Session 11 Transcript: Linda Johnson

- Hi, my name is Linda Johnson, and I am a current Level 2 specialist with the Institute for Arts Integration and STEAM. My primary arts background is in music, but I also have experience in teaching elementary school, and secondary English Language Arts and Reading. Over the years, as a music teacher, I noticed that composition was one of the areas I neglected the most. I was so busy teaching the basics of music, and preparing for performances, that I never had any time to allow my students to create and record their own music. I also noticed, that when students wrote responses to listening activities in my classroom, their writing skills were very poor. Then it dawned on me. That I could help students improve their writing skills, and make time for composition, by combining the writing process for English Language Arts, with the composition process for music. So today, I will share how easy it is to get your students writing in your classroom, with the arts-integrated songwriting process. ♪ Yeah, this is how we flow ♪ ♪ Mechanical, electrical ♪ ♪ Lights, thermal and sound ♪ ♪ Yeah, here we go ♪ ♪ These are the types ♪ Anyone can write a song using an acoustic instrument, or with technology. If you don't have a strong musical background, but would like to use songwriting as an approach to learning with your students, technology will be your best friend. In this session, you can actively participate in the music-making process, if you grab your smartphone, tablet or laptop. This will help you explore some of the musical ideas we will discuss, as we work through the songwriting process. Here's some of the standards we will be hitting today. For the arts area, we will use the National Core Arts Standards for music, to generate musical ideas within related tonalities and meters. This will include rhythms, melodies, and simple accompaniment patterns. The students will use this standard to create their musical composition. For our core content area, we will use the English Language Arts Standard, for writing informative and explanatory text, to examine a topic, and convey ideas and information clearly. Students will use this standard to write their song lyrics. Students will also use the concept of the geosphere, or the layers of the earth, to write their music compositions. Many of the science concepts you will see and hear throughout their music, will come from the Next Generation Science Standards, that pertain to one or more of the different types of energy, such as mechanical, electrical, light, thermal and sound. Now let's look at the similarities between the writing processes for music and English Language Arts and Reading. The composition process has five steps. The first is pre-compose, then rough draft, revise, edit with the final draft, and perform and publish. Now let's look at the writing process. It also has five steps. Pre-write, rough draft, revise, edit with the final draft, and publish. Notice that the concepts we use, in the composition process, and the writing process, are almost identical. The difference lies in the terminology. For example, the composition process uses musical notation. The writing process uses words. Now think about the musical terms, form and motif, and compare them with the writing terms, sentence structure and main idea. Form and sentence structure function the same way in music and Language Arts, and a musical motif is simply a theme or main idea, that recurs throughout a song. Now let's move on and look at the handout, for the arts-integrated songwriting process. Notice that steps one through three occur at the same time. The first step of pre-composing,

giving students a menu, and letting them brainstorm musical ideas, and pre-writing, giving students a menu and letting them brainstorm gist statements, ideas, are going on at the same time. Then, as a rhythmic track laid in step two, the students who are writing the lyrics are beginning to write about the academic content, and organizing the theme to match the form that's on the music menu. And in step three, the students create a musical motif, based on a melody or bassline, and upon its completion, the students working with the core content begin to add melodies and rhythm, meter, to the lyrics, as they listen to the melody. Or, the bassline, that is in the musical motif. This process continues, until the music and the lyrics come together, and they sound the way the students want to have it. There is also another aspect that is very important to this process, and believe it or not, it's connected to science. It's the idea of layering. If you remember from your Science class, you learned that the Earth has layers. As a matter of fact, it has four layers. You have the inner core, the outer core, the mantle and the crust. And just as the Earth has its layers, when composing a song, you do it the same way. With layers. Here's how the concept applies. Rhythm is the core, and holds the entire song together with a steady beat. Harmony is the outer core, and is important in holding down the chord structure of the song. The mantle is the biggest part, which would be the tambor, or the instruments used, that gives the song more flavor. And the melody is a single instrument or voice, and is the thinnest layer, just like the crust of the Earth. The Earth itself is a form, just as the shape of a song, or how a song is put together in the whole package. Here is an example of a song, that one of my piano students put together. You can see and hear that the first area, in blue, is a percussion instrument, and you will see and hear the second percussion instrument, that's layered in green, and the third is in gold. You can actually see the layering of the music in this digital audio workstation. If you notice, she layers the instruments almost mathematically, as the song progresses, about every eight measures. The first melodic instrument she adds is a flute, and after that, she adds a string instrument, that's lower in pitch, and then a third. This song is a great example of what layering music looks like, and sounds like. And it was all done using pre-made loops, in GarageBand. Now it's time to pull out your devices, and begin our songwriting session. I will be using GarageBand, and you can follow along, and lay your musical tracks along with me, or you can come back later and pause the video, and go step-by-step at your own pace. You have a blank template for your composition project, and you can also fill this out as we go along to document your ideas. So here we go. Step one, pre-compose and pre-write. Here is where we set our parameters for our song and our subject matter. Student work with parameters on the board, and in this case, my students were working on a song for the District STEM Expo, and were writing about METLS, or the five types of energy, mechanical, electrical, light, thermal, and sound. So if you look ahead at your planning sheet, this section prompts you to answer questions that helps you plan out your song. In the first step, I like to have a composition checklist. You can say this is how I set up my menu. It helps the students organize their ideas, and makes sure that you address the core content and the music concepts, equitably, during the songwriting process. And since we were talking about the types of energy, I just asked the students to choose one or more types of

