EVERYDAY LIFE

DESCRIBING YOUR AREA/ NEIGHBOURHOOD

onestopenglish

TEACHER'S NOTES

Age: Adult

Level: Pre-intermediate+

Time: 60 minutes

Activity: In this lesson, students will:

1. learn new vocabulary related to describing towns, cities and neighbourhoods;
2. practise listening for specific information in the context of towns and cities;
3. describe the area they live in.

Language focus: Vocabulary for describing places (buildings, accommodation, adjectives, etc)

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student; audio; cut ups for listening task.

Exercise 1

In this exercise, students explore the topic of their area/ neighbourhood. The questions prime learners for the final task, which is describing their own neighbourhood in detail. Students discuss the questions in pairs.

Exercise 2

a. Ask learners to add the items given to the mind map.

Key

Places to visit – park, bar, museum

Adjectives – busy, lively, quiet

Accommodation – house, flat, halls of residence

Other - traffic, people, neighbours

Clarify any unknown terms, drill pronunciation if necessary.

b. Ask learners to add their own ideas to the mind map. You could elicit a few ideas to add together first.

c. Ask learners to use the terms in their mind map to describe their area/neighbourhood. Example:

Student A: Ok… park… Are there any parks in your area?

Student B: No, but there are a few good parks out of town.

Student A: Okay, what about bars or museums?

These short speaking stages build up to the final task, giving the learners more practice with the language reviewed/taught.

Exercise 3

a. Ask learners to listen and tick any words they hear in their mind map.

Possible answers (vary depending on students' own ideas from Exercise 2).

bars, lively, flat, park, traffic, people, (restaurants, swimming pool, parking, canal, etc)

b. Ask students to discuss their own views about Hackney based on what they heard. This can be a short discussion in pairs.

c. Learners are given phrases from the text broken into halves. Students work alone or with a partner to match the halves to make phrases from the listening. Then they listen to the text to check their answers. You may wish to draw attention to some useful language patterns or chunks after this, especially the language for comparing ('cheaper than', 'compared to')

Key

I live in Hackney, which is an area in/of East London.

I live in a flat just opposite Hackney Central tube station.

… it's not far from London city centre.

… it's cheaper than living in the centre …

… there are lots of things to do in Hackney.

There are plenty of good bars and restaurants there …

The traffic in Hackney is okay…

Overall, I'd recommend Hackney as a place to live.

It's affordable compared to other parts of London.

Optional:

After listening to the text, you may wish for learners to reconstruct the listening. Using the extracts as prompts, they can take turns (1 or two extracts at a time) to describe Hackney, building a cohesive description around the extracts given (or adding further information they remember from the listening).

DESCRIBING YOUR AREA/ NEIGHBOURHOOD

one stop english

Exercise 4

a. This exercise focuses on the key phrases from the text which learners can use to describe their own area. Students read each extract together. They decide which information they might need to change when describing their own area/neighbourhood. Then they take turns to change this information, making the sentence true for their area. NOTE: They do not change this in writing, they do so only in speaking. An example conversation would be:

Student A: Okay, so this says '… it's not far from London city centre.' So we could change 'not far'

Student B: Yes, and 'London city centre', That would change to somewhere near where we live. So…

Student A: For me it might be 'it's not far from Madrid'.

Student B: And for me I'd say 'it's quite far from Madrid'. I think 3 hours is quite far, do you?

Student A: Yes, I agree. Ok, next one…

Your learners may benefit from some analysis of the target phrases. For example, you may wish to draw attention to the quantifiers used (plenty of/lots of/not many) and the nouns which follow these, i.e. patterns related to count/ uncount nouns. Alternatively, you could allow learners to express themselves and address any errors after each repetition of the task.

Pronunciation

This stage draws attention to catenation, when the final consonant sound of a word joins with a vowel sound at the beginning of the following word. Read each sentence to the students naturally. Instruct students to notice how the underlined sounds join together. Drill these segments and then the whole utterance (backchaining may help – see box). Learners then look through the extract to predict other instances where this linking may occur.

Key

Possible answers:

I liv<u>e i</u>n Hackney, it'<u>s a</u>n area i<u>n E</u>ast London.

I live in a flat jus<u>t o</u>pposite Hackney Central tube station.

You may need to model the sentences for the students to help them identify this feature. They then practise saying each sentence and joining the sounds together.

Backchaining

Backchaining is a drilling technique. It helps learners deal with difficult groups of sounds, and it can also draw attention to stress and intonation at word/ sentence level.

