The following band names, all rock and metal bands, form the corpus (body of texts) for your investigation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Iron Maiden</th>
<th>Def Leppard</th>
<th>Eagles of Death Metal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Led Zeppelin</td>
<td>Bullet for my Valentine</td>
<td>Sex Pistols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panic! at the Disco</td>
<td>Wolf Alice</td>
<td>Avenged Sevenfold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Sabbath</td>
<td>System of a Down</td>
<td>Foo Fighters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Activities**

A. Identify three semantic or lexical effects typically used in rock bands’ names. Describe each one using accurate terminology and briefly explain the effects created in each case.

B. Identify two phonological and/or graphological effects used in the band names. Describe each one using accurate terminology and briefly explain the effects created in each case.

C. Identify three grammatical structures used in the band names. Describe each one using accurate terminology and briefly explain the effects created in each case.

D. Analyse and evaluate the ways in which band names are used to engage the target audience.

In your response, you should consider:

- the context
- the tenor and the effect of the lexical choices
- how form/structure and choice of imagery are used to create impact
- any similarities and/or differences.

Use the corpus data and your answers to activities A, B and C to inform your answer.
The language of band names

Teaching notes and suggested commentary answers

The tasks followed by answers:

The following band names, all rock and metal bands, form the corpus (body of texts) for your investigation:

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Activities

A. Identify three semantic or lexical effects typically used in rock bands’ names. Describe each one using accurate terminology and briefly explain the effects created in each case.

1. Three of the band names use lexis associated with animals: ‘Def Leppard’, ‘Eagles of Death Metal’ and ‘Wolf Alice’. All of the predatory animals mentioned have connotations of power and danger, which suggests that the bands want to evoke a sense of danger or power about them, which fits with the genre of rock music.

2. Another pattern in the names here is a semantic field of violence, which is suggested primarily through common nouns: ‘Sex Pistols’, ‘Bullet for my Valentine’ and ‘Foo Fighters’, while ‘Iron Maiden’ refers to an instrument of torture. Again, this makes the band names sound dangerous, violent and powerful, fitting a rock and roll cliché.

3. A final semantic effect that occurs is the use of juxtaposition or even oxymorons in a band name: ‘Led Zeppelin’, ‘Sex Pistols’, ‘Bullet for my Valentine’ and ‘Wolf Alice’ all combine lexis that at first glance seems to be contradictory. The contradiction in terms of ‘Sex Pistols’ and ‘Wolf Alice’ may add a sense of mystery, enticing an audience to find out what a band named like this would sound like; while ‘Led Zeppelin’ suggests that the music is heavy (the ‘led’) and yet that it can fly or float (like a zeppelin). The phrase ‘bullet for my valentine’ is ambiguous, but perhaps hints at a stereotype of ‘love gone wrong’.

B. Identify two phonological and/or graphological effects used in the band names. Describe each one using accurate terminology and briefly explain the effects created in each case.

1. Both ‘Led Zeppelin’ and ‘Def Leppard’ use phonetic spelling in their band names, leaving out silent letters to simplify the spelling. Both employ non-standard English spellings of common words deliberately, as a sign of their non-conformity or rebelliousness, which suits the genre of rock music.

2. Several of the band names make use of types of alliteration. ‘Foo Fighters’ uses fricative alliteration, making the name perhaps more memorable, and ‘Def Leppard’ employs the /d/ for a strong effect. ‘Sex Pistols’ uses several sibilant /s/ sounds /seks_pistols/. This may create a hissing or spitting effect, which could seem aggressive.
C. Identify three grammatical structures used in the band names. Describe each one using accurate terminology and briefly explain the effects created in each case.

1. Most band names consist of a noun phrase with one noun and a premodifier. For example, ‘Black Sabbath’ (adjective + noun) or ‘Sex Pistols’ (abstract noun + common noun). The pattern of adj + noun is a common device and it helps a band to create an interesting (and unique) name. Using a noun to modify another noun is less common, but it widens the possibilities for a band name and in the case of ‘Sex Pistols’, you can read the noun ‘sex’ as abstract (the idea or concept of having sex rather than the more concrete aspect of biology of being female or male), which makes for an oxymoronic, startling effect when combined with the concrete noun ‘Pistols’, making the name very striking.

2. Some band names use non-standard English grammatical structures, such as ‘Panic! At the Disco’, which consists of a minor sentence, the exclamation ‘Panic!’, followed by an adverbial phrase on its own. Again the use of non-standard English possibly signals rebelliousness and gains the band covert prestige, which may appeal to a young, music-loving audience. Another example of non-standard English is ‘System of a Down’. This unusual non-standard phrase makes the band name stand out, and again signals an element of covert prestige.

3. Some band names have an archaic or deliberately old-fashioned quality because they use less common grammatical structures. For example, the post-modification in ‘Eagles of Death Metal’ could just as easily have followed the more common pattern of pre-modification: ‘Death Metal Eagles’. A similarly archaic grammatical structure is present in ‘Avenged Sevenfold’ where ‘sevenfold’ is an archaic adverbial and the past participle ‘avenged’ suggests the passive voice. This old-fashioned feel may suggest a long tradition or history, giving the band name authority and gravitas, a form of overt prestige. All of these effects help to draw in audiences for their music.

D. Analyse and evaluate the ways in which band names are used to engage the target audience.

As the bands all loosely fit the genre of rock music, it is not surprising that the names chosen hint at rebellion and sex, to appeal to their target audience who are mostly teens and young adults. Lexical examples include ‘Sex Pistols’, ‘Iron Maiden’, and ‘Bullet for my Valentine’.

As well as alluding to rebellion in the lexical choices that make up band names, bands can also deliberately use non-standard English forms and taboo lexis to provide covert prestige for a band. The ‘Sex Pistols’ chose the challenging, almost taboo premodifier ‘Sex’, whereas the use of non-standard grammar in ‘System of a Down’ potentially signals their alternative status.

Another way to attract the target audience is by suggesting danger, through lexical choices that imply violence: ‘Foo Fighters’, ‘Bullet for my Valentine’, and ‘Iron Maiden’. Another means of achieving this effect is through the use of powerful, predatory animal lexis in bands such as ‘Def Leppard’, ‘Eagles of DM’ and ‘Wolf Alice’.

Rebellion and danger are also implied through the semantic field of witchcraft suggested in ‘Black Sabbath’ and ‘Iron Maiden’ (an old torture device might well have been used in the persecution of witches). ‘Avenged Sevenfold’ includes the mystical number seven, contributing to this semantic field.
Another way in which the band names appeal to their target audience is by referring to the type of ('metal') music they make. A semantic field of ‘darkness’ is created through words with connotations of heaviness/darkness: ‘Led Zeppelin’, ‘Black Sabbath’, ‘Iron Maiden’ and ‘Eagles of Death Metal’.

Another striking feature of many of the names in the corpus is how they use juxtaposition, combining some pre-modifier with a noun (in most cases) where both parts appear contradictory. ‘Wolf Alice’ suggests both a predatory animal and a storybook heroine or girl for example. In ‘Iron Maiden’, the metal suggests something strong and hard, whereas ‘maiden’ suggests vulnerability. This use of contrast is also suggested in the names ‘Led Zeppelin’, ‘Sex Pistols’, ‘Bullet for my Valentine’, ‘Panic! At the Disco’ and ‘System of a Down’. This use of contradictions adds interest, as well as suggesting that the band is unique and not easily defined, making them all more appealing to the target audience.