**TEACHING WITH MUSIC**

INTRODUCTION

Music is an indispensable part of a teenager’s life. Provided we as teachers choose the right songs, we can create a fun and memorable learning experience for our students in our English classes.

Songs are fun and effective tools for teaching and reviewing grammar, vocabulary (including idioms and useful expressions), pronunciation, culture, and for older students, social issues. They can also be used to improve listening and reading comprehension or for purposes other than teaching English. For example, depending on your objective at a given time, you can use songs – or music -- to get your students in the mood for class, that is, get them settled if they are restless or energized if they are bored and uninterested.

It is worth noting here that we teachers should not impose our personal taste in music on our students. We should be careful to offer music or songs that teenage students will want to listen to and work on.

**Putting together a class song bank**

At the start of the term or school year, invite students to create a “song bank,” or a collection of songs, which the class can draw from during the school term. The song bank can be in the form of a list posted on the English class bulletin board, a special section in the students’ notebooks, or on a class website. Encourage students to continue to add to the song bank for the duration of the English class.

Before approving songs for the song bank, check that the lyrics don’t have inappropriate language or inappropriate content. Many songs, especially hip-hop, contain offensive language. Try to avoid hip-hop songs. Better yet, provide some dos and don’ts for choosing songs.

GENERAL USES FOR SONGS IN THE CLASSROOM

**To set the mood or to get students in the mood**

*Suggested activities:*

* Play music before starting a class to set the mood or to stimulate students’ imagination.
  + Tell students to close their eyes and relax. Explain what you are about to do: You will play a song or a piece of music. They will close their eyes and imagine the sights they see as they listen to the music. You may guide them as they listen by asking questions, for example: What place do you see? Is it a sunny day or a rainy day? What else do you see? Does the scenery you imagine make you feel happy or sad?
  + If students are sleepy, bored, or restless, play a song of their choice while they’re working.

**To practice vocabulary or grammar**

*Suggested activities:*

**\*\*\*For more advanced students**

* Choose ten words from a song and write them on the board. Tell the class that you will play a song and they will listen for the ten words. Students will stand up when they hear the words in the song. For fun, turn this activity into a competition.
* Prepare Bingo cards and distribute them to the students. Tell students they will play Bingo with the lyrics. Write some of the words from a song on a Bingo card. Tell students to listen for the words on the card and put an X on them. The first student to X out a line of words wins.
* Choose a popular song in English. Mix in words that are not in the original lyrics. Play the song and have students find the words you mixed in (that is, that aren't in the original lyrics).
* Choose a song. If an entire song is too long, choose a verse or two. Choose words from the song -- for example, all adjectives, all verbs, all prepositions, all nouns, rhyming words, etc. -- to delete or blacken out,. Then tell students to replace the deleted words with different ones and have them sing the song with the new words. Finally, have them look closely at the lines with the new words and explain how the meanings have changed. *Note:* Choose only one category of words, e.g., prepositions only, for an activity.
* Students read carefully the lyrics of a song in English and correct all the grammar and spelling mistakes they find. For fun, turn the activity into a competition.
* Blacken out the word that rhymes with a previous word and have students guess the missing word. Make sure you choose words that students know.\*\*\*
* Blacken out selected words and have students replace them with either their synonyms or their antonyms.\*\*\*
* Choose a verse from a pop song in the students’ native language. Tell students to work in groups and translate the verse into English. Encourage them to use a dictionary and a thesaurus. Have the groups compare their translations. Invite students to sing the verse in their native language but in the original melody.\*\*\*
* Choose a song addressed to someone, for example, a song by Taylor Swift. Students work in groups. One group rewrites the song into a letter or an e-mail; the other responds. Divide the class into all-boy and all-girl groups. Have the girls rewrite the song into a letter or e-mail addressed to the boys. The boys write their response. Invite a girl and a boy to sing or read out loud their messages.\*\*\*
* Take a verse or the chorus in a song. Blacken out every other line in the verse and have students work in groups and fill in the missing lines with their own ideas.\*\*\*
* Choose a song with a story. Tell students to work in groups and rewrite the song into a story using standard sentences. They may also write a short play based on a song.\*\*\*
* Older students and those in advanced classes can listen to a song that touches on a social issue, for example, parent-child relationship. Students discuss the social issue expressed in the song. An alternative would be to choose two songs with the same theme or that touches on the same social issue but from two different periods or decades. Students compare the viewpoints expressed in the songs.**\*\*\***

**As class projects**

*Suggested project ideas:*

**Project 1**

* Have students work in pairs or small groups. Tell each pair or group to choose a favorite singer or band. Tell them to create a poster of a make-believe concert by their favorite singer or band. Ask this question: *What type of concert is it?* They will then decorate their poster based on the type of concert it is. Remind students to include information on the place of the performance, the time, where people can buy tickets, and the cost of a ticket. *Extension:* Students could also prepare a brochure about the concert performers, which could include photos and the following information about each performer:
  + real name, country of origin, nationality, date of birth or age
  + likes and dislikes
  + titles of top songs or albums

**Project 2**

* Have students work in pairs or small groups. Tell them that they will create a booklet of the top five favorite pop songs in English and in the students’ first language. Tell them to include biographical information about the singers or performers of the songs and to find pictures of them. Have students include the photos and biographical information in the booklet. Give students time to share their booklets, and, if time allows, to listen to one song in English and one in the native language. Ask: *Which song do you prefer? Why?*

**Project 3**

* Have students work in small groups. Have students in each group choose a song. Tell them that they will create a collage about their song. They can use colors, pictures, and drawings that express the images, message, and emotions conveyed in their song.

