

Bitter Break-Ups

How Songwriters Use Inferences

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Grade Level	9th – Secondary Grade
Subject	English/Language Arts
Course	A.P. Language and Composition, A.P. Literature and Composition, American Literature, Composition, Creative Wr

Essential Question

How does bias influence an author's perspective and are our inferences impacted by our own bias? Does being an artist provide a shield from public reaction or provide a “free pass” to overshare?

Summary

Humans have many artistic outlets for emotional expression. Songwriters have been known to use their craft to develop a reaction as a response to a specific situation. In this lesson, students will explore an author’s perspective using break-up songs. Students will complete a card sort comparing response/reaction break-up songs to general break-up songs. They will then explore vocabulary terms that allow them to understand how those terms influence an author’s perspective. Once they have completed this task, students will brainstorm in groups characteristics of a break-up song that they will ultimately use in developing their own songs.

Snapshot

Engage

Students compare different types of break-up songs with a Card Sort.

Explore

Students develop their own definitions of key vocabulary.

Explain

Students brainstorm characteristics of a break-up song and create a finalized list using Collective Brain Dump and Stand Up, Sit Down.

Extend

Students analyze song lyrics using Why-Lighting and C-E-R to summarize their findings.

Evaluate

Students create a Two-Voice poem using characteristics from the collective brain dump.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards: English Language Arts (Grade 12)

12.3.R.5: Evaluate how authors writing on the same issue reached different conclusions because of differences in assumptions, evidence, reasoning, and viewpoints, including examining rhetorical appeals, bias, and use of logical fallacies.

Attachments

- Break Down of Break-Up Songs—Bitter Break-Ups - Spanish.docx
- Break Down of Break-Up Songs—Bitter Break-Ups - Spanish.pdf
- Break Down of Break-Up Songs—Bitter Break-Ups.docx
- Break Down of Break-Up Songs—Bitter Break-Ups.pdf
- CER—Bitter Break-Ups - Spanish.docx
- CER—Bitter Break-Ups - Spanish.pdf
- CER—Bitter Break-Ups.docx
- CER—Bitter Break-Ups.pdf
- Card Sort—Bitter Break-Ups - Spanish.docx
- Card Sort—Bitter Break-Ups - Spanish.pdf
- Card Sort—Bitter Break-Ups .docx
- Card Sort—Bitter Break-Ups .pdf
- Lesson Slides—Bitter Break-Ups.pptx
- Let's Talk About It—Bitter Break-Ups - Spanish.docx
- Let's Talk About It—Bitter Break-Ups - Spanish.pdf
- Let's Talk About It—Bitter Break-Ups.docx
- Let's Talk About It—Bitter Break-Ups.pdf
- Lyrics—Bitter Break-Ups - Spanish.docx
- Lyrics—Bitter Break-Ups - Spanish.pdf
- Lyrics—Bitter Break-Ups.docx
- Lyrics—Bitter Break-Ups.pdf

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Card Sort handout (attached; one per group [see note on preparation])
- Break Down of Break-Ups handout (attached; one per student)
- CER handout (attached; one per student)
- Lyrics handout (attached; one per student)
- Let's Talk About It handout (attached; one per student)
- Pen/Pencil
- Highlighters (one per student)

10 minutes

Preparing the Lesson

Engage - Card Sort

Prior to the lesson, print copies and cut out the attached Card Sort handout. Students will work on this activity in pairs or small groups. It is recommended that you print the cards on heavy paper or card stock for durability. Place each set of cards in a small plastic bag.

15 minutes

Engage

Teacher's Note: Disclaimer

Some of the songs in the Card Sort may include inappropriate language or content. Playing the songs is not required for the activity, but if you choose to play clips, do so at your own discretion.

Introduce the lesson using **slide 2** of the attached **Lesson Slides**. Then transition through **slides 3-4** to review the essential questions and lesson objectives.

Display **slide 5** and introduce the Card Sort strategy. Assign students to work in pairs. Explain to students that they will be doing a Card Sort which contains two types of break-up songs: generic break-up songs and reaction/ response break-up songs. The generic songs could be about any break-up situation but not about a specific person. In contrast, the response/reaction break-up songs are about two artists reacting or responding to a specific person and/or break up.

Before you set students to work, move to **slide 6** and model the activity by playing examples of a pair of reaction/response songs:

Play "Cry Me a River" by Justin Timberlake lyrics video:

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=zpgMbWkTnPU?feature=shared

Play "Everytime" by Britney Spears lyrics video:

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=n5uE6XtVX4Q?feature=shared

After listening to both songs, pose the question: Do you think the songs are about the other person? Explain how you know.

Teacher's Note: Sample Response

Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake's high-profile relationship ended in 2002 amid rumors of infidelity. Timberlake's subsequent release of "Cry Me a River" presents a tone of anger, blame, and resentment. In response, Spears released "Everytime" in 2003, a heartfelt ballad reflecting on loss and remorse, widely interpreted as her perspective on the breakup. Refer to "Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake: A Timeline of Their Ups and Downs" article for more details.

An explicit example from the text that connects both is the symbol of water. Water is thought to be metaphorically cathartic. The image of water as a refrain has a two-fold purpose: washing away whatever "good" was in their relationship and washing away the "bad" as well. Timberlake continually uses "cry" and "river" as well as the sound of rain in his song, while Spears has a line near the end "I may have made it rain" where she is acknowledging and directly responding to his imagery.

