Song that Tell a Story

The goal of this activity is four-fold:

- to expand your vocabulary,
- to give insight into English (particularly American) culture,
- to develop auditory comprehension, and
- to have fun.

You guys make my job a joy. I enjoyed making these playlists for you.

A thank you to Guada for inspiring the original idea; to Bruno for his song suggestions; to Leandro, who I imagine playing his guitar when I listen to some of these songs; and to Euge, whose sweet voice I imagine singing them.

Un abrazo.
—P

To expand your vocabulary. I have made these playlists to present you with (and explain the meaning of) common English words and expressions. Although I always try to dedicate some portion of our class time to conversation, that brief amount of time (and, unfortunately, its unavoidable lack of varied context) could never be enough to introduce you to the many common expressions and slang used by English speakers. Providing you with songs—particularly those that tell a story—is a more effective way of achieving this goal.

To offer insight into English culture. Sociolinguists tell us that the way in which we think about the world is directly influenced by the language we use to talk about it.

> "The real world is, to a large extent, unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever so similar that they represent the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct, not merely the same with a different label attached" (Edward Sapir, 1929).

Therefore, to speak a language is to assume a culture, and to know a culture is like knowing a language. In other words, language and culture are homologous mental realities. Culture is the representation and interpretation of the world that must be communicated—through language—in order to be lived.

The problem lies in what happens when cross-cultural interactions take place, i.e., when message producer and message receiver are from different cultures. With the exception of immersing oneself in another culture, studying the language of that culture is an effective way to better understand those whose beliefs and backgrounds may be vastly different from one's own.

To develop auditory comprehension. These playlists offer more exposure to the English language—something this is essential to building oral competency. These songs will challenge and develop your ability to comprehend what you hear, and because they tell stories, you will be able to monitor your own level of comprehension to some degree. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that they are sung rather than spoken, these songs will provide examples of English speech rhythm and the differences—whether regional, socio-economic, etc.—in pronunciation.

To have fun. Finally, I offer these playlists because listening to music is much more interesting than reviewing grammar rules and completing repetitive drills. I have tried to include a wide variety of songs—songs from diverse musical genres, with differing stories and tones (some serious, some comical), and from several generations. I hope that you listen to all of the songs for the reasons previously mentioned, but I also hope that at least some of the songs appeal to your tastes.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Songs that Tell a Story 1

Playlist*

1. *Coward of the County* — Kenny Rogers (1979) 
2. *Operator* — (Jim Croce 1972) 
3. *The Devil Went Down to Georgia* — The Charlie Daniel's Band (1979) 
4. *You Don't Mess Around with Jim* — Jim Croce (1972) 
5. *The Drunken Scotsman* — Bryan Bowers (2006) 
6. *Escape (The Piña Colada Song)* — Rupert Holmes (1979) 
7. *Bad, Bad Leroy Brown* — Jim Croce (1973) 
8. *The Piano Man* — Billy Joel (1973) 
9. *The Gambler* — Kenny Rogers (1978) 
10. *How Come My Dog Don't Bark When You Come Around?* — Dr. John (1992) 
11. *American Pie* — Don McClean (1971)* 

* I have tried to classify the songs, but this is very difficult to do. Many of these songs could belong to multiple genres. The key to the icons follows.

country / bluegrass 

rhythm & blues 

pop / easy listening 

hard rock / metal 

reggae 

rock / soft rock 

folk 

drinking song 

rap 

oldies 

LIVEWORKSHEETS

➧ *American Pie* is an American classic. The other songs on this playlist are less well known—or, more accurately, known only to fans of a specific genre or from a certain generation. But American *Pie* crosses lyrical and generational boundaries.

This is a *very* complex song—loaded with references to post-WW2 American culture. There are many interpretations of what—McClean admitted—were purposefully obscure lyrics. My interpretation is that, in essence, *American Pie* laments the changes in music from the 1950s – 70s, and McClean presents those changes as a metaphor for the decline of American society and culture.

My interpretation is based not only on the lyrics, but also on comments from McClean. In a December 2019 interview with Fox News, McLean said that, when he wrote *American Pie*, he had in mind the theory that popular music and politics move in parallel. So, you can tell the political history of a country by telling the story of its contemporary popular songs, and vice versa. In the song, he said, every verse is darker than the last, projecting the direction he saw America heading. (As ideals of the 1960s turned into the cynicism of the 1970s, this feeling was widespread enough to send the song to No. 1 in 1972.)

LIVEWORKSHEETS

COWARD OF THE COUNTY[1]
Kenny Rogers (1979)

Everyone considered him the coward of the county.
He'd never stood one single time to prove the county wrong.[2]
His mama named him Tommy, but folks just called him Yellow.[3]
But something always told me, they were reading Tommy wrong.[4]

He was only ten years old when his daddy died in prison.
I looked after Tommy 'cause he was my brother's son.
I still recall the final words my brother said to Tommy:
"Son, my life is over, but yours has just begun.

"Promise me, son, not to do the things I've done.
Walk away from trouble if you can.
Now it won't mean you're weak if you turn the other cheek.[5]
I hope you're old enough to understand.
Son, you don't have to fight to be a man."

There's someone for everyone, and Tommy's love was Becky.
In her arms, he didn't have to prove he was a man.
One day while he was working, the Gatlin boys came calling.
They took turns at Becky, an' there was three of them.

