

Shakira

Lead-in

What do you know about the following world famous pop stars?

Madonna

Shakira

Britney

Gloria Estefan

Which of the words and phrases below would you use to describe them?

a pop star

an entertainer

a pop diva

a pop princess

daring

controversial

political

Latin

Vocabulary

Look at the phrases below. Put them in the order they are likely to occur in the career of a pop star.

- Go on a world tour
- Sign a recording deal
- Write music and lyrics
- Release a debut album
- Perform live on stage in a concert

Reading 1

You are going to read a newspaper article about the pop star, Shakira.

Look at the sentences below. Then read the passage and decide which are true and which are false.

- 1 She uses her fame to make comments about world politics.
- 2 She was advised to make her live concerts more political.
- 3 She is learning English so she can understand the translations of her songs.
- 4 She lives in Colombia.
- 5 She wanted to be a singer-songwriter from an early age.
- 6 Her fans have felt that she is trying to become a mainstream American star.

Much more than just a pretty voice

Siobhan Grogan meets Shakira, the Latin pop diva with a political message

15,000 New Yorkers look [startled](#) as Saddam Hussein strokes his chin and considers his next chess move. Across the table George Bush waits his turn. A single spotlight moves away from the actors on the big screen to the stage below, searching out Shakira, the newest, blondest pop diva.

"I know pop stars are not supposed to stick their noses into politics," she says, shrugging. The screen above her head next reveals Bush as [a hooded Grim Reaper](#) and Saddam's [puppeteer](#), controlling the chess game below. This is hardly subtle social comment, but it is daring for a pop concert in a city still with a painful [scar](#) in its altered skyline. Shakira may have sold 12m albums and accepted the "Latin Britney" tag, but this is not the behavior of a pop princess.

"Sometimes people don't want to see pop stars giving their opinion about politics. They think pop stars are made to entertain. I come from Colombia, a country that has been in a slow, subtle war for 40 years. Growing up with this makes you have an opinion. It was a little risky to use my show to deliver a message - many people around me told me not to do it - but it was a statement about love and what I feel this world and its leaders are lacking."

This explanation [unwittingly](#) betrays the contradictions behind everything Shakira does. While she wants to make serious political observations, she feels it necessary to [couch](#) them in less controversial words about love. She points out the control she has over her own career: writing and producing her own material, learning English so that she would not need someone

else to translate her lyrics. Yet she seems equally at home [pouting](#) for men's magazines.

Shakira was born in Barranquilla, an industrial town on the Caribbean coast of Colombia and she moved to Miami eight years ago. "I have always been aware of the situation in Colombia" Shakira acknowledges. "A five-year-old child there knows what a guerrilla is. They probably know who Mickey Mouse is, too. They are aware that there is injustice."

Her first song, *Your Dark Glasses* was a tribute to her father ("My idol," she declares). Aged just 14 she released her first album, *Magia*, comprising songs she had written between the ages of eight and 13. In 1995 her third album, *Pies Descalzos*, sold 4m copies and Shakira the popstar was born. Encouraged by Latin diva Gloria Estefan she spent the next two years studying rhyming dictionaries, the poems of Walt Whitman and the lyrics of Leonard Cohen, hoping to learn English.

"I had to find a way to express my ideas and my feelings, my day-to-day stories, in English." She then went to rural Uruguay to write her debut English-language album, *Laundry Service*. Even more significantly, she dyed her black hair blonde on the eve of the album's release in 2001, to the disgust of a number of her original fans. It was a [fuss](#) over nothing, she says. "I'm not pretending to be American. How could I? I am Colombian. I would never abandon the Latin community."

The Guardian Weekly 20-2-1226, page 13

Glossary

Startled	→	/adj/ suddenly frightened or surprised by something
Hooded Grim Reaper	→	/adj/ + /noun/ wearing a hood + an imaginary character who represents death
Puppeteer	→	/noun/ a person who performs shows using puppets. <i>Puppet</i> has a secondary meaning: a person or government that a more powerful person or government supports and controls.
Scar	→	/noun/ a mark on something where it has been damaged.
Unwittingly	→	/adverb/ in a way that is not conscious or deliberate
To couch (sth)	→	/verb/ to express something in a particular way.
Pouting	→	/verb/ originally means sulking or pushing the lips forward as an expression of displeasure. In this context it means to pose for the camera using this type of expression.
Fuss	→	/noun/ a lot of unnecessary worry or excitement.

Reading 2 and vocabulary

Read the passage again and answer the questions. Discuss them with a partner.

