

Professional Development Plan: Teaching “Jimmie Rodgers: Waitin’ on a Train”

Session Length: 60 Minutes

Facilitator: Richelle Putnam, Mississippi Arts Commission Arts Integration Specialist

Grade Focus: 3rd–5th Grades

Format: In-person, interactive, hands-on with live guitar

1. Welcome and Introduction (5 minutes)

Objective: Set the tone, establish purpose, and connect participants to the lesson.

- **Greeting & Overview:**

Richelle welcomes attendees, introduces herself as a Teaching Artist and MAC Arts Integration Specialist, and gives a brief overview of the workshop focus—integrating music, history, and English Language Arts through Jimmie Rodgers’s *“Waitin’ on a Train.”*

- **Engagement Question:**

- “When you hear the word *train*, what images or emotions come to mind?”
- “How might a song capture a historical moment better than a textbook?”

- **Session Goals:**

Participants will learn to:

1. Use music as a historical and literary text.
2. Facilitate lyric analysis to strengthen reading and writing skills.
3. Guide students in collaboratively composing a verse in rhythm and rhyme.

2. Historical & Artistic Context (10 minutes)

Objective: Ground teachers in the historical and musical setting of the lesson.

- **Historical Overview:**

- Briefly discuss the Great Depression and the “hobo culture” of transient workers.
- Share a short video clip or photograph to visualize the period.

- **Introduce Jimmie Rodgers:**

- Explain Rodgers’s connection to Meridian, Mississippi, and his influence as “The Father of Country Music.”
- Play or sing a short section of “*Waitin’ on a Train.*”
- **Interactive Question:**
 - “What emotions do you hear in this song—loneliness, hope, weariness?”
 - “Why might this story have resonated with people during the Great Depression?”

3. Analyzing the Song (10 minutes)

Objective: Model how to analyze song lyrics with students.

- **Distribute Lyric Sheets.**
- Together, read the first verse aloud and identify key features: repetition, rhyme, rhythm, and syllable count.
- Discuss figurative language and theme.

Interactive Questions:

- “What do you notice about how many syllables are in each line?”
- “Why do you think Rodgers repeats certain sounds or phrases?”
- “If this were a poem, what would its main theme be?”

Transition:

Explain that the class activity involves writing a third verse to continue the hobo’s story, just as students would in their classroom.

4. Hands-On Songwriting Activity (25 minutes)

Objective: Experience the creative process of collaborative songwriting.

Step 1: Brainstorming (10 min)

- Write the prompt on the board: “*What happens next in the hobo’s story?*”
- Facilitate brainstorming as attendees call out ideas—missing home, meeting someone kind, finding a new town, etc.
- Narrow down to one theme collectively (e.g., *Missing Home*).

Step 2: Writing the Verse (10 min)

- Guide attendees in crafting a 4-line verse that follows the song’s rhythm and rhyme.
- Play short instrumental phrases on guitar to test the rhythm of their lines.
- Use the whiteboard to build and revise lines collaboratively.

Step 3: Perform the New Verse (5 min)

- Sing or perform the class-created verse together with Richelle accompanying on guitar.
- Applaud participation and note how even simple lines can become powerful through rhythm and melody.

Teaching Reflection Prompt (to connect to classroom):

- “How might this process engage reluctant writers or readers in your classroom?”
- “What standards did we naturally touch on just now—music, writing, or both?”

5. Reflection and Application (10 minutes)

Objective: Connect experience to classroom practice and reflection.

Guided Reflection:

- “What part of the songwriting process surprised you most?”
- “How can collaborative songwriting encourage student voice and empathy?”
- “How might you adapt this for different grade levels or abilities?”

Wrap-Up Discussion:

- Review key integration takeaways:
 - *Music as Text* – builds comprehension and inference skills.
 - *Songwriting as Writing* – strengthens language structure and creativity.
 - *Performance as Assessment* – demonstrates understanding through art.

Resources Provided:

- Printable lesson plan and lyric sheet.
- List of extension ideas (Great Depression research, collage activity, creative writing expansion).
- QR link to instrumental track for classroom use.

6. Closing (Optional 2–3 minutes if time allows)

Richelle closes by performing the full song “*Waitin’ on a Train*” to demonstrate how storytelling, history, and rhythm meet through the arts. This reminds educators that **arts integration transforms information into experience.**