



# Teacher's page

## Fun lesson plans from Learn Hot English

### *Xmas censorship!*

**Level:** Advanced (C1) to Proficiency (C2)

**Video:** Yes

**WARNING:** the article and song in this lesson contain terms that some people may find offensive. Please check over it carefully before deciding whether to use with your students or not.

In this fun lesson, your high-level students will read and talk about an interesting but controversial topic based on the censorship of a famous Christmas song *Fairytale of New York*, by Irish group the Pogues.

Your students will use lots of useful language and all the essential skills: speaking, listening, reading, writing... Here are some ideas for doing it in class. Good luck!



### 1 Article

Read over the article with your students. Help them with the meanings of any words and in particular the pronunciation. Discuss the topic in general and what they think of it.

### 2 Song

Students listen to the song and fill in the gaps. You can click on any words to get the translation and meaning. The song is very difficult to understand in parts. I'd recommend using the "Beginner" option below as there are options for the gaps (not just a blank space). The singers have fairly strong Irish accents, so even proficiency students may find it hard. There were one or two gaps that I couldn't get.

<https://www.lyricsgaps.com/exercises/view/1774/Beginner>

<https://www.lyricsgaps.com/exercises/view/1774/Expert>

### 3 Discussion: censorship

Students ask and answer the questions on censorship. They could do this in pairs then report back, or you could do it as a class. I like to give students the opportunity to answer any question of their choosing. Be careful as it's a potentially sensitive topic. Try not to let it veer too far into politics, religion...



#### 4 Speaking: debate

Hold a debate. Divide your students into two groups. Group 1 are in favour of playing the full version of the song, giving reasons why; and Group 2 are against playing the full version on radio. Give each student an opportunity to air their viewpoint, then they can debate the topic among themselves. To make it fun, give the two groups funny names: Group 1 – “The Morally Offended Brigade”; Group 2 – “It’s PC gone mad!” That way they will hopefully deal with it a bit more light-heartedly.

#### 5 Extra: short news video

If there’s time, show this short news video, following the instructions below. Do this before the debate so students hear other opinions on the topic.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ivbbo-vqMgo>

Watch a video on the topic about the song. What does the presenter think about it? Try to get the general gist of what he says. Before watching, do you know what these words and terms mean?

- It is **faux outrage**... it’s fake anger
- The mortally offended brigade.
- The woke brigade. He is very woke (“awake” to social, racial, gender... issues)
- It’s PC gone mad (political correctness).

#### 6 Song writing

Students create an edited version of the song with non-offensive terms. Or, they write a new verse for the song. When they’re ready, students can present (or sing) their new verses to the class. Students can vote on the best ones.

**NOW SCROLL DOWN FOR THE STUDENT PAGES!**

# Should the Pogues' Christmas song *Fairytale of New York* be censored?

Source: BBC.com

THE BBC has launched a staunch defence of its decision to censor The Pogues' Christmas song *Fairytale of New York* following a flood of complaints.

It took the decision to edit the song as part of an effort to avoid offending younger listeners. The BBC felt these youngsters may take offence at the use of several derogatory terms. A spokesperson for the organisation said, "We know *Fairytale of New York* is considered a Christmas classic and we will continue to play it this year on BBC Radio, with our stations choosing the version of the song most relevant for their audience."

"However, we are also aware that young audiences are particularly sensitive to derogatory terms for gender and sexuality, and after considering this carefully, Radio 1 has decided to play a version featuring Kirsty MacColl singing alternative lyrics, provided by the record label."

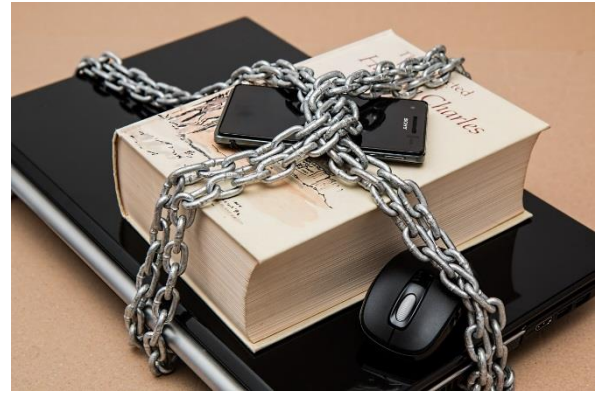
The controversy centres on a couple of lines. In one part, MacGowan's character in the song refers to MacColl's character as "an old slut on junk". She responds by saying, "You scumbag, you maggot, you cheap lousy faggot."

Earlier, MacGowan, who co-wrote the song with his former Pogues band mate Jem Finer branded the decision to censor the song "ridiculous". The Irishman previously defended the song in an interview with Ryan Tubridy for *The Late Late Show* last year. "There is no political correctness to it," he said. "I've been told it's insulting; I don't understand how that works."

The Pogues star also addressed the controversy in a statement to Virgin Media TV's *The Tonight Show* back in 2018. "The word was used by the character because it fitted with the way she would speak and with her character," he said. "She is not supposed to be a nice person. She is a woman of a certain generation at a certain time in history and she is down on her luck and desperate". MacGowan added: "Her dialogue is as accurate as I could make it, but it is not intended to offend! She is just supposed to be an authentic character. Not all characters in songs and stories are angels or even decent and respectable, sometimes characters in songs and stories have to be evil or nasty in order to tell the story effectively."

MacGowan went on to say that he does not want to clash with anyone over the song and would understand if it had to be censored on the air. "If people don't understand that I was trying to accurately portray the character as authentically as possible, then I am absolutely fine with them bleeping the word, but I don't want to get into an argument," he concluded.





## Discussion: censorship

Choose any of the questions below and answer them.

- What books, songs or films have been censored in your country? Which ones should be censored? Why?
- What controls should there be over the media? Why?
- Should there be more or less censorship in general? Why?
- What is your opinion of violent content in TV, films and video games? What sort of censorship should there be, if any?
- What about content of a sexual nature? What sort of censorship should there be?
- What do you think of swearing on TV or the radio?
- Should TV shows or songs with swearing only be played at certain times? Why? Why not?
- Is it OK to include offensive or insulting terms if they're in context? Why? Why not?
- When is it *not* OK to include offensive or insulting terms? Why?
- What effect could violent scenes on the media have on people?
- What stories in the news have you heard about censorship?
- Should freedom of speech be absolute, or should there be limits? Why?
- Should people be allowed to say anything which another person might find offensive for some reason?
- Should people with extreme political views be allowed a voice?
- If a political party advocates violence, should they have freedom of speech? Why? Why not?
- Should the internet be censored in any way? Why? Why not?
- How far should governments take censorship, and what are the limits?

## Speaking: debate

Group 1 = you're in favour of playing the original version of the song, with no censorship.

Group 2 = you're against playing the song because of the use of certain offensive words.

After being assigned your role in the debate, think of arguments to defend your position. Then, when you're ready, explain your arguments. After that, listen to the other arguments. Finally, ask questions, or challenge the other viewpoints. Please have fun and try to keep it fairly light-hearted. Thanks!

## Quick debating language

- It's clear that...
- It's obvious that...
- I firmly believe...
- I think... because...
- In my opinion...
- It's been shown that...
- There's some evidence to suggest that...
- There's no doubt in my mind that...
- A lot of people claim that...
- Some people claim that...
- It's clear that...
- Without a doubt,...
- It's a hoax / It's fake news