

Using the Newspaper

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This is the first of a series of articles on how we can make much more use of newspapers in the classroom than we do at present. When one stops to consider it, it is really amazing how much potential teaching material there is inside the pages of one 25 cent newspaper. We could even afford to buy a class set (out of our own pockets)! Since the newspapers are Malaysian and are reporting incidents and events that have happened in Malaysia, our children will perhaps be encouraged to see that English is not just a dead language that has no connection with reality. On the contrary, it will be seen to reflect our children's background and provide a useful means of exploring that background.

Obviously there are problems. We cannot just give out newspapers to Standard 4 pupils and say, "Read". We all know what happens when teachers do this. Also much of the newspaper will be too difficult and obscure for the young child. Nevertheless some of the items can be used, and if the teacher is enterprising enough and has the time, can be adapted.

In this first article I should like to look at adverts. I have chosen one on slimming. Although some of the language used in the advert is rather advanced, with suitable adaptation the following lesson notes could be used for Forms 1 or 2, and in those schools where the children have reached a reasonable level, Standards Five and Six.

The original of this advert was large enough to use in the classroom, held in the teacher's hand or stuck up on the blackboard or some other prominent place. It's true that with most adverts the newspaper cutting would be too small for display purposes. How do we get round this problem?

Well, here are some suggestions:

1. Buy about 10 copies of the paper and let each group of 4 or 5 pupils have their own cutting.
2. Photocopy the article and have an electronic stencil cut. Most schools do not have such sophisticated machines so you might have to ask a friend in another school. If you have no luck, don't despair, just give up possibility number two.
3. Have a go at drawing an enlarged version yourself. I must be one of the world's worst artists but with a piece of paper, a pencil and a rubber I can do a reasonable copying job after half an hour.
4. Ask a friend who can draw to do it for you. My friend's wife has produced many good pictures for me.
5. Buy a pantograph. I have one of these in my office mounted on a large piece of plywood. Draughtsmen use them to enlarge drawings.
6. Use squared paper. First draw 1 cm squares over the advert. Then take a larger piece of paper and draw 5 cm squares if you want to enlarge the original five times. Then copy the advert by looking at each 1 cm square, seeing where the lines go, and drawing identical (but larger!) lines in the 5 cm squares.

The easiest solution is number one. You can justify the expense to yourself by saying that the advert in question is only one piece of teaching material out of hundreds that you will find in the paper.

Now we can start work on the advert. Remember that this is only one person's interpretation. You yourself may find other interesting ways of using it.

Oral Work (assuming each group of 4 has a copy, or that the picture is displayed)

Presentation:

Tr: "OK children, now look at this advert. It's from the Malay Mail. Here's a copy of the Malay Mail. It's from page three.

Now can you see this lady here on the left? Her name is Miss Puspa Devi. Where does she live? Yes, she's from Desa Jaya.

Is she a thin lady? Yes, that's right. She isn't thin, is she? She's a little fat. How much does she weigh?

Now look at the other picture. What's her name? Yes, that's right. But wait a moment, are you sure? Is she wearing the same clothes? What is she wearing? What is she wearing in the first picture? How does she look? Happy.

Why does she look happy? Because she's lost 42 pounds. How did she lose 42 pounds? She joined a special programme. Is she fat now or slim? She's slim. Yes, she joined a slimming programme. She was fat, but she wanted to be slim. So what did she do? She joined a slimming programme.

How does she look now? How much does she weigh? How much weight has she lost?

I have mixed tenses in the preceding notes assuming that the pupils have already been introduced to the past tense, present perfect, etc. Using a mixture of grammatical items and using vocabulary which may not appear in the syllabus vocabulary list is **not** to be avoided at all costs. On the contrary it's a good way of getting children to use the language naturally, talking about something which interests them. We might even introduce items such as 'Would you like to lose 42 pounds? If you lost 42 pounds would you be fat or slim?' The word 'would', or conditional sentences, may not have been presented yet, but why not use it if the situation demands it and the meaning is clear? The teacher has to use his own discretion here and decide what his pupils can or cannot understand. Sometimes teachers teach over the heads of their pupils or, on the other hand, do not give them enough of a challenge. The intelligent teacher knows almost by instinct what his pupils can take and what they can't.

