Note-worthy Language
Using music to build second language proficiency and cultural knowledge
Curriculum ideas for teachers of world languages and English Language Development
By: Nicole Naditz, National Board Certified Teacher of French
2010

As a world language teacher (high school French), I frequently incorporate music into my standards-based lessons for many reasons: to practice learned vocabulary and structures; to demonstrate understanding of learned vocabulary and structures; to facilitate student creativity in the target language; to provide a window to authentic products of the cultures that speak the language being studied; to study a theme of concern to the culture/society; and finally, to address the diverse learning styles and interests of my students.
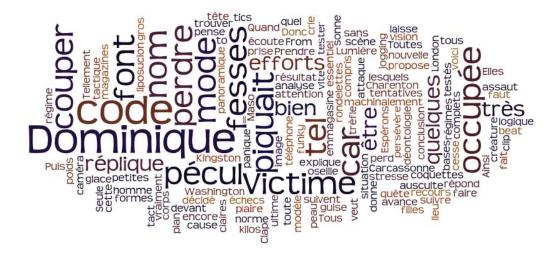
This guide includes examples of activities originally used in my French classes (levels 1-AP language) and in teacher trainings I have conducted for teachers of all languages, including English as a Second Language. Many of the activities presented here can be used in combination. For example, a teacher might start with a cloze activity (section 1) and then ask the students to rewrite the song in the third person (also section 1), before having the students create a strip booklet inspired by the song (section 3). Note also that the descriptions are in English so that all language teachers may use the activities, but the activities are intended to be done *in the target language*. As a result, these activities are designed to work with music from any language.

Activities such as the ones presented in this guide help teachers design varied means through which to assess their students' language proficiency in the various categories of their state's world language standards. In California, these activities would address the "Content," "Cultures," and "Communications" areas of the *World Language Standards for California Public Schools, K-12*. Some also address "Structures," depending on how the activity is designed or on what facets of the target language the teacher wishes to assess with the activity. The specific elements of each category of the standards depend upon the song and the nature of the activities designed with the songs. Furthermore, these activities are aligned to the Communication, Cultures, and Communities threads of the *National Standards for Foreign Language Teaching*, published by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

The following numbered sections provide examples of many ways in which music can be used in language classrooms. Following the numbered sections, you will find the appendix, which includes student directions and activity masters for a lesson based on the song "She's Leaving Home" by John Lennon and Paul McCartney (© 1967). These activities would be appropriate for students learning English and demonstrate many of the activities described in the numbered sections below.

1. **Pre-listening activities to prepare students for the content of the song**: much like any piece of literature, students' ability to work with the language in music is often enhanced if they are *prepared* to listen. Try the following activities before listening to a song.
   a. Vocab sorts (see "Pre-listening activity" in the appendix):
      i. pre-select some words from the song. Most should be words the students know, but the set may include a small percentage of new words, especially if the words are cognates with the students' native language and/or if they are in the same family as words the students already know. Put each word on its own index card or slip of paper. Make enough sets to distribute to each group (or have groups copy the set from the board or projector).
      ii. Give each group of students the set of vocabulary words.
      iii. Ask them to sort the words any way they'd like. For example, they may choose to group words by part of speech, by theme, or try to tell a story with the words.
      iv. Have them select a representative to go to another group.
      v. Each group explains their group's system for organizing the words to the new "representative" that has arrived.
      vi. Representatives return to their home groups and explain the systems they learned about when they visited new groups.
      vii. Whole-class debrief.
   b. Make a list: Instead of teachers creating a list, such as in Activity A above, teachers may want students to make a list themselves before listening. Depending on the topic of the song, students might make a list of vocabulary words or phrases they know related to the song. When songs talk about a specific subject that includes a lot of vocabulary the students know, making a list before listening can help the brain get ready to hear a song on that topic. For example, for a song dealing with the environment, students make a list of what they are doing to protect the environment before listening to the song.
   c. Think-pair-share and/or discussion or journal write: if the song tells a story, a good way to prepare students to listen to the song is to have them conduct a survey (with questions prepared by the teacher) that asks about scenarios similar to those in the song. This allows students to have done some thinking and discussing that will personalize the content of the song for them when they do listen. Here are two survey ideas that will work depending on the content of the song:
      i. "Have you ever...?"—a survey. For example in a song that talks about relationships, questions might include "Have you ever had a fight with a good friend?" "Have you ever wished you said something differently to someone?" "Have you ever wished you didn't say anything at all?", etc. Students circulate around the room (or within their groups) asking the survey questions and collecting data. Data is reviewed and discussed with the class before listening to the song.

