

More Practice Noticing the Conversation

"I hate a song that makes you think that you're not any good. I hate a song that makes you think you are just born to lose. I am out to fight those kind of songs to my very last breath of air and my last drop of blood."

Woody Guthrie could never cure himself of wandering off. One minute he'd be there, the next he'd be gone, vanishing without a word to anyone, abandoning those he loved best. He'd throw on a few extra shirts, one on top of the other, sling his guitar over his shoulder, and hit the road. He'd stick out his thumb and hitchhike, swing onto moving freight trains, and hunker down with other traveling men in flophouses, hobo jungles, and Hoovervilles across Depression America.

He moved restlessly from state to state, soaking up some songs: work songs, mountain and cowboy songs, sea chanteys, songs from the southern chain gangs. He added them to the dozens he already knew from his childhood until he was bursting with American folk songs. Playing the guitar and singing, he started making up new ones: hard-bitten, rough-edged songs that told it like it was, full of anger and hardship and hope and love. Woody said the best songs came to him when he was walking down a road. He always had fifteen or twenty songs running around in his mind, just waiting to be put together. Sometimes he knew the words, but not the melody. Usually he'd borrow a tune that was already well known—the simpler the better. As he walked along, he tried to catch a good, easy song that people could sing the first time they heard it, remember, and sing again later.

Source: Partridge, E. (2002). *This land was made for you and me: The life and songs of Woody Guthrie*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.

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Questions for Group Discussion

1. On the basis of these three paragraphs, what do you think is the subject of the text from which they were taken? What rules of notice helped you?

2. How do you expect this text to fit in with the ongoing conversation about this subject? What makes you think so?

3. Please complete the following sentence frames based on the prediction you made above.

Rather than songs that _____,

Woody Guthrie composed songs that _____.

Rather than musicians who _____,

Woody Guthrie _____.