

*Teacher's Notes for:
English through songs and their cultural
background.*

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"A song for Ireland"



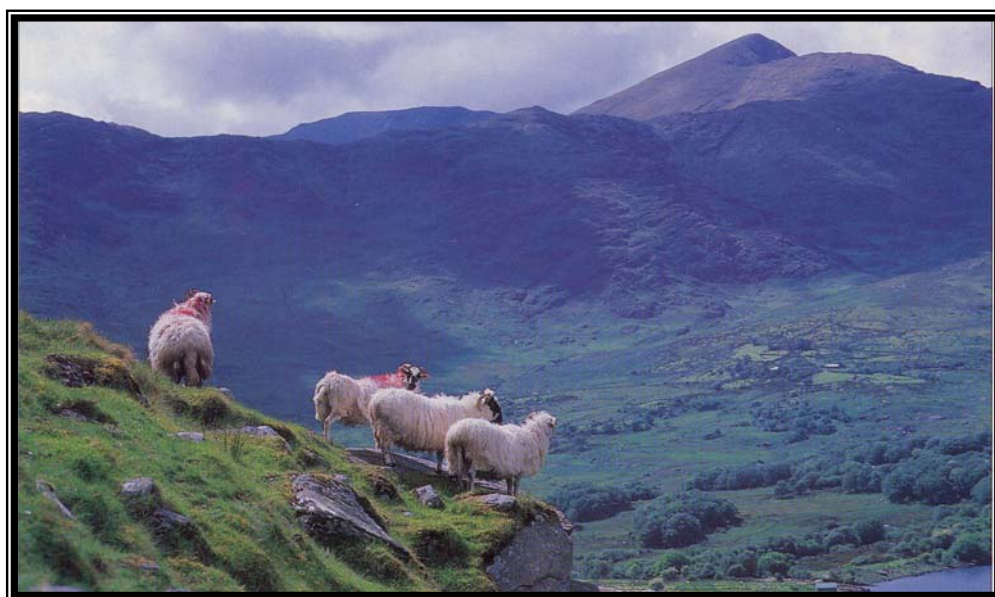
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A song for Ireland (Traditional Irish song)

This lesson has been designed for students of 4º E.S.O. or 1st year of Bachillerato, although its contents may be adapted to lower or higher levels.

Contents:

1. Cultural background: Ireland in “*A song for Ireland.*”
2. Grammar:
Past Simple and Past Continuous.
Relative pronouns: who, where.
Ellipsis of To Be forms in the Past Continuous.
Grammar activities.
3. Specific vocabulary.
4. Reading: “*Stories, music and dancing.*”
5. Listening to the song.
6. Fill in the gaps activity.
7. Ireland in songs.
8. Useful bibliography.



1. Cultural background. Ireland in “A song for Ireland”.

Ireland is a strange and interesting country. It has beautiful high mountains, wide empty beaches, long deep rivers. People go there to fish and swim and walk. They love Ireland because it is so quiet, and because the Irish people are so nice and friendly. This love for Ireland is the topic of our song: *A song for Ireland*.

Ireland is a country of stories and music. Most Irish people can sing, and many famous musicians are Irish. Most Irish people speak English and a lot of the most famous writers in the English language are Irish. But some people in Ireland do not speak English at all. They speak their own language, Gaelic.

Most Irish people go to church, but Ireland is not always quite and peaceful. Since 1968, thousands of people have died in Northern Ireland. But most Irish people are not interested in the fighting. This song also speaks about these problems.

The island of Ireland is low in the middle, and high on the outside. Because of this, the middle of Ireland is full of beautiful lakes and rivers, where people fish and sail. Most of Ireland's mountains are near the sea. They are not very high –the highest is Carrantuohill, in the south-west. But they are beautiful, and good places to walk. At Moher, in the west of Ireland, you can look 200 metres straight down into the sea. The giant's Causeway, in the north, is made of strange rocks two metres high, with six sides.

Much of the north and west of Ireland is very beautiful. There are hundreds of flowers in the green fields, and the beaches are wide and empty. The weather is warm and wet –there is rain and sun nearly every day.

All Ireland's important cities –Dublin, Belfast, Londonderry, Galway, Limerick. Cork and Waterford –are near the sea. In “*A song for Ireland*”, the seas and the rivers are also important, and therefore they are mentioned several times.



2. Grammar:

Past Simple and Past Continuous:

Past Simple:

We use the Past Simple to talk about completed actions in the past.

Affirmative.

I/You/We/ They *worked*

last night.

