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THE PHOTOCOPIABLE RESOURCE Series

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Grammar Songs & Raps

For young learners and early teens



Introduction

Grammar Songs and Raps gives you 28 original songs and raps for the ELT classroom with a special focus on supporting the teaching of grammar; they are presented on two audio CDs together with teaching notes and two photocopiable handouts per song. The songs and raps cover a range of structures for beginners and elementary students (A1 and A2 according to the Common European Framework of References). *Grammar Songs and Raps* can be used as support material with any course book or language programme.

How to select a song

The table of contents and the Quick Reference Guide (pp. 138–139) make it easy to select a song or rap according to the language you are planning to teach or practise. Each of the songs or raps has a clear overview with a brief description of the language focus, the language level, a rough estimate of the time you will need to do the activities suggested, and the kind of preparation needed (for example which worksheets you need to copy). This is followed by extensive teaching notes ('In class') with suggestions on how to use each song or rap over two lessons ('Lesson 1' and 'Lesson 2'), each lasting between 10 and 45 minutes ('Time'). The teaching notes are arranged in clear and easy-to-follow steps, with drawings and examples of classroom discourse where necessary, as well as suggestions for extension activities. Answers to all activities and worksheets are included. The lyrics of each song or rap follow the teaching notes.

Photocopiable worksheets

There are up to three worksheets for each song or rap (Worksheets A, B and C). Worksheet A usually focuses on language and comprehension, with tasks to help students notice, remember and retrieve target structures. Worksheets B and C usually go beyond the song lyrics, with interactive activities and games that encourage students to use the target structures in different contexts. All explanations on classroom management and teaching techniques required in implementing the worksheet activities can be found in the teaching notes.

We are very much aware that the suggestions we are making in this book may need to be adapted for use in your specific classes. You may want to use the activities we are suggesting here, or you may want to develop your own activities around the songs and raps. The activities have been developed in such a way that they can easily be adapted to various language levels.

Introduction

Songs and raps and the teaching and learning of grammar

Young learners and early teens need a good balance of fun and language practice in order to be able to gradually develop language accuracy. Many – or even most – of them do not yet have a deep understanding of grammar rules. That is why many colleagues look for fun ways of supporting their teaching and practising of grammar. At the same time, teachers notice that young learners and teens often show a remarkable ability to pick up and remember chunks of language they come across in stories, pop songs and other forms of texts that they like. Such chunks of language often contain important language structures. Therefore using songs to help students remember strings of words, sentence fragments and sentences can be very valuable practice.

Parents frequently comment that it is amazing how well their kids remember the lyrics of pop songs and regret that when it comes to ‘serious learning’ memory retrieval seems to happen far less easily. This is not surprising. It’s a well-known fact that rhythm, rhyme and catchy tunes have a strong mnemonic function, and make language memorable – a phenomenon that is very successfully employed by people who design TV commercials and radio adverts. The songs and raps in this book have been written in such a way that they contain both useful language (in the form of lexical chunks), and the mnemonic devices mentioned above (rhythm, rhyme and catchy tunes). This means that the chances are high that important language will be remembered well by the students, and more easily transferred to their long-term memory.

Motivation

Many colleagues have noticed that authentic pop songs are not always greeted with enthusiasm by their students. On the face of it this sounds strange, but on further investigation it turns out that the teachers’ choices are rarely identical with the choices students themselves would make, whereas teachers are often not happy about songs that students would like to hear in the foreign language classroom. This is because the songs are either too demanding in terms of the language level, or their content and language turn out to be problematic from a pedagogical point of view; as a colleague recently commented, it seems quite difficult to find any authentic song lyrics these days without references to sex and drugs, or which don’t contain swearing!

All lyrics have been specifically written for the foreign language class. They can be used with beginners and elementary students. We have tried to get as much humour and fun into the lyrics as possible, as humour and fun are important support systems facilitating motivation and long-term memory recall.

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Luckily, when we work with young learners and early teens we can count on their enthusiasm for songs if their quality is good. Young learners and early teens are also normally keen to sing along with a song or join in a rap if the tune is catchy and/or the rhythm is riveting. The songs and raps you will find in this material have been developed with a specialist and trialled carefully in young learners' and early teens' classrooms. We are happy to say that the feedback we got from students was very positive, and colleagues working with our trial classes reported that their students became very engaged in singing along with the songs.

