



## **FROM FIRST IDEA TO FINISHED SONG™**

***An In-Depth, Curriculum-Based, Creative Writing Residency with  
4-Time Parents' Choice Gold Award® Songwriter Roger Day***

**RESIDENCY GOAL:** To write, record and perform an original, curriculum-based song during 3 classroom visits and 1 assembly.

**RESIDENCY PURPOSE:** To demonstrate how a professional songwriter starts with a “First Idea” and ends with a “Finished Song” using real-life examples from Roger’s music.

The class will then follow these steps, with Roger’s guidance, to create their own original song based on a subject they are currently studying.

### **ADDITIONAL RESIDENCY GOALS:**

To learn the parts of a song (Chorus, Verse, Bridge)

To discuss rhyme schemes and word choice, specifically how the right word can affect how a lyric “sounds” (i.e. how a melody “sings”)

To hear how music helps create the right mood for lyrics, whether using minor or major chords; loud or soft dynamics; fast or slow rhythms.

Song examples from previous First Idea to Finished Song residencies:

<https://www.rogerday.com/songwriting-residency>

## **RESIDENCY LOGISTICS:**

**Target group:** 3rd, 4th and 5th grade (Adaptable for K - 2 if needed)

**Number of Students Per Writing Session:** One class (15 - 25 students max)

**Number of Visits with Each Class:** Three, hour-long sessions (i.e. the normal length of class)

**Number of Assemblies:** This will vary depending on space and scheduling.

At the very least, each class will perform for their grade peers. If time and space allow, each class will perform for the entire school.

Depending on school policy, it's always exciting to have parents and other visitors attend!

**Maximum Number of Writing Sessions per Day:** 4

**Maximum Number of Writing Sessions per Week:** 20 (This will include assembly times)

**Materials needed:** A Smart Board, Dry Erase Board, etc.

**Additional help:** It is essential that the classroom teacher be available to type the students' brainstorming ideas as well as their lyrics so that both are clearly visible on the Smart Board.

## **RESIDENCY OUTLINE:**

**FIRST CLASS VISIT:** Roger introduces the songwriting process with real life examples from his own songs. The class chooses their Main Idea from a subject they are currently studying. They will then choose the music that goes with it.

This turns into the Chorus.

By the end of Roger's first visit, the class will have rough draft of the Chorus recorded on Roger's phone. Roger will email the rough draft recording to the teacher before he leaves the classroom.

**SECOND CLASS VISIT:** Roger and the class will review the rough draft recording. Together they decide what supporting details are needed.

These will turn into a first and second verse.

They will continue to revise and edit any additional lyrical or musical details the song might need. This could turn into the bridge if needed.

By the end of Roger's second visit, the class will have a finished song recorded on Roger's phone, ready for rehearsal. Roger will email the recording of the finished song to the teacher before he leaves.

**THIRD CLASS VISIT:** Roger and the class will review the recording of the finished song. They will rehearse the song so that it is performance ready.

With input from the students, simple choreography will be added. They will practice stage etiquette such as entering and exiting and taking a bow.

By the end of Roger's third visit, the class will be poised and ready for performance. They will know the words. They will know the choreography. They will know proper stage etiquette.

**ASSEMBLY:** Break a leg! This is when all the students' hard work comes together. Each class will perform their original song with Roger in front of their peers and classmates. If possible, parents are encouraged to attend.

## **RESIDENCY DETAILS:**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Roger begins his first class visit by introducing the students to the 5 steps that take a songwriter from a “First Idea to a Finished Song”.

1. Create a Main Idea from a First Idea
2. Choose Music that Matches the Mood for the Main Idea
3. Brainstorm Supporting Details
4. Choose the Best Details (Revise/Edit)
5. Record a Finished Song

Roger plays three of his songs to illustrate how he uses these steps to help solve problems every creative writer faces.

#### ***Where do Main Ideas come from?***

Roger’s song “Mosquito Burrito” started as a “First Idea”. It’s an idea he could easily have dismissed.

But creative writers learn that those “aha moments” - moments when an idea pops into your head when you’re doing something completely unrelated - are often the best ideas.

