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Country Music: Access to American Culture in the ESL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the use of country music lyrics in teaching American culture. Country music, as any aspect of popular culture, reflects the values of the society which produces and experiences it. The paper starts with a brief history of country music. Then the values of work, family, romantic love and individualism are analyzed and matched with appropriate songs. Within each value a dichotomy emerges: the contrast between a cultural ideal and a more ambiguous reality. The paper concludes with suggestions as to how the songs may be used in the ESL/EFL classroom. Included are nine transcriptions and lesson plans, with at least two songs representing each value.

ERIC DESCRIPTORS

Cross Cultural Studies, Culture, Cultural Activities, Cultural Awareness, English (Second Language), Music, Music Activities, Popular Culture.

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INTRODUCTION

1978 was the year I came to appreciate country music. The place was the Hawk-I Truck Stop, along Interstate 80 and a few miles out of Iowa City, Iowa. On the wall were glossy photographs of trucks and the hot beef sandwich was called the "Big 10-4." I served the food, poured the coffee, and joked with the truckers. And all the while the juke box played. There were happy songs and melancholy songs. There were on-the-road, lost love, and party songs. Some songs made me laugh or drum my fingers with the rhythm; others made me sigh and wonder about the personal sadness we all must endure as human beings. I worked at the truck stop for a year and a half, and I heard the same songs hundreds of times. "Mammas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys," "Good Hearted Woman," and "Sleeping Single in a Double Bed," were among the truckers' favorites. The songs never lost their appeal for me. Instead, each time I heard them, they seemed somehow truer. I changed the dial on my car radio to a country station.

Four years later I found myself teaching ESL in Minneapolis and always searching for new material. I brought in a tape of Hank Williams singing "Window Shopping." The song was well-suited for the listening exercise which I had intended: it was short, rhythmic, and clearly sung. There was one factor, though, which I had not taken into account, and that was the emotional appeal of the song:

> You don't feel love,
> You don't want real love,
> You're window shopping, that's all.

My class was mainly composed of lonely, unmarried men, and when Williams sang those words the students understood, in their hearts, what he was saying.

Although my friends, colleagues, and even students teased me, I continued to use country music. It worked. On the most basic level, the songs give students the satisfaction of understanding exactly what they hear. The rhythm and repetition of the songs make them excellent vehicles for reinforcing grammatical structures. The songs can also be used to point out relaxed speech, colloquial language, and idiomatic expressions in context. On a deeper level, though, and my primary concern in this paper, country music reflects certain basic American values, and illustrates how they are, at times, in conflict with each other. Country music is an easily accessible cultural artifact.

In this paper I show how an ESL teacher can use country music to teach American culture. I start with a brief overview of what country music is today and where it came from. The main body of the paper is a discussion of how country music expresses the American values of the work ethic, family, romantic love, and individualism. In the last section I give teaching suggestions and nine sample lesson plans.

OVERVIEW

The country music of today has its roots in the 19th and early 20th century music of the rural Southeast. Long before it had a label (an early one was "hillbilly") it was simply the music of the white settlers in isolated and often impoverished communities. Amateur musicians played at homes, barn dances and churches, their songs reflecting the "down home" values of family and a fundamentalist Christian religion. These early country music songs can be traced directly to the British and European origins of those who played them, yet scholars attribute the current use of guitar and the focus on realistic subject matter to the influence of black music and culture (Malone 2). This fusing of disparate musical traditions makes country music a truly American genre.

From its early roots country music became popularized with the growing availability of radio and phonographs in the 1920s and '30s. This meant the appearance of professional musicians, newly written songs, a homogenization of style, and a wider distribution of the music. At that point, music in the West started to influence country music. "Singing cowboys" such as the Sons of the Pioneers were popular, and cowboy attire became standard for all country singers. The "cowboys" offered Depression era Americans a romanticized version of their history and, by implication, of themselves. Western swing groups such as Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys offered dance as a means of escape from a dreary reality.

Country music before World War II was still, however, primarily a reflection of regional tastes and concerns. The music of the West spoke of rootlessness and the pioneer spirit, while in the Southeast the music

continued to be centered around family and religion. This regionalism faded in the decades which followed, leaving two basic themes of modern country music, "the deification of home" and "the glorification of the wanderer" (Malone 3), which have remained constant.

Then, as American society changed during and after World War II, so too did country music. Many rural southerners migrated to cities, both in the North and South, women worked in factories, and, after the war, returned to the home. Temptation, infidelity, and divorce became aspects of American family life, and continue to be mainstays in the subject repertoire of country music as well. The honky tonk was a place of solace, a place to meet people, dance, and drown one's sorrows. (Alcohol is also a major theme in country songs.) The music was amplified so that it could be heard over the din of the bar, and the plaintive sound of the steel guitar became familiar. Hank Williams sang his "Honky Tonk Blues" and Kitty Wells reminded listeners that "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels."

Since the 1950s, rock and popular music have also greatly influenced country music. The phenomenon of crossover hits has made the lines between the genres indistinct. Because of the difficulty of defining exactly what country music <u>is</u>, I find the definition used by Martha Hume particularly appealing. "Country music is the music listened to by the people who like country music" (3).

Nonetheless, country music today is listened to by more people than ever before. It is popular in the North as well as the South, in urban as well as rural areas. It is still, however, primarily listened to by white working class adults (Rogers 152-154). It reflects their pride and their confusion, and offers a running commentary on the issues of the day.

The country music which I write about here is that which, for the most part, is currently played on commercial country music stations. Most of these songs are less than 25 years old. A practical aspect of this choice is that the songs are easily attainable in almost every city and town in America. More importantly, though, because all the songs have been hits, it is fair to say that their message has "rung true" for enough people that they may be classified as true popular culture.

FOUR VALUES

The purpose of this section is to show how the values of work, family, romantic love and individualism are reflected in country music. I begin each chapter with a discussion of the value itself. For this I use four major sources. The first is a 1957 book, American as a Civilization, in which Max Lerner describes a people confident that temporal happiness may be achieved. I also refer to "The American Character," a 1983 article by Alex Inkeles. Inkeles lists various aspects of the American personality. He also describes several areas in which he perceives changing attitudes, including an increased tolerance for diversity. Edward Stewart, in American Cultural Patterns, discusses many of the same aspects from a cross-cultural perspective. My final source is New Rules, a 1981 book in which Daniel Yankelovich refers to polls and case studies to describe contemporary American society. His thesis is that fundamental changes are occurring as affluence gives Americans the opportunity to pursue self-fulfillment.

After discussing the value, I proceed to the songs. There, a dichotomy emerges: the contrast between the ideal and the reality. In some songs we can observe a vision of how life should be, and the myth of how it used to be. Yet we also see, in song after song, the reality of depressing jobs, unhappy marriages, and heart-wrenching loneliness. The reason is that the values themselves negate each other. A need for individualism makes people chafe under the bonds of work, family, and marriage. A need for commitment, though means that the achievement of personal freedom leaves people feeling unconnected, and equally

unfulfilled. The ideal remains elusive, as the assumptions behind it are in conflict.

My thesis is that the values inherent in country music mirror those of the society which produces and experiences it. By analyzing these songs, it is possible to see how Americans perceive themselves and their culture, both in its ideal and its reality.

THE WORK ETHIC

There is, in America, a strong work ethic. Keeping busy is a virtue; lack of physical activity is considered idleness, and morally dubious. A significant portion of Americans' identity is in their line of work, hence the typically American question, "What do you do?"

