

# Canary in the Mine: Nova Scotia Mining Disasters and Song

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*Songwriting: A Learning and Teaching Module to Support the Secondary Music Curriculum*

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## Overview

### Rationale

Creating songs is a natural form of communication that enables individuals to tell a story or to express thoughts, ideas and feelings. From the early years, pre-school children “make up” songs and sing them with conviction. They know what they want to communicate, and without the limitations of the mechanics of songwriting or even the basic functions of speech, they are able to express themselves in ways that older children, youth and adults find challenging. Why is this so? The answer is simple. Children are spontaneous and have a natural tendency to explore and create.

Although the spontaneity of songwriting diminishes as one gets older, there is still a strong tendency to tell stories through song, and to provide an emotional link to life experiences using music as a form of expression. Throughout the ages, traditional folk songs, for example, have been passed down through generations, and these become an important part of repertoire for many musicians. The roots and folk music genre is a prime example of story-telling through song, and many emerging genres in popular music can find their roots in traditional folk songs from a range of cultures.

Traditionally, music in Canadian schools has focused primarily on instrumental and choral music, with performance being the most prominent “vehicle” for instruction. In recent years we are seeing an emergence of curriculum that is designed to allow students to create their own music, allowing them to put into practice the skills and concepts taught in music lessons. This learning and teaching module will enhance this focus as it meets outcomes in creating and presenting music. **In short, it will provide opportunities for students to experience songwriting as a vehicle for that exploration.**

**Taking into consideration the current research on the brain and how it constructs meaning in the teenage years, this module is designed to be interactive, applicable with authentic learning experiences, and based on a discovery approach.** Today’s students are not content to be passive learners, confined to desks where they listen, respond, practice, and drill. They are excited to receive new information that has meaning for them – the hook – and to learn how it fits into their existing repertoire of knowledge. They want to play with this new information, tinker with it, try it out, experiment, just as toddlers explore their world as they discover new things in their immediate environment. Our task as teachers is to allow our students the flexibility to apply their new learning, and to encourage them to take it to new limits – the meta-cognitive domain. This can be a challenge, particularly if students have, through their earlier musical experiences, developed the attitude that music can become mundane and limited in focus.

The digital exhibit, *Canary in the Mine: Nova Scotia Mining Disasters and Song*, provides an extensive range of songs written to tell stories of tragedy, life experiences in coal mining communities, and disasters in general. **This module is intended primarily for instruction in the music classroom, but in Appendix A, teachers will find opportunities to collaborate with social studies and language arts teachers through integrated units of work.** It is recommended that the activities presented herein become a starting point with these integrated units to provide opportunities for students to experience cross-disciplinary connections.

## Introduction

This learning and teaching resource supports the digital exhibit, *Canary in the Mine: Nova Scotia Mining Disasters and Song*, and is designed to build on students' improvisation and composition skills that have been developed from the early elementary years. In the beginning stages, songwriting may appear to be a daunting task for students, but as they gain confidence in their abilities, teachers should take a "back seat" to the writing process and allow students to take ownership of their learning.

The literature indicates that often teachers themselves feel inhibited in leading activities that require students to write their own music, and this attitude may be transferred to students. It is very important that teachers are aware of this tendency, and that they portray a positive attitude toward student composition so as not to stifle the creativity that will become apparent when the process begins.

Improvising songs is a natural process. When we observe toddlers in their earliest stages of development, it becomes apparent that there is a natural tendency in us all to "create" songs that reflect personal feelings and attitudes. Although this is evident in very young children, as they grow – particularly after they enter a structured environment in schools – they often tend to lose their spontaneity in songwriting. This is why **it is very important for teachers to allow students to rekindle their interest and ability in songwriting, and not be stifled by inhibitions – an important teacher role and one that is critical for the success of this module.** The role of teacher is facilitator of the learning process, and not the one who holds all the answers and ideas.

**Knowing the nature of young teens, teachers must be aware of the limitations they may face with students in the class.** We know that peer pressure influences how students react to new learning. Moreover, because of changes taking place at this stage of development, young teens often experience challenges with discovering their singing voice. Therefore, teachers must be sensitive to these issues, and not place students in situations where they will "shut down" because of embarrassment among their peers. By grade 9, students should have more confidence in their singing abilities, but teachers need to understand that the boys' changing voices may not settle until age 16 or 17.

**The range of learners is amplified when one considers the prior learning experiences outside the school that some students may have had.** There may be students who have a strong background through private instruction. Similarly, there may be other students who have extensive experience in songwriting and performing in garage bands, but may be limited in their musical literacy skills. Teachers need to be aware of this range of abilities and differentiate instruction to ensure that all students are challenged and are able to achieve success.

**Songwriters learn by doing, and so each lesson, if possible, should be designed to include some aspect of composition,** whether that is allowing individual students to sing a song that they are in the process of writing, or to write chord progressions, or create lyrics for a future song. Teachers may wish to consider setting up a password-controlled website that allows students to post their songs allowing other students in the class to listen to them and respond. Teachers may also consider organizing “songwriters’ circles” to allow students to perform works in progress so they can receive feedback from their peers in a non-threatening environment.

When implementing this module, encourage students to bring a guitar or a keyboard to the class if these instruments are not readily available in the music room. Also, keep in mind that some young musicians have experience using sequencers and computers, so having a computer and sound system in the class would be a great benefit. It is also recommended that students record their music using technology that is available in the classroom.

### **Nova Scotia Mining Disasters and Song Exhibit**

The following materials provide a rich resource to support the secondary Music curriculum. The suggestions for learning, teaching and assessment have been adapted from Nova Scotia curriculum documents, and you will notice that they address the curricular outcomes in *Explore Music 7, 8, 9; Music 10, 11 and 12; and Advanced Music 11 and 12*. They also support *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Arts Education Curriculum (2000)*. **It should be noted that while this resource is written to support Nova Scotia curriculum, teachers in other jurisdictions will find similarities to outcomes and ideas described in their curriculum documents.**

The activities described are directly related to repertoire describing coalmining and other disasters highlighted in *Canary in the Mine: Nova Scotia Mining and Disasters and Song*, as well as monologues and visuals contained in the exhibit. **The activities are focused primarily on secondary grades, but can be adapted to upper elementary if those students have a strong background in music literacy.**

Also included at the end of the module is a list of Nova Scotia curriculum documents as well as additional resources including resources on the Authorized Learning Resources list for Nova Scotia schools, and websites.

## Curriculum Outcomes

Nova Scotia curriculum documents are based on outcomes that articulate what students should know and be able to do at all grade levels. All activities described in this resource are rooted in the following General Curriculum Outcomes (GCOs) for music:

GCO 1: Students will be expected to explore, challenge, develop, and express ideas using the skills, language, techniques, and processes of music.

GCO 2: Students will be expected to create and/or present, collaboratively and independently, expressive products in music for a range of audiences and purposes.

GCO 3: Students will be expected to demonstrate critical awareness of and value for the role of music in creating and reflecting culture.

GCO 4: Students will be expected to respect the contributions to music of individuals and cultural groups in local and global contexts.

GCO 5: Students will be expected to examine the relationship among music, societies, and environments.

GCO 6: Students will be expected to apply critical thinking and problem-solving strategies to reflect on and respond to their own and others' expressive works.

GCO 7: Students will be expected to understand the role of technologies in creating and responding to expressive works.

