Thematic Unit

Learners’ Lives as Curriculum©

Learning About English

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In this unit you will learn:
- [ ] Language functions
- [ ] Some ways to talk and think about English
- [ ] Words to talk about language
- [ ] The English alphabet
- [ ] Question words
- [ ] Finding syllables
- [ ] Finding vowels
- [ ] Alphabetizing
“I learned my English listening to people I work with, people I was around. I learned some English listening to my girlfriend. I learned all my English here, not in Mexico. I never went to school. I only speak English with people at work. My problem is with reading and writing. The alphabet with different letters is confusing. Somebody at my work showed me how to read the scale on a blueprint. I ask my boss what something said. I try to remember things in my head. When I work, we do it everyday and that helps me remember things. When I fill out forms I have to get someone to help me.”

Jenaro Q. from Mexico
2. Playing with language

Listen to Jenaro’s Story

Write in the missing words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>learned</th>
<th>head</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>read</th>
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</thead>
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<td>listening</td>
<td>boss</td>
<td>school</td>
<td>forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speak</td>
<td>writing</td>
<td>remember</td>
<td>alphabet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I ____________ my English listening to people I work with, people I was around. I learned some English __________ to my girlfriend. I learned all my _________ here, not in Mexico. I never went to ________. I only _______ English with people at work. My problem is with reading and _______. The _________ with different letters is confusing. Somebody at my work showed me how to _______ the scale on a blueprint. I ask my _______ what something said. I try to remember things in my _______. When I work, we do it everyday and that helps me _________ things. When I fill out _________ I have to get someone to help me.”

Share your answers with a classmate. Do you have the same answers?

Can you understand Jenaro’s story?

Circle: Yes No
3. Language practice.

**How much** English do you know?

Put an X in the box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(Listen) Understand</th>
<th>(Speak) Say</th>
<th>Read</th>
<th>Write</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everything</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Most things</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A lot of things</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some things</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A tiny bit</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use the words from the chart.

a. I can understand _____________ I hear in English.

b. I can say _________________ in English.

c. I can read _________________ in English.

d. I can write _________________ in English.

4. Let’s compare English

**Who** knows **the most** English in our class?

___________________understands the most English.

How did he learn to understand so much English?

___________________speaks English the best.

How did he learn to speak so much English?
reads the most English.

How did he learn to read so much English?

writes English the best?

How did he learn to write English so well?

Who knows the least English in our class?

How can we help each other learn more English?

5. Let’s talk about learning English.

Where did you learn the English you know? Check the boxes.

☐ I learned English in my country.
☐ I learned English in the United States.
☐ I learned English in school.
☐ I learned English on the streets.
☐ Other _____________________

When did you learn the English you know?

☐ I learned English when I was in school.
☐ I learned when I was young.
☐ I learned when I was an adult.
☐ Other _____________________
6. Let’s Talk
Name 6 places you can learn English.
1____________________________________
2____________________________________
3____________________________________
4____________________________________
5____________________________________
6____________________________________

7. Read some more stories…..

In Mexico, I remember learning to say, “What is your name? How are you? Teacher, can I go to the bathroom? Where are you?” We learned numbers. We had class 1 hour a day, 5 days a week for only 3 years. In the United States, I went to English class on Princess Street in York, but I quit the school. It was the same time as my work. Juan B. from Mexico

I had English classes in Puerto Rico. Half of my classes had English; half had Spanish. I had English 2 hours a day, 5 days a week for 12 years. I don’t remember much English from school except for reading and writing. I read well in English, but I only can speak about 40% in English. I remember learning words like teacher, father, brother, table, and sister. I have been in the U.S. 2 years, I speak Spanish to people at work and at home with my family. Frankie S. from Puerto Rico

People speak English in my country, but I never went to school to learn to read and write. This is true of many of my countrymen. English school is very expensive. When I came to the U.S., I could speak English very well, but I could not read and write. Aruna R. from Sierra Leona
8. Journal Writing.

Did you learn any English in your native country? Do you remember what your first words in English were? Write or dictate a story about learning English and the first things you learned to say.

9. Group Think - Talking about our language community

What’s your native language? Look at the diagrams

Draw these circles on a large sheet of paper. Label the circles.

- Where do you use your native language?
- Where do you use English?
- Where do you want to use both?

Look at the cartoon.

Some teachers say a student should only hear English in class. They say a student learns English faster. What do you say?
Other teachers say students understand English better when someone explains some things with their native language. **What do you say?**

**What rules do we want** in our classroom?

10. Old and New

**Where** do you hear English?

**Where** do you hear your native language?

Circle your answer or answers.

At home, I hear my native language **English.**

At work, I hear my native language **English.**

At my doctor’s office, I hear my native language **English.**

At the store, I hear my native language **English.**

11. Speaking Survey

The English in Puerto Rico is first grade English here and not the kind that you need to communicate. I came to the U.S. when I was 16. When I was at the high school, I was in ESL class. It was good. Then I went to juvenile (detention); I got my GED (in Spanish) so I couldn’t go back to school. After juvenile, I could understand, but I would think in Spanish. It was hard to speak in English. I had girlfriends who spoke English, so I had to get used to them. It took me 4 years to learn English. When it comes to writing, that’s my problem. Now I write the shortest thing I know how to write in.

