

Wonder Song by Natalie Merchant

Part A

In this activity, you will be learning to read visual language and intention in a music video.

You'll notice at the beginning of each section of Wonder that there is a lyric from a song printed. The one on page 81 is from Space Oddity by David Bowie. All these lyrics reflect the story and its characters. The main lyric quoted is from Wonder by Natalie Merchant. The first two verses of this song are printed at the beginning of the book.

Natalie Merchant is an American singer and songwriter. As a teenager, she worked with children with special needs. These children were in institutional care and many of them had unpredictable behaviour. Natalie overcame her initial fear and became good friends with the children she worked with. She wrote the song, Wonder, about a woman with disabilities who overcame them with the help of her adopted family.

View the video of **Wonder by Natalie Merchant**. You may need to watch the video a few times. After you have watched the video, discuss these questions with your group:

1. Do you like the music and the video? Why/why not?
2. What types of people are featured in the video?
3. Who appears to be singing in the video? What message do you think this sends?
4. What message do you think the images in the video give the viewer about women?
5. What message do you think the images in the video give about people with disabilities?
6. Does the video make you think of anything in your own life or experience?

Once you have discussed the video in the group, split up and write down your own thoughts on the video. You can use the ideas your partners in the group have come up with, if you wish. There are no correct answers to this – you are writing what you think.



Part B

In this activity, you will be learning to summarise and infer from verses of a song. Find the lyrics and watch the video of **Wonder by Natalie Merchant**. For each verse, write a commentary on the verse, giving your thoughts, opinions and interpretations of the verse. Use the template overleaf if you wish. The first verse is done for you as an example. You can complete this activity in a group, in a pair or individually.

Verse	Commentary
Verse 1 <i>Doctors have come from distant cities...</i>	<i>I think that the woman's medical condition is so serious and unusual that doctors have come to see her to help to treat her and to learn from her condition. They can't believe that she can live like she does with the disabilities she has. This is quite shocking to me because you put your trust in doctors and that they're standing there disbelieving what they see would make me feel hopeless and depressed if I were their patient.</i>
Verse 2	
Verse 3	
Verse 4	
Verse 5	
Verse 6	
Verse 7	<i>Repeats verse 4.</i>
Verse 8	

Part A

Reflections on the music video Wonder by Natalie Merchant:

1. Do you like the music and the video? Why/why not?

Children give preferences on video. Perhaps comparing the music and video to other music/music videos.

2. What types of people are featured in the video?

All the people are women. There are a range of races and ages. Some of the women/girls are/ may be disabled. One child has Downs Syndrome. They all look happy.

3. Who appears to be singing in the video? What message do you think this sends?

The main person singing is (presumably) Natalie Merchant. But many of the other women are made to look as if they are singing the song too. We think the message this sends is that we can all share in the meaning of the song – that we are all ‘wonders’, whoever we are. It sends a message that everyone has a voice and should be heard, whoever they are, however old they are, whatever race they are and whatever disability they might have.

4. What message do you think the images in the video give the viewer about women?

We think that the video shows women of all types and puts them together in the same room, singing the same song. This shows them unified and happy – they support one another. One message is that women are strong, supportive and have a voice. The images send a message that women can be together, whatever their perceived differences. Women are often shown as weak or lesser than men in the media and this video shows the opposite. The video sends a positive message – that women are ‘wonders’.

5. What message do you think the images in the video give about people with disabilities?

We think the images show the women with disabilities in the group as part of the group and as involved in what’s going on. The girl with Downs Syndrome joins in with Natalie as she’s singing the song. They laugh together and Natalie helps her with the singing. There is respect between the two of them and Natalie is supportive of the girl’s disabilities. The message is that people with disabilities have a voice (they sing the song too), that they belong in our society as much as anyone else, are respected, helped and are our friends.

6. Does the video make you think of anything in your own life or experience?

Children may relay situations or friendships in their own lives regarding belonging, being a girl/woman or having a disability or knowing/seeing someone in that situation. They may reflect on their thoughts on their own experience in comparison to their thoughts regarding the video.

Part B

Commentary on the lyrics for Wonder by Natalie Merchant will vary.