

## Let's build a playlist for the classroom!

**Language assistant name:** Natalia Burgues Durán

**Name of your school:** Our Lady's Bower Secondary School

**Language:** Spanish

**Name of the song:** “*Mr. Jones, o Pequeña Semblanza de una Familia Tipo Americana.*”, by Sui Generis. Composed by Charly García and Nito Mestre and released in the album *Confesiones de Invierno*, in Argentina, in 1973.

**Theme of the song:** Sarcastic portrait of a stereotypical American family

**Year group(s) you can use it with:** 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> (levels A1 to B1, adapting tasks)

### How you would use it:

The song was selected as the core to a Halloween-related activity. Since this celebration is a rather recent tradition in Spain and is not observed at all in Uruguay or Argentina, I decided to place focus on vocabulary and introduce the students to some terms in Spanish that could apply to the Halloween imagery. In addition, I took advantage of the highly sarcastic and ironic lyrics to discuss literary figures with them.

In line with the peculiarities of this family portrait the song opens with a brief comment from the narrator/singer, using rude language (in English). Although I do not support censorship, I edited out this introduction before using the track in class to comply with the school's etiquette code.

I prepared similar activities for my 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year classes, adapting the difficulty to the students' overall level and to the contents they were covering when we did this activity, but the focus remained on vocabulary and mostly oral skills (listening and speaking). I designed three worksheets with Halloween imagery: the first for a fill-in-the-blanks listening activity to complete the lyrics (for the 1<sup>st</sup> years, I omitted mostly determinants [el/la/los/las], and names of family members, which gave them a chance to practice gender and number correspondence between the former and nouns; for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year classes, I added some nouns with which I knew they were familiar). The third worksheet is aimed to work with vocabulary (see annexes). With higher level students, this song would be useful to practice verbs in past tenses (*pretérito imperfecto* and *pretérito indefinido*), since most of them are regular, and rather frequently used (*abrir/abrió, guardar/guardó, comer/comían*, etc.). On a textual level, it has potential for analyzing the elements of a short story (characters, setting and structure), as well as differences in punctuation between English and Spanish, especially in dialogues, exclamation, and question marks.

These were 40-minute classes, so I distributed the time approximately as indicated below.

### 3 minutes:

I started by introducing the song and its authors.

My cooperating teacher gave me two valuable tips that I now follow as a general rule since discovering how much they help to build the students' confidence in their new language, especially at the beginner stage. The first is to make sure that the students will be familiar with all the vocabulary they are about to encounter, whether already known or new. For this activity, I included the matching exercise in the vocabulary worksheet for this goal. The second is to explain that although the rhythm of spontaneous speech usually seems fast for learners (a point to be taken into account especially in this song), these audio samples will not be slowed down. However, the song will be played at least three times to allow completion of the tasks.

### 5 minutes:

I distributed the worksheets and corrected the matching Spanish-English exercise orally, encouraging individual students to speak while self-correcting their pronunciation against mine, and the whole group to repeat the words and fix their sound.

### 4 minutes:

Next, I read the lyrics translated into English so that the students would understand what the song was about. I deemed this necessary because they would not have otherwise been able to understand most of it at their current level, which might take away from their learning and enjoyment of the activity. This song is great because it allows for a rather literal translation without a major loss of meaning or impact of the themes. As a result, this reading gave the students a chance to reinforce their identification of new vocabulary, by putting it in context.

### 14 minutes (3 for explanations; 11 to play the song three times, the second, with pauses):

I included some hints in the fill-in-the-blanks worksheet to make the task easier: since many of the words in the lyrics appear more than once, I explained that the highlighted words would fill some of the upcoming blanks. I took the opportunity here

to quickly recommend a strategy for any “listening” task they will face in their study of foreign languages. My advice was:

*The first time, listen to the track while following the fragments of the text on your worksheet and do not write anything down, just follow along. Don't worry about forgetting the missing words after hearing them. If you understood them once, you'll recognize them again on the next listen!*

*The second time, fill in the missing terms you picked up from the listening (I would pause the music after each blank this time, to give them time to write).*

*Finally, use the third and last playback to review your completed lyrics and ensure they make sense. Pay attention to grammar and spelling at this point.*

#### 5 minutes:

The next task was to compare their results with their classmates and with the full lyrics that I displayed on the class screen at this point.

I know from experience that not being able to fully complete a listening task generates frustration. In order to prevent this, I acted out some parts of the lyrics by imitating the tone the singer employs for a touch of humour that would also facilitate the identification of different instances of dialogue in the song. During the interaction that followed, I encouraged them to discuss the concepts of “sarcasm” and “irony” and clarified the terms for them.