- 1 What is showing on the screen at Shakira's pop concert? What do you think is the political message of the film?
- 2 The word *subtle* is used to describe 'social comment' and 'war'. What is its meaning in each case?
- 3 Shakira is performing in 'a city still with a painful scar in its altered skyline'. Which city is that?
- 4 Shakira 'unwittingly betrays the contradictions behind everything (she) does'. What are those contradictions?
- 5 If you 'couch' something in 'words about love', what does this mean?
- 6 How did she learn English? Why do you think these influences might be useful to a lyricist?
- 7 Why do you think she dyed her black hair blonde?
- 8 What is the writer's attitude towards Shakira?

Vocabulary in context

Find the verbs in A in the passage, then match them to the parts of the body in B used to perform these action verbs.

A	B
Shrug	feet
Stroke	lips
Stir	shoulders
Pout	finger, thumb and spoon
Smile	fingers
Jump	

Why shouldn't pop stars 'stick their noses into' politics?

Follow-up

Think of a controversial pop star that you admire. Answer these questions.

- 1 What is the name of the star, and what type of music does he or she sing?
- 2 What does he/she write about?
- 3 Think of a song you know. Can you remember any lines from the song? What is its message? What does it say to you? Why is it important to you?
- 4 Do you think pop stars should be political?

Talk to your partner or in groups.

Teacher's notes - Shakira

Lead-in

It is a good idea to find and bring in a poster or CD by Shakira and/or the other stars mentioned. Alternatively, you could start the lesson by playing an extract from one of Shakira's songs – the song 'Wherever, whenever' is her biggest hit so far – and asking the students if they can name the singer.

Ask students what they know about the pop stars. Elicit ideas to the board.

Ask students in pairs to match the words and phrases to the stars.

Answers

They are all pop stars, entertainers, pop divas and pop princesses. A pop diva is a phrase used to describe a female pop star who is very successful and powerful.

Arguably, they are all mainstream performers, though Gloria Estefan's music is very latin.

Shakira and Gloria Estefan are latin stars.

Whether they are daring, controversial or political is arguable.

Vocabulary

Ask students to look at the phrases and put them in order.

Answers

Write music and lyrics

Sign a recording deal

Release a debut album

Go on a world tour

*Perform live on stage in a concert (this could go anywhere after 'write music...')

Reading 1

Ask students to look at the sentences, then read the passage and decide which are true and which are false.

Answers

1. T 2. F 3. F 4. F 5. T 6. T

Reading 2 and vocabulary

Ask students to read the passage again and answer the questions.

Answers

- 1 Actors playing President George Bush of the USA and President Saddam Hussein of Iraq are playing chess. It is revealed that Saddam is a puppet being controlled by Bush, who is dressed as the Grim Reaper, a traditional hooded character who represents death. The political message of the film is that the conflict between Iraq and the US is a game, and that, in fact, Bush is manipulating Saddam and the situation for his own purposes.
- 2 *Subtle* can mean complicated, detailed and intelligent. The phrase 'hardly subtle social comment' ironically means that it is very simple. The phrase 'subtle war' means a war that is not simply one side against another, but very complicated and difficult to understand or categorize.

- 3 New York – referring to the destruction of the Twin Towers, September 11th 2001.
- 4 While she wants to make serious political observations, she makes them in uncontroversial love songs. She is an independent woman in control of her writing and career, but is happy to pose for men's magazines.
- 5 *Couch* means express. The implication here is that Shakira's politics is expressed through love songs, which make simple yet forceful 'political' points.
- 6 By studying rhyming dictionaries, the poetry of Walt Whitman, and the lyrics of songwriter, Leonard Cohen. These influences might be useful to a lyricist because you need to be poetical and to rhyme when writing songs.
- 7 She says it was just to create a fresh image. It was more likely an attempt to make herself more mainstream, more 'American' so that she could sell her music in the American market.
- 8 The writer is quietly critical. She implies that, while claiming to be bravely political and interested in fighting injustice, Shakira's image and songs are commercial and mainstream.

Vocabulary in context

Ask students to find the verbs in A in the passage, then match them to the parts of the body in B used to perform the action verbs.

Answers

A	B
Shrug	shoulders
Stroke	fingers
Stir	finger, thumb and spoon
Pout	lips
Smile	lips
Jump	feet

Pop stars shouldn't 'stick their noses into' politics because it is none of their business. If you stick your nose into something, it means that you are being curious or concerned about something that you have no right to be interested in.

Follow-up

Give the students a few minutes to think of a pop star they admire, and prepare things to say in answer to the questions. When they are ready put the students in pairs or small groups to tell each other about their stars.