

Learning Guide



Kid Pan Alley

We hope you enjoyed learning all about the songwriting process of Kid Pan Alley, a musical duo that creates prolific music about any and all topics with kids. Extend your learning with this print-ready Learning Guide!



What's in this Learning Guide?

Get Set to Listen

Answer reflection questions before and after listening to the episode.

Vocabulary

Discussion Questions

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.1, SL.3-8.3

Songwriting Prompts

National Core Arts Standards (Music): MU:Cr1.1, MU:Cr2.1, MU:Cr3.1, MU:Cn10.0, MU:Cn11.0; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3-8.3, W.3-8.4, SL.3-8.1, SL.3-8.4

Quick Songwriting Activities

National Core Arts Standards (Music): MU:Cr1.1, MU:Cr2.1, MU:Cr3.1, MU:Cn10.0, MU:Cn11.0; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3-8.3, W.3-8.4, SL.3-8.1, SL.3-8.4

Rhythm Circle Activity

National Core Arts Standards (Music): MU:Cn11.0, MU:Re7.1, MU:Cr2.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3-8.1, SL.3-8.4

Songwriter's Notebook

National Core Arts Standards (Music): MU:Cr1.1, MU:Cn10.0, MU:Re7.1, MU:Re8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3-8.3, W.3-8.10, L.3-8.5

Songwriting Workshop Activity

National Core Arts Standards (Music): MU:Cr1.1, MU:Cr2.1, MU:Cr3.1, MU:Cn10.0; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3-8.3, SL.3-8.1, SL.3-8.4, L.3-8.5; CASEL: Self-expression, Social awareness, & Relationship skills

Additional Resources & Book List



The Children's Hour
kids public radio

© 2026 The Children's Hour radio show podcast
<https://www.childrenshour.org/kid-pan-alley/>



If you could write a song about any topic, what would it be and why?

Work with a partner, small group, or individually to turn your ideas into a poem or song.

My voice matters because..._____

Turn your ideas into a poem or song!

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Vocabulary

Listening for Words

1. Make a four-column chart and label the columns “I don’t know,” “I’ve seen or heard, but don’t know the meaning,” “I think I know the meaning,” and “I know the meaning.”
2. Write the vocabulary word in the column that describes how well you know the meaning of the word.
3. Listen to [the episode](#). Note how the speaker uses the words.

Matching Words with Definitions

1. Print and cut apart the word and definition cards.
2. Spread out the word cards so you can see them all. One by one, attach a definition card to each word card.

Writing with New Words

After working with the words and definitions, write a one-page essay or story that uses at least three of the words.

bridge

A section that introduces a new idea, feeling, or musical change. It connects different parts of the song and usually appears only once.

chorus

The part of a song that repeats throughout the song. It usually contains the main message or idea and is often the most memorable part.



Vocabulary

verse

The part of a song that tells the story or shares details. The melody usually stays the same, but the words change each time.

rhythm

The pattern of beats and timing in music. Rhythm is what makes you want to clap, tap your foot, or dance.

pitch

How high or low a sound is. A bird's chirp has a high pitch, while a tuba plays low pitches. Our voices naturally go up and down in pitch when we speak or sing.

melody

A sequence of notes that forms the tune of a song. It's the part you usually hum or sing along with. It's made in part by expanding the distance between the syllables when we sing.



Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever worked on a project with a group? What was that experience like?
2. If you could write a song about any topic, what would it be and why?
3. What talents or creative skills do you enjoy using?
4. When have you felt that your ideas were heard and valued?
5. What is something you have created that made you feel proud?
6. How can songwriting help people share their ideas and feelings?
7. Why is listening important when working together to create something?
8. How can art, music, writing, or other creative activities help people make a difference in the world?
9. What qualities make someone a good collaborator?

Group Discussion Strategies

Think Pair Share:

1. Individually, student writes down their answer to a question.
2. Students pair up and tell each other their answers.
3. Teacher calls for volunteers to share with the whole class their answer (and/or their partner's answer). Teacher notes key words/phrases on board.

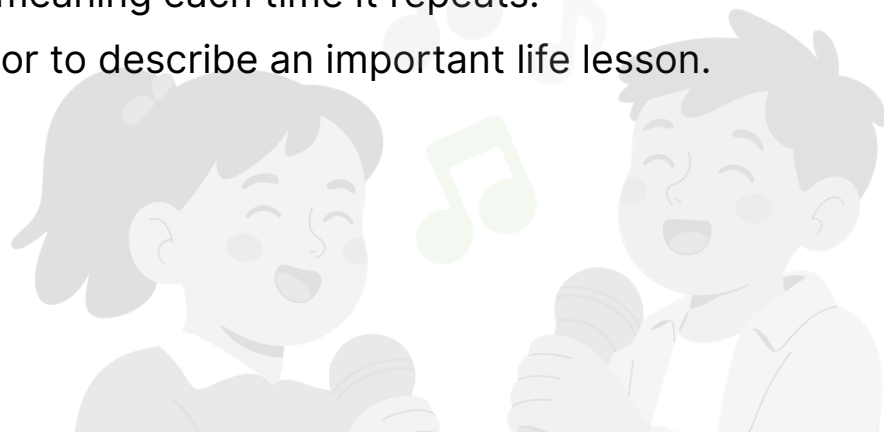
Round Robin:

1. Teacher poses one question (written on top of a large page) to students, who are assembled into small groups of 3 or 4.
2. Students take turns brainstorming the answers. The recorder of the group writes down all answers.
3. The leader reads the group's ideas to the entire class. Teacher moderates.



