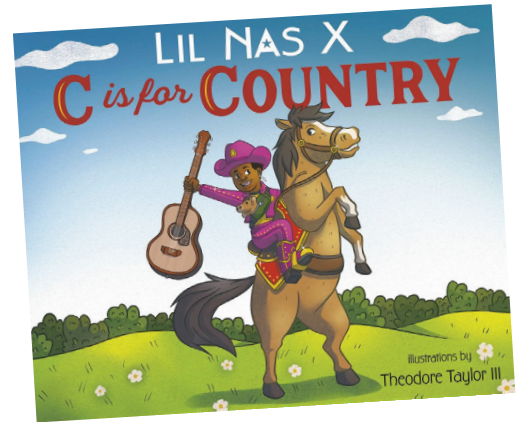


Reviewed by **Martina Vasil**

C is for Country

Written by Lil Nas X /Illustrated by Theodore Taylor III
Random House, 2021



46

Ever since Lil Nas X released his hit song in 2019, *Old Town Road*, I had been hearing it everywhere—in the grocery store, in the car, in my hometown sung to me by my nephews, and at work, where my preschool students sang it to me and told me it was their favorite song. Since then, not only has Lil Nas X emerged as a multi-award-winning artist, but he also released a children’s book.

Listening to our students and picking up on the songs and melodies they know is a powerful way to make authentic connections with them.

I instantly snatched up a copy of *C is for Country* and began coming up with a multitude of lesson plan ideas. The book is simple. It goes through the alphabet, naming things you would expect to associate with a farm: “A is for adventure ... B is for boots ... C is for country.” On occasion, you get some unexpected associations. For example, “F is for fringe, and feathers, and fake fur ...” In the end, readers follow Lil Nas X around his farm to meet the animals in his life and his family. Some of my favorite lines in the book are, “Music is for everyone” and “We’ve got love for everybody, no matter who you are, where you’re from, what you look like.”

Author Gabi Snyder and illustrator Stephanie Graegin work preschool and kindergarten students to review the alphabet and develop body

awareness. As I read the book to an instrumental track of *Old Town Road*, I paused in the story to ask students to make the shapes of the alphabet with their bodies. We did half the alphabet one day, and the other half another day.

In a different lesson, I played the instrumental track of *Old Town Road*, transposed up six half steps using the Chrome extension Transposer. This put it in an appropriate range for my young students, enabling them to sing the chorus every four or five pages: “Gonna take my horse to the old town road, I’m gonna ride ‘till I can’t no more.” Once they were comfortable with that, I used a deck of animal flash cards to inspire creative movement. “What animal did he take to the old town road?” I asked. “His horse!” students acknowledged. “What if he took a ... penguin? How do penguins travel?” Students showed me waddling, and so I sang, “Gonna take my penguin to the old town road, I’m gonna waddle ‘till I can’t no more.” This continued with four to five more animals. In the next lesson, we reviewed the animals from the last class and students took turns singing the chorus by themselves.

Further possibilities abound. You can explore connections to social-emotional learning, as the book promotes acceptance and love for one another. The book can also be a great way to connect to rural life, and children can learn about farm communities and the people and animals who work there. Drawing music connections, you can explore the sound of the song, which is both hip hop and country. What are other hip hop and country songs children might know?

In the end, this book offers a great connection to music and artists in our current society. Listening to our students and picking up on the songs and melodies they know is a powerful way to make authentic connections with them. The last sentence on the back of the book invites us all to “Join Lil Nas X in his celebration of music and power inside all of us.” You won’t look back. ■

MARTINA VASIL is an associate professor of music education at the University of Kentucky and a preK through Grade 6 music teacher at Lexington Montessori School. She completed AOSA Teacher Education Levels I–III and served on *The Orff Echo* editorial board. Martina loves incorporating popular media and current artists into her lesson plans and co-teaches a one-week special topics course on Popular Music and Orff Schulwerk at the University of Kentucky with David Dockan.