Rise Up! The Manifesto of the Masses:
Lesson on Rebellion and the French Revolution through Poetry and Song
High School
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Introduction

This chapter provides a look at the French Revolution from a literary and lasting point of view. It examines how this event was perceived by British poet, William Wordsworth and from a tradition made during the French Revolution, that of punk rock, through the rebellion song “Red Flag” by Canadian band Billy Talent. The poem “The French Revolution As It Appeared To Enthusiasts At Its Commencement” written by Wordsworth provides the reader with a snapshot in time as well as a sense of the atmosphere that was propagated by British youth as a reaction to the events taking place in France. Billy Talent’s song “Red Flag” is a call for youth to rebel against a society that does not understand them. These two poems are therefore easily related and provide students with perceptions about the French Revolution from Wordsworth who was a young man at the burgeoning and from Billy Talent who have kept the same feeling of rebellious youth alive in the lyrics to their popular song.

The French Revolution as It Appeared to Enthusiasts at Its Commencement

Oh! pleasant exercise of hope and joy!
For mighty were the auxiliars which then stood
Upon our side, we who were strong in love!
Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven!—Oh! times,
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
The attraction of a country in romance!
When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights,
When most intent on making of herself
A prime Enchantress—to assist the work
Which then was going forward in her name!
Not favoured spots alone, but the whole earth,
The beauty wore of promise, that which sets
(As at some moment might not be unfelt
Among the bowers of paradise itself )
The budding rose above the rose full blown.
What temper at the prospect did not wake
To happiness unthought of? The inert
Were roused, and lively natures rapt away!
They who had fed their childhood upon dreams,
The playfellows of fancy, who had made
All powers of swiftness, subtilty, and strength
Their ministers,—who in lordly wise had stirred
Among the grandest objects of the sense,
And dealt with whatsoever they found there
As if they had within some lurking right
To wield it;—they, too, who, of gentle mood,
Had watched all gentle motions, and to these
Had fitted their own thoughts, schemers more wild,
And in the region of their peaceful selves;—
Now was it that both found, the meek and lofty
Did both find, helpers to their heart's desire,
And stuff at hand, plastic as they could wish;
Were called upon to exercise their skill,
Not in Utopia, subterranean fields,
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!
But in the very world, which is the world
Of all of us,—the place where in the end
We find our happiness, or not at all!

William Wordsworth

About the Author
William Wordsworth (7 April 1770 – 23 April 1850) was a major English Romantic poet who, with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, helped to launch the Romantic Age in English literature with the 1798 joint publication Lyrical Ballads.

Wordsworth's magnum opus is generally considered to be The Prelude, a semiautobiographical poem of his early years which he revised and expanded a number of times. It was posthumously titled and published, prior to which it was generally known as the poem "to Coleridge". Wordsworth was Britain's Poet Laureate from 1843 until his death in 1850.

William Wordsworth died by re-aggravating a case of pleurisy on 23 April 1850, and was buried at St. Oswald's church in Grasmere. His widow Mary published his lengthy autobiographical "poem to Coleridge" as The Prelude several months after his death. Though this failed to arouse great interest in 1850, it has since come to be recognised as his masterpiece.

Rationale
I was attracted to this poem because of the way it captures the atmosphere at the onset of the French Revolution. Wordsworth is able to describe the feeling created by the youth who participated in the event. I believe that this poem has much to offer the reader in historical perspective as it describes the feeling of change that promulgated throughout the world due to this event. Another emotion that can be sensed throughout the poem, is that of ‘all or nothing’
as the youth of the time asserted themselves, they understood that change was necessary and that they would rather die than remain under the control of a monarchy.

This poem would therefore easily connect to students in high school as they are often experiencing the same sense of rebellion against authority. Although students may not feel the need to rebel against the government, they will understand the feeling of having to obey rules and regulations imposed by someone else that they do not believe to be equitable.

**What’s Special?**
This poem is meant to provide students with a primary sourced perspective on the French Revolution. Because Wordsworth was one of the European youth that lived through this period of time, he has a firsthand view of the event. This point of view comes from Wordsworth who was the British Poet Laureate as it demonstrates the enthusiasm that most British citizens had for the French Revolution. It is also interesting that this poem is nostalgic and evokes a melancholic feeling that would represent the way that Wordsworth felt at the onset of the French Revolution. This is true as Wordsworth became disenchanted with the events happening in France as blood was being shed and the political leaders who once represented the ideals of freedom and equality turn on these prevailing principles. This poem mentions some of the facets of the French Revolution through its discussion of reason and the atmosphere at the beginning of the event.

