

Kwame Alexander with Mary Rand Hess

solo

SECTION 1
Language

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TEACHER'S GUIDE



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Kwame Alexander & Mary Rand Hess's

solo

Teacher's Guide

Section One: Language

In this section, teachers may invite students to consider the language used within Solo as a means of vocabulary acquisition. With its economy of words and rich turn of phrase, poetry naturally lends itself to the inventive usage of figurative language found within the standards addressing language. Narrative poetry also helps a reader to track an author's or character's mood within the poems, making Solo a rich novel for addressing aspects of language and how readers make meanings from the words chosen, and the words chosen for a specific effect within a poem.

Features of this section include a vocabulary list and featured poems from the book that present elements of the standards for grade levels 8-12. The bonus part on this section features writing invitations using feature poems from the book as mentor texts for young writers, in grades 8-12.

Featured poems from the book that lend themselves to a deeper appreciation through reading and/or listening:

Poem 5 "Sunny" by Bobby Hebb
(rhyming patterns/internal rhyme)

Poem 7 "Enter Sandman" by Metallica
(rhyme scheme/allusion/myth)

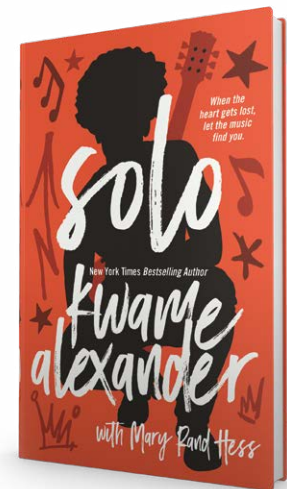
Poem 13 "Landslide" by Fleetwood Mac
(metaphor/apostrophe)



SECTION ONE FEATURES

(CLICK TO NAVIGATE)

1. [Vocabulary](#)
2. [Word Patterns and Structures](#)
3. [Voice, Style, Mood](#)
4. [Titling](#)
5. [Allusions](#)
6. [Figurative Language](#)
7. [Multimodal Presentation of Text](#)





VOCABULARY

Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess's Solo offers its own embedded vocabulary that could be utilized for vocabulary enrichment and lessons while reading.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.8.4 L.8.4.A L.8.4.B L.8.4.C L.8.4.D

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.2.C L.9-10.4 L.9-10.4.A
L.9-10.4.B L.9-10.4.C

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.3 L.11-12.5.A L.11-12.5B

Solo: A vocabulary list (42 words)

The vocabulary words presented here can have multiple definitions dependent upon their usage within the text, which addresses the language standards for multiple definitions and alternate uses of a word.

interstellar (adjective)

arpeggio (noun)

tabloid (noun)

platinum (adjective)

illustrious (adjective)

endangerment (noun)

nefarious (adjective)

commencement (noun)

egalitarian (adjective)

aneurysm (noun)

wretched (adjective)

desolation (noun)

posh (adjective)

soundboard (noun)

crossroads (noun)

naïve (adjective)

absurdity (adjective)

paparazzi (noun)

fret (verb)

giddy (adjective)

ominous (adjective)

rancor (noun)

arrogant (adjective)

pompous (adjective)

silhouette (noun)

fumigated (verb)

variation (noun)

settlement (noun)

treacherous (adjective)

barren (adjective)

mezza fresco (noun)

pristine (adjective)

affirmation (noun)

resemblance (noun)

lore (noun)

gullible (adjective)

expletive (noun)

sprightly (adverb)

engulfed (adjective)

inquisitive (adjective)

monumental (adjective)

proboscis (noun)



WORD PATTERNS AND STRUCTURES

Poetry naturally lends itself to structures and features that convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy. L.8.5

CCSS.ELA-Literacy. L.9-10.B

CCSS.ELA-Literacy. L11-12.5

Featured poems with word patterns and structures

“October 10, 2007”

(Free Verse in three Line Stanza Operating as a Flashback)

“Chambers”

(Variation on Haiku)

“Climbing the Steps to Speak”

(Concrete Poem—Stairs to Podium)

“All the Songs That Make Me Think of You”

(List Poem Created with Song Titles)

“On the way to the village, we pass”

(Serial List with Employment of Articles)

“Revelation”

(Metaphor in a Single Sentence Poem with Internal Rhyme)



VOICE, STYLE, MOOD

The narrative voice of the poems within Solo suggest the “mood” of the character at different times within the story. There are numerous instances within Solo where a series of poems carry a mood or a part of a story.

Another suggestion for voice, style, and mood is to consider how Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess write out from the fourteen tracks embedded within Solo. Students might be invited to write—from and out of their favorite songs—responses and reflections (narrative) or through a background/backstory of the song and the culture’s response (expository).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy. L.8.1.C L.8.1.D

CCSS.ELA-Literacy. L.9-10.5 L.9-10.6

Featured poems from *Solo* demonstrating voice, style, and mood

<i>“The Show”</i>	Children and Father	page 14
<i>“Who Am I?”</i>	Apostrophe/Internal Monologue	page 18
<i>“Chambers”</i>	Metaphor/Haiku	page 25
<i>“In my house”</i>	Mood	page 43
<i>“Climbing the Steps to Speak”</i>	Concrete Poetry Structure	page 56
<i>“Conversation”</i>	Dialogue in Poetry	page 79
<i>“Don’t fret”</i>	Mood	page 101
<i>“When the Levee Breaks”</i>	Mood	page 134
<i>“Her Village”</i>	Mood	page 236
<i>“Why I Don’t Play Music Anymore”</i>	Mood	page 269



TITLING

Titles not only provide compelling examples of tone, mood, and figurative language, they also serve to carry the narrative forward. The authors signal a title's role in various poems via a lack of standard capitalization.

