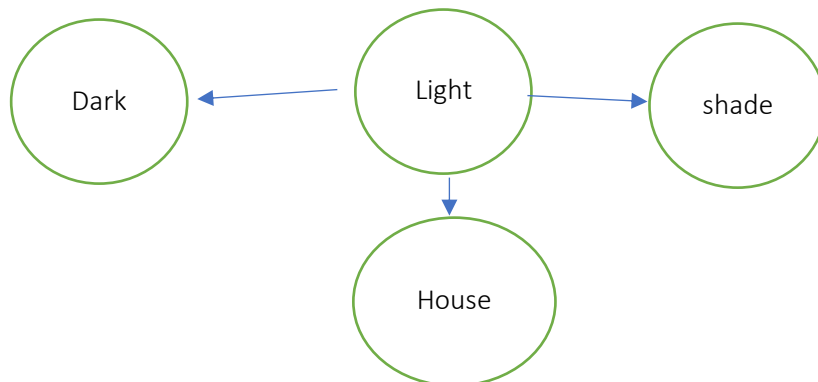
Pre-activity preparation

Resources

- Pen
- Paper
- Whiteboard and music playing facilities for demonstration purposes.
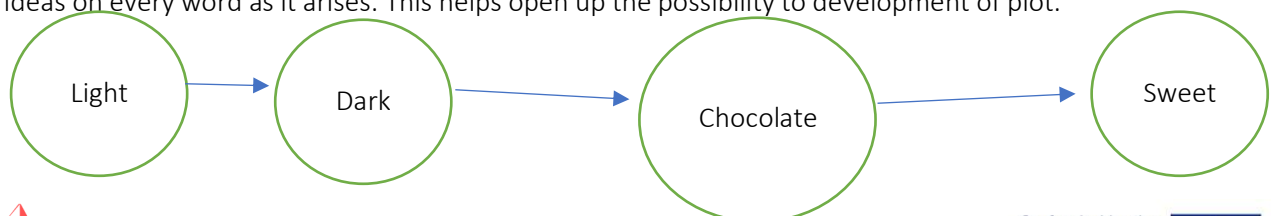
Deliverer preparation

Understand the difference between brainstorming and clustering.

Brainstorming encourages students to come up with words and ideas centred around one theme.

According to Sheila Davies (1988) clustering in songwriting requires the writer to come up with fresh ideas on every word as it arises. This helps open up the possibility to development of plot.

Student preparation

Students should have undertaken the Sense Bound "diving" activity in the previous module *Find the Story.*

Running the activity

Step 1 - clustering

Time: 120 minutes

The group select the object and the accompanying "dives" that best represent their understanding of the theme, in this case the statement 'We're Aw Jock Tamson's Bairns'. They work on pulling together the key themes, ideas and emotive words they have gathered in their dives. They sketch out a plot for their lyric using tools such as clustering (Davies, S.).

At this point they will analyse their resulting plot: what elements of an interesting and engaging lyric does it have, and what is missing?

Support	Extension
Students can consider: what are the main features of the plot of a good film?	Sharing songs that have lyrics that mean something to the students in the group can help gain a common approach to the plot development.
This can then be applied to the 'plot' of their song.	

Step 2 – presentation and group discussion

Time: 120 minutes (this may take more than one session depending on the numbers)

Within each group, the student whose object was chosen, (with support from the group) present their lyric theme and plot idea to the class as a whole. Participants will be encouraged to explore the meaning of any words or ideas through question and answer. The facilitator will note the results on the whiteboard. The meaning of any words in unfamiliar languages can be discussed at this point.

Each group is paired with another group (this can be done as a whole class if there is not an even number of groups). They will then peer review each other's lyric idea giving feed forward on how it fits with the overall theme of the concert on three specific areas:

- Is the viewpoint/voice of the character in the song effective?

- Is the plot development effective?

- What style/genre of music does this lyrical idea fit?

These are discussion points for the groups to take away and consider, not instructions and are not exhaustive. Facilitators can add their own questions for consideration.

All members of the group take written notes of the feedback session, and each create a short summary paragraph of their understanding of the feedback to be considered by the group as a whole.

Support	Extension
If you are struggling to agree, choose an existing song and plot that you feel already fits the overall theme as a template to work towards.	The main aim is for the group to have a universally understood idea for their song, a structure and a plot. Listening to a wide range of songs and researching effective song plots can be helpful. Listening to podcasts such as https://www.sodajerker.com/podcast can also help.

Step 3 – writing lyrics

Time: 120 minutes

Each group of participants creates a lyric based on the work in the previous step.

The project can stop at the lyric writing stage and the lyrics can be exhibited alongside the objects in an exhibition. The lyrics can be recited or acted at this point rather than set to music as songs.

Ideally, these lyrics will be developed into songs and this step can be approached in a variety of ways dependent on the skill level of the participants:

- In small group/ensembles with support.

- The group's lyric can be set to music by another participant/s or by the facilitator.

- Participants can be paired to work together based on their abilities.

This will result in a full performance of the songs.

Students will reflect on their work by creating back drops/ exhibition pieces or pre-concert talks to accompany the work at a performance or an exhibition, and (where appropriate) translate the description/lyrics to the languages of the peer group.

Success criteria

Things to look for to ensure this activity has been run successfully include:

- Participants have completed a lyric to an accepted song structure

- Participants have effectively worked together in the decision-making process

- Participants have learned about effective storytelling through song

- Participants have disseminated their work in an effective manner

- Participants have taken part in creative experimentation

Further prompts

Davies, S. (1988) Successful lyric writing. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books

Pattison, P. (2009) Writing better lyrics: the essential guide to powerful songwriting. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books

Pattison, P. (2011) Songwriting without boundaries. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books

https://www.sodajerker.com/podcast/