Tommy opened up the door and saw his Becky cryin'.
The torn dress, the shattered look was more than he could stand.
He reached above the fireplace and took down his daddy's picture.
As his tears fell on his daddy's face, he heard these words again:

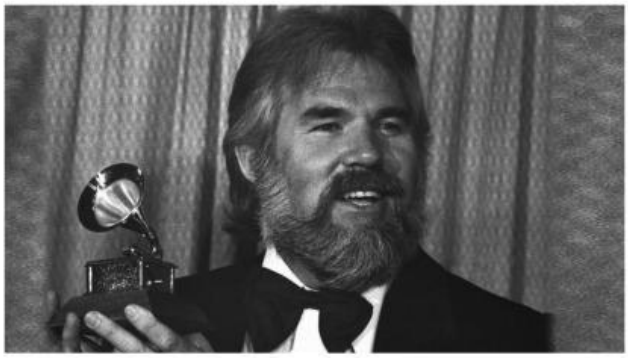
"Promise me, son, not to do the things I've done.
Walk away from trouble if you can.
Now it won't mean you're weak if you turn the other cheek.
I hope you're old enough to understand.
Son, you don't have to fight to be a man."

The Gatlin boys just laughed at him when he walked into the bar room.
One of them got up and met him halfway across the floor.
When Tommy turned around, they said, "Hey, look! Old Yellow's leaving."
But you could've heard a pin drop[6] when Tommy stopped and locked the door.

Twenty years of crawling was bottled up[7] inside him.
He wasn't holding nothing back; he let 'em have it all.
When Tommy left the bar room, not a Gatlin boy was standing.
He said, "This one's for Becky," as he watched the last one fall.
And I heard him say:

"I promised you, Dad, not to do the things you'd done.
I walk away from trouble when I can.
Now please don't think I'm weak. I didn't turn the other cheek,
and, Papa, I sure hope you understand:
sometimes you got to fight when you're a man."

Everyone considered him the coward of the county.



Kenny Rogers

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[1] This song has actually been made into a movie with the same title. Kenny Rogers plays Tommy's uncle.
[2] This phrase—"to prove someone wrong"—means to show that what someone says is incorrect.
[3] This is a slang term meaning *cowardly*. To say that someone is "yellow" is to call him/her a coward.
[4] To "read someone" is to understand them based on watching his/her behavior, expressions, etc. A related and equally common expression is "to read (someone) like a book", which highlights how easy it is to read someone. Example: *Mom always knows when I'm lying. She can read me like a book.*
[5] This is an expression taken from Christ's Sermon on the Mount, found in the *New Testament* (Matthew, chapter 5), where he refutes "an eye for an eye" dictated by the Laws of Hammurabi. To "turn the other cheek" means to respond to an offense with nonviolence, without revenge.
[6] This expression dates from the early 1800s and means that it is so quiet, even the smallest sound can be heard.
[7] This is a phrasal verb that means "to not express emotion or strong feelings."

LIVEWORKSHEETS

OPERATOR
Jim Croce (1972)

Operator,[8] well, could you help me place this call?
See, the number on the matchbook is old and faded.
She's living in L.A. with my best old ex-friend Ray,
a guy she said she knew well and sometimes hated.

Isn't that the way they say it goes?
Well, let's forget all that.[9]
And give me the number if you can find it,
so I can call just to tell 'em I'm fine and to show
I've overcome the blow.[10]
I've learned to take it well.[11]
I only wish my words could just convince myself
that it just wasn't real.
But that's not the way it feels.

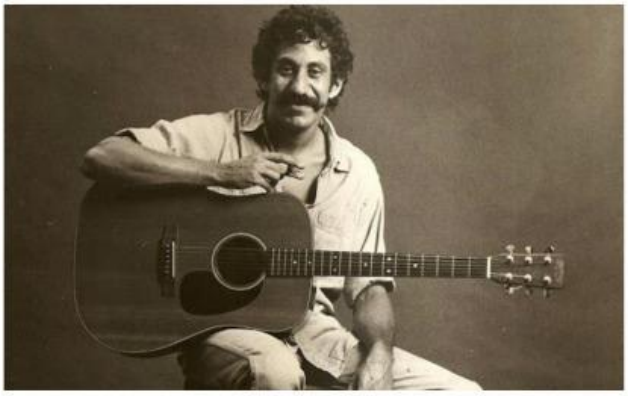
Operator, well, could you help me place this call?
I can't read the number that you just gave me.
There's something in my eyes.
You know it happens every time
I think about a love that I thought would save me.

Isn't that the way they say it goes?
Well, let's forget all that.
And give me the number if you can find it,
so I can call just to tell 'em I'm fine and to show
I've overcome the blow.
I've learned to take it well.
I only wish my words could just convince myself
that it just wasn't real.
But that's not the way it feels.

No, no, no, no. That's not the way it feels.

Operator, well, let's forget about this call.
There's no one there I really wanted to talk to.
Thank you for your time.
Aw, you've been so much more than kind.
And you can keep the dime.[12]

Isn't that the way they say it goes?
Well, let's forget all that.
And give me the number if you can find it,
so I can call just to tell 'em I'm fine and to show
I've overcome the blow.
I've learned to take it well.
I only wish my words could just convince myself
that it just wasn't real.
But that's not the way it feels.



Jim Croce[13]

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[8] You may be too young to know what an operator was. For most of the 20th century, people didn't have cell phones; land-line phones or public telephones were used. An operator was a person who would help callers make a long-distance telephone call or provide "directory assistance," i.e. s/he could search for and provide people with another individual's phone number.

[9] He is telling the operator to disregard, to not pay attention to what he said. "Forget it" is similar to the expression "never mind."

[10] You may know this word as a verb, meaning *soplar*. As a noun, a blow is a sudden shock or disappointment.

[11] The expression "take it well" means that someone accepts bad news or his/her fate without great distress.

[12] In the 1970s, dropping a dime into a public pay phone connected the caller with an operator. If the operator couldn't provide assistance, the dime was returned to the user.