Students may be invited to think about the author's choice to repeat titles for continuity. This is seen in "Hollywood Report," "Conversations," "Perplexed," "Dream Variations," and "Delayed."

As titles really become the first reaching out to the reader by a writer, invite and encourage students to think about labels and titles for any piece of writing they might do for the year.

Teachers might consider finding instrumental versions of the songs featured within titles to invite students to think about and to reflect upon how the music lends to what is happening within the story.

CCSS.ELA.Literacy. L.8.3 L.8.5 L.8.5.A L8.5.B

CCSS.ELA.Literacy. L.9-10.3

CCSS.ELA.Literacy. L.11-12.3.A

Featured poems from *Solo*: titling

Many of the titles here reference a well-known song not included as a track within Solo inviting even more reading, listening, and consideration.

"When Doves Cry"	Prince	page 93
"Under the Cherry Moon"	Prince	page 132
"Shattered"	The Rolling Stones	page 200
"Stay"	Rihanna	page 264
"Purple Rain"	Prince	page 275
"People Are People"	Depeche Mode	page 340



ALLUSIONS

Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess's Solo is packed with allusions presenting opportunities at every turn for extended sharing and reading as suggested by the standards. Allusions invite expertise in the room, with the teacher taking the lead on an older reference and students picking up upon cultural references closer to their ages. Any and each of the allusions invite an opportunity to listen, read, or view more from the figure or event to which the authors allude. The rock music tracks are the standout allusions, with the text and titles of familiar and not-so-familiar songs tucked into various titles within the book.

The fun of reading Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess's Solo is to find the embedded allusions within the titles of the poems. Encourage students to think about when a title could be an allusion.

Here are fifteen allusions pulled out of the book

<i>"American Woman"</i>	Lenny Kravitz	page 21, 23
<i>"The Bridge"</i>	Eddie Van Halen	page 41
<i>"Deliver Me"</i>	The Goddess Lakshmi	page 86
<i>Track 3: "Cross Roads Blues"</i>	Robert Johnson	page 98
<i>Mick and Jagger/Mick Jagger</i>	Musician	page 105
<i>"Jumpin' Jack Flash"</i>	Song/Recording	page 109
<i>"All the Songs That Make Me Think of You"</i>	Various Artists	page 153
<u>Charlotte's Web</u>	E.B. White	page 183
<i>Garth Brooks</i>	Musician	page 219
<i>Michelangelo/mezzo fresco</i>	Artist/Art Type	page 246
<i>The Whip/The Nae Nae</i>	Dance/Dance Types	page 257
<i>The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame</i>	Location/Geography	page 267
<i>"The Star Spangled Banner"</i>	Anthem/Traditional Song	page 328
<i>Woodstock</i>	Historical/Cultural Event	page 328
<i>Anansi the Spider</i>	Mythological Character	page 422



FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Poetry lends itself naturally to the usage of figurative language and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy. L.8.5 L.8.5.A L.8.5.B

CCSS.ELA-Literacy. L.9-10.5 L.9-10.5A L.9-10.5B

Featured poems from *Solo*: usage of figurative language

"Soundboard"

Metaphor

page 78

"zZZZZZ"

Onomatopoeia

page 251

"What are you doing, Blade?"

Use of Punctuation

page 298

"Freak Show on Wheels"

Metaphor/Simile

page 318



MULTIMODAL PRESENTATION OF TEXT

While presented primarily in verse, Solo offers other modes for writing within the book. Students might be encouraged to reformat some of the modes within the book to more formal language (example: text messages into dialogue).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L9-10.3

Multimodal feature poems

“Hollywood Report”

(News Report in Free Verse)

page 17

“Excuse Me”

(Lyrical Poetry/Song Writing)

page 27

“Voice Mail”

(Digital Monologue)

page 31

“Texts to Chapel”

(Conversation Using Digital Technology)

page 38

“Climbing the Steps to Speak”

(Concrete Poetry)

page 56

“How to Throw a Sick Party”

(Listing Poem)

page 110

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Section Two: Reading & Literature

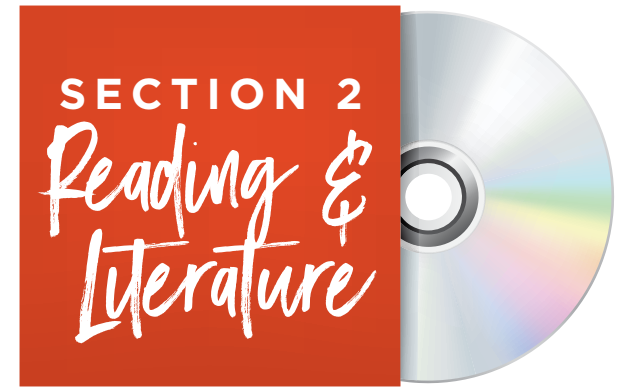
Within section two, teachers may invite students to consider key ideas and details, craft and structure, and the integration of knowledge and ideas.

As with “language,” found within the language standards, narrative poetry presents the elements of the reading standards by using words and phrases purposefully chosen to achieve not only a poetic effect but to present a story while recognizing an economy of words. Narrative poetry helps to illuminate the standards to be addressed and met when reading and considering fiction in the classroom.

Features of this section include exploration of themes, consideration of dialogue, and figurative and connotative use of language within the book. The bonus portion on this section features writing invitations using feature poems from Solo as mentor texts for young writers grades 8-12.