Underlying the American work ethic are the assumptions that people are equal and that there is equality in opportunity for all people. Americans believe that people are responsible for their own fate. There is, as Alex Inkeles writes in "The American Character," a "tendency to attribute improvement or decline of one's condition to one's own effort and accomplishment" (31). Americans therefore find it difficult to explicity accept what they implicitly know: that a class system does exist, and that it may, much more than personal effort, determine how much an individual can accomplish.

Americans, then, are caught between the belief that they should work, and the knowledge that work may not change anything. In American Cultural Patterns, Stewart explains the conflict in this way, "Work is pursued for a living. It is what a man must do and he is not necessarily supposed to enjoy it" (38).

In country music, the idea of work is noble, although the work itself may be tedious, painful, financially unrewarding and spiritually deadening. The songs with the most emotional pull reflect this ambivalent attitude.

Among the most moving of all country songs are those in which the writers pay tribute to the hard work of their parents. In "Hungry Eyes," Merle Haggard tells how "my daddy raised a family with his two hard-workin' hands and tried to feed my mamma's hungry eyes." The hard work went towards surviving, and not change:

> I remember Daddy prayin' for a better way of life
> But I don't recall a change of any size
> Just a little loss of courage as their age began to show
> And more sadness in Mamma's hungry eyes.

In the same song, Haggard gives a reason for his parents' situation: "Another class of people put us somewhere just below."

Loretta Lynn's "Coal Miner's Daughter" has more details about the labor involved just to survive:

> My daddy worked all night in the Van Lear coal mines,
> All day long in the fields a hoein' corn.
> Mommy rocked the babies at night,
> And read the Bible by the coal oil light
> And everything would start all over come break of morn'.
>
> Daddy loved and raised the kids on miner's pay,
> Mommy scrubbed our clothes on a washboard everyday.
> Why I seen her fingers bleed,
> To complain there was no need,
> She'd smile in Mommy's understanding way.

Again, the poverty seems terminal. Complaining would serve no purpose, and no action is suggested.

In both these songs, also Dolly Parton's "Coat of Many Colors," the work is all-consuming, but it offers no escape from poverty, and the humiliation of poverty. In Parton's and Lynn's songs, however, there is an attitude that close family ties, religion, and an inner sense of dignity can make the experience bittersweet. For Haggard, though, the experience is simply bitter.

In much of country music, work tends to be hard and unrewarding. The chorus of Tenessee Ernie Ford's 1955 hit "Sixteen Tons" goes:

> Ya load 15 tons, what d'ya get?
> Another day older, and deeper in debt.
> St. Peter, don'cha call me 'cause I can't go,
> I owe my soul to the company store.

In 1962, Bobby Bare sang of an empty life in "Detroit City," "By day I make the cars, by night I make the bars." More recently, in "Nine to Five," Dolly Parton has given voice to a previously unsung group, women office workers:

> They let you dream just to watch 'em shatter
> You're just a step on the bossman's ladder
> But you've got dreams he'll never take away
> It's a rich man's game, no matter what they call it,
> And you spend your life putting money in his wallet.

There is a class consciousness in these songs. At times there is a pride in being part of the working class, with the emphasis on working. As Haggard proclaims in "Working Man Blues," "I ain't never been on welfare. That's one place I won't be." There is also a distrust of upper classes, and a recurring theme that money will not buy happiness and is no substitute for love. In "Luckenbach, Texas (Back to the Basics of Love)," we are told "The successful life we're livin' got us feudin' like the Hatfields and McCoys." Women who marry for money always regret it, (at least according to their working class former boyfriends). A particularly explicit example of this genre is a Johnny Paycheck song, "Slide Off of Your Satin Sheets":

> What a beautiful mansion he built you
> Splendor, Lord, you've got it wall-to-wall
> And yet with all of that, you're still not happy
> 'cause every time he's gone, I get your call.
>
> Slide off of your satin sheets
> Slip into your long, soft mink
> You know where to find my door
> And I know what you're crying for.

The last song I will mention in this section offers an apparent break with the passivity that we have seen up until now. Written by David Allen Coe, "Take This Job and Shove It," was an enormous hit for Johnny Paycheck in 1978. It is an aggressive song if one looks only at the chorus:

> You better not try to stand in my way
> As I'm walking out the door
> Take this job and shove it
> I ain't working here no more.

Yet this is the song of a defeated person, for it turns out that the above is only what he wished he had "the guts to say." His imagination has created a scene in which he can be an individual, and be proud of himself. The reality is that this will probably never happen.

Though they seem sapped of energy and initiative, the workers in country music keep working. Perhaps it is because others depend on them, perhaps it is pride. It may be for a lack of other options. In any case, we are back to Stewart's original assessment of the situation. The revolution is not yet upon us.

FAMILY/HOME

The family in American tends to be a nuclear family. Husband, wife, and children make up the basic unit. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins play only supporting roles. Parents and grown children, whether married or not, do not live together.

The above are generalizations to be sure, but they contain enough truth, or have in the past, to be a part of the national self-image Until quite recently, the nuclear family has been seen as the typical American family. Literature, movies, and television all bear witness to this fact.

In New Rules, Daniel Yankelovich describes the traditional nuclear family as the "epochal experience" (112-13). Family success depended on staying together, earning enough money so that a higher standard of living might be achieved (at least for the children), and being respectable. This last component of success was the display to the outside world that the other two aspects were achieved. Being respectable included, among other things, having costly possessions and staying married. Also a part of the epochal experience, and an integral part of the respectability component, were traditional sex roles. The husband/father earned the money which supported the family, and he was also the ultimate authority figure in the household. The wife/mother provided spiritual guidance, raised the children, and took care of the day-to-day running of household affairs.

During the past 30 years general prosperity has freed many families from economic struggle. As the family has become less of an economic unit, members have demanded increased emotional satisfaction from it. Higher demands have led to more acute disappointments, and divorce and "broken families" have become common place. Many people have accepted new definitions as to what are respectable life styles and sex roles. For many, the traditional nuclear family has been modified, or even disappeared.

Despite changes, or maybe because of them, the nuclear family continues to be a cherished notion of American mythology. Yankelovich reports an ambivalent attitude, saying that Americans yearn for the closeness and stability that they associate with such a family, yet they do not wish to return to the traditional roles and rules (104-5). It should be no surprise that America's changing and troubled views about the family are clearly illustrated in country music.

Country songs about the past depict families that, no matter how difficult the situation, remain close and devoted to each other. Mothers, especially, are given credit for holding the family together with their nurturing, and also by the strength of their religious faith. Typical of this genre is "Daddy Sang Bass" by Carl Perkins and sung by Johnny Cash:

> I remember when I was a lad
> Times were hard and things were bad,
> But there's a silver lining behind every cloud.
> Just four people, that all we were,
> Tryin' to make a living out of blackland dirt,
> But we'd get together in a family circle singin' loud.

Daddy sang bass, Mamma sang tenor,
Me and Little Brother would join right in there,
Singing seems to help a troubled soul.
One of these days, and it won't be long,
I'll rejoin them in a song.
I'm gonna join the family circle at the throne.

Also in this category are "Coal Miner's Daughter," "Coat of Many Colors," and "Hungry Eyes." In all these songs there is an absolute and unquestioned commitment by the family members to each other. It is significant, though that these are all songs about the long ago.

In some songs, the idea of home has a significance similar to that of a promised land. The singers portray a home and family which has not changed in their absence and which would happily welcome them back if, somehow, they could return. "Detroit City" is one such song:

Last night I went to sleep in Detroit City
And I dreamed about those cotton fields and home,
I dreamed about my mother,
Dear old father, sister, and brother,
I dreamed about that girl who's been waiting for so long.

So I think I'll take my foolish pride,
And put it on the south bound freight and ride,
Oh, how I wanna go home.

