

Teacher's Page - Carrigfergus

The learner handout pages include:


- 1 Comments on the song by the singer, Colum Regan.
- 2 The song lyrics with some history and background.
- 3 An activities page for learners. Ideas for working with the song and connected themes.

Working with the song.


Tick the activities you wish to use.

Work in the whole class. Tell learners that the song is an Irish lament, a song of sadness and longing. Ask learners to guess what the song could be about. What might the singer be longing for or lamenting? Perhaps learners can give examples of other laments they know, either in English or their own language.

Listen to the song. Elicit reactions from the class. Do learners like it? Is it different from their expectations? In what ways?

 Ask them to work alone or in pairs and fill in a Song Review Sheet (which the teacher can copy and hand out).



 *Listening.* Learners can now listen to the singer, Colum Regan, talking about the song (Track 17). Do learners want to change anything they wrote on their Song Review Sheets? Allow them to do so.

Copy and hand out the transcript of Colum's comments. Learners can use dictionaries to look up any unknown words.

Copy and hand out the lyrics. Give learners time to read them. Some of the lyrics are enigmatic. What do learners think the following phrases refer to? There are no right answers for *a, d, e*, so ask learners to use their imagination.

a - verse 1 – Why does he long for 'nights in Ballygran'? (Key: perhaps because /he always had a good time there/it's a beautiful place at night/he met friends or his loved one there.)

b - verse 2 – 'Have all passed on now like melting snow'. What does this mean? (Key: It could mean that they have 'moved on' or that they, or some of them, have died.)

c - verse 2 – What is the meaning of 'Soft is the grass my bed is free'? (Key: he sleeps out in the open air for free.)

d - verse 3 – What are 'the marble stones as black as ink'? (Key: they could be grave stones.) What do you think is 'reported' on these stones? (Key - it could be the name of his mother or loved one - we can't be sure.)

e - verse 3 – Who is the person he would support 'with gold and silver'? (Key: again, perhaps his mother or loved one.)

f - verse 4 – What does 'my days are numbered' mean? (Key: he does not have long to live.)

□ *Language exercises*

- 1 'I wish I was in Carrigfergus'. Ask learners to note the use of the past tense. Then ask them to think of places they would like to be, or things they would like to do. These are present wishes, but impossible at the moment (although they may be possible in the future).

EXAMPLES:

I wish I was (somewhere).

I wish I could (do something).

I wish I had (something).

- 2 Ask learners to notice these verb + (noun) + preposition or adverbial combinations in the lyrics: swim over (verse 1), bring back (v2), passed on (v2), spend my days in (v2).

In the whole class you could ask learners to brainstorm similar combinations, starting with the verbs swim, bring, pass, spend.

For example: swim under/through; bring over/back/up/down/etc; pass by/down/up/through/etc; spend (time/money) on.

Make sure learners know what their suggestions mean and that they can use them in example sentences.

As an alternative to whole class work you could ask learners to work alone or in pairs. They could also use reference books such as dictionaries as help.

- *Hand out the Activities Page* and either tell learners which activities to do or allow them to choose. These can be done in class or for homework.

Colum Regan talks about the song Carrigfergus.

Transcript



Carrigfergus is one of the first Irish songs I ever learned, and it is one which I've never grown tired of singing.

It's a ballad, a lament for one's homeland. This is a common theme in Irish folk songs. In fact this style of song is very popular in Irish folk music.

Whenever we perform it live, it always elicits an emotional response from the audience.

It's very hard to put my finger on why I like this song so much – it may be because of the melody.

The verses start off gently and midway through build to a melodic and emotional crescendo – and then, with what seems to be a sense of resignation, the melody returns to the pitch and tone of the opening lines for the end of the verse.

The cyclical pattern of this melody gives a lot of emotional range suitable for such a sad song, because I think the lyrics and melody suggest the singer knows he'll never get back to Carrigfergus.