[13] His name is pronounced *KRO–che*.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

THE DEVIL WENT DOWN TO GEORGIA
by The Charlie Daniels' Band (1979)

The devil went down to Georgia.
He was lookin' for a soul to steal.
He was in a bind[14] 'cause he was way behind,[15]
and he was willing to make a deal.[16]

When he came across this young man
sawing on a fiddle[17] and playing it hot,
and the devil jumped up on a hickory stump
and said, "Boy, let me tell you what.[18]

"I guess you didn't know it, but I'm a fiddle player too,
and if you'd care to take a dare, I'll make a bet[19] with you.
Now you play pretty good fiddle,[20] boy, but give the devil his due.[21]
I bet a fiddle of gold against your soul 'cause I think
I'm better than you."

The boy said, "My name's Johnny,
and it might be a sin,
but I'll take your bet, and you're gonna regret,
'cause I'm the best that's ever been."

Johnny, you rosin[22] up your bow and play your fiddle hard
'cause hell's broke loose[23] in Georgia and the devil deals the cards.[24]
And if you win, you get this shiny fiddle made of gold,
but if you lose, the devil gets your soul.

The devil opened up his case, and he said, "I'll start this show."
And fire flew from his fingertips as he rosined up his bow.
He pulled the bow across the strings, and it made an evil hiss.
Then a band of demons joined in, and it sounded something like this.

When the devil finished, Johnny said, "Well, you're pretty good, old son,
but sit down in that chair right there and let me show you how it's done."[25]

Fire on the mountain; run boys run.[26]
The devil's in the house of the rising sun.
Chicken in the bread pan; pickin' out dough.
Granny, does your dog bite? No, child, no.

The devil bowed his head because he knew that he'd been beat,
and he laid that golden fiddle on the ground at Johnny's feet.
Johnny said, "Devil, just come on back if you ever want to try again.
I done told you once, you son of a bitch, I'm the best that's ever been." He played,

Fire on the mountain; run boys run.
The devil's in the house of the rising sun.
Chicken in the bread pan; pickin' out dough.
Granny, will your dog bite? No, child, no.



The Charlie Daniels' Band

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[14] To be "in a bind" is to be in a difficult or awkward situation, especially one that is not easy to resolve or escape.
[15] To "be behind" means that you are behind schedule, to not be progressing as expected.
[16] To "make a deal" means to negotiate an agreement, especially regarding an acceptable price or exchange for something.
[17] "Sawing on" does not mean *serruchando*. This refers to the motion of moving the bow, which is similar to that of sawing.
[18] This expression—"let me tell you what"—is used to introduce a suggestion or an offer.
[19] The expression "to make a bet" translates to *apostar*.
[20] A fiddle is the same as a violin. What is different is the style of music that is played on the instrument.
[21] The expression "give the Devil his due" means to give credit to what is good in a disagreeable or disliked person, to acknowledge the merits of someone who is regarded unfavorably.
[22] Rosin is a solid form of resin from pine trees. It is rubbed on the bow to help it grip the strings of a violin and make them vibrate more clearly.
[23] This is a slang expression: "all hell broke loose." It is used to describe a chaotic situation, especially one that begins suddenly or unexpectedly.
[24] The person who deals the cards distributes them to the other players, so the dealer is the person who controls the game.
[25] The expression "let me show you how it's done" means "allow me to demonstrate the proper way to accomplish (something)." Be careful when using this expression: the speaker often sounds arrogant when using this expression.
[26] Don't try to understand this verse. It is made up of the titles and lines from the songs that Johnny played.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

YOU DON'T MESS AROUND WITH JIM
by Jim Croce[27] (1972)

Uptown[28] got its hustlers.[29]
The bowery[30] got its bums.[31]
42nd street got big Jim Walker.
He's a pool-shootin'[32] son of a gun.
Yeah, he big and dumb as a man can come,
but he stronger than a country hoss.[33]
And when the bad folks all get together at night,
you know they all call big Jim boss—just because.

And they say,
"You don't tug on Superman's cape,
you don't spit into the wind,
you don't pull the mask off that old Lone Ranger,
and you don't mess around with Jim."

Well out of south Alabama came a country boy.
He say, "I'm lookin' for a man named Jim.
I am a pool-shootin' boy.
My name is Willie McCoy,
but down home they call me Slim.
Yeah, I'm lookin' for the king of 42nd street.
He drivin' a drop-top[34] Cadillac.[35]
Last week he took all my money,
and it may sound funny,
but I come to get my money back."
And everybody say, "Jack, don't you know...

"that you don't tug on Superman's cape,
you don't spit into the wind,
you don't pull the mask off that old Lone Ranger,
and you don't mess around with Jim."

Well a hush[36] fell over the pool room.
Jimmy come boppin'[37] in off the street.
And when the cuttin' were done,
the only part that wasn't bloody
was the soles of the big man's feet.
Yeah he were cut in 'bout a hundred places,
and he were shot in a couple more.
And you better believe
they sung a different kind of story
when big Jim hit the floor.

Now they say,
"You don't tug on Superman's cape,
you don't spit into the wind,
you don't pull the mask off that old Lone Ranger,
and you don't mess around with Slim."

Yeah, big Jim got his hat.[38]
Found out where it's at,[39]
and it's not hustlin' people strange to you—
even if you do got a two-piece custom-made pool cue.

Yeah,
"You don't tug on Superman's cape,
you don't spit into the wind,
you don't pull the mask off that old Lone Ranger,
and you don't mess around with Slim."

Did you notice the change?

