

Topic : Ireland, the Land of Music

AXE 1: Identities et exchanges

KEY QUESTION: How does traditional Irish music reflect Irish identity and culture?

How has Irish music helped to create a strong national identity?

LESSON 4

Reclaiming Identity through Music

Activity 1 : Warm-up (10 min)

- Brainstorming : *“How can music express identity or protest?”*

Activity 2 : Reading

Doc A : adapted from historical sources and UNESCO :

“For centuries, Irish people have used music to resist oppression and reclaim their cultural identity. During the British ban on the Irish language and traditional gatherings, songs became a way to keep the culture alive. Ballads told stories of heroes, rebellion, and everyday struggles. Instruments like the harp, once a symbol of Irish pride, were also banned — but musicians kept playing secretly. Today, traditional music festivals and artists proudly revive these traditions, showing that music has always been a tool of resilience and national pride.”

Doc B : « The harp a symbol of resistance »

The Irish Harp is the oldest of the Irish instruments. A symbol of Irish identity: it appears on Irish coins and flag. Until the 16th century, harpists enjoyed quite a privileged position in Irish society. The ruling chieftains employed them under a patronage system to compose and perform music.

However the English had a dislike for the harpists. At the time efforts had been made to anglicise Ireland, the harpists were seen as ‘keepers of the tradition’. So in 1571 Queen Elizabeth I issued a decree to “hang the harpers and burn their instruments”. This, coupled with the 1607 “Flight of the Earls” where the last of the Irish chieftains fled to Europe, dealt a serious blow to the harpists. The skill went into decline for some time afterwards.

By Alison Hughes, www.vagabondtoursofireland.com, March 3rd 2016



Comprehension Questions

1. ☒ Answer the questions

1. What role did music play during times of oppression?
2. Why were instruments like the harp banned? Explain using both documents.

3. How has traditional music survived until today?

4. Find two words in the text that show resistance.

Activity 3 : 🎵 Group work

◇ Group 1 – *Zombie* (The Cranberries, 1994)

Theme: Protest against violence in Northern Ireland (*The Troubles*).

Activities:

1. Fill in the blanks

Complete the song using the following words (you may have to change the form).

bomb, child, to die, family, to fight, gun, head, heart, mother, tank, violence

Another _____ hangs lowly,
_____ is slowly taken.
And the _____ caused such silence
Who are we mistaken?
But you see it's not me,
It's not my _____
In your _____, in your _____
They are _____
With their _____ and their _____
And their _____ and their _____
In your _____, in your _____
They are crying
In your _____, in your _____
Zombie, Zombie, Zombie
What's in your _____, in your _____
Zombie, Zombie, Zombie
Another _____'s breaking _____ is taking over
When the _____ causes silence
We must be mistaken
It's the same old theme since 1916
In your _____, in your _____
They're still _____
With their _____ and their _____
And their _____ and their _____
In your _____, in your _____
They are _____
In your _____, in your _____
Zombie, Zombie, Zombie
What's in your _____, in your _____
Zombie, Zombie, Zombie

2. Answer the following questions:

1. Context

- When was *Zombie* released?
- What tragic event inspired the song ?
- Why was this event shocking for public opinion ?

2. The song itself

- What feelings does Dolores O'Riordan express?
- Find 2 verbs in the present continuous. Why are they used?
- What is the exact meaning of the word « Zombie » in the song?
- Why does she repeat the word "*Zombie*" so many times? What effect does it create? When do you think we behave like zombies?

3. Interpretation

- What is the message of the song? What does the song denounce ?

◇ Group 2 – *Sunday Bloody Sunday* (U2, 1983)

Theme: Civil rights movement & protest against violence in Derry (Bloody Sunday, 1972).

I can't believe the news today
Oh, I can't close my eyes and make it go away
How long, how long must we sing this song?
How long? How long?

'Cause tonight
We can be as one
Tonight

Broken bottles under children's feet
Bodies strewn across the dead-end street
But I won't heed the battle call
It puts my back up, puts my back up against the wall

Sunday, Bloody Sunday
Sunday, Bloody Sunday
Sunday, Bloody Sunday
Sunday, Bloody Sunday
Alright, let's go

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

Sunday, Bloody Sunday
Sunday, Bloody Sunday

How long, how long must we sing this song?
How long? How long?