GCO 8: Students will be expected to analyse the relationship between artistic intent and the expressive work.

## Suggestions for Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Teachers are encouraged to have the class visit the travelling exhibit, *Canary in the Mine: Nova Scotia Mining Disasters and Song* and a schedule of the exhibiting sites can be found at **[disastersongs.ca](http://disastersongs.ca)**. This module can be used to prepare the students in advance for what they will see and experience at the exhibit. Alternatively, the activities for each song can be used as a follow-up to the visit, while at the same time addressing key curricular outcomes in the music curriculum. For advanced students, and as a way to differentiate instruction, teachers may consider presenting this module as an independent assignment.

For this resource, ten disaster songs from the exhibit have been selected, and these will be supported by monologues and visuals from the exhibit that help students make meaning of the content. The GCOs listed above are addressed, and teachers should identify the Specific Curriculum Outcomes (SCOs) for each grade level.

As you navigate through the four kiosks, feel free to select additional song materials and monologues from the collection to supplement the students' understanding of songwriting as a means to tell stories. It should be noted that in addition to the skills and concepts highlighted in this resource, teachers will discover others that are taught through the curriculum and bring the learning alive for students.

**The suggestions for learning, teaching and assessment are not intended to be sequential**, and teachers should feel free to extract those that supplement the curriculum, reinforce specific music concepts, and develop a deeper understanding of the songwriting process. They may also elect to follow the module from beginning to end as a way of creating a unit of work for the students.

Throughout the activities, reference is made to **other resources** that are prescribed for the Nova Scotia music curriculum, including *Explore Music 7, 8, 9, Music 10, 11, 12, and Advanced Music 11 and 12*. In addition, reference is made to other publications listed on the Authorized Learning Resources (ALR) list for Nova Scotia schools and these are accessible through the Nova Scotia Book Bureau. In particular, you will find *The Essential Secrets of Song-writing, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed*, (2010) by Gary Ewer most helpful. Online resources for songwriting are also listed at the end of this document.

Because this resource is intended to enhance and supplement the Music curriculum, it is limited in its scope with respect to the amount of time a teacher will be able to spend on it. Therefore, there may not be enough time to discuss in detail copyright issues associated with songwriting. This does not diminish the importance of this concept, and even from a young age students should be aware of the need to protect their own songs. Therefore, **it is strongly suggested that teachers incorporate copyright issues – particularly mechanical and performance rights – throughout the module**, or direct students to do this research on their own time. Information on this can be found in Gary Ewer's *The Essential Secrets of Song-writing*, Chapter 8.

## “The Westray Story” (Sammy Graham)

### Kiosk: Disaster!

On May 9, 1992, a tragic mining accident in a small town in Northern Nova Scotia claimed the lives of 26 men who worked under ground. Caused by a methane gas explosion, the Westray mine disaster prompted a public inquiry that explored negligence on the part of management and the final report five years later stated that the mine was mismanaged, miners’ safety was ignored, and poor oversight by government regulators led to the disaster. The explosion caused the mine to shut down, and 111 miners became unemployed.

Shortly after the disaster, a singer-songwriter, Sammy Graham, wrote a song to preserve the story of the Westray disaster. In it one can hear Graham’s sadness over the loss of friends and co-workers, and through an interesting blend of major and minor tonalities, there is a sense of hope that this will not happen again.

### Activity 1: Listening

Have students listen to Gillian’s monologue on the Kiosk: Disaster! in which she recalls her experiences growing up in a small mining town in Cape Breton. Gillian was born on May 9, 1992 – the day the Westray disaster happened – and thus she feels a close connection to the incident because, as she mentions, “it’s in my blood”.

Next, play the recording of Sammy Graham singing “The Westray Story” (Kiosk: Disaster!) calling attention to the story he is telling as portrayed in the lyrics. Following the listening exercise, lead a class discussion to get the initial impressions from the students and their interpretation of the events that took place. The song is also available on YouTube at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgK\\_qXs63D0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgK_qXs63D0).

### Activity 2: Analysis

#### Form

Review form in music with the students, and discuss various musical forms that they have been using in their prior improvisation and composition activities. These should include call and response, Rondo ABA, Question and Answer, Verse and Chorus, etc. You may need to play examples of each to reinforce what to listen for. Musical form is a type of “template” that songwriters follow to make a point or reinforce a main idea.

Now, play the recording once again and have the students determine the form of this song. The most obvious observation should be that there is little variation throughout, and that it consists

of verses only without a repeated chorus. Have them speculate why a songwriter might have chosen this style to tell his story. Possible answers might include:

- The songwriter wanted to reinforce the fact that it was a long ordeal that went on for many days during the recovery operation, and for years afterwards during the inquiry. In the end, 26 men were dead, and the management of the mine was never charged. A chorus often gives a song a “break” from the verses, reinforces the main idea, and brings the song to a conclusion. However, in the Westray event, there was no reprieve and there was no obvious conclusion.
- The songwriter is still grieving the loss of his fellow-miners, and by repeating the same haunting melody and harmony, this idea is reinforced. There was no resolution to the disaster.
- A repeating chorus invites the audience to join in with the singing. A song without a chorus keeps the audience’s attention on the lyrics and their meaning. The emphasis is remains on the song’s message.

Ask if the students know of any contemporary tunes that they listen to that keep repeating the same melody and harmony continuously through the song. Why do we include variations in melody, harmony, rhythm, form, tempo, dynamics, etc. in a song? Are these variations evident in this recording? Ask the students if they think this was deliberate on the part of the songwriter, and if so, why.

### Tonality

Discuss the haunting melody and the tonality that is heard. Highlight the fact that the chordal structure moves from E minor to C major throughout the first three lines.

- What notes are heard in the E minor triad? (E, G, B) What about C major? (C, E, G)
- What notes are common in the two chords? (E and G)
- Which note shifts? (B to C)
- Have a student play the E minor triad on a keyboard. Alternatively, or for younger students, have three students each hold one tone bar representing each of the notes in the triad. Put the triad in second inversion (B at the bottom). Demonstrate how to shift from B to C to form the major chord.
- Play the recording again, and have students play the E minor to C major chords on a keyboard, the tone bars, or guitar as they listen.
- The last line in each verse varies in tonality and uses more major chords (D, A) but ends back on E minor. Have students speculate as to why the songwriter chose this to reinforce the story.

## Assessment

In groups of 4, have students brainstorm a list of songs that have a limited melodic range, and little contrast in harmony and form. Ask them to locate a recording of a song from that list, either on YouTube or in their personal collection, and play it for the class. Have them explain their discoveries after playing their selection, ensuring that each student in the group has a specific role or concept to explain.

## **“No More Pickin’ Coal” and “Draegermen of Westray Mine” (Valerie MacDonald)**

### **Kiosk: Home and Community**

Valerie MacDonald (nee Ruddick) is the daughter of Springhill’s famous singing miner, Maurice Ruddick, who miraculously survived the 1958 Springhill disaster. Valerie, along with two other sisters, used to sing and tour with him as the Minerettes, and later five other siblings performed with him as the Harmony Babes. Valerie later wrote “No More Pickin’ Coal” in memory of a childhood spent in poverty after the disaster. Work was hard to come by and the relief funds allotted after the disaster were inadequate to support Ruddick and his family.