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[27] This is the second of three songs by Jim Croce on this list. You will find many grammatical errors in this (and his other songs) because he often tried to mimic the speech of the people/area/class represented in his music.
[28] This is the opposite of *downtown* (which usually refers to a city's center).
[29] A hustler is an expert gambler or game player who seeks out challengers, especially unsuspecting amateur ones, in order to win money from them. The verb is *to hustle*.
[30] The Bowery was a street and area in New York City, historically noted for its cheap hotels/bars and the destitute and homeless that lived there. In time, the word *bowery* came to mean any area with those characteristics.
[31] The word *bum* has two main meanings: (1) a homeless person and/or (2) a person who lives off other people/avoids work. A related expression—"to bum (something)"—uses the verb equivalent and refers to asking for something (for free), for example: *"Can I bum a cup of coffee?" or "Joe bummed a cigarette."*
[32] This is one example (of many in this song) of a compound adjective, sometimes called a hyphenated adjective. In general we put a hyphen between two or more words (before a noun) when we want them to act as a single idea (adjective) that describes something, i.e. *We live in a Spanish-speaking country*.
[33] This is a variant spelling and pronunciation of *horse*. In the southern US, it is a slang term for a big, strong man.
[34] This means "a convertible", which is a car whose roof retracts.
[35] A Cadillac was a very expensive car at that time, a symbol of status.
[36] *Hush* means *silence*.
[37] This is a synonym for *dancing*.
[38] To "get your hat" means to prepare to leave. Here it indicates that Jim has been forced out of his position as the most powerful person in the area.
[39] The slang expression "where it's at" refers to the true place of action. Here it means that Jim learned the truth.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

THE DRUNKEN SCOTSMAN
by Bryan Bowers (2006)

Well a Scotsman clad[40] in kilt[41] left a bar one evening fair.
And one could tell by how he walked that he'd drunk more than his share.[42]
He fumbled[43] 'round until he could no longer keep his feet.[44]
Then he stumbled off into the grass to sleep beside the street.

~ring ding diddle iddle I de oh, ring di diddly I oh~
He stumbled off into the grass to sleep beside the street.

About that time two young and lovely girls just happened by.[45]
And one says to the other with a twinkle in her eye,[46]
"See yon'[47] sleeping Scotsman so strong and handsome built?
I wonder if it's true what they don't wear beneath the kilt."[48]

~ring ding diddle iddle I de oh, ring di diddly I oh~
I wonder if it's true what they don't wear beneath the kilt.

They crept[49] up on that sleeping Scotsman quiet as could be,
lifted up his kilt about an inch so they could see,
and there behold, for them to view, beneath his Scottish skirt
was nothing more than God had graced him with upon his birth. [50]

~ring ding diddle iddle I de oh, ring di diddly I oh~
Was nothing more than God had graced him with upon his birth.

They marveled[51] for a moment, then one said, "We must be gone.
Let's leave a present for our friend, before we move along."
As a gift they left a blue silk ribbon,[52] tied into a bow, around the bonnie star[53] the Scot's kilt did lift and show.

~ring ding diddle iddle I de oh ring di diddly I oh~
Around the bonnie star the Scot's kilt did lift and show.

Now the Scotsman woke to nature's call[54] and stumbled toward the trees.
Behind a bush, he lifts his kilt and gawks[55] at what he sees,
and in a startled[56] voice he says to what's before his eyes,
"O, lad, I don't know where you been, but I see you won first prize."

~ring ding diddle iddle I de oh, ring di diddly I oh~
"O, lad, I don't know where you been, but I see you won first prize."



Bryan Bowers

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[40] *Clad* is the past tense and participle of the verb *clothe*, meaning "to dress or cover with clothing."
[41] A kilt is a knee-length, pleated skirt usually of tartan (wool with a plaid pattern) worn by men in Scotland. (Think *Braveheart*.)
[42] *Share*, as a noun, means "a portion belonging to, due to, or contributed by an individual or group."
[43] To fumble is to make awkward or clumsy attempts to do something.
[44] This expression –"to keep his feet"—means to maintain one's balance, to avoid falling or tripping.
[45] To "happen by" is an expression (mainly used in the US) that means "to arrive casually or by chance."
[46] To have a twinkle in one's eye means that a person has a friendly or happy expression in one's eyes.
[47] *Yon'* is an abbreviated form of the word *yonder*, which is an older term (rarely used today) which means "at some distance in the direction indicated; over there."
[48] Scotsman, traditionally, wear nothing beneath their kilts.
[49] *Crept* is the past tense and participle of the verb *creep*, which means "to move slowly and carefully in order to avoid being heard or noticed."
[50] He had "only what God had given him," nothing made by man/woman. In other words, he was naked under the kilt.
[51] *Marvel* is a cognate for *maravillarse*.
[52] A ribbon is a long, narrow strip of fabric, used for tying something or for decoration. A blue ribbon is usually a piece of blue silk or satin fabric that is given to the winner of a competition.
[53] This is a both euphemism for—well, you can figure it out—and a pun because a star is a famous and important performer.
[54] "Nature's call" is a euphemism indicating that someone feels a need to urinate, to use the bathroom.
[55] To *gawk* means to stare openly and stupidly at something.
[56] *Startled* is an adjective that means "feeling or showing sudden shock or alarm."

LIVEWORKSHEETS

ESCAPE
by Rupert Holmes (1979)

I was tired of[57] my lady.
We'd been together too long—
like a worn out[58] recording
of a favorite song.

So while she lay there sleepin',
I read the paper in bed.
And in the personal columns,[59]
there was this letter I read:

"If you like piña coladas,
and getting caught in the rain,
if you're not into yoga,
if you have half a brain,
if you like making love at midnight
in the dunes on the cape,
then I'm the love that you've looked for.
Write to me and escape."

I didn't think about my lady.
I know that sounds kind of mean.[60]
But me and my old lady[61]
had fallen into the same old dull routine.

