

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



The Educator Materials for this Young Reader edition of *Taylor Swift: In Her Own Words* are organized according to the main parts of the book (Part I, Part II, and Part III). For each part, you will find:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This is information you may wish to share with students to help them better understand the context of or references in a quotation.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

These prompts are connected to specific quotations but allow students to conduct research and engage in discussion beyond the information provided in the text.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING CONNECTIONS

These prompts are connected to specific quotations and allow students to consider questions related to one or more SEL topics such as: identity, identifying or managing emotions, relationship building, empathy, or decision-making.

STUDENT ACTIVITY

This is a page that can be given directly to students and asks readers to consider multiple quotations from one part of the text. Students may work on this page individually, with a partner, or in small groups.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

I actually learned on a twelve-string, purely because some guy told me that I'd never be able to play it, that my fingers were too small. Anytime someone tells me that I can't do something, I want to do it more.

—*Teen Vogue*, January 26, 2009

When I was 10 I saw this TV program about Faith Hill, and it said, you know, "When Faith Hill was 19 or so she moved to Nashville, and that's how she got into country music." And so I had this epiphany when I was 10. I was like, I need to be in Nashville. That's a magical dream world where dreams come true. . . . That's when I started on my daily begging rant with my parents of, "I need to go to Nashville, please, please, please take me to Nashville. I need to go!"

—*The Paul O'Grady Show*, May 8, 2009

I had this showcase at The Bluebird Cafe, ironically the place where Faith Hill got discovered. And I played my guitar and sang a bunch of songs that I'd written. There was one guy in the audience named Scott Borchetta. So he came up to me after the show and he said, "I want you on my record label, and I want you to write all your own music," and I was so excited. And I get a call from him later that week and he goes, "Hey, so, good news is I want you on my record label. Bad news is that I don't actually have a record label yet."

—*Taylor Swift: Journey to Fearless*, October 22, 2010

NOTE: Swift got her start in musical theater at the age of nine, and she also took voice and acting lessons. When she was twelve, a computer repair technician and local musician reportedly taught her how to play guitar. She now plays both acoustic and electric guitar, piano, banjo, and ukulele.

NOTE: Nashville, Tennessee, also known as "Music City," is considered the birthplace of country music. The city has a rich musical history of now-famous artists and is still home to some of the most revered country music venues in the U.S.

NOTE: The Bluebird Cafe is one of Nashville's iconic music venues, established in 1982. Apart from Hill and Swift, country music stars Kathy Mattea and Garth Brooks were also discovered there. Scott Borchetta is a record executive who branched off to start his own label, Big Machine Records, to which Swift was signed from 2005 to 2018. She became the label's most successful artist. In 2018, when her contract expired, Swift moved to Universal Music Group, negotiating better terms both for herself and for other artists at the label.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

My life would kind of go, like, you record an album, you put out the album, you go on tour. . . . And it kind of went like that over and over again until I finished with the 1989 World Tour. And I just felt like I needed to kind of stop for a second and think about who I would be as a person if I broke that kind of cycle of constantly making something and putting it out—like, if I stopped to reflect. What kind of life would I have if there wasn't a spotlight on that life? And I was a little afraid to do that because I was like, "Oh my God. What if they don't wanna hang out with me anymore? They'll forget about me, they're gonna move on, go see someone else who wears sparkly dresses, I don't know." And I was so honored and pleasantly surprised that you guys were so supportive of me taking a break. You're so empathetic. You guys were like, "Go, be happy! We just want you to be happy!"

—*Reputation Stadium Tour, Foxborough, Massachusetts, July 26, 2018*

They always go to the same fabricated ending that every other tabloid has used in my story, which is, "She got too clingy," or "Taylor has too many emotions, she scared him away." Which has honestly never been the reason for any of my break-ups. You know what has been the reason? The media. You take something very fragile, like trying to get to know someone, and it feels like walking out into the middle of a gladiator arena with someone you've just met.

—*Glamour UK, April 24, 2015*

NOTE: After the release and tour of her album 1989, Swift took a year-long hiatus before returning with the release of Reputation. Swift was embroiled in several high-profile feuds leading up to this break, putting her in the spotlight even more than usual. She retreated from the constant scrutiny by disappearing from the public eye for a year.

NOTE: Tabloids used to be newspapers that were about half the page size of standard newspapers and featured sensational content. They have progressively moved online in the twenty-first century, but they still attempt to profit off of sensational stories about celebrity figures and the invasion of their privacy. These sources often share inaccurate news and information. Many celebrities have attempted to sue tabloids for libel or slander.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

My mom thought it was cool that if you got a business card that said “Taylor” you wouldn’t know if it was a guy or a girl. She wanted me to be a business person in a business world.