Featured songs for the reading literature section (these are the tracks within the book that lend themselves to the standard presented.)

- Song 3** “Cross Roads Blues” by Robert Johnson
- Song 5** “Sunny” by Bobby Hebb
- Song 8** “Zombie” by Fela Kuti
- Song 14** “(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman” by Aretha Franklin



SECTION TWO FEATURES

(CLICK TO NAVIGATE)

1. [Themes/Thematic Sets](#)
2. [Craft and Structure](#)
3. [Allusions](#)
4. [Figurative Language](#)
5. [Different Worlds](#)
6. [Integration of Knowledge and Ideas](#)
7. [The Poet's Craft](#)





THEMES/THEMATIC SETS

Any one of nine distinct themes can be explored within Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess's *Solo* as students follow Blade's journey from LA to Ghana. These potential themes include universal messages within the political, social, economic, psychological, religious, domestic, gender, and intimacy subjects presented inside a longer work of fiction. *Solo* presents unique opportunities for students to begin to explore and express themes as singular ideas (grade 8) or to do the advanced work of synthesizing themes presented by the book (grades 9-12). Invite students to consider the poems as an individual category in order to appreciate a theme from that category. Students may also be encouraged to select themes from different categories in an effort to synthesize themes together.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.2
 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2
 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10

Featured poems suggesting themes/ thematic sets:

Two to three poems suggesting one of nine possible and potential themes are listed by page number here:

Song 8: "Zombie"	page 238	(political)	"Joy's Prayer"	page 401	(religious/spiritual)
"The Elders"	page 332	(political)	"I sing"	page 456	(religious/spiritual)
"What begins"	page 273	(social/cultural)	"The Show"	page 14	(family/domestic)
"A New Day"	page 422	(social/cultural)	"My father"	page 59	(family/domestic)
"Surprise"	page 446	(social/cultural)	"Conversation"	page 72	(family/domestic)
"Conversation"	page 79	(economic)	"Home"	page 243	(family/domestic)
"People Are People"	page 340	(economic)	"Family"	page 296	(family/domestic)
"Perspective"	page 146	(psychological)	"Erase Me"	page 120	(gender)
"Why I Don't Play Music Anymore"	page 269	(psychological)	"Track 5: Sunny"	page 177	(gender)
"2:51 pm"	page 396	(psychological)	Track 14: (You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman	page 440	(gender)
"WHY?"	page 450	(psychological)	"Her Village"	page 2376	(class)
"In my house"	page 43	(religious/spiritual)	"Orphans"	page 245	(class)
"Deliver Me"	page 86	(religious/spiritual)	"Worth the Chance"	page 379	(intimacy/relationships)
"Track 3: Cross Roads Blues"	page 98	(religious/spiritual)	"Diagnosis"	page 431	(intimacy/relationships)



CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

The poem-driven narrative of Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess's Solo present unique opportunities for teacher and student alike to consider how poets use economy of language to present parts to the whole via purposeful word choice and diction, creating a range of moods and tone, a sense of, time and setting, and changes within characters in the span of a longer fictional work.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.4

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4

Several poems suggesting elements of craft and structure are listed by page number and suggested sharing point here

"Chambers"

"Texts to Chapel"

"All the Songs That Make Me Think of You"

"Day 1" through "Day 7"

"Confession"

Haiku	page 25
Triolets/Digital Text	page 38
Serial List	page 153
Journal Entries	pp. 154-155, 158, 163, 165, 172
Conversation	page 271



ALLUSIONS

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.4

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4

Here are fifteen allusions pulled out of the book

<i>"American Woman"</i>	Lenny Kravitz	page 21, 23
<i>"The Bridge"</i>	Eddie Van Halen	page 41
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<i>"Jumpin' Jack Flash"</i>	Song/Recording	page 109
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<i>Michelangelo/mezzo fresco</i>	Artist/Art Type	page 246
<i>The Whip/The Nae Nae</i>	Dance/Dance Types	page 257
<i>The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame</i>	Location/Geography	page 267
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<i>Anansi the Spider</i>	Mythological Character	page 422



FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Poetry lends itself naturally to the usage of figurative language and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.4

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4

Featured poems from *Solo*: usage of figurative language

“Soundboard”

metaphor

page 78

“Conversation”

idiomatic usage

page 109

“It feels”

simile

page 151

“The heart”

metaphor

page 197

“The Moment”

imagery

page 294



DIFFERENT WORLDS

Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess's Solo presents a unique opportunity to explore a character who travels from the US to Africa, which directly speaks to [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL9-10.6](#)



INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS

Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess's Solo presents a unique opportunity to use a novel in verse to analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material (this time, rock music across time and genres). Invite students to consider how the inclusion and the back story of a song lend to the development of the narrative within the book.

This standard is also an invitation to consider how allusion informs the integration of knowledge and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.



THE POET'S CRAFT

Select poems from Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess's Solo too good to be missed as stand-alone, read-aloud mentor poems, which might invite student writing of poems and poetry.