**Project 4**

* Have students work in pairs or small groups. Write the types of contemporary music on the board, e.g., pop, reggae, heavy metal, rock, R&B, country, techno pop, etc. Assign each group a different type of music each. Tell each group that they will make a booklet or collection of songs and singers or bands for each type of music. Remind them to include examples of songs for their type of music to share with the class.

**Project 5**

* Have students work in small groups. Tell students that they will each choose a theme for their group. Write some common themes or topic found in songs, for example, happiness, friendship, love, lost love, beautiful girl, loneliness/sadness, anger, etc. Tell each group to find up to three songs that express the theme they have chosen. Students share the songs with the class.

**Project 6**

* Have students work in small groups. Tell students that they will create a poster about a singer or band who is involved in charitable work or is involved in social issues, for example, a singer or band who’s working for peace, for the cause of children in poor countries, for the environment, for the rights of animals, and other causes and social issues. Have them research on the following:
  + biographical information of the singer or band (country of origin and nationality, type of music and songs the singer or band is known for, age, etc.)
  + the charitable work or social issue the singer or band is involved in
  + photos of the singer or band doing the charitable work
  + a song that the singer or band have written or performed for the cause

Tell each group to present their poster to the class. They may play a representative song if they wish.

**Project 7**

* Have students work in pairs or small groups. Tell students that they will do research on the types of music teenagers from different countries listen to. Assign a different country to each group. Try to choose a country from different continents or cultures. Additionally, students should find information about the following:
  + the most popular singer or band in that country or culture. (*Note:* If possible, students should also find pictures of the singer or band.)
  + a sample song of the singer or band that students can play in class

Have each group present their findings and play the sample song. Ask: *Did you like any of the songs or music from other countries? Which ones did you like? Do teenagers from other countries listen to the same type of music as you?*

**Project 8**

* Have students work in small groups. Tell students that they will create a comic strip about a song. Give each group a song or one verse from a song. Be sure the song or verse has enough information – images or loose storyline – to make it possible for students to create a comic strip out of it.\*\*\*

**Project 9**

* Have students work in small groups. Tell them they will compare the type of music from their parents’ generation with theirs. Have students ask their parents these questions: *What types of music did you listen to when you were a teenager? Who were the top three singers or bands during your time? What were the three top albums or songs when you were a teenager?* Tell students to answer the same questions for their generation. *Note:* Students can present their information in a chart with these headings: *My parents’ favorite music; Our favorite music*. To make the presentations interesting, tell each group to bring to class a sample song from their parents’ favorites and a sample of their favorites. Ask this question: *What do you think of the songs from your parents’ generation? Do you like them? Why or why not?*\*\*\*

*Extension:* Have each group create a poster announcing a make-believe concert featuring one of their parents’ and their favorite singer or band. The poster should include photos or drawings representing the two generations.

**Project 10**

* Have students work in groups. Tell them to think of at least three songs that are memorable to them. Bring lyrics and recordings of the songs to class. If possible, distribute copies of the lyrics and play the songs to the group members. Have students talk about the songs. Give these questions to guide the discussions: *What do you remember when you hear each song? Is the memory happy or sad? Why do you feel that way when you hear the song?*

**Project 11**

* Have students work in pairs or small groups. Tell them that they will “discover” a singer or band. They can find talents from different sources: (1) their school or class, (2) their neighborhood, or (3) the Internet, for example, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), for undiscovered musicians, or (4) a TV talent show. Once students have identified the “musician,” tell them to do the following:
  + find information about the musician (for example, town or country of origin, nationality, age, likes and dislikes)
  + find a sample recording of a song (*Note:* If the talent is a classmate or a neighbor, ask students if they can possibly record a performance by the person.)
  + write a short biography about the musician. Remind students to include a photo if available.
  + introduce or present the group’s discovery to the class.

After all the groups have introduced their discoveries, have the class vote on the most promising or the best talent.

**Project 12**

* Have students work in small groups. Tell them that they will create a cover for a CD album. Show some CD covers of popular and familiar songs to the class. Students can do an album cover for any of the following projects they have previously done:
  + Project 2, The Top five pop songs (international and local)
  + Project 4, A collection of . . . (for example, A collection of reggae songs)
  + Project 5, Songs about . . . (for example, happiness)
  + Project 7, Songs from . . . (for example, South Africa)
  + Project 9, Songs from two generations
  + Project 10, Songs and memories
  + Project 11, (*Note:* Each group will decide on an appropriate album title for their newly discovered talent.)

Tell students that they can use pictures from magazines or they can draw their own images. Encourage them to be as creative as they can. Assure them that crazy and unique ideas are always welcome

Allow time for each group to present their album covers, explaining why they used the images and colors for their covers. If time allows, encourage each group to play a sample song softly during their presentation.