#### 8-9 minutes (remaining time):

For the last activity, we went back to the second worksheet. In the empty cauldron, they were instructed to write down one or two phrases from the song that they considered sarcastic or ironic. In the minutes remaining until the end of the class, I invited individual students to read their choices and explain the rhetorical figures in English, but using as many Spanish terms as they could. The most used were “*Mamá está muerta en el ropero!*”, “*Somos una familia muy normal.*”, and “*¡Ay, qué pena, nena!*”.

#### How it turned out:

The students with whom I used this song were between 12 and 14 years of age, very curious about cultural facts from the Río de la Plata area and new to the Spanish language. They agreed that the choice of this song was in line with the spirit of Halloween prevailing during that week and they enjoyed it in general.

The last section of this activity, devoted to the analysis of rhetorical figures, could not be carried out with two of the five target groups. They were the largest and the students in them worked at a slower pace, so it seemed sensible to forego any extra tasks in favor of leaving them more time to complete the main ones.

The preliminary tasks designed to help them identify the words they would need and become familiar with their meaning proved essential for success in the main task. Finding different ways to present new vocabulary is as challenging as it is rewarding to see the students' interest grow. With this activity, I also learned the importance of selecting terms that will be used with certain frequency and to keep their number small in each new session. In the case of this activity, for example, only two of the expressions introduced in the matching exercise were new to the students. Being able to recognize most of what is presented to them as "new" is key to building their confidence in the new language, especially when they can recognize these expressions in context, in oral form.

The song below is a good fit for this kind of activity because it is very short (less than 2 minutes). Most songs will not allow three playbacks (one with pauses) in a 40-minute class, so in the case of other songs, I used smaller sections which proved equally effective.

**Link to the song:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7X1VtnxZRM>

## **ANNEX I:** Worksheets for this lesson.

Three documents are submitted together with this one. Their titles are self-explanatory:

*vocabulary worksheet 1st and 2nd yrs.docx*

*worksheet jones 1styr.docx*

*worksheet jones 2ndyr.docx*

## **ANNEX II:** Images and fonts.

The images and fonts used in these worksheets were downloaded from the sources listed below.

*Chiller* font:

<https://freefontsfamily.com/chiller-font-free/#:~:text=Chiller%20font%20is%20a%20truetype,a%20minimum%20fifty%20six%20languages.>

*Blackout* font:

<https://www.fontsquirrel.com/fonts/blackout>

Halloween frame clipart is available for free download with a trial account at:

<https://www.dreamstime.com/royalty-free-stock-images-halloween-border-image26401239>

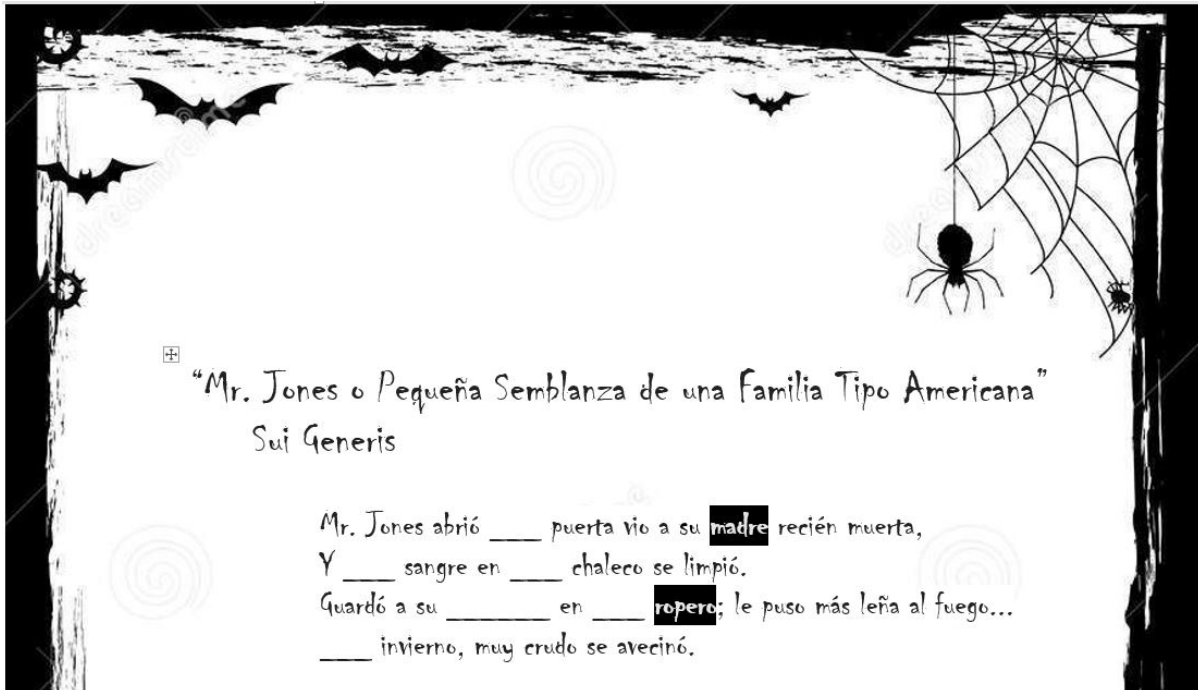
Vocabulary worksheet frame and cauldron clipart can be downloaded for free from:

<http://clipart-library.com/free-halloween-borders.html>

<http://clipart-library.com/clipart/395919.htm>

## **PREVIEWS**

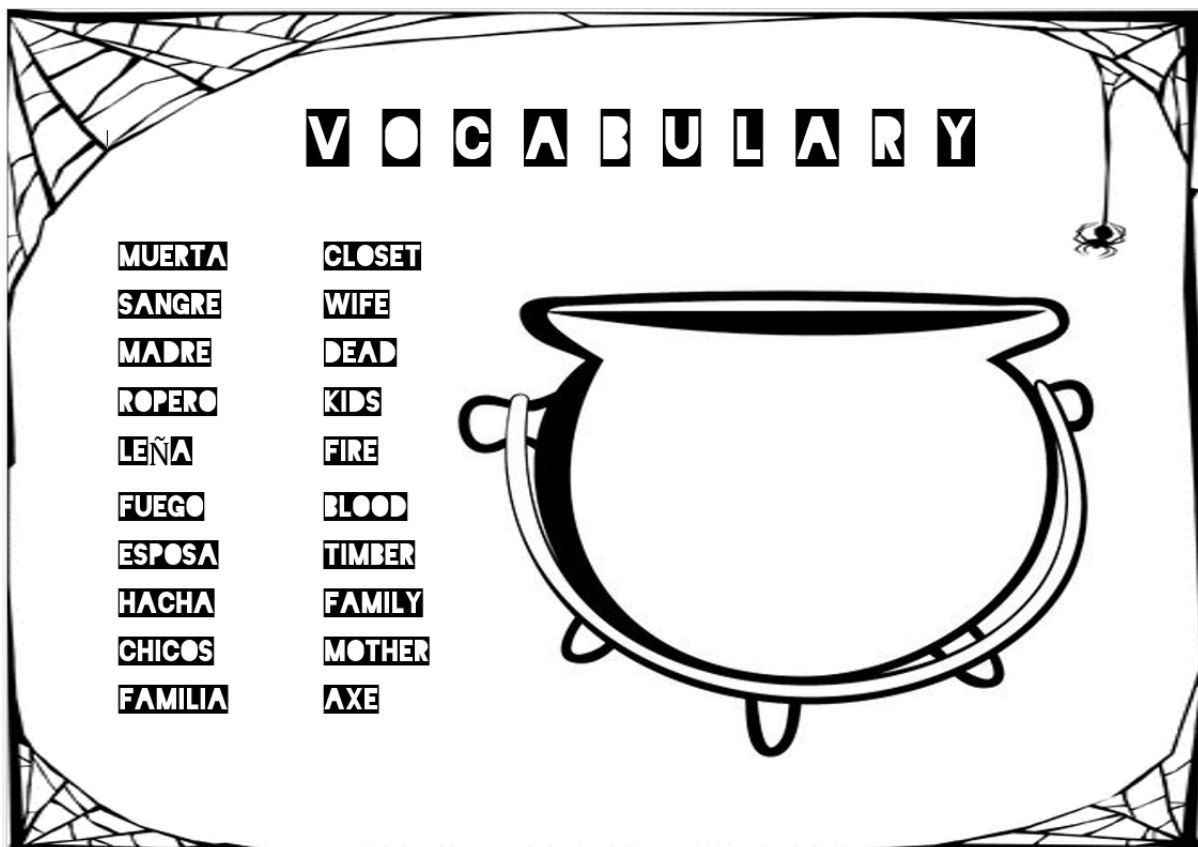
This is how these worksheets should look when the appropriate fonts are installed:



☒

“Mr. Jones o Pequeña Semblanza de una familia Tipo Americana”  
Sui Generis

Mr. Jones abrió \_\_\_\_ puerta vio a su **madre** recién muerta,  
Y \_\_\_\_ sangre en \_\_\_\_ chaleco se limpió.  
Guardó a su \_\_\_\_ en \_\_\_\_ **ropero**; le puso más leña al fuego...  
\_\_\_\_ invierno, muy crudo se acercó.



## V O C A B U L A R Y

<b>MUERTA</b>	<b>CLOSET</b>
<b>SANGRE</b>	<b>WIFE</b>
<b>MADRE</b>	<b>DEAD</b>
<b>ROPERO</b>	<b>KIDS</b>
<b>LEÑA</b>	<b>FIRE</b>
<b>FUEGO</b>	<b>BLOOD</b>
<b>ESPOSA</b>	<b>TIMBER</b>
<b>HACHA</b>	<b>FAMILY</b>
<b>CHICOS</b>	<b>MOTHER</b>
<b>FAMILIA</b>	<b>AXE</b>