So I wrote to the paper.
Took out a personal ad.[62]
And though I'm nobody's poet,
I thought it wasn't half bad.[63]

"Yes, I like piña coladas,
and getting caught in the rain.
I'm not much into health food.
I am into champagne.
I've got to meet you by tomorrow noon,
and cut through all this red tape,[64]
at a bar called O'Malley's,
where we'll plan our escape."

So I waited with high hopes,[65]
and she walked in the place.
I knew her smile in an instant.
I knew the curve of her face.
It was my own lovely lady,
and she said, "Aw, it's you."
Then we laughed for a moment,
and I said, "I never knew...

"That you liked piña coladas
and getting caught in the rain,
and the feel of the ocean,
and the taste of champagne.
If you like making love at midnight
in the dunes on the cape,
you're the lady I've looked for.
Come with me and escape."

"If you like piña coladas,
and getting caught in the rain,
if you're not into yoga,
if you have half a brain,
if you like making love at midnight
in the dunes on the cape,
then I'm the love that you've looked for.
Write to me and escape."

"Yes, I like piña coladas,
and getting caught in the rain.
I'm not much into health food.
I am into champagne.
I've got to meet you by tomorrow noon,
and cut through all this red tape,
at a bar called O'Malley's,
where we'll plan our escape."



Rupert Holmes

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[57] To be "tired of" something means that you have lost interest in it.
[58] *Worn out* is a phrasal verb that means *gastado*.
[59] The personal columns are a section of a newspaper devoted to advertisements placed by individuals, not companies.
[60] *Mean,* as an adjective, means "characterized by petty selfishness or malice."
[61] This phrase—"my old lady"—is used to refer to a man's wife or girlfriend. Some people find this expression offensive. The opposite expression—"my old man"—is also used.
[62] A personal ad is an item or notice (traditionally) in the newspaper, similar to an advertisement but personal in nature. With its rise in popularity, the internet has also become a common medium for personals, also referred to as online dating.
[63] "Not half bad" means "surprisingly good."
[64] "Red tape" is a common phrase referring to excessive bureaucracy or adherence to official rules and formalities.
[65] To have "high hopes" is to have a strong feeling that something good will happen or be true.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

BAD, BAD LEROY BROWN
by Jim Croce (1973)

Well, the South side of Chicago
is the baddest part of town,
and if you go down there,
you better just beware
of a man named Leroy Brown.

Now Leroy more than trouble.
You see he stand 'bout six foot four.[66]
All the downtown ladies call him "Treetop Lover."
All the men just call him "Sir."

And he's bad, bad Leroy Brown,
the baddest man in the whole damned town—
badder than old King Kong[67]
and meaner than a junkyard dog.[68]

Now Leroy, he a gambler,
and he like his fancy clothes.
And he like to wave his diamond rings
in front of everybody's nose.

He got a custom[69] Continental.
He got an Eldorado too.[70]
He got a thirty-two gun[71] in his pocket for fun.
He got a razor in his shoe.

And he's bad, bad Leroy Brown,
the baddest man in the whole damned town—
badder than old King Kong
and meaner than a junkyard dog.

Well, Friday 'bout a week ago,
Leroy shootin' dice.[72]
And at the edge of the bar
sat a girl named Doris,
and—oooh—that girl looked nice.

Well, he cast his eyes upon her,[73]
and the trouble soon began.
And Leroy Brown learned a lesson
'bout messin' with[74] the wife of a jealous man.

And he's bad, bad Leroy Brown,
the baddest man in the whole damned town—
badder than old King Kong
and meaner than a junkyard dog.

Well, the two men took to[75] fightin',
and when they pulled them from the floor,
Leroy looked like a jigsaw puzzle[76]
with a couple of pieces gone.

And he's bad, bad Leroy Brown,
the baddest man in the whole damned town—
badder than old King Kong
and meaner than a junkyard dog.

(repeat)



This is a movie poster for the film King Kong.

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[66] The Imperial system uses feet and inches to measure height and (short) distances. Leroy is "six foot four" (abbreviated 6'4"), which would be 1 meter, 93 cm in the Metric system.

[67] You don't watch movies—ugh!!—so I will tell you who King Kong was... King Kong is a film monster, resembling an enormous gorilla, that has appeared in various media since 1933.

[68] This expression—"meaner than a junkyard dog"—means that a person is exceptionally cruel, spiteful, malicious, or violent. A junkyard is *un basurero*.

[69] *Custom* in this context means "made to order", or in Spanish "*a medida*."

[70] Both a Continental and an Eldorado were makes of cars popular in the 1970s.

[71] The number thirty-two here refers to the caliber of the gun.

[72] Shooting dice—also known as street craps—is a slightly simplified version of traditional casino craps, a game with dice (*dados*) and is a classic hustle.

[73] To "cast your eyes" is to look at someone/something.

[74] To "mess with" is to interfere or bother.

[75] *Took to* is a phrasal verb that means "to start."

[76] A jigsaw puzzle (translation: *rompecabezas*) is a board game whose objective is to form an image by combining correctly the individual pieces.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

PIANO MAN
by Billy Joel (1973)

It's nine o'clock on a Saturday.
The regular crowd shuffles[77] in.
There's an old man sittin' next to me
makin' love to his tonic and gin.[78]

He says, "Son, can you play me a memory?
I'm not really sure how it goes.
But it's sad and it's sweet, and I knew it complete
when I wore a younger man's clothes."

la, la, la, di, dee, da
la, la, di, dee, da, da, dum

Sing us a song; you're the piano man.
Sing us a song tonight.
Well, we're all in the mood[79] for a melody,
and you've got us feelin' alright.

Now John at the bar is a friend of mine.
He gets me my drinks for free.
And he's quick with a joke or to light up your smoke,
but there's some place that he'd rather be.