He/She/It *worked*

last night.

Negative.

I/You/We/They *didn't work*

last night.

He/She/It *didn't work*

last night.

Interrogative

Did I/you/we/they

work last night?

Did he/she/it work

last night?

Past Continuous:

We use the Past Continuous to talk about: unfinished actions in the past; a past action which was interrupted by another action; a number of actions which were happening at the same time.

Affirmative.

I was playing outside

You/We/They were playing

outside.

He/She/it was playing outside.

Negative.

I wasn't playing outside.

You/We/They were playing

outside.

He/She/It wasn't playing.

Interrogative.

Was I playing?

Were You/We/

They playing ?

Was he/she/it playing?

Relative pronouns: who, where:

Who is a relative pronoun referring to people, and it appears after a noun making reference to it. "This is the woman who came before."

"These are the musicians who play in the pub."

Where is a relative pronoun referring to places, and it appears after a place-noun making reference to it. "This is the place where I'd like to live."

"Dolan's is the pub where these musicians play."

Ellipsis of To Be forms in the Past Continuous:

Sometimes, when writing, we may not write *was/were* in the Past Continuous tense if we understand we are speaking about past actions. For example, in "A song for Ireland" we do not write "We were" before ...walking all the day/ ...dreaming in the night/...living on your western shore.

Grammar exercises:

- Fill in the gaps with a suitable form of the PAST SIMPLE.

- a) Sam _____ (not used to) go to the cinema when he was younger.
- b) _____ Benigni _____ (win) an Oscar last year?
- c) She _____ (hate) classical music that is why she _____ (not/go) to the theatre.
- d) Mike _____ (hurt) his leg with his motorbike and nobody _____ (take) him to hospital.
- e) Why _____ (the actor/choose) the worst role in the film?
- f) When I _____ (come into) his villa the dog _____ (run after) me and it _____ (bite) me.

- Fill in the gaps with the correct form of the PAST CONTINUOUS:

- a) How many apples _____ (you/cut) yesterday before dinner?
- b) Why _____ (your mum/scream) as _____ (your brother/cry)
- c) When I got out of the car the tree branches _____ (freeze)
- d) Sue _____ (drink) heavily when I found her last evening -she _____ (have) some alcohol and she said that she _____ (not/feel) very well.
- e) While we _____ (ride) on the rollercoaster it started to snow.
- f) _____ (the people/laugh) at your birthday party?
- g) _____ (it/rain) when you arrived in London?

- Write the right form of the PAST SIMPLE or the PAST CONTINUOUS.

“Dear Chiaran,

We _____ (have) a terrible flight back to the States last month. First of all, as John and I _____ (get into) the plane, the air hostess _____ (say) to us that our seats _____ (be) apart. Later, I _____ (go) to my seat and found this horrible big fat man who _____ (smoke) a stinky cigar. While he _____ (smoke), he also _____ (listen) to some very loud music and I

-----*(can) hear it perfectly and with no effort. Some time later during our flight, a frightening storm suddenly-----*(begin) and the plane -----*(start) to move awkwardly up and down. While some small children -----*(cry), the captain -----*(explain) through the loudspeaker that the storm -----*(get) stronger. I was very scared and I -----*(not know) what to do. I -----*(look) at John all the time -he -----*(sit) some rows behind me. However, he -----*(not look) at me!! Can you believe it? He -----*(sleep) placidly like a child!! It -----*(be) my first and last flight. I can promise you that. Love, Diane. “************

3. Specific vocabulary:

Students may find useful to look for these words from the song in their dictionaries.

- Nest:
- Breast:
- Shore:
- Sunset:
- To dart:
- Fiddler:
- Bow:
- Reel:
- Cast:
- Foam:

4. Reading. “Stories, music and dancing.”

Many of Ireland’s most famous writers lived in Dublin. Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) was a churchman here. In his book Gulliver’s Travels, a man called Gulliver visits the strange country of Lilliput, where all people are about ten centimetres high. Then he visits Brobdingnag, where the people are twenty metres high; and another country, where horses are cleverer than people.

James Joyce (1882-1941) wrote all his stories about Dublin. His most famous book, Ulysses, is the story of everything that one man, Leopold Bloom, does in Dublin in one day. The book has 700 pages.

Every year of June 16 (‘Bloomsday’) people visit Dublin to talk about Ulysses and to visit the places in the story.

Samuel Beckett (1906-89) won the Nobel Prize for his work in the theatre. His play Waiting for Godot is about two poor men waiting for a man called Godot. Perhaps Godot is a man, perhaps he is God –they do not know. But Godot never comes.

