

English Through Malaysian Folk Songs

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The English language curriculum in any school will be enriched by the addition of songs. Songs give variety to a lesson and help to make language items meaningful. Children love to sing songs and this interest often means that they receive valuable practice in the language without their realising it.

Below are samples of three songs for English language practice set to the folk music of the ethnic Malays. The lyrics have been written to provide material for presenting language items, for consolidation and revision as well as simply for fun. The musical score provides a model for the melody and a guide for dividing the words into musical syllables. Moreover, all the songs are written in major keys. The rhythm and tempo are regular and there is plenty of repetition of both rhythm and melody.

In the lyrics themselves there is much repetition of words, phrases and lines – a kind of drilling used for the ESL classroom.

Notes for the teacher:

1. Teachers can make use of such songs as these to practise language items and vocabulary. Because of the repetition it is likely that such items will be remembered by pupils for a much longer time.
2. Because students learn best when they are totally involved, these songs are designed to offer many possibilities for action – mime, role-playing, choral responses and body actions. This also assists less adept students in their comprehension of the lyrics.

3. Some songs can be told as stories initially. This could take the form of a reading comprehension passage in an earlier lesson. The song then becomes a condensed version of the longer story, e.g. the story about Sang Kanchil. Pictures can also be effectively incorporated into the teaching of the songs, again to aid comprehension.
4. The songs should always be introduced as a whole and then repeated at least twice before the class is asked to join in the singing. Pupils can be encouraged to respond by tapping, clapping or singing along quietly. The natural sequence is to learn the tune before the words although with these sample songs, the tunes should be familiar. Repeat parts of the song with the class, if necessary, until they can sing it unaided. However, if it is not felt necessary for pupils to memorize the song, then don't. If interest begins to flag, stop and try again another day.
5. Once students have learned a song and the tune, feel free to experiment with variations. In some songs, verses may be sung by solo voices or groups with everyone joining in the chorus.
6. The teacher can help students to build up their confidence in their ability to decode the new language. Allow them to use their intuition when analyzing new song lyrics.
7. Try assigning one student to call out words for each line just before the other students sing it. Of course, the caller must be quick — and clear, so that the rest of the class can hear and understand the cues. The group can also be divided into sections for two-part songs such as question-and-answer and other dialogue songs. Group leaders can lead the singing leaving the teacher with a background role.
8. Feel free to experiment with the tempo of the songs. Some are traditionally sung slowly, others naturally call for a faster pace. But whatever tempo is set, insist on clear articulation of the words.
9. Don't let song practice seem like hard work. Keep it brief, never tedious. Keep it spontaneous and never force pupils to sing. It is sometimes a good idea to ask pupils what they would like to sing.
10. The teacher may need to simplify, expand or adapt these or other teaching songs to suit his purpose. He may want to do his own recordings or accompany the singing with a guitar, piano, tambourine or some other musical instrument.
11. The teacher can start a project on writing original words to other songs and students can be encouraged to do this, either individually or in groups.
12. Songs are frequently used as a follow-up activity once a new structure has been introduced and practised. However, on occasion, the teacher may like to try singing a new song without any explanation. This could serve as motivation for a new item.
13. The teaching and learning of each of the three songs below would take about 10–15 minutes. These particular songs are probably most useful for intermediate students in Forms One to Three.
14. Finally, relax and enjoy the songs!

Sample 1:

Have You Ever...?
(Ikan Kekek)

Key of F $\frac{4}{4}$



Have you e-ver, e-ver in your long leg-ged life, Seen a long leg-ged haw-ker with a long leg-ged wife? No, I've ne-ver ne-ver in my long leg-ged life, Seen a long leg-ged haw-ker with a long leg-ged wife.

Title: Have You Ever

Tune: Ikan Kekek

Have you ever, ever in your long-legged life,
Seen a long-legged hawker with a long-legged wife?
No, I've never, never in my long-legged life,
Seen a long-legged hawker with a long-legged wife.

