

Using Songs in the LCTL Classroom

Sample Lesson Plan Overview

Level: Beginning-advanced

Aims: Improve listening skills, increase knowledge of the target culture, focus on selected grammatical forms and vocabulary

Class Time: Variable (30 min-several class periods)

Preparation Time: Variable (20 min-1 hr.)

Resources: Recorded songs with lyrics; audio tape recorder, handout/worksheet, accompanying picture

Folk or popular songs with easy-to-understand lyrics are a rich resource for the LCTL classroom. Songs provide an excellent means of reinforcing vocabulary and grammar and of stimulating issue-oriented discussion. They also raise awareness of cultural issues. Finally, by exposing learners to universal themes with which they can identify, songs increase student interest in learning.

The following four lesson plans exemplify the diverse ways in which songs can enhance motivation, provide learners with insight into the target culture, and in general enrich classroom language learning.

- **Details, details—Cloze listening**
- **Who did what to whom?—Reinforcing grammar through song**
- **Making order from chaos—Scrambled song lyrics**
- **What's love got to do with it?—Songs as discussion prompts**

Details, details—Cloze listening

Level: Beginning-advanced

Aims: Practice listening, make inferences about meaning

Class time: 30-40 minutes

Preparation time: 30-60 min

Resources: Recorded song, cloze passage with lyrics; audio tape player, accompanying picture (optional)

Students' listening ability is greatly enhanced when adequate context is established. By providing students with the majority of the song's lyrics, this cloze listening procedure establishes such context, thereby allowing students to relax and focus only on the missing details.

Procedure:

1. Before class, do the following:
 - a. Locate a song and its lyrics in the target language. Choose one that has familiar vocabulary or content that your students will be able to understand.
 - b. Optional: Locate a photo or picture that captures the mood or theme of the song.
 - c. Prepare a cloze passage (lyrics with selectively deleted words) using one of the following two strategies:
 - i. Delete every nth word (e.g., every 7th word) of the lyrics.
 - ii. Delete selected items (e.g., already familiar vocabulary) only.
2. Optional: At the beginning of the lesson, present the photo and elicit from students what they see (e.g., what the mood of the photo is, what theme is depicted, etc.). Write relevant contributions from students on the blackboard.
3. Play the song once through and elicit from students what they have understood.
4. Distribute the cloze passage. Play the song 1-2 additional times while students fill in the missing words in the cloze.
5. Ask for student volunteers to read the answers to the cloze passage.
6. Ask students about the content of the song to see what they understood on their own.
7. Answer any follow-up questions that students have about the meanings of words or the content of the song.

Caveats and Options:

1. The difficulty level of this activity depends largely on the complexity of the song lyrics, the speed of delivery, the singer's enunciation, and the students' familiarity with the vocabulary.
2. Singing the song together can be a fun additional activity.
3. Another option is to focus on difficult sounds as a pronunciation exercise.

Who did what to whom?—Reinforcing grammar through song

Level: Beginning-intermediate

Aims: Practice listening, reinforce a grammatical feature, make inferences about meaning

Class time: 30-40 minutes

Preparation time: 30-60 min

Resources: Recorded song with lyrics; audio tape player

Songs can provide an excellent authentic example of grammar in action. This activity employs the medium of song to motivate students and encourage them to make inferences about the song's meaning. It further uses the song's lyrics to reinforce a previously taught grammatical point.

Procedure:

1. Before class, do the following:
 - a. Locate a song in the target language. Choose one that will allow you to focus on a particular grammatical feature, e.g., yes/no questions, the past tense, and imperatives.
 - b. Prepare a handout of the song lyrics.
2. Play the song once through and elicit from students what they have understood.
3. Distribute the song lyrics.
4. Play the song again, asking students how seeing the lyrics has added to their understanding of the song.
5. Briefly review the selected grammatical feature, eliciting both the rule and examples from students. Put relevant information on the blackboard.
6. Ask students to underline in the lyrics instances of the targeted grammatical feature.
7. In pairs, ask students to compare their findings.
8. Ask for student volunteers to write the examples they have found on the blackboard.
9. Have students discuss whether these examples follow the rules they have learned.
10. Provide further explanation of any examples that do not appear to fit the rule.
11. For homework, assign students to create example sentences of their own to illustrate the grammatical rule.

Caveats and Options:

1. Take care to choose a song that contains enough instances of the grammatical feature that you wish to reinforce.
2. For a follow-up writing activity, students can be asked to write an additional stanza of the song incorporating the selected grammatical feature.

