

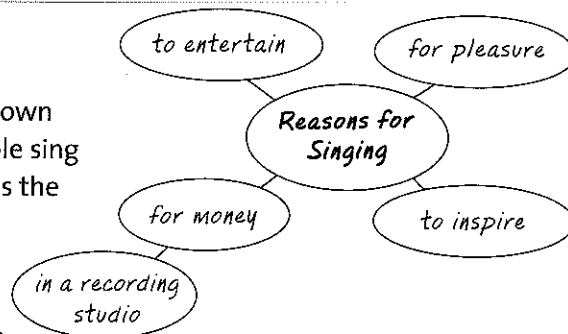
Kabul's Singing Sensation

Magazine Article by Tim McGirk

Why do we SING?

KEY IDEA Think about the last time you sang. Was it at a birthday party? during choir practice? on the street with a group of friends? Whether it's to celebrate, lift someone's spirits, or express joy, almost everyone belts out a tune at some point or another. In the article you're about to read, you'll meet a boy whose singing helps relieve the suffering of his country.

WEB IT People sing for a variety of reasons. Fill in a web like the one shown with places and events where people sing or hear singing. What do you think is the most common reason to sing?



ELEMENTS OF NONFICTION: FEATURE ARTICLE

What was the last article you read in a magazine or newspaper? If it was a piece about a favorite celebrity or about skate parks around the country, what you read was probably a feature article. A **feature article** is an article that

- focuses on a person or topic of human interest, rather than a current news event
- often includes language and imagery that appeal to emotions
- often gives only one perspective on a story

As you read “Kabul’s Singing Sensation,” notice how the author helps you understand the difficult life of one young Afghan singer.

READING SKILL: IDENTIFY MAIN IDEA AND DETAILS

Nonfiction writers usually organize their writing around **main ideas**, the most important ideas they want to share about a topic. Sometimes these main ideas are stated directly, often at the beginning of a section or paragraph. Other times they may merely be implied, or suggested. **Supporting details**, such as facts or examples, help to illustrate main ideas.

The article you are about to read contains several main ideas supported by details. Use an outline like the one shown to record supporting details for each main idea.

- I. History and politics of Afghanistan
 - A.
 - B.
- II. Difficulties faced by Mirwais and his family
 - A.
 - B.

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Tim McGirk uses the following words to describe the challenges faced by a young musician. How many words do you know? Make a chart like the one shown, putting each vocabulary word in the appropriate column.

WORD LIST	edict	immaculate	transcendent
	exile	puritanical	virtuoso

Know Well

Think I Know

Don't Know at All

Danger and Determination

Reporters who travel to dangerous areas of the world often have difficult decisions to make. How bold or how careful should they be in order to get information? Tim McGirk, a reporter for *Time* magazine, has had to answer this question himself.



Tim McGirk
born 1952

In 2001, McGirk had to decide whether to visit an island in the Philippines where rebels held kidnapped tourists and journalists and sometimes killed them. Because of the dangers involved, he chose not to go to the island. However, since 1976, McGirk has covered his share of difficult assignments, including reporting on the people and situations in Latin America and in war-torn areas of the Middle East.

Background

Turbulent Times The late 20th century saw years of civil unrest in Afghanistan, a landlocked country in southern Asia. The Taliban, a violent Muslim extremist group, captured control of the country in the 1990s. The group imposed strict rules on the Afghan people, based on its extreme interpretation of Islam. Under the Taliban’s rule, Afghan girls lost their right to an education, art and sports were outlawed, and even music was banned. Those who violated the Taliban’s rules were often brutally punished. The Taliban fell out of power after a 2001 invasion by the United States and its allies. A new government was created, and people in certain parts of the country again enjoyed some of the freedoms they had missed for years.



MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND BACKGROUND

To learn more about Tim McGirk and Afghanistan, visit the Literature Center at ClassZone.com.