Larry S. from Puerto Rico
Who speaks what languages? Put a check mark in the box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My wife speaks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My doctor speaks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My children speak</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My landlord speaks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My boss speaks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My neighbors speak</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My co-workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My auto mechanic speaks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends speak</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My lawyer speaks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My grocery cashier speaks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I speak</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Vocabulary to talk about English

♪ → sound

b → letter (alphabet)

a e i o u (y) → vowel

b c d f g h j k l m n p q r s t v w x (y) z → consonant

ba by → syllable

[bəː bɛ] → sounds (pronunciation)

baby → word

[ˈbəː bɛ] → stress or accent

a very young child → phrase

He is a baby. → sentence

sentence + sentence + sentence → paragraph
13. Learning About Each Other

Today in my English class, Jenaro was reading the letters of the English alphabet. When he came to the letter “e” in English, he said “a”. When he came to the letter “i”, he said “e”. He was very confused when I told him that the letters had different name and sounds in English and Spanish. Yes, but they look the same! I told him that I get confused too when I try to learn Spanish.

Erica Runkles, ESL teacher

Think about learning new sounds and a new alphabet. Do you have your own story about learning a new alphabet? Write about it or tell someone who can write it down.

а б в г д е ё ж з и й к л м н о п р с т у ф х ц ч ш ъ ъ ы э ю я

14. Compare and Contrast

What language do you speak? ________________

Say and write your native alphabet on the line below.

Is the English alphabet very different for you?

↑ Circle the letters that are hard for you ↑

Count the letters

How many letters are in your native alphabet? ______
How many letters are in the English alphabet? ______
What other languages are spoken in your classroom?
Where do you use the alphabets? Listen as your teacher explains. Put a check mark.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alphabet</th>
<th>English alphabet</th>
<th>Native alphabet</th>
<th>Alphabet</th>
<th>English alphabet</th>
<th>Native alphabet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>spelling aloud</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>telephone touch pad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the dictionary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ATM machine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>passwords</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>address book</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phone book</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>library</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>book index</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>parking lot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer keyboard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>lists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>other</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

15. Playing with Language
a. Find a computer key board and copy the letters below.
   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___

b. Ask 4 of your classmates to do this:
   “Spell your first name. Spell your last name.”

Write their names on the lines.
1 __________________________ __________________________
2 __________________________
3 __________________________
4 __________________________
c. Put these place words in alphabetical order and write them on the blanks below:

American Red Cross, CVS Pharmacy, Adult Basic Education - ESL, Giant Food Store

d. Look in the telephone book and find the phone numbers for the alphabetized names

____________________________ ___ ___ ___ - ___ ___ ___ ___
____________________________ ___ ___ ___ - ___ ___ ___ ___
____________________________ ___ ___ ___ - ___ ___ ___ ___
____________________________ ___ ___ ___ - ___ ___ ___ ___
____________________________ ___ ___ ___ - ___ ___ ___ ___
____________________________ ___ ___ ___ - ___ ___ ___ ___
____________________________ ___ ___ ___ - ___ ___ ___ ___

(you pick a name)

16. Listen Up    baby → syllable

Listen as your teacher says these words. Listen for the syllables breaks in the words and recopy the words with the breaks like the sample. Count the syllables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>syllable</th>
<th>How many?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>syllable</td>
<td>syl-la-ble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sound</td>
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<tr>
<td>letter</td>
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<td>word</td>
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<td>phrase</td>
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<tr>
<td>sentence</td>
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<tr>
<td>paragraph</td>
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<td>stress</td>
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17. Listen Up Again

Listen while your teacher reads this sentence slowly. Listen for the syllables. Tap or clap when you hear a syllable break.

a. Jenaro was reading the letters of the English alphabet.

b. Je-nar-o was read-ing the let-ters of the Eng-lish al-pha-

Write or dictate your own sentence about learning the alphabet. Read aloud and listen for the syllables. Divide the words into syllables. Use the dictionary if you need help.

a. ____________________________________________________________

b. ____________________________________________________________

18. Language Practice.  

Every syllable in English must have at least one vowel.

Je-nar-o was read-ing the let-ters of the Eng-lish al-pha-

Read Aruna’s sentences aloud. Draw a line between the syllables. Underline the vowels.

a. People speak English in my country.

b. I never went to school to learn to read and write.

Sometimes a “y” is a vowel. Sometimes “y” is a consonant.
19. Putting It To Use: A Language Project

Creating a Contact List

Work with other students in the class and make a list of important phone numbers and addresses of people, businesses or agencies to keep handy.

Use the local phone book and other reference books in the classroom and library to locate this information. Ask other people in our facility.

What resources are important for you to know?

When you have found them, list them below in alphabetical order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
<th>Address</th>
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</table>
Checklist for Learning
Check the vocabulary you know

☐ everything  ☐ immersion
☐ most things  ☐ target language
☐ a lot of things  ☐ native language
☐ some things  ☐ alphabet
☐ a little  ☐ sound
☐ a tiny bit  ☐ syllable
☐ nothing  ☐ vowel
☐ Who  ☐ consonant
☐ What  ☐ word
☐ When  ☐ phrase
☐ Where  ☐ sentence
☐ Why  ☐ paragraph
☐ How much

Check what you can do in English

☐ Talk about learning English
☐ Write and use the English alphabet
☐ Use language vocabulary to talk about English word structure
☐ Use question words in English
☐ Find vowels and syllables in English words
Looking Back

A. In this unit I learned: _______________________________________

B. I want to study more: _______________________________________

C. What I liked best was __________________________because ________________

D. What I liked least was __________________________because ________________