Curley Putnam's "Green Green Grass of Home" is a "going home" song which is sung from the point of view of a prisoner:

The old home town looks the same
As I step down from the train
And there to meet me is my mama and my papa
And down the road I look and there runs Mary,
Hair of gold, and lips like cherries,
It's good to touch the green, green grass of home.

Then I awake and look around me
At these four gray walls that surround me
And I realize that I was only dreaming
For there's a guard and there's a sad old padre
Arm in arm we'll walk at daybreak
When again I'll touch the green, green grass of home.

They'll all come to see me
In the shade of that old oak tree
As they lay me 'neath the green, green grass of home.

Jail, as has often been pointed out, is a common theme in country music. I return to the topic in the section on individualism, but I mention it here because of the frequent references to family in those songs. The songs contrast life in jail with an idealized vision of life at home. "Green, Green Grass of Home," is an example. A more recent one is "There Ain't No Good Chain Gang":

Bet it ain't rainin' back home
Betcha sister's still on the phone
Bet Mama's in the kitchen
Cookin' fried chicken
Wishin' that I hadn't done wrong.

Papa's readin' yesterday's mail
Wishin' that the hay was all bailed
I bet he's wishin'
That we could go fishin'
And here I am a layin' in jail.

Parents, especially mothers, are praised for trying to keep their wayward children out of trouble. Merle Haggard writes in "Mama Tried":

I turned 21 in prison doin' life without parole
No one could steer me right, but Mama tried
Mama tried, Mama tried to raise me better
But her pleading I denied
That leaves only me to blame 'cause Mama tried.

Similarly, in "I'm the Only Hell (Mama Ever Raised)," the singer finds only himself to blame:

She tried to turn me on to Jesus
But I turned on to the Devil's ways
And I turned out to be
The only Hell my mama ever raised.

If Americans find comfort in an idyllic picture of family life in other times and other places, this may be because present day reality can be so difficult. As Loretta Lynn sings in Shel Silverstein's "One's on the Way":

Here in Topeka
The flies are a abuzzin'
The dog is abarkin' and
The floor needs ascrubbin'
One needs aspankin' and
One needs a huggin'
And one's on the way.

"I Don't Wanna Play House," by Billy Sherill and Glenn Sutton and sung by Tammy Wynette is about a broken family. A woman quotes her young daughter speaking to a playmate:

I don't want to play house
I know it can't be fun
I've watched Mommy and Daddy
And if that's the way it's done,
I don't want to play house.
It makes my mommy cry
'Cause when she played house,
My daddy said good bye.

The possibility that the mother and daughter might ultimately be happier without such a husband/father around is not considered. This song simply mourns the passing of the nuclear family.

Country songs show more and more a questioning of traditional sex roles and how those roles, and the role of the family, are changing. Yet the songs of an idealized past and of an idealized family continue to have appeal. They offer reassurance that life has not always been so difficult and confusing. Country music reflects both the ideal and the reality of the American family.

ROMANTIC LOVE

Americans love love. They even believe that love, romantic love no less, should be the basis of how people choose their mates and why they stay married. The search for 'true love' is something of a national obsession, and one that transcends boundaries of class and age.

Yet romantic love, especially within a marriage, is a relatively recent value in terms of the history of the human race. Even today, in a good part of the world, people choose their marriage partners (or have their partners chosen for them) for political and economic reasons. The goals of a traditional marriage are security and stability, and to have children. Happiness, or self-fulfillment as Yankelovich calls it, has not, until recently, been a goal associated with marriage.

The contemporary American attitude towards marriage has, as I see it, two causes. The first is in the nature of the American character. As I wrote in the section on the work ethic, Americans consider themselves responsible for their own fates. The same streak of anti-authoritarianism that makes it difficult for them to admit to the existence of a class system also makes Americans headstrong in the matter of choosing their mates. The traits of trust, optimism, and "this worldliness" which Inkeles refers to also have the effect of predisposing Americans towards high expectations for marriage.

The second reason Americans view marriage as they do is the economy. As I wrote in the section on the family, increased prosperity has allowed for increased introspection and greater demands for emotional satisfaction.

It also means that people need feel less trapped in unsatisfying situations.

An increased tolerance of various life styles may be a necessary result of the current situation, or it may be a contributing factor. In any case, the divorce rate hovers at around 50%, and many wonder just what is the future of marriage in America.

Most people, however, remarry after a divorce, and Yankelovich reports that surveys in both 1970 and 1980 show that 96% of Americans are "dedicated to the ideal of two people sharing a life together" (252). This indicates that Americans have not in the least abandoned marriage. They have, rather, over-valued it, expecting it to fulfill all of their emotional needs, including a need for romantic love. As oft-married country star Tammy Wynette comments in her autobiography Stand By Your Man, "I would much rather have stood by one man for a lifetime than four for a short time, but circumstances didn't work out that way. That doesn't mean I don't believe it should be, or that I've given up hope" (194).

The American view of romantic love is, to say the least, well represented in country music. Jimmie Rogers, in The Country Music Message, estimates that "three of every four popular country songs relate to some facet of love" (33). He divides country songs about love into three categories: "hurtin," "happy," and "cheatin." Eric Nelson views love in country music as a cycle, and charts the various paths a romantic relationship may take, giving examples of songs at different points. Loretta Lynn, in her autobiograpy Coal Miner's Daughter, sums it up, "Lots of country songs are about people trying to get along - falling in love, quarreling, having affairs, messing up their lives. That's life, and we've got to face it" (53).

INFATUATION

"Hey good lookin', what-cha got cookin'?" asks Hank Williams in a song which shows the eternal hope Americans have for love. "Hey Good Lookin'" continues:

> I'm gonna throw my date book over the fence
> And buy me one for five or ten cents
> I'll keep it till it's covered with age
> 'Cause I'm writin' your name down on every page.

This song is typical of country songs of hope and infatuation in that it shows the expectation Americans have that love should be everlasting. It also should be all-consuming, as in Dolly Parton's "Don't Call It Love":

> Nobody believes we got something they ain't got
> They've never seen a fire this hot
> They never got that far
> We're burnin' as bright as any star.

These two songs describe aspects of the cultural ideal of love. The intensity of these songs is a clue that Americans expect so much from love that disappointment may be a likely result.

There are country music songs which do describe enduring romantic relationships. Some, such as "Little Green Apples," celebrate the joy of life shared with a loved one:

> And I wake up in the mornin'
> With my hair down in my eyes and she says 'hi'
> And I stumble to the breakfast table
> While the kids are goin' off to school, goodbye
> And she reaches out and takes my hand
> And squeezes it and says, 'How you feelin' hon'
> And I look across at smilin' lips that warm my heart
> And see my mornin' sun.

Notice that the fire that Parton feels has been replaced by a morning sun and a warm heart. "Kiss An Angel Good Morning" makes love look easy:

> Well, people may try to guess
> The secret of a happiness
> But some of them never learn it's a simple thing
> The secret I'm speaking of is a man and a woman in love
> And the answer is in this song that I always sing:
> Kiss an angel good morning
> And let her know you think about her when you're gone
> Kiss an angel good morning
> And love her like the devil
> When you get back home.

Other songs acknowledge that domestic bliss involves a conscious decision to ignore the temptations of the world outside the home. Ronnie Milsap sings in "(I'm a) Stand By My Woman Man" that his wife does not have to worry about him "runnin' around." Similarily, Johnny Cash, in "I Walk the Line," proclaims that any sacrifice is well worth it:

> I find it very very easy to be true
> I find myself alone when each day's through
> Yes, I'll admit that I'm a fool for you
> Because you're mine, I walk the line.

All of these songs suggest that, with good luck and a proper attitude, the ideal of romantic love can be obtained. These songs do not constitute a large percentage of country music songs about love.