ANALYZE VISUALS

This photograph shows Mirwais Najrabi singing at a wedding in Kabul, Afghanistan. How would you describe the expression on his face?

Kabul's Singing Sensation

TIM MCGIRK

It's midnight, long past bedtime for most children. But in a poor, war-ravaged neighborhood of Kabul,¹ more than 300 men are gathered at a wedding party to listen to the singing of Mirwais Najrabi, a pale, chestnut-haired 13-year-old. He performs in an open courtyard, under the night sky, to an audience that has endured so much suffering and grief over years of oppression, war, and mayhem. Yet for this brief, **transcendent** moment, their burden is lifted by the exquisite purity of the boy's voice. **A**

With his jaunty, Bollywood-style² haircut and white embroidered tunic, Mirwais looks as though he would warble like a pretty songbird, but his singing is forceful and worldly, as if he has already seen it all. And he has. Tonight, he croons folksongs of impossible love, betrayal, and heroism that flow from the depths of Afghanistan's tragic history. . . . Two men leap up to dance, circling each other like angry cobras. They turn aggressive and are pulled apart. . . . When performances get wild, says Mirwais, he tells himself: "I must not be scared, never."

1. **Kabul** (kā'bōōl): Afghanistan's capital city.

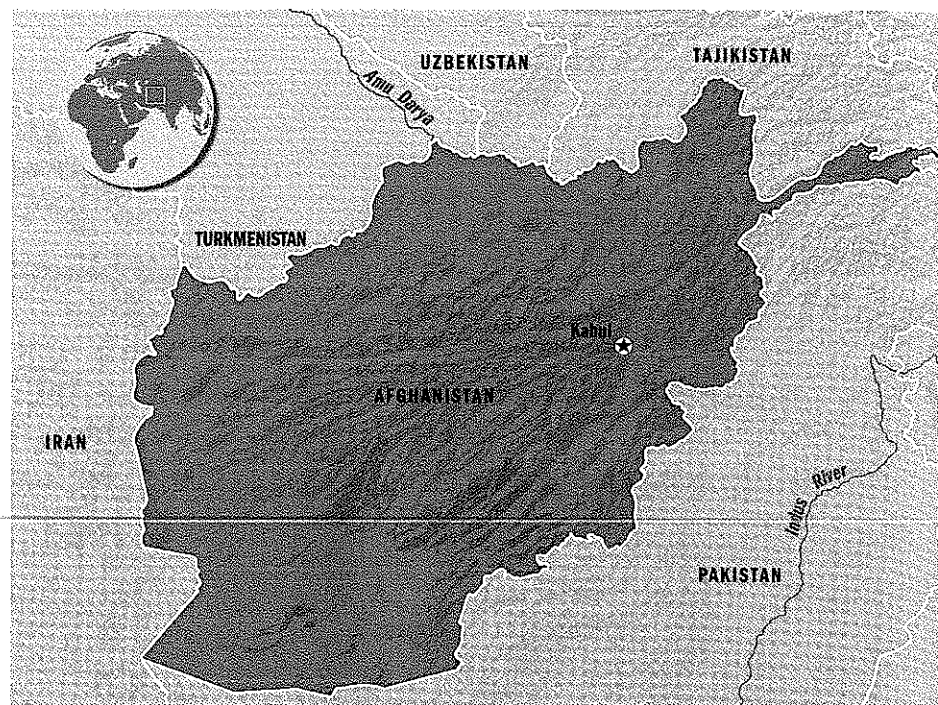
2. **Bollywood** (bōl'ē-wōōd'): the Indian film industry. The name combines the names *Hollywood* (center of the U.S. film industry) and *Bombay* (the former name for Mumbai, a large Indian city).

transcendent

(trān-sēn'dənt) *adj.* being above the material world

A FEATURE ARTICLE

Reread lines 1–8. What words and phrases suggest that you are reading a feature article?