Alright, let's go

'Cause tonight we can be as one, tonight
Tonight, tonight (Sunday, Bloody Sunday)
Tonight, tonight (Sunday, Bloody Sunday)

Wipe the tears from your eyes
Wipe your tears away
I'll wipe your tears away
I'll wipe your tears away (Sunday, Bloody Sunday)
I'll wipe your bloodshot eyes (Sunday, Bloody Sunday)

Sunday, Bloody Sunday
Sunday, Bloody Sunday
Sunday, Bloody Sunday
Sunday, Bloody Sunday
Yeah, let's go
And it's true we are immune
When fact is fiction and TV reality
And today the millions cry (Sunday, Bloody Sunday)
We eat and drink while tomorrow they die
(Sunday, Bloody Sunday)

The real battle just begun (Sunday, Bloody Sunday)
To claim the victory Jesus won (Sunday, Bloody Sunday)
On Sunday, Bloody Sunday, yeah
Sunday, Bloody Sunday

Answer the following questions :

1. Context

1. Match the words to meanings: *bloody, trench, bodies, broken bottles, victory*.
2. a) When was *Sunday Bloody Sunday* written and released?
b) What tragic event does it refer to? Where and when did it happen?
c) Why is this event important in Irish history?

2. The song itself

3. True/False:
 - The song celebrates violence.
 - The lyrics describe a battlefield.
4. *First stanza (ex. "I can't believe the news today...")*
 - a) What atmosphere is created in the opening lines (sadness, anger, despair...)? Justify with a quotation.
5. Why is the word "*Sunday*" important?

3. Interpretation

6. Focus on the repetitions, the images used and the feelings conveyed. What is the message ?
7. How does the singer describe the situation in Northern Ireland (fear, violence, injustice...)?
8. In your opinion, why did U2 decide to sing about this event? What message do they want to send to the world?

◇ Group 3 – *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (Loreena McKennitt's version, 2010, traditional ballad)

Theme: 1798 Irish rebellion against British rule.

I sat within a valley green I sat there with my true love My heart strove to choose between The old love and the new love The old for her, the new that made Me think on Ireland dearly While soft the wind blew down the glade	Tw'as sad I kissed away her tears, Her arms around me clinging When to my ears that fateful shot, Came out the wildwood ringing The bullet pierced my true love's breast, In life's young spring so early And there upon my breast she died, While soft wind
---	--

And shook the golden barley 'Twas hard the woeful words to frame To break the ties that bound us But harder still to bear the shame Of foreign chains around us And so I said, "The mountain glen I'll seek at morning early And join the brave United Men While soft winds shook the barley"	shook the barley. <i>I bore her to some mountain stream, And many's the summer blossom I placed with branches soft and green, About her gore- stained bosom I wept and kissed her clay-cold corpse, Then rushed o'er vale and valley My vengeance on the foe to wreak, While soft wind shook the barley</i> <i>'Twas blood for blood without remorse, I took at Oulart Hollow I placed my true love's clay-cold corpse, Where mine full soon may follow Around her grave I wondered drear, Noon, night and morning early With aching heart when e'er I hear, The wind that shakes the barley</i>
---	---

Answer the following questions:

1. Context

1. Identify the narrator. What choice does he have to make?
2. What kind of song do you think it is ?
3. What happens to his beloved?
4. Explain the historical context.

2. The song itself

5. What "the wind that shakes the barley" symbolises?
6. What are the characters' feelings ?

3. Interpretation

7. What is the representation of Ireland ?
8. Highlight verbs in the past simple → what story is told?

◇ Groupe 4 – *Famine* (Sinéad O'Connor, 1994)

Theme: Great Irish Famine (1845–1852) and its legacy.

Okay, I want to talk about Ireland Specifically I want to talk about the famine About the fact that there never really was one There was no famine See Irish people were only allowed to eat potatoes All of the other food Meat, fish, vegetables Were shipped out of the country under armed guard	All the lonely people (I'm sorry, excuse me) Where do they all come from? (In fact, I can tell you in one word) All the lonely people Where do they all belong? So let's take a look, shall we? The highest statistics of child abuse in the EEC
---	---

