

Use Music in ESL Instruction

Introducing music into an English as a second language (ESL) class enables ESL students to encounter the English language in a novel way. Music provides a low-stress, fun activity for those students who like music and enjoy singing. In multilevel classes, spending some portion of the class time on music enables students with very different skill levels to participate equally.

Getting students involved in singing along with you and with one another enhances listening comprehension. Students can also improve their pronunciation, as well as practice the stress, rhythm, and intonation of English in a natural way. You can reinforce recently learned vocabulary and grammatical structures without students even being aware that they are participating in a reinforcing activity.

You can lead discussions about the meaning of the song and the intent of the composer, as well as related cultural issues. The use of music is consistent with Gardner's multiple intelligences theory. According to this theory, every person has eight intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist. Instruction can be most effective by accessing these multiple intelligences. Incorporating music into lessons allows students to access their musical intelligence. The vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and cultural context of English are all presented in a musical format.

Music can offer a welcome change from the standard ESL instruction!

Music Lesson Outline

Here is a basic outline for an ESL lesson with music.

1. Introduce the song. (Get students ready to listen.) Introduce new vocabulary and discuss any customs or culture-specific references in the song that students may be unfamiliar with.
2. Listen to the song. (Play the tape or CD.) If appropriate, provide written activities for students to do while listening. One possibility is a cloze activity: Write part of the song on paper. Then take out some words and replace each one with a line. Ask the students to fill in the missing words. Another possibility is a sequencing activity: Write each line of the song on a separate strip of paper. Mix the strips up, and ask students to put them in the correct order.
3. Work with the meaning. (Follow up after the song.) Make sure the students have understood the song, and provide further skill development activities—for example, discussing the song, discussing culture and customs, or summarizing or paraphrasing the song.
4. Sing the song with the students.

Evaluating a Song

When you hear a song that you think might be useful in teaching ESL students, consider these points:

- Could you use this song to:
 - improve listening skills?
 - increase speaking ability?
 - practice conversation?
 - teach vocabulary or illustrate idioms?
 - teach grammar/structure?
 - improve pronunciation?
 - improve stress, rhythm, and intonation?
 - practice reading?
 - depict American culture?
- Would this song be most appropriate for beginners, advanced beginners, intermediate students, or advanced students?
- Would a student's culture accept/be offended by the song?
- Are the words clear (with music that is not overpowering)?
- Is the message understandable?
- Is the syntax simple?
- Is there repetition in the song? (Look for songs with a chorus.)
- Does the song have a singable melody or chorus?
- Do you like the song?
- Do you want to sing it?

Lesson Plan for Teaching *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*

Try using this song at the beginning of baseball season (early April), although you could use it throughout the summer.

1. Introduction. Talk about sports. Find out what sports the students like. Talk about games that use balls. Discuss what is meant by *season*.
2. Play the tape or CD for *Play Take Me Out to the Ball Game* twice.
3. Ask students to listen to the song a third time and then try to answer these questions (oral or written, depending on student ability):

Beginner Level

- Does the person want to go to a ball game? Yes _____ No _____
- Are all the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 used in the song? Yes _____ No _____
- Is this song about tennis? Yes _____ No _____

Intermediate Level

- Where does the person want to go? _____

- What does the person want to do? _____
 - How many strikes make an “out”? _____
4. Talk about the song and the answers to the previous questions.
 - Teach vocabulary: *crowd, root, home team, win.*
 - Explain uses of *out* as in the idioms *take me out* and *you’re out.*
 - Bring a box of Cracker Jack to class. Show it, open it, pass it around, and let students taste its contents.
 - Teach commands: *take, buy, root.*
 - Teach other idiomatic expressions: *I don’t care; It’s a shame.* Use the expressions in contexts other than in the song.
 - Explain the game of baseball. Show pictures or videos. If possible, play the game!
 5. Read (rather than sing) the words of the song. Point out how, in songs, singers may reduce some of the words—that is, how singers may “slide” over some sounds or combine them. In this song, for example, *peanuts and Cracker Jack* could come out sounding like *peanuts ’n Cracker Jack.* Other words that may be reduced in the song are *with the, if, for the, it’s a,* and *at the.*
 6. Play the tape again. Clap out the beat.
 7. Do a sequencing activity using sentence strips.
 8. Teach idioms from baseball that are in common usage. For example:
 - *a ball-park figure*
 - *way off base*
 - *out in left field*
 - *He threw me a curve ball.*
 9. Explain that people sing *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* during the seventh-inning stretch. Tell them how the seventh-inning stretch originated: President Taft, a large man, got up and stretched, and everyone else did, too. This became a custom.
 10. Sing the song again. Have fun! For added atmosphere, wear a baseball cap with a local team logo.