—*Rolling Stone*, March 5, 2009

TOPIC: Ask students to research the impact of a person’s first name. How do first names affect individuals and what might data about trends in first names reveal about a given time period? Have them share their findings with each other, and then discuss the following: In what other ways might a name affect someone’s choices? Ask for volunteers to share if their name has ever impacted the way they’ve been treated or the choices they’ve made.

When I was making the rounds first trying to get a record deal, the thing that I heard the most is, “Country music does not have a young demographic. The country music demographic is 35-year-old females, and those are the only people that listen to country radio. . . .”

That’s what I heard everywhere I went, and I just kept thinking that can’t be true. That can’t be accurate because I listen to country music and I know there have to be other girls everywhere who listen to country music and want some music that is maybe directed more towards them, toward people our age.

—*CMT Insider*, November 26, 2008

TOPIC: Invite students to choose a genre of music and hypothesize who composes its primary listening demographic. Then have them research to find the answer. After analyzing the data, ask the following questions: Who is the biggest consumer of their chosen genre? Was their hypothesis correct, or are the results surprising? Why or why not?

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

I'll have these style epiphanies. When I was 15, I realized that I loved the idea of a dress—like a sundress—and cowboy boots. And that's all I wore for, like, two years. And then I just started loving the bohemian, like, fairy-type look . . . so I dressed like a fairy would dress for like two years. And now I see pictures from the '50s and '60s where women had, like, red lips and a pearl earring and, like, those very classic looks. And I kind of dress now a little more vintage-y. So it's always got a direction to it.

—Keds partnership video, May 15, 2013

I'd never been in a relationship when I wrote my first couple of albums, so these were all projections of what I thought they might be like. They were based on movies and books and songs and literature that tell us that a relationship is the most magical thing that can ever happen to you. And then once I fell in love, or thought I was in love, and then experienced disappointment or it just not working out a few times, I realized there's this idea of happily ever after which in real life doesn't happen. There's no riding off into the sunset, because the camera always keeps rolling in real life.

—Elle, May 7, 2015

In the last couple of years the story has been that I'm, like, a serial dater, and I, like, have all these boyfriends and we're traveling around the world and everything's great, until I get overemotional and crazy and obsessive and then they leave. And I'm devastated, and then I write songs to get emotional revenge because I'm psychotic. And, you know, that character, if you think about it, if that's actually how I was, is such a complex, interesting character to write from the perspective of [in "Blank Space"] . . . If you make the joke first and you make the joke better, then it's kind of like it's not as funny when other people call you a name.

—on "Blank Space," *The Morning Show*, December 29, 2014

TOPIC: Assign students different decades and have them research the fashion trends of that time. After they share their findings with each other, discuss the following: Why do fashion trends change over time? How does a person's style help them express themselves? How might this be true for Taylor Swift?

TOPIC: Lead a discussion with students about the ways they have seen relationships portrayed in movies, books, or songs. Ask students which elements of these portrayals are realistic and which are not. How might unrealistic portrayals of relationships in the media impact consumers?

TOPIC: Throughout her career, the media has tended to focus more on Swift's presumed relationships than her music, and has viewed her music primarily through the lens of those relationships. With "Blank Space," Swift attempted to take control of the narrative by putting herself in the exaggerated role the media had created for her. Ask students to consider the possible effects of this choice. Do they think this is an effective way to control a narrative being told about them? Can they think of other ways someone might be able to shift a personal narrative?

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING CONNECTIONS

I grew up on a Christmas tree farm, and I just remember having all this space to run around and be a crazy kid with tangled hair. And I think that really had a lot to do with me being able to have an imagination and become obsessed with, like, little stories I created in my head. Which then, later in life, led to songwriting.

—rehearsals for the 52nd Annual Grammy Awards,
January 31, 2010

When I was 10 years old, I'd lie awake at night and think about the roaring crowd and walking out onstage and that light hitting me for the first time. But I was always very calculated about it. I would think about exactly how I was going to get there, not just how it would feel to be there.

—*Country Weekly*, December 3, 2007

My confidence is easy to shake. I am very well aware of all of my flaws. . . . I have a lot of voices in my head constantly telling me I can't do it. . . . And getting up there on stage thousands of times, you're going to have off nights. And when you have an off night in front of that many people, and it's pointed out in such a public way, yeah, that gets to you. I feel like, as a songwriter, I can't develop thick skin. I cannot put up protective walls, because it's my job to feel things.