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Section Three: Writing

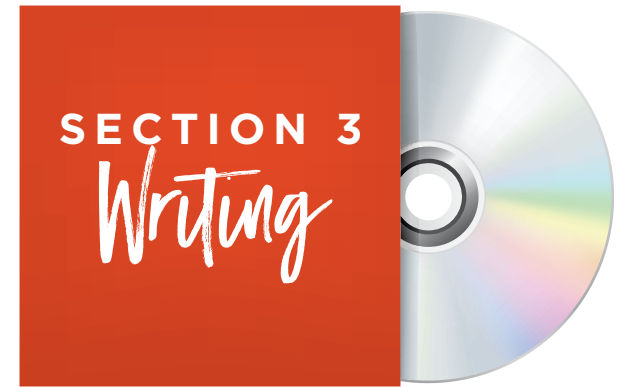
Within this section, teachers may invite students to write cohesive reflections and reviews of Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess's *Solo*. Student writing might be based upon their own inquiries and wonders coming out of the reading. Student writing may also be informed by the presentation and style of the nonfiction elements within *Solo* (presentation and information for each of the fourteen song references embedded in the book).

This section presents invitations along five distinct features, anchored by a question for consideration that can be responded to by using the text. Inquiries are presented to invite extensions from *Solo* to other sources in order to write in the room based upon the national standards and suggested by the novel in verse. The tracks can be used as singular invitations to write, for group consideration and collaborative writing, or to invite student choice in selecting an invitation in response to the reading of *Solo*.

As students begin to draft responses to the text and to prompts coming from the text, the standards for writing present themselves.

Drafts can then be assessed by the classroom teacher for the elements of writing presented by the standards, particularly those of grade 8 that speak to the origins and the presentations of ideas using formal language and conventions of the language.

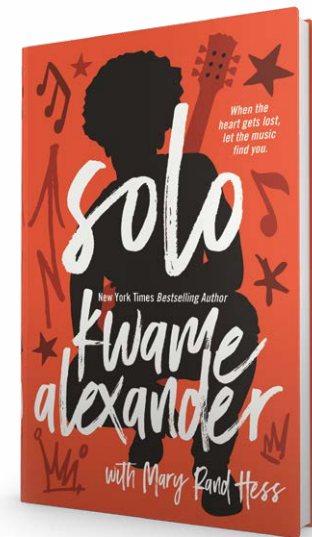
While the standards make a marked shift from 8-12th grade, the invitation to read fiction—particularly a novel-in-verse—creates opportunities to stretch out from the text, exploring subjects and topics suggested or nudged from the text as students read.



SECTION THREE FEATURES

(CLICK TO NAVIGATE)

1. [Setting](#)
2. [Exploration of Music and Sound](#)
3. [Mapping the Journey](#)
4. [Minor Characters/Major Roles](#)
5. [Exploring the Themes in/from *Solo*](#)





SETTING

A student's keen awareness of setting (micro, meso, and macro) could lend to insightful writing that explores where we find our character within the story arc of Solo.

Writing invitations

How could the LA setting be limiting for Blade as a young man seeking his own identity?

In which settings do we see different elements of Blade's personality? Which settings bring out the better parts of Blade's character?

In which parts of the book do we see shifts in Blade's character that be can directly attributed to setting?

How does Rutherford's coming into and visiting Ghana affect this character and, ultimately, the main character, Blade?

Stretching out from the text

How does Blade compare to other characters you have read or seen who experience large shifts in place or setting?

How does the movement to another country and culture within Solo help you to appreciate the larger world?



EXPLORATION OF MUSIC AND SOUND

The fourteen song references embedded within Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess's Solo almost become characters themselves, stopping like a sort of Greek chorus to provide not only a deeper consideration of the music of our time but an interlude to the story as well. Here, students are invited to think through the music within the book and the music within their own narratives.

Writing invitations

How do the song references help to advance the narrative?

How does the poetic commentary following each song help to carry or support the story in *Solo*?

What is the effect achieved by Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess's alluding to songs across time and style within *Solo*?

Stretching out from the text

You've been invited to include one more song, bringing the list to fifteen songs overall. Make an argument for your chosen song, including the background information as modeled in *Solo* for your response. For an additional stretch, find the place within the story where the song would be inserted.



MAPPING THE JOURNEY: THE HERO'S JOURNEY AS SUMMARY

Solo—at its heart—is a “journey” story. Blade Morrison leaves his ordinary world to enter into a world of mystery with an intended outcome in mind. How challenging and dangerous is this kind of journey? Who are the guides that help the character along the way? What are the trials that must be faced in pursuit of this goal? What does the ultimate boon look like? How is Blade changed by this journey from the ordinary to the extraordinary? What is lost? What is gained?

There are many resources available for classroom teachers to look at Joseph Campbell's “*The Hero's Journey*.” The monomyth can be a powerful means for connecting with a story by way of a character's separation from an ordinary world, their initiation toward and into the completion of a goal, and their return as a changed being, mentally and spiritually as much as bodily.

Exploring Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess's *Solo* through the monomythic lens

brings students to the kind of academic writing addressed by the 9-12th grade standards, which ask for more argumentation and supports from the text. Further, appreciation of the monomyth invites consideration of some of the higher-ordered elements of literature to include archetypes and their expressions as well as their shadows.

There are multiple resources on the web that introduce *the hero's journey* to both the classroom teacher and to the students in the room. Here is one resource from ReadWriteThink:

The Hero's Journey (ReadWriteThink):

The Hero's Journey (Edutopia):

Hero's Journey Resource with Introduction to Archetypes:

Writing invitations

Consider the hero's journey and its three components. Using one of those components write out how Blade Morrison is called from his innocent world, how Blade faces trials in pursuit of an end goal, and what Blade brings back with him after going on a journey.

Explore the stand-out features from *Solo* regarding the monomyth. Where do Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess connect best with this age-old exploration of characters and how they leave, how they are initiated and how they return?