In 1992 after the Westray disaster, Valerie was motivated to write “Draegermen of Westray Mine,” because the event evoked powerful flashbacks of her own family in the wake of the 1958 Springhill disaster. Her father, Maurice, attributed his rescue to the draegermen (rescue workers) and so she wanted to acknowledge their efforts to save the 26 miners of the Westray disaster.

### **Activity 1: Listening**

Have the students listen to the male monologue on the Kiosk: Home and Community while viewing the images portrayed throughout. References are made to Maurice Ruddick, the singing miner, and a photo of him is shown. Reference is also made to his jazz style, and the effect his singing had on his co-workers as he appeared to make light of a dangerous situation.

Now play the recording of Maurice’s daughter, Valerie MacDonald, performing her song, “No More Pickin’ Coal.” Ask students to listen to the words carefully, and paraphrase the story she is

trying to relay in the song. Comparing this to Sammy Graham’s tune, “The Westray Story,” have them discuss the differences in style, tonality, rhythm, and form. Are there any similarities?

In “The Westray Story” we talked about repetition and how this reinforced the ideas and feelings Graham was trying to portray. In “No More Pickin’ Coal,” there are several examples of variation. Ask the students to tell about these, and what the variations do to reinforce the message that MacDonald is trying to tell.

### Assessment

Have the students search the Internet for information on Maurice Ruddick. They will discover his cultural heritage (African Canadian) and the type of music he liked to sing (blues, jazz, pop). In small groups, have the students discuss the following questions and present their findings to the class:

- How did he use his cultural heritage and his talents to make working in the mines easier for him and his fellow workers?
- During the rescue operation after the Springhill “bump” and while waiting for the draegermen to reach them, Ruddick’s music played a vital role. Ask the students to compare Ruddick’s preferred style of music to that of MacDonald’s as is evident in “No More Pickin’ Coal.”
- Do you think the cultural heritage of Ruddick and MacDonald affect the messages they are trying to portray?

### **Activity 2: Listening and Analysis**

Also on the Kiosk: [Home and Community](#), you will find another song written by Valerie MacDonald, “Draegermen of Westray Mine.” Put the students in groups of 4 and ask them to listen to the song and analyse it based on the previous discussions for the other two songs in activity 1 (Graham and MacDonald). Provide guiding questions for them to consider as they listen and discuss, such as:

- How is this song similar to the others? How is it different?
- Describe the style of music.
- Compare the metre. In what time signature is each written?
- Describe its form.
- Is it written in a major or minor key?

- This song is written to celebrate the work of draegermen. Who are the draegermen and what is their role in the mining industry?
- We have two examples of songs written by the same songwriter: Valerie MacDonald. Discuss the similarities and differences. Do they have similar styles? How is the orchestration similar and different?

NOTE: The key to good songwriting is good listening, and while the students may find the analysis discussions redundant, it is important for them to know the intricacies of good songwriting.

### Activity 3: Principles of Good Songwriting

Gary Ewer in *The Essential Secrets of Good Song-writing* identifies several “principles” of writing good songs. Discuss these with the class, and see if the students can name familiar songs that clearly demonstrate each principle. You may wish to have some examples ready to play for them. Another idea is to display these principles on a chart so the students will be able to refer to them as they write their own songs.

#### Principles of Good Songwriting (Gary Ewer)

1. Songs without contrast risk being boring.
2. In general, the energy at the end of a song should equal or exceed the energy at the beginning.
3. Songs need to use mostly “strong” chord progressions (chord progressions that clearly point to one chord as being the key or tonic), with few “fragile” ones (chord progressions that are tonally ambiguous, i.e. it feels like it could be in one of several possible keys).
4. Use fragile progressions in the verse; use strong chord progressions in the chorus.
5. The best chord progressions are often very predictable, and shouldn’t include too many chords.
6. A melody needs to be planned with vocal range, harmony, and text in mind.
7. A verse should tell a story, describe someone or recount a situation, and can use many fragile chord progressions; a chorus usually conveys emotions, tells the audience how he/she is feeling, and uses stronger chord progressions.
8. The tonic note should happen in the melody of the chorus, rather than in the melody of the verse.

9. Chorus notes are often higher than verse notes.
10. A hook should be short and memorable.
11. Adding a hook to a bad song gives you a bad song with a hook.

Assessment: While not all these principles will be addressed in this module, at this stage we can focus on the obvious ones that require a limited background: 1, 2, 6, 7, 9, and 10. With students in pairs, assign a principle to each and have them discuss the previous three songs (“The Westray Story,” “No More Pickin’ Coal,” and “Draegerment of Westray Mine”). Have them identify the strengths and weaknesses of each song in relation to the principle that has been assigned to them. As the students work in their groups, you as teacher should move from group to group, listening in on the discussion and offering assistance when needed. After sufficient time, debrief with the class.

## **“Buddy, Can You Hear Me?” and “Pictou’s Black Coal” (John Archbold)**

### **Kiosk: Home and Community**

John Archbold was born in 1947 in Newcastle on Tyne, England, and came to Canada at the age of 13 months. After doing an Internet search in 2008 on Canadian mining songs, Archbold stumbled across a biography of Maurice Ruddick. He became fascinated with Ruddick’s life and was affected by the man’s experiences. Ruddick’s biography inspired “Buddy, Can You Hear Me?” – the story of Maurice Ruddick. Archbold believes that knowing enough about the topic and being affected in some way by the topic is very important when writing a song. “Buddy, Can You Hear Me?” came together for Archbold within two days. This song is requested quite often by a men’s singing group in Toronto with whom Archbold sings.

### **Activity 1: Listening and Analysing**

In the previous two songs we learned about Maurice Ruddick, the singing miner and father of Valerie MacDonald. During the Springhill disaster, it is said that he kept singing as some men in his area of the mine waited for the draegermen to reach them. Prior to the disaster, he would sing, mostly in a jazz or blues style as the rakes carrying the men descended into and exited from the mine. In a way, it became a distraction for the miners, and there are definite hints of his cultural heritage (African Canadian) as he was characteristically noted for singing in the style of the slaves.

Have the students listen to the male monologues on the Kiosk: Home and Community, and on the Kiosk: Concerts. In both, reference is made to Ruddick and the inspiration for “Buddy Can You Hear Me?” Before listening to the song, ask the students if they can predict what they might hear in this selection, including style, form, rhythm, melody, harmony. Ask them to justify their answers, impressing upon them that all answers are acceptable at this point, as they are using the knowledge gained in this module and their intuition to interpret the music.

Next, play “Buddy Can You Hear Me?” from the Kiosk: Home and Community. Have the students individually record their initial observations. In the debrief, look for key vocabulary words like a cappella, call and response, dynamic levels, passion, pleading, etc. Ask them to write a few sentences that summarize the story that the song is trying to tell.

In groups of four, have the students write additional verses to this song using the same call and response style and keeping the theme of the Springhill rescue. Once the students have had sufficient time to work on the verses, perform the piece. First, have the students join in on “call my name” as Archbold sings the song. After his last verse, have a group that is ready to lead the verse sing what they have written and the class join in on “call my name.”

Assessment: Ask the students to write a brief reflection on the process they used to create new verses, and their initial response as to how they felt about the success of their efforts.

Put the students in pairs, and using the Principles of Good Songwriting (see above), have them discuss their observations in relation to the effectiveness of the writing style.

Assessment: As a class, debrief the activity, and discover the many interpretations as heard through the ears of the students. This is a very important exercise in the process because it allows students to synthesize the information they have learned throughout this module, and bridge to the next step where they will be creating their own songs.