Practice:

Step 1. The teacher can now run through the material again, getting answers from other children who so far have not had a chance to speak.

Possible questions:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Who is this lady? | 6. What is she wearing? |
| 2. Where does she live? | 7. How much does she weigh now? |
| 3. How much did she weigh ? | 8. How many pounds did she lose? |
| 4. Was she fat or thin? | 9. How did she lose them? |
| 5. Did she look happy? | 10. How does she look? |

Step 2. Get the children to ask some of these questions. Usually if you say to the class "Ask a question" you get silence and the teacher, embarrassed by the lack of noise (useful noise!) hurries on to the next stage of his lesson, with himself (or herself) doing **more** talking. We **must** let the children have a go at speaking. After all, it is **they** who are learning.

So what do we do?

1. Tr: Ask a question, please.
Pupils:- (no answer)

2. Tr: Look at picture one. Ask a question with 'who'. 'Who" (Say 'Who", pause, look expectantly round the class. 'Who"'. Come along somebody. 'Who" Notices Ali who seems to want to answer but is too shy. "Yes, Ali, come on then, "Who""

- Ali: Who is that lady?

- Tr: A very good question, Ali, well done. Thank you very much. Now can you say that again?

- Ali: Who is that lady?

- Tr: Good. Who can answer? (A forest of hands go up!) Yes, Ah Seng.
Ah Seng: That is Miss Puspa Devi.

- Tr: Good, very good. Now another question, "Where""
Ahmad puts up his hand: "Where does Miss Puspa live?"

And so on, right through your list of questions or until you see the pupils getting tired. It cannot be emphasized enough how important this stage is. We **must** give children the chance to speak, to answer **and** ask questions. Our role as teachers at this stage is to withdraw from the limelight, encourage the children, correct any mistakes, and generally interfere as little as possible.

Step 3. Now we can return to the advert, and explore its potential a little more.

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1. Where can a person go if he wants to slim?
 2. What's their telephone number?
 3. What's their address?
 4. When are they open?
 5. Can only women go?
 6. What will you get if you go in December?
 7. How much does it cost?
 8. What will they give you free?
A consultation.
 9. What is a consultation? They will tell you about their programme, their weight loss programme. They will tell you how to lose weight, how to become slim.
 10. Must you do exercises? "No, you don't need to"
 11. Must you stop eating?
 12. Must you use machines?
 13. Must you undress?
 14. Must you spend a lot of time there?
 15. Must you spend a lot of money?
 16. What must you do?

We will also get the pupils to practise these question forms, one, because it gives them the chance to speak, and secondly, because later on we will ask them to carry out a role playing exercise involving telephone calls and consultations. They will need to use some of the question forms themselves.

Step 4. Production: In this part of the lesson we want to give the pupils the chance to speak freely, using the store of language they have acquired up till now. We want to hear their personal views and we don't mind very much if they make grammatical or pronunciation mistakes **at this stage**, provided we (that is, the teacher and the pupils) understand what they are saying.

- (a) 1. Do you think the two pictures are of the same woman?
2. Is it possible to lose 42 pounds? How many katis (kilos) is that?
3. Do you know anybody who is trying to slim?
4. How do they do it?
5. Do you think this company is expensive?
6. If **you** wanted to slim, what would you do?
- (b) Role playing exercise:
- i) Two ladies discussing their weight. One of them has seen the advert and wants to ring the company.
 - ii) Telephone call. Lady and receptionist who explains what time to come, how much it costs, etc.
 - iii) Lady's first visit and meeting with employee there.
 - iv) Back home, telling her husband where she went and how much she spent.

The preparation for these four episodes which together make up an enjoyable little playlet will generate a lot more oral work. Depending on the level of the children what the characters actually say will have to be rehearsed so that they do not "dry up" in front of the class.

Several different groups should be allowed to act it out, and if modifications or additions to the dialogue are made, these can be incorporated into later versions.

At the end of the activity which may spread over several lessons the teacher can either call it a day, or resurrect it at a later date, and try to polish it up. In fact if the teacher makes use of other adverts and other material from the newspapers in this way, he and his class will soon build up a whole repertoire of interesting playlets. Pupils will actively enjoy their lessons instead of sitting there bored.

In the next article I will look at newspaper reports. If you have any comments to make or "productive" adverts to send in, contact the editor!