DISAPPOINTMENT

Many country songs tell of relationships that have endured because of great sacrifice and compromise. In their 1971 song "Good Hearted Woman," Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson pay tribute to a woman who continues to love her rather erratic mate:

He likes the night life, the bright lights
And good timin' friends.
When the party's all over, she'll welcome him
Back home again.
Lord knows she don't understand him,
But she does the best that she can.
'Cause she's a good hearted woman lovin' her
Good timin' man.

A few years earlier, Tammy Wynette had a hit with "Stand By Your Man," a song that could very well have been written by the above-mentioned good hearted woman.

Sometimes it's hard to be a woman
Giving all your love to just one man
You'll have bad times
And he'll have good times
Doin' things that you don't understand
But if you love him
You'll forgive him
Even though he's hard to understand
And if you love him
Be proud of him
Cause after all he's just a man.

In both these songs, as in a great many country songs, women hold together relationships with warmth, ability to forgive, and plain old perseverance. (These are the same women we met in the section on family, where they played 'Mamma'.) Women need to be strong, it is implied, because men can be so unreliable. There are some songs which show appreciation for men who stand by women, for instance "You Needed Me." Generally, though, society seems to put men under less obligation than women. In "Only Daddy That'll Walk the Line," the "good timin'" Waylon Jennings of "Good Hearted Woman" finds the tables turned, and he does not like it!:

> I keep a workin' every day
> All you wanna do is play
> I'm tired stayin' out all night
> I'm a comin' unglued from you funny little moods
> Now honey baby that ain't right.

At this point, I feel the need to set the record straight about country music. It is not simply a genre of men who mistreat women -- whose duty it is to forgive and forget, although the belief that men are morally weaker than women appears regularly. Another possible response is in the songs which show women who, out of revenge or desperation, start to act like the men who have mistreated them. Examples are "Your Good Girl's Gonna Go Bad," "It Was Always So Easy (To Find An Unhappy Woman)," and the groundbreaking "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels":

It's a shame that all the blame is on us women
It's not true that only you men feel the same
From the start most every heart that's ever been broken
Was because there always was a man to blame.

With songs such as "The Pill" and "Don't Come Home A-Drinkin' (With Lovin' On Your Mind)," Loretta Lynn has given a feminist perspective to the music and shown that women do have the power of choice. While traditional sex roles are assumed in country music, there is an awareness that they do not always work to make people happy.

DISILLUSIONMENT

As we have seen, the ideal marriage demands a great intensity of feeling. That such intensity cannot be indefinitely sustained should be no surprise. While some, as in "Little Green Apples," are willing to exchange this intensity for a mature appreciation of the other person, others feel a loss when it is not present. They turn outside the marriage to satisfy this need. It may be in drinking, partying, or travel. Or it may be, to use the language of the genre, in "cheating." Country music songs view cheating from all possible angles, and assign to it all kinds of motivation. While infidelity is certainly an aspect in the breakdown of many American marriages, it is not the cause that one would surmise it to be if one's only access to the culture were country music. It should be remembered though, that country music is an art, and songs about cheating have a greater emotional appeal and entertainment value than songs discussing why the family budget is not working.

Some songs do not actually involve cheating, but tell, rather, of temptation that has been successfully overcome. Charley Pride sings in "You Almost Slipped My Mind":

> I could taste, taste her kisses in the wine
> But your memory came and found me just in time.

A similar situation is reported in "Almost Persuaded," a song which has been recorded from both a male and female perspective. In a peculiar trick of honky tonk lighting, the would-be cheater is dissuaded by the sight of his (or her) wedding ring reflected in the eyes of the alluring dance partner. "Almost cheating" songs are a renewal of marriage vows. More than ever, these repentant quasi-sinners believe in the one man, one woman aspect of romantic love.

When cheating does occur, it may be either the man or the woman who ceases to "walk the line." It may be simply for excitement, or it may involve a more lasting bond. Betrayed lovers may exhibit anger, as in "You Ain't Woman Enough (To Take My Man,") or hurt, as in "Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue." They may blame themselves, as Barbara Mandrell does in "Sleeping Single in a Double Bed":

> Sleeping single in a double bed
> Thinking over things I wish I'd said
> I should have held you but I let you go
> Now I'm the one sleeping all alone.

Or they may place the blame on whoever has "stolen" their beloved, as Dolly Parton does when she addresses her rival in "Jolene":

I had to have this talk with you
My happiness depends on you
And whatever you decide to do, Jolene.

Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, Jolene
I'm beggin' of you please don't take my man
Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, Jolene
Please don't take him just because you can.

As for the adulterous couple, they may feel guilt, as Kenny Rogers describes in "Daytime Friends":

When it's over, there's no peace of mind,
Just a longing for the way things should have been.

They may, however, feel exhilaration, as in the Kendall's song, "Heaven's Just a Sin Away." They may even exhibit self-righteousness, as Barbara Mandrell does in "If Loving You Is Wrong, I Don't Want To Be Right":

If loving you is wrong, I don't want to be right
If being right means living without you
I'd rather live a wrong than right.

Rogers claims that songs justifying, or even extolling cheating have become more popular in recent years (104-114). This would certainly be an example of the greater societal tolerance which Inkeles posits (36-37). Nevertheless, despite a growing number of amoral songs, the classic "Somebody Done Somebody Wrong Song" type of cheating still constitutes the great body of country cheating songs. Their appeal is in the basic conflict they present: the American ideal of romantic love faced with the reality of human nature and behavior.

DESPAIR

Finally, in our progression away from the ideal, are the songs in which the romantic relationship is over. The songs generally are told from the perspective of the one who had been abandoned, and misery is the order of the day. George Jones, in "The Grand Tour," shows visitors around the house where he and his wife lived. Nothing has changed, even her clothes are still in the closet, because all she took were "her baby and my heart." To protect her son, Tammy Wynette, in "D-I-V-O-R-C-E," spells out all the "hurtin' words," but "can't spell away the hurt that's drippin' down my cheek." In "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," perhaps the saddest of all lost love songs, Hank Wiliams scarcely mentioned what has caused this agony:

> Hear that lonesome whipporwill?
> He sounds too blue to fly
> The midnight train is whining low
> I'm so lonesome, I could cry.

I've never seen a night so 'lone
When time goes crawlin' by
The moon just went behind the clouds
To hide his face and cry.

Did you ever see a robin weep
When leaves begin to die
Like me, he's lost the will to live
I'm so lonesome, I could cry.

The silence of a fallin' star
Lights up a purple sky
And as I wonder where you are
I'm so lonesome, I could cry.

Alcohol, which up to this point has served mostly to loosen inhibitions, now is used as an anesthetic. Willie Nelson's theme song, "Whiskey River" is typical:

Whiskey river take my mind
Don't let her memory torture me.

As in the cheating songs, the singers in lost love songs may blame themselves, the people who deserted them, or those who lured their mates away from them. They do not regret having loved so deeply, nor do they question how realistic were their expectations.

RENEWAL

Just as most divorced Americans remarry, so too do the people in country music eventually move on. The first step is to let go of the old relationship. Juice Newton, in "Old Flame" says, in effect, good riddance:

> You went to get cigarettes
> That was last July
> You didn't get 'em yet
> And now you expect me to bail you out
> You call me collect, there ain't no doubt
> This old flame went out
> You never thought you'd be the one in the darkness now
> I think you know what I'm talking about
> This old flame went out.

At this point, the stage is set for new romance. Dolly Parton offers her heart in "Bargain Store":

> If you will just replace the missing parts
> You would be surprised to find how good it really is.
> Take it, and you never will be sorry that you did.