3. Instead of a grammatical feature, idioms or cultural/historical facts can be presented.

Making order from chaos—Scrambled song lyrics

Level: Intermediate-advanced

Aims: Practice critical listening and sequencing skills, make inferences about meaning

Class time: 30-40 minutes

Preparation time: 30-60 min

Resources: Recorded songs with lyrics; audio tape player, scissors, envelopes with scrambled lyrics; overhead transparency or class set of complete lyrics

Songs often tell a story or use repetition as a device for special effect. In this activity, students use their critical listening and sequencing skills to correctly arrange the scrambled lyrics of a song. They then discuss the meaning of the song along with any stylistic devices the songwriter has employed for special effect.

Procedure:

1. Before class, do the following:
 - a. Locate a song and its lyrics in the target language. Choosing one that tells a story or has a distinct narrative strand will make the task easier for students.
 - b. Transcribe the song's lyrics and make a handout with the complete lyrics. Make multiple copies of the lyrics (see step c).
 - c. Prepare materials for the scrambled lyrics activity (see below). You will need multiple copies of the lyrics, scissors, and envelopes. Cut the lyrics into strips, scramble them, and put them into envelopes. Assuming groups of 3-4 students, make enough sets of the scrambled lyrics for the entire class. Also prepare an overhead transparency or a class set of the complete lyrics.
2. Introduce the song by playing it 1-2 times. Ask students what they have been able to understand and write pertinent details on the board.
3. Assign students to groups of 3 or 4 students each and provide each group with an envelope containing the scrambled lyrics. Tell them that their task is to listen to the song and correctly order the lyrics.
4. As a preliminary step, ask students from memory to arrange the lyrics as best they can.
5. Play the song 2-3 additional times (more if necessary) while students reorder the lyrics.
6. Using the overhead, display the correct ordering of the lyrics and have the groups check their answers. Alternatively, pass out the complete lyrics and have students check their answers.

7. Ask students to comment on the song (e.g., did they like it, what didn't they understand, etc.)
8. Have them comment on any stylistic devices the songwriter used (e.g., repetition of words, lines, stanzas) and the overall effect of these devices on the song's meaning.

Caveats and Options:

1. Take care to select a song that is appropriate for the students' level of proficiency; otherwise, be willing to adjust for comprehension difficulties and provide more support in terms of vocabulary explanation.
2. A fun additional activity is to have students create new stanzas for the song. This can be done by asking students to randomly select from the envelope of scrambled lyrics a new first line of the stanza. In small groups, they then brainstorm the additional lines of the stanza, taking care to use the same rhyme scheme as in the original song.
3. Another fun expansion activity is to have students in their groups create a word poem by selecting certain lines from the song and creatively rearranging them. Groups can then be asked to read their word poem aloud and provide an explanation of its meaning.

What's love got to do with it?—Songs as discussion prompts

Level: Intermediate-advanced

Aims: Practice listening, make inferences about meaning, discuss issues

Class time: 30-40 minutes

Preparation time: 30-60 min

Resources: Audio tape player, recorded song, lyrics, possibly an accompanying picture

Songs are a powerful means of conveying messages about societal issues. The songwriter's stance toward the issue is seldom ambiguous, and the song's intent is generally to bring attention to the issue and/or to convince the listener of a particular point of view. In this activity, students' attention is first focused on the message of the song. Subsequently, the songwriter's stance is used as a point of departure to explore student opinions on the issue.

Procedure:

1. Before class, locate a song and its lyrics in the target language. Choose one that will allow you to focus on a particular issue, e.g., gender roles, traditions, love, freedom, etc.
2. Prepare a worksheet of comprehension questions, e.g.,
 - a. Who are the main characters in the song?
 - b. What does the singer want?
 - c. What is the singer's attitude toward _____?
 - d. What is the conclusion of the song?
3. Introduce a few (7-10) relevant vocabulary words, idioms, or cultural facts.
4. In class, play the song 2-3 times and ask students to take notes on what they understand. Following this, ask students to share what they have understood in whole group format. Write relevant vocabulary on the blackboard.
5. Pair students and distribute the worksheet. Allow them 5-10 minutes to answer the questions; then have the pairs share their answers with the class as a whole.
6. Assign students to small groups. Ask them to discuss and debate the key issues in the song. Examples:
 - a. "This song is the singer's response to a friend committing suicide. Why does he respond in this way? How do others respond to such a situation? Do you agree?"
 - b. "In this song two young lovers have been forbidden to see one another by their parents. Why would the parents make such a demand? Defend the parents (or lovers)."
7. Have the groups report back the main points of their discussion.

Caveats and Options:

1. Take care to choose a song with appropriate complexity in vocabulary, speed, or grammar or be willing to adjust for comprehension lapses.
2. Be sensitive to the places where the discussion might lead, especially if the topic is more controversial.
3. Have students act out the story (if it is a story)
4. Consider including a follow-up writing activity. For example, ask students to discuss their opinion on the topic as homework. Alternatively, have them write a journal from the perspective of one of the characters in the song.