Irish people love a good story, and these three famous Irish writers wrote very strange, interesting stories. A modern Irish writer, Seamus Heaney, won the Nobel Prize, too, in 1995, for his poetry.

Today, Ireland is also famous for its musicians. Bob Geldof sang with a group called the Boomtown Rats, and, in 1985, he planned some concerts called Band Aid and Live Aid to get money to help poor hungry people in Africa. One of the groups who played at these concerts was called U2. U2 are four Dublin men called Bono, Larry, The Edge and Adam Clayton. The boys are Christians and they called themselves 'U2' or 'you too' because they think you are important too. Westlife is another Irish pop group.

Most people in Ireland love music. People sing in pubs in every Irish town, and many people in other countries can listen to Irish songs on television. The Irish dancers Riverdance are famous too, all over the world.

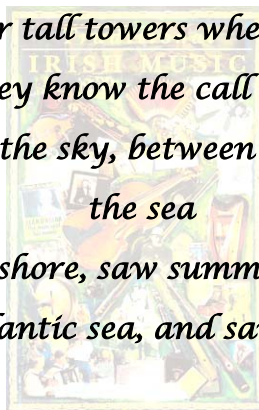
Answer these questions about the text:

1. *How tall are the people living in Lilliput?*
2. *Which city did James Joyce write about?*
3. *What happens on "Bloomsday"?*
4. *Who is Godot?*
5. *Which Irish writer won a Nobel prize for his poetry in 1995?*
6. *What did Bob Geldof plan in 1985 to help poor people in Africa?*
7. *What does 'U2' mean?*
8. *What is Westlife?*
9. *What is Riverdance?*
10. *What do you think about Irish music?*

5. Listen to the song.

*Walking all the day, near tall towers where falcons build their nests
Silver winged they fly, they know the call of freedom in their breasts
Soar Black Head against the sky, between the rocks that run down to
the sea*

*Living on your western shore, saw summer sunsets, asked for more
I stood by your Atlantic sea, and sang a song for Ireland*



*Talking all the day with true friends, who try to make you stay
Telling jokes and news, singing songs to pass the night away
Watched the Galway salmon run like silver dancing darting in the sun
Living on your western shore saw summer sunsets, asked for more
I stood by your Atlantic sea, and sang a song for Ireland*

*Drinking all the day in old pubs, where fiddlers love to play
Someone touched the bow, he played a reel, it seemed so fine and gay
Stood on Dingle beach and cast - in wild foam we found Atlantic Bass
Living on your western shore, saw summer sunsets asked for more
I stood by your Atlantic sea, and sang a song for Ireland*

*Dreaming in the night, I saw a land where no man had to fight
Waking in your dawn, I saw you crying in the morning light
Lying where the Falcons fly, they twist and turn all in you e'er blue sky
Living on your western shore, saw summer sunsets asked for more
I stood by your Atlantic sea, and I sang a song for Ireland.*

6. Fill in the gaps activity.

Students listen to the song and fill in the gaps with the correct word. The words taken out of the text are those belonging to the Past tenses studied throughout the lesson and also some words they should have looked up in the dictionary.

_____ all the day, near tall towers _____ falcons build their nests
Silver winged they fly, they know the call of freedom in their breasts
Soar Black Head against the sky, between the rocks that run down to the sea
_____ on your western shore, _____ summer sunsets, _____ for more
I _____ by your Atlantic sea, and _____ a song for Ireland.

_____ all the day with true friends, _____ try to make you stay
_____ jokes and news, _____ songs to pass the night away
_____ the Galway salmon run like silver dancing darting in the sun

_____ on your western shore, _____ summer sunsets, _____ for more
I _____ by your Atlantic sea, and _____ a song for Ireland.

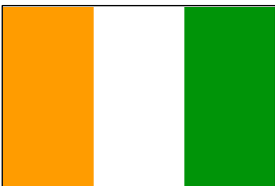
_____ all the day in old pubs, _____ fiddlers love to play
Someone touched the bow, he played a reel, it seemed so fine and gay
Stood on Dingle beach and cast - in wild foam we _____ Atlantic Bass
_____ on your western shore, _____ summer sunsets, _____ for more
I _____ by your Atlantic sea, and _____ a song for Ireland.

_____ in the night, I saw a land _____ no man had to fight
_____ in your dawn, I _____ you crying in the morning light
_____ where the Falcons fly, they twist and turn all in you e'er blue sky
_____ on your western shore, _____ summer sunsets, _____ for more
I _____ by your Atlantic sea, and _____ a song for Ireland.

