

## Final exercise, Pedagogical Pop1.

By Monica Stacconi

The song chosen is “Starry Starry Night” by Don Mclean.

Target students: intermediate or over. They must be familiarised with phonetic symbols.

Pre-activity/lead in: Teacher shows students Van Gogh’s famous picture that gives the song its name:



T. elicits from SS a description of the picture and what it represents, if it is realistic or not, etc., and who painted it.

The students might not know much about Van Gogh, so, a short summary of his biography could be provided.

I.e. Vincent Van Gogh was born in the Netherlands on March 30, 1853. He lived in various cities in Europe going from job to job until, in 1880, he decided to go to Brussels to study art. During the next years he painted 872 paintings. For most of his life he was very poor and suffered from severe depression. In December 1888 he was admitted into an asylum after chopping his own ear off. It is thought that Vincent Van Gogh was actually epileptic and this is why people thought he had fits of insanity. In 1890 Vincent Van Gogh shot himself in the chest and died a few days later.

The teacher explains to SS they are going to hear a song called Starry Night, dedicated to this work and its author.

T. gives hand outs of the song with gaps for the students to fill in:

### STARRY, STARRY NIGHT

Starry, starry night.

Paint your palette 1) \_\_\_\_\_

Look out on a 2) \_\_\_\_\_,

With eyes that know the darkness in my soul.

3) \_\_\_\_\_

Sketch the trees and the daffodils,

Catch the breeze and the winter chills,

In colors on the snowy linen land.

Now I understand what you tried to say to me,

How you 4) \_\_\_\_\_,

How you tried to set them free.

They would not listen, they did not know how.

Perhaps 5) \_\_\_\_\_.

Starry, starry night.

Flaming flowers that brightly 6) \_\_\_\_\_,

Swirling clouds in violet haze,

Reflect in Vincent's 7)\_\_\_\_\_  
Colors changing hue, morning field of amber grain,  
Weathered faces 8)\_\_\_\_\_are soothed,  
Are soothed beneath the artist's loving hand.

Now I understand what you tried to say to me,  
How you 9)\_\_\_\_\_,  
How you tried to set them free.  
They would not listen, they did not know how.  
Perhaps 10) \_\_\_\_\_.

For they could not love you,  
But still your love was true.  
And when no hope 11)\_\_\_\_\_  
On that starry, starry night,  
You took your life, as lovers often do.  
But 12)\_\_\_\_\_, Vincent,  
This world was never meant for one  
As beautiful as you.

Starry, starry night.  
Portraits hung in empty halls,  
Frameless head on nameless walls,  
13)\_\_\_\_\_ and can't forget.  
Like the strangers that you've met,  
The ragged men in the ragged clothes,  
The silver thorn of bloody rose,  
Lie crushed and 14)\_\_\_\_\_

Now I think I know what you tried to say to me,  
How 15) \_\_\_\_\_,  
How you tried to set them free.  
They would not listen, they're not listening still.  
Perhaps they 16)\_\_\_\_\_...

If after the first listening SS have not completed all the gaps, T. could give them a phonetic clue, providing a phonetic transcription for each missing clause/sentence and having them decide the spelling in pairs:

- 1) /**blu:** ən greɪ/
- 2) /'sʌməz 'deɪ/
- 3) /'fædəʊz ɒn ðə 'hɪlz/
- 4) /'sʌfəd fər jɔ: 'sæni:ti/
- 5) /'ðeɪ 'lɪsən 'naʊ/
- 6) / 'bleɪz/
- 7) /'aɪz əv 'tʃaɪnə 'blu:/
- 8) / 'laɪnd ɪn 'peɪn/

- 9) like number 4  
 10) like number 5  
 11) /'wəz 'left ɪn 'saɪt/  
 12) /'aɪ 'kʊd hæv 'təʊld 'juː/  
 13) /wɪð 'aɪz ðæt 'wɒtʃ ðə 'wɜːld ənd 'kɑːnt fə'get/  
 14) /'brəʊkən ɒn ðə 'vɜːdʒɪn 'snəʊ/  
 15) like number 4  
 16) /'nevə 'wɪl/

Answers:

blue and grey/summer's day/ shadows on the hills/ suffered for your sanity/they listen now/ blaze/ eyes of China blue/ lined in pain/ was left in sight/ I could have told you/ with eyes that watch the world and can't forget/ broken on the virgin snow/ never will.

Follow up:

Once identified the missing bits and checked new vocabulary, SS in pairs, discuss the meaning of the song.

The teacher provides them with a set of questions to help discussion:

- 1) Who speaks in the song and whom does he address?
  - 2) What is mostly described in the song? (SS should realise about the different content of each stanza/section. I.e. Some are descriptive of the painter's work, others are a personal reflection/judgement of the lyrical voice/singer. A good exercise could consist of writing next to each stanza a sentence summarising the content in a more simple way.
  - 3) What is the overall mood of the song? Who do you think is really aimed at?
- Opinions are eventually shared as a class. This activity could be a part of a unit dealing with music or the media and a starting point for reflection on the messages contained in more modern music of different genres nowadays. SS themselves might bring the lyrics of their favourite songs to class.

### PHONETIC FOLLOW UP EXERCISE

The song can be further used to revise the discrimination between similar vocalic sounds and their most common spellings.

Find, in the song, words that contain the following vocalic sounds:

1) /aɪ/

/eɪ/

/ɪ/

Answers:

1) night, eyes, linen, I, tried, brightly, sight, life, like, lie.

2) grey, day, say, they, frameless, nameless,

3) starry, with, in , hills, daffodils, winter, chills, insanity, listen, soothed, still, Vincent, empty, ragged (as adjective), silver, bloody, will.

Further activities might be linked with word-formations, more specifically adjectives, since this songs contains a number of example of adjectives formation (-less, -ing, -ed, -y, etc.)