Note that Afghanistan is a mountainous country.

exile (ɛk'sil') *n.* enforced removal from one's native country

B MAIN IDEA

What details help you understand the difficulties Mirwais has faced? Add these details to your outline.

puritanical (pyōōr-ī-tān'ī-kəl) *adj.* strictly observant of religious practices; sternly moral

edict (ɛ'dīkt') *n.* a command from those in power

The soulful melancholy in Mirwais's voice is the product of hard times. He may be only 13, but he has already suffered greatly, and this, he says, may have helped him capture the anguish that many Afghans have endured
 20 in the last 25 years of scorching battle and **exile**. "I sing what I feel," he says with a child's simplicity. His father was a famous musician who died when Mirwais was only five years old. The family had the misfortune of living in the Char-Deh neighborhood of Kabul on the front line between two warring commanders; as mortars and rockets exploded around them, Mirwais and his brothers risked their lives every day just to draw water from a communal well. **B**

Boy vocalists, long a part of Afghan tradition, were once silenced completely by the **puritanical** Taliban regime, which regarded song as un-Islamic and had many musicians arrested and beaten. When
 30 the Taliban seized power, one of their first **edicts** was to ban music. They ransacked the Afghan Radio and Television station, decorating nearby trees and rosebushes with streamers of ripped-out audiotape. (Brave technicians, however, sealed thousands of Afghan records and tapes behind a false wall at the studio, which the Taliban never found.) "We were afraid that the Taliban would kill us," recalls Mirwais's older

brother Nur-ul-Haq, a tabla³ player who says dozens of artists were beaten in public by Taliban zealots. So the family buried their musical instruments under a chicken coop in the garden. Another brother left to sell flowers in Iran, while Nur-ul-Haq hawked carpets in Pakistan.

40 Mirwais, who was just five years old when the Taliban took over, stayed in Kabul with his mother. **C**

As a toddler, Mirwais showed no interest in music. It wasn't until he was six, a year after his father's death, that anyone even heard him sing. According to Nur-ul-Haq, Mirwais had never hummed or whistled until the day when he climbed a pomegranate tree in the garden and sang to his mother. His voice was a revelation. She immediately apprenticed him to a music teacher, Ustaad Amin Jan Mazari, who listened to him and took him on for free. In the South Asian tradition of gurus and disciples,⁴ Mirwais lived with his teacher "like a son," recalls Mazari. He did

50 household chores and spent hours each day practicing the broad range of vocal scales found in classical Afghan music. Mirwais came to revere his master. Today, when they meet, the boy's face glows, and he bows to touch his teacher's feet. "He has good talent," says Mazari, "and, by the kindness of Allah, when Mirwais is 40 years old or so, with practice, he will become great."

... After the Taliban were defeated, singers began wandering back from exile in Europe and the U.S. to a tumultuous welcome, and Kabul's **virtuosos** unearthed the instruments they buried in their gardens. Songs now blast from Kabul shops, and more than a dozen
60 radio stations flourish around the country. Mirwais, one of the first to sing in public after the Taliban's ouster,⁵ is at the front of this revival. Despite his youth, he recognizes the enormity of the change. In the old days, he says, "If the Taliban caught me, they would have shaved my head. And only Allah knows what other punishments I would have faced." **D**

Remaining a singer until adulthood may be a challenge. Already, Mirwais works punishing hours, often singing until 3:00 A.M. and then rising late to ride his bicycle—whose handlebars have sprouted a bouquet of artificial flowers—to a dirt-floor schoolhouse that has no doors or
70 windows to ward off the icy winter winds. Mirwais sits there with other drably uniformed boys, a bright kid with a sad smile. The schoolyard is full of toughs, and he knows better than to show off his one luxury, a new cell phone in which he's stored dozens of jangling tunes. **E**

3. **tabla** (tä'bla): a small hand drum of northern India.

4. **gurus and disciples** (göö-rööz', dī-sī'pels): spiritual or religious teachers and their students, who respect them very much.

5. **ouster** (ous'ter): the state of being ejected or forced out.