If you wish to discuss the mechanics of the poem, you may want to discuss:

- **Punctuation**: How does the author use punctuation to affect the reading of the poem?
  - To demonstrate the emotion.
  - To slow down the reading of the poem.
  - To make the reader place emphasis in the proper places when reading the poem aloud.
  - To make the poem read like a monologue or that someone is talking directly to the reader.
- **Personification**: How does Wordsworth make use of personification in this poem? What does he use it to describe? Is there any significance to using personification in this way?
  - To describe Reason, this is described as a woman. This demonstrates Wordsworth’s belief that Reason is a breathing, living thing. Takes a feminine form, much like that of Marianne, the female representation of liberty that became a symbol of the French Revolution.
- **Emotions**: Wordsworth evokes strong feelings of nostalgia or melancholy throughout this poem as the speaker remembers a better time. He thinks back to a period of hope, change, and opportunity.
- **Flashback**: This poem is a flashback as the speaker of the poem thinks back to their experience at the beginning of the French Revolution and comments on the atmosphere of the time.
Readability

The age of this poem could cause some difficulty to some readers. Although students will be able to understand the emotions evoked throughout the poem, they will need guidance on the history that are emphasised in certain parts of the poem.

The parts of the poem that students may need background information are:

“The French Revolution as It Appeared to Enthusiasts at Its Commencement” (Title): Students may need to understand that the feelings that existed amongst the general population at the beginning of the French Revolution changed as events progressed.

In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
The attraction of a country in romance!
When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights,
When most intent on making of herself
A prime Enchantress—to assist the work
Which then was going forward in her name!
(lines 6-12)

This section of the poem may cause students the most trouble as they require background knowledge. This section provides the reader with a look at the past government (lines 6-7), then to the notion that the sense of revolution and rebellion took over the not only the country, but became attractive to others that were watching the events in France. They saw that reason was taking over and that this new way of thinking was about to push itself forward and spread throughout the world.

Students may therefore benefit from a short reading of background information in order to have a better understanding of the poem. The website http://www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/french/french.html provides a short, but accurate description of the French Revolution that will allow students to understand why a poet like Wordsworth would become disenchanted with as events progressed.

This is a list of words that students may have trouble with found in the poem. It would be best to ask them to identify which words they have difficulty with before giving them a definition. It may also be best to attempt to get the students to find the root word or the suffixes and prefixes so that they can discover the meaning of the word on their own before you have to give them the answer. If students cannot find the answer on their own, then you may want one of them to look it up in the dictionary.

**Auxiliars**: a helper, assistant; something which helps towards a purpose.

**Meagre**: of a person, animal, limb, etc.: having little flesh; lean, thin, emaciated.
Prime: of the best or highest quality, first class, excellent. Also in extended use.

Bowers: A dwelling, habitation, abode. In early use *lit*. A cottage; in later use a poetical word for ‘abode.’

Fancy: to frame in fancy; to portray in the mind; to picture to oneself; to conceive, imagine. Also to suppose oneself to perceive.

Wield: command, control; possession, keeping; *occas.* hold, grasp; to have command or control.

Lofty: extending to a great height in the air; of imposing altitude, towering. (Said of mountains, trees, buildings, rooms; not of persons, though *lofty stature* is a common phrase).

Utopian: possessing or regarded as having impossibly of extravagantly ideal conditions in respect of politics, customs, social organization, etc.

Subterranean: of a physical phenomenon, force, movement, etc.: operating or performed below the surface of the earth; occurring underground.

Connecting
- What do you believe the speaker of this poem believes or is saying about the French Revolution?
- Have you ever thought that something was going to be extraordinary when it began and in the end you were disappointed by the result?
- Can you connect the emotions evoked in this poem to something in your life?

Activities

Verbal-Linguistic

-Give students primary documents that explain the causes of the French Revolution. You might want to direct them towards the website created by Mr. Schwartz entitled “History 151 The French Revolution: Causes, Outcomes, Conflicting Interpretations.” The link to this site is: [https://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwart/hist151s03/french_rev_causes_consequences.htm](https://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwart/hist151s03/french_rev_causes_consequences.htm). If you do not have access to the Internet within the classroom, you may want to print out the information for your students. It would only use about 3 pages to print out the information contained within the website and would provide the students with background knowledge about the event and the atmosphere described in the poem.

