Lesson Share TEACHER’S NOTES

Problem page

by Jake Hughes

Age: Teenagers / Adults
Level: Intermediate / Upper Intermediate
Time: Up to 90 minutes
Aim: To practise language used for giving advice, debating, and identifying and correcting errors
Key skills: Reading and speaking
Materials: One copy of Worksheets 1 and 2 per student; one letter from the cut-outs worksheet per group of students

Procedure

1. Write the words Problem page on the board and ask the whole class what they think it means.
   
   **Key:** a page in a magazine consisting of letters that people have written about problems that they have and the advice that someone gives them

   Ask the students whether problem pages exist in their country. Brainstorm, as a class, what sort of problems people write in about and make a list of these on the board.

2. Hand out Worksheet 1. Elicit the word advice and put students in pairs to discuss the two questions in the Warmer exercise. Get whole-class feedback.

3. Draw the students’ attention to the Reading exercise. Explain the term agony aunt (a woman whose job is to give advice about personal problems in a newspaper or magazine by answering people’s letters / emails) and tell them that they are going to read an email that someone has sent to the Dear Ellen problem page. Tell them to ignore any mistakes they see and answer questions 1-3 in pairs. Then discuss the students’ answers as a class.

   **Key a:** 1. She’s feels lonely living in London and is quite shy.; 2. because she likes her job; 3. There is no clear answer but we can assume that she wants a boyfriend to help her with her English and introduce her to more people.

4. Tell the students that there are five spelling mistakes and 12 mistakes connected with vocabulary and grammar in Nuria’s email. Give them 5-10 minutes to find and correct mistakes in pairs. Then ask each pair to identify a mistake and correct it as a whole-class activity.

5. Tell the students that they will be helping Nuria with her problem later, but first they will focus on some of the structures used for giving advice.

   Hand out Worksheet 2. Ask the students to work through the Language exercise in pairs before checking the answers as a class.

   **Key:** 1. were, ‘d (or ‘would’); 2. don’t; 3. should; 4. have. ‘Have to’ is the strongest advice.

   Allow the students a few minutes to discuss the advice in pairs. Encourage them to be imaginative when thinking of their own advice!

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Dear Ellen

I am from Spain but I have been living in London for two months. I am 25 years old. I came here because of work and I really like my job. The problem is I am very lonely. I don’t know anyone here apart from my colleagues at work. They are nice but they are all much older than me.

Another problem is that I am quite shy. In Spain this is not a problem because I already have friends but in London it is difficult. I live alone and every night I just watch television.

In Spain I had hobbies but here it is impossible! I like cooking but I’m not used to cooking English food. I like live music but I don’t know where to go in London. And I like walking but London is huge and I’m frightened of getting lost!

Maybe if I had a boyfriend, everything would be easier but I don’t know how to find one. I want to stay in England because of my job but I’m so bored and lonely. Please help me!

Nuria

PS My English is not very good. Sorry about my mistakes.
6. Divide the class into five groups (ideally there will be two to four students in each group) and give them a few minutes to complete the Discussion task and decide what they think Nuria should do. Get feedback from each of the groups and encourage the students to use the structures demonstrated in the previous exercise.

7. Remind the students that Nuria would like to find a boyfriend. Elicit suggestions for what sort of boyfriend she should find, what characteristics he should have, etc. Explain that Nuria has joined an internet dating site and has received several responses. Tell them that each group will read one of those responses.

8. Give each of the five groups one of the cut-out responses and tell them that each group will prepare a short presentation about the author of the response, firstly giving his name, age and occupation and then giving a summary of his personality (from notes they have made, not from the original response). Ask them to make a list of the reasons why their person would be good for Nuria and a list of reasons why he would be bad, which will form part of the presentation.

9. Each pair or small group gives their short presentation. Tell the students who are listening that they should make notes about the other potential boyfriends as they will need this information.

10. Once the groups have presented all the potential boyfriends, ask the students to discuss as a class who they think would be most suitable for Nuria and why. Encourage them to use the constructions from the Language exercise. If the discussion is not progressing, you could prompt them with the following questions:

- How important is it to mix with the locals when you move to a new country / learn the language of the host country? What about cultural differences in general?
- Is it good to be in a relationship with someone very similar to you? Do the students know the expression opposites attract?
- Is an age gap a problem in a relationship?
- How important is it to go out and have fun and ‘let your hair down’?
- How important is money in a relationship?
- How important is it to have a routine?

The class now votes on who is the best boyfriend for Nuria.

11. For homework, students take on the role of the agony aunt and write a reply to Nuria’s original email. Encourage them to use the structures presented during the lesson, e.g. I think you should …
1 Warmer

Discuss the questions below with a partner.

a. Who do you ask for advice? Does it depend on the problem?
b. Are you good at giving advice? Give examples if you can.

2 Reading

a. Read the email sent to the problem page below.

Dear Ellen

I am from Spain but I live in London since two months. I have 25 years. I came here because of work and I like very much my job. The problem is I am very lonely. I don’t know anyone here apart of my colleagues at work. They are nice but they are all much older that me.

