

Yearning. Believing. Achieving.

YBA English Teachers' Newsletter

No. 9

Music To My Ears

Life seems to go on without effort when I am filled with music

-George Eliot-

Editor's Note

The holidays have ended, and with them, the distinctive prayers and melodies. When words of prayer become lyrics that are sung instead of read, they affect people on another level entirely. We also remember them more vividly.

Now that the "High Holiday High" has started to wear off, it seems fitting to focus on songs in the classroom – a teaching tool that leaves long lasting impressions and memories.

Food for Thought

Adapted from "9 Reasons Why You Should Use Songs to Teach EFL"

Professor Larry M. Lynch

1. **Songs almost always contain authentic, natural language.** This often contrasts the contrived, stilted language found in many student texts. Of course songs can also go to the other extreme by using overly crude, foul or otherwise objectionable language. With careful screening, an extensive library of usable songs for language learning can be compiled.
2. **A variety of new vocabulary can be introduced to students through songs.** Songs are almost always directed to the native-speaking population so they usually contain contemporary vocabulary, idioms and expressions.
3. **Songs are usually very easily obtainable.**
4. **Songs can be selected to suit the needs and interests of the students.** In English especially, so many songs are available that selection of songs with suitable themes, levels and vocabulary is not at all difficult. Allowances can also be made for complexity or simplicity of language by using suitable songs.

5. **Grammar and cultural aspects can be introduced through songs.** ...Excerpting cultural elements

is usually a possible, but often overlooked aspect, of using songs.

6. **Time length is easily controlled.**

Whether you have an hour, 30 minutes, or only 15 minutes or so, a song can be used in the course of a planned lesson.

7. **Students can experience a wide range of accents.** A good thing

about songs is that you can expose the students to many different kinds

Ah, music," he said, wiping his eyes. "A magic beyond all we do here!"

J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

of English. Accents, too, are well represented by songs from different regions and in a variety of types and formats.

8. **Song lyrics can be used in relating to situations of the world around us.** Songs

have been used as vehicles of protest for civil rights, workers' rights, even prisoners' rights along with an untold number of other causes...

9. **Students think songs are natural and fun.** Well actually they are, aren't they?

They make offbeat, fun changes of pace with classroom use."

Source: www.eslbase.com/teaching/using-songs-to-teach-efl

Promoting Progress In and Out of the Classroom

There is no shortage of head shaking when the level of English of the **חינוך ממלכתי דתי** is investigated. Statistics show that the **המ"ד** students are behind. When people have asked why I think this is so, I suggest that to a certain extent, it may be related to lack of exposure of sections of the religious student population to music and other forms of media in English. Once, a teacher, now principal, reminisced how he had learned the present perfect in class with the song "You've Got a Friend". Why were English songs copacetic¹ 25 years ago but subsequently vetoed by cautious teachers? I see it as fear of the unknown.

A few years ago, at the top of the charts on Israeli radio was a Portuguese song which had accompanying dance moves. "Everyone" was singing it. Out of curiosity, I Googled the lyrics' translation and returned to class asking if anyone knew what they were singing. It was

a trigger for a lively discussion on the importance of taking time to understand lyrics instead of mindlessly singing them. When we teach songs, we have to stress the screening process, and like Hebrew, there are high calibre songs and shallow, tasteless pieces.

In 9th grade, our performance task is a Music Project. Students choose a song that must meet the following criteria:

- It's clean.
- It has a minimum of two stanzas, but three or more are preferred.
- It has background information that will interest an audience.
- The performer 's and/or composer's biography can be researched.

Songs are rejected if they are not up to par. Students screen downloaded clips of the lyrics in their oral presentations so everyone can learn as they play and ▶

1. One suggestion is that the source of this word is **הכל בסדר**

explain the piece. This performance task includes all elements: Reading comprehension, oral skills, learning the cultural background of the piece/the era, vocabulary and freedom to choose a song that appeals to the students. It is done as pair work – which adds to the challenge.

Among the positive experiences I've had with music have been times I was asked to translate English songs for Hebrew teachers. The timeless "Hotel California" is taught annually by our principal for use in a **שיעור חינוך**. Another lecturer asked me to translate songs that he used in his talks. Their subliminal message to the students: English songs have intrinsic value, too.

Song Suggestions

Musicals

Les Misérables is currently in theatres in Hebrew. Join forces with history teachers. The "safest" song is [Bring Him Home](#). You can add to the discussion by bringing

it to the attention of students that Dudu Fisher gave up prime roles on Broadway, including Jean Valjean, because he was Shomer Shabbat.

The Oldies / The Remakes

Show your age. Bring the original and new cover of a song and debate with your class which version is better.

Contemporary Music

I have found four pointers that eclipse the five pointers with their vocabulary because they memorize songs and translate the lyrics. Give your students opportunities to bring songs to class. As the article says, sometimes the most enjoyable lessons are spent sitting and singing.

Jewish Songs

The top Hassidic singers have hits in Hebrew and English as do the growing number of acappella groups. Keep feelers out for ones that will work with your class.

Frozen

I'm going to Let it Go.

Final Thoughts

When my stint as a recess DJ was cut short last year, I uncovered another staff member who was not a fan of "Loazi". If we want to close the gap and improve our students' English skills through creative methods, including teaching songs, we have to open the lines of communication with teachers and parents who remain suspicious of English content. Just as you do

for your students, show them the material if they have concerns. Explain why you think it's suited for class and its value. "Knowledge is power".

My seventh grade Israeli Hebrew teacher taught the class "אנשים טובים" and "על כל אלה" and these songs remain with me until today. I hope our students feel the same way about songs we teach them.