

Remakes and Remixes

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Research popular remakes and remixes to determine which elements of the original were retained in the new version
- Analyze the elements of a hit song including the lyrics, beat, and rhythm
- Create an infographic to communicate their theories of what makes the song a hit and their plan for remaking it
- Remake a popular song for a different genre or to express a new feel, vision, or purpose

GRADE RANGE

3–8

DURATION

3 class periods of 45–60 minutes each

LESSON OVERVIEW

What do the famous songs "Hurt," "Pretty Woman," and "I Will Always Love You," have in common? They are all hits that were remade into popular songs of different genres. What can turn a rock ballad into a soulful country chart-topper? How can a solo love song be rearranged to showcase the talents of a quartet? In this activity, students will explore how music producers reimagine hit songs and remix them into something entirely new. Then they will work in groups to create their own song remake.

This activity ties into the Video Topic Series Anatomy of a Hit Song: The Music Producer, where Discovery Education meets up with guitarist and Country Music Producer Derek Wells. In this video, students will learn how music producers collaborate with musicians to help them bring their artistic visions to life. Creating a hit song involves more than just the artist's music and lyrics. Music producers build teams of sound engineers, musicians, and background singers to work creatively together to make beautiful music that conveys the tone and message the artist wants.

DRIVING QUESTION

How do music producers identify the elements of a hit song that make it popular and reshape them into something unique and new?

NATIONAL CONTENT STANDARDS

CCSS ELA-Literacy

- CCRA.R4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

- CCRA.R.5 Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g. a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

Music Technology

Creating

- MU:Cr1.1.T.1a Generate melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic ideas for compositions or improvisations using digital tools.
- MU:Cr2.1.T.1a Select melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic ideas to develop into a larger work using digital tools and resources.

KEY VOCABULARY

- Lyrics
- Chorus
- Verse
- Tone
- Theme
- Rhythm
- Beat
- Key
- Chord
- Arrangement

MATERIALS

- Laptop or device connected to the internet
- Chart paper and markers or access to a whiteboard or chalkboard
- Access to graphic editing or presentation software like Discovery Studio, Canva, Google Slides, Keynote, or PowerPoint
- Two copies per student of the SIFT Song Lyric Analysis Sheet or another poetry analysis strategy of your choice
- Copies of song lyrics from an original and a remake version (age appropriate)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

One of the most interesting phenomena of music is its ability to influence and impact other artists. A hit song can transcend a specific time and even genre and be remade over and over again to express different artist's visions. Sometimes called a "cover," musicians often pay homage to other artists in their own work by remaking a famous or particularly meaningful song in their own style. Some of the most beloved and famous Country Music hits are remakes or the inspiration for remakes. "Jolene" by Dolly Parton, "Life is a Highway" by Rascal Flatts, "Landslide" by The Chicks, and countless other chart toppers have served as inspiration for future artists or been covers themselves! Often these covers even cross musical genres, changing the rhythm, beat, tone, and general "feel" of the song.

Rhythm, lyrics, melody, theme, tone: a hit song is more than just the sum of its parts. It is the perfect balance of meaningful lyrics, soul-touching melodies, and an artistic vision. Likewise, creating a hit song requires more people than just a musician. Producing great music is a collaborative process. It involves bringing together a team of creative individuals, each with unique talents and skills. Sound engineers, writers, musicians, singers, and even accountants must work together to create a record that matches the artist's vision and ideal. The person who organizes, directs, and encourages all the players on this team is the music producer.

Derek Wells is a music producer and guitarist who has worked with many big names in Country Music and is credited on over 100 number 1 singles. In this VTS, he describes the music producer's role in the collaborative process. Listening to the artist and making their vision the priority are the most important aspects of being a music producer. The job of a music producer is to help the artist analyze what they want to say with their music and figure out how to convey that message through the poetry of the lyrics and the sound of the music.

The "feel" is the vision and the message that the artist is trying to convey through their music. Sometimes an artist focuses on simple melodies so that complex and powerful lyrics can be the star. Other times an artist might highlight a beat or rhythm to make a statement. In this activity, students will take on the role of music producer and analyze a hit song that has been remade to identify the artist's message and vision. Then they will find a hit song that they'd like to transform and go through the process of producing a remake.

TEACHER PREPARATION

Ensure students have a device connected to the internet.

Select a Country Music song that has been remade or was itself a remake.

Prepare to demonstrate how to analyze poetry for your students. You might use the SIFT method described in the Teacher Background. If so, make copies of the SIFT Song Lyric Analysis Sheet for your students.