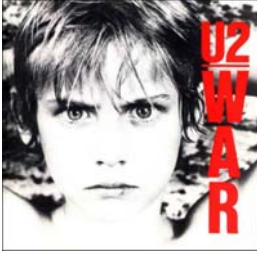
7. Ireland in songs.

As we have seen, Ireland, with its history, people and special treats, has always been present in all kinds of music, dances and artistic interpretations. Although students may think that all songs speaking about the country are old and traditional and perhaps a bit far away from their likings, we may suggest a number of contemporary artists and musicians whose songs may reach more easily our students. Here is a short list of contemporary artists singing about Ireland:

- “*The Soldier’s song*” : The Irish national emblem can be used as a means of showing Ireland in its most patriotic way. This song does not only reflect the love for one’s country but it also portrays a good description of Ireland’s magnificent natural landscapes.



*In valley green, on towering crag,
Our fathers fought before us,
And conquered 'neath the same old flag
That's proudly floating o'er us.*



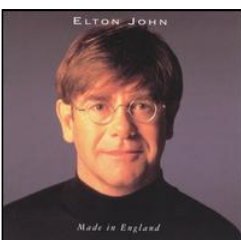
- “*Sunday Bloody Sunday*”, by U2, (*War* album, 1983): This is ideal for the purpose of tackling an until recently tragic situation as it is the killings of people by the I.R.A. It is also useful to explain the political situation which gave rise to these terrorist attacks.

*And the battle's just begun
There's many lost, but tell me who has won
The trench is dug within our hearts
And mothers, children, brothers, sisters torn apart*



- “*Zombie*”, by The Cranberries, (*No need to argue* album, 1994): Another Irish group talking about terror, bombings and tragedy in Ireland. With references to the 1916 Easter Rising, this song by the Limerick band can also be used to explain the Irish separation from the United Kingdom and the consequences deriving from it.

*It's the same old theme since 1916,
In your head, in your head, they're still fighting.
With their tanks, and their bombs,
and their bombs, and their bombs,
In your head, in your head,
They are dying.*



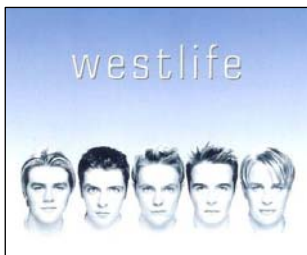
- “*Belfast*”, by Elton John, (*Made in England* album, 1994): Yet another song dealing with the same, but perhaps in this case it would be worth noticing that Elton John is British. Ireland's problems do not only worry national artists. Sorry and hope for the future may be extracted from the lines of this song.

*No bloody boots, or crucifix,
Can ever hope to split this emerald island.
But I never saw a braver place, Belfast.*



- “*This is where I belong*” by Boyzone (*Where we belong* album, 1998): A merrier song talking about one’s wishes to come back to Ireland. Nowhere else can the singers of this song find what Ireland has to offer, the same as in *A song for Ireland*.

*Many a road that I’ve travelled, that’s led me astray,
Here’s where my heart’s gonna stay,
This is where I belong, this is where I come from,
No need to shed my tears or face my fears anymore...*



- “*My love*”, by Westlife, (*Coast to Coast* album, 1999): Again, the wishes for coming back to Ireland move our artists, who can’t wait for the moment of returning home.

*So I say a little prayer, and hope my dreams will take me there,
Where the skies are blue, to see you once again, my love.
Over seas, from coast to coast, to find the place I love the most,
Where the fields are green, to see you once again, my love.*

(Besides the songs, available video-clips from *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, *Zombie* and *My Love* could be used in the lesson, as they depict clear images of Ireland and the topics dealt with in them. More particularly, the *Sunday Bloody Sunday* video-clip has strong images of street-violence and military marches; *Zombie* uses children dressed as paramilitaries in its video-clip to highlight the darkest side of the crisis; and *My Love* is shot at the unique surroundings of the Cliffs of Moher, where Ireland’s natural appeal gets to its highest.)

8. Bibliography:

Some useful information concerning Ireland, its traditions, history and legends can be found in :

- a. Magnus Mclean, *The Literature of the Celts*, Senate, London, 1902.
- b. Michael Scott, *Irish Myths and Legends*, Warner Books, Bristol, 1992.
- c. Tim Vicary, *Ireland*, Oxford Bookworms 2, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998.