Song Lyrics & Poetry Comparison Activity

Song Lyrics as Poetry
After reading the lines, answer the questions after each song. Then listen to the song & reflect on the meaning of the song.

Unpretty
by Dallas Austin & Tionne Watkins
(performed by TLC)
I wish I could tie you up in my shoes
Make you feel unpretty too
I was told I was beautiful
But what does that mean to you
Look into the mirror who's inside there
The one with the long hair
Same old me again today (yeah)

My outside looks cool
My insides are blue
Everytime I think I'm through
It's because of you
I've tried different ways
But it's all the same
At the end of the day
I have myself to blame
I'm just trippin

You can buy your hair if it won't grow
You can fix your nose if he says so
You can buy all the make up
That man can make
But if you can't look inside you
Find out who am I too
I'll make you unpretty too

Never insecure until I met you
Now I'm being stupid
I used to be so cute to me
Just a little bit skinny
Why do I look to all these things
To keep you happy
Maybe get rid of you
And then I'll get back to me (hey)

My outside looks cool
My insides are blue
Everytime I think I'm through
It's because of you
I've tried different ways
But it's all the same
At the end of the day
I have myself to blame
Could be I'm trippin

Questions (Use separate sheet of paper, please)
1. What does the speaker mean when she says, “Wish I could tie you up in my shoes/Make you feel unpretty too”?

Unpretty

No More Clichés
by Octavio Paz
Note: a “cliché” is something that is overused & therefore unoriginal.

No More Clichés
Beautiful face
That like a daisy opens its petals to the sun
So do you
Open your face to me as I turn the page.

Enchanting smile
Any man would be under your spell,
Oh, beauty of a magazine.

How many poems have been written to you?
How many Dantes have written to you, Beatrice?
To your obsessive illusion
To you manufacture fantasy.

But today I won't make one more Cliché
And write this poem to you.
No, no more clichés.

This poem is dedicated to those women
Whose beauty is in their charm,
In their intelligence,
In their character,
Not on their fabricated looks.

This poem is to you women,
That like a Shahrazade wake up
Everyday with a new story to tell,
A story that sings for change
That hopes for battles:
Battles for the love of the united flesh
Battles for passions aroused by a new day
Battle for the neglected rights
Or just battles to survive one more night.

Yes, to you women in a world of pain
To you, bright star in this ever-spending universe
To you, fighter of a thousand-and-one fights
To you, friend of my heart.

From now on, my head won't look down to a magazine
Rather, it will contemplate the night
And its bright stars,
And so, no more clichés.

2. What is the “cliché” in the poem? Hint: in the first three stanzas, the speaker describes a woman. In the fourth stanza, he tells the reader what the cliché is.

No More Clichés

3. The song “Unpretty” and the poem “No More Clichés” have a similar theme. What is this message both are telling the reader?
Song Lyrics & Poetry Comparison Activity

Crossroads
by Tracy Chapman
(Performed by Tracy Chapman)
All you folks think you own my life
But you never made any sacrifice
Demons they are on my trail
I'm standing at the crossroads of the hell
I look to the left I look to the right
There're hands that grab me on every side

All you folks think I got my price
At which I'll sell all that is mine
You think money rules when all else fails
Go sell your soul and keep your shell
I'm trying to protect what I keep inside
All the reasons why I live my life

Some say the devil be a mystical thing
I say the devil be a walking man
He a fool he a liar conjurer and a thief
He try to tell you what you want
Try to tell you what you need

Standing at the point
The road it cross you down
What is at your back
Which way do you turn
Who will come to find you first
Your devils or your gods

All you folks think you run my life
Say I should be willing to compromise
I say all you demons go back to hell
I'll save my soul save myself

conjurer: someone who conjures magic
conjure: someone who orders or commands something or someone

Questions
4. Can you find the metaphor in the third verse of the song "Crossroads"? What are the two things being compared?

Compare “Crossroads” with the Robert Frost poem, “The Road Not Taken.”

The Road Not Taken
Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that, the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

5. Find one similarity between the speakers.
6. Find one difference in the speakers’ situations.
7. What is the message the speakers are trying to tell the readers?
8. In the poem “The Road Not Taken,” find the pattern in the rhyme scheme (which lines rhyme with one another?).
Song Lyrics & Poetry Comparison Activity

She by Billie Jo Armstrong
(performing by Green Day)

She
She screams in silence
A sullen riot penetrating through her mind
Waiting for a sign
To smash the silence with the brick of self-control

Are you locked up in a world
That's been planned out for you
Are you feeling like a social tool without a use
Scream at me until my ears bleed
I'm taking heed just for you

She
She's figured out
All her doubts were someone else's point of view
Waking up this time
To smash the silence with the brick of self-control

Are you locked up in a world
That's been planned out for you
Are you feeling like a social tool without a use
Scream at me until my ears bleed
I'm taking heed just for you

Are you locked up in a world
That's been planned out for you
Are you feeling like a social tool without a use
Scream at me until my ears bleed
I'm taking heed just for you

heed: paying close attention
sullen: somber; gloomy or showing irritation

Questions
9. Find examples of alliteration in the song “She.”
10. Find the example of personification in the first verse.

Read the poem “Dreams” by Langston Hughes.