—*All Things Considered*, November 2, 2012

CONNECTION: Invite students to think of a time they've relied on their imagination to tell a story. How do they think the act of imagining is important to storytelling? What else could this skill be useful for besides songwriting?

CONNECTION: Ask students how they might feel walking onto a stage to perform in front of thousands of people. Would they feel nervous? Excited? How do they mentally prepare when they think a situation might make them nervous?

CONNECTION: Have students think about a time when they felt overwhelmed by self-doubt. What are some ways to help someone quiet their inner voice when it is too loud? Ask students what works for them.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING CONNECTIONS

I honestly think my lack of female friendships in high school and middle school is why my female friendships are so important now. Because I always wanted them. It was just hard for me to have friends.

—GQ, October 15, 2015

CONNECTION: Ask students to brainstorm the effects their friendships have had on their lives. Has there been a time when a friend helped them through a tough moment, or a positive memory they associate with a friend? What other benefits might friendships provide?

When people need music the most is when they're either falling in love or falling out of it.

—backstage at the 2012 Canadian Country Music Association Awards, September 9, 2012

CONNECTION: Ask students to consider moments when they find music helpful. Are different kinds of music helpful in different situations? What's a time music has helped them?

My experiences in love have taught me difficult lessons, especially my experiences with crazy love. The red relationships. The ones that went from zero to a hundred miles per hour and then hit a wall and exploded. And it was awful. And ridiculous. And desperate. And thrilling. And when the dust settled, it was something I'd never take back.

—Red liner notes, October 22, 2012

CONNECTION: Ask students to think of a time when they experienced a range of extreme emotions. Did they learn from that experience? Would they go back and change anything about it if they could?

STUDENT ACTIVITY



Find quotations in *Part I: Personal Life* that illustrate priorities that are important to Taylor Swift. Write out the quote, what priority you think it illustrates, and a reflection about how you share or do not share that priority.

QUOTATION	PRIORITY	REFLECTION

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In isolation my imagination has run wild and this album [*Folklore*] is the result, a collection of songs and stories that flowed like a stream of consciousness. Picking up a pen was my way of escaping into fantasy, history, and memory. I've told these stories to the best of my ability with all the love, wonder, and whimsy they deserve.

—Instagram post, July 23, 2020

Music is art, and art is important and rare. Important, rare things are valuable. Valuable things should be paid for. It's my opinion that music should not be free, and my prediction is that individual artists and their labels will someday decide what an album's price point is. I hope they don't underestimate themselves or undervalue their art.

—*Wall Street Journal*, July 7, 2014

I didn't think that it would be shocking to anyone [not to release *1989* on Spotify]. With as many ways as artists are personalizing their musical distribution, it didn't occur to me that this would be anything that anyone would talk about. But I could never have expected so many text messages, emails and phone calls from other artists, writers and producers saying thank you.

—*Hollywood Reporter*, December 17, 2014

NOTE: "Isolation" here refers to the Covid-19 pandemic, during which Swift wrote and released her albums *Folklore* and *Evermore* (only five months apart) and worked on her re-recordings of *Fearless* and *Red*. Due to the pandemic, Swift was unable to tour following the release of *Lover*, so she threw herself into creating new music as a way to continue connecting with fans.

NOTE: Swift is referring to the rise of streaming services as the primary method of public consumption of music. With services like Spotify and Apple Music, it's become harder for artists to profit from their music because they receive much lower monetary returns than in the era of CDs or records. Streamers give artists a much smaller cut of the profits.

NOTE: When *1989* was released in October 2014, it wasn't available to stream on Spotify. One week later, Swift's label briefly pulled her entire catalog from the streaming service to make a point. Other artists have spoken out about the lower revenues from streaming, and some have staggered their releases so that their albums are only available for purchase before being available to stream. This is likely what Swift is referring to regarding artists "personalizing their musical distribution."

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

Red started out, I was making country music. And I was getting the ideas exactly the same way I always did, and they were coming to me in the same ways. And then, a few months in, they started coming to me as pop melodies, and I could not fight it, and I just embraced it.

—Taylor Swift—*Road to Reputation*, September 28, 2018

Somebody once told me that you truly see who a person is when you tell them something they don't want to hear. . . . To the country music community, when I told you that I had made a pop album and that I wanted to go explore other genres, you showed me who you are with the grace that you accepted that with.

—50th Annual Academy of Country Music Awards,
April 19, 2015

[*Reputation*] was different because I kind of built it out from the concept of a reputation. So there are a lot of kind of like, "I'm angry at my reputation" moments. There are [moments] like, "I don't care about my reputation. I'm fine, OK! I don't care!" And then there are these moments where it's very like, "Oh my God, what if my reputation actually makes the person that I like not want to get to know me?"

