

Digging Deeper into Songs: A Writing Activity

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This lesson plan for intermediate and advanced ESL/EFL students offers teachers a writing activity where the students analyze the lyrics to one of their favorite English songs

Introduction

It probably isn't unusual for instructors to incorporate music into their lessons at some point during the year. Perhaps, there are some instructors who have their students listen to music and write down the words or key phrases they hear on a prepared handout. When I use music in my classes, I have my students go beyond just listening to songs by having them analyze the song lyrics. This activity allows the students to look more closely at the meaning of songs.

Lesson Plan

Levels: Intermediate and advanced

Materials: A sample song with a copy of the lyrics for each student, a sample song lyrics analysis paper, CD or tape player, paper, and pens

Preparation

Step 1

Find an English song in which the students can easily identify the meaning of the song and make a copy of the lyrics for each student. I suggest songs written by singers and songwriters such as the Beatles.

Step 2

Write your own sample song lyrics analysis paper so that students will have a model to follow while drafting. I recommend that your model be at least one page and include a short introduction, one or two body paragraphs, and a short conclusion. The body paragraph or paragraphs should address the meaning of the song by analyzing specific lyrics.

Step 3

Before the day of the lesson, you should instruct the students to bring in a copy of some lyrics for an English song which they enjoy; they should know all the vocabulary in the song. The students may find these lyrics on numerous websites.

The Lesson

Step 1

Explain to the students that the purpose of the lesson is to think more deeply about songs and to write a paper about the song they brought to class.

Step 2

Give each student a copy of the song lyrics you prepared. With the students following along, play the song once. Then, help the students understand all of the song's vocabulary and/or expressions.

Step 3

Ask some questions relating to the song: What happens in the song? What is the song about? What are some specific lyrics which convey the meaning of the song? Why do you think the writer wrote the song? During this part of the lesson, it is important for the students to understand the meaning of the song and its message to the listeners.

Step 4

Once the students answer the questions in Step 3, introduce the writing activity where the students will analyze the lyrics from a song of their choosing. I suggest the students write three paragraphs; paragraph one, a brief introduction telling about the song and some general information on the musician/group and/or telling why they like the song; paragraph two, the body of the paper which includes specific lyrics and analysis of them; paragraph three, a short conclusion. For the body paragraphs, you should stress to the students that they are not to write a summary of the song. One way to alleviate this problem is for the students to write specifically about the lyrics and how those lyrics support the song's message.

Step 5

Read over the sample song lyrics analysis paper you prepared beforehand.

Step 6

Allow students time to draft their paragraphs. Circulate around the room in order to check if the students are analyzing the song lyrics.

Step 7 (optional)

Students should be given some time (about a week) to draft and type their paper. Also, they should include the song lyrics with their paper.

Conclusion

This activity provides an opportunity for students to think about the meaning of songs. This "digging deeper" seems to connect closely with one of the major purposes of college: to get students to think more critically about the world around them. By analyzing song lyrics, the students are making a step into the critical-thinking world. One of my students commented on this activity: "Music is a big part of my life and for me to be able to sit down and analyze one of my favorite songs was very cool."

Resources

- <http://www.lyrics.com>
- <http://www.songlyrics.com>