Soundtrack to Our Class: Reading, Writing, and Speaking about Music

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Abstract

This curriculum unit explores how we can use music to understand ourselves, regulate our emotions, and build community with one another. In the unit, upper elementary or middle school English Language Arts students use song lyrics to deepen their understanding of figurative language and theme. They also explore how to cite textual evidence to support their ideas and arguments in writing. Finally, students have the opportunity to engage in collaborative discussion about their ideas and interpretations. In addition, throughout the unit, students reflect on how they can use music for emotional regulation, identity development, and community-building.

Keywords: middle school, English Language Arts, reading, writing, figurative language, theme, community building, identity, social-emotional learning

Unit Content

Teaching Context

I currently work as a Learning Support teacher in a K-8 school in South Philadelphia. Our school is a wonderfully diverse community as its population is about 40% Asian, 20% Hispanic, 20% Black, and 20% White. 75% of students are low-income and 25% of students are English Language Learners.

As a learning support teacher, I co-teach seventh and eighth grade English Language Arts. We collaborate to plan engaging instruction that helps students master grade-level standards while also incorporating reading interventions for students with disabilities. Next year, I will transition to teaching 5th grade English Language Arts as a general education teacher.

Despite this change in my teaching assignment, there is a consistent goal in the middle school English Language Arts classrooms. During this period of time, students must move from literal comprehension to deeper textual analysis. When reading stories, dramas, and poems, they must not only be able to understand and summarize, they must also be able to analyze through discussion and writing the overarching themes and how the author develops those themes. Accordingly, middle school English Language Arts teachers must provide opportunities for extensive practice with this deeper thinking and analysis.

The academic journey toward analyzing complex texts happens within the complex social and emotional landscape of the middle school classroom. Adolescents are highly concerned with peer approval and acceptance, which can cause conflict and stress in the middle school classroom. Adolescents are also often exploring their identities and grappling with their place in the world. As a result, adolescence can feel like an emotional and social roller coaster that middle school teachers must navigate in order to reach their students.

Recent events have compounded adolescents' stress levels. The COVID 19 pandemic induced isolation and stress that was linked to poor mental health for teens (Temple et al., 2022). In addition, Philadelphia teens are exposed to alarming rates of gun

violence, with over 100 students that have been shot this school year alone (Ileto, 2023). Penn researchers have linked exposure to gun violence (defined as living within 2-3 blocks of an incident) with increased rates of mental-health related emergency room visits (Vasan et al., 2021). As my students have lost friends to gun violence this year, I have seen firsthand how it creates profound stress that they must navigate in order to learn.

Overall, when I considered the needs of my current and future students, there were four needs that guided my planning when I enrolled in the Music and Healing in Philadelphia seminar.

1. Academically, our students need opportunities to engage with high-interest texts that build their ability to comprehend complex literature. In particular, students need tools to read and understand poetry, which is often overlooked in the English Language Arts curriculum.

2. Academically, students also need opportunities to write about high-interest topics in order to practice the key skills of introducing arguments and using evidence to support those arguments.

3. Socially, our students need opportunities to build community with each other. When students feel embedded into a supportive classroom community, they are more motivated and able to learn.

4. Emotionally, our students need opportunities for social emotional learning that builds their capacity to cope with difficult situations. Whether it be the universal difficulties of adolescence or more severe trauma that is pervasive within our city, students should feel

empowered to manage their emotions and write their own narratives about challenges in their life.

Participating in the Music and Healing in Philadelphia Seminar

When I signed up for the Music and Healing in Philadelphia seminar, I had a topic in mind for my curriculum unit. I anticipated that I would learn about music history and issues in Philadelphia, which would inform a unit on personal essay writing that centered on a high-interest topic for my students - music. I would use music as engaging "bait" to get my students interested in improving the academic skill of essay writing.

