Teaching with Authentic Materials

one stop english

'It's like a place of healing': the growth of America's food forests

Level: Intermediate – Teacher's notes

Article summary: Food forests across the USA rely on funding and volunteers to provide better access to healthy fresh food and to community to many people who need this.

Time: 90 minutes+

Skills: using authentic materials such as articles for email writing

Language focus: writing an email of enquiry

Learner training: predicting the meaning of a new authentic text, understanding main ideas, responding personally to a text, writing questions about a text

Materials needed: one copy of the worksheet per student

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1. Warmer

a. Divide students into pairs or groups. Then, ask students to read the headline of the article and predict its content. Follow the questions to elicit ideas and predictions. You can ask students to cover the text so they are not tempted to read it.

HOW TO: activate students' schemata when using authentic materials

When using an authentic text or source, it is important to keep in mind where students might encounter it. This text is a newspaper article students are likely to see on the internet or in their social media feed. Activate their knowledge about the topic of an article by having them read the title and subtitle or look at images and captions (when available).

2. Reading the article carefully

a. Students read the article carefully. If they need more guidance, ask them to pick and underline a specific number of interesting facts, e.g., three facts that they found interesting. Then, they decide whether this is an article they'd choose to read.

HOW TO: get students engaged with authentic texts

For engagement with authentic materials, let students express their real opinions about the text. Ask if they find it interesting and what their favourite parts were. This will inform your choices in the future and allow you to pick content all your students can enjoy.

3. Writing an email of enquiry

Students practice their writing skills by drafting an email of enquiry based on content from the text.

a. First check understanding of the text by getting them to work in pairs or small groups and answer the first two questions.

Key:
1. *b*
2. *a*

b. Then ask students to think about the activities mentioned in the article and if they would enjoy participating. Have them brainstorm a role they might enjoy and the kind of information they would want to know before committing to such a role. Monitor and prompt students if needed. (Ask: *How many hours a day or week is required? What kind of activities are there? Is it hard physical labour? Who else volunteers there? What kind of food will I get in return? What will I learn about permaculture? Will this prepare me for a job?*)

c. Then ask students to work together and draft an email of enquiry using the ideas they discussed, as well as the structure and phrases provided.

HOW TO: use authentic materials to teach email writing

To teach email writing in an authentic context, an authentic purpose and audience is required. Authentic materials such as an article or an ad can be a great way to introduce these.

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To use an authentic text for enquiry writing, you need to create a plausible and realistic scenario in which the student would have to request information from someone. Consider the following questions:

1. *Why would someone be interested in this text? (e.g., can be something related to studies, career, work experience, social service, hobbies, political or environmental or activist movement)*

2. *Why would the students need to write an email? (e.g., the text mentions a programme or activity of interest, a product, a role, etc., and the student will want to request information about, voice a complaint, express interest, apply, etc.)*

3. *What information from the text is necessary for the writing task? (e.g., what are the basic points in the text that students need to understand in order to spark their interest or for them to be able to come up with more questions, or make a complaint?)*

4. *What structure and conventional language of emails should students use in their writing? (e.g., a formal or informal greeting, reasons for writing, closing, language for expressing interest, making requests, clarifying, complaining, etc.)*

Remind students that we need to follow the conventions when writing an email. This means we use set phrases and expressions (*Dear … I am writing… I look forward to… Best,*). Encourage students to add some useful phrases to the list.

4. Optional homework

a. Students write an email to the organiation of their choice to enquire about a volunteering position. As a follow up activity ask students to share their emails with a partner. They could also reply to each other's emails.