ii. "What do you do when...?" This activity sets students up to already be thinking about the vocabulary or main idea of the song. For example, in French 3, I use a classic 1960's pop song (*7h00 du matin*) about a girl getting ready in the morning. Before listening, students might either discuss what they do in the morning to get ready for school or they do a journal write on the same topic.

d. Wordles (word clouds): for languages that use the Roman alphabet, teachers can paste the lyrics of the song into http://www.wordle.net. The Web site will then generate a word cloud of the most frequently occurring words in the song. Teachers then show the students the word cloud and have them make predictions about the song they are about to hear. The teacher notes the predictions on the board to revisit after listening to the song. In fact, after doing any of the activities above, it's a good idea to have students make predictions about the song they are about to hear. Even if their predictions are incorrect, they have given themselves a reason to listen attentively to the song because they want to know if their predictions were right. Predictions can be noted on the whiteboard, on an overhead, or typed into a word-processing program and displayed with an LCD. Students can even write predictions on large post-it notes and place them somewhere visible while they listen to the song. If possible, teachers and students should revisit the predictions after listening to the song. Here is a wordle generated by Wordle.net after pasting in all the lyrics from the French song "*Victime de la mode*" (Victim of fashion) by MC Solaar. Students made predictions about the song before listening by looking at this word cloud of the lyrics:

2. **Music to practice learned vocabulary and structures**: one of the best reasons to use authentic from the cultures that speak the target language the students are learning is because these songs demonstrate how native speakers use the same material we teach in class. This makes the language much more realistic—and what is taught in class

becomes much less artificial from the students' points of view. Students see that the same words and structures we are teaching really are used to communicated ideas by native speakers. When you find a song that includes several examples of language the students already know, try some of these activities to provide additional practice:

    a. cloze activities (appendix, activity 2): teacher removes words/phrases from the student copy of the song lyrics based on the material taught. Students complete the lyrics by filling in the words/phrases as they hear them in the song. I often do this with songs that have many examples of a certain structure we have been practicing, such as descriptions, talking about present or past actions, etc. It is a good idea to be prepared to play the song two or three times. I let my students work individually while the song is playing the first time. Then, they compare with a partner. This isn't a test; ultimately, having them talk about what they heard or didn't hear

    b. rewriting activities: given a song in the first person, the students rewrite it in the third person, making all necessary changes. Students can also change the tense of the song (from present to past, for example). Many other transformations are possible, depending on the level of the students and the content of the song.

3. **Music to demonstrate understanding of learned vocabulary and structures**: if songs are like literature, then students can demonstrate understanding of the literal and figurative meaning of the song lyrics similar to how they might do this in a language arts class. Depending on the proficiency level of the students, one or more of the following activities may be appropriate to assess student understanding of the lyrics:

    a. Checklists (appendix, activity 1): As students listen to the song, they put a check mark by each picture that represents something mentioned in the song. For example, in one French children's song, many members of the family are discussed. Teachers could provide students with a family tree in French. As the students listen to the song, they place a check mark next to each family member that is mentioned in the song.

    b. Illustrate the song: this could be done many ways. Using the example of the children's song about the family, another possibility is to have the students draw and label the family tree of the family described in the song. Truly, almost any song can be illustrated. Teachers can decide if they want a one-page copy of the lyrics with images accompanying them (to show that the students understood the words) or perhaps changing the song into a storybook, with one or two lines of the song's lyrics plus an image on each page.

    c. Answer questions about song (appendix, activity 3): like any text, teachers could choose to ask comprehension questions or language questions about the song

    d. student-led discussion of themes (a Socratic seminar would be wonderful to discuss songs with rich themes in advanced classes). This is particularly appropriate in intermediate or advanced classes using songs that take on cultural, historical and/or societal issues. Teachers encourage students to not only analyze the lyrics

but also the nuances of the music: rhythm, instrumentation, etc., and their effect on the impressions of the listener.