Map *Solo* using the hero's journey. Make an argument for each step of the journey as you go, citing specific poems and sections of the book that speak directly to the elements of the monomyth.

Stretching Out from the Text

Explore and consult the web for resources related to literary archetypes (Carol S. Pearson's work would serve well here). Where do we see the familiar archetypes presenting themselves by way of literary symbols (to include colors and repeating elements) and situations (to include the journey and the initiate) and characters (including general archetypal characters)?



MINOR CHARACTERS/ MAJOR ROLES: ARCHETYPAL ANALYSIS

Characters who play a minor role within Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess's Solo may do more than their inclusion (or page count) might suggest. Teachers who share Joseph Campbell's "The Hero's Journey" schematic with students might invite the room to consider the role of the characters in the traditional sense of the monomyth.

One stretch from the hero's journey schematic could be the exploration and consideration of literary archetypes as found within the specific characters inside Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess's Solo.

As with the hero's journey invitation, an introduction to the archetypal characters in literature as a writing invitation can be chosen for a class response, a group response in collaboration, or as a student-selected writing invitation in response to reading Solo.

Resource links

Introduction to Archetypes Resource:

Introduction to Archetypes Resource from Literary Devices:

Carol S. Pearson's 12 Archetypes with Feature Elements/Descriptions:

Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess's Solo: Cast of Characters

Blade Morrison
Chapel
Storm Morrison
Rutherford Morrison
Uncle Stevie
Robert on the Boardwalk
Cammie Wood
Van
The taxi driver
Joy
Sia
The elders
Birdie
Lucy November

Writing invitations

Explore one or more characters from *Solo* via recognizable elements from a specific archetype. What does it mean when an archetype "wakes up" within a character?

Pair two potential archetypes either in complement or in contrast. How is one character expressing the same archetype as another? How do two oppositional archetypes hinder or help Blade in his journey?

Following the hero's journey schematic, map Blade or Rutherford's journey via the archetypes that present and act through the character. How are these archetypes a help? How might they be a hindrance? Make an argument for what archetype must awaken—even if very briefly—in order to carry the character forward in his or her journey.

Stretching out from the text

Working within small groups, explore archetypes as found in other books and films. Make an argument for heroic groups in which Blade might now find himself after your reading of *Solo*.



EXPLORING THE THEMES IN/ FROM SOLO

In the Reading section, we explored thematic elements that present from the work. These themes include: political, economic, social, psychological, religious, domestic, gender, class, and intimacy.

The writing invitations here ask the student to explore thematic elements and themes from the book singularly and in synthesis. The classroom teacher might use these writing invitations to generate short responses, foster collaboration in small group discussions, and to allow for student choice in reflecting upon themes coming out of Solo after reading.

Writing invitations

Explore and express themes from each of the categories and select one theme as your “overarching theme” or “universal truth” or message coming out of Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess’s *Solo*.

Exploring each of the nine themes found within *Solo*, make an argument for a synthesized theme among two to three theme categories. Might *Solo* present a theme that synthesizes ideas of gender and/vs. psychology? Could *Solo* be a book that brings forth a social/domestic theme?

Stretching out from the text

Working in collaborative groups, invite students to consider how singular and synthesized themes can be found in other books and films. The generation of these lists could work as “Reading Ladders” or films to be considered for those students connecting with Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess’s *Solo*.

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Section Four: Speaking and Listening

This is the standard that seems to give us the most difficulty in the classroom, isn't it? We start to do the math for how many weeks it will take 25-30 students to do even a three-minute presentation. And then, what will our topic be? Can we allow students to choose without risking another phoned-in comment on tying shoes or making peanut butter sandwiches?

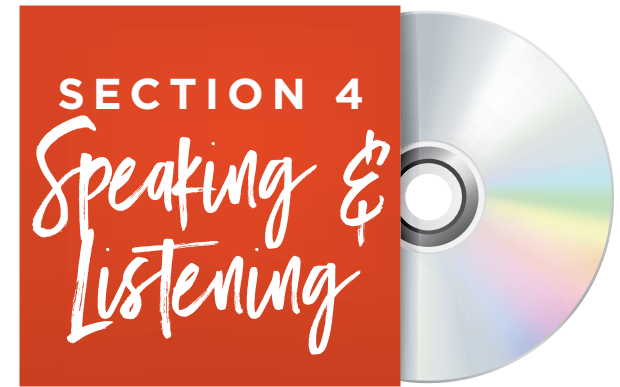
Yet, we still realize that all learning is social. The adage, "Literacy floats on a sea of talk" calls back to this fourth standard set.

Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess's Solo provides rich opportunities to listen ... and to talk. Especially about what we are listening to while we read. With a young adult novel in verse, we have an opportunity to not only tap into the trend of retro-rock among today's teens, we can invite conversations that stretch all the way back to the home as the songs of multiple generations are brought forward in the book.

The speaking and listening standard presents standards within two distinct categories. One addresses how the students prepare and present

themselves and the other addresses the types of presentations one might create and present.

All fourteen song references present themselves here as feature songs. If you are sharing Solo in the classroom or as part of a home study curriculum, please do not miss the opportunity to stop and listen to the music. In fact ... "follow the music," as the book suggests.



SECTION FOUR FEATURES

(CLICK TO NAVIGATE)

1. [Comprehension and Collaboration](#)
2. [Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas](#)



COMPREHENSION AND COLLABORATION OR “COME TOGETHER”

The standards for Speaking and Listening, for grades 8-12 begin with the same focus: bringing students together to talk about ideas, to listen to the ideas of others, and to set the rules of conversation and collaboration that will invite ideas of the group to the middle of the classroom community for consideration.

