

Songwriting Snippet #12

Assignment #12: Verse Examples

Example 1: "Orphan Girl" – by Gillian Welch

Verse 1)

I am an orphan
on God's highway.
But I'll share my troubles
if you go my way

Verse 2)

I have had friendships
pure and golden
But the ties of kinship
I have not known them

Verse 3)

But when he calls me
I will be Able
To meet my family
at God's table

Verse 4)

Blessed savior
make me willing
And walk beside me
until I'm with them

- "Orphan" tells us something crucial about the story in this song, defining the main character for us from the first line
- Phrases such as God's highway are metaphorical, but use a concrete object which conjures the desired imagery and meaning of the writer.
- Phrases like "I'll share my troubles if you go my way" communicate that the main character is sharing her story with us
- Also note how the Chorus of the song communicates the theme of the main character being an orphan; note how simply and beautifully every Verse reiterates this theme.

Example 2: "Eleanor Rigby" – by The Beatles

Verse 1)

Eleanor Rigby picks up the rice in the church where a wedding has been

Lives in a dream

Waits at the window, wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door

Who is it for?

Verse 2)

Father McKenzie writing the words of a sermon that no one will hear

No one comes near

Look at him working, darning his socks in the night when there's nobody there

What does he care?

Verse 3)

Eleanor Rigby died in the church and was buried along with her name

Nobody came

Father McKenzie wiping the dirt from his hands as he walks from the grave

No one was saved

- The use of a specific name at the beginning of each verse is a great way to use detail to introduce us to the main characters of the story
- The imagery that follows does a great job of communicating the story to us: the mundane invisible lives of these people
- The specific imagery would be:
 - Rice
 - Church
 - Wedding
 - Dream
 - Window
 - Face
 - Jar
 - Door
 - Words
 - Sermon, etc.
- The details that surround these images help the listener to better understand how the writer wants them to perceive, the story. The specific details would be:
 - Lives in a dream
 - Waits at the window
 - Wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door
 - A sermon that no one will hear
 - No one comes near
 - Nobody there
 - Died in the church
 - Buried along with her name

- "Lives in a dream" communicates the disconnectedness of this person
- Concepts like "waiting" communicate a kind of inertia - simple words and phrases like this set the mood of the song effectively
- The idea of someone "writing a sermon that no one will hear" communicate the futility of the character's existence
- The fact that Eleanor "died in the church and was buried along with her name" shows that her life seemed to mean nothing to those around her
- Note the use of irony, in that Eleanor dies in the very church where she had been working; yet even so, no one cared.
- Note how well it works to bring the 2 characters together in the final verse, by causing their stories to cross paths; this is a great technique, communicating the isolation of the characters, even in the context of their stories connecting. It was too late for their stories to affect one another; Eleanor had died.
- Note how every verse reiterates the theme of the song as seen in the Chorus, "lonely people."