

# Interpreting the Message of a Song

<b>THEME:</b>	<b>LEISURE (MUSIC)</b>	
<b>LANGUAGE:</b>	<b>ANY (SPANISH)</b>	
<b>STANDARD(S):</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	<b>CULTURES</b>
	<b>1.2</b>	<b>2.2</b>

## Time Frame:

Two 50-minute class periods

## Materials Needed:

- Printed copies of song lyrics (Spanish sample provided)
- Cassette tape/CD of song
- Cassette or CD player
- Overhead projector and transparencies
- Rubric for assessment (provided)

## Description of Task:

### Assumptions:

Students are accustomed to doing activities in cooperative groups and are familiar with the jigsaw structure. All activities are performed in the target language unless otherwise specified.

### Reflection on Group Process:

While working in groups, students should focus on the following group social skills (Johnson et al., 1993):

- total group participation
- asking for help or clarification
- offering to explain or clarify

### Level:

Novice-High

### Purpose:

To read for comprehension of cultural content and songwriter's message

### Communicative Function(s):

Referential: Paraphrasing, summarizing, or translating

### Language Structure(s):

Querer + infinitives and gerunds (will vary depending on song)

### Cultural Aspects:

The use of song and images as a means to express cultural values and beliefs

### Modalities:

Reading

Writing

**Pre-listening/reading:**

The teacher displays the following questions on the overhead and plays the song two to three times. Students listen to the song without the text and in “home groups” of three briefly address the questions in English:

- Can your group identify ten words in this song?
- What does your group notice or find interesting about the song (i.e., instruments used, rhythm, traditional vs. modern sounds)?
- What might be a possible title for this song?

Groups then share their responses with the whole class.

Next, the teacher distributes song lyrics in the target language and displays the title of the song on an overhead projector. The teacher briefly reviews cultural context as necessary to enhance comprehension. A few key vocabulary expressions and language structures that may present difficulties for students are then discussed. For example, the song <*Quiero ser agua fresca*> lends itself to a focus on the formation and use of infinitives with the verb *querer* and gerunds.

While looking at the song first individually, and then in pairs, students circle and identify key language structures (*querer* + infinitive and gerunds) and vocabulary and then check with a partner to ensure that each of them understands their meaning and use.

**Jigsaw Reading Activity:**

For this jigsaw task (Kagan, 1989, cited in Shrum & Glisan, 1994), students form “home groups” having three members each. In these “home groups,” students decide who will assume the following roles:

- reader/checker of understanding (initially reads the song aloud to others and checks for group members’ understanding during post-reading base group activities)
  - reporter (reports the group’s interpretation to the whole class)
- recorder (takes notes on task instructions and group’s discussion)

First, the reader reads the refrain aloud to others as others read silently to themselves. Students are asked to focus on a general understanding of the gist or meaning of the song. During “home group” work, students answer the following questions displayed on the overhead:

- What kind of person may have written this song? Why do you think so?
- For whom might this song have been written? Describe this person.
- How do you think the songwriter is feeling?
- Where might this situation take place?
- What might be the message intended by the songwriter?
- What images/metaphors does the songwriter use to communicate his/her message/feelings?

“Home group” members then regroup themselves in three medium-sized groups according to assigned roles. In these newly formed “expert groups,” each group is asked to decipher the meaning of one of the four-line stanzas. Each member of the group writes a 2-3 sentence summary in the target language paraphrasing their section (they should be discouraged from lifting phrases straight from the song). Some English may be spoken at this point to discuss and clarify meaning. Once the “expert groups” have had ample time to analyze their section of the song, they will return to their original “home groups.”

While the students are working in expert groups and home groups, the teacher circulates to answer students’ questions and help guide them in their comprehension and interpretation.

### ***Post-reading:***

In “home groups,” each member takes a turn sharing their summary of their part of the song with the other group members. Again, some English may be spoken at this point to discuss and clarify meaning. By the end of this stage, groups should have a good understanding of the meaning of the song’s lyrics and should be ready to return to a discussion of the songwriter’s message.

As students attempt to interpret the message(s) they think the songwriter wishes to convey, the teacher will emphasize that because this is interpretation, there is no right or wrong answer. However, the group should be able to back up their interpretation with specific references to the song’s lyrics. Each group ultimately creates a 1-3 sentence summary of the songwriter’s intended message(s). The recorder writes down this summary.

## NOTES

The base group reporter for each base group shares their interpretation of the song with the whole class. They should be able to explain on what lyrics their interpretation is based. After the reporters presentations, the teacher can guide the class in a summary discussion, comparing and contrasting the various interpretations.

Finally, in “home groups” students reflect on the group process and discuss how well they included the above-stated social skills while working in groups.

### **Assessment:**

First, students will demonstrate understanding of their section of the song by being able to paraphrase and explain its meaning to their group members. In addition, each “home group’s” written summary interpretation of the song’s message will be handed in and assessed with a primary trait rubric for understanding of intended message with appropriate reference to specific lyrics to back up the interpretation (see rubric provided).

Finally, the students will address in writing their assessment of their own participation and use of social skills in the “home group.” Each group member will offer one future recommendation for more effective group work.

### **Extensions:**

#### ***Suggestions for adapting the task for various levels:***

*For beginning levels:* Students can limit themselves to a focus on the refrain only.

*For advanced levels:*

- All discussion of meaning can be done in the target language.
- Instead of doing a jigsaw comprehension/interpretation activity for just one song, each expert group can have a different song to analyze about a related topic. Members then go back to their base groups and explain what their song has to say about this topic to the other group members.

**Other extensions:**

- Students could express their opinions about this song—both the lyrics and the sound, i.e. what they like or don't like about it and why.
- In groups, students could read the English translation of the song given on the CD jacket and compare it to the meaning they derive from the song. They can then discuss possible cultural implications of different interpretations.
- Students could do creative writing activities where they rewrite the song from another point of view, or continue the story the song tells.
- Students can create their own refrain or a new verse for the song.
- Students can write a short story or play about the song.
- Students can design a CD/cassette tape cover for this song.

**Cultural extensions:**

- The class could discuss in greater detail what the images in the song communicate about the cultural values and compare and contrast these images with those used in their own culture.
- Focus on the songwriter and his/her culture. Students can do research and provide background information about the songwriter, the time period in which the song was written, and the use of musical genre with the culture.

**References and Resources:**

This lesson makes use of the following authentic material: Lyric to the song *Quiero ser agua fresca* on album entitled *<Sueno de libertad>* to reprint this material online permission has been requested.

Singer: José Luís Perales

Johnson, D., Johnson, R., & Holubec, E. (1993). *Cooperation in the classroom*. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.

Kagan, S. (1989). *Cooperative learning: Resources for teachers*. San Juan Capistrano, CA: Resources for Teachers.

Shrum, J., & Glisan, E. (1994). *Teacher's handbook: Contextualized language instruction*. Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

## Reflections:

## Primary Trait Rubric for Written Summaries to accompany “Interpreting the Message of a Song”

Score	Criteria
3	The content of the summary provides a meaningful interpretation of the song and includes appropriate reference to specific lyrics to support the interpretation.
2	The content of the summary provides a satisfactory interpretation of the song and includes some reference to specific lyrics to support the interpretation, but not consistently.
1	The content of the summary does not provide an adequate interpretation of the song (in other words, the interpretation does not make sense). Reference to specific lyrics is lacking.

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