

Listening



- 1) *Fairytale of New York* has been repeatedly voted as 'best Christmas song of all time' in British music industry polls. What images does the song title evoke?
- 2) Listen to the song. In what ways does it match your ideas?

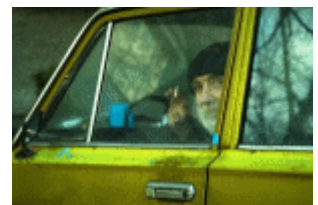
Reading

- 1) Look at a copy of the lyrics to *Fairytale of New York* and match these summaries to the verses of the song:

- a) They remember their hopes and expectations about emigrating to the USA.
- b) They reminisce over the Christmas they met.
- c) He got stupidly drunk to celebrate winning a bet he placed.
- d) They bicker and hurl insults at each other as she lies in hospital recovering from a drug overdose.
- e) He's been thrown in a police cell for the night to sober up.
- f) They blame each other for the demise of their dreams before admitting they do need each other.

- 2) Read the lyrics again and find:

- a) the names of two traditional Irish folk songs
- b) the name of New York's theatre district
- c) a more commonly used term for the *New York Police Department*
- d) a word/phrase meaning: *a police holding cell for the drunk and disorderly*
- e) a word/phrase meaning: *a method of administering fluids to patients*
- f) a slang term for *heroin* or other narcotic drugs
- g) an interjection indicating disbelief/disdain/disapproval
- h) insults:
 1. *a person with no morals or respect for others*
 2. *a sexually promiscuous woman*
 3. *a homosexual man (**highly offensive)*
 4. *a lazy, unemployed (homeless) person*
 5. *the larvae of a fly*
 6. *an aggressive and violent young criminal*



3) Below are some comments from an internet chat room about Christmas songs. Which could have been made about *Fairytale of New York*?

'There's nothing to distinguish it from all the other cheesy Christmas pop songs out there.' - Jamie, 26

'It's the complete antithesis of a Christmas song. I love it!' - Angela, 42

"It reminds me of all the best things at Christmas time and makes me feel warm and fuzzy inside!" - Mark, 31

'You'd be hard pushed to find another Christmas song so painfully heart-breaking yet so hilarious at the same time.' - David, 25



'The Irish folk music makes you want to tap your feet, but the lyrics are bittersweet.' - Jo, 49

'It highlights the fact that a lot of people have an atrocious time at Christmas – particularly immigrants.' - Richard, 38

'This song usually polarises opinion. It's definitely not your run of the mill Christmas song! Personally, I love it!' - Kate, 31

'Radio 1 [BBC] still won't play the full version – the language is rather colourful in places!' - John, 52



Source: songmeanings.com

Speaking

1) Discuss the following in pairs/groups:

- Describe the relationship between the couple in the song.
- How do you think their story ends?
- Thinking about immigrants to your country; Where are they from? What brought them there? What problems, if any, do they face?
- What, if anything, does Christmas mean to you?
- Have you ever spent Christmas or another important cultural festival away from family and friends? Did/Would you mind?

Artist/Song: The Pogues/Fairytale of New York

Listening

This exercise practises listening for gist and prepares students for reading the song lyrics later in the lesson.

- 1) Ask students about Christmas songs: Are they popular in their country?; Have they heard any in English?; What do people usually sing about in a Christmas song?... Then hand out the worksheets.
- 2) Ask students how they imagine New York at Christmas time – ask if any have visited the city/seen images in films etc. Make sure they focus on the 'fairytale' aspects, as they should be thinking about the song title (*snow, lights, shopping, presents, ice skating in Central Park, good food, family, friends...*).
- 3) Students won't understand all the lyrics on the first listen but should catch enough to be able to realise that this isn't a typical 'fairytale' story. Ask them to share what bits of the song they *did* catch with a partner before collating ideas together on the board as a class. Listen again if need be.

*Make sure you elicit the fact that there are two singers telling a story (of their relationship).

Reading

These exercises practice reading comprehension using the lyrics to the song students have just listened to.

EACH STUDENT WILL NEED A COPY OF THE LYRICS TO Fairytale of New York by The Pogues

- 1) Ask students to read the summaries (a-f) to check their understanding of the vocabulary. Then give each student a copy of the lyrics and tell them to match verses of the song with the summaries.

Answers: **a)** Verse beginning: "They've got cars..."
b) Verse beginning: "You were handsome..."
c) Verse beginning: "Got on a lucky..."
d) Verse beginning: "You're a bum..."
e) Verse beginning: "It was Christmas..."
f) Verse beginning: "I could have..."

- 2) Tell students to read the lyrics more carefully to find the vocabulary. Allow students to use dictionaries for the insults (g), which are more difficult to guess from context alone.

Answers: **a)** Rare Old Mountain Dew, Galway Bay; **b)** Broadway; **c)** NYPD; **d)** Drunk tank (US slang); **e)** a drip; **f)** junk; **g)** your arse; **h)** 1. scumbag; 2. slut; 3. faggot (**highly offensive); 4. bum; 5. maggot; 6. punk

- 3) Ask students to check the meaning of the underlined words with a partner/a dictionary before deciding which of the comments were made about Fairytale of New York. (**cheesy**: excessively sentimental/obvious; **antithesis**: the exact opposite; **warm and fuzzy**: comforted and content inside; **you'd be hard-pushed**: you'd find it very difficult; **bittersweet**: **atrocious**: terrible; a mixture of sadness & happiness; **polarise**: to divide opinion; **run of the mill**: regular/average; **colourful**: bad language (swearing or other impolite language)

Answers: Angela, Jo, David, Richard, Kate, John

Draw students attention to *Jo/Richard's* comments: Irish folk music/immigration. Ask them if they know anything about this. (*For many years agriculture was the dominant industry in Ireland. Wages were low and many people lived in poverty. Some began emigrating to the USA, where work prospects were better, and wages higher. Potatoes were the main crop and food staple in Ireland, so when a disease destroyed 75% of the country's crop in the late 1840s, many more people joined the emigration to the US, mostly arriving in New York – where they expected life would be much brighter... in reality this was usually not the case. Immigrants faced poverty, homelessness and prejudice amongst other issues.*)

Speaking

This exercise gives students freer speaking practise while further exploring issues from the song.

- 1) Ask students to work in pairs/groups for discussion before sharing ideas as a class.