**POET AS SONGWRITER, SONGWRITER AS POET:**
**COBAIN, DYLAN, SHAKESPEARE, AND MORE**

**Subject:** Language Arts/ Speech/Reading/Communication/ Music

**Grade Level:** 6-12

**Learning Standards:** National and Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements for the following content areas:

- **Reading** (1) Students understand and use different skills and strategies to read; (1.2) build vocabulary through reading; (1.3) read fluently, adjusting reading for purpose and material; (1.4) understand elements of literature—poetry, speech; (2) Students understand the meaning of what is read; (2.1) comprehend important ideas and details; (2.3) think critically and analyze authors’ use of language, style, purpose, and perspective; (3 )Students read different materials for a variety of purposes; (3.3) read for literary experience (poetry and songs) to understand self and others; (4) Students set goals and evaluate progress to improve reading, writing, and analysis skills.

- **Communication** (2) Students communicate ideas clearly and effectively; (2.1) communicate to a range of audiences for different purposes; (2.3) use effective delivery; (2.5) effectively use action, sound, and/or images to support presentations.

- **Music** (6) Listening to, analyzing, and describing music. Understand the relationship of music with language arts and other disciplines. Understand the role music plays in the transmission of history and culture. Composing and arranging with specific guidelines.

**Materials**

1. Musical instruments (optional)
2. Writing instruments and paper
3. Audio or audio visual equipment
4. Sound recordings, videos, or YouTube performances of selected music
5. Internet access or handouts (lyrics and poetry)

**Resources**

5. Teachers and Writers Collaborative at [www.twc.org](http://www.twc.org)
6. *Academy of American Poets at www.poets.org*
What is POETRY?

Poetry is a literary art in which language expresses ideas through unique patterns of speech. There are many different poetic forms (old and new). In poetry, the aesthetic quality of the words is as important as the communication of content. Poetry may exist by itself or in context with other artistic forms including poetic drama, hymns, song lyrics, or prose poetry. Poetry has a long history and has been published in specific anthologies and magazines. Early poetry focused on the use of speech in rhetoric, dramas, songs, and comedy. Over time, poetry developed into verse form and rhyme schemes. Contemporary poetry stretches the parameters of form, rhyme, and meter, and is found to be most popular in song lyrics.
PLAYING WITH WORDS...

**Alliteration:** Repeated first sounds of words (most frequently the repetition of one single consonant). *Alliteration* is used in tongue twisters like:“

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.  
How many pickled peppers did Peter Piper pick?

**Assonance:** Repeating the vowel sounds in stressed syllables (no rhyme scheme necessary). Examples include: “Open,” “broken,” or “remembered” and “tendered.” Check out Shakespeare’s sonnets # 61 and #120 for poetic examples. (Also see *Handbook of Poetic Forms*, p.16)


**Rhyme:** Words that sound alike (e.g. cat, fat, hat, bat).

**Meter:** The speed of the pulse or beat (fast, slow, medium); meter in poetry refers to the movement of the lines.

**Metaphor:** Figurative expression, simile, or analogy (e.g. “You are the wind beneath my wings”).

**Rap:** Originated in African oral tradition and landed in the Caribbean and the Old South (United States). It literally means “talk.” Standard rap has about 130 beats per minute with four accented beats per line and is performed out loud (often with percussive accompaniment or a pitched “hook”).
Questions for discussion:

- How was poetry used in Shakespeare’s time (Renaissance)?
- How was poetry used in the Victorian Era through the early 1900s?
- Describe the role of troubadours and bards.
- How is poetry used today?

**Smells Like Teen Spirit** (from the LP *Nevermind* by Nirvana 1991)

Load up on guns bring your friends  
It's fun to lose and to pretend  
She's over bored, self-assured  
Oh no, I know a dirty word

hello, hello, hello, how low (4x)

With the lights out, it's less dangerous  
Here we are now, entertain us  
I feel stupid and contagious  
Here we are now, entertain us  
A mulatto  
An albino  
A mosquito  
My Libido  
Yay

I'm worst at what I do best  
And for this gift I feel blessed  
Our little group has always been  
And always will until the end

Hello, hello, hello, how low (4x)

And I forget just why I taste  
Oh yeah, I guess it makes me smile  
I found it hard, it was hard to find  
Oh well, whatever, nevermind  
Hello, hello, hello, how low (4x)

Repeat: With the lights out, it's less dangerous… (to, "my Libido")

Coda: A denial (9x))
**All Along the Watchtower**, words and music by Bob Dylan, 1968
(featured in *Battlestar Galactica*)

“There must be some way out of here,” said the joker to the thief.
“There’s too much confusion, I can’t get no relief.”
“Business men, they drink my wine, plowmen dig my earth,
None of them along the line
Know what any of it is worth,”
"No reason to get excited," the thief, he kindly spoke,
"There are many here among us who feel that life is but a joke.
But, you and I, we've been through that, and this is not our fate,
So let us not talk falsely now,
The hour is getting late."

All along the watch tower
Princes kept the view
While all the women came and went,
Barefoot servants, too.
Outside in the distance a wildcat did growl,
Two riders were approaching
The wind began to howl.

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**Sonnet 116 Let me not to marriage of true minds admit impediments**
*by William Shakespeare* (1564 - 1616)

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come:
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

At EMP (optional activities):

- Visit EMP’s exhibit *NIRVANA: Taking Punk to the Masses*
- Sing and analyze the words to Nirvana’s *Smells Like Teen Spirit* and Bob Dylan’s *All Along the Watchtower*
- Check out *Battlestar Galactica: The exhibition* and tool box (with different versions of *All Along the Watchtower*)
- Read student poetry in JBL theater
- Sing Along Dance Along to a *PUNK/GRUNGE* mix

Post EMP visit:

- Post students’ poetry on thesoundboard.ning.com
- Identify poetic techniques (alliteration, metaphor, etc.) in song lyrics
- Identify songs or choral arrangements that use classic poetry as text

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