C MAIN IDEA

How did the Taliban enforce the ban on music? Note the details that helped you answer this question.

virtuoso (vûr'chöö-ō'sō) *n.*
a musician with excellent abilities, techniques, and/or an attractive personal style

D MAIN IDEA

Reread lines 56–65. How did Kabul change with the Taliban out of power? Add these details to your outline.

E FEATURE ARTICLE

Identify two examples of strong **imagery** used in this paragraph. What do they help you better understand about Mirwais's daily life?

Young artists like Mirwais have several advantages over their older rivals. The . . . clarity of their voices blends harmoniously with the Afghan rabab, an ancient, 19-stringed instrument that is a cross between a sitar and a mandolin.⁶ And because he is still a boy, Mirwais is allowed at weddings to sing for both men and women, whose parties are strictly segregated. This will last until Mirwais turns 15 and is considered a man, no longer to be
80 trusted around unveiled women.⁷

Among the boy singers, Mirwais is tops, though he has a 14-year-old rival, Wali Fateh Ali Khan, a favorite of former King Zahir Shah. But among the common folk, Mirwais is considered the best. He and his three-piece band—a tabla drummer and rabab and harmonium⁸ players—were booked every night during the three-month wedding season prior to the holy month of Ramadan, when the partying stops. His crowning achievement came last September, when he won a famous singing contest at Kabul's Park Cinema. That day, Mirwais appeared in an **immaculate** white suit, handling the audience with the casual manner of a mite-sized Sinatra.⁹ His performance
90 blew the other contestants off the stage. ❸

immaculate (ĩ-măk'yə-lyt)
adj. spotless; very clean

❸ **FEATURE ARTICLE**

Identify one **opinion** given in this paragraph. Does the author try to be objective, or unbiased, in this article?

6. **sitar** (sĩ-tār'); **mandolin** (măn'de-lĩn'): two guitarlike string instruments.

7. **unveiled women**: Some Muslims (followers of Islam) believe that women should wear veils to hide themselves from all men except close family members.

8. **harmonium** (hār-mo'nē-əm): an organlike keyboard instrument.

9. **Sinatra** (sə-nă'trə): Frank Sinatra (1915–1998). American singer and actor known for his beautiful voice.



Mirwais practices with his music teacher, Ustaad Mazari (center).


Comprehension

1. **Recall** When did Mirwais first sing?
2. **Recall** From whom did Mirwais receive his musical training?
3. **Recall** What advantages do younger singers have over older singers in Afghanistan?

Critical Analysis

4. **Summarize Main Ideas and Details** Look back at the outline you created while reading “Kabul’s Singing Sensation.” Based on the main ideas and details you noted, summarize the article.
5. **Examine Word Choice** What does Mirwais’s voice sound like? Look back at the article and find words and **imagery** that help you “hear” Mirwais’s voice.
6. **Analyze Quotations** A quotation is a direct statement made by someone. Lines 16, 20, and 63–65 contain three quotations from Mirwais. What do these quotations tell you about the young singer?
7. **Evaluate a Feature Article** Do you think Mirwais Najrabi is a good subject for a human-interest piece? Explain why most people would—or would not—be interested in reading about him.

Extension and Challenge

8. **Readers’ Circle** What if **singing** were banned in this country? How would you react to this decision? What would you be willing to risk to preserve music? Consider how Mirwais and his family reacted to life under the Taliban as you discuss these and other questions.
9.  **SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION** What is the current state of Afghanistan? What is life like for those who live there? Research the social and political climate of Afghanistan. Share your findings with the class.



RESEARCH LINKS

For more on Afghanistan, visit the **Research Center** at ClassZone.com.



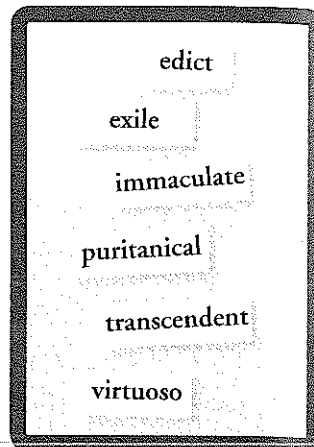
A family rides on horseback through the mountains of Afghanistan.

