



# Songwriting For Nature Curriculum Document

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Objective

The Songwriting For Nature project will connect people to the land of Last Mountain Lake through the process of songwriting.

### Goals

The goals of this project will focus on high school age students with a focus on creativity, self-expression and connecting students to the land through site visits. We will explore the process of songwriting from creating the song to a final performance of the student work. Goals will include:

- give the students a voice that will be shared through the concert and social media (e.g. Facebook);
- learning tools in the creation of a song;
- producing original songs created by the learners inspired by their experiences at Last Mountain Lake;
- learning additional skills in social media, photography and video editing/creation to enhance sharing their compositions;
- sharing student work to promote the area of Last Mountain Lake and encourage conservation by public support through the messages in the music;
- raising awareness of the land and issues related to Last Mountain Lake;
- extending the reach of the project of large groups of people being connected to Last Mountain Lake through audience members, seeing the project on social media sites or viewing a touring exhibit of the project.

### Solution

The project has assembled a team of professionals in a compliment of different fields. For songwriting, the team is lead by Glenn Sutter with assistance from Megan Nash, Kara Golemba and Ryan Hicks. Each of these professionals bring their unique skills and expertise to the project. For the purpose of this curriculum document, Ryan Hicks is the lead. Ryan Hicks is a Saskatchewan songwriter, performer as well as a educator with 16 years of experience and Ryan recently received his masters in education from the University of Regina (curriculum & instruction). This report will outline the project, link the project to the outcomes in the Saskatchewan Arts Education 09 curriculum and include lesson plans for the project.

### Project Outline

The project is currently in development, but the entire team has met, corresponded and have direction for the project.

- Fall 2015-Spring 2016- Develop the project and collect resources materials needed.
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- Spring 2016- Send out pamphlet/poster of the project to school divisions in southern Saskatchewan. This will be distributed through the arts education consultant/ superintendents. The pamphlet will give an overview of the project, highlights, as well as contact information for any interested learner.
- Spring 2016- work with various school divisions on distributing the pamphlet/poster and answering related questions to the project.
- May 2016- site visit to Last Mountain Lake with the team to look at the area and assess facilities.
- May-June 2016- selection process of interested learners.
- June 2016- notifying successful applicants, obtaining permission/consent (sharing of their student work) and distributing information to these applicants
- Summer 2016- preparing for the September site visit
- September 2016- weekend retreat with entire team and learners to Last Mountain Lake.
- Fall 2016- Spring 2017- stay in correspondence with team and learners through the development of their songs and the project. Possibly hold face to face meetings with the learners to continue working on their songs.
- Spring 2017- second retreat weekend (to be determined if this is with the same learners or opening it up to new members)
- May-June 2017- meet to prepare for public performance of the songs created by the learners.
- June 2017- public performance of the songs/ sharing of the project with an audience.
- June 2017- Sept 2019- Adult Songwriting Camps
- October 2019- March 2020- Recruiting for 2020 Student Songwriting Camp

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

### **Curriculum Connections**

#### **Focus of Gr. 09 Arts Education (and other subjects)**

##### *Taking Action*

Saskatchewan curriculum guides encourage cross-curricular themes in all subjects and grades. In grade nine the central theme is, "Taking Action: surviving life's challenges." In all grade nine subjects, learners look at how to overcome obstacles and challenges. Arts Education students look at how artists express their thoughts, emotions and what is important to them through their art (i.e. songwriting). There is a focus on Saskatchewan artists and to look at how these local artists express themselves through their art and how their art connects to the land (Saskatchewan).

This aspect is key to the Songwriting By Nature project as the outcomes of the project line-up with the outcomes

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of the Saskatchewan Arts Education 09 curriculum. While the team has chosen to focus on the gr. 09 curriculum, the project is open to learners from gr.9-12. In the curriculum it states that students will, “Research and describe the work of contemporary Saskatchewan and Canadian artists” (p. 27). Working with Saskatchewan artists such as Megan Nash, Glenn Sutter and Ryan Hicks allows different perspectives of artists who have a deep connection to the land in their own music. Through working with these artists, the learners will discover methods to express their own thoughts, feelings, emotions and issues that are important to them.