4. **Using music to facilitate student creativity in the target language**: many of these activities will be familiar to teachers of English Language Arts. They are activities that successfully enable students to personalize their connection to a text, which in this case will be a song. English teachers often do these activities after reading a piece of literature, or even after reading multiple pieces of literature examining a common theme.

   a. Structured poems inspired by the song: Ultimately, teachers will provide directions with the structure to be used, picking a structure that is appropriate for the students' levels as well as for the content of the song the students will be studying. Many of these "structured poem" formats are used in elementary level English Language Arts classes. Since language learners are also at an elementary level in their new language, this format is very well suited to their abilities in their target language. Two common "structured poem" examples for use with music follow, but teachers are encouraged to create their own prompts based on the music they select and on their students' prior knowledge in the language :

      i. "I know poem": each line may begin with "I know...", although often the poem is more interesting if this is removed in the final copy. The copy could be submitted with illustrations (providing another means to check comprehension of the song) or the students could use online programs such as voicethread.com or animoto.com to record their poems. A typical pattern for this poem would be as follows:

         1. I know <u>title of song</u>
         2. I know <u>one sound related to the story of the song</u>
         3. I know <u>two sights related to the story of the song</u>
         4. I know <u>three feelings generated by the song's story</u>
         5. I know <u>two actions (verbs) associated with the story of the song</u>
         6. I know <u>one adverb related to the song's story</u>
         7. I know <u>title of the song</u>
            As mentioned earlier, encourage students to read their new poem both ways when they are finished editing: once keeping the words "I know" at the beginning of every line, and once with the words "I know" removed. Many students find their poems more powerful when "I know" is removed, but this is a matter of choice.

      ii. "Structured poem" in another style: Diamond poem (appendix activity 5).
         1. A "diamond poem" basically has the shape of a diamond when it is finished. In order for this to happen, the lines of the poem start very short, and then get longer and longer until reaching the half-way point of the poem. From there the lines become shorter and shorter again until the end of the poem. If the theme of the song allows it, this can be an interesting way to show how a theme is addressed in a song,

particularly for advanced classes. Lower level classes may simply select words from the song and put a certain number of words per line—or words of a certain number of letters per line—as specified by the teacher so that the poem has a diamond shape when finished.

 b. Concrete poetry based on the song

  i. Concrete poetry means that students write the words in such a way that the shape of the letters demonstrates the meaning of the word, so that the meaning becomes "concrete". Here's an example with the French word *chat*: By looking at the letter "a" in the word below, can you tell what a *chat* is?

   In concrete poetry (sometimes also called a concrete collage), students pick several words from the song (or any other text) and place them on the page in such a way that the shape of the letters, color, and even how they are positioned on the page all contribute to explaining the theme of the song. Students can explain their choices in the target language during a "gallery walk" or another presentation format.

 c. Strip booklet with a variety of tasks that require analysis and explanation of the story told by the song (all in the target language, of course). As the tasks get longer, so do the strips on which they are written. By necessity, the exact tasks will vary based on the story told by the song, but a strip book in a song about a relationship that isn't really working out (might have the following strips (photos or other illustrations can be provided)

  i. strip 1 (shortest): title of song, artist, name of student

  ii. strip 2: a number that represents the theme of the song and why and a color that represents the song and why

  iii. strip 3: a journal entry from the point of view of the main character of the song

  iv. strip 4: a dialog between the main character and another person mentioned in the song

  v. Strip 5: a dialog between the main character and the student; what would the student like to tell this character if s/he were the character's friend?

  vi. Strip 6: an "I know" poem inspired by the song (see activity "a" above).

  vii. Once the text has been completed on each strip, the strips are put in order with strip 1 on top and strip 6 at the bottom. Punch two holes across the top (through all the strips) and fasten with string. There is a more creative option for making strip books with interesting edges or borders as well.

For a video tutorial on how to make this type of student project book, go to the Note-worthy Language Wiki: http://noteworthylanguage.wikispaces.com/.

d. Secret books: More advanced students can analyze songs for the obvious story and for the "hidden" messages or meaning. A secret book has an obvious portion that all readers see and then "secret" compartments that only those who know how to open them will see. This is ideal for songs that contain a lot of symbolism.

