



Learning Plan Guide:

Arts Integration

The Montgomery Institute • ABC PreK Program

Lesson Title: Soundtrack of Our Town: Telling the Community Story Through Song

Arts Content Focus:

Music (Songwriting/Composition, Community Storytelling)

Non-Arts Content Focus:

English Language Arts; Social Studies (Grade 4 Mississippi Studies)

Lesson at a Glance

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Lesson Summary 2-3 sentence lesson “snapshot”:

Students use community research, syllable mapping, and mentor songs to compose an original song about their own town. Drawing on the storytelling traditions of “This Land Is Your Land,” “City of New Orleans,” and “Meridian,” students gather local facts, match syllables to a melody, draft lyrics, and perform a finished community story-song in 90 minutes.

Setting the Stage

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Who & Where

Author(s): Richelle Putnam, MAC Arts Integration Specialist

Cultural Identity of Author(s) — optional: _____

Learning Setting: Classroom

Student Age Range: Grades 3–5

Time Needed: 90 minutes

Lesson Overview / Context:

Students listen to three mentor songs that tell community stories — “This Land Is Your Land,” “City of New Orleans,” and “Meridian” — then research their own town’s history, landmarks, and culture. Using a syllable-mapping worksheet, they match gathered facts to a melody and collaborate to draft, practice, and perform an original song about their community.

Learning Goals

	Big Ideas & Key Concepts What concepts matter most to my students?	Skills & Thinking Arts and non-arts content standards or benchmarks:	Looking for Learning What will we see and hear that shows student learning?
Learning Goals	Big Idea: Songs are vessels for community stories — every town has a soundtrack waiting to be written.	ARTS STANDARDS MS Arts Learning Standards for Music (2017), Grades 3–5 MU:Cr1.1.3–5a — Generate musical ideas for community storytelling. MU:Cr2.1.3–5a — Select and develop musical ideas into a short song.	We will SEE students: _____ _____ _____ We will HEAR students: _____ _____ _____
	Key Concepts: Community storytelling: what makes a place unique (history, landmarks, culture)	MU:Pr4.2.3–5a — Analyze and discuss the structure of the mentor songs. MU:Pr6.1.3–5a — Perform the community story-song with expression.	
	Chorus/verse structure and AAB lyric pattern	MU:Cn11.0.3–5a — Relate musical ideas to community history and culture.	
	Syllable mapping: matching words to a melody	ACADEMIC STANDARD MS CCRS for ELA (2025) Grades 3–5 + MS CCRS Social Studies (2022) Grade 4	
	Descriptive and figurative language in song lyrics	W.3–5.3, W.3–5.4 — Write narratives and produce clear, organized text.	

	Essential Question: What stories does your community need to have told, and how can a song tell them?	SL.3–5.4 — Report on a topic, using appropriate facts and details. L.3–5.5 — Demonstrate figurative language and word relationships. RF.3–5.4 — Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency. 4.MS.4, 4.MS.10, 4.MS.11 — Describe significant MS history/figures/symbols; explain how literature, arts, and music distinguish MS; evaluate geographic/economic factors shaping community life. INTEGRATE OBJECTIVE: Students research community history and culture, listen to mentor songs that tell place-based stories, then use syllable-mapping to write and perform an original song about their own town — uniting social studies inquiry, ELA writing craft, and musical composition.	
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Learning with Students — Lesson Step-by-Step

Time	Teacher Script & Actions	Looking for Learning What do you want students to know and do?
Step 1 15 min	Teacher Script & Actions: Hook: Songs Tell Stories. Play short clips from “This Land Is Your Land” (Woody Guthrie), “City of New Orleans” (Arlo Guthrie), and “Meridian” (Richelle Putnam) — titles referenced, no lyrics reproduced. Ask: What story does this song tell? Where does it take place? Discuss verse/chorus structure and the AAB lyric pattern.	Looking for Learning: Students will SEE: Marking the verse/chorus structure on a lyric chart as they listen. Students will HEAR: Naming specific details from each mentor song that made them picture a place.

Step 2 15 min	Teacher Script & Actions: Community Brainstorm. Students use the community research worksheet to list five things that make their town unique: a landmark, a local food, a historical event, a tradition, and a notable person. Share out and compile a class community facts board.	Looking for Learning: Students will SEE: Students filling out the community research worksheet with local landmarks, people, and events. Students will HEAR: Students explaining why each chosen community fact is important to their town's story.
Step 3 15 min	Teacher Script & Actions: Research and Fact Gathering. In small groups, students deepen their list using available resources (printed community fact sheets, reference books). Groups select their strongest facts and consider which details fit a song's rhythm.	Looking for Learning: Students will SEE: Groups comparing their fact lists and circling the most "songworthy" details. Students will HEAR: Groups discussing which facts are strongest and why some words feel more musical.
Step 4 20 min (+ 10 min practice/performance)	Teacher Script & Actions: Syllable and Rhythm Connection Activity. Using the syllable-mapping worksheet, students clap and count syllables in their chosen facts, then try fitting them to the AAB melody pattern. Teacher models with a sample community lyric.	Looking for Learning: Students will SEE: Students clapping syllables and writing syllable counts above each word on the worksheet. Students will HEAR: Students singing their syllable-mapped phrases aloud, testing whether they fit the melody.
Step 5 20 min (+ 10 min practice/performance)	Teacher Script & Actions: Student Songwriting. Groups draft at least two verses and a chorus using their syllable-mapped facts. Teacher circulates with prompts: Does the chorus repeat? Does the verse tell a story? After drafting, groups practice and perform their song. Close with reflection: What did you learn about your town? What surprised you?	Looking for Learning: Students will SEE: Groups drafting lyrics, revising lines that don't scan, and rehearsing together. Students will HEAR: Groups performing their community story-song; class responding to what they learned about each town.

Related Resources & Materials

Materials Needed:

- Audio playback device for mentor song clips (“This Land Is Your Land,” “City of New Orleans,” “Meridian” — titles only)
- Community Research Worksheet (see separate student handout)
- Syllable-Mapping Lyric Worksheet (see separate student handout)
- Community fact sheets, reference books, or printed local history materials
- Assessment Rubric for Community Story-Song (see separate handout, 6 criteria)
- Whiteboard or chart paper for class community facts board

Extension Resources:

Mentor song recordings: “This Land Is Your Land” (Woody Guthrie), “City of New Orleans” (Arlo Guthrie, written by Steve Goodman), and “Meridian” (Richelle Putnam) — referenced by title; find on streaming platforms. For deeper exploration of community songwriting, see the companion Soundtrack of Our Town teacher’s guide. Extension project: students can record their community song and share it at a school event or with local community members.

After Teaching — Reflection on Learning

Reflection on Learning What did students say and do to show learning? Where were students successful? What were some barriers and challenges?	Next Steps How will you celebrate student successes? How will you address identified barriers and challenges?
<i>What did students say and do to show learning?</i>	<i>How will you celebrate successes and address barriers?</i>

Standards Alignment Summary

Arts Standards Addressed	Academic Standards Addressed
• MU:Cr1.1.3–5a, MU:Cr2.1.3–5a • MU:Pr4.2.3–5a, MU:Pr6.1.3–5a • MU:Cn11.0.3–5a • _____	• W.3–5.3, W.3–5.4, SL.3–5.4 • L.3–5.5, RF.3–5.4 • 4.MS.4, 4.MS.10, 4.MS.11 • _____
Integrated Objective: Students will research community history and culture, listen to mentor songs that tell place-based stories, then use syllable-mapping to collaboratively write and perform an original song about their own town — uniting social studies inquiry, ELA writing craft, and musical composition.	