Songwriting Prompts

1. Create a bridge for the song "Skin" that focuses on kindness and respect.
2. Choose an object (a bicycle, tree, backpack, or pet) and write a song from its point of view.
3. Write a four-line song about your favorite season.
4. Create a chorus that repeats the phrase "We can make a difference."
5. Write a song about a small act of kindness that changes someone's day.
6. Use the words hope, dream, and friend in your lyrics.
7. Write a song about your morning routine.
8. Write lyrics about an animal's daily adventures.
9. Create a song that begins with the line, "I never expected today to be different."
12. Write a song from the perspective of a lost item trying to find its owner.
13. Write a chorus using only questions.
14. Create a song where every line begins with the same letter.
15. Write a song that includes at least three rhyming pairs.
16. Use all five senses in your lyrics.
17. Create a song about welcoming a new student.
18. Write a song about standing up for what is right.
19. Write a song about appreciating differences among people.
20. Create a chorus that changes meaning each time it repeats.
21. Write a song that uses metaphor to describe an important life lesson.





Quick Songwriting Activities

Mystery Object Song

Place a mystery object in a bag. (eg. a key, feather, baseball, or leaf).

Participants:

- Observe the object.
- Brainstorm words describing it.
- Create a short song from its perspective.

Community Song Project

Celebrate local culture and write a song about:

- Your school
- Your neighborhood
- Your city
- Your state

Include local landmarks, traditions, and people.

Songwriting Through Art

Connect visual art and music by writing a song inspired by a photograph or piece of artwork.

- *What story is happening?*
- *What emotions do you see?*
- *What sounds might be present?*

Kindness Chorus Challenge

Promote positive community values by writing a chorus about kindness in small groups.

Requirements:

- At least 4 lines
- A repeating phrase
- A positive message

Perform for the class.

Musical Storytelling

Many songs tell stories. Give it a try by adapting the story from a book, your own experience, or from your imagination!

- Verse 1: Beginning
- Verse 2: Problem
- Verse 3: Solution
- Chorus: Main lesson



Quick Songwriting Activities

Musical Interview

Interview someone and write a short song based on their answers:

- What makes you happy?
- What do you care about?
- What challenge have you overcome?

Genre Switch

Objective: Explore different musical styles.

Directions:

Write one set of lyrics.

Then imagine it as:

- Folk
- Country
- Pop
- Rap
- Musical theater

Discuss how the style changes the feeling of the song.

Collaborative Songwriting Chain

Practice building on others' ideas with this group songwriting activity:

- Each participant will write one line. Start with the first person's line.
- The next participant adds a line that connects to it.
- Continue until the group creates a complete song.



Rhythm Circle

Traditional rhythm games and songs have entertained and bound people together in community for hundreds of years, originating in African traditions of body percussion and call-and-response rituals, later mixing with European rhymes and eventually creating the playground classics we know today. Explore rhythm and teamwork in this activity.

Watch

[Sing a Song with Ella Jenkins, the Beloved First Lady of Children's Music](#)

Listen

to the clapping rhythm ["I Wonder Who's Outside My Door" song by Ella Jenkins.](#)

Create Your Own Clapping Rhythm

- Sit in a circle.
- One person creates a rhythm by clapping.
- The next person adds another rhythm.
- Continue until the whole group has contributed.

Discuss

How did it feel to contribute to the group's rhythm?

What other ways can you make a rhythm? (Stomping, slapping, using found objects...)

How is building a rhythm similar to building a song?

Learn More

[The History of Hand Games](#)





Songwriter's Notebook

Professional songwriters are always looking for inspiration for their music. Spend a week writing down and recording in a notebook.

Later, use your notes about the following to create song lyrics:

- Interesting phrases: _____

- Emotions: _____

- Observations: _____



Songwriter's Notebook

• Observations: _____

• Conversations: _____

Songwriting From Nature

Use observation to inspire creativity. Take a walk outside and record:

- Sounds
- Colors
- Movements
- Feelings

Mini Inspiration Activity

Practice your observation skills by spending 2 minutes listening quietly. Record the following:

- Sounds you hear
- Feelings you notice
- Images that come to mind



Songwriting Workshop

No matter what you're doing, approach it creatively. Really be there and listen for what it's telling you and shape it and create your own culture instead of buying your own culture or buying someone else's culture. You can do it. —PAUL REISLER

