Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds – The Beatles – Notes

“We all have our favourite songs, and we like using them as often as we can in class. Some songs lend themselves to a variety of different kinds of activity, for both language and literature lessons. This series of activities illustrates what I mean ... and I’m sure you could add to them!

The Beatles’ song Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds is a treasure-house for the imaginative teacher. Here I present four ideas for exploiting the song - if you think up any more ways of using it, let me know. I’ll return your kindness with some ideas on using other songs ... not only the Beatles! You can contact me at elt@boardman.it.”

Roy Boardman, September 2008

ACTIVITY 1

- Activity type: Imagine and describe the scenes.
- Time: 30 mins.

1) Give each student a copy of the worksheet, but ask them to fold it so as they cannot read exercise 2 or the song lyrics. Students complete the first two columns of the table.

2) Play the song. Students tick each word as they hear it (in the third column).

3) Ask students to close their eyes, and ask them to try to imagine the scenes described in the song. Play the song. Students then put the 19 words in the order they hear them in the song (the fourth column).

4) Students work in pairs and describe and listen to one of the scenes they imagined as they listened to the song. Listen to your partner’s description.

5) Tell students to unfold the worksheet to read Exercise 2. Allow them to read the descriptions of the scenes. One detail in each description is not in the song. Which?

Key: The incorrect details are:  
A There's a girl with me.  
B She's hiding among the trees.  
C lemonade.  
D buy a newspaper.  
E A porter is helping me put my luggage on the rack.

6) Tell students to unfold the worksheet to see the lyrics, and give them a moment to read them. Then sing together.
1. Look at the list of 19 words. Rewrite them in the first two columns. Then listen and write the words in the correct order as they appear in the song.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words I know</th>
<th>Words I don't know</th>
<th>WORDS</th>
<th>Order of words in song</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>girl</td>
<td>train</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>somebody</td>
<td>trees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>someone</td>
<td>high</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>river</td>
<td>turnstile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bridge</td>
<td>smiles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sun</td>
<td>station</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boat</td>
<td>flowers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shore</td>
<td>follow</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fountain</td>
<td>clouds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>towering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Read the following descriptions of the scenes. One detail in each description is not in the song. Which?

A  I’m in a boat floating down a river. There’s a girl with me. The colours of the trees on the river banks are beautiful. I hear a girl’s voice calling me, and the sun is in her eyes.

B  I try to see the girl, but the flowers on the river bank are so tall, and her clothes are so colourful, that it’s impossible. She’s hiding among the trees. The sun dazzles my eyes.

C  People are having a picnic on the river bank. They’re sitting on the grass by a bridge and a lemonade fountain. They smile at me as my boat passes.

D  I leave the boat, buy a newspaper, and catch a taxi. I’m still thinking about the girl and the beautiful day, quite out of touch with reality.

E  I’m on a train waiting to leave the station. A porter is helping me put my luggage on the rack. Suddenly, the girl with beautiful eyes arrives.

3. Now read the lyrics of the song and sing it together.

Picture yourself in a boat on a river
With tangerine trees and marmalade skies
Somebody calls you, you answer quite slowly
A girl with kaleidoscope eyes

Cellophane flowers of yellow and green
Towering over your head
Look for the girl with the sun in her eyes
and she’s gone

Lucy in the sky with diamonds
Lucy in the sky with diamonds
Oh

Follow her down to a bridge by a fountain
Where rocking horse people eat marshmallow pies
Everyone smiles as you drift past the flowers
That grow so incredibly high

Newspaper taxis appear on the shore
waiting to take you away
Climb in the back with your head in the clouds and you’re gone

Lucy in the sky with diamonds
Lucy in the sky with diamonds
Lucy in the sky with diamonds
Oh

Picture yourself on a train in a station
With plasticine porters with looking glass ties
Suddenly someone is there at the turnstile
The girl with kaleidoscope eyes

Lucy in the sky with diamonds
(Repeat to fade)
ACTIVITY 2

- **Activity type:** Understanding and inventing compound nouns.
- **Time:** 40 mins.

1) Explain to students that this song contains a lot of unusual phrases – they are all **compound nouns**, phrases made up of two nouns like ‘flower shop’ and ‘bus ticket’. Play the song, and ask students to try to recognise and write down one compound noun as they listen.

2) Give each student a copy of the worksheet, but ask them to fold it so as they cannot read exercises 2 or 3. Students match the unfamiliar words with the definitions. Point out that the definitions match only one of the nouns in the compound structure.