A problem more is that I am quite shy. In Spain this is not a problem because already I have friends but in London it is difficult. I live alone and every night I just look the television.

In Spain I had hobbies but here it is impossible! I like cooking but I’m not used to cook English food. I like live music but I don’t know where to go in London. And I like walking but London is very huge and I’m fritened of getting lost!

Maybe if I will have a boyfriend, everything would be easier but I don’t know how to find one. I want to stay in England because my job but I’m so bored and lonely. Please help me!

Nuria

PS My English is not very good. Sorry about my misstakes.

b. Answer the following questions about Nuria’s email:

a. What is Nuria’s problem?
b. Why doesn’t she want to go back to Spain?
c. Why do you think she wants a boyfriend?

c. Nuria has made five spelling mistakes and 12 mistakes with her grammar and vocabulary. Can you find them all and correct them? There may be more than one way to correct the mistakes.
3 Language

There are different ways of giving advice in English. Fill in the missing words in the conversations below. Which is the strongest advice given?

1. John My neighbours play loud music every night and it's driving me mad!
   Sue If I _____________ you, I _____________ call the police.

2. Claudia I'm really struggling in my English class. I don't understand anything.
   Marco Why _____________ you speak to your teacher? She'll help you.

3. Dave My girlfriend is really angry with me because I forgot her birthday.
   Jack I think you _____________ buy her some flowers and say you're sorry!

4. Sarah I think Dave's girlfriend is cheating on him.
   Suzy What? You _____________ to tell him! He has a right to know!

Do you think the people above gave good advice? What would you say if your friend came to you with these problems?

4 Discussion

Return to Nuria's email. With a partner, discuss what you think she should do. Try and use the expressions from the Language exercise, e.g. I think she should join a gym because she would meet people.
Hello Nuria!

I’m from Spain too and I know just how you feel. When I first came to London six months ago I was lonely too. But then I met some other Spanish people and now I’m much happier. I think the Spanish are much friendlier than the English!

It’s so great that you like cooking because so do I! And there is a shop near me that sells Spanish food! Maybe you can come over to my flat and we can cook together. Or you can come and see me at work – I work in a Spanish restaurant!

I’m 27 years old and as well as cooking I like dancing and chatting with friends.

Call me!

Jose

p.s. My friend helped me write this because I don’t speak English.

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Hello gorgeous!

I just saw your picture and I’m speechless – you’re beautiful! I read your ad too and it sounds like you need to lighten up. You can’t waste your life in front of the TV, you’ve got to get out and have fun. And that’s why you should ring me!

I can describe myself in one word – PARTY!!! I sing and play the guitar in a band and we play gigs a few nights a week. After that I normally go to a club and dance all night. It would be great to have a hot girl like you to dance with every night! I work part-time in a record shop but that’s just for the money. My motto is ‘work to live, don’t live to work’!

Ok, that’s it. Give me a ring – you won’t regret it!

Peace out

Zane

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Dear Nuria,

I am a very busy man so I’ll get straight to the point.

• You like music. I’m able to obtain front-row seats at any concert you like. Classical, jazz, blues, rock – you name it.

• You like cooking. This will not be necessary. I like to eat well and we will go to a different restaurant every night. The price is not an issue.

• You like walking. What? No need! I have my own personal driver and he is available 24/7.

Contact me and we will arrange a date.

Best wishes,

Guy

PS Your English seems fine to me but if you want to perfect it I will arrange for you to have lessons with the best teacher in London. She is a personal friend of mine.
Name: George  Age: 25  Occupation: Poet

Dearest Nuria,

When I read your advertisement it felt as if I were looking into a mirror. You say you feel lonely and so do I. Every night I sit at my desk, alone, writing poetry and dreaming of having someone special by my side. Someone like you perhaps, sweet Nuria? I want to show you that not all English people are cold and unfriendly. On the contrary, I am an intense and passionate man and I am looking for a lady to share my life with.

What can I tell you about myself? Well, as well as writing and reading, I enjoy having conversations with close friends – I like to discuss art, philosophy, politics, etc. It would be good for your English! I also enjoy walking around London, learning about all the different buildings – I would love to walk with you and explain everything to you.

I’m not a very sociable person and I hate large groups of people. But once we’re together, we won’t need anyone else, right?

Please call me, Nuria.
All my love,
George

Name: Gavin  Age: 25  Occupation: Fitness instructor

Hi Nuria,

I saw your advert and I’d really like to meet you. I’m sorry you’re feeling blue but I think you’d soon cheer up if we got together. I live by the motto ‘healthy body, healthy mind’ and I treat my body like a temple.

I think the best way to describe myself is to tell you my daily routine. I jump out of bed at 6am and go for a five-mile run. Then I eat my breakfast, shower and do 30 minutes of yoga before I cycle to work. Depending on traffic, I get home between 6.00 and 6.15pm. I cook myself a healthy dinner of chicken, brown rice and vegetables. I like to spend the evenings improving myself in some way – I’m currently taking art classes. Perhaps we could go together!

I think you would be much happier if you concentrated on getting fit and following a strict routine like mine. So why not give me a ring (between 8.00 and 8.15pm)?

Hope to hear from you soon,
Gavin