I had not anticipated how much our discussions would center around students' emotional lives and how music can influence our moods and cognition. Our discussions about the interaction between music, emotions, and trauma prompted thinking about how I could incorporate opportunities for social emotional learning and community building into my unit.

During an early session, we discussed "The Emotional Life of the Brain" by Richard Davidson and Sharon Begley. The author discusses distinctions between emotional state (fleeting feelings), mood (persistent feelings), and emotional style (an individual's profile of how they respond emotionally consistently over time). I began wondering about how having students reflect on their emotional states, moods, and emotional styles could spark ideas for their writing.

During a subsequent session, we discussed the role of music in the classroom more generally. We discussed studies showing that listening to Mozart increases performance on

academic tasks and the concept that this derives from the pleasure of listening to music rather than anything inherent about Mozart or classical music. While there is some debate about music's impact on student's performance on tests, research suggests that playing background music has positive impacts on the classroom environment as it induces a sense of calm and focus (Chalmers et al., 1999). As a result of this discussion, I began considering how I could use music not only for purely academic tasks, but also to set a tone for my classroom. After hearing from other seminar participants about the positive impacts of background music, I began playing the Lo-Fi Hip Hop YouTube channel while my class was working independently. Before putting it on, I would ask students if they wanted background music and they would overwhelmingly respond that it helped them. These events opened my eyes to how to not only use music as part of my TIP unit, but as part of my efforts to create a positive overall classroom environment.

We also discussed how music may have evolved as a tool of social cohesion. In the TIP seminar, we discussed how as social groups got bigger, they needed a way to come together en masse and song and dance may have helped them to accomplish this. After this discussion, I dove into independent research on the evolutionary origins of music, which led me to a series of essays on the universal human drive to make and hear music by psychologist Josh McDermott. He writes, "We think we understand why we are driven to eat, drink, have sex, talk and so forth, based on the uncontroversial adaptive functions of these urges. The drive to engage in music, a compulsion that is arguably just as pervasive in our species, has no such ready explanation…Some (including Darwin) have proposed that music is the product of sexual selection. Alternative hypotheses include that music

promoted social cohesion in group activities such as war or religion, that music was an evolutionary antecedent to language, or that its evolution was driven by the pacifying effect it has on infants," (McDermott, 2008, p. 287).

Empirical research has also explored how music impacts social cohesion within families and peer groups. According to a study by Boer and Abubakar (2014), "across four cultures, music listening in families and peer groups contributes to family and peer cohesion, respectively., our study revealed that musical family rituals affect emotional well-being particularly in more traditional/collectivistic contexts," (p. 10). These findings further encouraged me to explore how to use music as a tool for social cohesion and community-building in my classroom. I set out to write a curriculum unit that capitalized on music's capacity for community-building in order to build relationships, particularly at the beginning of the school year.

During the next session, we delved into individual and community-level trauma. One tool for understanding individual trauma is the concept of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). According to the Philadelphia Urban ACE Survey (2013), "In Philadelphia, 69.9% of the population experienced at least one ACE when looking only at indicators from the original Kaiser study…The prevalence of ACEs in Philadelphia suggests urban communities with disadvantaged populations are at high risk for ACEs and suggests these populations warrant targeted interventions to reduce the impact of ACEs and to prevent ACEs," (p. 24).

Our class discussion echoed the findings of this study as we shared how many of our students have experienced ACEs and how structural factors such as large class sizes,

access to mental health services, and transient student populations hinder us from reducing the impact of those ACEs on students' education. One source for solutions was the documentary, "Resilience: The Biology of Stress and the Science of Hope," which describes how interventions such as parent education, therapy for children, nutrition, exercise, meditation, and sleep can mitigate the long-term impact of toxic stress and build resilience. These resources further developed my thinking about my curriculum unit by emphasizing the importance of addressing students' social-emotional needs in a music-focused unit.

