

Glory Days & Ghost Towns: Crafting Your Story with Bruce Springsteen

Subject: English Language Arts, Creative Writing, Music History

Grade Level: High School (9-12)

Time Allotment: Flexible (designed to be completed over several weeks as the student reads the book)

Materials Needed

- A copy of the book "Born to Run" by Bruce Springsteen
 - A dedicated notebook or journal for reflections and notes
 - Pens or pencils
 - Access to the internet for listening to Springsteen's music (e.g., YouTube, Spotify) and for light research
 - Headphones for an immersive listening experience
 - **Creative Project Materials (Student chooses ONE pathway):**
 - **For the Songwriter:** Instrument (optional), voice memo app on a phone, paper for lyrics.
 - **For the Visual Artist:** Poster board or large paper, old magazines, scissors, glue, markers, paint, or other art supplies.
 - **For the Author:** A word processor or a fresh section in their journal.
 - **For the Digital Storyteller:** Access to free presentation software (like Google Slides, Canva) or a simple video editing app on a phone or computer.
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Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Analyze how an author uses narrative structure, vivid language, and tone to develop central themes in a non-fiction work (memoir).
- Evaluate the relationship between Springsteen's music/lyrics and his life experiences as described in the text.
- Identify and discuss key themes such as identity, the concept of "home," ambition, and the struggle for self-expression.
- Create an original, multi-modal project that communicates a personal narrative, inspired by the stylistic and thematic elements of "Born to Run."

Alignment with Standards

This lesson aligns with common High School ELA standards, including:

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.3:** Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.
 - **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.6:** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.
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- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3:** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Lesson Activities

Part 1: The Overture - Setting the Stage (Introduction)

1. **The Hook (15 mins):** Before reading, listen to the song "Born to Run." Without any context from the book, ask the student to journal their response to these questions: *What story is this song telling? What emotions do you feel? Who do you think the singer is? What does he want?* Discuss their initial thoughts.
2. **Lesson Framing (10 mins):** Explain that the entire autobiography is, in many ways, Springsteen's 400-page explanation of that single song. It's his story of where he came from, the "traps" he felt, and his journey to find his voice. The central question of our study will be: **How do we tell our own stories?**

Part 2: The Main Set - Reading, Listening, and Reflecting (Ongoing)

This is the core of the lesson, to be completed as the student reads the book. Break the reading into logical chunks (e.g., by "Book One," "Book Two," etc., or by every 100 pages). After each chunk, the student will complete a "Reading Response Set" in their journal.

Instructions for each Reading Response Set:

1. **Find Your "One True Sentence":** Springsteen mentions searching for "one true sentence." Find one sentence from your reading that you feel is powerful, honest, or beautifully written. Copy it into your journal and write a few sentences about why you chose it.
2. **Connect to the Music:** Choose one song mentioned in the reading section. First, listen to the song. Then, reflect on this question: *How does reading about the song's creation (the people, places, or feelings behind it) change your understanding of the lyrics?*
3. **Thematic Exploration (Choose one prompt per section):**
 - How does Bruce describe his relationship with his father and his hometown (Freehold)? Find a specific passage and analyze how his word choice creates a specific mood (e.g., confinement, love, anger, nostalgia).
 - Springsteen often writes about feeling like an "outsider." Where do you see this theme in the book? How does he use this feeling to fuel his ambition?
 - Describe the "E Street Band" as if they were characters in a novel. What role does "the band" as a concept play in Bruce's life and story?
 - How does Springsteen write about fame, success, and depression? Why do you think it's important for him to be so honest about his struggles?

Part 3: The Encore - The "My Hometown" Creative Project (Summative Assessment)

The Prompt: Bruce Springsteen used his music and his book to tell the story of where he came from, the ghosts that haunted him, and the dreams that drove him. Now, it's your turn. Choose one of the following projects to tell a piece of your own story, inspired by the themes and style of "Born to Run."

Project Choices (Student selects one):

- **1. The Mixtape Memoir:** Curate a playlist of 5-7 songs (by any artist, or even instrumental pieces) that tell a story about a specific time, relationship, or journey in your life. Design a "cover" for your mixtape and, most importantly, write short "liner notes" for each song, explaining its personal significance and why it's on the playlist.

- **2. The Visual Anthem:** Create a collage, painting, or detailed drawing that represents your "hometown" — whether that's a physical place, a group of people, or a state of mind. Use images, colors, words, and symbols to capture its feeling. Write a one-paragraph "Artist's Statement" explaining the key elements and how they tell your story, similar to how Springsteen describes Freehold.
- **3. The "Backstreets" Narrative:** Write a 2-3 page personal essay or short story that captures a core truth about yourself, a key memory, or your dreams for the future. Focus on using vivid details and an authentic voice, just as Springsteen does when describing a scene from his childhood or a moment on stage.
- **4. The Digital "Thunder Road":** Create a 2-3 minute video or slideshow. Combine personal photos (or symbolic images from the internet), text overlays (using powerful, poetic language), and a background song to tell a short story about hope, escape, or finding your place. The goal is to create the emotional feeling of a Springsteen song.

Part 4: The Curtain Call - Presentation and Reflection

1. **Project Presentation:** The student shares their finished project, explaining their creative process and the story they chose to tell.
2. **Final Discussion:**
 - After reading his story and creating your own, what do you think is the main purpose of storytelling?
 - What was the most surprising thing you learned about Bruce Springsteen?
 - How did this project help you think about your own life story and the places/people that have shaped you?

Assessment

The student's "My Hometown" creative project will be assessed using the following simple rubric.

Criteria	3 - Excellent	2 - Proficient	1 - Developing
Thematic Connection	The project masterfully connects to central themes from "Born to Run" (e.g., identity, place, dreams) and applies them to a personal narrative in a creative and insightful way.	The project connects to themes from the book and applies them to a personal narrative. The connection is clear and well-executed.	The project makes a limited or unclear connection to the themes of the book.
Creativity & Effort	The project is highly original, polished, and demonstrates significant thought and effort. The chosen medium is used effectively to convey the story.	The project is complete and shows good effort and creative thought. The medium is used appropriately.	The project is incomplete or shows minimal effort. The execution does not fully convey the intended idea.
Reflection & Clarity	The student's explanation (written or verbal) of their work is exceptionally clear, thoughtful, and provides deep insight into their creative choices and the story being told.	The student clearly explains their work, their creative choices, and the meaning behind the project.	The student's explanation of their work is unclear or lacks detail about their creative process and meaning.