Carrigfergus

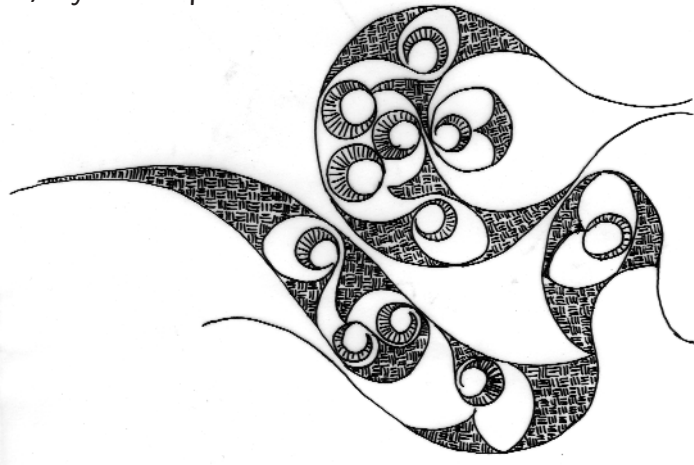
I wish I was in Carrigfergus, only for nights in Ballygran
I would swim over the deepest ocean
The deepest ocean, my love to find
But the sea is wide and I cannot swim over
Neither have I the wings to fly
If I could find me a handsome boatman
To ferry me over my love and I



My childhood days bring back reflections of happy times spent long ago
My boyhood friends and my own relations
Have all passed on now like melting snow
And I'll spend my days in endless roving
Soft is the grass my bed is free
Oh to be back there in Carrigfergus
On that long road down to the sea

And in Kilkenny it is reported on marble stones there as black as ink
With gold and silver I would support her
But I'll sing no more now till I get a drink
For I'm drunk today and I'm seldom sober
A handsome rover from town to town
But I'm sick now, and my days are numbered
Come all you young men and lay me down

I wish I was in Carrigfergus, only for nights in Ballygran
I would swim over the deepest ocean
The deepest ocean, my love to find



Some history of Carrigfergus

The origins of Carrigfergus are lost in the mists of time. It is possible that the song was first known as *The Sick Young Lover*, a combination of two songs from the west and north of Ireland. A song sheet with lyrics in both Irish and English was printed in Cork, Ireland, in 1830. The alternative spelling for Carrigfergus is Carrickfergus, which is a port 9 miles north-east of Belfast. It is often said that the Irish writer Brendan Behan and the Irish actor Peter O'Toole helped to popularise the song in recent times.

Activities Page - Carrigfergus

Choose one or more of these activities.

- Tick the ones you want to do.* If you want you can treat them as short activities, mini-projects, or even major projects.
- Work alone or with a partner.* Think of a place you really like. Replace the word *Carrigfergus* in the song lyrics with the name of your place. Then make any other changes so that the lyrics are about your place. Arrange the lyrics so that you can sing them to the same tune as *Carrigfergus*. If you want, sing your version to the class.
- On your CD, Colum Regan speaks about why he likes *Carrigfergus* so much. Listen to Colum's comments (Track 17). Do you feel the same way about a particular song in either English or your own language?



Write a few lines about the song and why you like it. If you quote lyrics in your own language add the English translation in brackets. Then tell a partner or your classmates. If you want, you can sing the song or recite some of the lyrics.

- Brian McLintock was born near Belfast thirty-six years ago, but moved with his family to Australia when he was six. He wrote to a relative back in Ireland to describe his feelings on hearing *Carrigfergus* for the first time. 'I'd never heard the song before. I no longer thought of myself as an Irishman with roots in Belfast. One day, I was channel-surfing, and this Irishman on the telly was singing a song. Suddenly I was almost overcome by a sense of belonging and identity. For the first time I felt I was as much Irish as Australian. What is it about this song that could cause such a powerful set of emotions? Since that day I've been interested in my own and my family's background, and I'm learning a lot about Ireland and what it means to be Irish.'



Can you think of a song in your own language which releases similar emotions about identity and belonging? If so *write a little about the song*. You could also translate the lyrics into English.

- Do you know* the names of any Irish musicians? Choose one and write about him or her. Include some information about their music. Use the WWW or reference books.



- There is another song that Irish people feel strongly about. It's called *Danny Boy*. Use the WWW to find the lyrics and a sample recording in a sound file.



Which song, *Danny Boy* or *Carrigfergus*, do you prefer? Write a few lines to say why.


Work in a small group. Each of you choose one or two of the following places in Ireland. What do you know about them? Use the WWW or reference books.

Write a few lines.



Dublin Belfast Cork Limerick Galway Donegal

 In addition to musicians, Ireland has produced many fine writers, poets and artists. *Choose one and write about* their life and achievements. Choose an example of their work to show to others in the class. Use the WWW or reference books.

 *Carrigfergus* is a song about exile, longing and loss. *Find out about the history* of Irish emigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Why did people leave? Where did many go? Which cities around the world now have large populations of descendants from Ireland? Which Irishmen or women became famous in their new homelands? Use the WWW and reference books. Also find out why many Irish are now returning to Ireland. Write a brief account of your findings and inform your classmates or pin your work up on a wall to be read.