Subsequent readings and discussions about trauma, emotions, and music provided ideas on how to accomplish that. Dr. Muller brought a tool to the class called the Coping Skills for Trauma Deck, a deck of cards with 54 exercises for building coping skills to handle PTSD and chronic stress. Many of the cards included questions and prompts that help children to tell positive stories about their own lives and selves, such as "If you could have a mentor (real or imaginary), who would you pick? What do they see in you? How might they encourage you to be yourself? What message do they have for you?" Reading through these exercises made me consider how I could build opportunities for self-reflection that allows students to build resilience into my unit, particularly in to the writing portion of the unit.

Another resource that Dr. Muller brought to the class was the book, "Belonging: A Culture of Place," by bell hooks (2019). In it, hooks explores her own experiences traveling to and from her origins in Kentucky to explore the concepts of home and belonging. She references, "the importance of creating a 'community of care' so that our relationships with

one another can be "governed by conviviality rather than suspicion, by praise rather than blame," (p. 228). This reading further encouraged me to think about how to create a classroom that could serve as a "community of care" that could help students to learn despite difficult situations in their lives.

As we spent several weeks discussing trauma and ways to build resilience, our class discussed our roles as educators amidst the high levels of trauma that our students experience. We discussed how while we are not school counselors or psychologists who fully address our students' trauma and emotional lives, we must teach in a trauma-informed way in order to be responsive to the students in front of us. This consists of creating an emotionally safe classroom environment that will allow students to learn to their full potential, as students cannot learn when they feel threatened. It also includes making space for students to share their difficulties while also not being exploitative or overly invasive into students' lives. These conversations made me consider how I could create a unit that invites students to share their experiences and build a safe classroom community while also not demanding that they share things they are not comfortable sharing.

Towards the end of the seminar, we delved into hip hop specifically and its capacity for healing. In a book titled The Healing Power of Hip Hop, Raphael Travis (2015) writes about how hip-hop can make learning accessible for students. He writes, "Expanding accessibility also includes allowing out-of-class knowledge inside the classroom, and even privileging culturally relevant experiences and knowledge that is often inhibited within traditional educational spaces. The dynamics of teacher-student interactions becomes especially important, as does how the educational climate is framed and transformed over

time. Breaking down these barriers, welcoming individuals in their entirety, and respecting their intelligences creates full participants in learning," (p. 157). Travis's writing made me consider how I could use students sharing their own music to break down barriers between our classroom and their lives. By selecting songs for my unit that are culturally relevant and by inviting students to also bring in their own songs, I could create an educational space that is fully welcoming and inclusive.

The readings and discussions of the Music and Healing in Philadelphia seminar provoked my thinking and developed my understanding of how I could use music in my classroom. The seminar led me to several key objectives for my unit.

Content Objectives Related to the Music and Healing Seminar

One key theme that we discussed throughout the seminar was music's capacity to help people with emotional regulation and healing. Not only does enjoying music together foster a calmer classroom environment and corresponding higher achievement, but students' personal music listening can be used as a tool for regulating their own emotions. In this way, music can build students' resilience for dealing with difficult emotions and situations.

Another key theme that emerged was how music can be tied to one's sense of self and identity development. As the adolescents in my classroom explore their identities, encouraging them to find songs that reflect their lives and personalities could be a way to encourage positive identity development.

Finally, our seminar highlighted the importance of creating "communities of care" in the classroom. By sharing, enjoying, and discussing music together, we can create a caring classroom community that fosters' students learning.

These recurring themes led me to the following objectives for my unit related to the Music and Healing in Philadelphia seminar:

1. Students will be able to use music as a tool for emotional regulation and healing.

2. Students will be able to use music as a tool for identity exploration and development.

3. Our class will be able to enjoy music together and exchange music with each other in order to build a community of care.

Content Objectives Related to Grade 5 English Language Arts Standards

As the Music and Healing in Philadelphia seminar provided me with key objectives related to social-emotional learning, identity development, and community-building, I reflected on how I could interweave these objectives with academic objectives in the fifth-grade curriculum.

