

Song 7: Simple Down



ACTIVITY MENU

PRE-LISTENING

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Simple Down

by Lael Neale

(4:13)

1 These wheelers and dealers
 Trying to sell us trinkets and rings
 But there is no real value on these things
 And I want to simple down.

5 My closet and my trunk
 Are filled with so much junk
 I thought it made me happy
 But I just feel sunk
 And I want to simple down.
 Oh, I want to simple down.

11 Sail the six-lane highways
 We're married to machines
 And despite our lives of excess
 We are filled with emptiness
 And oh, all the little birds
 Sing for all the trees
 Please, please, please
 Be good to me.

19 I bought a new white dress,
 Sunglasses, silks, and scarves.
 I've tried to buy my happiness
 But can't buy that or love,
 And so I want to simple down.

24 So come away with me.
 Let's quit this crazy town.
 In a valley by a river
 We will not be found.
 Let's move to the mountains
 Where the dirt is rich and brown
 Where the garden grows
 And the rooster crows
 Someplace...
 Someplace to simple down.
 Oh, I want to simple down. (3X)



Pre-listening Activities: Choose one or two of the activities below.

Four Corners

Purpose: To generate interest in the song, and express opinions and make choices about controversial ideas/statements

Level: 2 and above

Time: 15 – 20 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Label four corners or areas of the classroom with these signs:
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Instructions: See page 317. Write the following controversial statements on the board (but only one at a time):

1. *Advertisements and media turn people into consumers.*
2. *People have become obsessed with the desire to obtain material possessions.*
3. *Material things are the least important things in life.*
4. *Money brings stress and strain instead of happiness.*

Find Someone Who...

Purpose: To generate interest and introduce vocabulary for the song, activate background knowledge about the topic, and practice asking and answering questions

Level: 2 and above

Time: 30 minutes, plus the length of the song (4:13 minutes)

Preparation and Materials: Make a copy of the questions (page 649) for each student or group of students, or write the questions on the board.

Instructions: Review the list of questions with students. Explain that the students will need to walk around the room and ask these questions to all other students. For each question, they must find one person who can answer *yes* to that question, and write the name of the person next to the question. They may not use the same person for more than one question. The first person to complete the task wins.

Brainstorming and Mind-Mapping Vocabulary

Purpose: To generate interest and introduce vocabulary for the song, and activate background knowledge about the topic

Level: All

Time: 10 – 15 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Write the following word on the board and circle it, as the starting point for the brainstorming: *happiness*

Instructions: Ask students to call out any thoughts that come to mind when they see the word on the board. Write the students' ideas, or have students come to the board and write down their own thoughts. Ask the students to look at these ideas to see if they can be grouped into subtopics. Write the subtopics in smaller circles around the main idea and connect them with lines to the main circle to create a "mind map." Have students listen for their ideas in the song.



Simple Down: Find Someone Who...

1. Is your closet filled with junk?
2. Do you like to buy trinkets?
3. Would you like to be a car dealer or salesperson?
4. Are you feeling sunk today?
5. Do you think that trinkets are worth very little?
6. Would you rather be where the garden grows and the rooster crows instead of in class?
7. Would you like to live in a big city?
8. If you could, would you move to the mountains or countryside?

Simple Down: Answer Keys

Did You Hear What I Heard? Answer Key

1. The singer wants to tell listeners that a simple life is a happier life, and that people do not need to own lots of things in order to be happy.
2. trinkets, rings, a white dress, sunglasses, silks, scarves
3. lines 14 – 15, 23 – 30



Listening Activities: Choose one of the listening activities below.

Relax and Enjoy!

Purpose: To enjoy listening to the song

Level: All

Time: 10 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Write the following discussion questions on the board:

What feelings or images does this song evoke?

Does the singer's style remind you of any other singer? Who?

Would you listen to this song again outside of class? Why or why not? Where and when?

Instructions: Tell the students they are going to hear a song and that you want them to focus on how the song makes them feel and what it reminds them of. Play the song once. Have a general class discussion about the students' ideas and feelings using the discussion questions.

Did You Hear What I Heard?

Purpose: To listen for main ideas and specific details

Level: 2 and above

Time: 15 – 20 minutes (to play the song one or two times)

Preparation and Materials: Write the following questions on the board:

1. *What message does the singer have for the listeners? Do you agree with it? Why or why not?*

2. *What material objects are mentioned in the song?*

3. *Which lines of the song are related to a simple way of life?*

Instructions: Tell the students that as you play the song, they should try to answer the questions on the board. After the song is finished, ask the students to compare their answers in groups of three or four. Play the song again, if needed. Let the students work in groups and then check the answers with the whole class. If an answer is wrong, help the students to understand *why* it is not correct. (Answer key: see page 649.)

