



# Poems Into Song



## The Ukraine English Access Microscholarship Program

In the 2016, as part of Ukraine’s Year of English, students of the Access Program wrote short poems. These poems were transformed into short songs. Really short. One minute or less. You can find the poems at the end of this document.

### For Teachers

These songs can now be used for listening activities. They are extremely short, and therefore easy to fit into class sessions. Most of the activities below require very little preparation. Variety, I think, is the key. Of course, you can use these listening activities for any song or spoken word text.

Loop Listening. I recommend playing songs as loops. As soon as the song finishes, play it again. All the tasks below are designed so that students do something *during* the listening. So play the song several times, and students get more listening practice and more chance at succeeding at their task.

Some times the words may not be easy to discern. That’s because the singers are singing naturally, not as teachers of English. That means these songs—though written by non-native speakers—are perfectly authentic English. Occasionally, the musicians have slightly altered the original poems in order to fit the music more naturally. This is a collaborative effort.

The **Suggestions for Use** below can be used for any song, or indeed any audio text or piece of audio text.



### Activities with Movement

#### Word/Picture Arrangement

Print the lyrics to a song (to the right is a screen grab of two full pages of the poem “What You Get Back”), and then cut them into separate words or chunks of language. Print on cardboard stock or laminate before cutting and you can use the materials for years. (Do you know the “I’m a Fish” song? Some of those word cards I have been carrying around since 2008).

Groups of 2-5 students will then arrange the words into the correct text while they listen.

For a really short song like Polina Zhurakovskaya’s “White,” you can easily write the words by hand onto cards or paper.

My life	is	like a hot
summer	because	it moves
faster	than a	Hummer.
My	life is like	a
chameleon	because it	is changeable
and unexpected.	My life is	like a

book	because you	are the
author,	and every day	is a
new	page.	My life is like
an echo	in the	hole
because	what you	send out
is what	you	get back.

Or get the students to write the words on cards. Start with a dictation. Your very first group to do the activity can write the words on separate cards as a dictation. Just tell them, “Only write one word per card.” After that, you have numerous sets of Word Arrange cards for all other classes—and the rest of your career.

There is a separate attachment for “What You Get Back” which you can print, laminate, and cut into segments. You’ll notice that there are sometimes *a few words* on each card. That makes the task much more manageable for longer texts. I consider a long text to be over 30 words. At that point, put a couple words on each card.

If you want to make a short poem more difficult, include extra cards including words that are *not* in the song.

### Human Word Circle

This is the same principle as Word Arrange, except you will write the text of the song, one word at a time, on A4-sized pieces of paper. Each student receives one paper with a word (or a few words) on it. All students must then arrange their bodies in a large circle, holding their papers so that the word is visible to all others.



This task requires teamwork and cooperation. Some groups do it fast; for others it takes multiple listenings. Keep playing the song as a loop with no pauses in between. —some do it slow. It’s best to start students out in a circle.

If you were doing the song “Eating Outside,” your separate pages might have these word chunks on them:

I love	summer!	Summer	is hot.	It’s sun
to shade in.	It’s water	to wade in.	It’s frogs	and bugs.
It’s grass	and rugs.	It’s eating	outside.	

In total, that would be 14 pieces of paper: perfect for 14 students. If you have more than 14 students, put some in pairs. Or you can just write one word per paper: that would give you 28 separate papers.

Save the papers! Then you can do the activity with other groups in the future.

## Post-it Race

Put students into groups of two to four. Divide the blackboard into sections, one for each group, or give each group a section of the wall to work on. Give

students enough post-its so they can write the lyrics with only one word on each post-it note. In the case of “I See You in the Night,” you’ll need 18 post-its per group.

Each team listens to the song (on loop—play it again and again). Each player may write one word (contractions count as one) on a post-it, run to the wall or the board, and stick it in his teams area. Each team tries to arrange the words for the song on their section of the wall of board. Only one player from each team may leave the table at a time. This requires teamwork! Which team will finish first? Which will reproduce the song perfectly?

Access

rocks!



## Hunt and Gather

This activity requires preparation—and guts (courage) from the teacher. It’s chaotic and noisy. But students will love it! You’ll need a lot of index cards and a very short song, or just take one verse from a song, which you will play over and over as a loop. (You get the idea that I like loop listening).

Preparation for this task is rigorous, so select a song that you think you might use for years and years. Then write the words on some good card stock, or print them, laminate, and cut into squares. The cards should be at least as large as your hand, so students can see the words easily.

The principle is the same for Word Arrangement—organizing the text from mixed cards. The difference is that in Word Arrangement each group has their cards on a desk. In Hunt and

Gather the cards of all groups are mixed. Then they are posted at random on walls around the room. So for a 14-word song, with five groups involved, you would have 70 word cards on the walls around the room! Yeah, I told you it's nuts! You play the song—as a loop—again and again, while students gather words from the wall and attempt to re-build the text at their Home Base.

