**Subject area/course**: English/Language Arts; English Literature

**Grade level/band**: 11-12

**Task source**: Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC)

**Verses vs. Lyrics: Poetry and Song**

**TEACHER'S GUIDE**

1. **Task overview**:

For this task, students write an essay comparing a poem to the lyrics of a song. The two texts should share a common theme. Students will write a 3-4 page paper arguing whether the similar use of figurative language, rhythm, sound effects, and other poetic techniques in song lyrics prove those lyrics worthy of being taught as poetry in a literature class.

1. **Aligned standards:**
2. **Primary Common Core State Standards**

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/11-12/1/) Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/11-12/4/) Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/11-12/6/) Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/1/) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/4/) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.5](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/5/) Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/9/) Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

1. **Critical abilities**

Research: Conduct sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem, narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate, and demonstrate understanding of the subject under investigation. Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, use advanced searches effectively, and assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the specific task, purpose, and audience.

Analysis of Information:Integrate and synthesize multiple sources of information (e.g., texts, experiments, simulations) presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to address a question, make informed decisions, understand a process, phenomenon, or concept, and solve problems while evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

Communication in Many Forms:Use oral and written communication skills to learn, evaluate, and express ideas for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, and rewriting while considering the audience.

1. **Time/schedule requirements:**

Before the assignment is given, students should spend class time discussing questions of poetry as a genre of literature, including the various elements listed above. Students should also apply these definitions to poetry/song lyric pairings in class. These discussions in advance of the assignment would likely take 1-2 weeks.

Once students are given the assignment, they should be allowed 1-2 weeks to complete.

1. **Materials/resources:**

* Internet access for students
* Sample poems and songs to use to introduce the task in class:
  + Edwin Arlington Robinson’s “Richard Cory” is available at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/16079>
  + Simon and Garfunkel’s “Richard Cory” (lyrics and audio) is available at: <http://www.lyricsfreak.com/s/simon+and+garfunkel/richard+cory_20124655.html>
  + Anne Sexton’s “The Starry Night” is available at: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/171273>
  + Don McLean’s “Vincent” (lyrics and audio) is available at: <http://www.songlyrics.com/don-mclean/vincent-lyrics/>
  + William Shakespeare’s “My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun” (Sonnet 130) is available at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15557>
  + The Civil Wars’ “Birds of a Feather” can be heard at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgb05OvtHBw>. Lyrics alone are available at: http://www.songlyrics.com/the-civil-wars/birds-of-a-feather-lyrics/ and on the liner notes to the 2011 album *Barton Hollow*.

1. **Prior knowledge:**

Students should be able to:

* Identify and analyze important poetic techniques, including figurative language, imagery, sound effects, wordplay, layered meanings, symbol, and voice.
* Apply the use of poetic techniques as criteria to define a work as a poem.
* Write an argumentative definitional essay.
* Use MLA style.

1. **Connection to curriculum:**

None listed.

1. **Teacher instructions:**

* Students should work independently during this task.
* Students should be well-versed in using criteria to evaluate poetry/song lyrics. Some students will confuse taste with applying evaluative criteria, and teachers should be prepared to guide them in avoiding this erroneous approach.
* In order to introduce this task, the teacher may choose to have the whole class analyze one of the following poem/lyrics pairings:
  + Edwin Arlington Robinson’s “Richard Cory” and Simon and Garfunkel’s “Richard Cory”
  + Anne Sexton’s “The Starry Night” and Don McLean’s “Vincent”
  + William Shakespeare’s “My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun” (Sonnet 130) and The Civil Wars’ “Birds of a Feather”
* Students should have models of the work they are asked to do through class discussion of similar pieces.
* The teacher should allow students to submit a rough draft for feedback before submitting a final version. The teacher should also ask students to complete a peer review during class or electronically outside of class.
* A note on scoring student work: Some students will argue for song lyrics to be considered poetry based on the definitions and usage of various poetic techniques; others might argue that song lyrics may not be considered poetry because of the loss of context that removing the aural component of a song will create (e.g., in “Birds of a Feather,” the song is written to be sung as a duet, something that may be lost when considering only the words on the printed page). Some might qualify their arguments, indicating that certain song lyrics might stand as poetry while others might not, in which case they would need to demonstrate what qualities a song lyric would need to have to define it as poetry.

1. **Student support:**

The following suggestions are examples of scaffolding that can be used to meet the diverse student needs within the classroom.

* Provide class time for research on students’ topics.
* Provide definitions of new vocabulary words ahead of time.
* For the final product, all learners will benefit from peer assistance while brainstorming their topics, as well as a peer- or teacher-edit of their papers before final submission.
* Some students will have good research skills, but some will need guidance in the determination of appropriate sources and where to look for them. It is important to spend class time in review of what constitutes an appropriate source in advance of students’ independent work time.

1. **Extensions or variations:**

* Students could present the results of their research to the class via an oral or multi-media presentation.
* If there is a particularly interesting and/or controversial topic, a debate could be organized where students choose sides on the topic and defend their views.
* Students could research and incorporate outside texts to support their position.

1. **Scoring:**

Student work can be scored using the College and Career Ready (CCR) Task Bank Rubric.