After modeling what reaction/response break up songs look like, display **slide 7** (which shows the instructions again) and pass out a set of cards from the attached **Card Sort** handout to each pair. Allow students time to work.

Once the students have finished sorting the cards, have them share out as a whole class where they put certain songs and why. After some discussion, transition through **slides 8-9** and show students the correct way to sort the songs. Clear up any misconceptions.

Teacher's Note: Model Songs Choice

For this lesson, we have chosen to focus each example and activity using "Cry Me a River" and "Everytime." Teachers can swap the songs with songs of their choice if they wish. Be sure to update all relevant slides and handouts with your new examples.

15 minutes

Explore

Distribute the **Break Down of Break-Ups** handout to each student and display **slide 10**. Explain to students that they will be defining the following three terms: inference, public reaction, and oversharing. As students develop their own definitions, have them consider what they already know about an author's intent behind a break-up song.

Once students have created their own definitions, have them brainstorm examples for each term. Students should consider an author's perspective when developing examples. Allow students a few minutes to complete this task.

Transition through **slides 11-13** to review the definitions of inference, public reaction, and oversharing to clear up any misconceptions students may have had during the previous activity. Invite students to revisit their handouts and make any edits, if needed. Use the discussion questions to facilitate a class discussion about how each term connects to an author's bias when writing songs.

15 minutes

Explain

Display **slide 14**. Using the Collective Brain Dump strategy, ask each pair to brainstorm characteristics that make a song considered a “break-up” song. Students will create a list on a sticky note or scratch piece of paper. Allow 2-3 minutes.

Once students have had an opportunity to write down these characteristics, display **slide 15** and share the instructional strategy, Stand Up, Sit Down. Instruct one member of the pair to stand up with their list. Let them know that they are going to share just one of the characteristics with the class that they have written down. Once they have shared out or if someone else shares something they have written down, ask students to cross the characteristics off their paper. As they shared out, record their responses on a large poster paper or on the board (or digitally).

Ask students to sit down once all of the characteristics have been shared out and crossed off. Once the list of characteristics is complete, review the terms as a class.

20 minutes

Extend

Display to **slide 16**. Distribute the **Lyrics** handout to each student and a highlighter. Explain to students that they will be using the Why-Light strategy by highlighting pieces from both songs that connect back to the characteristics of the class brain dump. Remind students to write their inference of the meaning in the margins. Then allow students time to annotate.

Once students have completed their Why-Lighting, move to **slide 17** and distribute the **CER** handout to students. Explain to students that they will write CER (Claim, Evidence, Reasoning) statements to answer the question, "How are these songs a reaction/response break-up song?" Allow students time to work. Remind students that they will need evidence from both songs. After they have completed the activity, ask for volunteers to share some of their claims and reasoning.

Move to **slide 18**. Facilitate a class discussion about examples of oversharing in the songs and how break-up songs in general may or may not lead to artists being boycotted. Note: If you're using the songs provided see the "Teacher's Note" below for more details about this example. If you are using your own examples, consider having evidence on hand to help answer these questions for students.

Teacher's Note: Additional Information

While neither Britney Spears nor Justin Timberlake was formally "canceled" at the time of their breakup in 2002, public sentiment and media narratives have shifted over the years, particularly in light of Spears' 2023 memoir, *The Woman in Me.* In the memoir, Spears reveals that Timberlake ended their relationship via text message and that his song "Cry Me a River" portrayed her as unfaithful, leading to her being vilified in the media while Timberlake's career flourished. These revelations prompted renewed criticism of Timberlake. Some fans called for accountability and suggested he be "canceled" for his past actions. However, there has been no official or industry-wide cancellation of Timberlake.

25 minutes

Evaluate

Display **slide 19** and introduce the Two-Voice Poem strategy. Explain that students will use this to showcase the perspectives of two different sides to a break-up. Pass out the attached **Let's Talk About It** handout to each student pair. Each partner should choose one side of the poem to write their perspective while using the middle box to write about a shared perspective they both have. Invite students to take out their Break Down of Break-Ups handout again and flip to the back. Explain that they can use the space provided to brainstorm the content for their poem/song. Remind them to refer back to the list of characteristics they made earlier as a class with the class brain dump.

After allowing students to work, ask for any volunteers to share their poems. Then move to **slide 20** and facilitate a class discussion by asking students to reflect on the essential question: Does being an artist provide a shield from public reaction or provide a "free pass" to overshare?

Teacher's Note: Optional AI Integration

Students can use Suno to bring their songs to life by adding music and vocals with the power of AI. Another optional alternative activity is to have students create the "reaction" break-up song then ask Suno to create a "response" based on their lyrics. When they have completed their song, have students critique how well the AI did.

Resources

- 7clouds. (2023, October 24). Britney Spears - Everytime (lyrics). YouTube. [video]. https://youtu.be/n5uE6XtVX4Q?feature=shared
- 7clouds. (2023, Aug. 30). Justin Timberlake - Cry Me a River (lyrics). YouTube. [video]. https://youtu.be/zpgMbWkTnPU?feature=shared
- Hearon, S. (2024, February 1). Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake: A timeline of their ups and downs. *US Weekly*. Retrieved from https://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-news/pictures/britney-spears-justin-timberlake-a-timeline-of-their-ups-and-downs/.
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Card sort. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/147
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Claim, evidence, reasoning (CER). Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/156
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- K20 Center. (n.d.). Stand up, sit down. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/1771
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Suno. Tech tools. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/3870
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Two-voice poems. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/133
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Why-lighting. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/128