Mixed-Up Lyrics

Purpose: To listen for specific words or phrases, and make print and sound connections

Level: 2 and above

Time: 15 – 25 minutes (to play the song two or three times)

Preparation and Materials: Make a copy of the handout (page 651) for each group of students. Cut apart the lines and mix them up. (Answer key: see song lyrics on page 647.)

Instructions: Divide students into small groups. Give each group one set of lyrics from the song. They should read through the lyrics and put the sets into the order they think is correct. As you play the song, they should check their work and put the strips in the correct order. Play the song again so most groups have the strips correctly ordered. Then check their answers.



Simple Down: Mixed-Up Lyrics

----- ✂ -----
These wheelers and dealers
Trying to sell us trinkets and rings

----- ✂ -----
But there is no real value on these things
And I want to simple down.

----- ✂ -----
My closet and my trunk
Are filled with so much junk

----- ✂ -----
I thought it made me happy
But I just feel sunk

----- ✂ -----
And I want to simple down.
Oh, I want to simple down.

----- ✂ -----
Sail the six-lane highways
We're married to machines
And despite our lives of excess

----- ✂ -----
We are filled with emptiness
And oh, all the little birds
Sing for all the trees

----- ✂ -----
Please, please, please
Be good to me.

----- ✂ -----
I bought a new white dress,
Sunglasses, silks, and scarves
I've tried to buy my happiness

----- ✂ -----
But can't buy that or love
And so I want to simple down.

----- ✂ -----
So come away with me.
Let's quit this crazy town

----- ✂ -----
In a valley by a river
We will not be found.

----- ✂ -----
Let's move to the mountains
Where the dirt is rich and brown
Where the garden grows

----- ✂ -----
And the rooster crows
Someplace...
Someplace to simple down.
Oh, I want to simple down.

----- ✂ -----



Singing Activities: Choose one of the singing activities below.

Sing Along With Me

Purpose: To practice pronunciation and intonation

Level: All

Time: 10 – 15 minutes (to sing the song one or two times)

Preparation and Materials: Write the lyrics (page 647) on the board or on a large poster.

Instructions: Practice singing the song with the students. While singing, use a large stick, ruler, or your hand to point on the board to the words as they are sung so that students don't lose their place in the song. If some students learn the song quickly, they can take turns coming to the front and pointing to the words on the board.

Show Me the Word

Purpose: To make print and sound connections, and learn the vocabulary from the song

Level: 2 and above

Time: 20 – 30 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Hang the large pictures (pages 653-660) on the board.

Instructions: Divide students into small groups. Have students divide the words evenly among their group and then copy their words onto separate pieces of paper or cards. Each student should have an equal number of word cards. Have students sing the song as they sit in their groups. Whenever students hear and sing any of the words on their cards they need to raise the corresponding card above their heads. To make it more competitive, you could select a class judge to watch the groups and make sure they raise the correct words.

Your Moves

Purpose: To learn vocabulary from the song, and represent word meanings with actions

Level: All

Time: 20 – 30 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Make a copy of the song lyrics (page 647) for each student, or write the lyrics on the board.

Instructions: Give students a handout of the lyrics or show them the lyrics on the board. Elicit possible motions that could be associated with each keyword or phrase and choose the one they like the best. Practice that mime and then go on to the next keyword until each keyword has a mime. Practice all of them so that students can remember them. Play the song and have the students sing along and do the correct mime when they hear the word or phrase.



Simple Down: Show Me the Word



trinkets



six-lane highways





rings



trunk





birds



feel sunk





white dress



mountains





trees



garden





sunglasses



rooster





scarves



buy





river



love



Post-listening Activities: Choose one or two of the activities below.

Speaking: Small Group Discussion and Summary

Purpose: To think critically and express opinions

Level: 3 and above

Time: 25 – 35 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Make a copy of the discussion questions (page 662) for each group of students.

Instructions: Divide the students into small groups. Tell the students to discuss the questions. You can assign them all of the questions or assign different questions to different groups. When all groups have finished their discussions, ask each group to comment on one aspect: the most surprising opinion, the funniest opinion, or the similarities and differences among groups.

