



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

*A Creative Writing Workshop with Songwriter Roger Day*

Goal: To write and record an original song in one class period

Purpose: To reinforce that as a professional songwriter Roger uses many of the same creative writing techniques the students are already learning in class: brainstorming, editing, etc.

Target group: 3rd, 4th and 5th grade

Size: No more than one class-size

Time: One class period - at least one hour

Materials needed: A blackboard or dry erase board; 1 cassette tape - Roger will provide a tape recorder; water is always appreciated!

From First Idea to Finished Song: A songwriting workshop in 5 steps

1. First Idea = Main Idea
2. Match music to the Idea
3. Brainstorm
4. Edit
5. Finished song = Final draft

### **INTRO**

Roger begins his workshop by explaining to the class that as a professional songwriter he uses many of the same creative writing techniques they already use when writing their own stories: main ideas, brainstorming, editing, etc. He then sings three of his songs, *It's a No-No to Kiss a Rhino*, *Mosquito Burrito* and *Open Up the Coconut* using each to demonstrate how he uses the 5 steps listed above to go from his first Idea to his finished song. Each song emphasizes a slightly different challenge he faced and how he solved it.

" Mosquito Burrito - Emphasizes how often our best ideas as writers are those unedited First Ideas that pop into our head, like the phrase Mosquito Burrito popped into Roger's head on a family bike trip near a marsh in South Carolina. First Ideas are roughly equivalent to a Main Idea

" It's a No-No to Kiss a Rhino - Emphasizes the importance of editing and how Roger had to choose the best verse out of ten written in his rough draft to make the strongest Beginning Middle and End

" Open Up the Coconut - Emphasizes the fun of Brainstorming . Roger challenges the class to think of more ways to Open Up the Coconut than he did and uses that creative energy as a springboard to write a song

Now comes the heart of the workshop: using the 5 steps to create an original song!

#### Step One - FIRST IDEA = MAIN IDEA

Roger asks the students to look around their classroom to see if they notice anything unusual that might spark their imagination to write a song. Invariably there's something that sparks a good First idea . A lava lamp, a classroom pet, a colorful decoration , etc. This First Idea will serve as their Main Idea for the song, the idea from which all other ideas will spring.

#### Step Two - Match Music to the Idea

This is the step that distinguishes songwriting from storytelling. Roger explains that the style of the music must match the main idea. For example, if the idea is a spooky halloween idea, match it to spooky halloween music. Or if the idea is a silly, goofy idea, match it to silly, goofy music. Roger will typically introduce several musical options such as a blues beat or a rock beat, a minor sad chord or an energetic major chord and together with the class decide which musical idea matches best.

#### Step Three - Brainstorming

Once the class has settled on their first idea and matched it to music, Roger will create the hook or the chorus .

" The Chorus - This is the most memorable part of the song, the part that students sing loudest too. He does this by creating on-the-spot a melody using the students First Idea and the students musical suggestions. Once that's established, Roger will introduce the webbing technique to help the students

brainstorm.

" Webbing Technique - Roger will ask the class to write their First Idea in the middle of a sheet of paper. He will then ask that they draw a circle around it. Finally he will instruct the class to spend 2 or 3 minutes thinking of every idea that could possibly go with the First Idea no matter how improbable. With each new idea, the students will draw a line from the main idea and write the related idea thereby creating a web of new ideas.

When the students are finished with their webs, Roger will solicit as many of those ideas as he can and will begin to put those details into the song. As he goes, Roger makes a work tape which will serve as the rough draft of the song. Roger tries to include as many student's ideas as possible.

#### Step Four - Editing = Making Choices

By now, it should be clear to all involved why editing is such an important part of creative writing! There are always more ideas floating around than can possibly be used. Together with the class, Roger makes choices about which verses, details, story lines are the best and begins to work toward the finished song. Roger refers back frequently to the work tape to listen to earlier ideas, often remembering forgotten ideas. This also affords Roger an excellent opportunity to demonstrate how to clean up the grammar and the word usage, making sure tenses agree and that the action proceeds logically.

#### Step Five - The Finished Song

Once all the votes are in, all ideas have been considered, every plot twist has been followed, Roger tunes up his guitar, turns on the recorder and everyone sings the new song, once for the class and once for Roger's master cassette.

Summary: Roger's songwriting workshop is a fun, fresh approach to creative writing and authoring. It gives students a chance to develop language and ideas, learn about the importance of meter and rhyme and get a close-up view of the creative process. Once back in the classroom, students can continue to develop the song started in the workshop or be encouraged to write new songs.

#### Bibliography:

Successful Lyric Writing - by Sheila Davis, Writer's Digest Books  
Writing Down the Bones - by Natalie Goldberg, Shambhala Books