**College Composition and English IV**

**“Hello, Turn Your Radio On. Is There Anybody Out There? Help Me Sing My Song”: Music, Invention, and Storytelling.**

Adapted from a teaching demonstration by Josh Call, Ph.D., Grand View University

Music shapes students’ identity growth. It provides language and metaphors with which students make sense of their experience and leads to outstanding writing…songs can help students create and understand their personalities and personae. They provide titles, questions, and central metaphors for introspection, presentation, and discussion. –Brock Dethier, from *Dylan to Donne: Bridging English*

**Rationale:** As we ponder one of our questions, “Who Am I,” I thought about Josh Call’s invention assignment. Josh writes, “My difficulty has been finding invention exercises that are both useful and engaging in ways that ultimately benefit the writing my students do.” Like Dr. Call, I wanted you to find a way to “get at” your best writing but also to “get at” answering that question, “who am I?” I believe music can define us all and through music we do find a way to express ourselves. So, through your “Life Soundtrack,” I hope you *begin* to answer this vitally important question.

**Step 1**: Brainstorm Activity

With your group, you will conduct three brainstorms to tap into your memory of songs that have had significance in your life, either because they represent a certain time period or event in your life or because the lyrics resonate with a deeper part of who you are.

Take a blank piece of paper and divide it into thirds. On each third, label it accordingly:

1. Songs of Childhood…
2. Songs from Teen years…
3. Songs from special moments, holidays, events, etc.

Try not to be tempted to work ahead on a different list. Keep your group focused on the list you are on so that you truly dig into the deepest recesses of your memory to see what you can remember. Your memory may trigger something for someone else…which is why brainstorming together is a good thing! ☺

**Step 2**: Using your brainstorm items, please come up with a list of ten songs that may represent your life. These songs should *matter to you in some capacity. You should feel some connection to the songs for whatever reasons,* *and you should be willing to explain or articulate that connection.* Fill out the following chart:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Song and Artist | Favorite lines from the song | Explain the personal connection to the song |
| 1. |  |  |
| 2. |  |  |
| 3. |  |  |
| 4. |  |  |
| 5. |  |  |
| 6. |  |  |
| 7. |  |  |
| 8. |  |  |
| 9. |  |  |
| 10. |  |  |

**Step 3**: We will now take three of the songs and write three separate five minute quick responses about the chosen songs. As you free write, consider some of the following ideas. Think about your age when you first heard this song. Think about your surroundings and the people who were present when you first really connected to the song. Think about the emotions that accompanied the song. Think about the memories you associate with this song. Try to communicate in what way this song represents your life or your place or your purpose. *Maybe discuss why it might have different meaning to you than to others.* Discuss why the song might have connections to your generation. Think about the **deeper meaning** of the song and how it might apply to your life.

**Step 4**: Please consider what kind of essay you could write out of a piece titled “My Life Soundtrack.” Many of you could probably write a narrative essay, however, if another form seems to fit well, give it a try. You can write about any one of the songs on your list, or you could write about a combination of them. The songs should spark some memories or feelings *worth writing about*. Remember that we are trying to press to deeper meaning in these essays. This is not just a list of songs you like. This is an essay that allows the reader to see you as a writer and to see how music has impacted who you are in life. Please create a rough draft to share with your peer group on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions to think about:** How does this activity with music help you with ‘form’ in essay writing? With ‘content’ in essay writing? How does this help you frame your content? How does this help you think about your audience? Who is your audience? How does this concept push you as a writer to leave the basic essay form or idea and press into a deeper thought process about who you are and the role music has played in forming who you are? How can you use some bigger ideas to tie some of your music ideas together? What could you do for an introduction or a conclusion to really pull your reader in and leave an impression on him or her?