The teacher begins by saying the final sounds or words of an utterance. Then they drill each part of the utterance moving back towards the beginning. Here is an example with a sentence from the listening text. This is building towards 'It's affordable compared to other parts of London'.

…London.

…parts of London.

…other parts of London.

…to other parts of London.

You don't need to backchain a full utterance, you can deal with certain important chunks. In the above example, there is catenation in 'parts of London'. Isolating this part of the text may help draw attention to this feature. Similarly, the words 'to other (parts of London)' blend together with an intrusive /w/. Introducing these sounds gradually will help focus learners on these features.

Top tips: to keep backchaining natural, I find it's important to say the full target sentence in your head each time, and only articulate the necessary sound groups each time. By doing this, you may notice that English is actually quite rhythmical and it becomes easier to notice stressed words or syllables.

You can use backchaining to drill the pronunciation of individual words – it may help your learners pronounce difficult consonant blends.

Exercise 5

This exercise is the final task of the lesson – describing your own area/neighbourhood.

a. Ask learners to plan what they are going to say about their own area. They add notes to the table on each topic, but make sure that they don't write sentences to read from.

b. Learners take time to think about how they will link their ideas together. They also consider whether the phrases they use will include any sounds that join (see Pronunciation stage). At this stage, or before, you could give learners a copy of the listening text so they can analyse how the speaker linked their utterances together.

c. Once prepared, learners describe their area/ neighbourhood to three different partners. As they listen, partners make notes on good and bad things about each area, and other details.

d. Students use the details from **c** for the post task discussion and reflection stage (see handout).

Exploiting the listening text

You may wish to draw attention to further features of the listening text. One feature of the language in the text, which may interest learners, is the use of less formal and/ or vague language. Here are some examples:

'I live in a flat **just** opposite Hackney Central tube station.'

The use of 'just' stresses how close the flat is from the tube station. However, 'just' to emphasise close proximity depends on your perspective. For example, you could say 'There's a post office just down the road'. You feel it's 'close', but it could be 500m or even miles away!

'…not many tall buildings like skyscrapers **or anything.**'

The speaker uses 'or anything' here to mean 'other, similar things to skyscrapers'. They don't need to give specific examples, it is just implied. Here are some examples of the phrase in use:

Is he alright? He's not in danger or *anything,* is he?

Do you want a drink, *or anything?*

We use other vague language like this in English. Your learners might be familiar with 'stuff' or 'stuff like that'.

Q: What did you do last night?

A: You know. Just chilled out. Watched TV and *stuff.* You?

I *guess* there are some downsides to living in Hackney.

We use 'I guess' to say that we think something is probably true. In this sentence, the speaker is reflecting or thinking, and this vague language suggests that the downsides they are about to describe are the speaker's own opinions.

Other phrases you may wish to explain or focus on include:

- There are plenty of good bars and restaurants there, but **you know**, they're London prices.
- It's over **six quid a pint** these days. **Unbelievable**.
- **I mean**, I feel like the area is quite safe
- **It's got a good feel about it**. (may also be 'good vibe about it')

I live in Hackney, which is an area in East London. I live in a flat just opposite Hackney Central tube station. Hackney's a nice place. It's quite residential, I mean, there are lots of houses and not many tall buildings like skyscrapers or anything. It feels more like a small town really, but it's not far from London city centre. Lots of people live in Hackney but work in central London. They choose to live here because it's cheaper than living in the centre, and the transport links are good. You can get to central London on the bus or underground in about 20 minutes – plus you can cycle along the canal to other parts of the city – Camden's not far.

Anyway, there are lots of things to do in Hackney. The high street is lively in the evening and at the weekend. There are plenty of good bars and restaurants there, but you know, they're London prices. It's over 6 quid a pint these days. Unbelievable.

Apart from pubs, there are a few good parks. Plus, there's also an outdoor swimming pool called London Fields Lido. I'm sure you're thinking that no one would want to swim outside in England, especially in winter, but don't worry - the pool's heated!

I guess there are some downsides to living in Hackney. I mean, I feel like the area is quite safe, but a couple of my friends have had problems there. Like, one of them had their bike stolen from outside their flat. Still, that could happen anywhere really. It doesn't seem like crime is a big problem in the area.

The traffic in Hackney is okay, even at rush hour, but parking is a problem. There aren't many parking spaces on our road, plus it's really expensive to park there. It's much more convenient to take public transport in the area, or to cycle around.

Overall, I'd recommend Hackney as a place to live. It's affordable compared to other parts of London, and it's got a good feel about it.