One avenue was to take song lyrics as texts that can serve as foundations for literary analysis. Through analyzing song lyrics, we could delve into the concepts of figurative language and theme in poetry. These are key skills for fifth graders who are expected to move from literal comprehension to inferencing and analysis as they move into middle school. As a result, I decided to adopt the following objectives related to the fifth-grade standards for reading literature:

1. Students will be able to identify and interpret figurative language in order to determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text.

2. Students will be able to adopt a strategy for determining the theme of a text.

Another way for students to engage academically with the content of the seminar is through writing. Since music is a high-interest topic for students, it provides an opportunity for reflection and argumentation through writing. One key skill for middle school students is crafting clear, coherent arguments and supporting them with evidence. In this unit, I decided to adopt the following objectives related to fifth-grade standards for writing:

1. Students will be able to write arguments and support them with text evidence.

2. Students will be able to edit and revise their writing to prepare it to share with others.

Finally, throughout the unit, students will be discussing their ideas about the music we experience together. The unit includes the following objective related to fifth grade standards for speaking and listening:

1. Students will be able to prepare for a presentation or class discussion, use arguments and supporting details to present their ideas, and follow norms and rules for conducting a class discussion.

Teaching Strategies

In this unit, I will use a variety of teaching strategies in order to accomplish the objectives related to the TIP seminar and the objectives related to fifth-grade standards for reading, writing, and speaking and listening.

Deep Listening to Emphasize Enjoyment

One key tenet of successfully teaching poetry is to emphasize enjoyment and encourage students to develop personal relationships to the poems they study (Lockward, 1994). Introducing students to poetry through studying music and lyrics poses an opportunity to provide students with this experience.

For this unit, students will first experience each "poem" (song lyrics) by listening to the song without looking at the paper copy of the lyrics. After listening, we will discuss questions (What do you notice about the song? How does it make you feel? Which instruments do you hear? What do you notice about the tone or tempo? What does it make you think of? Does it remind you of any people or events in your own life?) By doing this "first listen" and discussion, students will have the opportunity to listen for enjoyment and build a relationship to the poem before they dive into literary analysis, which can improve their confidence with poetry reading and analysis.

Repeated Readings/Listening

Another key component of this unit is the opportunity for repeated readings or listening of song lyrics/poetry. Repeated readings are a powerful tool for improving reading fluency and comprehension, particularly for students with learning disabilities. When students have opportunities to read texts aloud multiple times with corrective feedback, they improve their ability to recognize words, read with automaticity, and therefore understand the words that they read (Therrien, 2004).

After listening to a song for the first time, I will provide students with the printed lyrics and we will conduct two reads as a class. After that, students will read the lyrics to a partner, taking turns for each stanza. These repeated readings will aid students' reading fluency, a key part of building their reading comprehension.

Strategy Instruction for Interpreting Figurative Language During the First Read

Another key component of this unit is explicitly teaching different types of figurative language to analyze song lyrics/poetry. As students progress from elementary to middle school, they begin to encounter increasingly complex texts with more figurative language and imagery. This curriculum unit equips them with a cognitive strategy for interpreting non-literal statements.

First, students will create a Figurative Language toolkit that introduces them to the types of figurative language and how and why an author may use them. Then, while reading poetry together, I will introduce a cognitive strategy for interpreting figurative language. First, I will draw their attention to the vivid language within the song. Then, I will model via think-aloud how to determine whether the language is figurative or literal. Finally, we will discuss what the author meant by the figurative language, referring to the Figurative Language toolkit to scaffold our thinking. This type of research-based instruction is important for building students' capacity for understanding complex texts (Palmer and Brooks, 2004).