He says, "Bill, I believe this is killing me,"
as the smile ran away[80] from his face.
"Well, I'm sure that I could be a movie star
if I could get out of this place."

oh, la, la, la, di, dee, da
la, la, di, dee, da, da, dum

Now Paul is a real estate novelist,[81]
who never had time for a wife,
and he's talkin' with Davy, who's still in the Navy,
and probably will be for life.

And the waitress is practicing politics
as the businessmen slowly get stoned.[82]
Yes, they're sharing a drink they call loneliness,[83]
but it's better than drinkin' alone.

Sing us a song; you're the piano man.
Sing us a song tonight.
Well, we're all in the mood for a melody,
and you've got us feelin' alright.

It's a pretty good crowd for a Saturday,
and the manager gives me a smile
'cause he knows that it's me they've been comin' to see
to forget about life for a while.

And the piano, it sounds like a carnival.
And the microphone smells like a beer,
And they sit at the bar and put bread[84] in my jar
And say, "Man, what are you doin' here?"

oh, la, la, la, di, dee, da
la, la, di, dee, da, da, dum

Sing us a song; you're the piano man.
Sing us a song tonight.
Well, we're all in the mood for a melody,
and you've got us feelin' alright.



Billy Joel

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[77] To shuffle is to walk by dragging one's feet along or without lifting them fully from the ground.
[78] This is a metaphor. The man is holding his glass, caressing it like something precious.
[79] "In the mood" means "to have a desire for something or to do something." Compare this to "*tener ganas*."
[80] This means "to leave quickly."
[81] This line hints that Paul works in real estate (*inmobiliaria*), but his dream is to write a novel.
[82] By "practicing politics," Joel describes the tact and patience that the waitress must show—smiling and being friendly like a politician even when angry or tired—when dealing with customers, especially those who have drunk too much, that is, those who are "stoned." *Stoned* is a synonym for *drugged*, either by alcohol or drugs.
[83] This song is about loneliness and unfulfilled dreams. Even Joel is unfulfilled at this time. The manager smiles because he knows that Joel is over-qualified for this gig in a small bar. The patrons know as well; they ask, "Man, what are you doing here?"
[84] *Bread* is slang for *money*.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

THE GAMBLER[85]
by Kenny Rogers (1978)

On a warm summer's evening,
on a train bound for nowhere,
I met up with the gambler.
We were both too tired to sleep.
So we took turns a-starin'[86]
out the window at the darkness.
The boredom overtook[87] us,
and he began to speak.

He said, "Son, I've made a life
out of readin' people's faces,
knowin' what the cards were
by the way they held their eyes.
So if you don't mind[88] my sayin',
I can see you're out of aces.
For a taste of your whiskey,
I'll give you some advice."

So I handed him my bottle,
and he drank down my last swallow.[89]
Then he bummed a cigarette[90]
and asked me for a light.
And the night got deathly quiet,
and his face lost all expression.
Said, "If you're gonna play the game, boy,
you gotta learn to play it right.

"You've got to know when to hold 'em,
know when to fold 'em,[91]
know when to walk away,
and know when to run.
You never count your money
when you're sittin' at the table.
There'll be time enough for countin'
when the dealin's done."

Every gambler knows
that the secret to survivin'
is knowin' what to throw away,
and knowin' what to keep.
'Cause every hand's[92] a winner,
and every hand's a loser,
and the best that you can hope for
is to die in your sleep.

And when he'd finished speakin',
he turned back toward the window,
crushed out his cigarette,
faded off to sleep.
And somewhere in the darkness,
the gambler he broke even,[93]
but in his final words
I found an ace that I could keep:

You've got to know when to hold 'em,
know when to fold 'em,
know when to walk away,
and know when to run.
You never count your money
when you're sittin' at the table.
There'll be time enough for countin'
when the dealin's done.

You've got to know when to hold 'em,
(when to hold 'em)
know when to fold 'em,
(when to fold 'em)
know when to walk away,
and know when to run.
You never count your money
when you're sittin' at the table.
There'll be time enough for countin'
when the dealin's done.

(repeat)

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[85] This is another song sung by Kenny Rogers that was made into a movie; again, Rogers acted in the film.
[86] This word—"a-starin'"—is written to accommodate the music. The actual word is *staring*, which translates to *mirar fijamente*.
[87] *Overtook* is the past of *overtake*, which translates to *superar*.
[88] This is a common expression. "If you don't mind" is used to check that someone is willing to do something or let you do something.
[89] Swallow, as a verb, translates to *tragar*. As a noun, it translate to *trago*.
[90] Here we have the use of *bum,* as a verb, again.
[91] This is an expression from the game of poker. To fold is to discard one's cards and forfeit. No further bets are required by the folding player, but the player cannot win. It is the opposite of to hold one's cards, to keep them.
[92] Your "hand" are the cards (*naipes*) in your hand that you are available to you to play.
[93] To "break even" means "to reach a point in a business venture when the profits are equal to the costs". In cards, it means that you neither win nor lose. Here, it is a euphemism meaning that the gambler died.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

HOW COME MY DOG DON'T BARK WHEN YOU COME AROUND?[94]
by Dr. John (1992)

Now you say you never met my wife; you ain't never seen her befo',[95]
Say you ain't been hangin' roun' my crib.[96]
Well here's somethin' I wanna know...
I wanna know what in the world is goin' down,[97]

How come[98] my dog don't bark when you come around?

I got the baddest dog; he'll bite anybody.
He bit my little brother, took a chunk out of my ol' sweet li'l mother.
He bit the mailman; he sees him every day.
He takes one look at you, he wanna jump up and play.
Now I ain't got a clue as to what you puttin' down, but...

How come my dog don't bark when you come around?

My dog's dangerous; I tried to set people straight.[99]
I even bought a "BAD DOG" sign an' hung it on the gate.
Here you come trippin' up 'bout a quarter to nine,
full of that *Night Train* wine,[100] tryin' to slide past the sign...