To England while the Irish people starved And then, in the middle of all this They gave us money not to teach our children Irish And so we lost our history And this is what I think is still hurting me See we're like a child that's been battered Has to drive itself out of it's head because it's frightened Still feels all the painful feelings But they lose contact with the memory And this leads to massive self-destruction Alcoholism, drug addiction All desperate attempts at running And in it's worst form Becomes actual killing And if there ever is gonna be healing There has to be remembering And then grieving So that there then can be forgiving There has to be knowledge and understanding All the lonely people Where do they all come from? An American army regulation Says you mustn't kill more than ten percent of a nation 'Cause to do so causes permanent psychological damage It's not permanent but they didn't know that Anyway, during the supposed famine We lost a lot more than ten percent of our nation Through deaths on land or on ships of emigration But what finally broke us was not starvation But it's use in the controlling of our education Schools go on about "Black 47" On and on about, "The terrible famine" But what they don't say is in truth There really never was one	And we say we're a Christian country But we've lost contact with our history See, we used to worship God as a mother We're sufferin' from post traumatic stress disorder Look at all our old men in the pubs Look at all our young people on drugs We used to worship God as a mother Now look at what we're doing to each other We've even made killers of ourselves The most child-like trusting people in the Universe And this is what's wrong with us Our history books the parent figure, lied to us I see the Irish As a race like a child That got itself bashed in the face And if there ever is gonna be healing There has to be remembering And then grieving So that there then can be forgiving There has to be knowledge and understanding All the lonely people Where do they all come from? All the lonely people Where do they all come from? Because of our tradition Everyone here knows who he is And what God expects him to do
---	---

Answer the following questions:

1. Context

1. Listen/read → Identify one historical reference.
2. When did it happen? What were the consequences for Ireland?

2. The song itself

3. What criticisms does O'Connor express about Ireland's past and present?
(What does she reproach some people for ?...)
4. How would you describe the tone of the song ? What feelings does the singer convey ?

3. Interpretation

5. According to Sinéad, how has the Famine shaped Irish identity today? How does she link the Great Famine to contemporary problems in Ireland?
6. Fill-in: *Music has ... (bring) people together / History has ... (shape) our identity.*

◇ Groupe 5 – « Sunday Bloody Sunday » by John Lennon and Yoko Ono, 1972

Well it was Sunday bloody Sunday When they shot the people there The cries of thirteen martyrs Filled the Free Derry air Is there any one amongst you Dare to blame it on the kids? Not a soldier boy was bleeding When they nailed the coffin lids!	You Anglo pigs and Scotties Sent to colonize the North You wave your f*cking Union Jack And you know what it's worth! How dare you hold to ransom A people proud and free Keep Ireland for the Irish Turn the British back to sea!	Sunday bloody Sunday Bloody Sunday's the day ! Sunday bloody Sunday Bloody Sunday's the day! Sunday bloody Sunday Bloody Sunday's the day! Sunday bloody Sunday Bloody Sunday's the day!
Sunday bloody Sunday Bloody Sunday's the day!	Sunday bloody Sunday Bloody Sunday's the day!	
You claim to be majority Well you know that it's a lie You're really a minority On this sweet emerald isle When Stormont bans our marches They've got a lot to learn Internment is no answer It's those mothers' turn to burn!	Well, it's always bloody Sunday In the concentration camps Keep Falls Road free forever From the bloody English hands Repatriate to Britain All of you who call it home Leave Ireland to the Irish Not for London or for Rome!	
Sunday bloody Sunday Bloody Sunday's the day! Sunday bloody Sunday Bloody Sunday's the day!	Sunday bloody Sunday Bloody Sunday's the day!	

Answer the following questions:

1. Context

1. When was the song written and in reaction to which event?
2. Where were John Lennon and Yoko Ono living at the time? How might this have influenced their perspective?
3. What was the political situation in Northern Ireland in 1972?

2. The Song Itself

4. What kind of vocabulary does Lennon use to describe the British soldiers and authorities? Quote some examples.
5. How is the tone of this song (angry vs. pacifist)?
6. Identify any lines that directly accuse the British government or army.
7. What emotions does the repetition of “Sunday bloody Sunday” convey?

3. Interpretation

8. What is the message of the song? Does Lennon encourage peace or resistance?
9. How was the song received in Britain and in Ireland at the time? Why was it controversial?
10. In your opinion, is the song more of a **political protest** or a **call for violence**? Justify your answer with references to the lyrics.

◇ Groupe 6 – Sunday Bloody Sunday (by Wolfe Tones, written in 1972 but It was re-released as a single in 2004 (on the album The Troubles))

