

Lesson: Communicate / Cooperate – Blackout

Level: Intermediate

Age: Secondary / Adult

Time: 10 - 20 minutes

Language objectives: a speaking activity with emphasis on oral fluency; students role play a series of mobile phone calls that all take place during a blackout to practise expressions used to talk about being afraid

Key life skills: adaptability, decision making

Materials: Copies of the role cards so that there is one role card for every two students. This activity works well if you can also bring in two mobile phones (or ask students to lend / use their own) as props.



Warmer

Write the word BLACKOUT on the board. What do people understand by Blackout? Explain that a blackout is when there is no electricity. In the summer of 2003, the state of New York and parts of Canada had one of the biggest blackouts in history. On 14th August the electricity went out and stayed out for almost 15 hours.

Ask the students to brainstorm what they think happened to people during the blackout. Here are some ideas:

- People were trapped in elevators and subways.
- People had to walk long distances because they couldn't get gas for their car (the gas stations didn't work).
- Restaurants had to throw away lots of food because the refrigerators didn't work.
- Nobody could get money from the banks because the bank machines and the computers didn't work.

Stage one

Set up the situation. It is 4 in the afternoon in New York on 14th August (change the place and time if appropriate). Each pair of students will be given a role card with a situation and some language on it. They have five minutes to prepare their role-play. The role-play must last at least one minute and they must incorporate the expression on their role cards (for this part they have to decide who says the expression!). They mustn't tell anyone else what their expressions are. Circulate and help students with the meanings of their expressions. There are six different role-play cards. If you have less than twelve students, choose the ones you like best. If you have more than twelve students, repeat some of the situations.

Stage two

Pairs perform their mini role-play in front of the class. To help the students get into role give them each a (turned off) mobile phone to speak into. So that the class pays attention, give them the following task: they must try to 'spot' the expressions that were on the card and record them in their notebooks. After each role-play, see if the class can find the expression.

Stage three

After all the role-plays are finished, do a quick review of the new language that came out. You might want to pick up on interesting use of language you heard or students' errors. You can follow this role-play up with some questions:

- What would you do if you were in this situation?
- Has anyone been in a similar situation?
- What is your advice on what to do during a blackout?

Stage four

Decision making: ask students what they would do as A or as B in each of the situations? What are the possible outcomes from their actions? If it weren't a blackout how would they act differently?

Variations

For more or less advanced learners, vary the preparation time and presentation time. For low-level students give them more language to get them started, for example the first two lines of dialogue (this requires a little more preparation on your part). Very creative classes could make up their own situations for role-play.

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Role cards



BLACKOUT!

A: You are in an elevator which is stuck between two floors. There is no light. You are visiting a friend in the building. You call your friend.

B: You are waiting for a visit from your friend but the lights have gone out.

Expression: *I'm REALLY afraid of the dark.*

BLACKOUT!

A: You are a criminal. You see a chance of making some money by robbing a bank during the blackout. You want to convince a friend to help you.

B: You are a criminal. Your friend calls you to ask for help but you are scared that the lights will come on. You don't want the police to catch you.

Expression: *I'm terrified we'll get caught.*

BLACKOUT!

A: You are on the metro when the blackout happens. There is a pregnant woman in the train with you and you think she is going to have her baby. You phone the emergency services for help.

B: You work at the emergency services. Give A advice on what to do with a pregnant woman.

Expression: *I'm freaking out here!*

BLACKOUT!

A: You are a student. You were finishing your homework on the computer when the blackout occurred. You have to phone your teacher and explain that you can't do the homework now.

B: You are the teacher. You won't accept A's excuse because the homework is already two weeks late!

Expression: *I was frightened of losing it, so I did it on the computer.*

BLACKOUT!

A: You are the President of the United States. You want an explanation of what is happening. You are worried that this is a terrorist attack.

B: You are the Head of the FBI. You were fishing when the blackout happened and have no information.

Expression: *Frankly, I'm quite anxious about all this.*

BLACKOUT!

A: You are a 70-year-old man. You are very grumpy. You are waiting for your daughter to come and make you your dinner.

B: You are the daughter. You can't come to your father's house now because you have no gas for your car and the gas stations don't work. Explain how he can make his own dinner.

Expression: *I'm so scared!*