energy to write about, to choose a sound that creates an image, or that type of energy, create a song with purposeful form, what is it, what is the form of the song. List three to five characteristics or example of the energy, type that you chose. Write some rhyming couplets that summarize the characteristics of that energy type. Write an eight-note bassline using one, four, five and six chords. And then choose three distinct sounds or instruments for your composition that go together well. This checklist assists my students a lot, because honestly, some of them do not know what to do, or what to look for, as they write their song. But it helps to set up a menu for them, with specific instructions like this. In step two, we're laying a rhythmic track, and writing out our lyrics. We will use what I like to call rhyming couplets, to make gist statements about our subject matter here. I'll give you an example. One year my students did a project about the phases of the moon, and they were trying to describe what the different phases of the moon look like. One of them wrote, "The first quarter is black and white, "One half is dark, and the other half is light." So you can see in the rhyming couplet, how the words 'white' and 'light' are rhyming. And the gist statement, is that the main idea, the student is trying to summarize, in two lines. In this case, the main idea is that we can only see half of the moon's surface illuminated during the first quarter moon phase. In this slide, you will actually see some student work. She's brainstorming rhyming words, and writing down rhyming couplets and ideas for her chorus. And here you can see, that the same chorus idea, and one of the verses the student wrote in her music journal, in the final version of the song. And in the meantime, her songwriting partner was exploring various rhythmic tracks to create an accompaniment for the lyrics. Now remember, a rhythmic track has only percussion, and will not have any melodic or harmonic properties. So let's start to talk about step three, the outer core. That's where we're going to use a bassline. We talked about the blues and the four-chord pop pattern in the planning sheet that you already have. We use the bassline to develop a hook or a main idea for the chorus, and also to help with the rhythmic flow of the verses. So remember, this is a work in progress, so things will change as we go along. Here's an example of how this actually works. I muted everything at the beginning so you can hear how we build the tracks. The first one is a cowbell, and then after the cowbell is a bass drum. And the cowbell is actually a sample. We sampled the sound of the cowbell and recorded it. And then we struck the center of a bucket, and we added the bucket center as well, as a sample. The next layer is the rim of the bucket, and then we added the high-hat, the triplet fill of ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch. Then we added the bass xylophones, we added a few more to help with the bottom. And we continued to add and layer the remaining instruments until we finished with the piano. This is an example of how to layer through GarageBand using the 12-bar blues progression. My students decided that they wanted to use the pop song chord progression. And this student did hers in Google Flat, which is an add-on in the Google Suite. When you enter the notation, you can actually playback what you wrote. You can also input music using the keyboard within the app. And Google Flat will place the note you play on the staff for you. In other words, if you're not able to read music notation, but you know where C is on the piano, you can actually play the keyboard, and with your ear, figure out what you want to do,