As people fall in love again, or are reunited with former lovers, there is no moderation of expectations. Americans hold tightly to their ideal of romantic love, ever hopeful to make it a reality. And so the cycle of infatuation, disappointment, and disillusionment continues.

INDIVIDUALISM

I have saved for last individualism, or personal independence, because it serves as a counter balance to the values of work, family and love. Those three values demand a sense of responsibility and commitment to others. Individualism is commitment to self. It implies a lack of binding ties to the past and present, and a willingness to explore and experiment, often at the expenses of work, family and love.

Respect for individualism is deeply embedded in American character. It has its roots in the pioneer spirit of the frontier and the Emersonian virtue of self-reliance. The irony is that self-reliance and the pioneer spirit are, for the most part, myth. Americans have always worked best as interdependent members of groups (Stewart 71).

Stewart writes that self-reliance is the historical root for the contemporary values of autonomy, self-actualization and personal growth (171). The appeal of the "rugged individual," as in the cowboy image of John Wayne, is still strong, but is, in a sense an evolutionary curiosity that reflects a romanticized and distorted view of history. Both the lonesome cowboy and the seekers of self-fulfillment described by Yankelovich desire a personal freedom which is often in conflict with commitment to others (Yankelovich 58).

Individualism is an American myth that provides a mental escape from the sometimes stifling bonds of work, family, and love. The problem arises when Americans try to live the fantasy or, to use the terms of this paper, to make the ideal a reality.

Country music pays tribute to individualism in songs about people who do not hold traditional jobs and are not bound by traditional familial or romantic relationships. The songs offer modern day personifications of the "rugged individual," and these are almost as mythic as the historic one. From truck drivers to outlaws, they take their pleasures where they can, they are ever ready to move on, and they may or may not regret the pleasure of the hearth.

Travel is the most frequent country music metaphor for individualism. The constant motion of those people who refuse to settle makes them the spiritual descendants of the American pioneer, plunging ever deeper into the wilderness. In "I'm a Ramblin' Man," Waylon Jennings brags:

> I've been down the Mississippi
> Down through New Orleans, yes I have
> I've played in California
> There ain't too much I haven't seen, no there ain't
> Lord, I'm a ramblin' man
> Don't fool around with a ramblin' man.

The rest of the song recounts exploits with the women of West Virginia, Cincinatti, Chicago and Alabama, all of whom are presumably waiting for him. He warns:

> You'd better move away
> You're standin' too close to the flame
> Once I mess with your mind
> Your little heart won't be the same.

(This theme of the sexually irresistable wanderer is made more explicit in another Jennings hit, "Ladies Love Outlaws," by Lee Clayton.) Merle Haggard also sports a devil-may-care attitude in "Ramblin' Fever":

> If someone said I ever gave a damn
> They damn sure told you wrong.
> I've had ramblin' fever all along.

The assumption that travel is an honorable way out of unhappy romantic experiences appears in songs such as "By the Time I Get To Phoenix" and "Is Anybody Goin' to San Antone":

> Rain drippin' off the brim of my hat
> Sure is cold today
> Here I am walkin' down 66
> Wish she hadn't done me that way.
> Sleepin' under a table in a roadside park
> A man could wake up dead
> But it sure seems warmer than it did
> Sleepin' in our kingsize bed.

The open road is mostly the domain of men, though women do appear. The "Railroad Lady," of Willie Nelson once traveled from:

> South Station in Boston to the stockyards of Austin
> From the Florida sunshine to the New Orleans rain

Now, however, she's lost her looks, the railroads are in decline, and she is reduced to riding a bus home to Kentucky.

The above songs refer to unrestricted freedom and unlimited amatory adventures. They are celebrations of the American fantasy of emotional and material independence. Feelings of ambivalence, though, appear in "Me and Bobby McGee" by Kris Kristofferson and Fred Foster. The rootless traveling figure is familiar, but he is unusual in that he is accompanied by a woman whom he loves:

> From the coal mines of Kentucky to the California sun
> Bobby shared the secrets of my soul
> Standin' right beside me, Lord
> Through every thing I done
> And every night she kept me from the cold.
>
> Then somewhere near Salinas, Lord
> I let her slip away
> Lookin' for the home I hope she'll find.
> And I'd trade all of my tomorrows for a single yesterday
> Holdin' Bobby's body next to mine.
>
> Freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose
> Nothin' ain't worth nothin', but it's free.
> Ah, feelin' good was easy, Lord,
> When Bobby sang the blues
> And feelin' good was good enough for me
> Good enough for me and Bobbby McGee.

(Notice that again it is the woman who feels the need to have a home.) Unlike the other travel songs, this is not a romanticized vision of freedom. We see that it involves a painful denial of those other two American values: love and home.

Other country songs show people who, because of their work, (which often involves travel), have achieved a certain amount of personal independence. These people do not do the spiritually deadening work in mines or factories that we saw earlier. Instead, they clearly are doing something they love, that they take pride in doing well, and which allows them to flaunt some of the "trivial" restrictions of society. For example, songs about truck drivers have been popular, and one of the earliest hits in that genre is "Six Days on the Road." The driver, although hurrying home to his "baby," clearly derives a large portion of his identity from his profession. He is in control of a large truck ("a little old but that don't mean she's slow") that lets him create a society of one in which he makes and follows his own rules:

> Well I pulled out of Pittsburgh
> A-rollin' down that eastern seaboard
> I got my diesel wound up
> And she's runnin' like never before
> There's a speed zone ahead, but all right
> I don't see a cop in sight
> Six days on the road and I'm gonna make it home tonight.

Country music singers also consider themselves to be "free." The infectious rhythm and lyrics of Wilie Nelson's "On The Road Again," make the American phenomenon of perpetual motion seem completely natural, plus a lot of fun:

On the road again
Just can't wait to get on the road again
The life I love is making music with my friends
And I can't wait to get on the road again.

On the road again
Going places that I've never been
Seeing things I may never see again.
I can't wait to get on the road again.

On the road again.
Like a band of gypsies we go down the highway
We're the best of friends
Insisting that the world keep turning our way
And our way is on the road again.

Waylon Jennings, in "Are You Sure Hank Done It This Way?" strips away some of the glamour:

Ten years on the road makin' one night stands
Speedin' my young life away.
Tell me one more time just so's I'll understand
Are you sure Hank did it this way?
Did ol' Hank really do it this way?

Lord, I've seen the world with a five piece band
Lookin' at the backside of me
A singin' my songs, one of his now and then
But I don't think Hank done 'em this way.
No I don't think Hank done 'em this way.

The humor in this song indicates that Jennings does not truly regret having chosen the path he did. Finally, the country singer in "Amanda" realizes that his non-traditional life style may have afforded him independence, but it may also have cost him understanding and acceptance:

It's a measure of people who don't understand
The pleasures of life in a hillbilly band
I got my first guitar when I was fourteen
Now I'm over thirty, and still wearin' jeans.

Truck drivers and singers are generally proud of the life style they have chosen. Let us now look at some country music characters who have similar values, but without the excuse of a career to hold it together.

These free-living people, again mostly men, are called good ol' boys, honky tonk heroes, cowboys, or even crazy. They may be married, as in "Good Hearted Woman," and they usually find their work meaningless, as in "Detroit City." By means of drinking, partying, playing and fighting, they are able to temporarily break free of the demands of society and achieve a certain measure of independence. It seems that it is only at those moments when they truly feel alive. "A Boy Named Sue" tells the story of a man who, because of his "awful name," has never felt comfortable in society:

> It seems I had to fight my whole life through
> Some gal would giggle and I'd get red
> Some guy'd laugh and I'd bust his head
> I tell you life ain't easy for a boy named Sue.
>
> Well I grew up quick and I grew up mean
> My fists got hard and my wits got keen
> I roamed from town to town to hide my shame.