Dreams
Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

11. Find an example of personification in the first stanza.
12. There are two metaphors about “Life.” What are they?
One
by James Hetfield & Lars Ulrich
(performed by Metallica)
I can't remember anything
Can't tell if this is true or dream
Deep down inside I feel to scream
This terrible silence stops me

Now that the war is through with me
I'm waking up I can not see
That there is not much left of me
Nothing is real but pain now

Hold my breath as I wish for death
Oh please god, wake me

Back in the womb it's much too real
In pumps life that I must feel
But can't look forward to reveal
Look to the time when I'll live

Fed through the tube that sticks in me
Just like a wartime novelty
Tied to machines that make me be
Cut this life off from me

Hold my breath as I wish for death
Oh please god, wake me
Now the world is gone I'm just one
Oh god, help me hold my breath as I wish for death
Oh please God help me

Darkness imprisoning me
All that I see
Absolute horror
I cannot live
I cannot die
Trapped in myself
Body my holding cell

Landmine has taken my sight
Taken my speech
Taken my hearing
Taken my arms
Taken my legs
Taken my soul
Left me with life in hell

Questions
13. What happened to the speaker in this poem?
14. Based on his experience, what is his attitude toward war?
DULCE ET DECORUM EST
by Wilfred Owen

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares\(^2\) we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest\(^3\) began to trudge.

Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots\(^4\)
Of tired, outstripped\(^5\) Five-Nines\(^6\) that dropped behind.

Gas!\(^7\) Gas! Quick, boys! – An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets\(^8\) just in time;
But someone still was shouting out and stumbling,
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime\(^9\) . . .

Dim, through the misty panes\(^10\) and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.
In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering,\(^11\) choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gurgling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud\(^12\)
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent\(^13\) for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et Decorum est
Pro patria mori.\(^15\)

8 October 1917 - March, 1918
1 DULCE ET DECORUM EST - the first words of a Latin saying (taken from an ode by Horace). The words were widely understood and often quoted at the start of the First World War. They mean "It is sweet and right." The full saying ends the poem: Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori - it is sweet and right to die for your country. In other words, it is a wonderful and great honour to fight and die for your country.

2 rockets which were sent up to burn with a brilliant glare to light up men and other targets in the area between the front lines (See illustration, page 118 of Out in the Dark).

3 a camp away from the front line where exhausted soldiers might rest for a few days, or longer.

4 the noise made by the shells rushing through the air

5 outpaced, the soldiers have struggled beyond the reach of these shells which are now falling behind them as they struggle away from the scene of battle.

6 Five-Nines - 5.9 calibre explosive shells

7 poison gas. From the symptoms it would appear to be chlorine or phosgene gas. The filling of the lungs with fluid had the same effects as when a person drowned.

8 the early name for gas masks

9 a white chalky substance which can burn live tissue

10 the glass in the eyepieces of the gas masks

11 Owen probably meant flickering out like a candle or gurgling like water draining down a gutter, referring to the sounds in the throat of the choking man, or it might be a sound partly like stuttering and partly like gurgling.

12 normally the regurgitated grass that cows chew; here a similar looking material was issuing from the soldier's mouth.

13 high zest - idealistic enthusiasm, keenly believing in the rightness of the idea.

14 keen

15 see note 1

18 What sort of images does this poem convey?

19. Owen was a soldier & this is known as one of the greatest poems of World War I. Does it support war? Why or why not?

20. He titles his poem “Dulce et…” meaning “Sweet and Fitting (Right)” or the entire phrase: “It is sweet and fitting (right) to die for one’s country.” Does the speaker believe in this statement? What clues are you given?
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**JUST LIKE HEAVEN**

by Robert Smith
(performed by The Cure)

"Show me, show me, show me how you do that trick
The one that makes me scream," she said
"The one that makes me laugh," she said
And threw her arms around my neck
"Show me how you do it
And I promise you I promise that
I'll run away with you
I'll run away with you"

Spinning on that dizzy edge
I kissed her face and kissed her head
And dreamed of all the different ways I had
To make her glow
"Why are you so far away?" she said
"Why won't you ever know that I'm in love with you
That I'm in love with you"

You
Soft and only
You
Lost and lonely
You
Strange as angels
Dancing in the deepest oceans
Twisting in the water
You're just like a dream

Daylight licked me into shape
I must have been asleep for days
And moving lips to breathe her name
I opened up my eyes
And found myself alone alone
Alone above a raging sea
That stole the only girl I loved
And drowned her deep inside of me

You
Soft and only
You
Lost and lonely
You
Just like heaven

Question

21. Identify the example of an anaphora in this song.

Read the following two poems & compare to this song:

**I Love You (Sara Teasdale)**

When April bends above me
And finds me fast asleep,
Dust need not keep the secret
A live heart died to keep.

When April tells the thrushes,
The meadow-larks will know,
And pipe the three words lightly
To all the winds that blow:

Above his roof the swallows,
In notes like far-blown rain,
Will tell the little sparrow
Beside his window-pane.

O sparrow, little sparrow,
When I am fast asleep,
Then tell my love the secret
That I have died to keep.

Question

22. What is the “secret” that spreads throughout the night?

**When You Are Old (W.B. Yeats)**

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

And bending down beside the glowing bars,
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

Question

23. In “When You Are Old” what do you think the speaker is trying to say to the reader? (What is the speaker's message?)