

Lesson Plan

A Song's Process

Book: *Great Careers in Music*

Series: Great Careers

Level: Navigator

Objective

To help students learn more about the process musicians use to write, record, and produce a song.

Supplies

- *Great Careers in Music* book
- Access to “Episode 151: Hozier” of the Song Exploder podcast: <https://songexploder.net/hozier>
- Paper and pencils

Before the Activity

Read *Great Careers in Music*, or assign it to students to read on their own. Pull up the podcast episode in your web browser.

Activity

Great Careers in Music talks about some of the technology that people in music use to record and produce songs. This process often involves recording and editing several different parts, called tracks, that are blended together to create the song.

The podcast Sound Exploder interviews musicians about the process of making their songs. In “Episode 151: Hozier,” Irish singer Andrew Hozier-Byrne talks about how he created the tracks for the song “Nina Cried Power.” He also talks about the other singers and musicians he collaborated with to create these tracks. One of these musicians was gospel singer Mavis Staples. In the podcast episode, she and Hozier talk about her role in the song.

Start the podcast at 1:15 to skip the ads at the beginning. As students listen, encourage them to take notes on a piece of paper. They should write down the artists and ideas that helped inspire the song, the steps Hozier used to write and record it, the different tracks he created, the mood or effects he tried to create, and any other information they find interesting or important.

After listening to both the podcast and the song (which begins at 15:35), have students turn to a neighbor and discuss the following questions:

- What music artists or styles are you drawn to or inspired by?
- What ideas or topics do you care about or think are important?

Evaluation

Have students turn in their note pages to make sure they were paying attention. Here's a brief overview of the information the podcast contains:

- 1:15: Hozier describes the very beginning of his musical idea (a chord progression and a few fragments of lyrics) and how he plays around with or develops it.
- 4:00: Hozier talks about how he uses recordings to help keep track of these ideas.
- 4:30: Hozier talks about loops he used to make a demo, and how this step helped him figure out the other parts (bass line, drums, backing vocals, guitar part, etc.).
- 5:30: Hozier describes some social and political changes in Ireland that inspired him to write a song about the power of protest.
- 6:00: Hozier describes the themes he wanted the song to have.
- 7:00: Hozier describes some of the musical styles and artists who inspired the song, and his choice to add their names to the song's lyrics and title.
- 9:00: Hozier and Mavis Staples talk about how she got involved and her role in crafting the song.
- 12:45: Hozier describes the other tracks (drums, background vocals, and organ parts), and how they blend together to create the song.
- 15:00: Staples and Hozier describe what the song and its themes mean to them.
- 15:35-18:55: Listeners hear the final version of "Nina Cried Power."

Standards

This lesson may be used to address the Common Core State Standards' reading standards for informational text, grade 7 (RI 7.7), and speaking and listening standards, grade 7 (SL 7.1).