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Foundation**

"Hearing Between The Lines"

Estimated Time of Completion: Two 50-minute periods, plus optional homework assignment

[I. Summary](#)

[II. Objectives](#)

[III. Materials Needed](#)

[IV. Procedure](#)

[V. Classroom Assessment](#)

[VI. Extensions and Adaptations](#)

[VII. Online Resources](#)

[VIII. Relevant National Standards](#)

I. Summary:

For grades 7-12. Students will listen to and read lyrics from popular songs that explore themes of self-esteem, body image, and eating disorders. The song interpretations will serve as a jumping-off point to deeper discussion on the issues, culminating in a writing exercise.

II. Objectives:

- To interpret song lyrics both objectively and subjectively
- To understand that self-image struggles are part of being human and affect everyone
- To be better able to identify the pressures to look and act a certain way, and where these pressures come from
- To be able to express their own attitudes, experiences, and feelings about self-image and how it is influenced by the media.

III. Materials Needed:

- CD or tape player
- Songs on CD or tape (preferably 2 or more):
 - "At Seventeen" - Janis Ian (from *Between The Lines* album)
 - "Perfect" - Alanis Morissette (from *Jagged Little Pill* album)
 - "Ana's Song" - Silverchair (from *Neon Ballroom* album)
 - "Reflection" - Christina Aguilera (from *Christina Aguilera* album)
- Song lyric sheets:
 - ["At Seventeen"](#) - Janis Ian
 - ["Perfect"](#) - Alanis Morissette
 - ["Ana's Song"](#) - Silverchair
 - ["Reflection"](#) - Christina Aguilera

IV. Procedure:

1. Begin the lesson with some discussion questions that will help students focus in on the subject:
 - Who are your favorite celebrities/entertainers? What do you like best about them? Do you like

the way they look?

- If you could "be" any entertainer, who would you pick, and why?
- Do you think celebrities always like the way they look and feel great about themselves?
- Did you watch, see, or listen to any type of entertainment this week that made you feel bad about yourself? Anything that made you feel good about yourself?

2. Explain to students that you will be focusing on media-- namely, music-- that deals with issues of body image, self-esteem, and eating disorders. By looking at what certain artists have to say on the subject, we'll see that they're all related--and that everyone experiences these feelings, no matter how "successful" they are or "perfect" they seem on the outside.

3. Play one of the songs and ask students to just listen to it, taking note of how it makes them feel.

4. Pass out the song lyrics and play the song again, asking students to follow along.

5. Discuss the song. General questions might include:

- What does the song title mean, and how does it relate to the song lyrics?
- If you could come up with an alternate title for this song, what would it be? Why?
- What is the songwriter trying to tell you? What do you think they were feeling when they wrote this song?
- Do you agree or disagree with what they're saying? Why?
- How did this song make you feel? Did you feel that it was expressing feelings that are similar to your own?

6. Bring up questions about the particular song and its lyrics:

- Suggested questions on "At Seventeen":

- Janis Ian wrote this song over 25 years ago. Are there themes in her lyrics that were only present in 1975, or are they present now as well? Do you think that these things will be true when the song is played in another 25 years?
- What is "the truth" that Janis Ian refers to?
- What is "the game" that she sings about?
- Why is she singing about age 17, rather than age 30, or 12, or any other time in one's life?

- Suggested questions on "Perfect":

- Alanis Morissette has admitted that she has struggled with anorexia. In this song, she is definitely delivering a message to someone. Who is it? What is the tone of the message? Is the message serious or sarcastic?
- What familiar terms and ideas do you hear in the lyrics?
Examples: "good enough," "win first place," and "good girl."
- What teen problems are these ideas associated with?
Examples: parental pressure, competition, peer pressure, etc.

- Suggested questions on "Ana's Story":

- Silverchair's lead singer Daniel Johns, who wrote this song, has admitted to a history with eating disorders. Does it surprise you to hear about a guy who has an eating disorder? Why would a guy be vulnerable to an eating disorder? What pressures are out there for males to look a certain way? What is the stereotype "perfect male body"?
- Who-- or rather, what-- is "Ana"? (a disease: anorexia nervosa). What in the song tells you that dealing with this disease is a real battle?

- Suggested questions on "Reflection":

- What is "reflection"? What kinds of reflections do we deal with in daily life?
Examples: mirrors, comparing ourselves with others, inner self-reflection.
- Do you think that everyone feels like nobody sees the "real them"? What can you do to feel that people ARE seeing the "real you"?

7. If time, repeat the process with another song.
8. Assign a writing activity for homework or for in-class exercise:

Option 1 (for in-class): Write a letter to one of the artists that you just heard. Tell them what you did or did not like about their song, and why. If you did like it, recount one episode in your life that relates to the theme and/or emotions expressed. If you didn't like it, explain how you feel differently, with an experience to back it up.

or

Option 2 (for homework): Ask students to find a song that they feel deals with self-esteem issues, then write an essay interpreting the song lyrics line by line.

In the next class period, ask volunteers to share their letters or song/interpretations.

V. Classroom Assessment:

Score student work to the following scale:

- **4:** Contributed to class discussion and completed a well-planned, well thought-out, and creative writing assignment.
- **3:** Contributed to class discussion and completed a fairly planned writing assignment.
- **2:** Contributed minimally to class discussion and writing assignment not well done.
- **1:** Writing assignment was incomplete.

VI. Extensions and Adaptations:

- Have students write letters to a news outlet or talk show (such as Oprah, Today Show, etc.), asking them to cover the issue of self-image and the media, and presenting reasons why it's an important subject.
- Have students identify one piece of media that made them angry or that they felt was unrealistic, then write a song about it by replacing the lyrics of an existing song with their own.
- Have students explore other media for expressing positive messages about self image by: writing a poem or short story, creating a drawing, painting, or collage, taking a photograph or group of photographs, composing a song, writing and performing a sketch, etc.

VII. Online Resources:

- **PBS In the Mix** - "Self-Image: The Fantasy, The Reality"
www.pbs.org/mix/selfimage_index.html
- **PBS "Affluenza"**
<http://www.pbs.org/kcts/affluenza>
- **Dads And Daughters**
<http://www.dadsanddaughters.org>
- **Radiance Magazine (For All Size Women)**
<http://www.radiancemagazine.com>
- **Girls, Inc.**
<http://www.girlsinc.org/PROGRAMS>
- **About-Face**
<http://www.about-face.org>

VIII. Relevant National Standards:

These are established by McREL at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/docs/contents.html>:

Health

- Knows environmental and external factors that affect individual and community health
- Knows how to maintain mental and emotional health

Language Arts

- Students will use descriptive language that clarifies and enhances ideas
- Students will use a variety of sentence structure to express expanded ideas

Life Skills

- Self Regulation: Performs self-appraisal
- Self Regulation: Maintains a healthy self-concept

Language Arts

- Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process
- Demonstrates competence in the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing
- Demonstrates competence in speaking and listening as tools for learning

Behavioral Studies

- Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior

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