And what invites this kind of talk but a shared piece of text? Whether that text is the whole of Solo or the tracks embedded within the book, this shared experience of reading together, talking together, and sharing together presents unique opportunities to talk about the book and to create presentations across platforms and genres.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL8.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL8.1A

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL8.1B CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL8.1C

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL8.1.D CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL9-10.1A CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL9-10.1B

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL11-12.1A

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL11-12B

Suggestion 1: Inviting the Students

Invite students to work in groups that might include:

- Students who play a musical instrument
- Students who have read all of Kwame’s books
- Students who enjoy 60s, 70s, 80s or 90s music
- Students who consider themselves “music-savvy”
- Student poets

Suggestion 2: Topics of Conversation

Have topics of conversation ready for the students to discuss in groups. Topics might include:

- Student relationships and dating
- Family dynamics
- The role of fame in a person’s life
- The cost of fame for a person
- Dreams (goals, desires, nightmares)
- Guides and mentors in the students’ lives
- The role of music as a soundtrack to one’s life

Suggestion 3: Collaborative Writing

Work from any of the writing invitations found in the Writing section as a prompt for the group to work upon in a collaborative effort.

Suggestion 4: Group Monitoring

Monitor group interactions during work sessions with a review system that models what one might do on *American Bandstand*. A shortened rubric that would address the rhythm, the volume, and the feedback from the group would echo the musical world and the collaborative workplace.

Suggestion 5: Going to the Balcony: Reflecting on the Work of the Group

Here students might come up with metaphorical band photo representations of the group members.

Create a band photo. Pose for that photo. Who takes the lead (mic), who sets the rhythm (drums), who fills in the holes when the group gets stuck (bass), and who provides unique riffs from the ideas of others (lead guitar) add instruments to include all members of the group. Don’t forget the managers and the agents who go out and speak on the group’s behalf to the venue (the room).

Bonus Suggestion:

Have students create a Top Ten List out of the group work for the day. This can be a kind of brain dump or a thought capture to be shared the next day. Let students elect one another to present the list to the group in any form or genre for the next class meeting: poem, haiku, lyrics, list?



PRESENTATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS

Now that ideas have been thought and laid out on the table, it's time for the students to think about how to present the material before them. The speaking and listening standards provide unique opportunities to present across platforms and genres, which echoes the book very nicely. Perhaps the students present their ideas not only in traditional response modes like reflections and essays but in playlists, parodies, retro-styled poster art, or social media memes, videos, and hashtags. Perhaps students make their own boxed set of ideas in a multi-genre/multimedia composition. As I write these ideas for speaking and listening, I keep coming back to the notion: this is where STUDENTS take the lead and show us what they can do with digital platforms and spaces.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.4 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.6

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.5 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL9-10.6

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5

Suggestion 1: My Mixtape

Create and Advertise Playlists Using Digital Formats. This is how today's students make "mixtapes." Invite students to create soundtracks to personal narratives, to historical, nonfiction pieces, or to their expository writing. Music plays an important part in the timeline of an event and taps into a natural interest in music.

Suggestion 2: On the Cover of the Rolling Stone

Create physical and digital album cover art for poems or scenes from *Solo*.

Suggestion 3: "I Give it an 8"

Create a blog wherein students can write a reflective and a critical review of a current album. Using the model from *Solo*, invite students to tell the backstory of an album (Pandora is a good model/mentor text for this).

Suggestion 4: Down on the Farm

Invite students to dive into the Woodstock moment to address standards that ask for multiple texts related to a subject. Groups might look at the event or any one of the singular artists who contributed to the moment.

Suggestion 5: "We've Got You Covered"

Invite students to explore original songs and "covers." How and when is a song rerecorded or "covered"? What is the response of the culture to these covers? Which covers have been the most successful? Have any covers surpassed the popularity of the original in sales and public response? What happens when an artist stretches the bounds of a traditional song or an anthem?

Suggestion 6: "I Write/Keep the Songs"

Invite students to consider: "Who Keeps the Music?" Where are recordings stored? What is the Rock and

Roll Hall of Fame? Who keeps the original score for "The Star-Spangled Banner"?

Suggestion 7: "The Back of the Jacket"

Working off the group photo idea, have students consider what kind of band their working group might be. Would a folk band present themselves and their ideas differently from a hard-rock or heavy metal band? Or would a synth pop band have a keener sense of the style and the digital presentation of ideas? These questions and prompts might be considered within the planning, the outlining, the composition, and the presentation of an idea.

Suggestion 8: "The Bad Slamma-Jamma"

Invite students to compose, arrange, and record an album of spoken-word poems inspired by *Solo*, inspired by their own narratives, or inspired by a nonfiction subject.

Suggestion 9: "The Musical Bed"

Invite students to embed snippets of music (within copyright) to anchor spoken word poetry they might write and share. If there are students with musical talents, have them play or sing these "hooks" for the others in the group. Students might consider songs that employ this kind of technique, particularly those songs that are collaborative in nature between rappers and singers.

Suggestion 10: "Making a List/Checking It Twice"

Create a narrative or an expository reflection on an event using singular items as a listing. Mentor texts here might include R.E.M.'s "It's the End of the World (As We Know It)" or Billy Joel's "We Didn't Start the Fire" among many others from the world of music and poetry. Work with the rhythms and the stanzas toward a satisfying, well-thought-out composition for the purpose of presentation (and perhaps even recording).

