

LEVEL B1 - C2

Learning English through Pop Music

by Fergal Kavanagh

Fergal Kavanagh runs the website www.tuneintoenglish.com, the web's largest free resource for learning English through pop music.

When Lord Byron was sent a recently invented kaleidoscope by his publisher in 1819, he noted its “constantly changing colours”. This was the first of many poetic references to the multi-coloured properties of the optical toy. The word kaleidoscope conjures an ever-changing extravagant image and is a joy to pronounce, with its four distinct vowel sounds and consonants positioning your lips and tongue into four different shapes.

Pop music has long embraced this word as a metaphor for variety in colours, emotions, passions and even cultures. Elton John refers to the “twisting kaleidoscope” of the passage of time on his Oscar winning “Can You Feel The Love Tonight”, and Taylor Swift uses the toy as a metaphor for New York City on her album 1989. A search of lyric videos on www.tuneintoenglish.com

gives seventeen songs with the word in the title. Coldplay use it in a message to embrace human experience over a lifetime, with a reading of an extract of “The Guest House” by 13th-century Persian poet Rumi and a clip of US President Barack Obama singing “Amazing Grace”.

The word is used perhaps most famously in The Beatles’ “Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds”, with John Lennon singing about “the girl with kaleidoscope eyes”. Although Lennon meant it as a psychedelic reference to a colourful physical characteristic, one wonders if he was aware of its kaleidoscopic meaning: Kaleidoscope Vision, often called “kaleidoscope eyes”, is a medical term for distorted vision, usually temporary and often caused by migraines.

There is a worksheet for this song written by Roy Boardman, editor of this magazine, on www.tuneintoenglish.com, featuring a kaleidoscope of activities!

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LEARNING ENGLISH THROUGH POP MUSIC

The Beatles' Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band is considered one of the best albums of all time. There are worksheets for 6 of the tracks on www.tuneintoenglish.com.

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ACTIVITIES

Go to: www.tuneintoenglish.com

- Create an account.
- Find out if there is a worksheet for one of your favourite pop songs.
- Read the worksheet on the Beatles' 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds'.
- Read what the worksheet says about 'Kaleidoscope eyes'.
- Meet up with your friends and spend an evening with the karaoke section.