Well it was Sunday, Bloody Sunday When they shot the people there The cries of fourteen martyrs Filled the brave Derry air They tried to blame the Provos You must blame it on the Brits Not a soldier boy was bleeding When they nailed the coffin lids [Chorus] Sunday, Bloody Sunday Bloody Sunday was the day Sunday, Bloody Sunday Bloody Sunday was the day Was Sunday, Bloody Sunday When the Paras, they went wild They were shooting indiscriminately At man, woman and child Father Daly waved his hankie He tried to anoint the dead But the soldiers kept on firing Kept on shooting evil lead	[Chorus] Sunday, Bloody Sunday Bloody Sunday was the day Sunday, Bloody Sunday Bloody Sunday was the day You say you are a majority But you know that's a lie You're really a minority In this, the Emerald Isle Did you care about majorities In Fermanagh and Tyrone? You took them from the people And kept them for the crown [Chorus] Sunday, Bloody Sunday Bloody Sunday was the day Sunday, Bloody Sunday Bloody Sunday was the day	You English Brits and Scotties Sent to the colonise the North You wave your bloody Union Jack For all that it's worth You're living here in Ireland Sure, Ireland is your home It's Ireland for the Irish Not for London or for Rome [Chorus] Sunday, Bloody Sunday Bloody Sunday was the day Sunday, Bloody Sunday Bloody Sunday was the day
--	---	---

Answer the following questions:

1. Context

- What historical event inspired the song?
- When and where did it happen?
- Who were the victims and who was responsible according to the song?

2. The song itself

- Who are the Wolfe Tones? (What type of band and their political orientation?)
- What feelings are expressed in the lyrics? (anger, revenge, sadness...)
- What is the main message of the song? (violence justified? call for resistance?)
- Which words/images show the violence of the events?

3. Interpretation

- Why do you think this song was so popular among some communities in Ireland?
- How might it have been perceived differently by unionists and British authorities?

◇ Groupe 7 – *The Foggy Dew* (Sinéad O'Connor & The Chieftains, 1995)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keWnPZOd2cw>

As down the glen one Easter morn To a city fair rode I There armed lines of marching men In squadrons passed me by No pipe did hum No battle drum did sound its loud tattoo But the Angelus Bells o'er the Liffey swells Rang out in the foggy dew Right proudly high in Dublin town Hung they out a flag of war 'Twas better to die 'neath that Irish sky Than at Sulva or Sud-El-Bar And from the plains of Royal Meath Strong men came hurrying through While Britannia's Huns with their long range guns Sailed in through the foggy dew	Their bravest fell and the requiem bell Rang mournfully and clear For those who died that Eastertide in the Springing of the year While the world did gaze with deep amaze At those fearless men but few Who bore the fight that freedom's light Might shine through the foggy dew And back through the glen, I rode again And my heart with grief was sore For I parted then with valiant men Whom I never shall see n'more But to and fro in my dreams I go And I kneel and pray for you For slavery fled, O glorious dead When you fell in the foggy dew
--	--

Answer the following questions:

1. Context

- What historical event is described in the song?
- Who are the men mentioned? Why did they fight?
- How does the singer compare them to the Irish soldiers who fought in World War I?

2. The song itself

- What feelings are expressed in the lyrics? (pride, sadness, admiration, anger...)
- Find expressions showing that the rebels are seen as heroes.
- How is the sacrifice of these men justified?

3. Interpretation

- What does the “foggy dew” symbolise?
- How does the song connect nature and national identity?
- Why do you think this ballad is still sung today?

🎵 Final restitution (15–20 min)

Each group presents:

- **Summary of the document** (2–3 min) (who ? Where ? Event ? Context ? When ? What happened ? Message of the document ?)
- **Answer to the guiding question:** *How does this song/article show that music helps reclaim Irish identity?*

READING

The Hungry Voice Album (Irish Times, Oct 30, 2017)

Theme: Commemoration of the famine through traditional & modern songs.

« There are very few songs about the famine anyway. Musically, I think it was skipped over. » [...]

O'Rourke just kept reading and reading. About 25 books in all. And the more he read, the more he came to the understanding that, as the late Dublin singer and song collector Frank Harte said: "Those in power write the history, while those who suffer write the songs."

"History books are full of academic renderings of the information and I wanted [my work] to be personal accounts," he says. "That's the kind of thing I was searching for, and that was the stuff that there was the least amount of in the books I read."

One of the most striking aspects of listening to these deeply lyrical songs of loss, of longing and of forced exile is their contemporary resonance. It's enough to send shivers down the spine of the most objective listener. [...]

Siobhan Long, *The Irish Times*, 30 October 2017

Answer the following questions:

1. According to the article, why was the album created?
2. Why do such songs have a « contemporary » resonance » ?
3. How do songs help transmit collective memory?
4. True/False:
 - The famine is still remembered in Irish music.
 - The album is only about modern pop.
5. Say what Frank Harte means when he says « Those in power write the history, while those who suffer write the songs. ». Can you think of other examples that illustrate this quote ?
6. Can songs help to keep history alive ?