Kwame Alexander & Mary Rand Hess's

solo

Teacher's Guide

Section Five: Solo: Unplugged

I loved being a part of the original four-hundred-member Solo pre-launch team, and I am proud to have been invited to write and to share this Teacher's Guide with you. It has provided me the opportunity to look at the national standards once again through the lens of a really, really good book. One your kids will enjoy. And one you could adopt with the sense that they will enjoy it and that you can use it to do all the good work that you need to do. That legwork was done in sections 1-4. I want to invite you to use the ideas and resources found in the first four sections and to add to them as you see what I did not include.

But, this is the Unstrung section. Here, we are going to have some fun. What follows are some ideas for reading Solo and stretching out from Solo with your students for whom music is a big part of their lives. The ideas here stretch from the student to the group to the room to the building to the community to the world. Good books generate BIG ideas. HUGE ideas.

This section offers ten approaches and activities to, into, and out of, Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess's Solo. And, yes, some of them just might fit a standard or two. If you don't tell the students, I won't.

Best,

Paul Hankins

Paul W. Hankins

English 11 and AP English Language and Composition

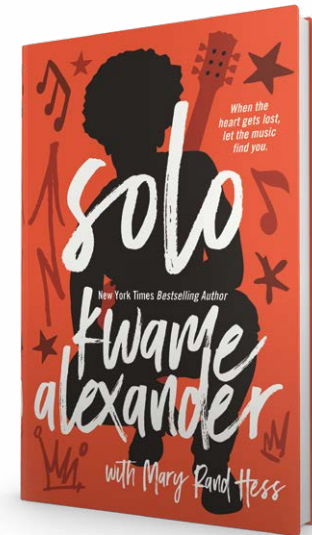
Silver Creek High School



SECTION FIVE FEATURES

(CLICK TO NAVIGATE)

1. [Unstrung Ideas 1-10](#)





UNSTRUNG IDEAS 1-10

Idea 1: "Along Came a Spider"

Texts and Resources for Anansi the Spider

Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti

Gerald McDermott
Henry Holt (1972)
978-0-8050-0310-9

This rendering of Anansi is based in Ghana, making it a natural extension text to *Solo*.

A Ring of Tricksters: Animal Tales from Africa, the West Indies, and Africa

Virginia Hamilton with Illustrations by Barry Moser
Blue Sky/Scholastic (1997)
0-590-47374-3

Introduction to Trickster Tales and to the author's work, which inspires the American Library Association's Virginia Hamilton Lifetime Achievement Award.

A Story A Story

Gail E. Haley
Aladdin (1988)
978-0689712012

This rendering of Anansi was awarded the Caldecott Medal, which serves as a potential introduction to the stories and to the award given annually in the celebration of artistry in picture books.

Anansi and the Magic Stick

Eric A. Kimmel with Illustrations by Janet Stevens
Holiday House (2002)
978-0823417636

This title is representative of a series of books by the author and illustrator with Anansi as feature character.

Anansi and the Box of Stories (On My Own Folklore Series)

Adapted by Stephen Krensky with Illustrations by Jeni Reeves
First Avenue Editions (2010)
978-0822567455

Anansi Resources Around the "Web"

Wilderutopica: "Ashanti of Ghana: How Spider Obtained the Sky-God's Stories"

This resource is hosted by Wilderutopica and features an animated version of an Anansi tale.

[URL LINK](#)

World Stories: "Why Anansi Has Eight Skinny Legs"

This resource features an Anansi story anchored by an animated rendering of the tale.

[URL LINK](#)

Anansi Stories

This resource is actually a page dedicated to Anansi, the stories related to Anansi, and some tips for how a young writer might write his or her own Anansi stories.

[URL LINK](#)

Anansi Brings Stories to the World

Hosted by Myths and Legends, this resource offers an introduction to Anansi and how the stories come to the Americas and into the larger body of trickster stories we know and share.

[URL LINK](#)

Anansi Spider Stories

Another nice resource for introductions to Anansi the Spider.

[URL LINK](#)

Idea 2: "Gonna Get My Picture on the Cover:" Picture Books with Rock Artists

Drum Dream Girl: How One Girl's Courage Changed Music

Margarita Engle with Illustrations by Rafael Lopez
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (2015)
978-0-544-10229-3

Esquivel! Space-Age Sound Artist

Susan Wood with Illustrations by Duncan Tonatiuh
Charlesbridge (2016)
978-1-58089-673-3

Gus & Me: The Story of My Grandad and My First Guitar

Keith Richards with Art by Theodora Richards
Little, Brown (2017)
978-0-316-32065-8

Jimi: Sounds Likes a Rainbow

Gary Golio with Illustrations by Javaka Steptoe
Clarion Books (2010)
978-0-618-85279-6

Odetta: The Queen of Folk

Stephen Alcorn
Scholastic (2010)
978-0-439-92818-2

Passing the Music Down

Sarah Sullivan with Illustrations by Barry Root
Candlewick Press (2011)
978-0-7636-3753-8

Outlaw Pete

Bruce Springsteen with Illustrations by Frank Caruso
Simon & Schuster (2014)
978-1-5011-0385-8

Spirit Seeker: John Coltrain's Musical Journey

Gary Golio with Paintings by Rudy Gutierrez
Clarion Books (2012)
978-0-547-23994-1

Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday and the Power of a Protest Song

Gary Golio with Illustrations by Charlotte Riley-Webb
Millbrook (2017)
978-1-4677-5123-0

Trombone Shorty

Troy "Trombone Shorty" Andrews with Illustrations by Bryan Collier
Abrams (2015)
978-1-4197-1465-8





UNSTRUNG IDEAS 1-10

Idea 3: “It’s My Party”: Album and Poetry Listening Parties (Resources)

This is where I want to encourage classroom teachers to go through those vinyl bins. What have we left behind that we can now “dig out” and share with students in the room. Record players are becoming more and more economical, and while the sound quality of the more cost-effective players is not great, there is an experience to be shared here that is invited by the reading and sharing of *So/o*.