   The Note-worthy Language Wiki (http://noteworthylanguage.wikispaces.com/) also contains a video tutorial for how to make the Secret Book.

e. Rewrite the song, or rewrite a portion of the song, while observing the meter and rhyme scheme. Students can do this with traditional or contemporary music. It is particularly useful for songs that include some vocabulary they already know but also have portions with words they don't know. The words they didn't know can be replaced with additional vocabulary they have studied.

f. Wordles (word clouds) part 2: Students decide on the most important words in the song they studied (which may not be the words that occur the most often). They type those words into wordle.com in order to generate a word cloud. Once the cloud is generated, students should experiment with font style, colors, and cloud forms in order to have a word cloud that is truly representative of the message of the song. Students will hang their clouds in a classroom "gallery" and discuss how their word cloud represents the song by explaining their choices for color, words, form, etc., while other students (and possibly invited guests who also speak the target language) visit the "gallery". This is especially successful if the teacher used a word cloud to introduce the song before listening: students often disagree with how wordle.com chose and organized the words. Since the teacher just put all the lyrics into wordle, the Web site makes a cloud based on frequency—how often words appear in the lyrics. Wordle assumes that words that appear more often are more important. Students often choose different words to represent the theme of the song, including many words that only occur one time. They make those words "important" to wordle.com by typing them in more than once. As a result, students should be encouraged to use the target language to compare the wordles they created with the one generated by wordle.com. Here is the word cloud students created after listening to the song *Victime de la mode*:

When one compares the word cloud generated by pasting all the lyrics (see activity 1d above) and the word cloud the students generated by only using the words they found essential to the message of the song, the students' word cloud was much more precise and their message was further aided by their choice of color, font and style so that students used multiple elements to convey meaning.

    g. Assume the role of a character in the song with journal writes, letters, etc. (appendix activities 6 and 7)

5. Music to provide a window to authentic cultures that speak the language

    a. By using authentic music (music written and intended for native speakers of the language), we are automatically providing students with opportunities to see the cultures that speak the language through the same lens and native speakers. Additionally, we are giving students opportunities to hear the language used in context and in ways that represent normal use of words and structures by native speakers. Activities such as the ones below maximize the cultural aspects of using music while still practicing language:

        i. Children's songs and folk songs often include very thematic vocabulary. For example, in French, one can find children's songs about family, food, clothes, and animals. These lend themselves naturally to some of the activities above, such as cloze activities and rewriting activities, as well as creating illustrated copies of the song to demonstrate understanding of the learned vocabulary. By teaching children's songs, we are also giving students opportunities to experience the same musical "upbringing" that native speakers of the language received as children. Many children's songs also contain historical or cultural references that lend themselves to additional cultural instruction.

        ii. Play music during class work: this is a great way to pique students' interest in the music of the cultures that speak the language. Students will often request the name of the artist and purchase tracks off of iTunes after hearing them in class. In addition, playing music during student work time allows the teacher to expose students to a variety of genres of music, including some

that are typically not heard in the United States. For example, as a French teacher one might play French, Canadian, Cajun, Haitian, and African music using a variety of rhythms, melody and harmony styles and traditional instruments not heard on American radio. Furthermore, playing music as background to class work also makes it possible to incorporate songs that may otherwise be too difficult for your students to use as a language activity, but that students can appreciate musically.

    iii. Provide a "playlist" of creative-commons-licensed music by target-language artists for use in multi-media projects.

    iv. Encourage students who enjoy singing to learn target-language music for performance events. For example, my students go Christmas caroling at a local retirement home. To prepare for this, students must learn a repertoire of new music. This builds their cultural knowledge, vocabulary and pronunciation skills. In the spring, we sometimes return to the retirement home for "spring caroling" using folk songs and children's songs from around the French-speaking world. I encourage students who like to sing to perform French music at the talent show or to participate in other events (often ones I have organized), such as a French café night or a multilingual cultural performance for the community.

    v. Teach students songs that are sung at specific times in the cultures that speak the language. For example, I don't teach the birthday song sung in France, because it's just a translation of the American birthday song. Instead, I teach the students a song sung in Quebec (French-speaking Canada). The song, *Gens du pays*, was symbolic of the Silent Revolution in the 1960s and became such a part of the Quebec culture, that even today, the chorus of that song is adapted for use at birthdays, promotions, etc. By teaching my students this song, I'm also able to provide a window into the history and perspectives of one segment of the French-speaking population.

