

Leonard Cohen



Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What is Leonard Cohen famous for?
2. Do you like reading poetry?
3. What subjects do poets and songwriters commonly write about?
4. How does poetry differ from music lyrics?

B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can.
Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| _____ 1. decade | a) having a calming effect |
| _____ 2. royalties | b) alone, not wanting to interact with others |
| _____ 3. debut | c) about one's own life and experiences |
| _____ 4. monotone | d) having a strong effect on others' work, inspirational |
| _____ 5. soothing | e) a ten-year span |
| _____ 6. iconic | f) to throw away or reject |
| _____ 7. autobiographical | g) well-known, famous |
| _____ 8. influential | h) income earned from a work of art |
| _____ 9. reclusive | i) the first performance or first release of a type of art form |
| _____ 10. discard | j) having a tone of voice that always sounds the same |

Reading

1. Leonard Cohen was a Canadian singer-songwriter, poet, and novelist. He became popular in the '60s and produced award-winning work for five **decades**.
2. Leonard Cohen was born into a Jewish family in Quebec, Canada, in 1934. He was only nine years old when his father died. At the age of 13, he picked up his first guitar. At school, he formed a country-folk trio called the Buckskin Boys.
3. Cohen attended McGill University and was president of the debating society. He spent much of his time studying and writing poetry. In 1956, Cohen published *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, his first book of poetry. His second collection, *The Spice-Box of Earth*, came out in 1961.
4. In the early '60s, Cohen used his **royalties** to buy a small property on the Greek island of Hydra. While living quietly by the sea, he wrote two more collections of poetry and published two novels, *The Favourite Game* and *Beautiful Losers*.
5. Cohen didn't earn enough money from his writing to maintain this lifestyle. In the late '60s, he moved to New York and began setting his words to music. His **debut** album *Songs of Leonard Cohen* came out that year. Many reviewers compared him to Bob Dylan.
6. Leonard Cohen's deep, **monotone** voice and emotion-filled lyrics had a **soothing** quality that attracted many fans. By the '70s, Cohen was an **influential** performing artist. In his lifetime, over 200 musicians performed 'Hallelujah', his most **iconic** song. In 1992, several of Cohen's songs were included in Oliver Stone's film *Natural Born Killers*. This helped Cohen gain a new following of young people.
7. Cohen approached all types of writing the same way—one word at a time. He wrote about politics, relationships, and isolation. His lyrics were often dark and **autobiographical**. Over the years, reviewers gave Cohen many nicknames including 'Godfather of Gloom'.
8. Leonard Cohen often admitted that words didn't come easily to him. He wrote many drafts and **discarded** work that didn't feel just right. His **reclusive** lifestyle allowed him to focus on his work.
9. Leonard Cohen's final album, *You Want It Darker*, came out in the fall of 2016. Canada's legendary poet died a few weeks later on November 10, 2016, at the age of 82.

*'I've often said
if I knew where
the good songs
came from, I'd go
there more often.'*

—Leonard Cohen

Comprehension

A. True or False?

Read the statements below.

If the statement is true, write T beside the sentence.

If it is false, write F and correct the information in your notebook.

- _____ 1. When he was a young boy, Leonard Cohen's mother died.
- _____ 2. Leonard Cohen wrote everything from poetry to music lyrics to novels.
- _____ 3. Leonard Cohen was born and raised in Canada.
- _____ 4. Cohen published his first music album on the Greek island of Hydra.
- _____ 5. Leonard Cohen turned to writing music because he had trouble earning money from books.
- _____ 6. Many musicians thought Leonard Cohen's music was boring.
- _____ 7. 'Hallelujah' was someone else's song that Leonard Cohen often sang.

B. Ask & Answer

Practise asking and answering the following questions with your partner.

Then write your answers in complete sentences.

1. What was Leonard Cohen's nationality and where was he raised?

2. Where did Cohen become interested in poetry?

3. Why did Cohen move to a Greek island, and what did he do there?

4. Why did Cohen move to New York, and what did he do there?

5. Why was Cohen's song 'Hallelujah' significant?

6. Did writing come easily to this Canadian icon? Explain.

Vocabulary Review

A. Choose the Correct Word

Choose the word or phrase with the closest meaning to the underlined word or phrase in the following sentences.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>1. She wrote one hit song and lived off the <u>royalties</u>.</p> <p>a) profits
b) family
c) wealthy</p> | <p>3. The speaker had a <u>monotone</u> voice. I almost fell asleep.</p> <p>a) annoying
b) unchanging
c) loud</p> | <p>5. Do you think these lyrics are <u>autobiographical</u>?</p> <p>a) personal
b) dark
c) gloomy</p> |
| <p>2. My father was very <u>influential</u>. He introduced me to country music.</p> <p>a) musical
b) inspiring
c) interesting</p> | <p>4. I listen to <u>soothing</u> music while I write poetry.</p> <p>a) calming
b) influential
c) folk</p> | <p>6. After her husband died, she lived a <u>reclusive</u> life.</p> <p>a) discard
b) soothing
c) isolated</p> |

B. Complete the Sentences

Complete the sentences using vocabulary from page 1. You may need to change the word forms.

1. Thanks for reading the draft. I _____ the first paragraph, so I need to rewrite it.
2. Their _____ album is excellent. I can't believe it's their first release.
3. It's an _____ song about his childhood experiences.
4. She isn't that well known here, but she's _____ in Europe.
5. He inspired many artists between 1960 and 1970. That was his most influential _____.
6. Babies like my grandfather because he has a _____ voice.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions in small groups or with your class.

1. Cohen had fans of all ages.
Which other singer-songwriters appeal to many generations?
2. How important is music to the success of a film?
3. A biographer once said that Cohen, like a fine wine, got better with age. Explain this comparison.
4. Listen to some of Leonard Cohen's songs. Describe his voice.
5. Listen to some different versions of 'Hallelujah'. Try Jeff Buckley and Bono's versions. Then listen to John Cale's version in *Shrek* or Kate McKinnon's version (as Hillary Clinton) on *Saturday Night Live*. Compare these versions to Cohen's version.

Poetry Challenge

Listen to some Leonard Cohen music and write a poem of your own. Choose a theme that Leonard Cohen would use, such as politics, relationships, or isolation.

Your teacher can email your poem to ESL Library.
We will share the best poems on our blog.