   **Key:**
   - A banana split
   - B tangerine
   - C marmalade
   - D kaleidoscope
   - E cellophane
   - F rocking horse
   - G marshmallow
   - H plasticine
   - I looking glass
   - J Easyjet
   - K takeaway
   - L house music

3) Tell students that this song was written and recorded in the 1960’s. Ask them which of the compound nouns in the list do they think are used in the song? Why?

4) Play the song. Students check their answers to 3).

5) Ask students to unfold the worksheet, and practice saying each of the compound nouns used in the song.

6) Ask them what they think these very unusual compound nouns mean. How can trees be ‘tangerine’, for example? Let them think about this, then discuss their interpretations with a partner.

7) Tell students to unfold the worksheet to read Exercise 3. Allow them to read the possible definitions, then discuss together.

8) Give each student a copy of the lyrics, and allow them read the text of the song. They then work in groups to invent different compound nouns to replace the ones in the song, but less imaginative ones, like this:

   Picture yourself in a boat on a river
   with **beautiful trees** and **lovely blue skies**

   Tell them to make sure they get the stresses right!

9) Each group sings its own version of the song to the rest of the class. Take a vote on the best one.
1. **Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds – The Beatles**

   **1. Read the list of 18 compound nouns. Match the unfamiliar words with the definitions.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPOUND NOUNS</th>
<th>DEFINITIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>tangerine trees</strong></td>
<td>A - a sweet dish with bananas and ice cream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>play station fingers</strong></td>
<td>B - a small sweet fruit like an orange with a skin that comes off easily; a bright orange colour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>kaleidoscope eyes</strong></td>
<td>C - a jam made from fruit such as oranges, lemons or grapefruit, usually eaten at breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>big burger mouths</strong></td>
<td>D - a pattern, situation or scene that is always changing and has many details or bright colours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <strong>rocking horse people</strong></td>
<td>E - a thin transparent material used for wrapping things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. <strong>newspaper taxis</strong></td>
<td>F - a wooden horse for children that moves backwards and forwards when you sit on it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. <strong>DVD pages</strong></td>
<td>G - a very soft light white or pink sweet, made of sugar and egg white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. <strong>marmalade skies</strong></td>
<td>H - a soft substance like clay, that comes in many different colours and is used by children for making models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. <strong>submarine silence</strong></td>
<td>I - a mirror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. <strong>plasticine porters</strong></td>
<td>J - a low-cost airline company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. <strong>marshmallow pies</strong></td>
<td>K - a meal that you buy at a shop or restaurant to eat at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. <strong>cellophane flowers</strong></td>
<td>L - a type of popular dance music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. <strong>Internet hands</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. <strong>house music fields</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. <strong>Easyjet magic</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. <strong>takeaway parcels</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. <strong>looking glass ties</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. <strong>banana split sweaters</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   All definitions are from the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*

   **FOLD**

   2. Each of the compound nouns in the song has two main stresses. Practise saying them.

   - **tangerine trees**
   - **marmalade skies**
   - **kaleidoscope eyes**
   - **cellophane flowers**
   - **rocking horse people**
   - **marshmallow pies**
   - **newspaper taxis**
   - **plasticine porters**
   - **looking glass ties**

   **FOLD**

   3. Here are some possible interpretations. How far do they correspond with yours? Which of them convince you, which don’t?

   - **tangerine trees** are bright orange in colour, like trees in a child’s drawing.
   - **marmalade skies** are bright with some clouds, like marmalade with pieces of peel in it.
   - **kaleidoscope eyes** seem to be of many colours when they reflect the sun.
   - **cellophane flowers** are flowers that are so beautiful they don’t look real.
   - **rocking horse people** are people sitting cross-legged on the grass, having a picnic, so they bend backwards and forwards to pick up their sandwiches and cakes.
   - **marshmallow pies** are small cakes with white and pink cream on them.
   - **newspaper taxis** are taxis that arrive just where and when you want, like newspapers being delivered.
   - **plasticine porters** are railway station porters in bright-coloured uniforms, standing still waiting for customers.
   - **looking glass ties** are ties which are all alike, so that when the porters stand facing each other one looks like a mirror reflection of the other.
Picture yourself in a boat on a river
With tangerine trees and marmalade skies
Somebody calls you, you answer quite slowly
A girl with kaleidoscope eyes