Important rules:

1. Only one student from each group can leave Home Base at a time. When that student returns with a card, another student may go hunt and gather.
2. A student can only have one card in his/her hand at any time. That means a student can't pull two or three cards from the wall at once. (This leads to more teamwork and communication at the Home Base).
3. A team must return any duplicate card to the wall. They can't leave it on their desk or at Home Base.

Yes, it's noisy and wild and requires a lot of prep. Enlist the students to place cards on the walls before they hear the text. Ten students can place 70-100 cards on the wall (with a dollop of adhesive putty) in a couple of minutes.

What is cool is that you can add new songs to your collection. It's okay—even beneficial—to have words posted on the walls that are not actually in the audio. That makes the hunt more challenging. So let's say you want to add cards to a new song. You can still put the words for "White" on the walls.

Get small pieces of adhesive putty to stick the on the ways, and let students do this. A handful of students can stick 150 cards on the walls in minutes.

What's cool here is that you can the cards of several songs. Let's say you are going to do Hunt and Gather with the poem "White." "White" has 14 words. You'll have five groups of students. That means you will need 5 stacks of the lyrics consisting of 70 separate cards.



## *Written Response Activities*

### **Dictation**

Never out of fashion! Play the audio—as a loop of course. Students write the words. If students are in pairs, they may succeed quicker and have more fun.

To make the task simpler, and provide a bit more language support, give students a head start by writing on the board:

- a) the first word or two
- b) the first full line
- c) 5 - 10 words throughout the song.

Some songs are so easy students will need to hear them just one time. (E.g. “I See You in the Night”). That’s fine. Play the song as a loop, repeating it as soon as it is ended, until everyone has finished writing. The more students listen, the more listening practice!

If you see students struggling, just go to the board and write some more words or phrases from the song as the activity is in progress. Keep playing the song until all students have finished. After all, we *want* students to succeed. These songs are really short: you can play them five or more times.

There are lots of fun variations on dictations. I have students in a circle, with each writing the dictation on the back of the person in front of them. Try it.

## Gap-Fill

You can write the text on the board, with words missing. Here are the first two lines of Oleksandr Galeshchuk’s “What You Get Back” as an example:

My life is like a \_\_\_\_\_ summer,  
because it moves faster than a \_\_\_\_\_.

It’s a great idea to return to the same song a week or two later. It never hurts to provide practice with determiners and articles. Remove *the/a/an/that*, etc.. You don’t have to explain rules to students. This is a *listening* activity.

My life is like \_\_\_\_\_ hot summer,  
because it moves faster than \_\_\_\_\_ Hummer.

## Wrong Words

In this activity the teacher will change some of the words and present the modified text to students, either by writing it on the board or giving a handout. Students will then identify the differences between what they read and what they hear. For instance, two words have been altered in the first lines of “School Day.” Listen to the song. Can you hear which words were changed from the original?

I see fat people in corridor  
I feel like I’ll fall near our classroom door.

## Extra Words

Present students with a written version of the text. But put extra words in the text. The students will cross out the words that aren't actually sung. This is good for articles, by the way. Put in "a" and "the" where they aren't needed. You can combine Extra Words with Wrong Words and Gap-Fill sometimes for a bigger challenge.

Keep up the variety, and you can do short listening tasks every class.

## C-test

Take away the second half of every second word. Below are the first four lines of "Elephant in the Zoo" written as a C-test.

In t\_\_\_ zoo  
th\_\_\_ is a\_\_ elephant.  
H\_\_ is t\_\_\_ strongest  
He \_s the big\_\_\_\_  
i\_\_\_ the z\_\_\_.

You can fill in the gaps without hearing the audio in a C-test; they were designed as writing/reading comprehension tasks, not listening. But it can be fun to use them with a listening task too.

## True/False

Write True/False statements on the board. Play the song a few times while students look at the True or False statements. They may write answers themselves and take notes in their notebooks.

Here are some possible T/F statements from the song "I Was in Italy One Day":

The speaker went to Italy on Monday.  
The speaker flew to Italy.  
The speaker went to two Italian cities.

True/False activities get *much* more interesting when we go beyond simple factual statements. Look at these:

It is impossible to eat too much pizza.  
The speaker is unhappy with his new clothes.  
I would not like to go to Italy.  
I have been to Italy.

Both True and False answers are possible for the above statements. Is it impossible to eat too much pizza? For the speaker in the poem, yes, but students could answer "False" if *they* really love pizza and can't get enough. Is the speaker unhappy with his new clothes? No, he was probably pleased, but we can deduce that he wasn't happy about how much money he spent. Students will need to defend and expand on their True/False choice. The last two statements elicit personal opinions from students.

