

Be the Bridge

SSA(A) and Piano • WW2088

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Lyrics

When you see the waters
rising up on your daughters,
lay yourself down...
be the bridge.

When the rushing river runs
up and over your sons,
lay yourself down...
be the bridge

We need more people who will reach across,
span the divide before the world is lost;
count the cost of causing hate to spread
and go build that bridge instead.

When half of the world thinks one thing,
and the other thinks another--
and starts the yelling and expelling--
can you stretch yourself out
and be the bridge.

When you have the chance to stand for truth,
and a voice across the chasm starts to shame you and inflame you
Can you stretch yourself out
and be the bridge.

When goodness and kindness hide their face,
and empathy goes missing, and no one can find grace,
won't you stretch yourself out
and be the bridge?

What does your bridge lead to?
Where is your bridge leading you?

Is it leading to redemption and restoration?
Is it leading to reconciliation?

Be the bridge.

Note from the Composer

A bridge can serve as a wonderful metaphor. How might we be a bridge of connection and understanding in a world where a lack of connection and misunderstanding pervade? How might we be a bridge of grace and empathy in a world so quick to judge?

In this reflection and connection guide, singers are invited to consider their role as bridge-builders—in their relationships, schools, and communities.



The Three Pillars of Connection

Identity (Self-Awareness and Self-Management)

“The perseverance needed to achieve musical excellence fosters resilience both in and out of the classroom. Musical creation cultivates self-awareness and allows students to develop a greater sense of identity, autonomy, and emotional vocabulary. Musicians learn the necessity of personal goal-setting, self-assessment, and accountability as they develop high standards for music making and for themselves personally. We each bring our own identity (who we are, how we feel, and what we believe) into our classrooms, and music learning environments that embrace identity exploration and respect provide a space for exploring and embracing one’s identity” (Edgar, 2025, p. 24).

Belonging (Social Awareness and Relationship Skills)

“The relationship built between music teachers and students over multiple years of instruction fosters the caring environment necessary to help build school connectedness, foster empathy, and provide a sense of belonging. Collaborative music spaces build connections between students, facilitate community engagement, and uplift and celebrate the cultural assets of students. Music learning environments require vulnerability and space for students to explore, tinker, envision, and grow. Music educators should strive to cultivate safe and brave spaces” (Edgar, 2025, pp. 24–25).

Agency (Responsible Decision-Making)

“The collaborative community developed through music embraces discussion, acceptance, and diversity, resulting in greater student agency and meaningful change. Student voices are amplified through the musical process, which involves refining a musical product, and as a result, students grow their capacity to make decisions, hone their beliefs, and represent themselves in true, concise, and meaningful ways” (Edgar, 2025, p. 25).

Reference

Edgar, S. N. (2025). *Needs before notes: Supporting student well-being through music education*. GIA Publications, Inc.

Identity

Skills

- Cope
- Identify and recognize emotions
- Recognize strengths, needs, and values
- Self-monitor

Level 1

Before we can stretch ourselves out to “be the bridge,” we need to have a strong foundation for ourselves. Guide students through a self-check-in during the warm-up that encourages healthy voices, bodies, and emotional well-being. While these things should happen daily in rehearsal, the focus is on how these fundamentals can make us a sturdy bridge for others.

- Begin by having students stand in a singing posture, thinking of the strong foundation of a bridge. Have students think of where they may have any tension. Ask students: *Where is there tension in your body that might make your bridge too rigid or weak? How can you release that tension?*
- Once tension is released, guide students through some breathing exercises. Just as wind can either strain or strengthen a bridge, our breath can either support or hinder our singing. Start with longer breaths, and then transition to more rhythmic breathing. Ask students: *What kind of breathing makes your bridge feel steady? Are there any types of breathing that negatively affect your voice?*
- Transition into a vocal warm-up. Every bridge has a purpose: they span rivers, valleys, or connect divides. In the same way, our voices may function differently each day. Every director handles vocal warm-ups differently, but you might consider starting on neutral syllables (*hm* or *mm*), then moving to text. Ask students: *What type of bridge is your voice today? Are there any barriers? How are you helping others through your singing?*

Level 2

Have students reflect on the following questions. These work well for journaling or a think/pair/share experience where students think of answers, share with the people around them, and then each group shares with the class.

- What might it mean to “lay yourself down” to be the bridge? What personal qualities might this require?
- What circumstances in your life cause the “waters” to rise? When you see the “waters rising up” over you, how do you keep moving forward?
- The composer chooses words like *goodness*, *kindness*, *empathy*, and *grace*. What do these words mean to you? How do you show and experience them in your daily life?
- How do you think your actions as a bridge-builder can inspire others? How do you model being a bridge-builder in your life?

- Think of a time you or someone you know built a bridge. Think of historical figures who built bridges.

Level 3

The QR code takes you to a worksheet showing a bridge and its supports. Students are encouraged to write down who supports them when they need it most, what outlets they use to cope when difficult situations arise, where they like to go during difficult times, and why these things bring them comfort. Taken together, these elements give students a success plan for restoration.



Belonging

Skills

- Be empathetic
- Build relationships
- Community
- Foster social engagement

Level 1

Reflect on the first words in the piece:

*When you see the waters rising up on your daughters,
lay yourself down... be the bridge.
When the rushing river runs up and over your sons,
lay yourself down... be the bridge.*

Consider using these guiding questions to start a conversation, or use them as silent reflection:

- Try putting a face to the people the composer may be referring to. Could it be your friends, your family, a teacher? How could you support them in a time of need?
- What kind of “waters” rise up on people in your community?
- How could larger groups, like this choir, be a bridge for people in need?