"Get the Gist" - Paraphrasing to Comprehend Poetry During the Second Read

During the second whole-class read of the text, we will focus on summarizing stanzas in order to gain literal comprehension of the song lyrics. One strategy is to "get the gist," a component of the research-based Collaborative Strategic Reading framework (Klingner and Vaughn, 1998). For this strategy, I will model how to use three questions or prompts to "get the gist" (Is this section mostly about a person, place, thing, or idea? What is it saying about that person, place, thing, or idea? State it in 10 words or fewer). Students will also practice "getting the gist" collaborative and independently. If students are able to summarize each stanza, they will be able to conduct deeper analysis, such as determining the theme.

Strategy Instruction for Determining Theme

This unit also includes direct instruction on the concept of themes in poetry and literature. Upper elementary and middle school teachers must find ways to push students from basic, literal comprehension to abstract thinking about the universal themes in literature, as determining the theme of a text is a key skill across upper grade levels in the Common Core Standards for ELA.

Previous research indicates that direct, structured instruction on understanding the concept of theme and using strategies to identify themes can successfully build students' generalized ability to determine themes (Williams et al., 2002). My curriculum unit opens with direct instruction on the concept of theme and how to differentiate it from the main idea of a text.

After conducting multiple readings of each set of song lyrics, we will use a strategy that equips students with a set of questions they can use to determine themes (What are the "big ideas" in the text? What is the author's message about those "big ideas"? Write a universal statement about those big ideas). I included these elements so that students can generalize the skill of determining themes to other texts and types of literature.

Using Graphic Organizer and Sentence Starters for Writing Instruction

In the second part of the unit, students will have opportunities to write about music that is important to them. For this part of the unit, we will use graphic organizers and sentence starters as a scaffold to help students master writing evidence-based paragraphs. I will model how to use the graphic organizer will a sample paragraph before students are asked to use it to write their own evidence-based paragraph.

The graphic organizer will prompt students to ACE (Answer the question, Cite evidence from the song, and Explain how the evidence supports their argument). It will also include sentence starters to help them get started with each of these components (One lyric in this song is, "…", these lyrics relate to me because…). These scaffolds will help to break down the complex task of writing an evidence-based paragraphs into manageable chunks so that students can do so successfully.

Selecting Songs for the Unit

One pedagogical decision that we discussed frequently during the TIP seminar is which songs and music to highlight during our units. For this unit, I sought out songs that

were culturally relevant to my students by highlighting different types of music that they were likely to have heard at home (hip hop, pop, rock) and by including several Philadelphia-specific artists. I also sought out songs that had a positive or uplifting message that could serve as a strong basis for building a classroom community where people care for each other and where difficulties are anticipated and even celebrated. In order to ensure that the songs could be used as a basis for literary analysis, I searched for songs that had a coherent theme and rich figurative language. Finally, I found songs that I have personally enjoyed and felt I could model how to use them as a tool for self-regulation. (Stibbs, 1981)

While the Classroom Activities section includes detailed instructions for the songs I chose to use, any teacher could adapt this unit to fit their own classroom by selecting songs that are culturally relevant, have a coherent, positive theme, have rich figurative language, and that the teacher personally enjoys so that they can model how to use music for self-regulation.

Provide Opportunities to Practice Speaking and Listening Skills

Throughout the unit, students will have opportunities to discuss their ideas and opinions. While we read and listen to the songs, students will discuss their interpretations of the songs, their figurative language, and their themes. We will use different discussion structures, such as a This or That game (students move to one side of the room that represents their opinion and defend their opinion), Think-Pair-Share (students think about a question independently, with a partner, and then share with the class), and whole-class discussion circles. At the end of the unit, students will have opportunities to present their

writing about songs that are important to them. Through these activities, students will be able to improve their speaking and listening skills in addition to their reading and writing skills.

Classroom Activities

Materials Needed: Projector/smartboard, printed song lyrics of selected songs, Chromebooks

Timeline for Completion: Approximately 2-3 weeks

Essential Questions:
1. How do songwriters and poets use poetic devices and figurative language to convey themes?
2. How can we analyze song lyrics to determine universal themes?
3. How can we use evidence to support our ideas in writing?
4. How can we have productive discussions in order to analyze literature and build community?