## Follow Ups

When you are finished with an audio, it's a great idea to return to it a week later. Try some of these follow ups:

### Choreography

Ask students to create movement that reflects what happens in a song. Think of activities "Head Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" or the "Itsy Bitsy Spider Went Down the Water Spout." Could students make up actions for the song "Scary?" Easy. If done in groups, one group can teach an entire class their choreography.

### Sing-Alongs

Revisit the song just to sing it. After singing once or twice, try doing it in a whisper. Finally do it in a shout.

### Call and Response

In some songs, there is enough time for students to echo the singer's lines, in rhythm. Take "I See you in the Night." Crystal sings each line (the call), and students will repeat what she sings (the response).

### Writing More Poems Based on Frames

Ask your students to take one of the songs and then use it as a writing frame for a pattern. For instance, here's a frame based on Paula's "White."

Original	Writing Frame	Example of new poem from the frame	Example of new poem from the frame
Milk is white	_____ is _____	Night is black	An ant is black
and so is glue.	and so is _____.	and so is space	unless he's red
Ghosts are white	_____s are _____	Spiders are dark	But either way
and they say	and _____	and live in dark	I don't want him
BOO!	_____	places	in my bed

Teachers (and students) can change frames whenever they feel the need. Frames are only guidelines, aids to writing.

## Poems

<p><b>What You Get Back</b> by Oleksandr Galeshchuk</p> <p>My life is like a hot summer, because it moves faster than a Hummer. My life is like a chameleon, because it is changeable and unexpected. My life is like a book, because you I am the author, and every day is a new page. My life is like an echo in the hole, because what you send out is what you get back.</p>	<p><b>I Was in Italy One Day</b></p> <p>I was in Italy one day, I went to Rome by train. I saw the Leaning Tower of Piza And ate too much pizza. The pizza was fantastic And really really tasty. In Milan I felt good, New clothes put me in a good mood. I spent a lot of money, which isn't really very funny. But then I got the train And came back to Ukraine!</p>
<p><b>White</b> by Polina Zhurakovskaya</p> <p>Milk is white and so is glue. Ghosts are white and they say BOO!</p>	<p><b>Scary</b> by Volodymyr Aleksandrov</p> <p>I see dark I feel nothing I hear bats I think it's scary</p>
<p><b>Eating Outside</b> by Misha Kvasnytsia</p> <p>I love summer! Summer is hot It is sun to shade in. It's water to wade in. It's frogs and bugs It's grass and rugs. It's eating outside.</p>	<p><b>Elephant in the Zoo</b></p> <p>In the zoo There is an elephant He is the strongest, He is the biggest in the zoo. But he is afraid of mice, —and huge falling houses.</p>
<p><b>I See You in the Night</b></p> <p>I see you in the night I feel your breathing I hear your voice I think it's love</p>	<p><b>Funny Time</b></p> <p>I see the stars I feel happy I hear a lot of voices I think it's funny time</p>
<p><b>School Day</b> by Irina Shlepova</p> <p>I see sad people in corridor I feel like I'll die near our class door. I don't think our teaches are glad To see our faces yet. I need some water and headache pills. This reminds me horror films. But we are still alive Thanks to the thought about summer drive.</p>	<p><b>Thunderstorm</b></p> <p>I see the rain is coming I feel how drops touch me. I hear the thunder growing. I don't think it's gonna kill me. I hear the thunderstorm growing I don't thin it will kill me. I see how life keeps going. I don't think it's gonna kill me</p>



## *Singers*

**Crystal Bock-Thiessen** teaches English at the University of Nebraska and has come to Ukraine as an English Language Specialist several times. Crystal sings, “I See You in the Night.”

**Uliana Fedoriachenko** is an Access teacher in Kyiv, and she sings on “School Days” and “I Was in Italy One Day.” Uliana also sang the “Three Million Likes Song” on the [American English website](#).

**Alla McCaughey** is a textbook writer who runs [Papa English](#), a website for Russian-speaking parents who want their children to know English. She sings “Scary.”

**Conrad Turner** was Public Affairs Officer at the US Embassy in Ukraine from 2014-2016. He sings “Eating Outside.”

**Kevin McCaughey** was Regional English Language Officer (RELO) in Kyiv, Ukraine from 2014-2016. He is currently RELO in Pretoria, South Africa. He sings the other songs. He has lots of audios at [English Teachers Everywhere](#).

All poems were written by Access students in Ukraine.

## *Thanks*

To Thaddeus McCleary, English Language Fellow, Vinnytsia, Ukraine.

To the inspirational Access teachers in Ukraine and their amazingly busy Facebook page.

To the [Regional English Language Office, US Embassy, Ukraine](#).