Level 2

If a bridge is too rigid, it will break. If it can bend and stretch, it will carry others across. Reflect on this text:

*When you have the chance to stand for truth,
and a voice across the chasm starts to shame you and inflame you
Can you stretch yourself out and be the bridge?*

Consider having a class discussion with these questions:

- How can we relate this to people? How can we be bridges?
- What does this say about the ways we could support and communicate with each other?
- Has there ever been a time you’ve had to stand up for someone or something? What was that like?
- What are some shared commitments we can create so that when challenges arise we can bend instead of break?

Level 3

One way to encourage belonging in your ensemble is to continue thinking about the bridge metaphor. Ask students: *How can we foster a flexible and supportive environment to make students feel welcomed in an ensemble setting?* Consider this group activity to build community and confidence in your classroom:

- Give students a strip of paper.
- Have each student write why they feel like they belong or have a connection to choir.
- Have each student bring their paper forward and begin connecting them together, link by link.
- Students can have the option to share their thoughts, and you will have a “bridge” of connections.

Have students reflect on what it looks like to carry these messages beyond the choir classroom by asking: *How can you promote belonging all the time?*

Agency

Skills

- Contribute to the good of one’s classroom, school, family, community, and environment
- Evaluate and reflect
- Leadership
- Take personal, moral, and ethical responsibility

Level 1

The piece concludes with a series of questions:

What does your bridge lead to?
Where is your bridge leading you?
Is it leading to redemption and restoration?
Is it leading to reconciliation?

Have your students silently reflect on these prompts and write down their thoughts. Some follow-up questions that could be added are:

- What is your bridge? How do you interpret that word in this context?
- What do redemption, restoration, and reconciliation mean? What does they look like?
- How should you sing this text? Are there certain emotional inflections we should explore? Why?

Level 2

Have the choir think of ways they could be a “bridge” in their school community. Choose a club, sports team, or activity that they want to support during the school year. Consider some of these potential ways to support:

- Collaborating to do a service project
- Making signs for a specific sports team
- Showing support at an event that they host

Regardless of what you choose, the goal is to reach others that you otherwise wouldn’t and build community and a stronger bridge in your school.

Level 3

The composer encourages singers to move their bodies while singing this piece. This is often very vulnerable and hard for singers who are not used to doing so. How could you give students voice and choice when incorporating movement? Here are some potential ways:

- Assign specific movements for each section of the piece (based on the form). This gives students a chance to analyze the form of the piece and then think of movements that best reflect the text and rhythms.
- Divide the choir by voice part. Have each section create movements for a specific part of the song and then teach it to the choir. By the end, you should have movements for the entire piece.
- Save movement for the end of the piece. Have students think of a meaningful way to create a “bridge” on stage.

Additional Musical Connections

Text Painting

There are lots of instances in this piece where the text is matched with a specific rhythm and dynamic, for example, the text “shame you and inflame you” in measure 40. Consider using this sequence to discover ways of better communicating the text:

- Focus on one verse or chorus at a time and speak the text as a poem first.
- Add the rhythm to the text, thinking about which words you want to highlight.
- Still speaking, add dynamics.
- Finally, add pitches, keeping the same intention you had when speaking.

This sequence will allow students to focus on adding one level of element at a time (*SKILL: Recognize strengths, needs, and values*). The goal is for the text of the piece to guide your musical choices as an ensemble. Consider having conversations about why the composer chose those rhythms or dynamics for that text. You can ask: *Additionally, can you find places where the composer tried to evoke the sense of a bridge being stretched out? What compositional strategies does he use to do that?* (*SKILL: Evaluate and reflect*). This process not only strengthens ensemble skills but deepens students’ understanding that music can express human experiences and values.

Sliding

Sliding is incorporated into the piece, which helps contribute to the “pop” element that the composer wants to evoke. It’s possible students haven’t been exposed to this type of singing yet (*SKILL: Recognize strengths, needs, and values*). While thinking of ways you could approach this technique, consider this process:

- Add sliding into your vocal warm-ups. When singing intervals, consider sliding and making it “messier” in between pitches.
- Practice sliding on different syllables—*mm, oo, hm, oh*, etc.—and landing on a unison pitch.
- Experiment with the extremes: sliding from too low or too high before landing on the desired pitch.
- Give each voice part a note in a chord and have them slide into that chord. Consider using some of the chords from the piece.

Consider using different movements or models to show the slide. Students could even come up with their own (*SKILL: Take personal, moral, and ethical responsibility*). Ask them: *How stable do you feel when you do this? How do you ensure it only happens on the notated pitches?* (*SKILL: Self-monitor*)

Layering

At the end of the piece, the composer layers the text. This begins in measure 61 and continues almost to the end. Here are some things to consider while rehearsing this final section:

- What type of onset could be used for the staggered entrances?
- Which part is most important? Is there a part that is more important than the others?
(*SKILL: Evaluate and reflect*)
- What is happening dynamically that could help you organize what is happening in this section?
- What mood is created when everyone is singing over each other? (*SKILL: Evaluate and reflect*)

Take It a Step Further

Have students rewrite one of the verses of the text (*SKILL: Take personal, moral, and ethical responsibility*). This could be done in a serious or funny way. Consider these questions:

- Could you find a way to make the text more personal? Potentially community or school focused?
- What words from your new text would you choose to layer, and why those specific words?
- Which dynamics would you choose to sing, and what type of mood would you hope to create from layering and singing?