



River Music

Rivers make beautiful music. From the trickle of melting snow to the babble of a full-flowing stream to the cascade of water over boulders and stones, the sounds and rhythms of the river can sooth and invite. A river can also make harsh tones, like when it floods and spills over its banks or when it carries a lot of ships and other vessels to a busy harbor.

Just as much as the river seems to want you to hear its music, people throughout time have been compelled to describe their feelings about the river through music of their own making. In this activity, you'll encourage your child to channel his own feelings about rivers into a rap or folk song.

Supplies

- paper and pencil
- musical instrument (can be a real instrument or homemade, such as a container of rice to shake)
- a recording device (optional)
- Internet access (optional)

Getting Started

Talk with your child about inspiration. Why would a river stimulate creativity and excite someone to write a song? Ask your child what kinds of good and bad characteristics a river has that would be interesting or entertaining to hear about in a song.

Traditional folk songs are related to a particular culture and often to historic or personal events or holidays. Rap music also expresses personal, as well as emotional, feelings in spoken rhyme. If your child has visited a river, encourage him to write down thoughts about his experience. If he hasn't made his own visit, he can base his song on the books you read together. Have him go back to the books you read and search for a simple story to tell.

The story he wants to tell about the river becomes his song lyrics. To generate a melody, he may want to just try to sing his words and see what comes out! If he needs more help framing his tune or finding a beat, suggest he borrow or modify another folk song, such as "Over the River and Through the Woods" or "I've Been Working On the Railroad." He might also generate ideas by listening to other songs or raps:

American Rivers has compiled a playlist of Best River Songs: www.youtube.com/view_playlist?list=PLAAC05D7C64C61568

Meet artists and listen to their music in this **Smithsonian series** on contemporary music along the Mississippi River: www.pbs.org/riverofsong

Rhythm, Rhyme, Results had educational rap songs on a variety of topics. This sample includes rivers: www.educationalrap.com/song/geography-in-the-usa.html

Once he's ready to perform, where better to gather an audience than down by the river! If possible, record his song so he can hear it. Show your enthusiasm by singing along or offering musical accompaniment.