Mathematical-Logical

-Once the students have some background knowledge about the event, ask them to debate the views of the different participants at the onset of the French Revolution. They should use the theories about why the French Revolution happened to prove their position.
-Ask students to look at The Bread Wars, which many deem the reason for the French Revolution. Students should calculate the rise in bread costs and then look at the effects that it would have had on the economy for the different French social classes.

**Visual-Spatial**

-Ask students to create a ‘two-sided’ poster. On one half of their poster have them represent the emotions and atmosphere found in Wordsworth’s poem and on the other side have them represent the emotions and atmosphere at the beginning of the French Revolution as described in their research.

**Musical**

-Ask students to find the music within Wordsworth’s poem. Have them create a song out of this poem. (They may paraphrase the poem or re-arrange the words to create their song).

**Bodily-Kinesthetic**

-Have students create a short video for the song that they have created. (Mac=iMovie or PC=Windows Movie Maker)
-Have students create a short video or Photostory that represents the poem.

**Red Flag**

Cast off the crutch that kills the pain
The Red Flag waving never meant the same
The kids of tomorrow don't need today
When they live in the sins of yesterday

Cast off the crutch that kills the pain
The Red Flag waving never meant the same
The kids of tomorrow don't need today
When they live in the sins of yesterday

Well I've never seen us act like this
Our only hope is the minds of kids
And they'll show us a thing or two

Our only weapons are the guns of youth
It's only time before they tighten the noose
And then the hunt will be on for you

The Red Flag waving never meant the same... no

The Red Flag waving never meant the same
Cast off the crutch that kills the pain
The Red Flag waving never meant the same
The kids of tomorrow don't need today
When they live in the sins of yesterday

Like the smallest bee packs a sting
Like a pawn checkmates a King
We'll attack at the crack of dawn

Build a ladder if there's a wall
Don't be afraid to slip and fall
Speak for yourself or they'll speak for you

The Red Flag waving never meant the
same... no
The Red Flag waving never meant the same... no!

Cast off the crutch that kills the pain
The Red Flag waving never meant the same
The kids of tomorrow don't need today
When they live in the sins of yesterday

Cast off the crutch that kills the pain
The Red Flag waving never meant the same
The kids of tomorrow don't need today
When they live in the sins of yesterday

Like a fire
Don't need water
Like a jury
Needs a liar
Like a riot
Don't need order
Like a madman
Needs a martyr

We don't need them [x8]

Cast off the crutch that kills the pain
The Red Flag waving never meant the same
The kids of tomorrow don't need today
When they live in the sins of yesterday

Cast off the crutch that kills the pain
The Red Flag waving never meant the same
The kids of tomorrow don't need today
When they live in the sins of yesterday

Cast off the crutch that kills the pain (We don't need them, we don't need them)
The Red Flag waving never meant the same (We don't need them, we don't need them)
The kids of tomorrow don't need today (We don't need them, we don't need them)
When they live in the sins of yesterday (We don't need them, we don't need them)
About the Author
Billy Talent (formerly known as Pezz) is a Canadian punk rock band from Streetsville, Ontario. They formed in 1993 with Ben Kowalewicz as the lead vocalist, Ian D'Sa on lead guitar, bassist Jon Gallant and drummer Aaron Solowoniuk. The band existed for almost a decade before mainstream success. The members met and played in Our Lady of Mount Carmel Secondary School under the name Pezz and remained underground in Toronto's indie music scene until 2001. The band renamed itself Billy Talent after running into legal trouble with the old name. It was then that Kowalewicz's connection with an employee of Warner Music Canada's A&R department landed the band a record deal and launched them into mainstream success. Since then, Billy Talent has made two multi-platinum records in Canada, and continues to expand their success overseas, this included touring for 20 months supporting their third album. They released their fourth album *Billy Talent III* on July 14, 2009. At an intimate gig in Brighton's Concorde 2 on May 29th 2012, Ben revealed that the band's fifth studio album will be released in September which will be followed up by a full UK tour over the course of October and November 2012.

