

A History Lesson in English... in Song!

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For students in Carrières Sociales / option Animation sociale et socioculturelle

Time spent: variable, minimum 2 hours

Olivier Azam and Daniel Mermet directed a documentary film in 2015 entitled *Howard Zinn: A People's History of the United States - Part 1: Bread and Roses*. (See trailer on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8El_Fu6mfU). The DVD is available.

I showed my students the first hour of this documentary, which includes interviews with Howard Zinn, the American historian, and his friend Noam Chomsky. In it, Howard Zinn notably describes a textile workers' strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1912 which has come to be known as the Bread and Roses strike. Why? Some of the marchers carried banners quoting a 1911 poem: "We want bread, but we want roses, too."

Alternatively, there's a short film on Youtube concerning the same strike: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xKnqhGpc8M> (6 minutes 17 seconds).

Article on the same textile strike: <https://www.thoughtco.com/1912-lawrence-textile-strike-3530831>

The poem: <https://chawedrosin.wordpress.com/2008/05/09/bread-and-roses-by-james-oppenheim/>

We went through the poem, reading it aloud, translating sections.

One potential difficulty: the meaning of "for" in the first verse:

"As we come marching, marching in the beauty of the day,
A million darkened kitchens, a thousand mill lofts gray,
Are touched with all the radiance that a sudden sun discloses,
For the people hear us singing: "Bread and roses! Bread and roses!"

This poem was set to music in the 1970s by Mimi Fariña and it is this composition that is used in the film.

We then listen to the version sung by Judy Collins and sing along. It's a bit high, but after warming up, it's a beautiful song that's fun to sing!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKEr5U8ERgc>

More information (from Wikipedia):

"**Bread and Roses**" is a [political slogan](#) as well as the name of an associated poem and song. It originated from a speech given by [Rose Schneiderman](#); a line in that speech ("The worker must have bread, but she must have roses, too."^[1]) inspired the title of the poem *Bread and Roses*^[2] by [James Oppenheim](#). The poem was first published in *The American Magazine* in December 1911, with the attribution line "'Bread for all, and Roses, too'—a slogan of the women in the West."^[3] The poem has been translated into other languages and has been set to music by at least three composers.

The phrase is commonly associated with the successful [textile strike](#) in [Lawrence, Massachusetts](#), during January–March 1912, now often referred to as the "Bread and Roses strike". The slogan pairing bread and roses, appealing for both fair wages and dignified conditions, found resonance as transcending "the sometimes tedious struggles for marginal economic advances" in the "light of labor struggles as based on striving for dignity and respect", as Robert J. S. Ross wrote in 2013.^[4]

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bread_and_Roses