

Songs of Loss: Springsteen and 9/11

The Basics

Time Required

1-2 class periods

Subject Areas

Middle School Humanities

Contemporary America, 1968-present

Common Core Standards Addressed:

Writing Standards K-5

Author

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The Lesson

Introduction

Bruce Springsteen (b. 1949) wrote the songs “You’re Missing” and “Empty Sky” for his CD titled *The Rising* (Columbia, 2002) as a response to the events of September 11, 2001. Springsteen’s home county of Monmouth in New Jersey lost 158 people on 9/11. Within days of the towers collapsing, Springsteen began writing songs. These two songs were inspired by discussions that he had with two New Jersey widows who lost their husbands when the twin towers of the World Trade Center collapsed.

Guiding Questions

What do you know about the 9/11 terrorist attacks?

Learning Objectives

Students will present responses to and interpretations of literature, making reference to the literary elements found in the text and connections with their personal knowledge and experience produce interpretations of literary works that identify different levels of meaning and comment on their significance and effect write stories, poems, literary essays, and plays that observe the conventions of the genre and contain interesting and effective language and voice.

Preparation Instructions

Songs used in lesson:

- “You’re Missing” Bruce Springsteen

- “Empty Sky” Bruce Springsteen

Lesson Activities

Introductory learning activities:

- Begin by reading the monologue “A Very Intriguing Train,” page 127 from *With Their Eyes*.
- When you finish the reading ask students to write a response to the question “What do you remember about the events of September 11, 2001?” Students should then share their responses with a partner. As a class, create a list of experiences, memories, and feelings about that day.
- Students will already know the fundamentals of sensory language and be able to identify them in a piece of text.
- Students will each receive a copy of the lyrics for both songs used in this lesson.
- Each group of five students will have a facilitator, a recorder and a reporter who will present the findings to the class as a whole.

Song discussion questions and activities:

- Whom do you think is telling this story/ Whose song is this?
- Why do you think the lyrics “Everything is Everything” and “Empty Sky” are repeated in the songs?
- What emotions are expressed in these songs?
- Does the songwriter use sensory imagery to convey these emotions? If so, how?
- What are the similarities and differences of the two songs?
- Which song is more accurate in portraying how you felt after 9/11? Why?
- Students should meet in groups of five. Each student will be responsible for one discussion question. Each group will report back to the class after 15-20 minutes of discussion.

Assessment

- Students will write their own poem about the events of September 11th. Their poem must use sensory language, repetition and be able to convey their own emotions about September 11th.
- Students will create an illustration to accompany their poem. Their illustration should convey the emotions expressed in the poem.

Resources

Lyrics

“You’re Missing” available at

<http://bruce springsteen.net/songs/youre-missing>

“Empty Sky” available at

<http://bruce springsteen.net/songs/empty-sky>

Other resources:

- Thoms, Annie. *With Their Eyes*. Harper Collins New York; NY 2002