My dog's there noddin' off,[101] ain't payin' you no mind.[102]
That's my dog; when I come home he don't sleep that sound![103]

How come my dog don't bark when you come around?

I still don't like it, I don't dig it[104] one damn bit,
The way you an' my dog's so tight,[105] somethin' don't fit![106]
I slipped through the alley; I called my dog,
said, "get off your rusty dusty; move a little faster to your ol' master, you old cayute,[107] you."
He took one look at me, an' he growled an' he ran straight to you.
Now somebody's been confusin' my poor hound.
An' I wanna know what's goin' down.

How come my dog don't bark when you come around?

Maybe I better call up Jacoby & Myers, an' you can take the fifth—amendment, that is.[108]
You better stand up fo' your rights, 'cause you might not be standin' too long.
I'm gonna stop all this confusion. I'm gonna fire that hound, shoot that dog down.
Then I'm gonna get busy mutilatin, strangulatin' operatin', an' crematin' my ol' lady down at the cremation station.
Then I'm gonna torch[109] that, too, and come right on after you!

You can give you heart an' soul to charity; all the rest gonna belong to me.

I'm goin' straight down to that barber supply shop, get me a pearl handle, double edge, hollow ground, super blue blade, adjustable, stainless steel, honed edge, both blades on the same side so when I cut you once, you gonna bleed twice—goin' an' comin'.
An' if you don' believe me, shake yo' head; it'll be singin' "I ain't got no body."

'Cause one night I did a little FBI 007-type investigatin'.
You an' my ol' lady thought I was gone, but I wasn't gone.
That's why I have to separate you from your crown.[110]
An' the only soun' you gonna hear when you six feet in the ground:[111]

How come my dog didn't bark when you came around?

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[94] This song is classified as a rock song, but it definitely has New Orleans blues influence.
[95] Remember that the apostrophe signals that letters have been omitted: *befo'* is *before*, *ol'* is *old*.
[96] A crib is a bed for a baby, with bars on the side to prevent the baby from falling out. Here it is slang for *house/home*.
[97] The phrase "what's going down" means "what is happening". Later, the phrase "what you're putting down" means "what you're doing."
[98] "How come" is slang for the interrogative *why*.
[99] To "set people straight" means to "tell people the facts".
[100] *Night Train* is a very cheap wine.
[101] "Nodding off" means "to fall asleep."
[102] "Paying no mind" means "to ignore; to not pay attention to someone/something."
[103] This song is full of grammatical mistakes to exaggerate the New Orleans speech mannerisms. *Sound* here should be *soundly*, meaning "deeply."
[104] "Dig it" was a term from the 1960s meaning "to like."
[105] *Tight* in this context means "to be close, friendly."
[106] If something doesn't fit, it doesn't make sense.
[107] This is a mispronunciation of *coyote*.
[108] Jacoby and Myers is a famous law firm, and the 5th Amendment to the US Constitution guarantees legal rights to an accused.
[109] *Torch,* as a verb, means "to set on fire."
[110] "Separate you from your crown" means "to cut off your head."
[111] Six feet is the usual depth of a grave.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

AMERICAN PIE

by Don McLean (1971)

A long, long time ago,[112]
I can still remember how
that music used to make me smile.[113]
And I knew if I had my chance,
that I could make those people dance,
and maybe they'd be happy for a while.[114]

But February made me shiver[115]
with every paper I'd delivered,
bad news on the doorstep.
I couldn't take one more step.[116]
I can't remember if I cried
when I read about his widowed bride.[117]
Something touched me deep inside
the day the music died.[118]

So bye, bye, Miss American Pie.[119]
Drove my Chevy to the levee but the levee was dry,
and them good ole boys were drinking whiskey and rye,
singin' this'll be the day that I die.
This'll be the day that I die.

Did you write the book of love?[120]
And do you have faith in God above
if the Bible tells you so?[121]
Do you believe in rock and roll?
Can music save your mortal soul?
And can you teach me how to dance real slow?[122]

Well, I know that you're in love with him
'cause I saw you dancin' in the gym.
You both kicked off your shoes.[123]
Man, I dig those rhythm and blues.
I was a lonely teenage broncin' buck
with a pink carnation and a pickup truck,[124]
But I knew I was out of luck
the day the music died.[125]

I started singin'
"Bye, bye, Miss American Pie.
Drove my Chevy to the levee but the levee was dry,
Them good ole boys were drinking whiskey and rye,
singin' this'll be the day that I die.
This'll be the day that I die."

Now, for ten years we've been on our own,[126]
and moss grows fat on a rolling stone,[127]
but, that's not how it used to be.[128]

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[112] The song was written in 1971, and the time that McClean talks about in the song is from the 1950s to that point. It seems like a long time ago because of all the turmoil in the 1960s.
[113] McClean preferred the music of the 1950s.
[114] In the 50s, the purpose of music was to dance. McClean wanted to play rock & roll so that people could have a good time.
[115] Buddy Holly died in a plane crash on February 3, 1959. He was McClean's hero.
[116] McLean was a 13-year-old paperboy in New Rochelle, New York, when Holly died. He learned about the plane crash when he cut into his stack of papers and saw the lead story.
[117] Holly's wife was pregnant at the time of the crash. She miscarried shortly after.
[118] The crash took the lives of three rock legends: Holly, Richie Valens and the Big Bopper. So February 3, 1959, became known as "the day that music died." The type of music that died is considered the standard rock & roll songs. The crash was the final blow to this kind of music because these three were the only major artists left. Elvis had been drafted into the army, Little Richard had turned to gospel music, and Chuck Berry had been arrested.
[119] A common saying in the USA is "as American as apple pie." So, metaphorically speaking, McClean is saying goodbye to the American spirit/soul.
[120] *The Book of Love* was a hit song by the Monotones in 1968.
[121] In 1955, Don Cornell wrote *The Bible Tells Me So*.
[122] Dancing in the 1950s is not like dancing today. Dancing with someone in the 50s meant that you were committed to them.
[123] This refers to "sock hops," an informal, sponsored dance event for teenagers featuring popular music.
[124] This is a reference to Marty Robbins, who had a hit with the song *A White sport Coat (And a Pink Carnation)* in 1957.
[125] The things that worked in the fifty's no longer work because the 60's brought a new social revolution.
[126] Music supposedly "died" in 1959. Perhaps McClean started writing this song in 1969?
[127] Dylan wrote *Like a Rolling Stone* in 1965. This was his first major change from folk music. In late 1966, Dylan had a motorcycle accident, and hid in his house in Woodstock, NY, for a year, hence the "fat," and the moss shows the time change.
[128] McLean liked Dylan as a folk singer in the early sixties more than his folk-rock style in the mid-60s.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