Reading: Main Ideas and/or Specific Details

Purpose: To write and answer questions that focus on main ideas and details

Level: 3 and above **Time:** 30 – 40 minutes (part of this activity is assigned as homework)

Preparation and Materials: Make a copy of the reading text (page 663) for each student. The reading and question preparation may be done in advance as a homework assignment.

Note to the Teacher: To read for the “gist” means to search for the main ideas. There may be one overall main idea plus separate paragraphs may have their own main idea. To read for detail is to find specific information within a text. Details give support to the main ideas. A main-idea question asks about the general ideas of a text or paragraph.

Instructions: Explain to students the difference between a main-idea question and a detail question. As a homework assignment, tell students to write questions based on the reading text. Two or three of the questions should be about main ideas and four or five questions about specific details. In class, have students exchange their questions with classmates. Tell them to answer the questions they received, and encourage them to discuss their answers in pairs.

Writing: Story Extensions

Purpose: To write creative narratives

Level: 2 and above **Time:** 45 – 55 minutes (may be extended over several class sessions)

Preparation and Materials: Make a copy of the song lyrics (page 647) for each group of students, or write the lyrics on the board.

Instructions: Divide the class into small groups: Tell students to work as groups to write a narrative paragraph about what will happen to the singer *after* the events in the song. Then invite one or two groups to share their combined stories with the class, or post the stories on the wall so that everyone can read and vote on which paragraph has the best ending.



Simple Down: Small Group Discussion and Summary

Directions: Read the following situation, and then respond to the discussion questions below. Be ready to summarize what your group has discussed.

Situation:

Sally has a dilemma. She has been working in a big company for a long time. She has a very hard job. She usually spends ten hours at work every day. She has only weekends to get together with her family and friends. Even on weekends, she is often called into the office for extra work.

On the other hand, Sally earns a lot of money. She has a luxury car and a wonderful house. She doesn't have to worry about whether she can pay her bills. She wears expensive clothes and shops at high-end stores. She can afford to take a vacation each year. Just when she is thinking of leaving her job and going back to her hometown to start her own business, she is offered a new position at work. This promotion means more money, but even less time for her personal life. Sally enjoys the money she earns and doesn't want to give it up, but she wonders how living in a big city and having a stressful job is impacting her life. On the other hand, she also knows that it will be difficult to get used to living in a small town after many years in a big city. She also knows that starting her own business will be a real challenge.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the benefits of accepting the promotion at work?
2. What are the drawbacks of accepting the promotion at work?
3. What are the benefits of moving back to a small town and starting a business?
4. What are the drawbacks of moving back to a small town and starting a business?
5. What would you do if you were Sally? Why?



Living the Simple Life

Folk music is also known as traditional music or roots music in the United States. The origin of the term dates back to the nineteenth century, although this musical genre is a great deal older. Traditional folk music includes the songs that ordinary people sang during their **everyday**³² activities, and these are passed down through the generations.

Today modern folk music in the United States has **evolved**³³ into a new but related style. It typically features the acoustic guitar (pictured), is performed in smaller, relaxed settings, and focuses on subjects that ordinary people can relate to. Many times the songs are concerned with the most basic and common aspects of our lives.



“Simple Down” is an example of modern folk music in the United States. In the song, singer and songwriter Lael Neale talks about her desire to live a simpler and more fulfilling life. She says that “despite our lives of **excess**,³⁴ we are filled with emptiness.” She realizes that many of the belongings that she owns have not made her a happier person. As a result, she decides that she wants to “simple down” and live a life without “**trinkets**”³⁵ and “junk.” The singer has discovered that having lots of stuff has not made her happy. Have you ever wanted to buy something, and then realized that it didn’t make you any happier once you owned it?



Naturally, everyone has different ideas of what it means to live a simple or fulfilling life. In “Simple Down,” the singer wants to “quit this crazy town” and move to the mountains to live closer to nature. The singer seems to believe that she cannot live a simple life in a big city where people are constantly busy, going places, and being encouraged to buy things. Rather, she would prefer to live in the countryside where she can watch plants grow, wake up to the sounds of nature, and no one can find her.

What do you think about living a simple life?

Can a person live a simple life in a big city? Can a person live a simple life in the countryside?

Is life simpler in the countryside or in the city? Why?

Is it easy to “simple down”? What could you live without? What is necessary for you to keep?

³² **everyday** ordinary, used in normal daily activities

³³ **evolve** to change over time

³⁴ **excess** amount that is more than needed

³⁵ **trinket** small items that are not worth a lot of money and are not useful