Idea 4: “We Are the World”

As a celebration of music, *So/o* presents opportunities to explore music from across time and culture and genre. The fourteen tracks within *So/o* could serve as a model to invite readers to listen and write about the music shared in the room before, during, and after reading. Here are ten books that celebrate music, classic and contemporary.

Squeak, Rumble, Whomp! Whomp! Whomp!: A Sonic Adventure

Wynton Marsalis with Illustrations by Paul Rogers
Candlewick (2012)
978-0763639914

When the Beat Was Born: DJ Kool Herc and the Creation of Hip Hop

Laban Carrick Hill with Illustrations by Theodore Taylor
Roaring Brook Press (2013)
978-1596435407

Esquivel!: Space-Age Sound Artist

Susan Wood with Illustrations by Duncan Tonatiuh
Charlesbridge (2016)
978-1-58089-673-3

What a Wonderful World

George David Weiss and Bob Thiele with Illustrations by Ashley Bryan
Antheneum Books for Young Readers (1995)
978-0689800870

Happy!

Pharrell Williams
Puffin (2015)
978-0141365282

He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands

Kadir Nelson
Dial Books (2005)
978-0803728509

Hip Hop Speaks to Children: A Celebration of Poetry with a Beat

Nikki Giovanni
Sourcebooks Jabberwocky (2008)
978-1402210488

Charlie Parker Played Be Bop

Chris Raschka
Scholastic (Reprint) (1997)
978-0531070956

Before John Was a Jazz Giant: A Song of John Coltrane

Carole Boston Weatherford with illustrations by Sean Qualls
Henry Holt and Co. (2008)
978-0805079944

Let’s Clap, Jump, Sing & Shout; Dance, Spin, and Turn It Out: Games, Songs, and Dances from an African American Childhood

Patricia C. McKissick with Illustrations by Brian Pinkney
Schwarz & Wade (2017)
978-0375870880

Idea 5: “I’m With the Band”: Rock T-Shirt Day

Retro-rock T-shirts are all the rage these days among teens. And the artwork comes along with them. Invite students to gather their favorite rock T-shirts that are appropriate for the school’s culture.

As an extension to this idea, have students create rock shirts for any one of Rutherford Morrison’s tours. You might invite tie-dyeing or graphic design here reflective of the era in which Rutherford would be recording and playing.

Idea 6: “Who’s Gonna Drive You Home?” Vinyl/Recording Gathering

Have each group choose a genre or a decade of music and create a crowd-sourced request for vinyl (or other chosen platform) for the room.

Be sure to think about older audio recordings of books here as well.

Collaborating with community resources and activity directors, a group or two may choose to do a drive for recorded music from another era to share with a local long-term care facility.

Under teacher direction, students might write the elements of a Donor’s Choose project to generate recorded materials.

The recordings may be kept in the classroom or donated to the building’s library as a listening resource.

Idea 7: “Rockin’ in the USA”: Mapping the Country through Rock Music

Invite students to map routes north and south and coast to coast, or have them find the state that has the most references found in popular music. These can be done as full-blown wall posters or created digitally with pop-up tabs and embedded music (within copyright parameters).

Students might also consider the famous artists coming from their home state.

Invite a local, unsigned artist (interview first) to talk to the class about the life of a performer. This would be a real boon to the artist (perhaps the school paper could do a feature article on the artist and his/her work for the next publication).



UNSTRUNG IDEAS 1-10

Idea 8: “She’s Got a Ticket to Ride”: Collage Art

Collect tickets from shows and venues or get a roll of different colored tickets from the local party supply store. Use the tickets to create mosaics or collage art that communicates a subject or theme from *Solo*.

Considering well-known collage artists, invite students to think about how the ticket might be a part or feature within a piece of composed art.

Students might be invited to create abstractions using tickets here as well.

Idea 9: “We Built This City on Rock and Roll”: Theme Songs for Our City

List the feature elements of your community including buildings, landmarks, familiar figures, community events, and history to create a map of theme songs for each. This could be a piece of extended research as the group looks into the figure or the business and composes an expository piece about the subject. Invite parent and grandparent input here in the interest of generating and creating a list of songs that the students might consider but might not know. After a listening period, invite the students to consider why they are selecting a song and to make an argument for THAT song to be a part of the city’s playlist. Share via school letterhead the adoption of a theme song for a community entity and have the students sign it. As an extension of this

idea, invite the entities and business representatives in for a celebration of community and of the music that connects us all.

An extension of this idea, if the students cannot come to consensus about a subject, might be to compose an anthem for that subject with lyrics and someone who has musical talent to create the music for their tribute piece.

Idea 10: “Walk This Way”: *Solo* A Go-Go Community Event: Run/Walk

Find a weekend to coordinate with your PTO and/or your athletic director to create and to sponsor and to host a 5K Run/Walk event. Watering stations could blast the tracks from the book. Participants might be awarded handmade “medals” bearing the *Solo* symbol from the cover of the book with the address of your local Independent (Indie bookstore).

I told you that some of these ideas would be really, really big! But, wouldn’t this be cool? And the businesses that you honored as you created those theme songs ... could they sponsor and help?