6. **Music to study themes of cultural or societal interest**

    a. This is typically done with advanced classes: teachers select music with a social message. In my French classes, we study music that examines facets of immigration and racism; music regarding the role of the Vichy regime in WWII France; and songs that call upon the public to protect the environment, among others. Often our study of these songs will begin with some of the activities in Sections 1 and 2 before progressing to more challenging and open-ended activities in section 3. Our WWII unit includes a final project that requires students to create a personal response to the themes they studied. Some students choose to compose and record a musical piece and then write in French about their composition. In this way, the music I provided was not only the vehicle for studying a theme of cultural significance, but it also became the method by which the students chose to demonstrate the impact of this unit of study on their own lives and perspectives.

Appendix:

Pre- During- and Post-listening activities for the song "She's Leaving Home" by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, © 1967. Activities created by Nicole Naditz.

Pre-listening: Choose 10 words from the list on the left and put them in an order that makes sense to you on the right. <u>Note to teachers</u>: this can also be done by giving each group of students a re-closable plastic bag with the words below cut out in strips. The groups then work to decide on an order and physically place the strips on their desks or tables in the order they have selected.

appointment	
baby	
bedroom	
bye bye	
cries	
daddy	
door	
father	
five o'clock	
Friday	
home	
husband	
is leaving	
kitchen	
letter	
man	
morning	
nine o'clock	
one	
she	
stairs	
Wednesday	
why	
wife	
years	

Make a prediction about the song you will listen to: _____

She's Leaving Home

Listening comprehension activity 1

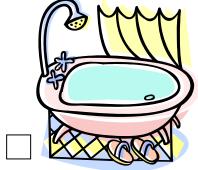First, finish spelling the days of the week below. Then, listen to the song and:
- put an "X" through the days of the week and the times that you hear and
- check off the rooms that are mentioned:

M	T	W	Th	F	Sa	S

1:00	3:00	5:00	7:00	9:00	11:00

☐ _____ ☐ _____

☐ _____ ☐ _____

Now, label all of the rooms above on the lines provided.

Listening comprehension: activity 2 : You will now receive an incomplete copy of the lyrics

Listen to the song again and complete the write in the missing lyrics on your sheet.

Language development: Activity 3

Read through the lyrics again and write on the lines below all of the words that identify the following people in the song (you may add more words than the number of lines):

the mom   _____

                 _____

the dad   _____

                 _____

                 _____

the daughter _____

                 _____

the other person in the song: _____

Comprehension and discussion: Activity 4—re-order the words and discuss
Pick 10 words again, this time based on your understanding of the song and put them in an order
that helps you explain the song. <u>Note to teachers</u>: like the pre-listening activity, this can be done
with the words cut into individual strips and placed in a plastic bag.

appointment	
baby	
bedroom	
bye bye	
cries	
daddy	
door	
father	
five o'clock	
Friday	
home	
husband	
is leaving	
kitchen	
letter	
man	
morning	
nine o'clock	
one	
she	
she	
stairs	
Wednesday	
why	
wife	
years	

<u>Creativity with Language: Activity 5</u>
Use five of the words we have talked about today (from these activity pages and the ones you filled in on the lyrics) to make a *diamante* poem about the song. Arrange the words you've selected as follows:
3 letters
4 or 5 letters
6 or more letters
4 or 5 letters
3 letters

When you're done, right one sentence (in the target language) about the song that helps explain your short poem. You may add punctuation, but you don't have to.

Example (from the song "Beat It" by Michael Jackson):

Run!
Beat it!
Disappear!
Leave,
man.
A person wants to fight the boy but he needs to leave because fighting is wrong.

Challenge activities for more advanced students

Activity 6

Choose one of the following written projects:

A.   Write the letter that the daughter left before leaving.
B.   Write a diary entry for the daughter.
C.   Everything turned out fine. Write a letter home from the daughter one month later.

Activity 7

Choose one of the following oral projects. All projects must last at least three minutes.

A.   It is the night before the daughter leaves. Have a conversation between the mom and daughter, the dad and daughter, OR the mom and dad
B.   It is the next day after the song. Have a conversation between the mom and dad.
C.   Prepare a photo album of the family. Include pictures of the parents, the daughter and their house. Show us the photo album and describe the family. You may either create a paper photo album to share, or you may use digital media tools to make a photo slide show that you will describe to us while the pictures are being displayed. Use your imagination and include the following:
- their names
- their ages
- where they live (city)
- description of their house
- parents' jobs
- likes and dislikes of all family members
- personalities of the family members