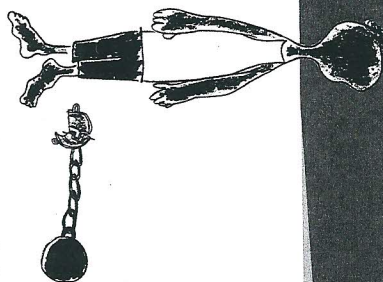


TEXT FILES 2

GRAP

READY

Look at the two drawings and describe them. Then read the title and the first sentence of the text. Can you guess what these "strange fruit swinging in the southern breeze" are?



In 1953 THE CHAINS WERE TAKEN FROM THE NECKLIES

Southern trees



It was during my stint¹ at Café Society² that a song was born which became my personal protest - *Strange Fruit*. The germ of the song was in a poem written by Lewis Allen. I first met him at Café Society.

When he showed me that poem, I dug³ it right off. It seemed to spell out all the things that had killed Pop Allen, too, had heard how Pop died and of course was interested in my singing. He suggested that Sonny White, who had been my accompanist, and I turn it into music. So the three of us got together and did the job in about three weeks. [...] I worked like the devil on it because I was never sure I could put it across or that I could get across to a plush⁴ night-club audience the things that it meant to me.

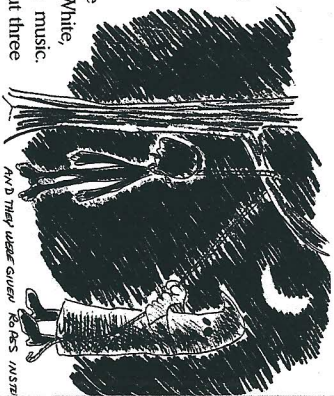
I was scared people would hate it. The first time I sang it I thought it was a mistake and I had been right being scared. There wasn't even a patter of applause when I finished. Then a lone person began to clap nervously. Then suddenly everyone was clapping.

It caught on after a while and people began to ask for it. The version I recorded for Commodore became my biggest-selling record. It still depresses me every time I sing it, though. It reminds me of how Pop died. But I have to keep singing it, not only because people ask for it but because twenty years after Pop died the things that killed him are still happening in the South.

Over the years I've had a lot of weird experiences as a result of that song. It has a way of separating the straight⁵ people from the squares⁶ and cripples⁷. One night in Los Angeles a bitch⁸ stood right up in the club where I was singing and said, "Billie, why don't you sing that sexy song you're so famous for? You know, the one about the naked bodies swinging in the trees."

Needless to say, I didn't. But another time, on 52nd Street, I finished a set with *Strange Fruit* and headed, as usual, for the bathroom. I always do. When I sing it, it affects me so much I get sick. It takes all the strength out of me.

This woman came in the ladies' room at the Downbeat Club and found me all broken up from crying. I had come off the floor running, hot and cold, miserable and happy. She looked at me, and the tears started coming to her eyes. "My God," she said, "I never heard



AND THEN WERE GIVEN TO US. INSTANT

anything so beautiful in my life. You can still hear a pin drop out there." Just a few months ago in a club in Miami I had run through an entire two-week date⁹ without ever doing *Strange Fruit*. I was in no mood to be bothered with the scenes that always come when I do that number in the South. I didn't want to start anything I couldn't finish. But one night after everybody had asked me twenty times to do it, I finally gave in. [...]

When I came to the final phrase of the lyrics I was in the angriest and strongest voice I had been in for months. My piano player was in the same kind of form. When I said, "... for the sun to rot¹⁰", and then a piano punctuation, "... for the wind to suck¹¹", I pounced on¹² those words like they had never been hit before.

I was flailing¹³ the audience, but the applause was like nothing I'd ever heard. I came off, went upstairs, changed into street clothes, and when I came down they were still applauding.

Billie HOLIDAY, *Lady Sings the Blues* (1956)

1. during my stint *pendant que je bossais* - 2. Café Society, a New York nightclub in the late 1930s - 3. dug (slang): *adorer* - 4. plush: *chic* - 5. straight (slang): *blanc* - 6. square (slang): *ringard* - 7. cripple (slang): *ici, bloqué* - 8. bitch (slang): *garce* - 9. date: *ici, contrat* - 10. rot: *pourrir* - 11. suck: *ici, dessécher* - 12. pounce on [pauv]: *ici, attaquer* - 13. flail: *ici, fouetter*.

1 Understanding the text



What was Billie Holiday scared of when she sang *Strange Fruit* for the first time? Why did she keep singing that song?

Your *workbook* will help you answer these questions and understand the text better.

2 Going further

- From what is said in the text, what can you guess about the contents of the song?
- Can you imagine how Billie's father was killed?
- How did she feel every time she sang *Strange Fruit*? Why?
- The song *Strange Fruit* has been described as "a declaration of war... the beginning of the civil rights movement." Explain why.

3 Phonologie



Mettez à l'infinitif tous les verbes de deux syllabes du texte, puis classez les verbes non préfixés dans une colonne et les verbes préfixés dans une autre. Prononcez-les à haute voix et déduisez la place de l'accent de mot. Vérifiez à l'écoute. Vous trouverez de l'aide dans votre *workbook*.

4 Enrichissez votre vocabulaire



Réviser le lexique lié à la musique. Vous trouverez des exercices dans votre *workbook*.



Billie HOLIDAY was born in 1915 in Baltimore, Maryland. One of the most influential jazz singers, she performed with famous orchestras, often including the tenor saxophonist Lester Young. Her singing was strongly emotional, relying on subtle but powerful changes in inflection and phrasing. One of her first hits was *Strange Fruit*. Other Holiday songs include *God Bless the Child*, *Lover Man*. Billie Holiday died in 1959.

Toolbox

Nouns: lynching = necktie party
- lyncher - mob *bande* - the whites/blacks - coloreds (Noloz)
- hate = hatred (hétard)
- punishment - (white) supremacy
- Ku Klux Klan - campaign (gagnés) - opponent *opposant* - limb (lmi) *grosse branche*.

Adjectives: committed *engagé* - segregated (ségrégué) - deep-rooted *profondément ancré* - overt (facim) *affiché* - degrading - unbearable - revolting - sadistic - powerless = defenceless.

Verbs and expressions:ynch - hang - threaten (men) - torture - mutilate - drug *traîner* - terrorize - hound down (haund) *taquer* - molest *brutaliser* - beat up *passer à tabac* - beat to death - go unpunished - be discriminated against - be denied equality - denounce = expose - assert one's rights.