



## 5. WRITING SONG LYRICS

### Learning Objective

- To adapt language and style for particular contexts, purposes and audiences;
- To perform your own compositions;
- To analyse writing styles.

### Resources

- Excerpts of lyrics from the show *Jina and the STEM Sisters*;
- Excerpts of 3 songs from the show.

### MAIN TASKS

1. Read the excerpts of lyrics from the show – there are three different songs to look at. All have very different structures and were set to very different genres or types of music:
  - a. Maria’s song has a very strong chorus but very fluid verses;
  - b. Ada’s rap was written to be exactly that – a rap which has a strong but very differently paced rhythm which doesn’t always follow an obvious pattern;
  - c. Marie’s song has a strong rhythmic structure – it was written to be a ‘patter song’; a particular style of fast, witty rhyming song that was particularly ‘fashionable’ during the Victorian period when Marie lived.
2. Read these aloud and discuss the different styles, ideas and characters they make you think of.
3. How do you know these are lyrics and not poems? Can you note any differences?  
 [There is no real answer to this question but it’s interesting to discuss!]
4. Now have a listen to these song excerpts and see how they have been set to music. Are the musical styles what you were expecting? Do you think they work – discuss your reasons? Do they give you an insight into the character of the women? Do you think they might have been conceived of and written differently if the songs weren’t created as part of a theatre show?
5. Choose one of featured women you want to write a song about and start thinking about the lyrics for your song. The lyrics can be written as her voice as in the ones you’ve looked at, or perhaps they could be opinions of people of the day, or your own reflections. Try and think beyond just doing a rap so you look at different writing structures. Any poem or words can be set to music but often a good way to start is to think about rhythm and rhyming although these are only one way of writing lyrics. Many songs have a chorus; a repeated stanza or set of lines which get revisited between the verses. Include a chorus and at least one verse in your lyrics:
  - a. What is the difference between the verse and chorus?
  - b. Does your verse tell a story? Do you have several verses which build up events or feelings?
  - c. Is your chorus an emotional reflection on the main story of the poem? Is it there to emphasise the mood of your song e.g. for humour or sadness?

There are not right or wrong answers here nor is there one way of writing your lyrics – everything is possible and anything can work if you believe in it and commit to it! Note how the verse of Maria song has no obvious rhythmic structure and is a piece of prose and yet can still be set to music. Have the courage to be really creative!

6. Practice reading these to each other in class and build confidence with your performing skills.

### **Extension Activity**

Can you set your lyrics to music either by composing your own song or finding an existing song or backing track they fit in with?

Be brave and perform them to each other and record them!