## Activity 2: Introduction to Writing Lyrics

As a preliminary activity, begin lyric writing by giving the students opportunities to explore individual words in a song. For example, distribute copies of the lyrics of “Draegerman of Westray Mine” by Valerie MacDonald (Kiosk: Home and Community). Begin by substituting another mine name for Westray, e.g. “Springhill”. Highlight the fact that a change in key words can change the flavour of the song text. With that in mind, are there other words in that song that can be changed? Experiment with other words in the song, and consider the difference if

nouns or verbs are changed. What happens if words become more or less specific? To demonstrate this, you may consider substituting a specific place name instead of a general term such as “in the mines”.

In groups of 4, have the students explore substitute words for those in “The Westray Story” by Sammy Graham (Kiosk: [Disasters!](#)). Give them the option of deciding what words will be replaced with their own. After sufficient time to plan and rehearse their song, have them perform it for the class and then debrief by discussing the process they used.

You may also consider substituting a different disaster in an existing song. Ask students to choose a disaster event with which they are familiar. Using “Miracle at Colliery Two” by Jack Kingston (Kiosk: [Disaster!](#)), have students use the same melody, but insert details from a different disaster (e.g, different dates, place names, type of disaster, etc.). After sufficient time to create and rehearse, have each group present their new song. Does the song work? Did other elements need to be changed? Why or why not?

*Tips for Teaching Success:*

Although the primary focus of the digital exhibit is coal mining disasters, references are made to other types of disasters that have taken place over time. Teachers should note some of these on the website: [www.disastersongs.ca](http://www.disastersongs.ca). It should also be noted that this activity can be used as a class/school response to a disaster that has affected them personally, either in the school or the community.

In Kiosk: [Disaster!](#) we learned of “conventional disaster traits” or typical features of lyrics as found in *Miracle at Colliery Two* by Jack Kingston. These include:

1. date of the disaster
2. place of the disaster
3. type or cause of disaster
4. the number of victims
5. reference to the rescue efforts
6. reference to God
7. reference to the bereaved

Project on a screen the words of “Miracle at Colliery Two” and identify the typical features as the song is played. This lyrical pattern is another type of “template” that songwriters use to tell a story (earlier we discussed form as type of template). Review the previous songs discussed and ask them to identify any of these traits in the lyrics.

Play the song, “The Westray Story” by Sammy Graham (Kiosk: [Disaster!](#)) and identify the conventional disaster traits in the lyrics. Students will discover that the first five are present. In groups of 5 or 6, have them write a verse for # 7: reference to the bereaved. Remind them that the lines should match in length and number of syllables to those in the song so that they fit the melody and rhythm. As a class, review each one to see if this goal was achieved.

### Activity 3: Influences in Songwriting

Disaster songwriters very frequently use pre-existing melodies for their songs. It was a normal part of the labour music tradition to set new words to old melodies, and as a result, a single melody can trigger the memory of several sets of lyrics which then interact with each other in the listener’s mind to build up many layered meanings.

Have the students identify a disaster that has affected their community, or an issue that is affecting their school. This will become an inspiration for a song that they can compose. Begin with a brainstorming session to generate ideas. It is not necessary for all students to be writing about the same topic.

Next, have them work individually or in small groups to select a familiar song that they can use for their melody. Write the lyrics to tell their story and ensure that it fits the melody of the song they have selected. It is suggested that they use the “template” approach to sketch out the themes or topics for each verse of a four- or five-verse disaster song (e.g., place and date of the disaster, type of disaster and number dead, rescue efforts, grief of loved ones).

Alternatively you could assign to pairs or groups of students the task of creating individual verses, and the song can be composed collaboratively as a class. Students should decide in advance on a melody to use and on a rhyming scheme. Allow time for them to rehearse so they can perform it for the other students.

Assessment: Ask each group to perform their song and have the other students (the audience) respond using the following guiding questions:

- What worked really well in the song?
- What impressed you the most?
- Did the melody and harmony suit the theme?
- What would you suggest that they try for the next time they perform it?

## Extension

An interview with John Archbold can be found in *Canadian Folk Music* published by the Canadian Folk Music and is available online at

<http://www.canfolkmusic.ca/index.php/cfmb/article/view/609/596>

Ask the students to read the article and summarize the key points focussing on how Archbold approached the creation of disaster songs. In groups, have them discuss if his approach can be seen or heard reflected in the other recordings in the digital exhibit.

## “Pictou County Mining Disaster” (Al Harris)

### Kiosk: Mass Media

In an interview for CBC Music, Al Hanis said:

Well, for the most part, I came from a cattle ranch near Teulon, Manitoba. It was a very rural thing, being in tune with your surroundings. I guess it becomes part of you.

Like most, the guitar came my way in high school and proved a good sounding board. Some cool locals with instruments and similar notions joined me in a rock group that played distant covers of their more popular originals. It was good fun playing those garage parties and high school gigs.... Songwriting became my expression.

I quit the prairies for the music scene of Vancouver, British Columbia, the coffee houses and bars where singer songwriters hung out. It was confirmation that original music was alive and held a captive audience. I made the rounds playing my own songs and some covers and became a part of a circle of unique musicians and songwriters.

It was my first real recording studio experience. With a handful of songs and the best musicians I knew, the album *Outer Bounds* was created. I'm very proud of it. Here are some of the songs and some others. I hope you enjoy them.

[<http://music.cbc.ca/#!/artists/Al-Hanis>]

Hanis's music can be categorized under the roots/folk genre, and typifies the power of songwriters to tell a story and/or deliver a strong message through song. His style is reminiscent of other contemporary recording artists, and the quality of his music has popular appeal. In “Pictou County Mining Disaster,” Hanis tells of the Westray mining explosion of 1992 and gives us a clear idea of the pain of the residents of Pictou County, Nova Scotia during that difficult time.

## Activity 1: Song Analysis

(This activity is adapted from the module, Singer-songwriter, contained in *Explore Music 9*, Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2012)

Have students work in pairs to answer guiding questions, providing an opportunity for them to “actively listen” to a song and discuss what they hear. Before beginning the listening portion of the activity, have the following elements projected on the white board, and as a class, review them by having individual students give a brief description of each.

- melody and lyrics
- rhythm
- harmony/chords
- form
- instruments and tone colour

### Tone Colour

Compared to other songs referred to in this module, the orchestration is more elaborate. The following questions allow the students to focus on the actual “sound” of the piece, without over-analysing the elements.

1. Describe the introduction.
  - a) What instruments are you hearing?
  - b) How many measures are in the introduction?
  - c) Do you hear repetition in the introduction?
2. Describe the quality of the singer: Individual or group? Male or female?
3. Describe the style. Does it sound like another singer or particular song with which you may be familiar?
4. Do you hear the instruments play alone without voice in interludes in the song?

### Form

The form of this song is verse with musical interludes.

1. Choose from the following to best describe the form that you are hearing in this song. “A” represents a verse, “B” represents a bridge, and “C” represents an introduction, instrumental interlude, or coda.
  - a) A1 B A2 C A3 C A4 A5 A6 B A7 C
  - b) C A1 C A2 C A3 C A4 C A5 C A6 C1 C2 A7 CC
  - c) A1 A2 B A3 A4 C A5 A6 B A7 C
2. What is the time signature in this song?

