Britpop of the 90’s

“Those who know nothing of foreign languages, know nothing of their own.”
Johan Wolfgang von Goethe

Learning a new language might help to enhance our learning abilities and broaden our perspective while looking at the world. Consequently, acquiring a language is like getting to know an entire cultural or social system, with references to the lifestyle, geography, history, arts, economy as well as music. The topic of music is always a very attractive one due to the fact that everybody knows songs in English but this lesson is aimed for learners with a B1 level of acquisition.

WARMING-UP

Write the word “gig” on the board and ask your students what do they think it means. It’s pretty funny to find out the different ideas they’ve got about such a short word. After five minutes the teacher explains that “gig” is a colloquial word for concert. Going to “gigs” is popular among young people in cities where live music is an important part of cultural life. Moreover, the gig experience was particularly intense during the punk period, when a band’s energy, aggression on stage was far more important than its musical ability. But “punk”? What’s “punk”? So the moment has come to undertake another second warming-up activity.

ACTIVITIES

1) Place your students in pairs and they are asked to look at the following genres of music written on the board: “classical”, “pop”, “folk”, “country and western”, “reggae”, “rock”, “techno”, “grunge”, “blues”, “jazz”, “hip hop”, “house”, “soul” and “disco”. Then, they are asked to search for one album and one artist for each music genre. This task will prove if they really know the differences between genres.

Soon after, the teacher asks questions about music genres:

1. What do they think these kinds of music are trying to transmit?
2. What kind of people they are targeted to?
3. Which type of music expressed young people’s anger and boredom?
4. Which type of music was inspired by post-industrial desolation?
5. Which type of music embodies traditional values?
2) After a general feedback of the previous assignment, students are asked to think in groups of three about the following. “Imagine you are going to stay on a desert island for 6 months, with only your MP3 and an endless supply of batteries! You can choose only 8 songs to bring with you. Which songs would you choose?”. Encourage your learners to explain why these songs and not some others. If the song isn't well known, tell him or her to explain what is the song about, for example. You can also give some further information about a BBC Radio 4 Programme called “Desert Island Discs with Kirsty Young” in which Kirsty Young asks castaways to choose eight records, a book and a luxury to take with them to the mythical desert island. The radio programme airs on Sundays at 11.15 repeated Friday at 0900.

3) The moment has come to introduce a short story of the British scene from Punk to Britpop. Parallelisms with their own country music scene are welcome.

1975-1977: The Punk scene moves from underground to the front row with the Sex Pistols, The Damned, Patti Smith.

1978-1982: ex-punk groups such as Siouxsie and The Banshees, and the Clash vary the genre. Post-Punk ends with the rise and fall of Joy Division.


1987-1998: Rise of rave culture, acid house music and the UK dance scene with Fat Boy Slim, Prodigy or Chemical Brothers. There was a subsequent evolution of the music scene into different genres, from techno and hardcore house to ambient, jungle (Asian Dub Foundation), drum & bass and Jamaican dub culture leads to the trip-hop, a UK hybrid of dark soul and electronic music (Massive Attack, Tricky, Portishead, etc.)

1994-1998: Rise of conservative Brit pop sound (Oasis, Blur, Pulp, Suede, etc.) that shows nostalgia for the 60's as a golden age of British pop music when there were groups such as the Beatles, The Rolling Stones or the Who’s. Brit pop leads a movement that also got a great influence in Fine Arts (Damien Hirst), Fashion design (Alexander Mcqueen, Galiano, Kate Moss) and cinema (Danny Boyle's Trasporting), this artistic movement is called Cool Britannia.

4) Now, the viewing of this hilarious documentary about the Brit pop music scene in the Nineties, featuring all the main bands of the scene exposing the truth behind the myths. Its name is “Live Forever, the Rise and Fall of Brit pop, it was directed by John Dower and released on the 21st of March 2003, it lasts 82 minutes. While watching, students have to take notes in order to answer some questions presented on a copy previously.

5) Here are the questions and the expected answers:

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A) How long did the Brit pop last?

According to the documentary, Brit pop started with the Spike Island concert played by the Stone Roses on the 27th of May 1990 because most of the future Brit pop bands attended that legendary “gig”.
At the end of the document, it's mentioned that the music genre was in decay by the time the song “Angels” by Robbie Williams was released due to the fact any commercial artist was able to compose Brit pop style songs.

B) In the documentary, we can see the members of the band Wonderwall. In fact, they are a tribute band of Oasis, define the concept of Tribute Band:

A tribute band is a group of music which sings the tracks of another groups, they dress like them and they also try to reproduce same attitudes or abilities on stage.

C) Many albums and artists are mentioned in the documentary, list them chronologically:

1989- The Stone Roses - The Stone Roses

1993- Blue Lines – Massive Attack

etc.

In fact, Intensive reading involves learners reading in detail with specific learning aims and tasks. It can be compared with extensive reading, which involves learners reading texts for enjoyment and to develop general reading skills. For example, The learners read a short text and put events from it into chronological order. In the classroom, intensive reading activities include skimming a text for specific information to answer true or false statements or filling gaps in a summary, scanning a text to match headings to paragraphs, and scanning jumbled paragraphs and then reading them carefully to put them into the correct order.

D) Drugs are often mentioned in the documentary, tell how they influenced the musical scene of Britpop.

The expected answer will be the following that in 1996 most of the artists were on drugs and their creations deceived their fans. The changes between 1993 and three years later were surprising, for instance Parklife and Beetlebum videoclips by Blur or the confession by Jarvis Cocker that writing This is Hardcore was the most difficult moment of his life.

Our general goal here, is to provide information on drugs and to introduce skills that promote positive, healthy life choices by showing the consequences on popular people.

E) How did Britpop influence British Society and Government?

Having a good command of the historical context of an English speaking country is essential to understand its language better. This is because curricular content leads language learning. Learning about History involves developing knowledge and understanding of events, people, structures and changes in the past; how the past influences the present; chronology; interpreting and evaluating sources; explaining cause and consequence; comparing and contrasting interpretations of the past; making links across historical periods and reaching conclusions.

In this question, learners are expected to refer to the different governments mentioned (The Margaret Thatcher’s, John Major’s and Tony Blair’s cabinet and their relationship with music and youth.
F) Locate the bands mentioned before on a map of the UK according to place they start their musical career.

Most of the time our students fail to locate, areas, cities or even countries on a map. That's why this exercise will enhance their spatial location skill.

All in all, bringing British culture to life focuses on extending our knowledge of the language and culture in Britain, reflecting on the teaching of intercultural awareness. This activity explores different aspects of modern British life and culture, investigates ways of teaching cross-cultural awareness in the classroom.

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**Bibliography**


Lightbown, P. 2006. How Languages are Learned, Oxford: OUP