Have you ever, ever in your bow-legged life,
Seen a bow-legged soldier with a bow-legged wife?
No, I've never, never in my bow-legged life,
Seen a bow-legged soldier with a bow-legged wife.

Have you ever, ever in your knock-kneed life,
Seen a knock-kneed doctor with a knock-kneed wife?
No, I've never, never in my knock-kneed life,
Seen a knock-kneed doctor with a knock-kneed wife.

Teaching suggestions:

- Structures: (a) The Present Perfect tense
(b) Ever, never
(c) Compound adjectives, e.g. long-legged
Teacher can drill (a) and (b) structures including the question form of (c)
- Clapping and tapping in time to the music.
- Students can perform actions to illustrate 'long-legged', 'bow-legged' and 'knock-kneed'.
- Appropriate drawings can be used to aid comprehension.
- Part-singing; one group asking the questions while the other sings the answers.
- Students can provide substitutions for 'hawker', 'long-legged' etc. once they are familiar with the tune.

Sample 2

Where Will You Be Going?
(Lenggang Kangkong)

Key of D $\frac{4}{4}$

Where will you be go-ing? Oh, where will you be go-ing? Where
will you be go-ing? Oh, where will you be go-ing? I'm
go-ing to Pu-lau Pi-nang, For ching-gay and- pesta fun. I'm
go-ing to Pu-lau Pi-nang, For ching-gay and Pesta fun.

Title: Where Will You Be Going?

Tune: Lenggang Kangkong

Where will you be going? Oh, where will you be going?	Repeat
I'm going to Pulau Pinang For chingay and pesta fun.	Repeat
Where will she be going? Oh, where will she be going? She's going to Melaka town, That's where her 'baba' is found.	Repeat Repeat
Where will we be going? Oh, where will we be going? We're going to far-off Sabah, That's where the Kadazans are.	Repeat Repeat

Teaching Suggestions:

- Structures: The Future Continuous tense. The teacher can also drill the question form "Where will...-ing?"
- Clapping and tapping in time to the music.

3. Students can act out the questions and the responses.
4. Suitable maps can be used to show the places mentioned in the song.
5. Part-singing (individual and group).
6. The teacher can ask questions related to the structure taught in the song, e.g. "Where will you/she/he/we/they be going? Students can give the names of other towns or states in their reply.

Sample 3

Sang Kancil (Trek Tek Tek)

Key of B \flat 4/4

One day Sang Kan- cil went out for a walk. Te- rek tek
 tek. He met Mis-ter Bua-ya be- side a stream. Te- rek tek
 tek. "He- llo", he said, "How are - you to- day, friend?"
 Bua-ya said no- thing, he was feel- ing mean. Te- rek tek tek.

Tune: Trek Tek Tek

Title: Sang Kanchil

One day Sang Kanchil went out for a walk.
Trek, tek, tek
He met Mister Buaya beside a stream.
Trek, tek, tek
"Hello", he said, "How are you today, friend?"
Buaya said nothing, he was feeling mean.
Trek, tek, tek.

Now Kanchil badly wanted to cross the stream,
Trek, tek, tek.
So he issued a challenge to Buaya.
Trek, tek, tek.
"I think you and your friends can't form a line,
From one end of the stream to the other".
Trek, tek, tek.

Buaya was incensed and accepted it.
Trek, tek, tek.

"I will show you what we can do, my friend."
Trek, tek, tek.
Then Kanchil simply jumped across their backs.
And the wily one said, "Thank you, good friend."
Trek, tek, tek.

Teaching Suggestions:

1. Structure: The Simple Past Tense.
2. Students can act out the story taking the parts of Sang Kanchil and Buaya.
3. The story could be done earlier as a reading-comprehension lesson.
4. Suitable pictures or flannelboard/magnetboard cutouts could be used to elucidate the meaning of the song.
5. The song could be handled with the whole class singing the chorus (trek, trek, trek) while the verses are sung by groups.
6. The teacher can ask questions about the story in the song.
7. Group project work: Students can turn other folktales into songs by fitting words to well-known tunes.