



# Thousands Are Sailing – Notes



- **Activity types:** discussion, vocabulary, writing.
- **Key words:** emigration / immigration
- **Note:** The song was written by the band’s guitarist Philip Chevron, and released on the 1988 album “If I Should Fall From Grace With God”.
- **History:** The first major wave of immigration took place as a result of the potato famine in Ireland 1845-52. The Immigration station on Ellis Island was open from 1892 to 1954 and processed roughly 12 million immigrants as they passed through. Typical jobs for Irish immigrants were in construction, maintenance or in the police force. There is a 30-minute documentary about immigration through Ellis Island on youtube, also available on [www.tuneintoenglish.com](http://www.tuneintoenglish.com)

- 1) Discuss the following questions with students. They can give answers in pairs or small groups.
  - What’s the difference in meaning between *immigrant*, *emigrant* and *refugee*?
  - Why did so many people leave Europe at the end of the 19th century and in the early 20th century?
  - What difficulties do you think people faced on the ships and also when they first arrived in America?
- 2) Optional activity: Play the short documentary as a general introduction.
- 3) Tell students they are going to hear a song that talks about immigration. Give each of them a copy of the folded worksheet. Ask them to write the word under each picture (the first is done, as it is particularly difficult!)
- 4) Play the song. Students work with a partner to put the pictures in the correct order. They also check the answers to the previous activity.  
**Key:** (numbers are order in song):  
 effigy(6), ship(3), man on the moon(4), dollars(2), postcards(5), ghosts (1)
- 5) Ask students to listen to the song again. This time they read the lyrics and match the underlined words to the explanations. Give them enough time to complete the task.  
**(Note:** there is a link to the traditional song Blackbird on youtube on [www.tuneintoenglish.com](http://www.tuneintoenglish.com))  
**Key:** b,d,c,j,f,a,h,e,i,k,g.
- 6) Answer any questions students have about the song.
- 7) **Further work:** Point out that the song is about the life of an immigrant in America, but in today’s world we still have a lot of refugees or people who decide to emigrate. E.g.: Immigrants in Italy include Senegalese, Chinese, Sri Lankans, Romanian and South Americans as well as others.  
 Explain that students are going to write their own poem/lyrics based on part of the song, to reflect the life, dreams or struggles for today’s people. You can give them an example (below), then students start writing (on their own or in pairs.) Allow them to use dictionaries. Compare what they have written or display their work. Some students might like to add an illustration, photograph or newspaper article.

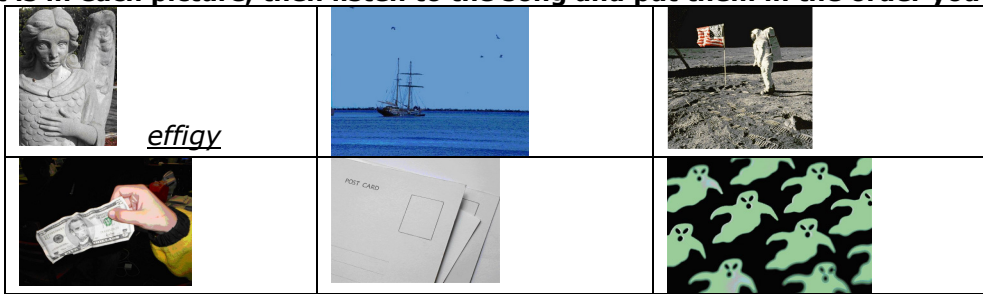
<p>Thousands are <b>fleeing</b>          Across <b>the waters in battered boats</b>          Where the <b>hope</b> of <b>salvation</b>  <b>Waits for us.</b>          Wherever we go, we <b>are persecuted</b>          The land that <b>we adopt as home makes us free</b>          From fear of <b>violence</b>          From <b>ignorance</b> and <b>corruption</b>          And we <b>sing</b> and we <b>try to forget.</b></p>	<p>Thousands are _____          Across _____          Where the ___ of _____          _____.          Wherever we go, we _____          The land that _____          From fear of _____          From _____ and _____          And we _____ and we _____.</p>
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# Thousands Are Sailing – The Pogues



Write what is in each picture, then listen to the song and put them in the order you hear them.



FOLD

Read the lyrics and match the underlined words to the explanations below.

The island it is silent now  
 But the ghosts still haunt the waves  
 And the torch lights up a famished man  
 Who fortune could not save.

Did you work upon the railroad?  
 Did you rid the streets of crime?  
 Were your dollars from the White House?  
 Were they from the Five and Dime?

Did the old songs taunt or cheer you  
 And did they still make you cry?  
 Did you count the months and years  
 Or did your teardrops quickly dry?

"Ah, no," says he, "'twas not to be  
 On a coffin ship I came here  
 And I never even got so far  
 That they could change my name."

Thousands are sailing  
 Across the western ocean  
 To a/the land of opportunity  
 That some of them will never see  
 Fortune prevailing  
 Across the western ocean  
 Their bellies full  
 Their spirits free  
 They'll break the chains of poverty  
 And they'll dance

In Manhattan's desert twilight  
 In the death of afternoon  
 We stepped hand in hand on Broadway  
 Like the first man on the moon

And "The Blackbird" broke the silence  
 As you whistled it so sweet  
 And in Brendan Behan's footsteps  
 I danced up and down the street

Then we said goodnight to Broadway  
 Giving it our best regards  
 Tipped our hats to Mister Cohan  
 Dear old Times Square's favourite bard

Then we raised a glass to JFK  
 And a dozen more besides  
 When I got back to my empty room  
 I suppose I must have cried.

Thousands are sailing  
 Again across the ocean  
 Where the/a hand of opportunity  
 Draws tickets in a lottery  
 Postcards we're mailing  
 Of sky-blue skies and oceans  
 From rooms the daylight never sees  
 Where/And lights don't glow on Christmas trees  
 But/And we dance to the music  
 And we dance

Thousands are sailing  
 Across the western ocean  
 Where the hand of opportunity  
 Draws tickets in a lottery  
 Wherever we go, we celebrate  
 The land that makes us refugees  
 From fear of priests with empty plates  
 From guilt and weeping effigies  
 And we dance to the music and we dance.



- Irish names were regularly anglicised.
- Ellis Island, New York.
- Part of the Statue of Liberty.
- Irish men or women who did not survive the long boat journey.
- An Irish writer and Republican.
- Ships travelling to America packed with people; named because of the high mortality rate on these ships.
- An American Act of 1986 imposed a limit on the number of Irish immigrants entering USA and green cards were given out in a lottery.
- A traditional Irish reel.
- He was an early 20<sup>th</sup> century American composer, born to Irish parents. There is a statue in Times Square.
- Shops in America selling cheap goods.
- He was assassinated in 1963. The only Catholic President of USA and the first Irish American President of the USA.