and Google Flat will notate it for you. It's a great learning tool. In this case, the student input her bassline using a midi piano on GarageBand, and one of our teaching artists added an additional track for the bassline that she wrote, using his bass guitar. If you look at the video, you will be able to see how this actually happened. Looking at the green area, labeled Hollywood Strings, that's where the bassline was originally placed on the synthesizer, that's playing the strings. As you go down, you'll see a picture of an amplifier right underneath the bubble. That's where it says Classic Stat, and that is where the bass was added, and it was actually added with a bass guitar, input into the iPad directly. Step four is revise and edit. That means to add or delete other instruments and parts of the song, until you're satisfied with your final product. Here is an example of revising and editing. The students decided that they wanted to add another part, and you can see that the voices are layering on, and there are a few changes in the drum machine synthesizer, that's labeled with a gold area. That's the percussion. And once there are two speaking voices that have layered on top of each other, the singing voice returns. And so within the actual song, in the bridge, another type of layering effect actually occurred. Step five is publish and perform. Now we are ready to perform our final product. In GarageBand, you can share your song as a project or a song. You can also create slides with lyrics, and sometimes you can just make a music video. If you make a music video, the writing process begins again, but this time you use a storyboard to plan out the video. There are several benefits to using the arts-integrated process for songwriting. One is student engagement. Students are engaged, and eager to learn, because they are involved in a creative process as content creators. It's also a win for the core subjects and arts, because students are demonstrating their understanding of writing, through music. They are also summarizing details about other subjects in their writing, at the same time. Three, students are creating content with technology. Students are using technology in a constructive and creative way. Digital audio workstations such as GarageBand help to make the songwriting accessible for anyone, including those with limited musical knowledge. Four, it's culturally-responsive. Songwriting in general is a wonderful, responsive strategy, for any classroom. It fosters cognitive development and independent learning, because it is student-centered, and based on student choice. Last, twenty-first century skills. Students are engaging in these skills when they work in pairs and small groups, because they're creating, collaborating, using critical thinking skills, and communicating, through words and music. The arts-integrated songwriting process is also very transferrable. For example, Science. Students can use an ostinato in music, and pair it with original lyrics, about a pattern that repeats in nature or science, such as the moon phases. In History, students can write songs that summarize information about historical figures, monuments, and important events in history, with rhyming couplets and giving informants, to demonstrate their knowledge and musical skills. In Math, they can demonstrate math concepts, such as fractions, symmetry, and sequence, in melodic and rhythmic patterns that they create in their music. And last, we have cloud-based apps. The music production side of songwriting is transferrable to other devices and cloud-based apps. Some examples of these would be, Soundtrap. Soundtrap is a cloud-based app with opportunities for collaboration and

works in the computer browser. BandLab is another music creation platform, that is also cloud-based and free. It works on iOS, Android, and web. Chrome Music Lab is free and incredibly accessible to everyone who has access to the web. Students can create and share music in the Song Maker section. Let's take one last look at our little cheat sheet, with a list of reminders of how to follow the arts-integrated songwriting process. Pre-compose and pre-write, in your first section, is where you will fill in what subject you are writing about, what type of mood you want to create, whether it's happy or whether it's sad. And that of course will determine your tempo, which is how fast or slow you go. And then also the instruments that you choose. I put the information for the chord patterns for the 12-bar blues pattern, and the four-chord pop pattern, and also just random, just in case you wanna use pre-made loops that are already in your digital audio workstation. Now looking at your rhythmic track and rhyming couplets, you will have to just circle whatever you want to do. There's a place for you to put your rhyming words, and also verse ideas with the rhyming couplets. And then you have your bassline. And this is where you're going to put it with your digital audio workstation. You will develop your ideas for your chorus here as well. Your chorus should be repetitive, should be something that's catchy. And of course, once you've done, you'll re-write it, and revise it, and publish and perform. And that's it. And this is just a guideline that should help you. I hope this session was very helpful, and you are well on your way to using the arts-integrated songwriting process. I would like to encourage you to try writing your own songs, either by yourself, or collaborate with a friend or coworker. If you have any questions, you can reach me through my email at lindajohnson@mattstudio.net. Songwriting can be work, but the rewards are completely worth it. Keep plugging away, encourage yourself. And with the words of the American songwriter, Steve Seskin, remember, the best way to become a better songwriter, is to keep writing songs. Thank you.