Common Core Standards: See Appendix A.

Evaluative Tool: See Lessons 3 and 4.

Lesson 1: Understanding Theme
Objective: Students will be able to differentiate between theme and main idea in literature in order to determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text.
CCSS Standard: RL.5.2
Instructional Activities: 1. Direct Instruction on Theme vs. Main Idea (See the anchor chart in Appendix B or guidance). Introduce students to the concept of a theme statement vs. the main idea statement and the key differences between the two. 2. Theme or Main Idea Game. Present students with a series of statements and have them move to one side of the room if they think it's a theme statement and the

other side of the room if they think it's a main idea statement. Have students discuss and defend their responses. (See Appendix C for statements).

3. Practice determining theme with Pixar Shorts. Watch the Pixar Short "Purl" as a class and follow the prompts for determining theme, using Think-Pair-Share to discuss each question (See Appendix D for example). Next, watch the Pixar Short "For the Birds" and have students determine the theme independently.

Exit Ticket/Demonstration of Learning: By the end of the lesson, students should be able to independently determine the theme of "For the Birds."

Lesson 2: Understanding Figurative Language

Objective: Students will be able to define and identify types of figurative language and poetic devices in order to determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text.

CCSS Standard: RL.5.4

Instructional Activities:
1. Direct Instruction on examples of figurative language and poetic devices to create a Poetry Analysis Toolkit. (See Appendix E).
2. Figurative Language Kahoot. Students will do Kahoot games to practice identifying different types of figurative language. (See Appendix F.)

Exit Ticket/Demonstration of Learning: By the end of the lesson, students should be able to correctly answer Kahoot questions in order to demonstrate emerging understanding of figurative language and poetic devices.

Lesson 3: Analyzing Songs to Determine Theme

Note: This lesson may take place over several class periods.
Objective: Students will be able to use an annotation strategy in order to determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text and determine a theme of a poem from details in the text.

CCSS Standard: RL.5.2, RL.5.4

Instructional Activities:

1. Conduct a "first listen" of the first selected song before you distribute the lyrics. Have students discuss in pairs what they noticed about the tempo, the sound, how it made them feel, what it reminded them of. Discuss how these feelings and impressions may inform the theme of the song.

2. Introduce the poetry annotation strategy (See Appendix G example). On the first read, students find examples of figurative language and poetic devices and make notes about their meaning. On the second read, students "get the gist" of each stanza (Is it about a person, place, or thing? What is being said about the person, place, or thing? Restate in 10 words or fewer).

3. Model how to use the poetry annotation strategy on Song #1. Use think-alouds and class discussion to "get the gist" and interpret figurative language.

4. Model how to use the cognitive strategy for determining the theme. First, identify "big ideas" from the song (friendship, fairness, etc.). Then, identify what the author is saying about those big ideas. Finally, shape that idea into a universal statement (See Appendix H for example).

5. Repeat the process of annotating and determining the theme for additional songs, increasing students' levels of independence. Provide opportunities for students to work independently or in groups to annotate and determine the theme before discussing it as a class. I will use Umbrella by Rihanna, Pain by De La Soul, Ain't No Stopping Us Now by McFadden and Whitehead, and Welcome to My Life by Simple Plan, but teachers may adjust based on their class and their personal music listening.

Evaluative Tool: After repeating the process for annotating lyrics and determining the theme as a class, students should be able to do so independently with a final song.

Lesson 4: Writing about Music
Objective: Students will be able to adopt a structure for writing an evidence-based paragraph in order to support their point of view with text evidence.
CCSS Standard: W.5.1, W.5.9
Writing Prompts: 1. Model how to write an evidence-based paragraph using the Argue, Cite, Explain, Cite, Explain structure, using the graphic organizer (see Appendix I). 2. Have students choose a writing prompt (see Appendix J for options). Provide time for them to choose a writing prompt and brainstorm about potential songs. 3. Students work independently on their evidence-based paragraphs, using the graphic organizer as a scaffold. 4. Have students use the evidence-based paragraph checklist (see Appendix L) to edit and revise their writing.
Evaluative Tool: By the end of this lesson, students should be able to product a high-quality evidence-based paragraph that argues their position, cites evidence from a song to support their argument, and explains how the evidence supports their argument.

