

Things

There's a new group called Bowling for Soup that has a song called "Trucker Hat". Bob Dylan wrote a song called "Leopard Skin Pillbox Hat". The BeeGees had a song called "Top Hat." And Ani DeFranco has a song called "Hat-Shaped Hat". Because hats tell us a lot about the person who wear them. Just as other things that people wear tell us about them. So do things that people carry, the things that people buy, the things they choose not to buy, the things they give other people, the things they steal from other people.

For this songwriting springboard, I'm going to ask you to look start watching the THINGS of the people around you. As you sit in waiting rooms or restaurants, begin to look at the things that people carry, that they wear, that they have...and write down the details.

Inanimate objects may be powerful clues that TELL you something about the unique nature of a person—where they are emotionally or what their background is, or what's happening now. These clues will make your lyric come alive. If you wanted to express that someone was stuck in the past, you could say, "He was stuck in the past." Or you could use objects to say it for you. How about: "His worn leather jacket with a faded peace sign, think it used to be Day-glo"

Maybe your character is someone you know well. The things that they surround themselves with can help to describe who they are, what their beliefs are, what they love and what they hate.

What is it that your character **carries** in her purse, in his wallet, or their pocket? The things that we carry around with us can be telling traits of characters. What about jewelry, tattoos and scars – do they tell a story?

Another way to discover how many different things can say something about a person is to make a list of **categories** of things people have in your songwriter's notebook. These might include:

- Pets
- Clothes
- Favorite color
- House
- Car
- Favorite sport
- Job
- Pictures on wall
- Objects on porch
- Bumper stickers

Once you have collected your telling items, go back to the song you are working on and see where inanimate objects can do the TELLING for you.

Sometimes characters reveal themselves by what they pick up...when there are many things. Imagine a big all-you-can-eat buffet. One person chooses lettuce and crackers. Another chooses one of everything. Another has five strawberry shortcakes. That's all you know about these three people...but maybe you have already started imagining what they look like, or why they made those choices and how they usually behave.

If you start your song...

"She filled her plate with nothing but lettuce
During lunch at Barney's Buffet..."

Your listener will immediately be pulled in, wondering why, AND wondering if THEIR guess why is right. It's important to pull your listener into a song with something that has something familiar in it...but also makes your listener wonder about what's going on. They'll form their own theory of what's happening and keep listening to your song to the end to see if they were right.

Here's another way to use inanimate objects to tell story:

In front of me I have a list of things being given away by folks in my neighborhood. The list is taken from an Internet posting – a site that lists free stuff. Your job is to use any of the postings and write about the owner. Think about what story these items tell about the person who is giving this stuff away and their family. Ready?

Posting 1:

* A bag of miscellaneous Beauty Magazines (Cosmo, Allure, Style, Shape, Lucky, etc.), must take them all. **Example answer:** maybe a woman is throwing them out because she decided she'll no longer be influenced by fashion magazines.

Posting 2:

* Two (2) sample size bottles of "Just for Men" hair dye....both are two different shades of brown, plus coupons.....must take both.

Posting 3:

* A Brand New pack of 2 Pink Satin Buttons that say "Brand New Mom" and "Brand New Dad".

Try copying one of these postings and then continuing your writing...freewrite whatever comes into your mind about it...imagine it was yours, or belonged to someone you knew, maybe loved. Imagine you found it thrown out of a car. Imagine it was a gift. As you write your songs and song fragments, containing these telling items, consider how these things were once used, or why they weren't used. Who are the people who are giving these things away? What happened to the baby? And if all these things belonged to the same couple, what would that tell you about the couple? By the way, if you want to find more lists like this (and even get some great free stuff for your attic or garage), go to the website <http://freecycle.org> and join a group in your area. Let me know how you do with this exercise...

