

Teaching English through literature

Target:

Scuola secondaria di secondo livello

Biennio

Genres of POETRY

THE BALLAD

THE QUATRAIN

THE COUPLET

THE SONNET

THE EPITAPH

THE SPIRITUAL

FREE VERSE

VARIATIONS

THE HAIKU

**Let's look at the first
one!**

Poetry and song

Some forms of poetry – such as the ballad – have always become popular through songs.

What is a ballad?

- A story – a narrative - told in verse
- Usually in four-line stanzas
- Usually with a strong rhyme scheme (e.g. ABAB or AABB)
- Sometimes with a chorus that is repeated

Some famous ballads?

- The Rime of the Ancient Mariner – Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- The Ballad of Reading Gaol – Oscar Wilde
- The Walrus and the Carpenter – Lewis Carroll

Many modern folk songs are ballads, such as
The Fields of Athenry, by Pete St. John.

The Fields of Athenry (Pete St. John)

By a lonely prison wall
I heard a young girl calling.
"Michael, they are taking you away.
For you stole Trevelyan's corn
so the young might see the morn, now a
prison ship lies waiting in the bay".

Chorus:
Low lie the fields of Athenry
where once we watched the small free
birds fly.
Our love was on the wing,
we had dreams and songs to sing,
it's so lonely 'round the fields of Athenry.

By a lonely prison wall
I heard a young man calling.
"Nothing matters Mary when you're free,
Against the Famine and the Crown,
I rebelled, they ran me down,
now you must raise our child with dignity".

Low lie...

By a lonely harbour wall,
she watched the last star falling,
and that prison ship sailed out against the
sky.
Sure she'll wait and hope and pray,
for her love in Botany Bay
it's so lonely 'round the fields of Athenry.

Low lie...

Listen to the song while you read it

Features to explore

Themes

Vocabulary

Historical context

Idiomatic language

Geography

Phrasal verbs

Sounds and spelling

Speech vs writing

Rhymes and
reasons

Exercises

Themes

- ✿ Freedom (birds) vs Imprisonment (prison and ship)

- ✿ Love

- ✿ Justice

- ✿ Heroic virtue: stealing to feed your children

- ✿ Bringing up children with dignity

- ✿ Can you think of any more?

- ✿ How are these themes illustrated?

Historical and geographical context

- ❁ What was the Famine?

- ❁ Who was the Crown?

- ❁ Who was Treveylan?

- ❁ What was the story of his corn?

- ❁ Why was Michael imprisoned?

- ❁ Where is Botany Bay? Who was sent there?

- ❁ Where is Athenry?

Sound and Spelling

The long vowel in *wall* (ɔ:) occurs in these words:

- *Wall, calling, falling*

- Practise saying it: make sure your lips are rounded! Careful: there is no similar sound in the Italian vowel system!

- Practise it in words like: *abroad, dawn, law, saw, yawn*

This is an Irish song. In Irish English, the letter 'r' is always pronounced.

- Practise saying these words, with the same 'or' sound, plus the 'r'

- *corn, morn*

- *Born, sword, torn, warn*

- Can you pronounce them without the 'r'? That's how a British speaker would say it.

-ed endings

Look at the verbs in **bold** in these lines:

-where once we **watched** the small free birds fly

-I **rebelled**, they ran me down

-As that prison ship **sailed** out against the sky

-ed endings have **three** pronunciations in English

-/t/ - watched, hoped, walked

-/d/ - rebelled, sailed, called

-/id/ - wanted, waited, repeated

Q. How do you know when to pronounce /t/, /d/, or /id/?

A. Look at (or LISTEN TO) the last sound in the verb!

Voiced and unvoiced consonant sounds

Voiced

b – to robu – robbed /d/

g – to blog – blogged /d/

v – to love – loved /d/

Z – to sneeze – sneezed /d/

But watch out for /d/

– to glide – glided /id/

**Can you add any more?
What about judge?**

Unvoiced

p – to hope – hoped /t/

k – to walku – walkud /t/

f – to laugh – laughed /t/

s – to kiss – kissed /t/

And watch out for /t/

to waiti – waitid /id/

**Can you add any more?
What about wish?**

-s spelling and sound

Listen to the sound /s/ in the chorus.

***Low lie the fieldss of Athenry,
Where once we watched the small free birdss fly
Our love was on the wing, we had dreamss and songss to sing
It's so lonely round the fieldss of Athenry.***

In *fields, birds, dreams, songs* , how is –s pronounced?

Like a /z/.

Why?

