

Capitol Steps

Capitol Steps is a comedy group formed by several former Congressional staffers. Their motto 'We put the Mock in Democracy' will surely give you more than a clue as to what sort of work they do : comedy, music, satire, irony - an intricate mix blending current events, cultural aspects, history, American's attitude – a veritable mine for teachers of English as a foreign language! Indeed, as teachers of the afore-mentioned subject, it goes without saying that our duty is not only to impart linguistic information, (and to hope that this will turn into capacity to produce!) but also to inform, to inspire! How better than with history, culture, tradition and a musical background?

Here then are some very doable songs!

The tunes are all well-known, and while the words have been changed, the lyrics remain similar to the original, and often tackle problems such as racism, immigration, economics, etc. Not all are useable, however, here are a few songs that are easy to understand, and that will bring many a lexical item, useful expression, and most importantly, so many cultural aspects into the class.

Hotel Arizona

A song about **illegal immigration** (with a twist)!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FTLfrzguHk>

To the tune HOTEL CALIFORNIA (the Eagles)

An animated film

Time: 2mins25secs

Subtitled

Summary

An immigrant, walking along a desert highway is stopped by a border guard. He is asked for his papers, the border guard suspecting that he is an illegal alien, a wetback, a foreigner who is sneaking into the country.

The border guard boasts that he will stop anyone who is not white, and that he even stopped a Porto Rican woman (whose name corresponds to America's first Hispanic Justice, and its third female Justice).

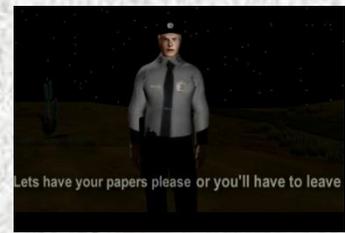
The supposed illegal immigrant turns out to be a Navajo Indian, and shows that HE really belongs in this country, that he and his people know all about fighting illegal immigrants – they have been doing it since...1492!

Sundry expressions, useful vocabulary, some cultural elements:

- stay out of sight
- White house
- crashers – (uninvited guests)
- cactus and sage
- brand new job
- minimum wage
- inside the border
- searchlight
- headed my way



- spotted by
- border guard
- your papers please
- not much room
- darker than George Hamilton (American actor, white)
- race isn't pure
- Sonia Sotomayor (of Porto Rican origin, one of the 9 members of the Supreme Court – THE highest court of justice in the USA)
- let me check
- I belong here
- My homeland
- Illegals



SNEAK INTO AMERICA

Animated film Time: 2 mins10secs Subtitled

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewKHIKspuJE&feature=related>

Images of

Statue of Liberty Uncle Sam Stars and Stripes Real Mexicans working

Summary:

Again this is an animated film but with real photos in the background. There are many different attitudes and feeling reflected in different parts of the song, including a chorus of 'Olés' sung towards the end of the song at quite a strategic point!

Uncle Sam sings about a Latin American who manages to get into the US. He mentions the sort of menial labor that is done by most illegal immigrants, the conditions crossing the border, where they have come from, and he hints at the fact that Americans don't have enough jobs for themselves, let alone people who arrive from foreign countries.

The song ends with us feeling that those who made it DO belong in America, and that they'll settle down, and become Americans.

- Felon
- Manicure your lawn
- Cross the border
- Sneaks into / snuck into
- Dodging
- Searchlights
- Impoverished place
- Lettuce heads
- Swarm
- Fill out forms
- Took my job
- Here to stay
- They made it
- Chips and salsa
- One more thing
- Serve the supreme



THE IMMIGRATION SONG – not subtitled

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2xa4qHCGKw&feature=related>

Again this is an animated film with photos in the background.

LYRICS:

Immigration, Illegal immigration
Give us all your tired and poor
If you're from Cambodia, we're here to say 'hello' to ya
Mexicans, and Tallibans, Al Quaida from Afganistan
America can be your land, just cross the border
Immigration all across the nation,
The only way to hire cheaper help
The President will let it go till no one's left in Mexico
With Amnesty, we will see, Hospitals in bankruptcy
Medicare, nothing there
Don't drink the water
Press One for English, Two to speak in Spanish,
Three for those who don't know either one
The man who mows and cuts my grass
Told me to take a Spanish class
Say 'hola' – that means 'hello'
Don't say 'one', say 'uno'
Please forget the Alamo
Give us Texas
I have a neighbor, who rented an apartment
With 50 people living in one room
Four sleep on the kitchen floor,
Six behind the bathroom door
In the bedroom, 32,
The cabinet has got a few
Refrigerator - there are two
And one sleeps standing,
Immigration, all across the nation
Give us all your tired and your poor



Beyond the obvious asking students to do research on 'cheap labor' and minimum wage, amnesty for illegals, Medicare and hospitals, the Alamo, 'Give us your tired and your poor', and to present (in less than 3 minutes) the results of their research to the rest of the class, here are a couple of different pedagogical suggestions:

- ✚ Why not use a few of the photos (screen shots) to help explain different cultural or historical aspects?
- ✚ This is a very simple song – it has short lines, an easy, repetitive tune (Alouette, gentle Alouette) and would be a fantastic way to practice the phonological aspects of the English language as it is rhythmic to an extreme! The students could practice singing just two or four lines in groups of two or three (safety in numbers) and then the class could perform the song, making great effort to keep it going, with not too long a pause between groups!

BUY, BUY AMERICAN PIE

Animated film

time: 2 mins40 secs

Subtitled

Summary

Sharp criticisms of the outrageous number of imports coming into the USA, originating in – where else? China. The song goes on to berate the pathetic (verging on dangerous) quality of the products. Several typically American products are mentioned, and the singer admits that he is a fan of cheap audio-visual technology, but he draws the line at buying a cheap, Chinese-made car 'cos “that'll be the day we all die”!

- It used to be
- With ease
- Quite a while
- Goods
- Make a buck
- We get stuck
- Sigh
- I told you so
- Wan
- Took bribes
- Toys
- Deemed unsafe
- Wheeze
- Laced with



Capitol Steps doesn't limit itself to producing songs about illegal immigrants and Chinese imports of course. Just like any satirical group, it feeds on anything and everything that the American scandalmongers can throw out – it addresses the issues of President O'Bama's Health Care Bill (Battle Hymn of the Tea Republic), national debt and the frightening increase in power of large corporations (This Land's not your Land), amongst others. Almost all of the clips are subtitled (not always such a great thing for teachers!) but these can be used as audio clips before actually looking at the screen!