3. How many measures are in each verse?
4. How many measures are in the instrumental interludes between the verses?
5. What is the phrase structure in each verse?
  - a) ababccab
  - b) aabbccaa
  - c) ababaaac
6. Which sections of the song have the most driving energy – the verses or the interludes? Describe why you think this is so.

### Lyrics

1. Are the lyrics written in the first or third person?
2. Is there repetition in the lyrics of each verse?
3. How do you feel about a song with no chorus repeated throughout the song?
4. Do you think the song is a happy one? Why or why not? Give examples from within the lyrics to justify your observations.
5. What makes the lyrics of the song easy to relate to for most people in Nova Scotia?

### Melody

1. If the melodic phrase is 2 measures long, how many phrases are in each verse?
2. In which phrases of the melody do you hear many repeated notes?
3. How many interval skips are in the first phrase?
4. What phrases are exactly the same from a melodic point of view?
5. How many measures are in the interlude?
6. Are there similarities between the melody of phrases in the verses and in the interlude between verses?

You may wish to have the students listen to other songs written by Al Hanis and recorded on his album, *Outer Bounds*. Students can hear these on CBC Music at <http://music.cbc.ca/#!/artists/Al-Hanis>. His songs often tell stories and are often in the third person. As an extension, these songs can be played and discussed as a class.

Assessment: If the above analysis is done in small groups, have each group present their findings.

## Activity 2 and Assessment: Song Analysis

Have students, again in small groups, do a presentation on the analysis of another song from the collection of disaster songs in this exhibit. Have them use the guiding questions above as a framework for their presentation. For an assessment, have the students individually write a reflection of what they learned in this process.

### “Springhill (These Are Green Hills Now)” (Brian Vardigans)

#### Kiosk: Concerts

Brian Vardigans is a native of Hillsborough, New Brunswick but now calls Nova Scotia’s Annapolis Valley home. He was nominated for a Music Nova Scotia Award for Folk Recording of the Year for his 2009 album, *Springhill*. The title song, “Springhill (These are Green Hills Now),” won the Lunenburg Folk Harbour Society’s songwriting competition. In 2008, he was invited to perform as part of the 50th anniversary memorial of the 1958 Springhill disaster, sharing the stage with Peggy Seeger and Men of the Deeps. Songs from *Springhill* are now being played internationally on stations in Australia, New Zealand, Israel, throughout the United States, and across Canada.

#### Activity 1: Listening

Listen to Gillian’s monologue on the Kiosk: [Home and Community](#) in which we hear a description of folk songs written to commemorate mining disasters in Nova Scotia, in particular disasters in New Waterford, Springhill and Westray. Gillian relates her initial reaction to these songs and the fact that she discovered similarities, “like same family, same song,” each connected by a thread that weaves them together.

Now play for the students “Springhill (These are Green Hills Now)” by Brian Varigans and ask the students to focus on the lyrics. On a screen or a white board, project the lyrics and the following questions to help focus their attention and guide them in their reflection.

- What is the story being told?
- Is there rhyming in the lyrics?
- From a lyrics point of view, are there phrases that repeat?
- Is there energy in the lyrics?
- Does the songwriter use key words to get his message across? Explain, and if possible, identify some of these.
- What is the most poignant line(s) in the song?

- Give your initial reaction to the lyrics, melody, harmony, and rhythm of this song.

## Activity 2: Writing Lyrics

### *Tips for Teaching Success*

The following activities may be challenging for many students in the class depending on their previous experiences with composition and their ability with music literacy. It may be wise for you as teacher to pre-select the groups to ensure that there are students in each group with a range of abilities so they can mentor each other.

To begin this activity and give more preparation for writing lyrics, have on the white board a list of phrases relating to possible mine disasters. Put the students in pairs and have each pair select one phrase. Examples might include:

- Every time I think of that dreadful day....
- As the procession wove its way through the streets....
- I heard sirens ring through the damp morning mist....
- Everyone gathered at the community hall....
- Hundreds of miners descend every day....

Ask each pair of student to work together to write a second line that “completes” the thought, or serves as a second phrase. Once they are satisfied with what they have written, have them experiment with fitting their words to the melody of *Springhill (These are Green Hills Now)*. Encourage them to make adjustments to their lyrics to suit the melody and rhythm. If some students are ready to share what they have written, ask them to do so.

### *Tips for Teaching Success*

It is important to understand that some students require more time when completing creativity exercises, and teachers should not pressure anyone to present until they feel comfortable.

Next, have one pair join another to create groups of four. Alternatively, you can put students in groups of 4 ensuring that, if possible, there is at least one guitar player or keyboardist, or someone with a strong understanding of music theory in each group. Have each pair share

what they have written. Can the two pairs combine their phrases to extend their ideas? Again, if adjustments need to be made, encourage them to do so.

Ask each group to consider what they have created as a beginning to an additional verse to *Springhill (These are Green Hills Now)*. Ask them to complete the verse so it is the same length as those on the recording. If there is a guitar player or a keyboardist in the group, have them rehearse their verse in preparation for the next activity.

Assessment: Upon completion of this activity, have students complete a self and/or peer assessment form that describes their contributions to this process. Examples can be found in Appendix D in *Explore Music 7 – 9: Appendices* (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2012).

As a class, create a rubric that will be used to assess the activity that follows next (Songwriters' Circle). Guide the discussion in such a way as to enable students to understand your expectations and work towards the successful achievement of them.

### Activity 3: Songwriters' Circle

Once the students have been introduced to the basics of writing lyrics, it is time to let them perform and be critiqued. Performing for one's peers is always the best learning experience because it is very hard for young musicians to listen objectively to their own music. In the professional world, the name for this type of activity is called a "Songwriters' Circle," and it is one with which students will be familiar from previous music classes.

To set the atmosphere, have the students establish a performance space and arrange a semi-circle of chairs that will allow for a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. Usually in a songwriters' circle, as each group performs every student is required to articulate a brief reflection – either verbal or written – that describes the performance. If it is written, the reflection serves as reminders when the class discusses the piece together. At this stage, however, you as teacher should lead a discussion after each performance by asking guiding questions, such as:

- Tell me something that you especially like about what this group did with their lyrics.
- Did their lines rhyme? Does this really matter?
- How do they add to the overall story being told in "Springhill (These are Green Hills Now)"?
- Do you have a suggestion that this group could try next time they sing their verse?

You should direct and encourage discussion after each performance by asking the class to comment on the musical ideas contained therein, stressing the importance of using appropriate musical vocabulary.

The most important aspect to reinforce is that their reflection should be positive and constructive. For example, it is not enough for a student to merely say, “I liked it.” They must inform their response based on the principles of songwriting, and what they know about the mechanics of composing. It is extremely important for the teacher to set the tone for this activity, and in so doing provide many examples of comments that are appropriate, as well as those that are inappropriate. Remember, students of this age are extremely self-conscious and very vulnerable, so you must be sensitive and not force them if they are not comfortable performing for the others. A Songwriters’ Circle must not be threatening in any way, as this will stifle the students’ creativity and negatively affect their self-esteem.

When arranging the Songwriters’ Circle, select as many students to perform as class time will allow without being rushed. You want sufficient time to hear their song through, and to allow for second attempts if it is necessary. Moreover, the reflection time needs to be sufficient enough to allow for appropriate responses to each song.