Cellophane flowers of yellow and green
Towering over your head
Look for the girl with the sun in her eyes
and she’s gone

Lucy in the sky with diamonds
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Lucy in the sky with diamonds
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Follow her down to a bridge by a fountain
Where rocking horse people eat marshmallow pies
Everyone smiles as you drift past the flowers
That grow so incredibly high
Newspaper taxis appear on the shore
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Picture yourself on a train in a station
With plasticine porters with looking glass ties
Suddenly someone is there at the turnstile
The girl with kaleidoscope eyes

Lucy in the sky with diamonds
(Repeat to fade)
ACTIVITY 3

**Activity type:** The Beatles’ Lucy and Wordsworth’s Lucy: comparing song lyrics to poetry.

**Note:** This is mainly for classes who study English literature, but it’s fun to do as a language-practice activity too.

The Wordsworth poem is *She dwelt among the untrodden ways*, in which the ambiguous figure of Lucy is neither here nor there, up in the sky and down on the earth, but in fact dead. In *Lucy in the sky with diamonds*, Lucy too is all-elusive. Get students to identify the phrases that express this elusiveness (Somebody / A girl with kaleidoscope eyes / And she’s gone / Follow her down to the bridge, etc.)

So, past (Romanticism) and present (1960’s pop music) come together and overlap, and the usually dreary-seeming Wordsworth (let’s admit it, that’s how most students think of him) has a chance of coming alive. Background facts like Wordsworth’s ‘odd’ relationship with his sister Dorothy and the love affair in France with Annette Vallon, who bore him a daughter, add spice and invite reflection on who Lucy might have been, if anybody.

The text of the poem is on the student’s worksheet, but here are some thoughts on it, and some background information on the ‘Lucy Poems’ for you to work with.

Just as Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds seems to appear and disappear, appear in the mind and then turn up at the station turnstile, so Wordsworth’s Lucy seems to be and not to be, and one statement is contradicted by another. How can the ‘ways’ be ‘untrodden’ when ways are trodden by definition? If there were ‘very few’ to love her, there must have been some, so why were there ‘none to praise’ her? If she’s ‘half-hidden’ on the ground, how can she be as clear as a star ‘shining in the sky’? If she ‘lived unknown’, how could a ‘few’ know when she ‘ceased to be’? Do both Lucy’s live only in the imagination? Is that part of the meaning of the Beatles song?

The Lucy Poems are a group of five lyrics by William Wordsworth composed between 1799 and 1801. There is no clear evidence that the figure of Lucy represents any actual person, though her ambiguity may be an expression of the poet’s intense relationship with his sister Dorothy. In ‘Strange fits of passion I have known’ the lover approaches Lucy’s cottage as the moon sinks behind it, and suddenly imagines, for no apparent reason, that she might be dead. In ‘Three years she grew’ Lucy is a child who has died young, and in ‘A slumber did my spirit seal’ the poet consoles himself with the idea that the dead Lucy is now part of inanimate nature. These poems, together with ‘She lived among the untrodden ways’, have a mystical simplicity which makes comparison with ‘Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds’ (with its own mysteries) appropriate, and students can compare the linguistic complexity of the Beatles’ song with the linguistic simplicity of Wordsworth’s lyric.

(Based on the *Bloomsbury Guide to English Literature* edited by Marion Wynne-Davies, Bloomsbury 1989)

ACTIVITY 4

**Activity type:** Internet search (Webquest)

What caused ‘Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds’ to be written?

There was and is a lot of discussion about whether the title is a reference to LSD, a drug the Beatles are known to have used and whose effects are similar to the kind of hallucinatory pictures in the song. But there are a lot of other theories, and students can be asked to do a Webquest activity on what has been suggested at various times (a real child’s drawing / a deliberate attempt by Lennon to create the effect of a child’s drawing / a recreation of the effects of the imagined fairground scene in ‘Mary Poppins’ / etc.

Students can then report their findings and discuss their various opinions.
Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds – The Beatles

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Suddenly someone is there at the turnstile
The girl with kaleidoscope eyes

Lucy in the sky with diamonds
(Repeat to fade)

She dwelt among the untrodden ways – William Wordsworth

She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove,
A Maid whom there were none to praise
And very few to love.

A violet by a mossy stone
Half-hidden from the eye.
Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be.
But she is in the grave, and O!
The difference to me!