Vocabulary in Context

VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Note the letter of the item that you might associate with each boldfaced word.

1. **edict**: (a) a friend's suggestion, (b) a king's order, (c) a polite request
2. **exile**: (a) being sent away, (b) being imprisoned, (c) having to pay a fine
3. **immaculate**: (a) without decorations, (b) without wrinkles, (c) without dirt
4. **puritanical**: (a) like a new school principal, (b) like a group with strict rules, (c) like a popular athletic coach
5. **transcendent**: (a) sinking down, (b) rising above, (c) solving problems
6. **virtuoso**: (a) a beginning violinist, (b) an off-key singer, (c) a musical star



VOCABULARY IN WRITING

Tim McGirk used emotional language and imagery to describe Mirwais's voice. How would you describe your favorite singer? Using at least two vocabulary words, write a one-paragraph review of his or her music. You might start like this.

EXAMPLE SENTENCE

Although he's only 16 years old, Chris is already a hip-hop **virtuoso**.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: SUFFIXES THAT FORM ADJECTIVES

A **suffix** is a word part that can be added to a root or base word to form a new word. Some suffixes, such as *-ical* in *puritanical*, can be added to nouns to form adjectives. Others, such as *-ent* in *transcendent*, can be added to verbs to form adjectives. If you can recognize the root or base word in a word with a suffix, you can often figure out the entire word's meaning. Consult the chart for common adjective suffixes and their meanings.

Suffix	Meaning
<i>-ant, -ate,</i> <i>-ent, -ic,</i> <i>-ical, -ous</i>	like; having to do with; showing; causing

PRACTICE Identify the base word in each boldfaced adjective. Then define the adjective.

1. Yesterday I received the **joyous** news that my grandmother will be coming to visit.
2. Like the earth, the moon is roughly **spherical**.
3. As he waits for his food, our dog wears an **expectant** expression.
4. Can you solve **algebraic** problems?
5. Mrs. Pine is a **considerate** host who makes sure that her guests are comfortable.



VOCABULARY PRACTICE

For more practice, go to the **Vocabulary Center** at ClassZone.com.

Reading-Writing Connection

Demonstrate your understanding of “Kabul’s Singing Sensation” by responding to these prompts. Then complete the **Grammar and Writing** exercise.

WRITING PROMPTS

A. Short Response: Write an Explanation

Why do you think Mirwais and other Afghan musicians were willing to risk their lives for music?

Write a **one-paragraph explanation** of Mirwais’s possible motivation.

B. Extended Response: Write a Letter

Music can connect people across distance and culture. Write a **two- or three-paragraph letter** to Mirwais expressing your reactions to the article you just read. Then share with him some of your own experiences and thoughts about **singing** and music.

SELF-CHECK

A clear explanation will . . .

- show an understanding of Mirwais’s background and personality
- consider the role music plays in culture

A successful letter will . . .

- clearly state your opinion about what you read in the article
- make connections between yourself and Mirwais

GRAMMAR AND WRITING

USE COMMAS CORRECTLY Be sure to insert commas after **introductory words and phrases** to avoid possible confusion. Place commas immediately after introductory words, such as *finally* and *afterwards*, and after introductory phrases.

Original: In Afghanistan the Taliban ransacked the Afghan Radio and Television station.

Revised: In Afghanistan, the Taliban ransacked the Afghan Radio and Television station.

PRACTICE In each sentence, add commas where they are needed.

1. Since the age of four I’ve played the trumpet.
2. Over the summer my friends and I formed a singing group.
3. After reading the article I wanted to hear your music.
4. Fortunately you were not harmed by the Taliban.

For more help with commas, see page R49 in the *Grammar Handbook*.