What do /d/, /m/, /ng/ have in common?

They are voiced.

Voiced consonant + s = z

Voicing

- ❁ When you pronounce a voiced consonant, your vocal cords vibrate. In English, voiced consonants are: b, d, g, l, m, n, r, ō (as in *the*), ʒ (as in *beige*), v, z
- ❁ Example: Say the three sounds (not the letters!) separately in “bad”. b-a-d. Touch your throat while you say them. You will feel your voicebox vibrate. These are voiced sounds.
- ❁ If you say the sounds in “cat” separately – c-a-t - you won’t feel the voicebox vibrate on the sounds c and t. (Vowels are always voiced.)

-th spelling and sound

Listen to the song: how do you pronounce -th in *Athenry*?

In *Athenry* – th is **voiceless**, as in *thing, think, thought, thick, thin, thank, three and throw*.

In some words, -th is **voiced**.

What do these words have in common?

the, this, that, these, they, those, them, there, although, though,

They are all **GRAMMATICAL**.

If in doubt, try the rule of thumb: **at the beginning of grammatical words, – th TENDS to be voiced.**

Any **exceptions? Thy** (*your* in Early Modern English).

And what about in “**the River Thames**”? **Alas, it is pronounced /t/!**

Check your -s endings

Put the words from the song ending in -s in the right box.
Treveylan's corn, a prison ship lies, it's so lonely, nothing matters.
Other words:
my dog jumps up when I give him a biscuit.
Mary sings so well.
My hands are shaking.
He's got blue eyes.

Voiced

Unvoiced

Answers

Treveylan's corn, a prison ship lies, it's so lonely, nothing matters,
against the sky, My dog jumps up when my dad .
How many stops til the central station?
My hands are shaking.
He's got blue eyes.

Voiced

Treveylan's

he's

Lies

eyes

matters

**DID YOU
NOTICE?
VOWELS ARE
VOICED.**

sings

hands

Unvoiced

it's

jumps

stops

Rhymes and reasons

Rhyme is pleasing to the ear; it makes poems and songs memorable, and creates a sense of unity. In *The Fields of Athenry*, what is the rhyme scheme?

Verse: AABCCB

Chorus: AABBA

Alliteration abounds in the ballad.

- What is the effect of the 'l' sound in the chorus?

Say the first two words slowly: Low lie the fields of Athenry. How are they sung? How does it make you feel? Can you imagine singing this quickly? Would it be as effective?

- Which sound is repeated here? *Where once we watched*
'w' doesn't exist as a consonant in Italian – it is rendered as 'v'. It is a soft sound in English and contributes to the sense of nostalgia the chorus creates.
- Can you find any more examples?

Vocabulary

Idiomatic language

In the chorus we find the expression *on the wing*.

A *bird* is usually said to be *on the wing*.

Here the use is metaphorical:
what is *on the wing* in the song?

What idea does that convey?

Phrasal verbs

There is one quite unusual phrasal verb:

I rebelled, they *ran me down*

'To run someone/something down' means

'To find someone or something after searching for them for a long time'

(Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary)

Verb structures

To hear/see/watch someone

doing something

I heard a young man calling..

I heard a young girl calling

She watched the last star falling

But what about this?

Low lie the fields of Athenry

*Where once we watched the small
free birds fly*

The difference normally lies in
seeing/hearing/watching a
complete action (fly) as opposed to
part of an action (calling, falling).

Here, however, the rhyme (Athenry-
fly) may provide the reason!

Features of speech - elision

Ballads, when sung, share features with speech.
Take rhythm: Where do the stresses fall in these sentences?

“Sure, she’ll **wait** and **hope** and **pray**”

What does that do to the word “and” How is it pronounced?

Similarly, what happens to the first letter (and syllable) of against in “against the Famine and the Crown?”

Or “around” in “it’s so lonely ‘round the fields of Athenry”?

Discuss the following questions, using if-clauses and the modal 'would'.

- What would you do if you were married and you could not feed your children?
- Would you risk your life and your freedom for them?
- What would you do if there were a famine in this country?
- How would you feel if you were Mary? And if you were Michael?
- What sort of things do you rebel against?
- How do you show your rebellion?
- Do you ever feel like you are in prison? If so, when and why?
- Does this song remind you of any films you have seen, books you have read or stories you have heard?

Writing exercise

Imagine you are Michael and you have arrived in Australia. Write a letter to your wife Mary.

Imagine you are Mary – answer the letter you have just received from your husband in Australia.

**For more examples, see the book *Enjoy Literature*.
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