While this is a songwriting project, it is specifically designed to connect learners to Last Mountain Lake. Whenever possible, the learners will be outside, in the fields and connecting with nature. The classroom is not tables, desks and chairs, but blue sky, green grass and open spaces. We have planned visits in May and September where the team feels will be ideal times to visit to experience the migratory birds in their habitat. Throughout the project we will be documenting the experience with sound recordings (the sounds of nature), pictures and video. As we share the project online and at the performance we want to transport the audience into the space where the songs were first created.

## **Connection between Songwriting for Nature and the Outcome and Indicators of the Curriculum**

### **CRITICAL PRODUCTIVE (CP)**

*CP9.7 Use voice, instruments and technologies to express musical ideas*

The Saskatchewan Grade Nine Arts Education Curriculum states in Creative/Productive Outcomes that students, “create and improvise with an instrument of choice” and “prepare, rehearse, and present structured compositions and improvisations.” (CP9.7, p.21). In this project students will learn how to create songs, how to record these songs and how to share these songs (e.g. social media).

*CP 9.8 Combine the elements of music and principles of composition to express unified musical ideas.*

Participants will be applying the music theory and tools for songwriting creation they will learn at the retreats into their own compositions. The team of experts will demonstrate these elements and how they are used to be expressive in their own music.

*CP 9.9 Compose and perform sound compositions to express perspectives and raise awareness about a topic or concern to youth.*

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*This is the heart of the project. **If people do not feel connected to the land, they will not value its importance, understand the habitat or fight for the environmental good of the area.** By simultaneously teaching songwriting skills and learning about the Last Mountain Lake area we hope to develop all of these important areas through the creation of the students' original songs.*

## **CRITICAL RESPONSIVE (CR)**

*CR 9.1 Respond to professional dance, drama, music and visual art works through individual or collaborative inquiry and the creation of own arts and expressions.*

Part of the songwriting process will be to look at the music the students admire and pull out qualities in songs they enjoy (e.g. simple message, relatable, interesting, said in a unique way, etc.). Megan, Glenn and Ryan will also share their experiences in songwriting and how the music they make relates to their home province of Saskatchewan. All three artists have used place based themes in their music and maintain a strong connection in related issues (i.e. environmental, nature, spiritual, animals and nature).

*CR9.2 Investigate and identify ways that today's arts expressions can inspire change.*

Sharing our collective work will be vital for the project. By documenting the progress and the final product, all aspects can be shared with a larger audience. The scope of the project can grow through this sharing and hopefully affect change not only in the students' lives, but with the lives of all who become familiar with the project.

*CR 9.3 Investigate and identify how arts expressions can challenge thinking about values, ideas and beliefs*

While we will be working in Last Mountain Lake, the space is only part of the songwriting process. We will look at issues meaningful to the students and how one could express their voice through music.

## **CULTURAL/ HISTORICAL (CH)**

*CH 9.1 Investigate and discuss the role of artists in raising awareness or taking action on topics of concern.*

Discuss with the songwriting team how they express themselves through music on issues meaningful to them. Through mentoring, the team will help focus the student's message and how to best get the message across through the creation of original songs.

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*CH 9.2 Use the arts to raise awareness on topics of concern to indigenous artists in dance, drama, music and visual arts.*

Part of the research into the area will be to see what the area was used for historically (i.e. home to cree indigenous people in the spring and summer). We could also use this as a question to the learners, “how is the future of this land important to understanding treaties and that we are all treaty people?”

*CH 9.3 Investigate diversity of artistic ideas, styles, and media in contemporary arts expressions*

This area would be ideal to look at Saskatchewan artists and how they express ideas and emotions close to them (e.g. First Nations artist Lindsay Knight aka Eewkol). We would also look at the environmental issues surrounding Last Mountain Lake and how these issues could affect the area’s future.

