

Student Created Song Exercises

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There is nothing new about using songs in class. The international appeal of music can unlock interest in even the shyest and most reserved students by engaging them in a real listening medium. Songs have often been used to supplement listening classes, and depending on the content of the song, other classes such as writing and culture as well. Typically, teachers simply cloze the lyrics of the song and may prepare several comprehension type questions. Recently, there have been a number of song book texts published which include ready made listening exercises to go along with each song.

After creating and sometimes using commercially available song exercises for years, I started to enlist my students in this activity. After making and doing the first song exercise in class, I explain to the students how they can make the same kind of exercises. I then ask each student to select a song and to prepare a similar exercise on a week by week basis. This not only offers the same benefits as song exercises that I have brought to class, but it involves the students, too. They need to think about songs that would work well with this type of activity. They need to make decisions about how to cloze the song and how to write questions about it. They need to understand and to think about the meaning of the lyrics. It is also refreshing for the students and me to hear new songs -- songs that are meaningful to the students. An added benefit is that the students bring in the CD or tape, which permits the teacher to follow the copyright law.

Here is a set of guidelines and some suggestions for doing this activity:

- appropriate level: all levels
- objectives: listening, reading and thinking practice; song exercise design; fun
- approximate time: 15-30 minutes per song
- preparation time: none for teacher; about one hour per student
- necessary materials: none
- necessary equipment: a CD or tape player
- implementation procedure: teacher makes first song exercise, does the activity in class, and then asks the students to follow the procedure below

1. Pick a song that you like and is meaningful to you in some way.
2. Make sure the lyrics of the song are clear and easy to follow.
3. Type, write or photocopy the lyrics on one A4 (standard size) sheet of paper
4. Make deletions to the text based on deleting every nth word or selective words of your choice. (There should not be more than one deletion per line.) Make sure that each deleted word is clearly audible.
5. In place of each deleted word, draw a line or parentheses wide enough for the word to be filled in. (Underlined blanks can be a solid line or a broken line to indicate the number of letters in the deleted word.)
6. Make sure that the chorus of the song is clearly marked.
7. Make 3-5 comprehension type questions that refer to the song and type or write them on another A4 sheet of paper.
8. Bring these sheets of paper to class, along with the accompanying CD or tape, the week before your song exercise is due.
9. The teacher has one week to make photocopies and to think about working the song into the following lesson. (These song exercises can be done on a stand alone basis, too, (i.e. as a separate activity).
10. Do the song exercise in class. The teacher can lead this activity or ask the student who created it to take over. Either way, the student should bring the answers to class and be prepared to help interpret the lyrics of the song.

Occasionally a student will bring in a song that doesn't work well (such as some heavy metal songs). In my experience this occurrence has been very rare -- maybe one per class. Most of the songs exercises have been well conceived, thoughtfully prepared and have worked well in class.

<http://iteslj.org/Lessons/Cunningham-SongExercises.html>