Rationale
When thinking of the spirit of revolution and rebellion, this song immediately entered my mind as something that encompasses these feelings. The song “Red Flag” was first released on September 11th, 2006 in the United Kingdom and was a hit throughout North America. The popularity of this song and the band that created it will connect to some of the students while the sentiment behind the song will help hook the rest of the students into the lesson.

This song not only demonstrates the rebellious fervour behind the French Revolution, but also serves as an example of a musical tradition started during the event. This is true as using song to discuss the need for freedom, change, and anti-government sentiment began at the time of the French Revolution. This tradition was later taken over by the British and transformed into the punk rock genre.

What’s Special?

The song relates to the theme of the French Revolution through the sentiment of rebellion, oppression, and need for change evoked in the lyrics. The style of song and the fact that the band follows the traditional punk rock genre also links to the event.

You may want to discuss:

- Symbolism: What symbols can be found in the song? Why does the author choose to use these symbols?
  - Red flag: politically, this has been a symbol of Socialism, or Communism, and with left-winged politics in general since the French Revolution. The
flags of several communist states, including China, Vietnam, and the Soviet Union are based on the original red flag. During the Red Scare (1919-1920) in the U.S., many states passed laws forbidding the display of red flags.

- Guns of youth: can be interpreted in many different ways, a few are: the ‘new’ weapons or tools of revolution that are being used by youth. (Social media, education, cell phones, etc.) Or that the youth themselves because they are the future have become weapons.
- Tighten the noose: before they close in on you or before you are hanged/caught up in societies trap.

- Rhyme: What is the rhyme scheme used in this song? How does it work in the song?
  - AABB/AABB/CCD/EED/FA/AABB/AABB/GGH/IID/FF/AABB/AABB/KLMKNKOK/A/AABB/AABB/AAAAA
  - The rhyme scheme works with the beat of the song. The sections of the song that have ending rhymes and 4 lines make up the chorus and the sections that have 3 lines that the first two contain end rhymes make up the verses while the rest is the bridge of the song.

- Form: What type of poem does the song create?
  - This song makes up a lyrical poem.

Readability

This song does not have many terms that would be difficult for students at the high school level.

These are a few words that students may struggle with:

Crutch: a staff for a lame or infirm person to lean upon in walking; to support, to prop.

Martyr: a person who chooses to suffer death rather than renounce the beliefs of tenets of a particular Christian denomination, sect, etc.

Connecting

- Have you ever heard this song before? If so, what did you think when you heard it? Did you like it or dislike it? Why?
- Does this song evoke any emotions in you? Does it affect you more when you read it or when you hear it? Why?
- Can you make any connections between this song and events that have happened to you? Have you ever felt this way?
- What does the title mean to you? Would you have titled this song something different? If so, what would you have chosen?

Activities
**Verbal-Linguistic**

- Have students make connections between the lyrics of the song and the poem by Wordsworth. What is similar? What is different?
- Have students make connections to other songs, books, articles, T.V. shows, movies, etc. that they have encountered.

**Mathematical-Logical**

- Have students do a statistical analysis of the demographic during the Arab Spring. Were the participants of these revolutions young, old, middle aged, working, unemployed, students, married, single, etc.? Information concerning these revolutions is easily accessed on the internet through sites like Wikipedia.

**Musical**

- Have students listen to the song “Red Flag” on the album Billy Talent II
- Have students create their own punk rock song. The song must evoke a feeling of discontent, of outrage, or of rebellion.

**Bodily-Kinesthetic**

- Students could make a music video to illustrate the punk rock song that they have created.
- Have students stage a living tableau that represents the paintings that they have discussed in the visual/spatial section.
- Have students create a living tableau that represents a moment in that evokes the same feelings as those evoked in the song.

**Visual-Spatial**

- Have students represent the song through illustration. They can make a poster, a painting, a graphic novel, or take a picture that represents the song to them.
- Students will compare and contrast Eugene Delacroix’s oil painting *Liberty Leading the People* to the artwork that accompanied Billy Talent’s single “Red Flag” when it was released (found on pg 11).
(French: *La Liberté guidant le peuple*) is a painting by Eugène Delacroix commemorating the July Revolution of 1830, which toppled Charles X of France. A woman personifying Liberty leads the people forward over the bodies of the fallen, holding the tricolour flag of the French Revolution in one hand and brandishing a bayoneted musket with the other. The painting is perhaps Delacroix’s best-known work.

*Cover shot of single “Red Flag” by band Billy Talent.*