

CENSORED!

A speaking class for upper intermediate and advanced students, by Lindsay Clandfield

Warning: This lesson plan contains controversial material. Discussion of censorship may raise issues of religion, politics, and morality. Teachers are advised to use this material only with classes that they believe would feel comfortable with it.

Level: Upper-intermediate to advanced

Aim: Students role play a discussion about censorship on a television talk show. They then discuss issues about censorship.

Speaking skills: Developing active listener skills, encouraging speakers to continue.

Stage 1: Warmer - Dictogloss

Tell the students that you are going to read a short text to them twice. They must not write anything down while you read the text, so make sure they have put their pens down. When everyone is ready, read the following text out loud:

"I am sorry that anyone was offended by the wardrobe malfunction during the halftime performance of the Super Bowl. It was not intentional and is regrettable."

Tell them to listen carefully, because you are going to repeat the text one more time. Read it again. Then ask students to work in pairs and recreate accurately as much of the text as they can remember. When they have finished, write the original text on the board for them to compare their text to.

Ask students to work in pairs again and speculate what they think the text refers to. If they don't know, explain that it is singer Justin Timberlake apologising for the incident during the 2003 Super Bowl (the final game in the American football league) when he and singer Janet Jackson were both on stage. Justin Timberlake pulled open her clothes and revealed her breast to the cameras.

Explain that this incident has had several repercussions in the United States television industry (e.g. the Grammy music awards were shown with a five minute delay to avoid any scandals, television shows have censored themselves to avoid criticism, certain music videos have been moved to late night programming...). If your students are familiar with this news story, let them talk about it as a whole class. What do they think? Explain that in today's class they are going to have a chance to discuss the topics of censorship.

Stage 2: Role Play

Divide the class into groups of four. If you have an odd number, you can have one or two groups of five. Tell students that they are going to role play a television talk show on a similar subject. Pre-teach the following: *breach of contract, nearly-naked, denounce, alienate, to run* (a television show, programme).

Explain that one student in each group will act as observer of the role play and will have to report back at the end on how successful the role play was. Give that person the Role Play Listener card (for a group of five, assign two people the role of listener). Distribute the role cards to the other people in the group. Give them a couple of minutes (but not too long) to read their role card.

Set a time limit of three to five minutes (depending on how much your class likes to talk) and have them do the role play.

Stage 3: Feedback

Ask the students who were listening to the role play to give their feedback to the students who were speaking. Do some whole class feedback on this at the end.

Stage 4: Discussion

Put students into new groups of three or four and give them the questions for discussion. Circulate and make notes of errors that you hear. At the end of the discussion, ask the groups to report back anything interesting that came up. If you think it is appropriate, and time allows, go over and correct the errors that you heard during stage 4.

ROLE CARD A

You are Candy M's public relations agent. You are here to defend your client's interests. Here are your arguments:

- Candy M has a contract with the television channel to run her music videos at a time when most young people will see them. Any change of programming would be considered breach of contract.
- Candy's video is provocative, but it is all humour. Young people can tell the difference between humour and reality. In addition, her video does not show any part of her body that would be considered inappropriate.
- Candy wants to be a role model for young people. She sings about independence and freedom, but respects her parents. She is also going to donate a percentage of the sales of her new album to help build a home for children in Africa.

ROLE CARD B

You are the vice-president of the national Music Channel, the most popular channel for young people in the country. You are here to defend your company's decision to run Candy M's videos only at night. Here are your arguments:

- Candy M's video is provocative to the point of obscenity. In the video she is almost naked except for a pair of boxing gloves. In several scenes you can see her fighting with other nearly-naked women.
- You know that a lot of your television audience are under the age of fifteen. This music video combines sex and violence and many parents have complained to the channel about it.
- The church has denounced this video as immoral. A large section of the population in your country is religious, and you don't want to alienate them.

ROLE CARD C

You are the television host. You are doing a chat show to discuss the recent decision by Music Channel to take Candy M's new video off prime time television and only run it late at night. You have invited Candy M's agent and the vice president of the company to come and discuss the issue on live television. Here's what you have to do:

- Introduce the two speakers and explain the background to the situation.
- Invite each speaker to explain his/her point of view, and moderate the discussion. To do this, you must listen actively to them, and help them continue if they slow down (see language toolbox below)
- You like it if people argue, because it makes your show more interesting and popular. Don't hesitate to provoke either speaker into getting more emotional.

USEFUL LANGUAGE for ROLE CARD C

Listening language (to encourage the speaker to go on)

Really
Right
Good
Fine
True

Reacting language (to provoke the speaker)

But wait a minute...
Do you REALLY believe that?
That's a controversial point.
Aw, come on.

ROLE PLAY - LISTENER'S INSTRUCTIONS

Listen to the role play and make notes. You will have to answer these questions at the end of the speaking activity.

Were the speakers able to convey their message effectively?

Who was more convincing?

Was the television host a good listener and facilitator of conversation? Why or why not? What words did he/she use?

Did you notice any examples of incorrect language? What were they?



DISCUSSION

Discuss these questions in small groups.

Have any books, television shows or films been censored in your country? Which ones? Why?

Do you think that television and films have too much sexual and/or violent content? Should there be more censorship?

What images ARE inappropriate, if any? Look at the following examples and decide if they are:

- a) inappropriate for children
- b) inappropriate for teenagers
- c) inappropriate for everybody
- d) can be shown to everybody

- _____ A torture scene in a movie.
- _____ A scene of extreme violence and lots of blood in a movie.
- _____ A scene where someone is taking drugs in a movie.
- _____ A scene where someone is taking drugs on the news.
- _____ A topless woman.
- _____ A naked woman.
- _____ A naked man.
- _____ A naked child.
- _____ A scene depicting sex.
- _____ Obscene language.
- _____ A dead person in the street on the news.
- _____ An image of someone committing suicide on the news.
- _____ Other: