

EPISODE 017

The Simplest Way to Start and Finish Song Lyrics that Mean Something!

See the show notes at storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-017

[00:00:00] Hey, this is Melanie Naumann, and welcome to the Stories in Songs Podcast.

If you've been having a hard time finishing the lyrics of a song you're stuck in and being objective about your material, then this podcast episode - "The Simplest Way to Start and Finish Song Lyrics that Mean Something!" - is exactly what you're looking for!

It shows you one songwriting trick to help you stay on topic in your lyrics and write something meaningful. It also enables you to figure out how you can use the most essential element of great storytelling to your songwriting advantage.

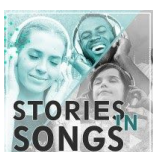
We will study the lyrics of Placebo's song "Special K" to talk about this great songwriting trick.

Furthermore, I will explain each question of each step of the S.O.N.G. framework that we use for discovering the storytelling power of lyrics to help you make better sense of why those questions not only help you improve your lyric writing skills but also help you revise your lyrics, push them to a higher level, and discover your skills as a storyteller.

So if you want to know the easiest way to start and finish the lyrics of a song that uses the power of storytelling to deliver a message to your listeners, then keep listening.

What you'll learn in this episode

[00:01:50] In the last two episodes we've talked about the dark side of love.



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In Cole Swindell's song "Middle of a Memory," we experienced what happens if what you are hoping for by meeting a special person gets taken away from you. The turning point event was when the girl left the character at the dance without him having the chance to complete the memory he wanted to create. She left him standing there under the neon lights trying to catch his breath and make sense of what just happened.

So we experienced that sometimes painting a picture before you lived through it can leave you paralyzed and overwhelmed by the unexpected turn of events when you lose what you never had. Not everything happens like we've imagined it to be.

In Jon Pardi's song "Heartache on the Dancefloor", we experienced how a person may get stuck in life when they miss out on taking a chance once it presents itself. The character didn't talk to the attractive girl and never found out her name. So he returned to that bar over and over again while life passed him by.

So those two songs show that meeting the one can go wrong. Either our expectations aren't met, or we let the chance slip and wait for it to return - most of the time in vain.

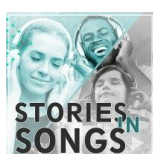
But today, we dive deep into the dark side of love. Today there's not just something that goes wrong, but we actually deal with the fact how love is not only a force of creation but also of destruction.

Furthermore, in the last episode, we talked about how you should focus on one creative poetic phrase like "Middle of a Memory" or "Heartache on the Dancefloor" to express your song's message in an original way without confusing your audience by using too much creative language that makes it hard to understand what the lyrics are about and take away its meaning.

But in this episode, we will look at a song with over 100 comments on songmeaning.com because the lyrics are not on the nose. And many people took part in the discussion about what the lyrics are actually about.

Even when we go through the analysis, you might have a totally different opinion of what the song is about. Maybe you agree with me. Perhaps you don't. But this podcast wouldn't be complete if we did not include that way of songwriting intended to leave its audience with many ways to interpret what has been said.

That's why we look at a single release of one band known for writing exactly those kinds of ambiguous songs.



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“Special K” by Placebo

[00:04:23] The song we will analyze is “Special K” by Placebo.

Even by just naming the title of the song, we are already able to make assumptions as to what “Special K” refers to. Some who like the brand of a breakfast cereal might think it’s a song about Kellogs. Others might know that “K” refers to the drug Ketamine. Others might be clueless about what kind of topic that title refers to.

So be prepared for how ambiguous the lyrics of “Special K” are going to be.

But firstly, some more information about the song itself.

As already said, "Special K" is a single by British alternative rock band Placebo and written by its band members: Steve Hewitt, Brian Molko, and Stefan Olsdal.

It was released in 2001 and helped promote their third album, “*Black Market Music*.”

Now, let’s get to the lyrics to see how difficult it can be to read between the lines when your lyrics are open for interpretation and use lots of creative phrases.

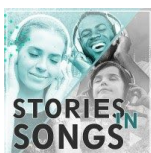
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*Coming up beyond belief
On this coronary thief
More than just a leitmotif
More chaotic, no relief
I'll describe the way I feel
Weeping wounds that never heal
Can the savior be for real
Or are you just my seventh seal?*

*No hesitation, no delay
You come on just like special K
Just like I swallowed half my stash.
I never ever wanna crash.*



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*No hesitation, no delay
You come on just like special K*

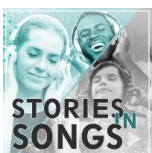
*Now you're back with dope demand.
I'm on sinking sand
Gravity, no escaping
Gravity
Gravity, no escaping
Not for free
I fall down
Hit the ground
Make a heavy sound
Every time you seem to come around*

*I'll describe the way I feel
You're my new Achilles heel
Can this savior be for real
Or are you just my seventh seal?*

*No hesitation, no delay
You come on just like special K
Just like I swallowed half my stash.
I never ever wanna crash.
No hesitation, no delay
You come on just like special K*

*Now you're back with dope demand.
I'm on sinking sand
Gravity, no escaping
Gravity
Gravity, no escaping
Not for free
I fall down
Hit the ground
Make a heavy sound
Every time you seem to come around*

*No escaping gravity
No escaping gravity
No escaping gravity
No escaping gravity
Gravity
Gravity*



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Gravity

Now that we have read through the lyrics let's start dissecting them to study the storytelling power of "Special K" using the S.O.N.G. Framework.

Ready?
Let's begin.

1. Summary (About)

[00:07:13] First, we start with a summary of the song and talk about what kind of story or story moment it includes. This first step helps us get a clear overview of what the song is about before diving deeper into who the song's main character is, the storytelling craft, and the message behind it all. This step is laying the groundwork for our lyric study.

So the first question is:

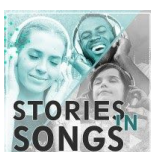
1. What is the song generally about?

This question helps us to get a general understanding of what the main topic of the song is about. It provides a clear orientation of where the lyrics will take us.

Placebo's song "Special K" is about a character who has found love and who compares that feeling with being on drugs. Of course, maybe that feeling is not love. It's more of a sensation for the main character. Because all he knows is the uplifting and at the same time crashing feeling of taking drugs and what it feels like when they wear off. That's what he knows. And that's why he's using what he knows to describe this new unknown feeling in a way that makes sense to him.

And the song is about the comparison between taking drugs and the sensation of the feeling of love.

So that's the starting point of our lyric study: A character who experiences the sensation of love or attraction that he can only describe by comparing it to the familiar feeling of taking drugs.



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Now let's dive a little deeper into getting a general overview of the song by categorizing into what kind of story genre the song belongs to. This will help us narrow down the song's main topic.

2. If the song was a scene taken out of a movie, under what genre would you promote the movie? What is the story's genre?

The first movie that comes to mind is: "*The Wolf of Wall Street*." Even though there's this whole side of building a business to it, we still have the main character, Jordan Belfort, an unscrupulous Wall Street mogul famous for making as much money as he could through whatever loophole he could find. The movie is mainly about money, but Belfort is also defined by his addictions to various other substances, particularly quaaludes – a sedative and hypnotic medication.

So when this song would be played in that movie, it would be in a scene that combines taking drugs and being with a girl. So if we only look at one of the movie's subplots, then the song is about love and addiction. And those two things can be found in "*The Wolf of Wall Street*" or in other films at which the center does not need to be a love story.

But if we do not focus on existing movies, but only on the story moment described in the lyrics, then I guess you can agree with me that the song can be categorized as a love story.

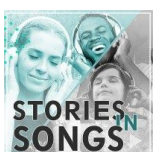
But it's not your typical romance love story with love at the center of it. But it's about the struggles and challenges of the main character and how he found something like love and has to learn how to deal with that new feeling that he considers being his weakness – his Achilles heel.

The question that arises is: Will it be his downfall (*his seventh seal*), or will she be his savior? And that's exactly the main question that the song's character asks himself:

*Can the savior be for real
Or are you just my seventh seal?*

3. After listening to the song, does the song refer to a specific moment that we expect to see in the love story?

Now that we have categorized the song's primary content genre, we can look at the typical moments of that story genre to see if the song is about one of those well-known moments.



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For example, a love story has six must-have moments that the audience expects to feel like they've got what they wanted to see.

So in a love story, you have:

1. the lovers' meet scene
2. the first kiss or intimate connection
3. the confession of love
4. the breakup
5. the proof of love
6. and the scene where the lovers reunite or part.

Those six moments provide us with another waypoint when analyzing the song's lyrics – another step to move forward in our lyric study. They help us go further into one direction and discover more about the meaning behind the words.

In Placebo's song "Special K," there's no obvious love story moment mentioned. It's not as clear as in the other songs that we've analyzed so far, which were all about the lovers' first meet scene.

The only indicator we have in Placebo's song "Special K" is the line:

Can the savior be for real

Of course, you can start a discussion now arguing if that line truly is an indicator for the moment when the lovers first meet. Maybe for you, the song is a confession of love - in the character's strange way.

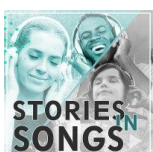
But for me, the character is trying to make sense of what's happening to him.

*Coming up beyond belief
On this coronary thief*

He is overwhelmed by what he feels. And he's trying to make sense of that feeling by comparing it to the only other sensation he knows. He has to figure that thing out and what it is doing to him because it is brand new.

And because that feeling is so overwhelming and brand new, I'd say the song refers to the lovers' first meet scene. Even though the scene is not explicitly mentioned, the song deals with the effects of meeting someone special for the very first time.

Do you agree with this assumption?



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Okay, so let's move on to the next question:

4. Do the song's first lines set the expectations of what the song will be about. Do they give a promise to what kind of story moment the audience can expect?

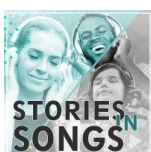
Now that we know that the song is about love, and especially the lovers' first meet moment, we have to make sure that the song's first lines set the right expectations for the listener.

If you want to write a love song, but your first lines do not give your audience that love song promise, then they need even more time to get into what your song will be about. And as we know, we don't have much time in a song to hook our listeners and keep them engaged. That's why it's so important to give your listeners a clear picture or even a hint to what kind of song they can expect.

The first lines are the setup for the rest of your song. And your listeners want that promise fulfilled that the first lines gave them. So never underestimate the power of the first lines of your songs. Those lines are super important because their job is to hook your audience.

There are multiple ways to do this.

- You can pull the listener right into an unfolding event using action verbs and the first-person perspective.
- Or you establish the central problem the song's character will have to deal with in this song. Because problems are a great way to let your listeners identify with your song's character.
- Or you establish your setting and main character by giving them some unique, intriguing features that make the listener keep listening.
- Or you start with the promise of what kind of moment of the chosen story genre the listeners can expect. Because each story genre has a different set of must-have moments that just need to be in that kind of story. For example, if you write a love story without the lovers breaking up, you miss out on the main event that pushes your character to change their perception of the world to be with each other. Or imagine an action movie where the hero never ends up at the mercy of the villain. How lame would *Die Hard* be if John McClane had never sat hands tied in the chair in front of Hans Gruber? Knowing the must-have moments of your chosen story genre can be a significant boost to your inspiration to start writing a song. If you want to find out which must-have moments belong to which genre, I'll include the Story Grid links in the show notes of this episode.



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- Or, when thinking about the first lines of your song, you can even use a combination of the options we've just mentioned: for example, combine the problem with the must-have story moment.

There are some amazing options at your disposal. However, if you are an aspiring songwriter still learning the craft of songwriting, then maybe, for now, it's good to focus on your listener's expectations by setting up the first lines of the song with a promise or hint of what kind of story moment the song will be about.

How did Placebo use the power of the first lines of their song "Special K." Do they tell us what kind of story moment we can expect?

Here's how the first two lines go:

*Coming up beyond belief
On this coronary thief*

Even though the words' meaning is in disguise, you might agree with me that those first two lines do two great things:

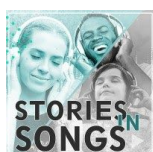
The first one is they establish who our song's main character is. It is someone who is overwhelmed by the feeling of love, which gets more apparent in the second line.

Now let me explain: In medical terms, the noun coronary is short for coronary thrombosis. Coronary artery disease is the narrowing or blockage of the coronary arteries.

So what is happening to our main character? He can't believe the sensation that suddenly rushes through his veins. He might have felt numb and suppressed all his emotions, but now those blockades are lifted, and he feels his heart beating again.

Those two lines show us who our main character is, and they establish that the song will be about love. If you take it further, you might even say they introduce us to the lovers' meet scene even though the line is left out that our character just met someone because the song's beginning switches right to the feeling that this encounter has caused.

Now we've already dove deeper into the love story moment of the song. Now it's time to look at some more love story must-haves.



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5. Does the song use conventions of the love story genre as well?

Answering this question will help us find some specific tropes the song's lyrics might include. Those conventions are strengthening our perception of what a love story needs to have in order to sound more real to us.

Conventions are referring to the roles of the characters. In a story, a character can take on different roles. And specifically, in a love story, we have characters that can take on the role of a rival, which means there is another possible love interest, which makes the love story so much more intriguing, or we have characters that are either in favor of or against the relationship.

Furthermore, conventions can also refer to the way the story moves forward. For example, by including

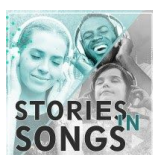
- an external need that one of the lovers has to deal with something else externally and not just wants to find love,
- there can be opposing forces to overcome,
- there might be secrets
- rituals,
- or we go as far as letting morality weigh in.

If you were to tell a complete love story – maybe on your concept album – you should focus on including all of those conventions and love story must-have moments to fulfill your listeners' expectations for a love story.

But if we look at a song that deals only with one specific moment of a bigger story, then it's okay just to include one convention. This makes your lyrics much more engaging because those conventions are what we are used to encountering in this type of story and as said, conventions help move the story along. So why not use them to tell a better story moment?

In the song "Special K" by Placebo, we might say the drugs are an external need and an opposing force that the main character has to overcome. Drug abuse is an essential element of the song lyrics, and by knowing the love story conventions, we can identify to which purpose they have been included. They give us the reason why our main character is struggling and why this is no fairytale love story because the song deals with deeper stuff than just the superficial sparks and butterflies.

But let's talk about the main character after the next two questions, which still belong to getting a general overview of the song's lyrics.



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6. Is the song's character talking about the distant past, their current state of mind, or an imagined future?

The reason why this question is important is because it reveals ...

- if the song's story moment has already happened and therefore is just a retelling of events that might have led to a certain situation or used to build a bridge to the present,
- or if the song pulls the listener right into an unfolding event
- or if the song is about an imagined, anticipated, or feared future event

Knowing this will help us when we make up our minds about the song's main character and if we consider them to be a mentor or guide, or someone we should not listen to.

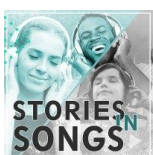
In the song "Special K," we are right at the moment with the character. He uses the present tense to describe the sensation and the wonder of what's going on with him. Present tense highlights that the song's character is dealing with a problem and has not yet found a solution to how he should deal with it. This search for an answer engages the listener who wants to know if the song's main character will come to a solution or if he will keep suffering.

And the last question of the S.O.N.G. framework is:

7. Are we hearing someone's inner monologue, someone narrating a story, or a conversation between two or more people?

This question helps us know how close the narrative distance is between the listener and the song's main character.

- If the main character is only talking to himself, then the narrative distance between listener and character is very close. Because we as the listener gain access to the character's thoughts and feelings, and if they use present tense, the chances are high that the listener gets pulled into the story moment and maybe even feels like the song's character.
- If the main character is only narrating a story, the narrative distance is not as close anymore. We are only being told a story. But as we've learned from the last episodes, there's still a way to include your listeners in your narration, such as using rhetorical questions aimed at the listener.
- And if there's a conversation between two or more people in the song, the narrative distance is vast between the listener and the song's character. The listener is only eavesdropping on a conversation without having access to the character's thoughts and emotions and without being paid attention to.



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So this question helps us know how well the song's lyrics engage the listener and pull them into the story moment of the song.

In the song "Special K" by Placebo, the character might be talking to this girl because he uses direct address by saying:

You come on just like special K

But mostly, the character seems to be talking to himself. He's mostly using the pronoun "I" and even talks in the third person about her as he asks himself:

Can the savior be for real

So I guess that the song's main character is leading an inner monologue. This also supports the idea that he is trying to make sense of that overwhelming feeling that this girl caused.

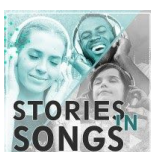
So the listener gains access to the song's character's thoughts and emotions, which leads to a close narrative distance.

Summary Step 1 - Summary

Okay, now we've finished the first step of the S.O.N.G. framework.

We now know:

1. the song is about a struggling character who encountered the sensation of love and is trying to make sense of that overwhelming feeling
2. We know the song is about love
3. and especially about the lover's first meet scene
4. which is more or less set up in the first lines of the song.
5. The song uses the conventions of external need and opposing forces by including drug addiction.
6. The character is speaking in the present moment,
7. and he is leading an inner monologue.



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2. Observer

[00:23:46] Now that we have a general overview of the story moment included in the song, let's talk about its main character.

Getting to know the character will help us figure out the problem or challenge he is dealing with, what he wants and needs if we can sympathize or empathize with them, and if he has yet to grow as a person or if he's already sophisticated enough to recognize the consequences of his actions.

This second step is another foundation for evaluating the storytelling power of the lyrics. Story is character. So never underestimate the importance of who your song's main character is.

The first question of the second step of the S.O.N.G. framework is:

1. What is the role the singer takes on in the song?

This helps us figure out if the singer is taking on the main character's role in the song, if he's just a bystander or an unidentified presence. This ties back to narrative distance and how closely connected we feel to the song's characters.

It's typical for love songs that the singer takes on the main character's role or the narrator of the story moment. And in Placebo's song "Special K," the singer becomes the song's main character.

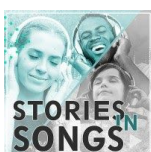
2. Is the singer referring to another person?

This question serves to list all the characters present in the song. It's to have an overview of who else is taking part in that scene.

So there's no reason to talk about this any longer than necessary.

In Placebo's song, we have the main character who is referring to his love interest.

Now let's get to know the main character:



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3. What does the main character in the song consciously WANT? What is his goal?

Answering this question will help you find out what your main character is actively after. What is he trying to achieve or get? In storytelling terms, we call this the “conscious object of desire.”

If you look at the people around you, everybody wants something, right? Usually, a lot of different things. They might want to travel again, get a raise, start a family, lose weight, become successful ...

The difference to storytelling in songwriting is that your song's character must have ONE desire for something that will drive their actions within that particular story moment, relevant to the main topic or story genre of the song.

So in a love story, what could a character want?

- They might want to win someone's heart.
- They might want to prove how much they love that other person.
- They might want to save them - either from themselves, someone else, or another force.
- Maybe they want to confess their love.
- Or it can be as small as asking them out on a date, stealing a kiss, saying sorry, making up, ... lots of different choices, and you should focus on only ONE desire your character will be after.

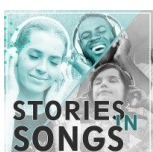
In Placebo's song “Special K,” the main character says:

I never ever wanna crash.

That means he wants that rush of falling in love to last. That's his conscious desire. He is an addict, and therefore he seeks that rush. He is addicted to that sensation. So again, this is a very self-centered song.

If we had said this song refers to the love story moment of the confession of love, we would have run into some difficulties now. After all, it would be a very selfish confession of love. It could be one. I don't argue with that. But again, the main character is still trying to make sense of what's happening, so I don't think he's even thinking about the possibility that it could be love.

For now, he's just addicted to the rush of this new sensation.



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Now that we know what the character is actively after let's talk about his NEED.

4. What is the main character's NEED? What is his internal desire?

In the book *Story*, Robert McKee observes that "The protagonist may also have a self-contradictory unconscious desire." He goes on to say, "The conscious and unconscious desires of a multidimensional protagonist contradict each other. What he believes he wants is the antithesis of what he actually but unwittingly wants."

Even though McKee uses the word "Want" both times, we could also rephrase his last sentence like this: "What [the character] believes he wants is the antithesis of what he actually but unwittingly needs."

A character may be unaware that they want something that conflicts with their conscious desire. They start to act out of a conscious desire and end up trying to satisfy the unconscious one.

Let's look at one example better to understand the WANT and NEED of a character.

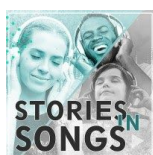
And to stay on the topic of drugs, maybe you have seen the famous TV series *Breaking Bad*.

The main character, Walter White, learns that he has brain cancer that will quickly lead to his death. Out of this shocking information rises the goal to leave his family with enough financial savings. But how can he provide this financial aid? He decides to make money by cooking meth.

Even though it was the concern for his family that led to this decision, the project feeds his unconscious desire to use his skills as a master chemist. Remember, Walter White had only worked as a High School Chemist, which means he never had the opportunity to fulfill his full potential.

And he comes to like the person he's becoming. He takes on the new name of "Heisenberg" – an alter ego that not only incorporates his skills as a master chemist but also his talents for improvising, solving problems, and even being a skilled criminal.

As his wife confronts him, he tells her he did all this for his family. But he soon recognizes that he continued being his alter ego "Heisenberg" out of the satisfaction that fulfilling this NEED brought him. Ultimately, he did his crime projects for himself. His NEED was to actually be someone and live to the fullest of his potential before he dies as a boring High School teacher.



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But the cost he paid was at the expense of love, family, safety, and his life.

So you see, what a character NEEDS can become a very important influence in how your story progresses and who your character becomes.

But don't worry about this contradiction between the goal of a character and his NEED. A song doesn't have to tell a complete story.

A song is great when it only focuses on one specific moment taken out of a possible larger story. Sometimes what the character wants will be all that is included because establishing the NEED as well is not always possible. Especially when the song's moment is just a short snippet, for example, like in Madonna's song "Crazy for You." There the character just wanted to hook up with their love interest.

Nevertheless, sometimes the need can make the difference. In the song "I'm A Believer" by the Monkees, the song's main character wanted to get away from love, but he needed to change his disillusioned worldview that love was out to get him. He needed to understand that love can be like in fairytales as well. This was a contradiction between what he wanted and what he needed.

So here's how you can use the character's WANT and NEED for your own songwriting:

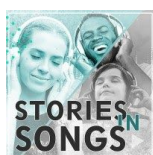
- If you write a song that is just about a very short moment in time, focus on what your character actively tries to gain, achieve, or get.
- If you write a song that builds a connection from the past to the present, sometimes even to the future, then you can include what your character needed.

In Placebo's song "Special K," we can't say how long that moment is. Is it minutes, hours, days, or weeks? We only hear the character's inner monologue without really discovering what's going on externally. We don't know where he is or what else he is doing.

Because of the undefined time frame and the character hanging on to his goal that he never ever wants the rush of falling in love to stop, we can assume what he needs.

And that's a contradiction to what he wants.

He needs to accept that the rush of falling in love can't last forever. It will stop, but it makes way for something much more beautiful: the intimate connection you can build with the person you love. But therefore, he has to give up chasing the rush of falling in love, or he'll never experience true love.



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He needs to get over his addiction.

Even though the song does not provide a resolution that shows the character's development - either his fall or maturation - we are left with the contradiction of what he wants and what he needs. The song is centered around that conflict.

But let's talk a little more about the song's character before we talk about the narration in the next step of the framework. So the next question is:

5. Do we like the main character of the song? Does he have positive character traits? Or is it someone we despise and can't consider a role model?

If we like the song's character, we will consider their actions prescriptive. So whenever we might face the same challenge or find ourselves in the same moment, we can look back to what the character in that particular song did and follow their advice. A likable character is more likely to become our guide or mentor.

The character traits of a likable character include the personality traits that we admire. Be it honesty, making actions speak louder than words, being mature enough to deal with the consequences, fighting for what you want, knowing what you want, being able to learn from mistakes ...

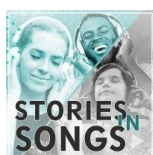
Suppose we don't like the song's character. In that case, it might be because they portray personality traits that we don't like to see in other people or ourselves: So maybe they see themselves as the victim, are whiny, lie, have no goals or ambitions, are too weak or too passive to do something about their life, only complain, promise things they don't keep, ...

If we don't like the main character, we won't consider their behavior as a guideline for our own lives. We will more likely see their actions as a warning of what not to do to not end up like them. They teach us the mistakes we should avoid.

Even if you like or dislike the character, you might still be able to sympathize or empathize with them. It all depends if you can relate to their struggles.

So did you like the character in the song "Special K"? Were you able to sympathize with them?

This is a personal question, isn't it?



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For my part, I can sympathize with their want of trying to hang onto something that they don't want to lose. But mostly, I'm in favor of the character falling and hitting the ground. Because I know what this character needs, and I want him to lead a better life.

Even though I don't really like the character, I still want them to have a better future. I'm interested in their well-being.

So remember, your listener doesn't have to like your song's character, but you can still engage your listeners if they can sympathize with them on some level.

The last question of the second step of the S.O.N.G. framework is:

6. What is the point of view?

As always, I refer to the book "Writing Better Lyrics" by Pat Pattison to determine the point of view.

Point of View helps us to find out if the POV was consistent or if it changed. If it changed, we need to look further and see if the shift of point of view was to the lyric's advantage or if the shift might confuse the listener—something we need to avoid at all costs if we want to keep the narrative dream alive.

The song "Special K" uses first-person and direct-address.

We have a shift in point of view in the last two lines of the first verse.

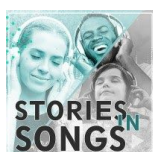
Brian Molko sings:

*Can the savior be for real
Or are you just my seventh seal?*

He is talking about the same person, but the first time he talks about her in third-person, before he switches over to direct address by using the pronoun "You."

Now, why would he do that?

I guess that the song's character is more focused on the negative aspect of that rush. After all, he feels the gravity that is pulling him down. He is afraid to hit the ground and crash. So his fear dominates what he feels.



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So somehow, it's easier for him to see that other person as his "seventh seal" and not as his savior. Using the third person for saying she could be his savior is his way of keeping his distance from a scenario that he's not yet ready to embrace.

So in "Special K," the different choice of point of view serves the purpose of highlighting the struggle of the main character.

Summary Step 2 - Observer

Okay, now we've finished the second step of the S.O.N.G. framework.

We now know:

1. The singer takes on the role of the main character
2. and he refers to another person as either his "savior" or his "seventh seal."
3. He wants the rush of falling in love to last
4. but he needs to hit the ground to discover the real power of love.
5. Even though we might not like the song's character, we can still sympathize with him.
6. And the song uses first-person and direct-address to further highlight the central struggle of the song's character.

Alright, now we got a bird's eye view of what the song is about, and we are aware of who the main character is.

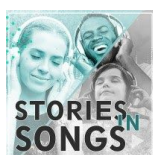
3. Narration

[00:37:24] Now it's time to study the storytelling power of the lyrics.

This step helps us narrow down what's at the center of the song's lyrics. We'll talk about the character's actions and challenges and the essential elements of a story moment and determine if something changes and the cause for that change.

All those questions serve to find out what works in the lyrics, what does not, and what could have been done better to increase the storytelling power – and ultimately how the song keeps the listener engaged.

The first and easiest question is:



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1. What are the characters literally doing?

Just answer what you can observe what the characters are doing. This just helps to place the characters in that story moment.

In “Special K,” the main character is talking to himself. That’s what’s going on on a surface level.

2. But what is the essential action of what the character is doing in the scene? What is on his secret agenda? What is he trying to achieve?

Sometimes when we have a scene with at least two characters, the characters might try to influence one another. They might try to convince the other one to do something they want them to do. For example, if someone is nice to you and compliments you, their compliments would be what they are literally doing. But their essential action could be directed towards seducing you.

So when we ask ourselves if there’s an essential action of the song’s character in the lyrics, we try to find out what they are secretly after and if they might try to manipulate someone.

In the case of the song “Special K,” the main character’s essential action is letting her into his life over and over again. It seems like he doesn’t want to get out of that cycle of being elevated just to crash down again. So his secret agenda is letting her do what she does with him.

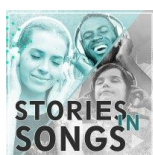
You see, by figuring out what’s happening on a surface level and underneath, can we widen our perception of what the main character is doing in that scene and if he follows what he wants or what he needs. In this case, it’s a combination of both since he is repeatedly crashing down. It’s just a question of when he’ll understand the dilemma he’s in.

Speaking of dilemma, let’s move on to a fundamental question:

3. Is there a problem the character is facing? Does something challenge him? Or is there some kind of conflict that he has to solve? If so, what is the central conflict the main character in the song has to deal with?

Why is this a fundamental question?

Because real life has conflict.



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If we all lived in a bubble where life had no challenges to overcome and nothing standing between us and our goals, our stories — if there even were some — would reflect that.

Imagine you had a goal, and you would achieve it right away. Nothing would trouble you and let you struggle.

Sounds too perfect, right? And not at all, how life really works.

Given the reality of life, having a character who gets what he wants without facing at least one obstacle does not ring true. Talking about this would not even be a story. At best, it would be mentioning an event.

The power of storytelling is in the foundation of why we love stories.

Stories speak to us because when we try to achieve something significant or worth mentioning, there's always a challenge or problem to overcome. Nothing is ever as easy as it seems. And we love to see a character struggle and watch them fall and stand up again because their actions inspire us. In a story, a character needs to face their demons, overcome them, solve problems, and fight for what they want. If they do, we are empowered to face our own challenges.

So when you write songs, and you want to use the power of storytelling for your lyrics, then ask yourself what's the one thing your character might be struggling with is?

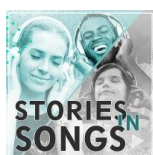
Here's a tip: If you know what they want, what obstacle could you put in their way to make it harder for them to reach what they are after?

If you want to focus on what your character needs, include a revelation. Let them get some new information that makes them doubt if they are at the right place in life, behave correctly, or let them see that the thing they're after is not what they really want. Everybody wants to be different, but no one wants to change. That's at the center of showing the personal growth of character. They need to be ready to change who they are, their worldview, to become someone they want to be.

In Placebo's song "Special K," the main problem is that the song's character is addicted to the rush of falling in love.

That's his problem.

Because this rush will wear off.



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And if he makes the wrong choice, he might lose the person who might be his one true love ... just because he's chasing after the next rush of falling in love with someone else.

Maybe you know someone who is seeking another thrill of love as soon as things start to settle between them and the person they've dated.

And that's a big problem.

Not just for the person, but also for the people they pull into their lives, make them fall in love with them, and then let go because they are addicted to that rush of endorphins.

Let's see if this problem was already used to start the song.

4. Do the song's first lines introduce the problem the main character will have to deal with? And thus hook us and spark our interest?

The first lines go like this:

*Coming up beyond belief
On this coronary thief*

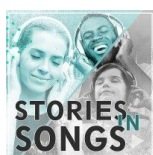
Labeling something as being a *thief* automatically sets up a problem.

Only with those two lines, we get the feeling that the song's character is asking himself if what happens to him is something good or bad.

We can't really grasp the central problem from those two lines, but we know the lyrics will deal with the question of figuring out if something is the end or the beginning of something wonderful.

The reason why we want to know if the problem was established in the song's first lines is that, as we know, establishing a problem right in the beginning of your song hooks your listeners because they want to know the problem's solution, and they are invested in the song maybe because they can even relate to that character's struggle.

Furthermore, in Placebo's song, we are also intrigued to determine who that *coronary thief* is and what they are doing to the song's character.



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Analyzing the scene told in the song.

[00:43:56] Alright, after discovering what's on the character's secret agenda and the problem they have to overcome, it's time to look at the five essential elements of every story or story moment.

So let's dive deeper into the Story Grid's five commandments to evaluate and analyze the song's storytelling power.

5. What is the inciting incident?

The inciting incident is an event that hooks the listener into the song.

This particular moment is when an event – either causal, anticipated, or coincidental – thrusts the song's character into the story moment's main action.

Screenwriting guru Syd Field describes it as 'setting the story in motion.'

The inciting incident shows the listener a reason to the cause of what led to your character having a specific goal for that story moment.

As we've already found out in the last couple of episodes, the inciting incident may not be mentioned in the lyrics. For example, the main character might have had whatever reasons to go to a certain place where they've met their special person they've felt so attracted to. We never found out why they went there. But it was clear that they had never anticipated getting caught in the beautiful feeling of Love at First Sight.

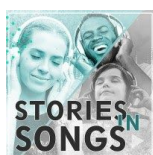
So is there an inciting incident mentioned in the lyrics of "Special K"?

You might have a different answer than I do, but for me, the inciting incident is not explicitly mentioned in the lyrics. I think meeting that special person is the inciting incident because it throws the song's character's life out of balance.

It's something new. And it creates his conscious object of desire, his goal, of never wanting to crash and lose that addictive feeling of falling in love.

6. So, what is the unexpected event that turns the tables?

This unexpected event is the most important essential element of storytelling. It not only serves the purpose of having a conflict in your story or story moment, but it is also the



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indicator that something changes. And stories are not only about conflict but also about change.

And this turning point event is the reason why a character has to face a dilemma and make a choice to be able to move on.

This event changes the cards you've been given. And it changes if you continue to seek what you're after, or if you make a different choice - may be in favor of someone else or of what might serve you better.

In the song "Special K," the event that turns the table for the song's character is the moment when he realizes what's going on. He's just getting out of another rush and finds back to his senses wondering:

*Coming up beyond belief
On this coronary thief*

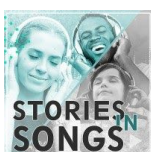
Because of the character's drug addiction, he's used to being high and crashing down again. But what amazes him is that the rush of falling in love has the same effects as taking the drug "Special K."

This revelation is something he tries to make sense of.

*More than just a leitmotif
More chaotic, no relief
I'll describe the way I feel
Weeping wounds that never heal
Can the savior be for real
Or are you just my seventh seal?*

*No hesitation, no delay
You come on just like special K
Just like I swallowed half my stash.
I never ever wanna crash.*

So that revelation – that the sensation of the rush of falling in love is similar to taking the drug "Special K" – is the event that throws the song's character into a dilemma.



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7. What is the dilemma that the character has to face? What are his options?

A dilemma is like a crossroad moment. You can't move on if you don't make a decision first. But that decision is never easy. There's always something at stake.

Either the character has to make a Best Bad Choice in which each alternative to choose from is worse than the other.

Or the character is caught between two stools in his Irreconcilable Goods Crisis. Here both alternatives are desirable, but choosing one excludes the other.

There are also hybrid cases in which an alternative might be good for someone but bad for someone else.

In your song, you don't need to let your character weigh their options explicitly. Oftentimes the crisis question per sé is ignored, and you jump from the turning point straight to the decision the character makes. Then we know what one option was and can come up with ideas of what the alternative option could have been.

Nonetheless, it's interesting to look at the lyrics and ask ourselves what might be the crisis question on the song's character's mind.

In "Special K" by Placebo, we hear part of the crisis question that ties back to the central conflict the song's character has to deal with:

*Can the savior be for real
Or are you just my seventh seal?*

That's the question the song's character needs to find an answer to.

He is reflecting on what she does to him. There's this rush, but he's also saying about her:

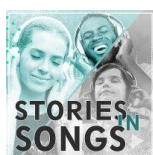
*I'll describe the way I feel
Weeping wounds that never heal*

as well as

You're my new Achilles heel.

He is still seeing her as his weakness.

The power of the gravity that is pulling him down is enormous.



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So at one point or another, he has to face his dilemma:

Is he going to commit, which means accepting that the first rush of feelings will wear off but embracing a new kind of sensation, or won't he commit because he's too afraid to face what comes after falling in love?

That will be his dilemma.

In other words, either he lets her be his savior, or he follows his weak mind thinking that she's his weakness and, therefore, his seventh seal – his end.

It's the character's choice.

8. What's the decision the character makes?

The character's decision is what defines what kind of person the character is. Even avoiding making a choice is a choice and tells us a lot about that person. They are indecisive and don't want to take responsibility for their decisions.

So who will your character be?

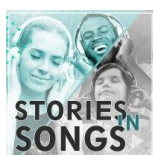
As we've talked about in the last episode, as we looked at the lyrics of Cole Swindell's song "Middle of a Memory," we've learned that you can end your lyrics with the turning point. You don't need to include a crisis, decision, or resolution. You can just leave an open ending, which is the definition of having a so-called cliffhanger.

Even though there are five essential elements to a story or story moment according to the Story Grid's methodology, the turning point trumps all of them.

In the song "Special K," I wouldn't say that the character has yet realized his crisis. And I don't think he is ready to make a decision just yet.

Maybe you argue that he decided to commit because the gravity is pulling him down, and that's what it feels like when the drugs wear off, and you get back to reality. Maybe.

But since the character's only way to describe how he feels is by continually comparing his feelings to using the drug Ketamine, I don't think he can clearly see that he has the power to make a decision. He doesn't know yet that it is his choice, and no one else's, to decide if she'll be his savior or his end.



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9. How does it all turn out?

Since the character isn't aware of the dilemma he's in and that he can make a choice to change his life, he's not yet deciding to go one way or the other.

Without a decision, we don't know the consequences of said decision.

And those consequences would tell us if everything turns out for the better or worse.

Some songs build a bridge from the past to the present to show the outcome of the character's decisions, and some even look into the future.

But in "Special K," you can clearly see that the song's character is still caught in the present moment. He is still trying to make sense of what's happening while getting high on his new rush every time she returns.

Change

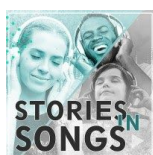
[00:52:10] Alright, let's just talk a little more about how the turning point led to a change in the situation. After all, a working scene always needs to include a change, which means a shift in how the situation started for the character and how it ended. Otherwise, everything would stay the same, and it would be boring if nothing happened, right? At least, when we look at stories.

It's what we've already talked about. There would not be a story if nothing got in the character's way and pushes them into a crisis where they've got to make a decision. So let's see how meeting that person changed the song's character's life in Placebo's song "Special K."

10. Did the song's main character change his perception of the world around him after going through that situation?

Not every song will show how a person changed through the experience they've made in the song's story moment. Sometimes the timespan is just too short when the song is told in the present tense and only focuses on one moment in time. For example, two lovers dance with each other to one song like in Madonna's song "Crazy for You."

Only if you include how a character used to be can you show how they've changed as a person when you switch over to the here and now. And you should always include the



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reason why they've changed. Listen to the song "I'm A Believer" by the Monkees to see how to include character development in your songwriting.

For the song "Special K," we can only answer this question if the main character has changed his view of the world once the cliffhanger has been resolved by another song that shows us the character's decision and the consequences that decision led to. We can't assume if he will come to his senses and understand that love itself is a thousand times better than drugs. He needs to see that love is not a destructive force like drugs, but love has more power if you are willing to embrace it.

But again, he's not there yet. He has to recognize the dilemma he's in first.

11. So, to wrap it up, how did the situation change for the main character?

This one is easier since it focuses on the turning point event.

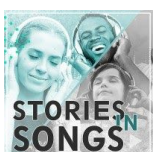
And a turning point is the indicator that something changed in the story moment of the song. After all, a turning point is like a disruptive force that keeps you from reaching your goal – at least as long as it takes you to make a best bad choice or an irreconcilable goods choice at this crossroad moment. Either your choice will bring you closer to your goal, let you stray away from it, or it'll get completely out of sight.

So let's see how the situation might have changed for the character in "Special K."

The song's character's turning point was the revelation that the sensation of the rush of falling in love is similar to taking the drug "Special K."

When we consider his external situation – so everything that surrounds him externally – considering someone as a mere means of receiving pleasure is just like getting hooked on another drug. There's no human value attached to it. Meeting her might have been a chance to be saved from his addiction and his opportunity to start a new life, but the turning point revelation is not strong enough yet to keep him from taking drugs. After all, he keeps crashing down. So we might say the character's external situation changed from being almost saved to getting obsessed with the superficial rush of falling for someone.

When we consider the character's internal situation – so everything coming from within the character – then this revelation is positive. It's the first step to be able to recognize his new opportunity. So his mind changed from being dormant to a form of enlightenment. So this revelation that makes him question his situation is positive because it might just be what he needs to change his worldview.



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12. Another exciting way to observe if the song is about change is to compare the first and the last sentence of the song. Can we see a difference between how the song started and how it ended?

If the first and last lines of your lyrics mirror each other, but they show the change – either of the character, their situation, or both – the song becomes much more powerful because it uses the power of storytelling to engage your listeners.

If you include this step when you revise your lyrics, you can make sure that your song has a beginning and an ending, and some thing that provoked the change of the situation in between. And by now, we've learned how important it is for successful storytelling to put obstacles in the way of your character and that nothing should stay the same in a story because then it would only be a boring retelling of events.

Just imagine you meet a friend, and they say: "Today I got up, made coffee, fed my dog, and then I went to work, and as expected, my boss promoted me."

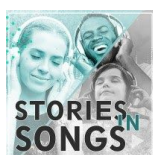
That's great for your friend, but nothing that keeps you interested because nothing exciting happened.

But if he had said: "Today my alarm clock did not ring, because my dog tried to eat my phone. Instead of getting a nice coffee before going to work, I had to bring him to the vet. So I missed my meeting with my boss. I think he wanted to promote me. But what could I have done? Let my dog die just to be in time to get the promotion?"

You see, the second story is much more engaging. Because the dog being sick was the turning point event for your friend who just wanted to have an ordinary morning like each day. But he had to decide: Go to the vet and save his dog, or let his dog die and save his career.

Or in other words, if you focus on the change between the beginning and the ending of your song, you got the main foundation of a song that will use the power of storytelling – more specifically, by making the song's character's situation change one way or the other.

If a song starts with a character who is alone in the beginning and ends with him having found a friend or lover, then something between the beginning and the end led to this event and made a difference. There must have been a turning point – the most crucial element for telling a story or scene that works.



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In the story with the dog, the character's situation changed from life to danger for his dog, as it did from being respected by his boss to probably be rejected. For the dog and the character's well-being, the situation changed from a negative to a positive. After all, the character knew that a life is worth more than a promotion. Just imagine how devastated he could have been if he did not help his dog, went to the meeting, only to hear his boss ramble on about something, and not get a promotion. Then he would have lost his dog and, even with a promotion, would have to live with the consequences. Maybe his wife would leave him if she found out he didn't help the dog.

Here's a tip for your lyric writing:

Even if you don't have the lyrics of a song yet, think about who your character is at the beginning of the song or what his situation will be like, and how it has changed at the end.

Then find the reason for that change, which will be your turning point event.

Or look at it this way: If your song starts positively, then it needs to end even more positively through a positive or helpful turn of events or, which is more often the case, it ends negatively because something bad happened.

If the song starts negatively, the situation might get even worse in the end or turn out for the better – for the character, his situation, or both.

So that's all you need to pay attention to when starting a song or revising your lyrics. Concentrate on the beginning and the ending of your lyrics, show how your character changed, his situation, or both – and then in your lyrics include the moment that turned the tables for better or worse.

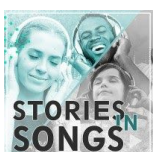
Let's look at Placebo's song "Special K."

Okay, here's how it started:

*Coming up beyond belief
On this coronary thief*

And the song ended like this:

*No escaping gravity
Gravity*



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So when we compare the beginning with the ending of the song, we have a beautiful turn of how things are for the song's character. At the beginning of the song, he's "coming up," which means he's feeling elevated or like being lifted.

At the end of the song, the word "gravity" gets repeated, so we feel how much that gravitational force pulls down the song's character.

So the song's lyrics changed from a character who's being elevated to being pulled down. They changed from a positive to a negative.

Writing Techniques

[01:00:36] Lastly, let's quickly talk about some of the writing techniques used in this song. This just helps us talk about some additional things we could apply or avoid in our songwriting.

The first question is:

13. Is the singer only revealing some general information, or does he go into the specifics?

The more specific you are in a story, the more universal the story becomes.

Specificity is very important for songwriting. It sets up how believable a song can be and if the listeners will be moved or not. It influences how well we get to know the characters. If we find the character relatable, we can empathize with them.

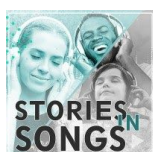
Specificity also makes a song memorable. We don't want to hear generic lyrics that there were problems. We need to know exactly what happened because otherwise, we just can't relate to what's going on and the character. We need details to see the picture. If we have no idea what happened to the song's characters, we can't get a sense of what the song is about. If we are confused about what problem a protagonist faces, we can't even consider the solution as helpful because we don't know what specific problem the solution is solving.

In the song "Special K," the character gets very specific in telling us the effects of using the drug Ketamine and comparing it to the rush of falling in love.

For example, he's telling us how weak he feels by saying:

Weeping wounds that never heal

or:



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You're my new Achilles heel

Through this specificity, we get a clear picture of how the character feels. He's not just saying: "I'm feeling weak because of you," but he's using a creative phrase to make his feeling come alive and highlight how strong that feeling actually is.

Another question about the writing technique considering the storytelling aspect is:

14. Is the song evoking specific pictures in the audience's mind by using imagery?

This question can be combined with the previous one.

Imagery can support the lyrics' specificity.

But being specific can also be naming time and places or offering details or specific clues to who the character is, his ambitions, goals, struggles, or where we can place him.

But painting pictures with words is what imagery does.

So in the song "Special K," the gravitational force is described in detail.

First, he uses specificity without using imagery. He's just using action verbs to pull us into what's happening. He's singing.

I never ever wanna crash

or:

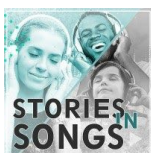
*I fall down
Hit the ground
Make a heavy sound*

That's very specific because we see the different steps between the fear of falling, falling, hitting the ground, and his reaction to having crashed.

When we look closer at the images created in the song, we encounter the following lines:

*I'm on sinking sand
Gravity, no escaping
Gravity*

So because he fears to crash, the pull of gravity is even stronger especially when we have the image in our minds that we're standing with him on sinking sand.



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So keep in mind that being specific trumps general terms.

Specificity evokes emotions in your listeners, makes them relate, engages them, helps them understand your character even better, and helps them feel the full force of the situation.

Summary Step 3 - Narration

Okay, now we've finished the third step of the S.O.N.G. framework.

We now know:

1. The song's character is talking to himself
 2. while he keeps letting her lift him and crash down again.
 3. His problem is that he's addicted to the rush of falling in love.
 4. Meeting her was the inciting incident to the song's story moment.
 5. The turning point was him realizing the connection between falling in love and taking drugs.
 6. He didn't yet realize the dilemma he's in, the choices he can make, and how they could change his life for better or worse.
 7. But we know that the turning point led to the character being addicted to the rush of falling in love, which is negative. Still, the revelation that love can substitute drugs is actually good for his personal development as soon as he starts seeing that love is much more than this rush, and even more valuable then.
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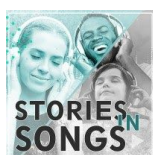
4. Gist

[01:04:51] Alright, let's move on with the big takeaway of the song. That's the last step of the S.O.N.G. framework.

When a character comes to a crossroad, they are forced to make a decision that will drive meaningful change. If a song has a turning point, the song's character's situation changes for better or worse. This moment determines if the song will have a happy or sad ending.

And that's what we'll take away from the song. Have the character's actions contributed to a positive outcome or a negative one?

If the song turns from bad to good, the song offers us a prescriptive tale. We can learn from the song. Because the main character had to face an obstacle and made the right decision, that led to positive consequences.



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If the song turns from good to bad, the song offers us a cautionary tale. We can learn from the song as well, but this time we learn what we need to avoid. Because the main character had to face an obstacle and made the wrong decision, that led to negative consequences. The song's story moment serves as a warning. *Better don't do what the song's character did to avoid ending up like him.*

This last step is important because it's about the message of the song. And if your song has a message that your listeners can take away from it and apply to their own life, then the song made a difference in their life. And that's what great songwriting is all about.

Now let's start with the first question.

1. Looking back at the problem the character had to deal with in the song, did he solve it?

That's the first question we need to answer in order to find out if his choice led to the preferred outcome of solving that problem or if he failed.

The problem that we defined for the character was that he got addicted to the rush of falling in love. But he did not solve that problem because he has not yet realized the dilemma he's in.

So, where does this lack of problem-solving leave us when we consider the big takeaway of the song?

2. What is the message of the song? What can the audience take away from it?

As said, the problem is not solved yet. The character still has to catch himself and get sober long enough to understand his situation to review his options and make a decision that will ultimately change his life. Can love be a creative force or a destructive one?

The song's character has not yet realized the dilemma he's in. So we don't know what his choice will be once he understands his options.

So we can't say if his pending decision will lead to a better life or to one that will lead to his demise.

The only thing we can talk about is his lack of self-awareness and his addiction, which stops him from seeing the possibilities he's been given.



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He's caught between being high and crashing down. An endless cycle that he needs to disrupt to be able to ever get out of it.

Since he's stuck in that cycle and unable to understand his choices, we can say that this song is a warning. Because whenever someone is too numb to recognize they're stuck even though they have the chance to move on, then that's something we clearly want to avoid for our own lives.

So we could say the message is: If you chase one rush after the other, you'll get addicted and miss out on what life and love are really about.

So keep in mind that even a song that does not provide the solution to the character's problem can still serve as a message to the listener – as long as the indecision of the song's character highlights the gravity of the problem.

The last question is:

3. Does the title refer to the message of the song?

This question helps you check that your song's title refers to the one thing you want your listeners to take away from your lyrics. The title does not need to be on the nose, but it's great if it hints at the message or the problem the song will solve or address. The title can be as abstract as "Middle of a Memory" or as specific as "I Saw Her Standing There." But those examples tie back to what each of those songs is about.

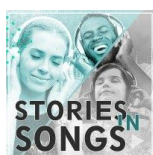
Placebo's song title is "Special K." As we started our lyric study today, I already said that the title might confuse the listeners depending on the context they apply to the song title.

But now that we know the lyrics to the song does the title "Special K" make sense for this song?

It does. After all, the song uses that drug, special K = Ketamine, as the means to compare the rush of falling in love.

But what's even more important is that the reference to a drug already suggests the problem of addiction. You can't think of drugs without thinking of addiction. It's the same as you can't think of jelly without thinking of jelly beans. It just fits together.

So yes, the song's title refers to the song's main problem that ties back to the song's message.



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Summary Step 4 - Gist

Okay, now we've finished the fourth and last step of the S.O.N.G. framework.

We now know:

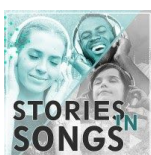
1. The character was unable to solve the problem of his addiction.
2. So the song's message is: If you chase one rush after the other, you'll get addicted and miss out on what life and love are really about.
3. And that message refers to the song's title "Special K" because when we think of drugs, we think of addictions. And ultimately about how addictions keep us from living our lives to the fullest.

What we've learned in this episode:

[01:10:11] Awesome, we've just gone through the S.O.N.G. framework, and I hope you can take away one or some of our observations for your own songwriting. I especially hope that my explanations of each framework question helped you discover why we need to ask those questions to improve and revise our lyrics.

Now let's sum up the most important songwriting tricks that we've learned through studying the lyrics of Placebo's song "Special K."

1. You know that you can use the storytelling power in songwriting when you only focus on your lyrics' first and last lines. They need to show either a change of the character's situation, a change of the character himself, or both. If there's a shift in how the song started and how it ended, your song progresses. It moves from one point to another. It's not static, but there's actually something happening in between that causes that shift. And your listeners will love your lyrics if there's actually something happening to the song's character. We love to see the story's character struggle and experience their hardships and challenges with them without the real-life risks involved. Those stories or story moments that we encounter in songs offer prescriptive and cautionary tales that we can learn from for our own lives. But the main thing we need to create that binding relationship with our audience is a character or a situation that changes from the lyrics' beginning to their end. And in between, we want to know the reason for that change and how the character dealt with that turning point event.



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2. We repeated **why being specific trumps general terms**. We've talked about this in episode 12 as we analyzed Madonna's song "Crazy for you." Specificity evokes emotions in your listeners, makes them relate, engages them, helps them understand your character even better, and helps them feel the full force of the situation. If ever in doubt, just apply "Show, don't Tell" to your lyrics, and you're good.
3. We know that the **song's title** doesn't necessarily need to be linked to the song's message or its big takeaway for the listener as long as it is related to the problem the song's character deals with.

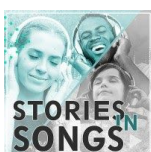
Song Exercise - The Lovers Meet

[01:12:21] Alright, this was a very long episode. If you want, you can skip to the show notes and download the exercise for this song.

But if you want to know what your task is for the next two weeks, then keep listening.

I want you to write your original lyrics about a struggling character who experiences a revelation through meeting their love interest, but who is still too caught up in their ongoing struggle that they can't embrace this new opportunity of appreciating the love they've found.

1. Use **present tense** to engage in the ongoing struggle of your song's character. They were dealing with a problem before they've met this special person. But now they wonder if that person is a positive influence or something that will pull them down.
2. Try to be as **specific** as you can when you mirror the character's problem onto their new love interest. Placebo used the comparison to the drug Ketamine. Can you think of a way to link your character's problem with their love interest to highlight what that person does to them (*question them, empowers them, makes them suffer, ...*)
3. You are free to choose if you want to **disguise the meaning of your words** in a fancy creative language (*like Placebo did*), or you just follow the style you are most comfortable with. Speaking tongue in cheek is not a must if that's not your thing. But you can try it out. You can also just write two versions—one using words in disguise and one that's easier to understand.
4. Show your song's **character's fear** and what it looks like when it comes true. Again, be specific and use action verbs.
5. Include only the **first two Story Grid commandments** so that you learn how to show the incapacity of a character to see beyond their ongoing struggle and recognize the opportunity they've got. Tipp: This new opportunity for a change should be clear to your listener, but not to your song's character.
 - a. Start your song with your character questioning what meeting that person (*which was the inciting incident*) provoked in their thoughts. Show how torn



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apart they feel and hint at their struggle to recognize who that person could become for them.

- b. Think about the love story conventions that are at your disposal for the turning point. There should be something or someone who points them in the direction to see their dilemma, even though they are not there yet to understand it fully. Maybe the turning point is recognizing what they feel, even though those feelings are distorted since they struggle with an even bigger problem (*drug addiction, depression, no self-esteem, poverty, ...*) that is constantly on their mind.
- c. Do not include the crisis, the decision, or the resolution of how everything turned out. Just focus on the character's struggle of wanting to move on while they keep giving in to what's holding them back.

For further inspiration and to read over the guidelines, download the exercise PDF in the show notes of this episode.

Do the exercise because the more you study the lyrics of other songwriters, the easier it will be to write your own lyrics and tell captivating stories in your songs because you can use songs of other songwriters as inspiration.

So if you want to write about a scene when the character's own struggles are in the way of committing to the new opportunity they've found through meeting their love interest, then you could study Placebo's song "Special K" to see how this band pulled it off.

You can read through other lyrics that resemble this topic to get inspired and get a feel of where the important story moments occurred so that you'll never get stuck in writer's block again.

That's why it's so important to study the lyrics of successful songs. They show you the craft, inspire, and help you hone your songwriting skills by enriching your songwriting through knowing the many possibilities that are at your disposal.

So do the exercise, and remember:
Never copy, but be original with your ideas.

I'm sure you got this.

Alright, now we've come to the end of today's show.



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If you liked it, please leave a rating and review and let me know what you think.

If you want to study some more lyrics about the lovers' first meet scene that deal with the dark side of love, then look at the songs of Placebo: "*Days before you Came*" and "*Kitty Litter*."

Now in the last seven episodes, as well as in this one, we have talked a lot about the first must-have moment of every love story: the lovers' meet scene.

In the next episode, I am going to sum up everything we've learned so far before we talk about the next must-have love story moment and study the lyrics of even more love songs that are not about the lovers' meet scene anymore, but about the first kiss or intimate connection of our two lovebirds. Those songs will show us the positive side of love as well as its dark side.

If you don't want to miss the next episode to get a recap of the last eight episodes and the lovers' meet scene, then subscribe to the Stories in Songs podcast.

Thanks a lot and see you next time.

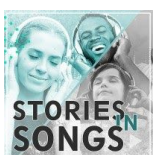
Show notes:

Find out more about love songs in those episodes:

- How to write a powerful love song?
<https://storiesinsongs.com/transcripts/ep-006>
- How to write a heartbreaking love song to get over someone?
<https://storiesinsongs.com/transcripts/ep-007>
- Introduction to the Love Story and the Lover's Meet Scene:
<https://storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-010/>
- Songmeaning.com - "Special K" interpretations
<https://songmeanings.com/songs/view/9152/>

Must-have Moments and Genre Overview:

<https://storygrid.com/genres-of-writing/>



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