



THE JOHNNY MERCER  
FOUNDATION



## Moon River: Unit 4: Lessons 1 & 2

### “Moon River” (1961) by Johnny Mercer and Henry Mancini

#### Lesson Overview

These lessons are an introduction to Johnny Mercer, the Great American Songbook, and lyric writing. Classes will receive the original Accentuate the Positive: Guide to Lyric Writing for Kids programming. Students will be exposed to different subject matters and will have opportunities to learn tools for lyric writing and creating personal lyrics, all while fulfilling national core standards. Have fun!

#### Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson students will be able to:  
Know more about songwriter Johnny Mercer  
Have more songwriting skills: Imagery, Metaphors, Similes.  
Write lyrics for a song

#### Standards

*Nat'l Core Arts: Creating.* Students will once again create their own lyrics and, depending on grade level and class, may experiment with original composition. They will explore Mercer's influences through creative ideas, concepts, and feelings and further apply what they learn to their personal lyrics

*English/Lang Arts Standards: STRANDS-- Vocabulary Acquisition & Usage.* Students will explore and demonstrate their understanding of figurative language.

#### Time Required

One class period of at least 45-50 minutes

#### Lesson Preparation

Review:

Ask students what they remember from past lessons of “Moon River,” and review previous lessons as needed.

Materials:

Accentuate the Positive: Guide to Lyric Writing for Kids booklet  
Whiteboard space for teacher/teaching artist  
Writing paper and pencils

Resources:

The Johnny Mercer Foundation: [www.johnnymercer.org](http://www.johnnymercer.org)

If needed, refer to the video of the educator workshop on the Accentuate the Positive webpage.

Johnny Mercer Collections at Georgia State University: <http://library.gsu.edu/merc>



## Moon River: Unit 4: Lessons 1 & 2 (*con't*)

### Lesson Procedure

Introduce and define songwriting skills: Imagery – painting pictures with words.

Depending on grade and skill level, one can also include metaphors/similes.

Introduce song and discuss background (see below: Information about “Moon River”)

Play the song “Moon River” and ask students to follow along with lyrics (see page 10 of the

Accentuate the Positive: Guide to Lyric Writing for Kids booklet)

What is the message of the song?

Discuss imagery used in the song.

Review understanding of lyrics – clarify definitions of words they may not understand.

Discuss the five senses: Sight, sound, taste, smell, touch.

Explore how using senses can aid in the use of imagery in personal lyrics.

Activity: Ask students to close their eyes and imagine what a “Moon River” scene would look like. What do they see, hear, smell, taste, touch?

Share what they see.

Brainstorm Song Ideas

Dreams/wishes for the future?

What do they want to be when they grow up?

Write the lyrics for a song.

Encourage students to use their five senses relating to their topic to aid them in using imagery in their lyrics.

Challenge: Create a song title using two images (similar to “Moon River.”)

Have students share their work.

Explain the importance of copyright and have the students copyright their songs.

### Extension

Students could draw a picture of a place and environment that makes them feel calm. Title the picture.

Now use the title of the picture for the title of their lyrics. Then write some lyrics about it using imagery.

MOON RIVER is also a song reflecting on friendship. Write a song about friendship using rhyme.

Students could create the accompaniment music for the song.

### Lesson Evaluation

Teacher observation of participation.

Evaluation of song lyrics using a rubric.

Student self-evaluation of process and project.



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## Moon River: Unit 4: Lessons 1 & 2 (*con't*)

### Information about “Moon River”

1. Written for the 1961 classic film *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, in which it is performed by actress Audrey Hepburn.
2. Won the 1962 Academy Award for Best Original Song and the 1962 Grammy Award for Song of the Year.
3. Was a collaboration with Henry Mancini, which whom Mercer shares two of his Academy Awards (the one for “Moon River” and the one for “Days of Wine and Roses”).
4. Has been covered hundreds of time by performers like Perry Como, Louis Armstrong, Frank Sinatra, Barbra Streisand, R.E.M., Morrissey, Neil Diamond, Rod Stewart, and Frank Ocean.

### From *Johnny Mercer: Southern Songwriter for the World*:

The inspiration for “Moon River” came from Johnny’s home town of Savannah, Georgia, where as a child, he could watch the moon rise from behind Skidaway Island and cast a silver reflection down on Back River, which ran behind his family’s summer home. In recognition of this, the Chatham County Board of Commissioners officially renamed Back River to Moon River on April 27, 1962.

Citation: Eskew, Glenn T. *Johnny Mercer : Southern Songwriter for the World*. Athens : The University of Georgia, 2013.

### From *The Complete Lyrics of Johnny Mercer*:

One of the most well-received lines from “Moon River” is the lyric about ‘my huckleberry friend.’ When asked about that lyric, Mercer remarked, “I don’t know how I thought of that phrase. Probably stems from the days of my childhood, when we’d go out in the fields and pick berries; they were everywhere. I was free associating for that song. The heroine, Holly Golightly, was from down there... I figured, it’s springtime, she’s in New York and thinking of her home down there when she was a child. And then I thought ‘huckleberry.’ I said, that’s the right word. I know it’s an odd word, but that’s why it’s so attractive.”

Mancini recalled, “Every once in a while you hear something so right it gives you chills. When he sang that ‘huckleberry friend’ line, I got them. I don’t know if he knew what effect those words had... but it was thrilling. It made you think of Mark Twain and Huckleberry Finn’s trip down the Mississippi. It had such echoes of America.”

Citation: Mercer, Johnny, and Robert. Kimball. *The Complete Lyrics of Johnny Mercer*. 1st ed., Alfred A. Knopf, 2009.