*CH 9.4 Create interdisciplinary arts expressions individually or through collaboration with peers, and examine the work of artists who create interdisciplinary expressions (e.g., sound and poetry, performance art, audio video installations).*

The final presentation/ concert would be interdisciplinary, as in addition to music there will be photography, audio/ video installation and other possible disciplines depending on each student’s interests. In order to give the audience a feeling of being in Last Mountain Lake we will create an experience that will make the audience feel they are in Last Mountain Lake.

## **THE LESSONS**

These are the suggested lessons, but could vary depending on time. The nature of the first few lessons could allow for learners to examine the material before the site visit.

### *Lesson one overview*

In this lesson, the learners will look at what they look for in a song. Learners are asked to look for common traits in a few songs that they feel are good quality. In addition to individual journaling, the students will be encouraged to discuss their responses within small groups. Outcomes of this lesson include identifying qualities of good songwriting, examining what to look for in music and to identify whose “voice” is in a song (who is the song speaking for and to).

### *Lesson two overview*

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This lesson begins with a brainstorming pre-write on a particular subject. It is assumed most students have never written a song and/or have little practice in creative writing. In order to generate ideas for their song we will look at warming-up the mind to thinking creatively. Students are encouraged to pick a topic that they are knowledgeable or passionate about. If the learners have a chance to do a tour of the area before this part of the assignment, it might encourage issues related to Last Mountain Lake as it would be fresh in their minds. From this brainstorming, they will begin to look for a central theme or idea for their song. After this, they will look for related words, develop rhyming words to work with related words and begin to start thinking about, 'what do I want to say and how am I going to say it?'

Outcomes of this lesson include brainstorming techniques, editing and reflective writing of their experiences.

#### *Lesson three overview*

This lesson will introduce the concept of the three boxes. The three boxes is a way of developing the central ideas of your song in a similar way to a plot diagram/outline. Through clear exploration of the story of the song, learners will focus on the important messages and the clearest way to convey these messages.

Outcomes for this lesson will include students creating their own narrative, learning skills in developing ideas and effective storytelling.

#### *Lesson four overview*

This lesson will introduce the students to a simple format for writing their original song. While there is no absolute method in creating a song, this method is approachable to beginning writers as it helps them focus their thoughts and ideas before the lyrics are written. The format given will allow for focusing of their initial ideas and easily creating a song through a simple format.

Outcomes for this lesson will be an application of the skills they are learning in composition by creating their own following a simple format.

#### *Lesson five overview*

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Students will begin to create melodies and harmonies that will support their lyrical ideas. The melody should match the mood and feelings conveyed in the lyrics (e.g. relaxed vs intense, major vs minor keys, etc.).

Outcomes for this lesson include learning about line, shape and tension & release.

#### *Lesson six overview*

Students will learn how to capture/record their ideas. This can be done by the process of tracking (recording one instrument at a time) or recording a live performance. We will explore both processes and discover best practices for both (e.g. using a computer program like Pro Tools, using high-quality microphones and cameras to record).

Outcomes for this lesson include acquiring recording, video recording, and editing skills.

#### *Lesson seven overview*

Now that we have a product, we will look at the best way to share the product such as uploading music to Soundcloud, uploading a video to Youtube or commercial release (e.g.iTunes). Other related topics to this step will include publicity (e.g. one-sheet bios, band photos), website design, branding and best practices for getting your work noticed by an audience.

Outcomes for this lesson include learning basics in design, promotion and advertising (e.g. how you want to represent yourself and your music to the public).

#### *Lesson eight overview*

As we prepare to showcase our songs through a live performance, we will look at what it takes to put on a successful live show and how to best connect with the audience during a live performance. This lesson will also address reducing the anxiety performing in front of an audience and how to channel that energy into something positive that can be used to enhance their performance.

Objectives include learning live production skills (e.g. live sound/lighting), stagecraft, live music methods (e.g. looking at the audience, how to create an effective set-list), building drama in the performance and relaxation methods specifically designed for reducing anxiety (e.g. breathing, positive self-talk, use of imagination).

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