When the jester sang for the king and queen[129]
in a coat he borrowed from James Dean,[130]
and a voice that came from you and me.[131]
Oh, and while the king was looking down,
the jester stole his thorny crown.[132]
The courtroom was adjourned.
No verdict was returned.[133]

And while Lennon read a book on Marx,[134]
the quartet practiced in the park.[135]
And we sang dirges in the dark[136]
the day the music died.

We were singin'
"Bye, bye, Miss American Pie.
Drove my Chevy to the levee but the levee was dry.
Them good ole boys were drinking whiskey and rye
and singin' this'll be the day that I die.
This'll be the day that I die."

Helter skelter in a summer swelter.[137]
The birds flew off from a fallout shelter[138]—
eight miles high and falling fast.[139]
It landed foul on the grass.[140]
The players tried for a forward pass,[141]
with the jester on the sidelines in a cast.[142]

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[129] The jester is probably Bob Dylan. The king is Peter Seger, and the queen is Joan Baez. These were the two big names in folk at the time (early '60's). During the Newport Folk Festival in 1963, Dylan was honored to play his own set and then combine with these two legends to sing his song *Blowin' in the Wind*.

[130] In the movie *Rebel Without a Cause*, James Dean wears a red windbreaker. On the cover of the Dylan's album *Freewheelin'*, he is also seen in a red windbreaker. This ties in with the previous line because this album is were Dylan really gained popularity, with such songs as *Blowin' in the Wind* and *A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall*.

[131] This could mean two things: (1) Dylan was the spokesman for the 60's and (2) he didn't have the best singing voice in the world—even you and I could sing like him.

[132] This could mean two things: Pete Seger remained a traditional folk singer, while Dylan was constantly reinventing himself—becoming unbelievably popular. Or this could be a reference to Elvis. While Elvis was in the army, Dylan took his spotlight and changed the whole music business. The thorny crown is the price of fame, and is referenced with Jesus's thorny crown before he was murdered.

[133] This may deal with the Kennedy assassination. Lee Harvey Oswald was never convicted because he was murdered.

[134] This is about the Beatles music becoming political. Songs like *Revolution* (1968), which actually mentions Chairman Mao, were much different than *Love Me Do* (1963). Many American adults thought the Beatles were bad for the American youth, especially after Lennon's remark in 1966 about Christianity: "Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn't argue with that; I'm right and I will be proved right. We're more popular than Jesus now; I don't know which will go first: rock 'n' roll or Christianity." This started anti-Beatles burnings and such.

[135] The quartet was the Beatles, and the park is Candlestick Park, the place of their last concert. It was "practicing" because their music would grow after they stopped touring.

[136] A dirge is a funeral song. These songs were for the Kennedy's (John & Robert) and Martin Luther King, who all died in the 60s.

[137] Charles Manson is one of the most dangerous serial killers ever. In the summer of 1968, he massacred an entire family because of the Beatles song "Helter Skelter," which appeared on the White Album. He thought that the Beatles were warning America about the racial conflict and that it was "coming down fast." He thought the Beatles were the four angels mentioned in the Book of Revelation in the Bible. Manson wrote the title of the song on the wall, in blood, after committing the murders. He also thought that, in *Revolution 9,* Lennon was saying "rise" instead of "right;" he thought the line "they need a damn good wacking" from *Piggies* was telling him to kill people; and he thought that the *Hollywood Song* in *Honey Pie* was about him because he lived near Hollywood. He was heavily into drugs and thought the Beatles were talking directly to him, telling him to kill those people.

[138] *The Byrds* were a folk-rock group, becoming popular with their cover of Dylan's *Mr. Tambourine Man* in 1965. A "fallout shelter" is a '60s term for a drug rehabilitation facility, which one of the band members of The Byrds checked into after being caught with drugs. A strange note is that Dylan's *Mr. Tambourine Man* appeared on his *Bringing It All Back Home* album, and on the lower left corner of the cover is a fallout shelter sign.

[139] This line is likely a reference to The Byrds' hit song *Eight Miles High*. It was the first ever psychedelic song. The "falling fast" part may refer to the fact that the Byrd's abandoned folk-rock for country music with *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* in 1967.

[140] "Foul grass" may mean marijuana. *Grass* is a common euphemism for marijuana.

[141] Here starts the football metaphor. The players are the protesters in the 60's. The forward pass was their movement to change the situation they were in, full of government corruption.

[142] Remember that the jester is probably Bob Dylan. In late 1966, while riding near his house in Woodstock, NY, he briefly glanced into the sun and lost control of his bike. When he went to brake, they locked up on him and sent him flying off the motorcycle, hence the cast. It took him about 9 months to recover, in which time he very rarely left the house.

LIVEWORKSHEETS