#### ***How do I create the right mood for my Main Idea?***

Songwriters use music to help create the right mood. For his song “Roly Poly” Roger chose a rock ‘n’ roll rhythm called a “bo diddley” beat. Had he chosen different music, it would have been a completely different song.

## ***Why is brainstorming so important?***

Two words: supporting details. That's the secret sauce of creative writing.

Roger's song "Open Up the Coconut" is the best example of how much fun brainstorming can be.

After he sings the song, he challenges the class to Brainstorm 10 new ways to "Open Up the Coconut". The only trick? They have to do it in 10 seconds! Creative chaos ensues!

## ***What if I have too many details?***

That's a good problem to have! Every class will have more than 10 ideas to "Open up the Coconut". But we can't use them all.

That's when writers learn to choose the details they think best support their Main Idea. It's the most important part of the editing process.

And the good news? There's no right or wrong answer. Each writer exercises their own unique creativity when they choose which details to include.

When Roger wrote "Open up the Coconut" he brainstormed more details than he could possibly use. So he had to choose which ones he thought worked best.

It was challenging, but in the end he edited out over 100 different ways to "Open up the Coconut" before he was ready to record his "Finished Song".

## **READY, SET, WRITE!**

Now that the students know how Roger writes songs and have their creative brains warmed up, it's their turn!

***\*This is the heart of the entire residency where everything Roger has talked about is put into action. In other words, it's when the "magic" happens!***

**MAIN IDEA:** Roger will ask the students what they are currently studying in class. It could be science. It could be math. It could be a special field trip that only their class or grade takes.

It just has to be something that captures their imagination. This will be the Main Idea.

**MUSIC:** Roger then asks the students what kind of music matches their idea.

It could be major chords like a rock song or minor chords like a sad song. It could be fast or slow; loud or soft.

The music will create the mood that supports the Main Idea.

**CHORUS:** Then in real time, usually right off the top of his head, Roger combines the style of music with their Main Idea and this turns into the Chorus.

The Chorus is the heart of the song, the part that's repeated several times and is so memorable the students will often sing it as they walk down the halls.

Or as we like to say in Nashville: "the hook"!

**SUPPORTING DETAILS:** Roger then quizzes the class about the specifics they've learned about their chosen subject.

This will take the form of who, what, where, when, why, how questions.

**VERSE:** Roger and the class then take these details and turn them into verses. There will usually be at least two verses, sometimes three, with supporting details.

As the class creates the verses, Roger talks about rhyme schemes and word choices and how lyrics, though similar to poems in many ways, are actually different.

For example, it's important to choose words that "sing" well and compliment the "melody" of a song.

Often this means choosing a song or a rhyme scheme that are different than the choice you would make for a poem.

**BRIDGE:** Occasionally a song will need just a little something extra either musically or lyrically that literally bridges a verse to a chorus.

If needed, it's typically a short section with additional details or a change of key.

Not many songs will need a Bridge. It's one of those "you know it when hear it" parts of the writing process.

## **TIME TO BREAK A LEG!**

**REHEARSAL:** Roger and the class will practice their finished song in the classroom.

Roger will make sure they are singing in the correct key and that any last minute word choices or melody changes are made.

With input from the students, Roger will add some simple choreography. If the teacher and students want, they are welcome to create stage props on their own.

Roger will teach the students proper stage etiquette; how to enter, how to stand, how to project, how to take a bow, and how to exit.

**PERFORMANCE:** During an assembly that can include a group as small as one grade or as many as the entire school, each class will come onto the stage one at a time and perform their song, to great applause!

**TOUR BUS:** If all goes well, a parent might randomly post the song on YouTube...which means it could go viral...which means we will be invited to sing on the Ellen Show...get a tour bus...and play arenas.

After our world tour is finished, each classroom teacher will retire to the Bahamas and live happily ever after!

## **FINAL QUESTIONS:**

### **What happens to the recording?**

Since each classroom teacher will have a copy of the the song their class wrote, Roger encourages the widespread sharing of the song to parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and neighbors.

Additionally Roger does his best to keep permanent copies of all the songs he writes on his office computer.