Extension Activities for Community Building
Objective: Students will be able to engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions.
Standard: SL.5.1
Potential Extension Activities

1. Use the songs that students chose to represent our class and school year to create a class playlist. Use this during independent work time, transition time, etc.

2. During the morning meeting, play the song of a "mystery student" (a song that they chose to write about). Have students guess the mystery student. Provide opportunities for students to explain their relationship to the song.

3. Allow students opportunities to present their songs and accompanying paragraphs. This could be in pairs or as a whole-class presentation.

4. Have students ask their families about the songs on the soundtrack to their lives. Allow students to share the songs that their families/parents named and how they related to their lives.

Resources

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Annotated Bibliography

1. Youtube Playlist of Short Films

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLOFBEeu0AJr3DDouLXdkGOTbqB9u9CQLP

Teachers can use this playlist to film short films that allow students to practice how to determine a universal theme of a story.

2. YouTube Playlist of Songs

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLOFBEeu0AJr1eX-XU6Prs_RJ4f9fpmBY6

Teachers can use this playlist to find songs that are culturally relevant, have an uplifting message, and have rich language that students can use for literary analysis.

3. CommonLit Resources on Determining Theme

https://www.commonlit.org/

The strategy for determining theme for the unit is adapted from Common Lit's model for determining theme. The Common Lit website has many texts and resources that teachers can use for additional work with determining theme in literature.

4. Degges-White, S., LMHC-IN, L. N., & Colon, B. R. (Eds.). (2014). Expressive arts interventions for school counselors. Springer Publishing Company.

This book presents many ideas for activities that teachers can use to integrate music into social-emotional learning.

5. Kahoot Games

https://kahoot.com/

This website provides free games that teachers can use to practice identifying figurative language and determining them

Appendix

Appendix A. Grade 5 Common Core State Standards Addressed in this Unit

Reading Literature Standards

RL.5.1. Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

RL.5.2. Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

RL.5.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

Writing Standards

W.5.1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

- Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which ideas are logically grouped to support the writer's purpose.
- Provide logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and details.
- Link opinion and reasons using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., consequently, specifically).
- Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.

W.5.9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Speaking and Listening Standards

SL.5.1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

- Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.
- Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles.
- Pose and respond to specific questions by making comments that contribute to the discussion and elaborate on the remarks of others.
- Review the key ideas expressed and draw conclusions in light of information and knowledge gained from the discussions.

Appendix B. Resources for Direct Instruction on Theme vs. Main Idea

Example Anchor Chart for Theme vs. Main Idea

Theme = **TheMe**ssage about life	Main Idea = the "gist" of the text!
1. Think about the big ideas of the text (honesty, friendship, greed, etc.). 2. Think about the message the author is sending about those big ideas (look at character change or lessons learned from clues!) 3. Write a universal statement about that message, leaving out specific character names or details from the text. Example Theme Statement: • In Finding Nemo, one theme is that perseverance and hard work will help you to reach your goals. • Another theme is that you must often accept help from your friends in order to succeed.	• The who, what, when, where, and why of the text. • Includes the key characters and events of the text. Example Main Idea Statement: • In Finding Nemo, a young fish named Nemo gets lost and his father, Marlin, overcomes many obstacles in order to find his son while making friends along the way.

Appendix C. Theme Vs. Main Idea Game Example Statements

No matter what happens, you can count on your family.

Little Red Riding Hood gets herself in danger by getting lost on her way to her grandmother's house and revealing too much information to a wolf.

Harry Potter learns that he is a wizard, attends his first year of school at Hogwarts, and ends up battling Voldemort with his best friends Ron and Hermione.