Assessment: At this stage, the assessment might be observation as you take notes on those students who are demonstrating an understanding of what you have been teaching, and the use of vocabulary that reinforces this observation.

#### **Activity 4: Chords**

In groups, have the students return to the song “Springhill (These are Green Hills Now).” The key and harmonic progression can be interpreted in a couple of different ways. It can be considered to be in E major, even though the song opens with a c# minor chord, which seems to deceive the tonality. This interpretation treats the key as a standard major key instead of as a mode. The strong perfect cadence (B-E) at the end of the chorus supports this interpretation, as do the primary chords of I, V and vi (it may be better to use Roman numerals rather than letters – E, B, c# -- to avoid a lengthy discussion about a key signature with four sharps).

Alternatively, this song can be considered to be in c# pentatonic (modal) with a progression that alternates between i and iii several times, then moves to VII-i. In an interview with Heather Sparling, Brian Vardigans talked about how much he loves minor chords and how he feels that the opening chord (c# minor) really sets the song up:

Disaster songs: they’re all minor chords, right? You don’t get three major chords in a disaster song.... In fact, that’s kind of the key to the song, I think: that first chord. It

really kind of kicks the song off. If you hear it, it just kind of sets the mood for it. It has disaster written all over it, doesn't it? (interview May 9, 2011)

This song is a good example of how amateur songwriters often do not follow the conventions of theory and harmony, but instead look for the overall effect of melody and harmony to tell their story. It is also a good example of how theory is a system that helps us to understand what composers are doing with their music without necessarily being a set of unbreakable rules.

Together as a class, put the chords above the words for the first two lines and see if the students can continue and complete the verse using this process. This is an important time for you as teacher to circulate to the groups giving assistance where necessary. As in the previous activity, the level of the students will determine the effectiveness of the results.

Assessment: Now that the students have had an opportunity to perform their lyrics in a Songwriter's Circle, provide an opportunity on another day for them to consider the suggestions made by their classmates. After experimenting further, some groups may decide that a particular suggestion did not work, or is not exactly what they want. This is OK and ultimately each group must make that determination.

## “Their Lights will Shine” (Ron MacDonald)

### Kiosk: Concerts

Ron MacDonald is a songwriter from New Glasgow, and he wrote one of the earliest songs about Westray. When Jack O’Donnell, conductor of Men of the Deeps, heard it, he immediately knew that he wanted to arrange it for his choir.

The Men of the Deeps was formed in 1966 in anticipation of Canada’s centennial celebrations in 1967 and the opening of the Glace Bay Miners’ Museum in Cape Breton (where the choir continues to hold their rehearsals and perform weekly during the tourist season). All members of the choir are either active or retired miners. The group sings about the miners’ work and lifestyles, often singing locally-composed songs. The Men of the Deeps played an important role in the aftermath of the Westray disaster, performing as part of a benefit concert in Halifax, and later at the 10<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary events.

### Activity 1: Listening and Analysing

Play “Their Lights Will Shine” from the Kiosk: Concerts and ask the students if there is a difference in style between this song and the others they have been listening to in this module. If someone does not mention it, you should highlight the fact that this has all the characteristics of an anthem. According to Wikipedia,

The word “anthem” is commonly used to describe a celebratory song, or a composition for a distinct group, as in the term “national anthem.” Many pop songs are used as anthems, such as Queen’s “We Are the Champions,” which is commonly used as a sports anthem.

Ask the students why “Their Lights Will Shine” could be considered an anthem. Possible ideas to look for include:

- It has a celebratory or “stately” feel to it, suggesting being something regal or special.
- There is contrast in both the verses and the chorus.
- It has interesting verses and a strong chorus with higher notes to make an impact and elicit emotions.
- The chord progression is strong and yet simple in nature with few chord changes.
- There is energy in the song, with many contrasts.
- The ending chords are very powerful.
- It is about a special group: miners.

## Activity 2: Chords

As a class, analyse the chord structure of “Their Lights Will Shine.” Project the words on the white board. Review the key and the scale upon which it is built. Depending on how advanced the students are and the experience they have had with scales and chords, determine whether to continue as a class, or have the students do the remainder of the activity in groups.

The song is written in the key of C major, with C (I), F (IV), and G (V) being the primary chords used. Em (III) and Am (VI) are used as passing chords to make the melody move. Play the chord progression on a keyboard or guitar, or even better, have a student(s) play it if there are some in the class who are capable.

Introduce the students to the concept of a “bridge” in songs, and highlight it in this song. It happens following the chorus after verse 2 and immediately precedes the final chorus. In many ways it can also be considered a “hook” because it draws attention to itself by its shortness and intensity. In addition, it contains one measure which is in 2/4 time before returning immediately to 4/4 time.

This is a relatively easy song to sing, so it may be an opportunity to have the students join in on the singing of “Their Lights Will Shine” and use this as a culminating activity for the unit on *Nova Scotia Mining Disasters and Song Exhibit*.

For a finale to the module, play the YouTube video that can be located at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qD42gnAjo4>.

## Extension

You may want to consider a songwriting assignment for those students who show an interest. This will allow them to implement all the concepts covered in this module, and to demonstrate achievement of the outcomes. Throughout this module we have been exploring the elements of effective songwriting. By now students should have a general idea of the challenges with writing songs that have appeal to a range of listeners. It is difficult to know when a song is actually “finished” and the songwriter is satisfied with the final product. Many successful singer-songwriters make changes to their songs up to and including the time spent in the recording studio. They are always looking for more perfection, as it could make or break their overall success. Sometimes, songs are modified after their initial recording, and an example of this is Gordon Lightfoot’s “The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald.” Check out that story by visiting the web site:

<http://gordonlightfoot.com/wreckoftheedmundfitzgerald.shtm#aboutchange>

This may lead to a discussion about changing lyrics in songs based on new information. You may even decide to hold a debate on the subject asking questions such as:

- Is historical accuracy essential in a song about an historical event?
- If new information comes to light after an historical song has been written, should the song be changed to reflect the changes to the historical record?
- Should a song about an historical event be written in the days and weeks immediately following an event, or should a songwriter wait for more information on which to draw? For this question, you may want students to read Ron Hynes' story about waiting to write *Atlantic Blue* – a song about the Ocean Ranger tragedy. This can be found at: [http://www.saltscares.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=642:man-of-a-thousand-songs&catid=34:people&Itemid=154](http://www.saltscares.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=642:man-of-a-thousand-songs&catid=34:people&Itemid=154)

### Assessment

This assignment may be done individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Before beginning, design a rubric as a class that describes the elements that you as teacher will be using to assess their compositions. This process is as important as the finished product, in that you will discover the depth of understanding of the material that has been presented in this Learning and Teaching Module. Encourage the students to write a song on the theme of disasters – something that has strong emotional appeal, and tells a story through words and music. Examples of themes might include:

- a mining disaster close to home
- a fatal car accident
- a fire
- a train disaster
- a plane crash
- a shipwreck
- an environmental disaster, such as a hurricane, flood, forest fire, etc.

Once they have selected a theme, encourage them to research as much information as possible on the disaster, and to brainstorm key points that they want to include. Now they are ready to begin. You may wish to provide a list of steps for them to consider when writing their song, realizing that all songwriters use a personal style that works for them. Always refer to the Principles of Effective Songwriting. This is a suggested list of steps:

1. Decide the form of the song (e.g., verses only, or verse and chorus).
2. Begin writing, considering the difference between rhyming lines and those that do not rhyme. If they are incorporating a chorus, it may be a good idea to begin with that, as this will be constant throughout the song.
3. Have them write the rhythm of the words, and this will determine the metre and rhythms used.