SESSION FLOW

ENGAGE: VOTE WITH YOUR FEET

- Begin the session by engaging students and activating their prior knowledge by having them use the instructional strategy [Vote with Your Feet](#). This informal polling strategy encourages active learning.
- Play part of a famous Country Music song that is a cover or that was remade and have students vote on whether they think the song is the cover or the original. Examples of songs that they may not know are actually covers and their original artists are:
 - "Jolene"—originally by Dolly Parton, covered by "The White Stripes"
 - "You Were Always on my Mind"—originally by Elvis, covered by Willie Nelson
 - "I Will Always Love You"—originally by Dolly Parton, covered by Whitney Houston
 - "Landslide"—originally by Fleetwood Mac, covered by The Chicks
 - "Footloose"—originally by Kenny Loggins, covered by Blake Shelton
 - "Hit Me with Your Best Shot"—originally by Pat Benetar, covered by Martina McBride
 - "I Swear"—originally by John Michael Montgomery, covered by All-4-One

Teacher Note: *These questions could be asked as a whole-class or small-group discussion. Another option would be to pose these as journal questions to give students time to think on their own before discussing.*

- Direct students to vote with their feet on whether they think the music played is a cover or an original. They will make their choices known by moving to the side of the room labeled "Cover" or "Original."
- Have students discuss why they made their choice. Have they heard the song before? What is different about the two versions of the song? What makes them think the song is an original or a cover?
- Ask students to return to their seats for a whole-class discussion.
- Have representatives from each group explain their concept maps and try to persuade the other group.
- Reveal to the class whether the song was a cover or an original and play the alternate version for them.

EXPLORE

Guide students to explore the idea of song lyrics as a form of poetry and storytelling by having students identify the structural and figurative elements of a Country Music classic. Students will see how the lyrics and the music work together to convey the vision of the artist.

- Display or provide students with a copy of the lyrics to one Country Music song or cover.

Teacher Note: *Choose an age-appropriate cover or original song that your students are likely to relate to.*

- Discuss the relationship between song lyrics and poetry while encouraging students to think analytically about structure and language as they go through the activity.
- Guide students through analyzing and annotating the song lyrics using whichever poetry analysis strategy with which your students are familiar. You can also use the SIFT Song Lyrics Analysis capture sheet to guide them and give them a

place to write their observations. Alternatively, have students use highlighters and pens/pencils to label the elements of poetry they identify within the song and annotate their observations. Demonstrate how to identify the following:

- Structure, including the verses, chorus, and any bridges or refrains
 - Figurative language, like metaphors, similes, hyperbole, onomatopoeia, or personification
 - Particularly vivid phrases or words
 - Tone of the song, as indicated in the lyrics rather than the music
 - Theme, message, or plot of the song
- Play the audio of the song for the students. Guide them through examining the rhythm and beat of the song to identify the overall tone and theme of the music and how it relates to the lyrics.

INVESTIGATE

Facilitate students' investigation of the song's poetry and lyrics, rhythm, melody, and beat by having them study the alternate version of the song you analyzed during the "Explore" phase.

- Have students research the song they previously analyzed and find an alternate version (either a cover or the original).
- Instruct students to identify and label any changes that were made in the alternate version, using the SIFT poetry analysis sheet as a guide.
- Have students research the historical and social context of the song and its cover. Guide them to explore the following questions. They can record their findings using a note-taking method of their choosing or the Historical and Social Context capture sheet.
 - When was the song written and by whom?
 - Did social or historical issues guide the tone or theme of the lyrics?
 - Did the same historical or social issues influence the cover artist, or did the song's original message apply to new historical events?

Teacher Note: *Remind students to verify and cite their sources.*

Give students the opportunity to create an infographic to demonstrate their understanding of the elements of the original song and the differences in its cover.

- Introduce or review the basics of an infographic with your students. Emphasize that all good infographics:
 - Tell a story with words and images
 - Summarize main ideas
 - Present key details and facts in an organized and clear way
 - Reflect elements of good visual design, like readable fonts, contrasting and pleasing color combinations, and use of white space

- Direct students to create an infographic showing the key features of the song and cover that they identified on their SIFT Song Lyrics Analysis Sheet and *Historical and Social Context* capture sheet. Information they should consider includes:
 - Basic information about the original song and the cover: title, author, the year the song was originally written, the performer of the song, and the album on which the song was released, and the release dates
 - The structure of the song, including the number of verses, chorus, any bridges or refrains, etc.
 - The overall tone of the song and cover (as is evident in the lyrics, AND the music)
 - The theme or main message of the song
 - Any social, historical, or even musical influences on the song and cover
- **Digital Option:** Students can create their infographic digitally using a program like [Discovery Education Studio](#), Canva, PowerPoint, Google Slides, Keynote, or another digital tool.
- **Non-digital option:** Have students create a one-pager or poster of their infographic using the materials you have on hand.

CREATE

Give students the opportunity to flex their creative muscles and take on the role of music producer. Students will choose a famous Country Music song and produce a cover for it reflecting their own unique vision and style.

