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

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

**Grade level/band**: 11­–12

**STUDENT PROMPT SECTION**

1. **Task context**:

Poetry often expresses intense emotion in concise phrasing by using sound effects and imagery, and song lyrics often operate in the same way. Indeed, poets and songwriters work with similar tools to develop their poems and the lyrics to their songs – imagery, figurative language, rhythm, sound effects, voice, and word play, to name a few.

Some people consider verses that are written without the original intent of being set to music to be the only types of verses worthy of study as poetry, while others consider song lyrics a genre of poetry that should also be studied in literature classes. In this task, you will join your voice to the debate. Start by locating and analyzing a poem and a song’s lyrics that treat the same theme (you must receive instructor approval for your chosen pieces). Then compare those treatments and use your comparison to argue why song lyrics should or should not be taught alongside traditional poems as examples of poetry.

1. **The task**:

Do poems and song lyrics both merit taking time to study them? After reading your chosen poem and song lyric, write a 4-page paper that compares each piece’s treatment of a similar theme and argues whether song lyrics should or should not be taught as examples of poetry in a literature course. Use evidence from each piece to support your thesis.

Your paper should consider each piece’s use or lack of use of those elements that are characteristic of poetry to defend your argument. Elements you might consider include:

* figurative language
* imagery
* sound effects
* rhythm and/or rhyme
* layered meanings
* other poetic techniques recently discussed in class

Your paper should also:

* Contain an argument that is organized, coherent, and addresses the purpose as posed by the essential question.
* Define and accurately refer to poetic techniques such as imagery, tone, symbol, meter, etc. as relevant to your chosen poem and song.
* Support your position with evidence from the texts.
* Employ standard English grammar and usage.
* Appropriately address the audience.

1. **Materials/resources:**

* Internet access and/or library access for choosing a poem and song lyrics.
* While you may or may not choose to discuss the ways in which the song’s music contributes to the listener’s understanding of the lyrics, your focus in this paper is on the words in the song and how they might stand alone or not stand alone as poetry themselves. Therefore, you need only address the text of your chosen poem and song lyrics in this essay, but you should cite both in proper MLA format.

1. **Time requirements:**

You will have approximately 1–2 weeks to complete the task and write your paper. Your teacher will provide you with specific instructions and due dates.