4. Now experiment with melody to accompany the words, considering rise and fall of phrases and tempo.
5. Write, listen, react, rework... the process takes time.
6. Consider a “hook” in the song to add interest.
7. Decide on a strong ending.
8. Plan frequent opportunities for peers to respond, either in songwriters’ circles or informally.
9. Listen, react, rework.... incorporate this throughout the process.
10. When you consider the song to be finished, record it and submit it for an assessment and feedback from the teacher.
11. Plan an opportunity to showcase the song in a school concert, a coffee house, or other venue appropriate for the age group.

## Appendix A: Suggestions for Integrated Units

Although this is a songwriting module for music classes, teachers will discover many opportunities for cross-disciplinary work. Students might identify these opportunities themselves but highlighting the fact that they are studying a similar topic in social studies or science, or that they are discussing songwriting in English language arts a part of a poetry unit. This is terrific because it shows students making connections to their learning in more holistic ways.

It is also important – and exciting! – for you as the music teacher to collaborate with teachers in other subject areas to develop integrated units that are cross-disciplinary, as this reinforces for students learning that is linked throughout their school day. The following are a few examples of idea threads that may be generated in a brainstorming session with teachers of other subjects and that could have direct links to many of the activities in this Learning and Teaching Module:

### Social Studies

- life in coal-mining communities
- family life where one or more family members work shifts in a coal mine
- key parts of the province where significant coal seams can be found
- active and inactive coal seams throughout the province over time
- importance of religion to coal mining families
- labour unrest and the development of trade unions
- support for bereaved families who lost loved ones in the mines
- lifestyles of mining families
- history of mining in the region
- leadership and management by outside companies

### Science and Technology

- properties of coal
- properties of gasses in mines
- environmental effects of surface and underground mining
- pollution
- coal as a source of energy
- changing technologies in mining and other natural resource industries

### English Language Arts and Drama

- lyric writing in songs as extensions to poetry
- monologues and narration
- play writing and production

- interviews with retired coal miners
- debates

### **Visual Arts and Film and Video Production**

- still life using mining tools
- painting, charcoal sketches, mixed media projects
- architecture of company homes
- short film production
- interviews with miners
- mining exhibit

## Appendix B: Song Lyrics

For the sake of convenience, selected lyrics of songs referenced in this guide are provided in this appendix. For full lyrics, and for the lyrics of additional songs, please consult [disastersongs.ca](http://disastersongs.ca).

### “The Westray Story,” Sammy Graham (Kiosk: Disaster!)

1. Twenty-six men went to work on that day,  
Down deep in the mine on the ninth day of May.  
Nobody really knows just what went wrong,  
But the family and friends know they are gone.
2. They were mining the coal in the old Foord seam,  
With danger of rock falls and methane unseen  
The old folks had known of the trouble it had been  
But the jobs they were needed, the times they were lean.
3. As the miners were nearing the end of their shift  
The fog over Plymouth was beginning to lift.  
Suddenly from deep down within the ground  
Came a blast that was felt for miles around.
4. So they gathered the families at the local fire hall  
To wait for the news, oh, any word at all.  
As the draegermen searched for their loved ones they prayed  
But their prayers were not answered and they lowered the flags.
5. Well the draegermen they searched round the clock but in grief  
The dangers they encountered were beyond belief.  
They found fifteen men, all of them dead from the blast  
And the doctors told their loved ones it was painless and fast.
6. Then they called off the search with men still trapped below  
All hope was lost and the sorrow did grow.  
What happened at Westray should never have been  
They were warned of the danger again and again.
7. Just ten days before the explosion took place  
Inspectors told of coal dust too near the working face  
The reports had stated something better be done.  
But no action was taken, not a thing by no one.

Oh no action was taken, not a damn thing was done  
Not a damn thing was done.

## **“No More Pickin Coal,” Valerie MacDonald (Kiosk: Disaster)**

Born in a town that never knew my name,  
Left for the city to make my fortune and fame.

CHORUS:

Those big city lights keep calling me;  
No more pickin’ coal,  
No more pickin’ coal.

Mamma, Mamma, please stop that cryin’;  
There’ll soon be lots of bread, and chicken frying.

Brothers and sisters, I’ll be back;  
No more pickin’ coal, across that track.

Papa, Papa, don’t worry no more;  
You won’t have to work at the company store.

## **“Draegermen of Westray Mine,” Valerie MacDonald (Kiosk: Disaster)**

Draegermen, digging in that cold coal mine  
God only knows just what they’ll find  
Down in that cold coal mine  
Draegerman down in that Westray mine.

Searching and hoping for a breath of life  
To bring the good news for a mother and wife  
Down in that cold coal mine  
Draegermen down in that Westray mine

Fresh air flowing through a huge rock fall  
Where the bare-faced miners could only crawl  
Down in that cold coal mine  
Draegermen down in that Westray mine.

Digging through the coal dust, it’s not safe to pass  
Are there airways blocked by that methane gas  
Down in that cold coal mine  
Down in that Westray mine

Draegermen, draegermen looking so sad  
For the twenty-six miners and the lives they once had  
Down in that cold coal mine  
Draegermen down in that Westray mine  
Draegermen down in that Westray mine.

## **“Buddy, Can you Hear Me?” John Archbold (Kiosk: Home and Community)**

Buddy, can you hear me?

*Call my name.*

Buddy, can you hear me?

*Call my name.*

Draegermen soon be diggin’,

Come on a- singin’ with me,

*Call my name, call my name.*

Buddy, can you see me?

*Call my name.*

Buddy, can you see me?

*Call my name.*

Fallen rock and coal dust,

My lamp’s still gleamin’ weakly.

*Call my name, call my name.*

Lord, are you near me?

*Call my name.*

Lord, are you near me?

*Call my name.*

I still got family need me,

Ain’t yet time to take me.

*Call my name, call my name.*

Draegerman, can you free me?

*Call my name.*

Draegerman, can you free me?

*Call my name.*

Eight long days I’m waitin’,

Now I hear you diggin’ so near me.

*Call my name, call my name.*

## **“Pictou’s Black Coal,” John Archbold (Kiosk: Home and Community)**

Explosion they called it, it should not have happened,  
This mine was as safe as any could be.  
Gas sensors for methane and sprinkling with stone dust  
Showed the owners’ concern for the miners’ safety.  
But the old men knew better, they’d worked on the Big Seam,  
And there were twenty-six more to add to the toll.  
For all those smart fellas who said Westray was failsafe  
Don’t go down underground to go on the coal.

*Chorus:*

*Fathers and brothers, sons, husbands and lovers,  
They go down underground to go on the coal.  
Fathers and brothers, sons, husbands and lovers,  
Are the price that we pay for Pictou’s black coal.*

What use a gas sensor if it’s not calibrated,  
Not hooked to the Scoop, or its readings ignored?  
When the dust from the Miner lies thick in the deeps,  
What use the stone dust still bagged up and stored?  
What use the inspector if he turns a blind eye  
To the open bare wires, to fuel spilled on the coal?  
What use regulation if it’s all for a buck,  
And there’s scarcely a thought for the men on the coal?

