



### **2.3. Using song lyrics and haiku to teach the structure of syllables**

#### **Notes on the Phonics Focus**

##### **🔊 What are syllables?**

Syllables are chunks of sounds which consist of a vowel alone or a vowel and surrounding consonants. Thus the word “best” consists of one syllable, whereas the word “insist” consists of two syllables (i.e. in/sist).

Junior secondary students should be taught the strategies to:

- break up multi-syllabic words into one-syllable chunks (i.e. chunking);
- apply phonics knowledge related to onsets and rimes to blend individual letter sounds into syllables; and
- blend syllables into words to facilitate both decoding and encoding.

##### **🔊 What are the steps involved in breaking up a word into syllables?**

To develop students’ skills in syllable recognition and blending, the teacher plays a critical role in familiarising them with the steps involved through demonstration.

For the multi-syllabic word “computer”, the following steps can be demonstrated:

- Identify the vowel letters in the word: “computer”.
- Read aloud the word and count the number of syllables: 3 syllables.
- Break the word up into syllables and identify the stressed syllable:  
“com / **PU** / ter”
- Blend letter sounds in each syllable.
- Blend sounds across the three syllables.

##### **🔊 What is a suitable language arts context for the learning and teaching of syllables?**

- Pop song lyrics and haiku provide particularly good sources of materials for developing students’ awareness of syllables.
- Pop songs are, by nature, characterised by repetitions of the melody. As the melody always imposes a constraint on how many syllables can fit into a line, melody repetition could lead to a recurring syllable distribution pattern which can be easily identifiable.

- Haiku, more than song lyrics, follow a regular principle of arrangement. A haiku, which is a Japanese lyric form that represents the poet's impression of a natural scene or object, is made up of 17 syllables in three lines, with 5 syllables in the first and third lines, and 7 in the second. With its highly predictable syllable pattern, as well as its brevity, a haiku can be conveniently used for both awareness-raising and production purposes.

### 2.3.1 Using song lyrics

#### Suggested Activities

**Level:** S2-S3

- Materials:**
- A PowerPoint slide that displays Verse 1 of the lyrics to the song *Butterfly* (PowerPoint file 2)
  - Activity Sheets (pp.52-54), which include the lyrics to the song *Butterfly*
  - An audio clip of the studio version of the song *Butterfly*, which is available on YouTube.

- Objectives:**
- Language-arts-related
- Understanding how the lyrics to a song fits in with the melody
  - Using knowledge of syllables to fill in the missing words in some parts of the lyrics to a song
- Phonics-related
- Understanding what syllables are
  - Understanding how a multi-syllabic word can be broken up into syllables
  - Using knowledge of syllables to count the number of syllables in words and in a single line of the lyrics to a song

**Summary of the activities:** Students read and listen to Verse 1 of the lyrics to the song *Butterfly*, work out the number of syllables in each line and draw conclusion about the syllable distribution pattern of the first verse. They then read Verse 2 and the rest of the lyrics, provide the missing words, taking into account the number of syllables required for the line concerned, and check answers by listening to the relevant verses of the song. Under teacher guidance, they identify the differences in the number of syllables in Verse 1 and Verse 2, and discuss the effects such variations may achieve.