—Taylor Swift *NOW* secret show, June 28, 2018

When you put out one song or you're in one movie, what you don't realize is that no matter what, you're a role model, whether you choose to embrace it or whether you choose to ignore it. And I just choose to embrace it because I feel like it's the biggest honor in the world when a mom comes up to me and says, "My eight-year-old daughter listens to your music, and I think that it's so great that she looks up to you."

—The *Ellen DeGeneres Show*, November 11, 2008

TOPIC: Ask students to research the differences between various genres of music. What are the differences between music categorized as country and music categorized as pop? Are there ways in which the two genres overlap?

TOPIC: Ask students what they think the first line of this quote means. Do they think it's true? Discuss a time you might be able to identify something about a person based on telling them something they don't want to hear.

TOPIC: Discuss the concept of a "reputation." Are there positive associations with this concept? Negative? Ask students if they think a reputation is an important part of a person. Why or why not?

TOPIC: Have students discuss the role of celebrities as role models. Should they be idolized in the way that they often are? Why or why not? What are some positive and negative effects of doing so?

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING CONNECTIONS

Music is the only thing that's ever fit me like that little black dress you wear every single time you go out. Other things fit me for certain seasons, but music is the only thing that I would wear all year round.

—*Esquire*, October 20, 2014

I think if I had to put a color to *Speak Now*, it would be purple. I think that there's just something kind of . . . honest and true about that record that kind of, to me, seems purple. And *Fearless*, to me, is golden because it was, you know, the first time that anyone really recognized my music outside of America, and to me that was like a golden rush of something new. My first album, I think, would be blue.

—*Universal Music Korea video*, October 23, 2012

When I pick people to send packages to, I go on their social-media sites for the last six months and figure out what they like or what they are going through. Do they like photography? I'll get them a 1980s Polaroid camera. Do they like vintage stuff? I'll go to an antiques place and get them 1920s earrings. . . . When you actually get to know them on a person-by-person basis, you realise what you're doing is special and sacred and it matters.

—*Telegraph*, May 23, 2015

If you look at . . . how people used to gather around a record player to listen to music, it was such a social event. And now these days we have, I think, a responsibility to try and turn music back into a social event. . . . I think it's really kind of exciting that we have so many outlets now to make a song back into something that people not only listen to, but kind of assign to their memories and talk about with their friends.

—*The Kyle & Jackie O Show*, April 29, 2019

CONNECTION: Have students think about something that fills this role in their own lives. What's something that feels this constant to them—that "fits them all year round"?

CONNECTION: Ask students if they associate different colors with certain emotions or experiences. Why do colors evoke emotion? Why might one person's idea of a "sad color," for example, be entirely opposite from someone else's? Alternatively, have students map out the "eras" of their lives and assign a unique color to each one. Ask them to provide an explanation for their choices.

CONNECTION: Have students think of a favorite gift they've given or received. What made it special? What makes a gift meaningful?

CONNECTION: Ask students to consider how they've experienced the power of music in a shared setting. Does it make a difference to listen to music with others? How so? Is there some music they'd rather listen to in groups or alone?

STUDENT ACTIVITY



Find quotations in *Part II: Empire Builder* that illustrate Taylor Swift's creativity when writing music or connecting with her fans. Explain how you think others might be able to apply each example to their own creative efforts.

QUOTATION	CREATIVE IDEA	APPLICATION

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

I wrote a song called “Mean” about a critic who hated me. I put it out, and all of a sudden, it became an anthem against bullies in schools, which is a refreshing and new take on it. When people say things about me empowering women, that’s an amazing compliment. It’s not necessarily what I thought I was doing, because I write songs about what I feel. I think there’s strength when you’re baring your emotions.

—Daily Beast, October 22, 2012

Over the years, I’ve learned I don’t have the time or bandwidth to get pressed about things that don’t matter. Yes, if I go out to dinner, there’s going to be a whole chaotic situation outside the restaurant. But I still want to go to dinner with my friends. Life is short. Have adventures. Me locking myself away in my house for a lot of years—I’ll never get that time back. I’m more trusting now than I was six years ago.

—Time, December 6, 2023

NOTE: At the 2010 Grammy Awards, Swift performed onstage with singer-songwriter Stevie Nicks and sang off-key. Critics panned her performance, but one went so far as to insist she “couldn’t sing,” had “kill[ed] her career,” and was “too young and dumb to understand the mistake she made.” Swift responded by writing the song “Mean,” specifically directed at that critic.