And each time it happens the families stand praying,  
While the draegermen toil in that black hell below.  
The Allan, the Foord, the McGregor, the Westray,  
All the pits have killed more than fell to the foe.  
By fire and explosion, by rockfall and mishap,  
Six hundred and more is Pictou’s grim toll.  
For a hundred and fifty years we’ve depended  
On the men who are willing to go on the coal.

## “Miracle at Colliery Two,” Jack Kingston (Kiosk: Disaster)

It was in the year nineteen fifty-eight, October twenty-third,  
From Springhill, Nova Scotia, disaster was the word.  
Sorrow hit that stricken town as it had two years before  
When the Springhill mine explosion took place in Colliery Four.

But this time it was different; much worse is what they said,  
And many of the miners they expected would be dead.  
The bump had caused destruction deep down in Colliery Two.  
Some miners saved their own lives by digging their way through.

But many of the miners were buried deep below.  
Still hope was not abandoned though digging it was slow;  
Six days went by of fears and fright—no sign of life was found;  
But then a miracle happened thirteen thousand feet underground.

Twelve more alive, the good news came—hard to believe but true.  
God had cared and prayers had spared and hope became renewed.  
The draegermen kept working hard with hopes more were alive;  
Still buried deep in Colliery Two, still missing were fifty-five.

Then more good news came from below—seven more alive this time.  
Some more prayers had been answered, some more men would survive.  
Its sorrow to those with loved ones lost, but credit for bravery due  
For the miners’ lives the draegermen saved—the miracle at Colliery Two.

## “Westray,” Sarah Harmer (Kiosk: Disaster!)

1. A natural disaster comes out wasn't natural after all  
In a small town on the East Coast  
they've gathered in a fire hall.  
And who forgot to let the canary out?  
Will you be there when they're pulling bodies out?
2. There are strange things done  
under the gun  
by the men who moil for coal.  
Eastern gales of howled out tales  
that would make your blood run cold.  
Lighthouse eyes wathces us spies  
and they put a word out on me.  
That night you and I got lost on the drive  
up the coast of the Northumberland Straight.

Chorus:

You'll know in a little while if this was meant to be  
Are they afraid of you?  
Are you afraid of me?

3. There wasn't a breath in the land of death  
and I hurried, horror driven.  
Was it something I said, somewhere in her head  
I just asked for the answers given.  
20 minutes up the road just off the great highway.  
I won't be around here for long,  
I did not come to stay.

Chorus

You'll know in a little while if this was meant to be  
Are they afraid of you?  
Are you afraid of me?

4. And one year later it has yet to come clear  
No one's doing anything, cause they're scared  
of the way they might appear.  
They're ignoring all the signals they could not afford to hear,  
Private investors in public fear.

## “Pictou County Mining Disaster,” Al Hanis (Kiosk: Mass Media)

What is in a man that would coax him to go  
Into the ground, say, a mile or so  
Down in the bowels of a dark, damp coal mine?  
Some folks would say that they’re out of their minds.  
And while they come from all over this land  
There’s one sure thing that they all understand  
A job is a job and a man is a man  
Now someone is depending on them.

Nova Scotia is home to the Old Foord Seam  
They’ve mined her for well over a century  
She’s twisted and rotted and deadly they say  
Many a miner’s poor life she has claimed  
Well not much has changed over the years  
Roof falls and methane, coal dust are still feared  
In a mechanized mine with all safety gear  
Yet somehow the Reaper appeared.

It was a cold Friday night on the graveyard shift  
The men had gone down where the dust was adrift  
Though fortune was theirs to be on the payroll  
They were given no warning of what would unfold  
Did they hear it explode? Did they see the flash?  
Did they suffer long before they breathed their last?  
An act of God or was it methane gas?  
But something ignited the blast.

In the Plymouth Fire Hall families gathered inside  
They prayed the coal miners would still be alive  
Reporters and cameras lined up on the street  
To share with the nation their moment of grief  
The rescue teams waded on down through the doom  
To save the poor souls from a dark, dusty tomb

## “Springhill (These re Green Hills Now),” Brian Vardigans (Kiosk: Concerts)

1. These are green hills now  
This is air you can breathe  
And the small miners’ homes  
Are all painted up and sheathed  
But when I was a child  
You know that wasn’t so  
There was coal dust up above us  
And coal dust down below  
And the dark miners’ faces  
Were as common as a penny  
Now fifty years later  
You won’t find any  
These are green hills now
2. It’s a drive thru now  
Another roadside attraction  
Where Anne Murray is an icon  
And Snowbird is a legend  
But when I was a child  
It was all black and white  
Where the cameras waited  
In the dark of the night  
And I recall their anxious voices  
As the draegermen went down  
To search for their loved ones  
So deep underground  
These are green hills now
3. These are green hills now  
But I remember those days  
When the big bump came  
And replaced the old ways  
When the mine shut down  
From the danger and the sorrow

## **“Their Lights will Shine,” Ron MacDonald (Kiosk: Concerts)**

Here we stand, holding fast to one another  
With the pain and the mem’ries rushing through  
Down below us lie the bodies of our brothers  
Seeking rest so their new lives may begin.  
Will there never be a chance for them to win?

### *Chorus*

Their lights will shine  
Twenty-six all of a kind  
Their lights will shine  
Facing those who would be blind.  
Their lights will shine  
For the loved ones left behind  
From the darkness of the mine  
Their lights will shine.

Time and space cannot part this bond among us  
Trees and stone mark the sacred place to be.  
Give us strength to resist life’s bitter hadness  
Give us hope that the world may one day see.  
Will we never find the truth that sets them free?

Bring us some meaning to the things that haunt our mind  
Bring us the solitude that seems so hard to find

## Additional Resources

### Nova Scotia Curriculum

Canadian History 11 (2002)  
Community Economic Development: A Curriculum Supplement (2002)  
Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Arts Education Curriculum (2000)  
Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum (1996)  
Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Social Studies Curriculum (1999)  
Geography 10 (1996)  
Music Primary – 6 (2000)  
Explore Music 7, Music 8 (Implementation Draft, 2009)  
Explore Music 9 (Pilot Draft, 2010)  
Social Studies 6 (Implementation Draft, 2006)  
Social Studies 7 (Implementation Draft, 2005)  
Social Studies 8 (Implementation Draft, 2006)  
Social Studies 9 (1998)

### ALR Resources

*A Forest for Calum* (25367)  
*Blackwater Mines* (13680)  
*Blast: Cape Breton Coal Mine Disasters* (25100)  
*Blood on the Coal: The Story of Springhill Mining Disasters* (24491)  
*Canada: Its Music* (21103)  
*Canada: Its Music* (21103)  
*Canadian Industries* (25113)  
*Dangerous Professions of the Past* (17131)  
*Energy for the Future* (17134)  
*Out of the Deeps* (1000142)  
*Pit Pony* (18859)  
*Rise Again: The Story of Cape Breton Island* (25628)  
*The Great Canadian Song Book* (19047)  
*The Music of the Men of the Deeps* (TBA)

### On-line Resources

These resources are published by Pantomime Music Publications and are available on-line at <http://www.secretsofsongwriting.com/prepurchase2.html>

*The Essentials Secrets of Songwriting, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition* (2010)

*Essential Secrets of Songwriting Lessons* (2007)

*How to Harmonize a Melody* (2007)

*Essential Chord Progression* (2008)

*More Essential Chord Progressions* (2008)

*Chord Progression Formulas* (2007)