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Proposal Title: Everybody has a Song

Description:

Making art can be a joyful process, but it can also be a stressful one. Many students desperately want to “get it right,” like they would on a test. But the act of creation is often messy—especially at the beginning—and getting students past the initial stages of creation can be a major barrier.

One way to teach songwriting is to describe the rules and conventions first and write songs later. The problem I have found with this approach is that it makes the act of songwriting even more intimidating to the students than before—now they now have a whole new list of things they feel they need to “get right.”

That is why I have the students to write first and examine the process of writing after. We begin by making a song together. The students pick an idea they can relate to, gather information about it through brainstorming and discussion, and then arrange this information into groups (usually by rhyme or relationship). I guide them through each step, but the material used to create the song is theirs. The groups of information are then turned into verse and chorus, and once the song is finished, we sing it.

I’ve found that this exercise de-mystifies the act of songwriting and gives the students a feeling of ownership and accomplishment—they are all songwriters now. With the fear of “getting it right” at least slightly subdued, I review the process we used to create the song, and proceed to introduce exercises that explore other approaches and techniques of songwriting.