



**Evaluation Criteria:** Some students' responses to the following question:

A song's chorus is effective if it...

- ...makes the listener think
- ...is entertaining
- ...achieves its intended purpose
- ...causes the listener to see something in a new way
- ...is clear and the listener understands
- ...touches the listener emotionally
- ...communicate interesting ideas
- ...memorable
- ...unifies or gives the song coherence

### **Revisiting Demonstration Songs**

Next, it is important to revisit the demonstration songs that opened the lessons. Direct the students to use their newly developed terminology, categories, and evaluation criteria to examine, classify, analyze, and evaluate the choruses of the demonstration songs. Gaining practice applying these terms will help them when they begin to work with thesis statements.

### **Applying Terminology/Classification to the Demonstration Songs**

Here is a brief example of how one might apply the terminology/classification system to the choruses of the following songs:

Merle Haggard's "Mama Tried"

Bruce Springsteen's "My Hometown"

Twista's "Hope" and Bob Marley's "Redemption Songs"

Examining a song and applying the newly devised classification system can help students construct meaning as well as form an opinion on the function and purpose of a particular chorus (and later a thesis statement). Such skills empower students and help them gain new evaluation perspectives.

Most modern songs incorporate a chorus that is repeated throughout the song. In many cases, the chorus of a song – like a thesis statement in academic writing – acts as a unifying force that holds together the ideas presented in each of the verses while offering a statement about the song's overall meaning or purpose. The chorus usually conveys the songwriter's purpose for writing the song. A song's chorus serves as a guide to help the listener understand the song writer's purpose and message.

## Analytical Statement

Sometimes the chorus presents an **analytical statement**. In doing so, the chorus works as an evaluative statement — a kind of assessment of the issues presented in the various verses of the song. For example, in the song “Mama Tried” by Merle Haggard, the verses present details of the persona’s background and character; however, the chorus presents the persona’s ultimate assessment of those details. Thus, the chorus unifies the details presented within each of the verses. It also provides an assessment of those details. More specifically, the chorus functions as the persona’s overall analysis or conclusion that he alone is responsible for his actions and, in addition, reveals the song’s purpose, which is to communicate to listeners that his mother deserves no blame for his evil ways.

## Expository Statement

Sometimes a chorus presents an **expository statement**. Like an analytical chorus, an expository chorus unifies the details presented in the various verses; however, an expository chorus does not analyze those details. Instead, the expository chorus serves to define, describe, or explain such details or events. Thus, the chorus’s function or purpose is to inform or provide a big picture for the listener.

One could argue that the verses in Bruce Springsteen’s “Hometown” offer details that are unified and defined or explained by the song’s chorus. “Hometown” is somewhat unique in that it employs a fixed chorus but uses the verses to cause the listener to reflect on the repeated refrain from different perspectives. In “Hometown,” Springsteen’s chorus explains how the verses fit together and, thus, presents the listener with a broad picture of how a persona’s opinion of their hometown can change over time. At first, the persona’s vision is simple and idealistic as seen from the eyes of a child. The middle verses show how the persona’s perspective on his hometown becomes more complicated and less idealistic as he matures. However, when the persona becomes a father, he experiences not only a return to his idealistic vision but also experiences a connection with both his father and his child.

## Argumentative Statement

A song’s chorus can also presents an **argumentative statement** about the details or situations presented in the verses of the song. As in an analytical or expository chorus, an argumentative chorus unifies the ideas or details presented in the various verses; however, an argumentative chorus differs from the analytical or expository chorus because it makes a specific claim or assertion, argues from or for a particular perspective, or initiates a call to action. The details in the verses usually serve to enrich and/or support the chorus’s general argument. Essentially, the purpose or function of the argumentative chorus is to present the song’s argument in a succinct and memorable way.

Bob Marley’s “Redemption Songs” is an example of a song that incorporates an argumentative chorus, which manages to be both succinct and memorable. The chorus of “Redemption Songs” is succinct because it is straightforward in its stance and very clear about its purpose. Marley addresses his listeners directly with the plea “Won’t you help to sing / these songs of freedom?” and clearly calls upon them to join the fight against slavery — both in its

physical and mental manifestations. The chorus is memorable and, therefore, powerful because Marley approaches his listeners as friends and fellow sympathizers and because he artistically relates the fight against slavery with the appeal and beauty associated with singing.

Twista and Faith Evans's "Hope" is another example of a song that incorporates an **argumentative statement**. In "Hope", the verses outline the various ways in which the persona, his family and friends, and people in general are suffering. The chorus asserts the importance of hope and faith in such situations and argues that music can be a tool for maintaining hope (as well as faith) when people are faced with hardship and tragedy. Unlike the Marley's "Redemption Songs" chorus, Twista's chorus implies rather than directly states the song's argument and purpose. However, like Marley, Twista's chorus demonstrates that he views his listeners as friends and goes even further by explicitly expressing an attitude of caring and good will toward his audience.

As usual with any artistic expression, music leaves room for interpretation. Thus, some listeners believe a particular song's chorus functions as an expository statement; however, another listener may believe that the same song's chorus is argumentative. For example, in the paragraphs above, the chorus of Springsteen's "Hometown" is presented as being expository. However, one could also interpret the chorus's function in relation to the verses as argumentative.

## SIDE NOTE

In general, music is a great way to introduce students to rhetorical devices such as appeals (logos, pathos, and ethos), fallacies (band-wagon, straw-man, begging-the-question), and other rhetorical devices. Working with choruses should get them thinking about the importance of purpose, audience, context, language, genre, etc.

**How do we get students to make the connection between song choruses and thesis statements?** Have students read a series of short essays that incorporate examples of analytical thesis statements, expository thesis statements, and argumentative thesis statements.

I directed my students to examine their own writing and the writing of their classmates. I asked them to classify the thesis statements of student-authored essays, compare the thesis statements from these essays with the choruses of the songs we discussed in class, and, finally, evaluate the thesis statements in terms of their purpose, unifying qualities, and overall effect.

## TIPS

Make sure you allow students time to experiment with using the terminology that the class developed for song choruses to examine, analyze, and classify thesis statements. Such experimentation will help students see both similarities and differences between a song's chorus and an academic paper's thesis statement. Furthermore, such experimentation will likely generate authentic learning situations in which students smile when they unearth connections between popular music and academic writing and gain an enriched understanding of writing when they

discover (rather than are told) that they need to adjust their terminology and evaluation criteria in order to accommodate features unique to academic writing.

For example, students may come to recognize and (hopefully) appreciate that ambiguity is often valued in artistic writing, whereas clarity and precision are valued in academic writing. Self discovery as opposed to memorization leads to enriched and transferable knowledge.

Create learning situations that encourage students to discover how thesis statements and song choruses have similar functions and are shaped by the writer's intended purpose.



This document is an addendum to the *LitTunes.com* lesson,  
"The Song Chorus and Thesis Statement Connection," available at  
[http://www.corndancer.com/tunes/tunes\\_lp019/lp11\\_chorus.html](http://www.corndancer.com/tunes/tunes_lp019/lp11_chorus.html)