Your voice is important, and how you feel and how you think has a place—whether it's in a song, or a picture, a poem, or just even your smile. Just know how important you are and what a great difference you make in this world. —CHERYL REISLER

Listen

to [The Children's Hour, "Kid Pan Alley" episode](#)

- Songwriting Inspiration from Kid Pan Alley (segment 42:21-46:54)
- Songwriting Workshop with Kid Pan Alley
 - Sections of a Song & "Skin" Song (segment 12:40-19:10)
 - Writing Lyrics to the Bridge (segment 20:20-24:37)
 - Writing Music/Rhythm to Bridge (segment 26:58-30:04)

Discuss

- *What Makes a Song?*
- *What is your favorite song?*
- *What makes it memorable?*
- *What messages can songs share?*

Vocabulary

Verse: Tells the story. The words change.

Chorus: The main message. The words repeat.

Bridge: A new idea or perspective that connects parts of the song.

Rhythm: The pattern of beats.

Melody: The tune you sing.

Pitch: How high or low a sound is.

Brainstorm

Choose a topic. (See "*Songwriting Prompts*" in this Learning Guide for inspiration.)

Create a **community word bank** of ideas, feelings, and images connected to the topic.



Songwriting Workshop

Write the Chorus

The **chorus** contains the BIG IDEA.

"What is the message you want listeners to remember?"

Write a simple repeating chorus.

Example:

*Treat everyone with kindness,
Every heart deserves a chance.
When we stand together,
We can make a difference.*

Write the Verse

The **verse** should tell the story behind the chorus.

- *What happened?*
- *What do you see?*
- *What do you feel?*

Write the Bridge

The **bridge** should introduce something different before returning to the chorus.

- *Is there another way to think about this topic?*
- *What new idea can we add?*

Share

- Read lyrics aloud
- Perform with a simple rhythm
- Share favorite lines

Reflect

1. *What part was easiest to write?*
2. *What part was most challenging?*
3. *How did your ideas change during the writing process?*
4. *What message do you hope listeners remember?*





Songwriting Worksheet

Choose Your Topic

My song is about: _____

Why is this topic important to me? _____

Brainstorm

Words that connect to my topic:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Feelings connected to my topic:

Images or examples:

Write Your Chorus

The **chorus** is the main message.

CHORUS: _____

Write Your Verses

The **verse** tells the story.

VERSE 1: _____



Songwriting Worksheet

Verses Cont'd

VERSE 2: _____

VERSE 3: _____

Write Your Bridge

The **bridge** introduces a new idea.

BRIDGE: _____

Song Title

My song title: _____

Reflect

What message does your song share? _____

What is your favorite line? _____



Additional Resources

[The History of Hand Games](#)

Lynde Rosario explains it in this article from the Denver Center for the Performing Arts.

[Songwriting with Kids](#)

Learn about the process of writing songs from children's author and songwriting coach Mary Amato. Includes recorded examples of songs written and performed by kids!

[Songwriting and Recording: Media Arts Toolkit](#)

This toolkit from PBS Learning Media includes a video, background reading, activity, and further information.

Videos

[Alma's Way | My Way: Songwriting! | PBS KIDS](#)

Two elementary-aged rappers talk about and demonstrate their writing process and the importance of songwriting in their lives.

[Sing a Song with Ella Jenkins, the Beloved First Lady of Children's Music](#)

Learn about one of the earliest creators of music specifically for children.



Book List

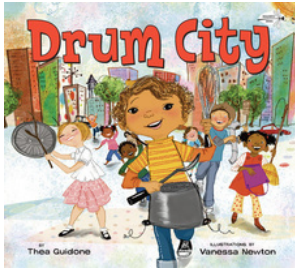


Sing with Me / Canta Conmigo

by José-Luis Orozco, illustrated by Sara Palacios

This joyfully illustrated bilingual book features 6 popular preschool sing-along songs in both English and Spanish.

ages 4-6



Drum City

by Thea Guidone, illustrated by Vanessa Brantley-Newton

This lively picture book follows a boy who inspires a citywide parade by making music with pots, pans, and other found objects.

ages 3-7

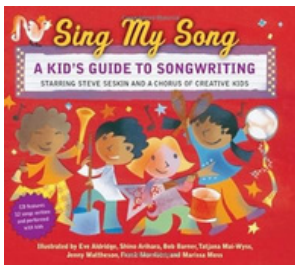


Songwriting for Kids Ages 8-12

by Making Life Musical Publications

An interactive workbook for tweens that will help them go from the spark of an idea to a completed song.

ages 8-12



Sing My Song: A Kid's Guide to Songwriting

by Steve Seskin, illustrated by Eve Aldridge

This book is based on the author's elementary school workshops and takes readers through the creative songwriting process.

ages 8-12



Adventures In Songwriting: A Guide For Kids & Anyone Who Wants To Write Songs

by Gina Boe & Sue C. Smith

11 chapters of practical advice on creating well-crafted lyrics, melodies, and more. This approachable book is good for aspiring songwriters of all ages.

kids & adults