

Note to Teachers: I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill

This beautiful old labor song has been sung by everyone from Woody Guthrie to Joan Baez. It has simple and timeless lyrics about repression, hope and organizing. In the big picture, it would go well after a story or two about the IWW. (There are three stories about the Wobblies at the ESL Garden, including one about the great Bread and Roses Strike.)

I suggest starting with some schema activation: What does the “organizing” mean? Why do people do it? Then transition to the fact that, while organizing is legal today, it was illegal – and dangerous – not long ago. Then tell students they're about to hear a famous song about a union organizer from a long time ago. (Then play the song.)

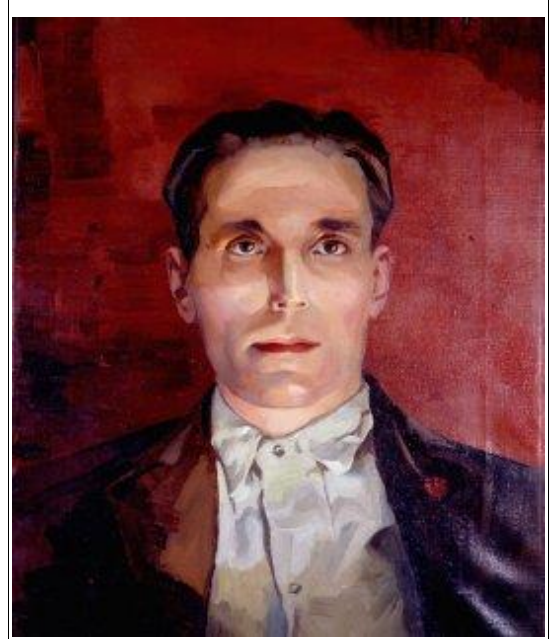
You should read up a bit on Joe Hill, too – an important if poorly-known figure from the labor movement of yesteryear. There's good information on him on Wikipedia, and a good page on this very song on the Labor Notes website, labornotes.org .

Good luck! As always, write to me with any questions or comments.

Solidarity,
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I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill

1. I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night
2. Alive as you and me.
3. Says I, "But Joe, you're _____ dead."
4. "I never died," says he, I never died," says he.
5. "In Salt Lake, Joe, by God," says I,
6. Him standing _____ ,
7. "They framed you on a murder charge."
8. Says Joe, "I didn't die," Says Joe, "I didn't die."
9. And standing there as big as life
10. And _____ ,
11. Joe says, "What they forgot to kill
12. "Went on to _____ . Went on to _____ ."
13. "Joe Hill ain't dead," he says to me,
14. "Joe Hill ain't never died.
15. "Where _____ are out on _____
16. "Joe Hill is at their side. Joe Hill is at their side."
17. "From San Diego up to Maine
18. "In every mine and mill,
19. "Where workers _____ and _____ ,"
20. Says he, "You'll find Joe Hill,"
21. Says he, "You'll find Joe Hill."



A painting of Joe Hill, 1879 to 1915

I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill

1. I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night
2. Alive as you and me.
3. Says I, "But Joe, you're ten years dead."
4. "I never died," says he, "I never died," says he.

5. "In Salt Lake, Joe, by God," says I,
6. Him standing by my bed,
7. "*They framed you on a murder charge.*" The courts said you killed someone, even
8. Says Joe, "I didn't die," Says Joe, "I didn't die." though you were not.

9. And standing there as big as life
10. And smiling with his eyes,
11. Joe says, "What they forgot to kill
12. Went on to organize, Went on to organize.

13. "Joe Hill *ain't* dead," he says to me, *ain't* – Old, casual way to say isn't or wasn't.
14. "Joe Hill *ain't never* died. *ain't never* – A strong way to ain't.
15. "Where working men are out on strike
16. "Joe Hill is at their side, Joe Hill is at their side."

17. "From San Diego up to Maine,
18. "In every *mine and mill*,
19. "Where workers strike and organize," *mines and mills* – Places where people did
20. Says he, "You'll find Joe Hill," hard and dangerous work for little money.
21. Says he, "You'll find Joe Hill."

Questions

1. Where does Joe Hill say you can find him? What does the expression "at their side" mean?

2. What happened to Joe Hill? Why does he say he isn't dead?

3. Why do you think the singer dreamed about Joe Hill?