At an "old saloon" Sue finds his father, the man who had named him before abandoning the family:

> I said, "My name is Sue, how do you do?
> Now you gonna die."
> Yeah, that's what I told him.
> Well I hit him hard right between the eyes
> And he went down but to my surprise
> He come up with a knife and cut off a piece of my ear.

After a bloody fight, though, there is a reconciliation. Sue realizes that his name has forced him to become a tough and independent character. He did not like the process, but he does like the result.

Two songs about being "crazy" provide a contrast between freedom and commitment. Waylon Jennings in "I've Always Been Crazy," feels that, despite mixed results, the unshackled life is the one for him:

> I've always been different, with one foot over the line
> Winding up somewhere one step ahead or behind.
> It ain't been so easy, but I guess I shouldn't complain
> I've always been crazy, but it's kept me from going insane.
> Nobody knows if it's something to bless or to blame
> So far I ain't found a rhyme or a reason to change.

Johnny Cash, in "I Wish I Was Crazy Again," has exchanged his freedom for commitment. When he meets an old friend we see how attractive the old life still is:

> Then we stopped in at a tavern
> We had us a round or two
> We called ourselves old desperadoes
> As old friends are likely to do
> We sat for a while and remembered
> Then he said let's have just one more
> I said I'd sure like to join you
> But I'd best be goin' on home.

Yes, she keeps me off the streets
And she keeps me out of trouble
Sometimes at night, Lord
When I hear the wind
I wish I was crazy again
Yes, I wish I was crazy again.

A message about the emotional price of independence is in "Mammas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys," by Ed and Patsy Bruce and sung by Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson. It serves a wistful sequel to their earlier high-spirited hit "Good Hearted Woman":

Cowboys like smoky old poolrooms and clear mountain mornings
Little warm puppies, children, and girls of the night.
Them that don't know him won't like him
And them that do sometimes won't know how to take him
He ain't wrong, he's just different.
And his pride won't let him do things to make you think he's right.

Mammas, don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys
Don't let 'em pick guitars and ride them ol' trucks
Let 'em be doctors and lawyers and such.
Mammas, don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys
'Cause they'll never stay home and they're always alone
Even with someone they love.

The cowboy embodies the American ideal of the individual, yet because he regularly chooses the option to "just ride away," he ultimately appears more pitiful than enviable.

One final category of songs about personal freedom are sung from the perspective of those who have none: prisoners. In "Folsom Prison Blues," Johnny Cash sings:

> When I was just a baby, my mama told me, "Son,
> Always be a good boy, don't ever play with guns,"
> But I shot a man in Reno just to watch him die
> When I hear that whistle blowin', I hang my head and cry.
>
> I bet there's rich folks eatin' in a fancy dinin' car
> They're prob'ly drinkin' coffee and smokin' big cigars.
> Well, I know I had it comin', I know I can't be free
> But those people keep a movin' and that's what tortures me.

The contrast between the train and prison gives the song emotional pull. Just as travel signifies freedom, prison is a country music metaphor for its absence.

As we have seen, country songs about individualism generally find it energizing and exhilarating. There is an undercurrent, though. Individualism, when lived to the fullest is irresponsible towards others and alienating towards self. It is ironic that too much freedom may ultimately be as confining as too little, whether the confinement is literal, as in prison, or emotional, as in the inability to maintain

lasting bonds with others. The American ideal of individualism and personal freedom hangs in precarious balance with the values of work, family and love. The tension is real, in the music and in the society.

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

As I hope I have made clear, country music reflects many aspects of American culture. In moods which range from exuberant to mournful, and in language which ranges from playful to lyric, country music shows both the archetypal ideal and the day-to-day reality. The remaining issue, which I will now address, is its place in the ESL classroom.

Country music, as does any other popular music, makes excellent supplementary material in a language class. The many linguistic uses have been extensively covered in the professional literature. I am writing here to encourage deeper analyses of the songs. With proper guidance, students will be able to find the cultural assumptions in a song and compare them both to their own cultural assumptions and to their developing perceptions of American culture.

I have organized the lesson plans which conclude this paper in the following way. For each value, with the exception of romantic love, I have chosen two songs. The first song describes an American ideal, the second a more ambiguous reality. (Because of the wealth of available material and the complicated nature of the issue, I have chosen three songs to represent romantic love.) The lessons themselves have four steps: motivation, comprehension, inference, and life.

The motivating activity serves to set a content schema for the song and it is the key to student involvement in a lesson. The teacher should start with what the students already know, in this case their own culture. She can ask them how people in their culture express the value in question. Then, to foster discrimination between the concept of ideal and reality,

she can also ask them to consider if the description is of how people actually behave, or how they think they should behave. It is important here to proceed carefully. Unless a high level of trust has been established in the classroom, students may hesitate to analyze their culture in a way that might show it to be "flawed." Next, the teacher asks the students their impressions of how Americans express the value. She writes these predictions on the board or on flip chart paper so that they may serve as hypotheses which may be confirmed or revised upon analysis of the song. The last part of motivation is to prepare the students for the actual song. This may involve a class discussion, or perhaps a short lecture, about the subject matter. It may also be useful to include historical background on the song or the singer. By this time, the students should be ready to deal with the song itself.

Comprehension, the second step, involves listening to the song and understanding the literal message. This step is the focus of how songs are most often taught in a foreign language classroom. Typically, the song is presented as a listening exercise, and it is certainly possible to do so with these songs. One option is to do a cloze exercise in which students receive a copy of the song with blank spaces either of key words or at regular intervals. The students listen to the song and fill in the blanks. Another option is to do a class transcription. The class dictates the words for the teacher to copy on paper or on the board. This works well with short, clearly sung songs, and is particulary useful when copying supplies are limited. Another advantage is the satisfaction students derive from having deciphered the entire song with minimal

teacher input. The problem with both cloze exercises and class transcriptions is that they usually require 20 minutes or more of class time, and the focus of the lesson tends to remain at the level of listening comprehension. That is why, in most of the lesson plans which follow, there is no listening comprehension. I suggest giving complete transcriptions of the songs, teaching them as one would a poem or a short piece of prose.

The teacher starts the comprehension section by having the students read, or listen to her read a transcription of the song. Students can choose which words or expressions they wish to know, or the teacher can choose those which are most essential to understanding the song. In any case, six to eight vocabulary words are usually sufficient. Next, the song is played, and the students read along and enjoy it. The teacher finishes the comprehension section by asking questions which the students can answer by looking at the text. It is important to avoid yes-no questions, as it should be the students who are expressing themselves, not the teacher. By the end of this section, the students should be able to summarize the song.

Inference, the third section, asks students to read between the lines. Typical inference questions contain the words "why" and "what if." (It is often useful to integrate comprehension with inference questions, asking first "what happened" and then "why.") The inference questions in these lessons also ask students to discuss what each song says about American culture, to compare the songs to each other, and to compare underlying messages. For instance, although "Daddy Sang Bass" and

"I Don't Wanna Play House," describe different situations, they share similar assumptions about how a family should be. Another inference the students may make is to imagine what would happen if the story occurred in their own cultures. Finally, the teacher refers back to the predictions that the students made earlier. In what ways does the song confirm their hypotheses? What would they change? The inferences which students make during this part of the lesson will help them not only get more meaning from the songs, but also to place the songs in the larger context of American culture.