Language learning and songs

When students listen to a song or rap for the first time, they naturally want to understand what the lyrics are all about. If the song or rap is engaging, they will want to sing or chant along. Thus, songs are about developing the students' listening comprehension and about repeating important words, structures and chunks of language. The process of understanding the lyrics of a song is an interesting one as it often involves the gradual interpretation of the language in the song. When students listen for the first time they may not understand a lot. But if the song is intriguing, they will make their hypotheses about the meaning of the lyrics, and when they listen a second or a third time they can verify their hypothesis or change their initial interpretations. Thus, their comprehension gradually grows and they learn an important skill – to be persistent with trying to understand meaning and not to give up when they cannot understand everything immediately.

Songs and raps are also ideal for developing pronunciation, word stress and intonation patterns. In a song, important lexis, structures and chunks of language get repeated time and time again without the process becoming boring for the students. Imitation is an important element in that process – the more fun and engaging the students find a song or rap to be the more they will develop positive feelings about the language in the song or rap. This kind of affective dimension plays a very important role in the process of the students' learning of a foreign language.

The flashcards on the CD-ROM

Flashcards are useful in teaching the meaning of new words and in getting students to memorise them better. Flashcards are great timesavers and mean teachers do not have to draw on the board or look for or make suitable pictures. This is why CD 2 that comes with this book is not only an Audio CD, but a hybrid CD-ROM that offers you (on top of the songs it contains) the PDFs of all the flashcards we recommend using in the teaching notes.

We recommend you download the flashcards onto the hard drive of your computer and print the ones you need for whatever song you have selected for your class. Alternatively, you can print the flashcards directly from CD 2 without downloading the files.

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Teaching the songs

It is easier to hum or sing along with a song than to sing without the support of the audio, especially when the song we want to join in with is in a foreign language. This is why it is advisable to play the songs several times before students are asked to join in and sing along. When students hear a song several times, it will be easier for them to sing. Likewise, we might notice that students find it much easier to sing along with a song when the song gets revised in a follow-up lesson than they did the first time they came across it.

How to use the karaoke version of the raps

On the Audio CDs, you will find 18 songs and 10 raps. For each of the raps there is also a karaoke version on the Audio CD; this is a version without voices, where students hear just the musical instruments.

When you want to use the karaoke version of a rap, make sure your students have listened to the version with the voice(s) often enough to find it easy to chant along with the music. Many of the raps are in the form of a dialogue between a singer/speaker and a chorus of children, so when you use the karaoke version you may want to agree beforehand with the students in your class who says what. If you use the Pizza rap on p. 33, to give just one example, you could get half the class to do the first verse, the other half the second verse, and the whole class to do the chorus:

Half the class:

She doesn't eat carrots,
 She doesn't eat rice,
 She doesn't like onions:
 "Peas aren't nice!"

Other half:

She doesn't eat burgers –
 "No, they aren't good!"
 She doesn't eat chicken –
 "Just my favourite food –

Whole class:

"And that's pizza with cheese
 Pizza with cheese
 Pizza with cheese
 Can I have one, please?
 Pizza with cheese
 Pizza with cheese
 Can I have one, please?"

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Then get the students to carry on in a similar way.

Likewise, when a rap is in the form of a dialogue, one group (e.g. all the girls in the class) could ask the questions, whereas another group (e.g. all the boys) give the answers. An example of this would be the first part of the Hungry Monster rap on p. 37.

Girls: An egg?
Boys: No thanks.
Girls: A sausage?
Boys: No thanks.
Girls: An orange?
Boys: No thanks.
Girls: A yoghurt?
Boys: No thanks.
Girls: An apple?
Boys: No thanks.
Girls: A mango?
Boys: No thanks.
Girls: Aren't you hungry?
Boys: Yes, of course.
But I eat desks, and doors, and wooden floors.

Later, you could also encourage your students to change the words slightly, thus helping them develop their creative thinking skills.

Songs and raps help to relax and overcome shyness

When students can sing or chant along with a song or a rap, they can more easily enjoy the psychological shelter they get from their peer group being involved in a harmonious and unifying activity. This way, shyer students will easily overcome their inhibitions and enjoy imitating the sounds of the foreign language, and the rhythm of a song or rap can have a very stimulating and engaging effect on the group dynamics of a classroom. Thus, singing a song or doing a rap together is fun and can at the same time have a very positive effect on interaction among the students on the one hand and the students with their teacher on the other. This is because students will find it easier to relate well to their classmates and to their teacher if they enjoy their lessons.

We have enjoyed writing the songs and the activities and materials around them. It is our hope that you and your students enjoy using them as much as we did creating them!