Using Songs in ELT Teacher Notes

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A practical guide to preparing and adapting the archive examples. The aim is to help learners understand and use the language they meet in a song. The additional planning task and follow-up questions below have been prepared for this seminar.

Learning aims

By the end of the workshop, participants should be able to choose a song excerpt for a stated language aim, give learners a focused listening task and plan a follow-up that uses the same language in a new context.

Possible learner aims include recognising body vocabulary, matching colour words with objects and exchanging greetings. Select one main aim for each short activity. Singing along can be an optional response.

Suggested workshop timing

Opening and aims: 5 minutes. Reasons for using songs and participation choices: 10 minutes. Body vocabulary demonstration: 12 minutes. Colours demonstration: 13 minutes. Greetings demonstration: 5 minutes. Participant planning task: 10 minutes. Sharing and final reflection: 5 minutes. These are planning estimates, not slide timings.

Use only one or two tasks from each demonstration. Keep the remaining tasks available as alternatives. A shorter session can focus on one complete sequence and the teacher planning task.

Preparing a recording

Listen to the entire excerpt before the lesson. Identify the target words and check that the recording matches the task and key. Decide where to pause or replay. Give the instructions before the sound starts and test the volume from the back of the room.

Use a short excerpt when a full song adds no further practice. A written task should contain only a few gaps or choices at first. Explain unfamiliar task language before asking learners to listen.

A reusable lesson sequence

Before listening, introduce the topic and prepare essential vocabulary with pictures or a short question. Give learners a general purpose for the first listening, such as identifying the topic.

For the next listening, set one specific task. Let learners compare their answers before a replay. Ask them to identify what they heard and use the recording to resolve differences.

After checking, ask learners to use a familiar expression without the music. They might give an instruction, describe an object, ask a partner a question or write a new sentence. Repeat a similar task later to see what they remember.

Body vocabulary demonstration

Use slides 8 to 12 in 8_Classroom_Song_Demonstrations.pptx. The main seminar introduces this sequence on slides 8 to 10. Start with listen and point using a body picture. Continue with the gap task and pair checking, then use true or false statements to check meaning. Finish by asking partners to give a new instruction or describe what a body part can do.

Gap sequence on slide 10: ears, nose, head, legs, walk. True or false sequence on slide 12: true, false, false, true, true, false. Confirm the gap sequence against the recording during preparation. Permit picture pointing and adapt movements to the learners and space.

Colours demonstration

Use slides 13 to 17 in 8_Classroom_Song_Demonstrations.pptx. Main seminar slides 11 to 15 introduce these tasks. Prepare the colour vocabulary with objects, then select either the word choices or the listening grid. The word-choice answers on slide 14 are blue, grass, rain, night and snow.

The grid associations are snow and white; sun and yellow; night and black; sky and blue; spring and green; earth and brown; cloud and grey; rose and red. Ask learners to describe a different object afterwards. Explain that the song gives particular associations and that real objects can have other colours.

Slides 18 and 19 are an optional spelling task. The learner grid and key contain some different letters. Check the exact grid before printing and use a verified selection of words. The line ordering task on slide 15 also needs a final check against the recording and the supplied strips.

Greetings demonstration

Use slides 20 to 22 in 8_Classroom_Song_Demonstrations.pptx. Main seminar slide 16 introduces the greeting sequence. Model a brief spoken exchange, listen, complete the gaps and check. Intended answers on slide 21: morning, you, well, thank. Then let learners greet a new partner with the written support closed. Offer familiar alternative replies so that learners can answer naturally.

Other archive examples

20_Song_Examples.pptx contains ten song slides. Select two or three for a live seminar rather than demonstrate them all. The 13 formerly linked MP3 files are now embedded. Titles include My Family, My House, In My City and Animals I Like. Some slides contain dense text; use a short section or show selected lines for classroom work.

20_Coat_of_Many_Colors.pptx provides a longer song example with four embedded MP3 files and an AVI video. For suitable learners, use the story as a prompt about care, dignity and respect. Suggested questions are: What makes a gift valuable? How could classmates respond kindly? How can we show respect for someone whose possessions differ from ours? Learners can discuss an imagined situation rather than disclose personal financial experiences.

The three teacher-created Flash examples are kept separately in the teacher archive as EXE originals and extracted SWF copies. Their playback has not been verified here. The classroom example presentations, Flash files and FrontPage HTML folders are not included in this five-file web package. Prepare a working local example before the session.

Participant planning task

Ask pairs to choose a learner group and a language aim. They should select a short song excerpt, describe the first listening purpose, prepare one focused task and name a follow-up that uses the target language. Give pairs ten minutes to plan and rehearse their instructions.

Invite another pair to review the plan. Can they identify what the learners will learn? Are the instructions clear? Does the follow-up require learners to use the language? Ask the authors to revise one part of the plan after receiving feedback.

Participation and informal assessment

Offer listening, pointing, marking an answer or a seated movement as participation choices. Avoid requiring solo singing. Keep repetitions purposeful and allow preparation in pairs. If learners cannot access the audio, provide a suitable written or visual version of the task.

Check learning with a brief response after the recording: one new description, one instruction or one exchange with a partner. Keep a simple note of whether the learner responds independently, with a prompt or with a model. Revisit the language in a later lesson.

Playback preparation

The main seminar is supplied as a PDF. The classroom example presentations and original media are kept separately in the teacher archive. Before a live demonstration, open the selected example in PowerPoint on the teaching computer and test it in Slide Show mode. Older AVI or Flash materials may need a compatible playback setup.

This web package includes the completed promotional video as 5_YouTube_Promo.mp4. Keep full commercial songs and complete lyric pages out of any further promotional edit unless you have the necessary permission.

Further reading

Millington, N. T. (2011). Using songs effectively to teach English to young learners. Language Education in Asia, 2(1), 134–141. https://doi.org/10.5746/LEiA/11/V2/I1/A11/Millington

Shen, C. (2009). Using English songs: An enjoyable and effective approach to ELT. English Language Teaching, 2(1), 88-94. These readings are held separately in the teacher archive. This guide presents activity plans, not measured learning outcomes.