NOTE: From roughly 2017 to 2023, Swift was dating English actor Joe Alwyn. They kept their relationship extremely private, rarely venturing out together in public or even speaking about each other publicly. They reportedly spent most of their time together at her various houses—presumably what she means by “locking myself away in my house for a lot of years.” After their breakup, Swift began dating football star Travis Kelce, with whom she engaged in a far more public relationship.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

I don't really think about things as guys versus girls. I never have. I was raised by parents who brought me up to think if you work as hard as guys, you can go far in life.

—*Daily Beast*, October 22, 2012

Invoking racism and provoking fear through thinly veiled messaging is not what I want from our leaders, and I realized that it actually is my responsibility to use my influence against that disgusting rhetoric. I'm going to do more to help. We have a big race coming up next year.

—*Elle*, March 6, 2019

I don't feel great when I am fed messages, and when I was fed messages as a young girl, that it's more important to be edgy and sexy and cool than anything else. I don't think that those are the right messages to feed girls. . . . My life doesn't gravitate towards being edgy, sexy, or cool. . . . I am imaginative, I am smart, and I'm hardworking. And those things are not necessarily prioritized in pop culture.

—*CBS This Morning*, October 29, 2014

Despite our need to simplify and generalize absolutely everyone and everything in this life, humans are intrinsically impossible to simplify. We are never just good or just bad. We are mosaics of our worst selves and our best selves, our deepest secrets and our favorite stories to tell at a dinner party.

—*Reputation* magazine, November 10, 2017

TOPIC: *Swift was twenty-two when she made this statement. Discuss how Swift's perception of sexism has changed as she's gotten older and more experienced, as demonstrated by the progression of quotes in the section "Speak Now: Finding a Political Voice." What events or forces may have contributed to that change?*

TOPIC: *Have students research the role of celebrities in the political arena. Ask them to try to find one celebrity who was able to impact politics using their platform and one who wasn't able to impact politics the way they wanted to. Discuss why some celebrities may be more successful than others in this regard.*

TOPIC: *Ask students to discuss the role of the media in messaging, especially toward young people. How are children and teens affected by what they see in the media? What messages are they receiving about what is important? How might they counteract some of this messaging?*

TOPIC: *Have students think of characters from books, TV, or movies who are neither all bad nor all good. Have them explain whether they find these characters believable or realistic, and why or why not. Can they also think of characters who are more simplistically "good" or "bad"? Do they seem more or less realistic than the more complex characters? Which are more interesting?*

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING CONNECTIONS

With the song “Shake It Off,” I really wanted to kind of take back the narrative, and have more of a sense of humor about people who kind of get under my skin—and not let them get under my skin. There’s a song that I wrote a couple years ago called “Mean,” where I addressed the same issue but I addressed it very differently. I said, “Why you gotta be so mean?” from kind of a victimized perspective, which is how we all approach bullying or gossip when it happens to us for the first time. But in the last few years I’ve gotten better at just kind of laughing off things that absolutely have no bearing on my real life.

—*All Things Considered*, October 31, 2014

I feel like we’re sent so many messages every day that there’s, like, a better version of us on a social media app with, like, better apps and a better vacation spot. But, like, you’re the only one of you. That’s it. There’s just you.

—Apple Music video, April 26, 2019

“Look What You Made Me Do,” it actually started with just, like, a poem that I wrote about my feelings. And it’s basically about, like, realizing that you couldn’t trust certain people but realizing you appreciate the people you can trust, realizing that you can’t just let everyone in, but the ones you can let in you need to cherish.

—*Reputation Secret Session*, October 2017

CONNECTION: Ask students to think of an experience that they’ve had to “shake off.” Are there things that used to bother them that they have learned to brush off and move past? Are there things that they’d like to work on learning to brush off in the future?

CONNECTION: Have students think about their own relationship with social media. Has social media ever made them feel like there was more they should be doing, or a better version of themselves they should, or could, be?

CONNECTION: Encourage students to write a poem about something they’ve been feeling, especially relating to friendship or trust. Did writing the poem cause them to realize anything that hadn’t been clear before?

STUDENT ACTIVITY

Find quotations from *Part III: The Wisdom of Taylor Swift* that show how Swift has shifted or maintained her perspective over time. Explain the change, or lack of change, that is illustrated by the comments you chose.

If you wish, you may use a quotation from a different section of the book for either Quotation 1 or Quotation 2, but at least one of the quotations should come from Part III of the book.



QUOTATION 1	QUOTATION 2	DID SWIFT'S PERSPECTIVE CHANGE BETWEEN QUOTATION 1 AND QUOTATION 2? IF SO, IN WHAT WAY? IF NOT, HOW DO YOU KNOW?