Life, the fourth and last section, returns the lesson to where it started: the students. This is the time when it is appropriate for students to give their personal responses to the song. How do they feel about the people in the song? If the situation in the song had concerned them, what would they have done? Again, the teacher should concentrate on open-ended, not yes-no questions. For some songs, I suggest follow-up activities which call for students to write responses or do role plays. It is important to allow enough time for this part of the lesson. In a class where students feel free to express themselves, and know that their peers will listen with interest, a lively and thought-provoking discussion is likely to ensue. By the end of this section, the students should have a greater awareness of their own values.

I cannot predict whether your students will appreciate country music, but do not be surprised if they do. Country music is popular in Japan, Europe, Mexico, and Africa. I would suggest, though, that much of the music will have greater appeal to students high school age and older, just as it does with an American audience.

Here, then, are the lesson plans. They can be adjusted in level, but are geared in general to intermediate and advanced students. They are specific in that I have transcribed country music songs. They are generic in that it is possible to do the same with rock, popular, and folk music.

Please enjoy.

LESSON PLAN DIRECTORY

I. A. COAL MINER'S DAUGHTER (As sung by Loretta Lynn)

Loretta Lynn

Well, I was borned a coal miner's daughter
In a cabin on a hill in Butcher Holler
We were poor, but we had love
That's the one thing that Daddy made sure of
He shoveled coal to make a poor man's dollar.

My daddy worked all night in the Van Lear coal mines
All day long in the field a-hoein' corn
Mommy rocked the babies at night
And read the Bible by the coal oil light
And everything would start all over come break of morn.

Daddy loved and raised eight kids on a miner's pay
Mommy scrubbed our clothes on a washboard every day
Why I seen her fingers bleed
To complain there was no need
She'd smile in Mommy's understanding way.

In the summertime we didn't have shoes to wear
But in the wintertime, we'd all get a brand new pair
From a mail order catalog
Money made from selling a hog
Daddy always managed to get the money somewhere.

Yeah, I'm proud to be a coal miner's daughter
I remember when the well was out of water
The work we done was hard
At night we'd sleep 'cause we worked hard
I never thought of ever leaving Butcher Holler.

Well, a lot of things have changed since way back then
And it's so good to be back home again
Not much left but the floor
Nothing lives here anymore
Except the memories of a coal miner's daughter.

COAL MINER'S DAUGHTER

I. A. What work do men in your culture typically do? Women?
Are there people in your culture who work hard but are still poor? In America?

B. Teacher gives background for song.

- Coal is mined in Appalachian Mountains. (Show on map.)
- Mining towns are small, isolated from the rest of the country and from each other.
- Mining is dangerous. (Conditions in mines, black lung)
- That part of the country is part of the "Bible Belt."

II. A. Students listen to song, read transcription. (Note: Loretta Lynn has a strong Appalachian accent.)

B. Students choose vocabulary they want to know. (Teacher may wish to point out washboard and mail-order catalog.)

C. What did the father in the family do? The mother?
What are some of the good memories?
What are some of the painful ones?

III. How can you tell that this family was poor?
What was their attitude about being poor?
How does the singer feel about their life?

IV. If this were your family, how would you feel?
Would you complain?
Would you try to change things?

NOTE: This lesson emphasizes the work ethic and class issues. The song can also be used to discuss family.

I. B. TAKE THIS JOB AND SHOVE IT (as sung by Johnny Paycheck)

David Allen Coe

CHORUS

Take this job and shove it

I ain't working here no more

My woman done left and took all the reason I was working for

You better not try to stand in my way

As I'm walking out the door

Take this job and shove it

I ain't working here no more.

I been working in this factory for nigh on 15 years

All this time I watched my woman drowning in a pool of tears

And I seen a lot of good folk die

That had a lotta bills to pay

I'd give the shirt right off my back

If I had the guts to say

CHORUS

Well that foreman he's a raggedy dog

The line boss, he's a fool

Got a brand new flat top hair cut

Lord, he thinks he's cool

One of these days I'm gonna blow my top

And that sucker, he's gonna pay

Lord, I can't wait to see their faces when I get the nerve to say

CHORUS

TAKE THIS JOB AND SHOVE IT

I. A. What are some reasons not to like a job?

B. Discuss factory work (assembly line, line boss, foreman).

II. A. Students listen to song with transcription.

B. Discuss vocabulary as needed. (Be sure to discuss register - 'shove it' is an expression that should not be used lightly.)

Expressions:
- blow one's top,
- give the shirt off of one's back
- brand new
- sucker
- gonna pay

III. How does the singer feel about his job? Why?

What does he want to do?

Why doesn't he do what he wants to do?

What do you think would happen if he did?

How is his situation similar/different to the situation in "Coal Miner's Daughter?" His response to the situation?

What do these songs tell you about how Americans feel about work?

IV. What would you do if you were the singer?

Have you ever had a job you did not like? What did you do about it?

II. A. DADDY SANG BASS (as sung by Johnny Cash)

Carl Perkins

I remember when I was laid
Times were hard and things were bad
But there's a silver lining behind every cloud
Just four people, that's all we were
Trying to make a living out of black land dirt
But we'd get together in a family circle singing loud.

Daddy sang bass, Mamma sang tenor
Me and Little Brother would join right in there
Singing seems to help a troubled soul.
One of these days, and it won't be long
I'll rejoin them in a song
I'm gonna join the family circle at the throne.
No, the circle won't be broken, by and by, Lord, by and by
Daddy sang bass, Mamma sang tenor
Me and Little Brother would join right in there
In the sky, Lord, in the sky.

Now I remember after work
Mamma would call in all of us
You could hear us singing for a country mile
Now Little Brother has done gone on
But I'll rejoin him in a song
We'll be together again up yonder in a little while.

Daddy sang bass, Mamma sang tenor

Me and Little Brother would join right in there

Singing seems to help a troubled soul.

One of these days, and it won't be long

I'll rejoin them in a song

I'm gonna join the family circle at the throne.

No, the circle won't be broken, by and by, Lord, by and by

Daddy sang bass, Mamma sang tenor

Me and Little Brother would join right in there

In the sky, Lord, in the sky.

DADDY SANG BASS

I. In your culture, who lives together in the family?

II. A. Students listen to song. Fill in words as cloze exercise or read transcription.

B. Students figure out from context these expressions:

- lad
- silver lining behind every cloud
- tenor, bass
- by and by
- country mile
- troubled soul

Note: "Can the Circle Be Unbroken" is an old gospel tune.

C. Describe the family.

What kind of songs did they sing?

III. Why did they sing?

How does the singer feel about his family?

What is the same/different in your cultures?

IV. How would you feel about this kind of life?

II. B. I DON'T WANNA PLAY HOUSE (as sung by Tammy Wynette)

Billy Sherrill and Glenn Sutton

Today I sat alone at the window
And I watched our little girl outside at play
With the little boy next door like so many times before
But something didn't seem quite right today
So I went outside to see what they were doing
And then the teardrops made my eyes go dim
Cause I heard him name a game
And I hung my head in shame
When I heard our little girl say to him

CHORUS

I don't wanna play house
I know it can't be fun
I've watched Mommy and Daddy
And if that's the way it's done
I don't wanna play house
It makes my mommy cry
Cause when she played house
My Daddy said good bye.

(Repeat Chorus)

I DON'T WANNA PLAY HOUSE

I. Students recall family in "Daddy Sang Bass".

Why was that family happy?

Students recall discussion of ideal family in their cultures.

Do families in their cultures break down?

How does society respond?

II. A. Students listen to song. (This song is short enough for a class transcription.)

B. Students ask about any vocabulary they are unsure of.

C. What is the situation in the song?

Why is the mother crying?

III. How does the singer feel about her family?

What would she like?

