

# From the archive: musical geography

*Lucy dips into some articles from the archive that show how music can be used to enhance the teaching of geography.*

Articles from Autumn 2004 are available on the GA's website, where there is also a link to the JSTOR archive which includes all *Teaching Geography* articles produced since first publication in 1975

When browsing through past articles in the GA Archive display at the 2018 Annual Conference. I happened upon 'Teaching geography through music and sound' (Dove and Owen, 1991) which inspired me to look further. When I searched for the word 'music' there were 131 results, indicating that geography teachers do recognise the role that music plays in the classroom, although many mentioned it only in passing. Richard Bustin's 'Thirdspace: exploring the "lived space" of cultural "others"' (2011) discussed using a music video (ZZ Top's 'Viva Las Vegas') to set the scene for a topic on the concept of 'Secondspace' in Las Vegas:

*The Secondspace is also easily recognisable via ... artistic representations such as films (e.g. 'Ocean's Eleven'), [and] music (e.g. 'Viva Las Vegas') (p. 55).*

The earliest article directly discussing the use of music in geography lessons comes in April 1977:

*'... music conveys the moods of many places, and in those tiresome two weeks before Christmas parts of the New World Symphony and other works which embody excitement, movement and nostalgia are well received.'* (Williams, 1977)

The example Williams picked out is a country music classic – George Hamilton IV's 'Canadian Pacific' – in which the singer roams all over Canada via the historic Canadian Pacific Railway, working as a miner, driving trucks, working on oil rigs and as a lumberjack, and describing the scenery he travels through. Williams suggests that as they listen students could locate Canadian provinces in their atlases and match places with the singer's occupations.

Dove and Owen (1991) delve much more deeply into ways of using music as a learning resource, listing numerous examples of both classical and modern music linked to the geographical topics they can support, and while some of the modern music suggestions might raise a smile the classical examples are just as relevant today. They provide classical music suggestions for 'Climate/Meteorology', 'Earth, materials movement, space', 'Other physical', 'Settlement', 'Industry', 'Transport' and 'Places' whilst in the modern (at the time of writing in 1991) music genre they suggest titles for 'Physical', 'Industry', 'Development' and 'Places'. They make the point that 'by removing the visual, pupils are forced to use their own imagination and create the images themselves' (p. 4).

Students encountering this type of resource as a learning tool for the first time can find it challenging, especially in terms of concentration level and their ability to process the information quickly enough to understand it without getting lost. Dove and Owen (1991) also suggest that teachers consider the accessibility of the material to their particular students and the length of time they can be expected to listen for. In addition to taught activities, they also provide project ideas for self-recording sound, which is more accessible to students now than it has ever been. They could use a recording ' to produce a school or



Figure 1: Illustration from Emily Fitzgerald's 'Geography's got rhythm!' (2005)

town sound map; to produce a dialect map; to provide commentary on a set of slides or video; to interview for coursework data collected'. In an age of mobile devices this could be used with the full age range of students. In particular, there could be interesting possibilities around types of data collected and/or presentation techniques used for more original non-examined assessments at A level and this can link back to Bustin's ideas of exploring different concepts of space.

Emily Fitzgerald's 'Geography's got rhythm!' (2005) (Figure 1). Like Dove and Owen (1991) suggests both taught and student project activities; for instance, allowing students to choose a song and then

*'...rewrite the lyrics to explain the three coastal processes of erosion, transportation and deposition; using geographical vocabulary to describe the features that these processes created (p. 96).*

She also sets out some useful ground rules for the use of music in lessons, and recommends using short audio clips for classroom management (such as the 30-second 'Countdown' jingle as the time allowed for students to get themselves ready). Using regional music when studying particular areas is an idea I have adopted, and which I know my KS3 students particularly enjoy (e.g. samba music when studying Brazil). Interestingly, although in 2005 she lists the essential basic equipment for using music in lessons as a CD/tape player, reference is also made to downloading music from the internet, which of course is now ubiquitous!

Even this small sample of articles indicates that music is a versatile learning resource that

we could consider for use in many ways with all ages of students. The ease with which music and lyrics can be sourced on the internet makes me wonder how many of us are using it to enthuse our students with something a little bit different?

## Taking things further

I have taken these ideas from the archive and have used them in my classes with additions and adaptations. To add some ideas of recent music from a different genre, I have enjoyed using folk music with my students, from year 9 to sixth form. The pieces by The Young 'Uns have been useful additions when teaching migration (e.g. 'Ghafoor's Bus', a story about voluntary aid; and 'Dark Waters', a description of a migrant's journey through the Aegean Sea) as these have accompanying videos on the group's YouTube channel where they speak to the people whose story they are telling. 'Mercy', France's entry to the 2018 Eurovision contest is another song written in response to the refugee crisis (and since it is in French it provides a good opportunity for collaboration with our modern languages department!). The topic of 'changing places' is also picked up in modern folk songs such as 'Country Life' and 'Roots' by Show of Hands, and 'A Place Called England' most recently by The Young 'Uns – these pieces challenge urbanisation and the loss of cultural heritage. 'Rich Man's Hill' by Maz O'Connor is an interesting one for the concept of inequality in a British urban area. Finally, I ought to add a particular favourite song of my year 12s... 'A13 Trunk Road to the Sea' by Billy Bragg... only one guess as to which county I teach in! | **TG**

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