Being popular can mean sacrificing your true friends an identity.

Joel Embiid was named MVP of the 2023 NBA season, beating out Nikola Jokic and Giannis Antetokounmpo.

Sometimes you need to take risks in order to become independent.

Appendix D. Practicing Determining Theme with Pixar Shorts

Determining Theme with Pixar Shorts

1. Which BIG IDEAS is the movie addressing?

Fitting in	*Bullying*	*Loneliness*	*Bravery*

2. What are the movie creators saying about those big ideas?

They are saying that Purl was tempted to change herself to fit in, but in the end she was brave and started to be herself.

3.Turn the message into a universal statement about the big ideas.

Instead of changing yourself to fit in, it is important to be brave and true to yourself.

Appendix E. Poetry Analysis Toolkit

Device	Definition	Example	Why would a poet use this device?
Rhyme			
Repetition			
Imagery			
Simile			
Metaphor			
Personification			
Alliteration			
Hyperbole			

Appendix F. Figurative Language Kahoot Games

Follow this link to a series of games that teachers can use to have students practice identifying figurative language in an engaging way.

Appendix G. Example Annotated Song

Umbrella by Rihanna

First Read (figurative language)		Second Read (get the gist)
AABBCC rhyme scheme creates positive tone *Imagery – in the dark*	You have my heart And we'll never be worlds apart Maybe in magazines But you'll still be my star Baby, 'cause in the dark You can't see shiny cars And that's when you need me there With you I'll always share	She loves her friend and will always be there for her during dark times.
Imagery – sun shines *Metaphor – raining* *Repetition – emphasizes that she will be there*	Because When the sun shines, we'll shine together Told you I'll be here forever Said I'll always be your friend Took an oath, I'ma stick it out to the end Now that it's raining more than ever Know that we'll still have each other You can stand under my umbrella You can stand under my umbrella, ella, ella, eh, eh, eh Under my umbrella, ella, ella, eh, eh, eh	They will thrive together and always be friends.
Metaphor – war *Idiom – dealt its cards*	These fancy things will never come in between You're part of my entity, here for infinity When the war has took its part When the world has dealt its cards If the hand is hard Together we'll mend your heart	They will not let anything (war, fancy things) get in the way of their friendship.

Appendix H. Determining Theme of a Song

Determining Theme

1. Which BIG IDEAS is the author/speaker/poet addressing?

Friendship	Loyalty	Money	Hardship

2. What is the author/speaker/poet saying about those big ideas?

> She is saying that she will stay loyal to her friend through hard times and that her friend is more important to her than money or nice things.

3. Turn the author's message into a universal statement about the big ideas.

> True friendship is staying loyal to each other through difficult times.

Appendix I. Evidence-Based Paragraph Graphic Organizer

PARAGRAPH GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

R/A **Restate** *Use keywords from the prompt in your answer/argument* **Argument** *What are you trying to prove or show in this paragraph?*	
C **Cite Evidence/Examples with CONTEXT** *What text evidence or examples are you using to support your answer/argument?* In the song, _____ sings, "..."	
E **Explain evidence/examples** *How does the above evidence/example support your answer/argument?* This shows that...	
C **Cite more evidence/examples** *What additional text evidence or example are you using to support your answer/ argument?* In the song, _____ sings, "..."	
E **Explain evidence/examples** *How does the above evidence/example support your answer/argument?* This shows that...	

Appendix J. Writing Prompt Options

1.   Think of a song that relates to your life experience (your family, your personality, a specific event). Write a paragraph analyzing how that song relates to your life experience. Use song lyrics as evidence to support your response.

2. Think of a song that can help you through difficult times in your life. Write a paragraph analyzing how that song can help you to be resilient. Use song lyrics as evidence to support your response.

3. Think of a song that you would like to represent our class and our school year. Write a paragraph analyzing how that song relates to our class and our year together. Use song lyrics as evidence.