

## **USING SONGS IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM**

One of the problems we, teachers, face is maintaining learners' interest throughout the lesson. Consequently, we have to be very creative in the activities we use. One of the activities that really works and does wonders is using songs. Music with its universal appeal is a great teaching tool, connecting all cultures and languages. This makes it one of the best and most motivating resources in the classroom, regardless of the age. Learners have a lot of benefit from learning through songs. Using songs in the classroom is a wonderful way to develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Besides, this activity develops learners' socio-cultural competence, aesthetic taste, stimulates memory and provides a great opportunity for physical activity.

There are many types of songs which can be used in the classroom ranging from nursery rhymes to contemporary pop or rock music. To get the right song consider the following:

- carefully examine what it is you want your class to learn in the lesson. (Is this going to be a lesson focusing on vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation or a particular topic)?

- the language level of your class will determine not only which song you can use, but also what other activities you will use to develop the lesson;

- for young learners use songs that are repetitive and very easy to understand;

- for teenagers use contemporary pop or rock songs.

Steps for making a song the focus of your class:

1. Listen to the song or watch the video. Ask learners if they've heard it before.

2. Ask some questions about the title.

3. Listen to the song again, this time with lyrics.

At this point you might do one or more of the following activities:

- learners read the lyrics while they listen;

- learners can highlight unknown words for later discussion;

- learners fill in the gaps as they listen.

4. Focus on a particular verb tense or aspect of grammar.

You might ask the questions as these:

How many examples of ... can you find in the lyrics?

Why did the writer of the song choose this verb tense or this aspect of grammar?

5. Focus on vocabulary, idioms and expressions.

6. Round things off with some creativity.

Ask your students to do one or more of the following activities:

- write another verse of lyrics, maintaining the same mood and style as the original;

- plan a music video of the song;

- draw the song;

- write a letter to the main character or the singer;

- rewrite the song as a story;

- write a story which began before the story in the song and led to it.

The examples shown in these handouts are based on the 11<sup>th</sup> form textbook by O. Karpiuk, topics of *Family and Friends* and *Art*.

## Handout 1.

### 1. Pre listening.

Have you ever heard about the group “Pink Floyd”?

What do you know about the group?

Do you know any of the group’s songs?

### 2. Listen to the song.

*If*

If I were a swan, I'd be gone.

If I were a train, I'd be late.

And if I were a good man, I'd talk with you more often than I do.

If I were to sleep, I could dream.

If I were afraid, I could hide.

If I go insane, please don't put your wires in my brain.

If I were the moon, I'd be cool.

If I were a rule, I would bend.

If I were a good man, I'd understand the spaces between friends.

If I were alone, I would cry.

And if I were with you, I'd be home and dry.

And if I go insane, will you still let me join in with the game?

If I were a swan, I'd be gone.

If I were a train, I'd be late again.

If I were a good man, I'd talk to you more often than I do.

### 3. Listen to the song again, this time with lyrics.

Fill in the gaps with conditional sentence as you listen.

If I ... a swan, I ... be gone.

If I ... a train, I ... late.

And if I ... a good man, I ... with you more often than I do.

If I ... to sleep, I ... dream.

If I ... afraid, I ... hide.

If I go insane, please don't put your wires in my brain.

If I ... the moon, I ... cool.

If I ... a rule, I ... bend.

If I ... a good man, I ... understand the spaces between friends.

If I were alone, I ... cry.

And if I ... with you, I'd ... home and dry.

And if I go insane, will you still let me join in with the game?

If I ... a swan, I ... gone.

If I ... a train, I ... late again.

If I ... a good man, I ... to you more often than I do.

### 4. Focusing on particular aspect of grammar.

What type of conditionals are these in the song?

Why did the writer of the song choose them?

Transform the second conditionals into 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>d</sup> Conditionals.

### 5. Focusing on vocabulary.

What does “go insane” mean?

What do you think about the lyrics?

What do you think the song is about?

Is the narrator a good partner?

6. Developing creativity.

Write a story which began before the story in the song and led to it.

Handout 2.

1. Pre-listening.

Do you know any artist with the name "Vincent"?

What do you know about Vincent Van Gogh?

Have you ever seen any of his paintings (reproductions of paintings)?

2. Listen to the song.

Have you heard it before?

What does the song describe?

How does the singer feel?

3. Listen to the song again this time with lyrics.

As you listen complete it by choosing one of the words at the end of the lines.

Starry, starry night

Paint your palette blue and grey

Look out on a summer's day

With ... eyes that know the darkness in my soul

(ice/eyes)

Shadows on the hills

Sketch the trees and the daffodils

Catch the ... breeze and the winter chills

(freeze/breeze)

In colors on the snowy linen land

Now I understand

What you tried to say to me

How you suffered for your ...

(sanity/vanity)

How you tried to set them free

They would not listen,

They did not know how

Perhaps they'll listen now

Starry, starry night

... flowers that brightly blaze

(framing/flaming)

Swirling clouds in violet haze

Reflect in Vincent's eyes of china blue

And now I understand

What you tried to say to me

How you suffered for your sanity

How you tried to set them free

Perhaps they'll listen now

For they ... not love you

(could/would)

But still your love was true

And when no hope was left in sight

On that starry, starry night

You took your ..., as lovers often do  
(knife/life)  
But I could have told you, Vincent  
This world was never meant  
For one as beautiful as you  
Starry, starry night  
Portraits hung in empty halls  
Frame-less heads on nameless walls  
With eyes that watch the world and can't forget  
Like the strangers that you've met  
The ragged men in ragged clothes  
The silver thorn of bloody rose  
Lie crushed and broken on the virgin snow  
And now I think I know  
What you tried to say to me  
And how you tried to set them free  
They would not listen,  
They're not listening still  
Perhaps they never will

4. What words and phrases does the singer use to describe Van Gogh's pictures?

Does the song include references to Van Gogh's landscape works?

What are they?

Does the singer consider these pictures to be beautiful?

What does the song demonstrate?

5. Plan a music video of the song.

Write a letter to the singer.

The possibilities for activities you can do with songs in the classroom are endless. Music and songs are fun, and most people enjoy them. Make songs a regular feature in your English lesson.