How is the family here different from the family in "Daddy Sang Bass"? (Separated vs. together, no religion mentioned vs. religious, long ago vs. now, happy vs. unhappy)

How is it the same? (Belief that the family should be a certain way)

What do both these songs tell you about American culture? (Belief about the way a family <u>should</u> be)

IV. If you were the singer, what would you do? How would you feel?

If you were the daddy?

III. A. HEY, GOOD LOOKIN'

Hank Williams

CHORUS

Say, hey, good lookin'

What-cha got cookin'

How's about cookin' somethin' up with me?

Hey, sweet baby

Don't you think maybe

We could find us a brand new recipe?

I got a hot rod Ford and a two dollar bill

And I know a spot right over the hill

There's soda pop and the dancin's free

So if you wanna have fun, come along with me.

CHORUS

I'm free and ready

So we can go steady

How's about savin' all your time for me?

No more lookin'

I know I been cookin'

How's about keepin' steady company?

I'm gonna throw my date book over the fence

And buy me one for five or ten cents

I'll keep it till it's covered with age

'Cause I'm writin' your name down on every page

CHORUS

HEY, GOOD LOOKIN'

I. In your culture, if a man sees someone he likes, what does he say? What are his intentions?

What does a woman do if she sees someone she likes?

What about in America?

What does it mean to 'go steady'?

Do people in your culture go steady?

II. A. Students listen to song, either with transcription or as a cloze exercise.

B. Discuss vocabulary as needed. (This song also has some good examples of relaxed speech.)

C. What is the song about?

III. What is the singer offering the woman?

What is the mood of the song?

What do you think will happen next? A year from now?

What does this song tell you about romance in America?

How is it the same or different in your culture?

IV. If you were the man, what would you do?

How would you respond if you were the woman?

III. B. STAND BY YOUR MAN (as sung by Tammy Wynette)

Billy Sherrill and Tammy Wynette

Sometimes it's hard to be a woman
Giving all your love to just one man
You'll have bad times
And he'll have good times
Doin' things you don't understand
But if you love him
You'll forgive him
Even though he's hard to understand
And if you love him
Be proud of him,
Cause after all he's just a man.

Stand by your man
Give him two arms to cling to
And something warm to come to
On nights he's cold and lonely
Stand by your man
And tell the world you love him
Keep giving all the love you can
Stand by your man.

STAND BY YOUR MAN

I. Describe the roles of husband and wife in your culture(s).
Does one have more freedom? More power?
What are the roles in America?

II. A. Students listen to song. (This song is short enough for class transcription.)

B. Discuss vocabulary as needed.

C. What is the singer saying?
How does she think that men and women are different?

III. This song, released in 1968, was very popular during the early days of the women's liberation movement. How do you think the feminists responded?
If this song were sung in your culture, how would people respond?

IV. How do you respond?
Write a response to Tammy Wynette's statement, "I'm happiest when I'm in love, and ....I think most women feel the same way" (Wynette 194).

III. C. DAYTIME FRIENDS (as sung by Kenny Rogers)

Ben Peters

And he'll tell her he's working late again
But she knows too well there's something going on
She's been neglected and she needs a friend
So her trembling fingers dial the telephone
Lord, it hurts her doing this again
He's the best friend that her husband ever knew
When she's lonely, he's more than just a friend
He's the one she longs to give her body to.

CHORUS
Daytime friends and nighttime lovers
Hoping no one else discovers
Where they go, what they do
In their secret hideaway
Daytime friends and nighttime lovers
They don't want to hurt the others
So they love in the night time
And shake hands in the light of day.

When it's over there's no peace of mind
Just a longing for the way things should have been
And she wonders why some men never find
That a woman needs a lover and a friend.

CHORUS (two times)

DAYTIME FRIENDS

I. In your culture, what are some reasons people are unhappy in marriage?

If they are unhappy, what do they do?

If they are unfaithful, what reasons do they give?

Is it different for men and women?

II. A. Students listen with transcription.

B. What is happening in this song?

Why does the wife think her husband is seeing another woman?

What is she doing about it? (What are some things she could do, but doesn't?)

How does she feel?

III. What do you think she wishes?

What do you think will happen?

What does this song tell us about marriage in America?

How is this similar/different from "Stand By You Man"?

Think about "Stand By Your Man" and "Daytime Friends" and compare marriage in America with marriage in your culture.

IV. What do you think about the people in this song?

Write a dialogue between the husband, wife and lover.

- or -

Write a letter giving advice to either the husband or wife.

IV. A. I'VE ALWAYS BEEN CRAZY (as sung by Waylon Jennings)

Waylon Jennings

I've always been crazy
And the trouble that it's put me through
Been busted for things that I did and I didn't do
I can't say I'm proud of all of the things that I've done
But I can't say I've ever intentionally hurt anyone.

I've always been different
With one foot over the line
Winding up somewhere one step ahead or behind
It ain't been so easy, but I guess I shouldn't complain
I've always been crazy
But it's kept me from going insane.

Beautiful lady, are you sure that you understand
The chances you're taking loving a free living man
Are you really sure you really want what you see
Be careful of something that's just what you want it to be.

I've always been crazy
But it's kept me from going insane
Nobody knows if it's something to bless or to blame
So far I ain't found a rhyme or a reason to change
I've always been crazy
But it's kept me from going insane.

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN CRAZY

I. What does it mean to be crazy in your culture?

Are there people in your culture who aren't really crazy but who don't do things like everyone else does? Are they men, women, or both? What happens to them?

II. A. Students read transcription of song.

Discuss vocabulary and expressions.

- busted
- insane
- one foot over the line
- rhyme or reason

B. Students listen to song with transcription.

C. What is the song about?

III. What do you think the singer means by 'crazy,' 'insane,' 'free living'?

What kind of relationship do you think he has with women? With his family?

Describe his life style. What does he like to do? Not like to do? (drink? go to church? etc.)

How does he feel about his life style?

How do you think Americans perceive him?

Are there people like him in your culture? Men or women?

How are they perceived?

IV. What do you think of this man?

V. B. MAMMAS DON'T LET YOUR BABIES GROW UP TO BE COWBOYS

(as sung by Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson)

Ed Bruce and Patsy Bruce

Cowboys ain't easy to love and they're harder to hold
They'd rather give you a song than diamonds or gold
Lone Star belt buckles and old faded Levis
And each night begins a new day
If you don't understand him and he don't die young
He'll probably just ride away.

CHORUS

Mammas don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys
Don't let 'em pick guitars and drive them ol' trucks
Let 'em be doctors and lawyers and such.
Mammas don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys
Cause they'll never stay home and they're always alone
Even with someone they love.

Cowboys like smoky old pool rooms and clear mountain mornings
Little warm puppies and children and girls of the night
Them that don't know him won't like him and them that do
Sometimes won't know how to take him
He ain't wrong, he's just different
But his pride won't let him do things to make you think he's right.

CHORUS

MAMMAS DON'T LET YOUR BABIES GROW UP TO BE COWBOYS

I. Teacher gives mini-lecture about cowboys.

- historically - a lonely profession that has been romanticized.
- present day - used to describe truck drivers and others who work alone at difficult and often dangerous jobs. (American macho)

II. A. Students read transcription.

Discuss vocabulary and expresssions.

- Lone Star
- faded Levis
- pool room
- girls of the night

B. Students listen to song with transcription.

III. How can you recognize a cowboy?

What do his clothes and truck tell you about him?

Describe his lifestyle.

Do you think a cowboy could be a woman?

Compare him to the character in "I've Always Been Crazy."

What is the attitude of the singers in this song?

Compare their attitude in this song to the attitude in "I've Always Been Crazy."

Looking at both songs now, how do you think Americans perceive these people?

IV. What is your opinion of the cowboy?

Would you like to be a cowboy?

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