- Have students work in groups to select a Country Music song that has lyrics they can identify with or a beat that inspires them.
- Using the skills and tools from the Explore and Investigate phases of the lesson, facilitate the students' analysis of their chosen song. They may use the SIFT poetry analysis sheet and the Historical and Social Context capture sheet or any other note-taking strategy of their choosing.
- Have students work together to re-envision the song. They should identify what elements of the song they would like to keep and what elements they would like to change, and why. What message are they trying to convey? What tone or theme are they hoping to encompass?
- Using a music production software of their choice like GarageBand or Audible, have students record and produce their songs.

REFLECTION

Share student work by having students play their songs for the whole class or by posting the songs on a class website or wiki. Another option would be to have students link their songs to QR codes and display those around the room. Students could then explore their classmates' music through a gallery walk format.

Have students share what inspired them about the original music and how they paid homage to it in their covers. You might have students write an exit ticket, post comments on each other's songs if you posted them on a class website or write a journal to express their thoughts about the process.

SIFT Strategy

This strategy includes the basics that students should look for when examining a poem. It is ideal for poetry novices and has them identify and describe elements of poetry and language that are commonly found in Country Music lyrics.

- **Symbols**—Students should examine the title and text of the lyrics and look for symbolism. A symbol is an object that represents something more abstract, like a feeling. For example, roses often symbolize love, while lilies often remind people of death.
- **Images**—Students should identify particularly descriptive sensory details in the lyrics. These might include images that appeal to the reader’s or listener’s senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch. For example, a song might describe in great detail the clashing of thunder, the sound of rain falling on a tin roof, and the earthy, clean smell after a storm.
- **Figurative Language**—Students should identify and analyze figurative language in the lyrics, like:
 - **Similes**—a phrase that compares one thing with another very different thing in order to make something more dramatic or vivid. For example, “as brave as a lion,” or “sweet as pie.”
 - **Metaphors**—a phrase that regards one thing as another, symbolic thing. For example, in Elvis Presley’s famous song “Hound Dog,” he describes his ex as a hound dog that just won’t leave him alone, and in Kenny Rogers’ “The Gambler,” he describes life as a poker game.
 - **Personification**—attributing human characteristics to non-human objects or the representation of an abstract idea in human form. For example, a song might proclaim the sun as “smiling” down on the singer or describe death as a person (or in one case, a train!).
 - **Hyperbole**—an exaggerated statement that isn’t meant to be taken literally. For example, a songwriter might declare that they think about someone every second of every day.
 - **Onomatopoeia**—a word that is spelled like it sounds or is reminiscent of the sound. For example, sizzle, vroom, or pop.
- **Tone & Theme**—This one sneaks in two separate elements of poetry:
 - **Tone**—the general character or attitude of a work, similar to the tone of someone’s voice. Word choice, syntax, repetition, and figurative language all contribute to a poem’s overall tone.
 - **Theme**—a main subject or idea that exists throughout the entire poem or song. There is a joke that Country Music themes can be boiled down to love, friendship, and trucks! Rest assured, the Country Music students will be exploring some of the finest examples of modern poetry and songwriting. Whether subtle or obvious, students will encounter a wide range of themes that make these songs appeal across the generations.

Have students use the SIFT Song Lyric Analysis Sheet included or direct them to highlight and annotate their physical copies of the songs.

SIFT Song Lyrics Analysis

Country Music is known for its beautifully descriptive storytelling and evocative lyrics. As genre-smashing musical superstar Taylor Swift once said, "Poetry and lyrics are very similar. Making words bounce off a page." After all, what is a song but a poem set to music? Use this sheet to analyze Country Music song lyrics with the SIFT method. Then look for elements of the song's poetic structure and answer the questions below.

Song Title:

Songwriter:

Album:

Year:

Performer:

	Example and Location	Explanation
S—Symbols Objects that are used to represent abstract ideas		
I—Images Descriptive language that appeals to the senses		
F—Figurative Language Similes, metaphors, personification, onomatopoeia, and hyperbole		
T—Tone The general character and mood and Theme The main subject or message of the song		

Song Structure

How many verses are there?

How often does the chorus repeat?

Is there a bridge? How does the bridge bring a change in tone?

Are there any refrains? How often do they repeat, and how do they add to the tone and theme of the song?

Historical and Social Context

When was the song written and by whom?

What historical events occurred prior to the writing of the song that may have impacted the author?

Were there any social issues surrounding the writing of the song? If so, were they deliberately mentioned in the lyrics of the song?

Did social or historical issues guide the tone or theme of the lyrics?

How was the cover artist influenced by the original artist's musical style?

How did the cover artist relate to the original song lyrics? Were there any historical or social issues that had a particular impact on the cover artist's vision?