Voice of America: Current Event Activities in the English Language Classroom

By Phil Dierking, Voice of America - Learning English
Objectives

1. Understand what current events are and why they are important
2. Learn about the benefit of using current events in the English language classroom
3. Learn about Voice of America and the different resources it offers English language teachers
4. Learn how to use Voice of America resources in the English language classroom
Introduction to Current Events
What Are Current Events?

► **Current Events**
  - Events in the present concerning important people, places, things, or ideas

► **News**
  - A report of recent events, information, people or things
  - Often recorded in print, radio, television, or online
What is the Media?

- Media
  - The industries and people that produce news and mass communication content
Why Teach Current Events in the English Language Classroom?

- Builds language ability in reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills
- Builds new vocabulary
- Offers endless topics that connect to all areas of a curriculum
- Keeps students aware of events happening locally, nationally, and internationally
- Promotes critical thinking
- Motivates students to have further discussions with friends and family
- Can inspire students to become active in their communities
Where Can You Access Current Events?

- Internet
- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Television
- Radio
- Social Media
- Podcasts
Voice of America

- Created in 1942
- Largest U.S. international broadcaster
- Provides news in over 40 languages to over 200 million people a week
Voice of America

- Produces content for digital, television, and radio platforms
- Accessible online, from mobile phones, social media, satellite/cable, FM/MW Radio
Voice of America Languages

- Afan Oromo
- Albanian
- Amharic
- Armenian
- Azerbaijani
- Bengali
- Bosnian
- Burmese
- Cantonese
- Chinese
- Dari Persian
- French
- Georgian
- Haitian Creole
- Hausa
- Indonesian
- Khmer
- Kinyarwanda
- Kirundi
- Korean
- Kurdish
- Lao
- Macedonian
- Ndebele
- Pashto
- Persian
- Pilipino
- Portuguese
- Russian
- Serbian
- Shona
- Somali
- Spanish
- Swahili
- Thai
- Tibetan
- Tigrinya
- Turkish
- Ukrainian
- Ukrainian
- Urdu
- Uzbek
- Vietnamese
Voice of America - Learning English

- VOA’s multimedia source of news for English language learners
- Accessed online
- Uses English for intermediate and upper-beginner levels
- Online texts, MP3s, videos, and podcasts
Voice of America - Learning English

- Began in 1959
- Read by English language learners, teachers, publishers, and anyone interested in the news
- Content drawn from world news, business, science, U.S. life, popular culture, etc.
- Texts, MP3s, videos, and photos free to the public
First Somali-American Lawmaker Begins Work in Minnesota
News Stories

- General News
- Education
- Health & Lifestyle
- Personal Technology
- Science in the News
- What’s Trending
News Stories Levels

VOA Learning English

Level One - Level Two - Level Three - Video - US Constitution - People in America - Student Union

Let's Learn English

Lesson 44: Making Healthy Choices

Teachers Find Calm in New Program

Vice President Breaks Senate Tie to Approve New Secretary of Education

Officials Consider the US-South Korea Free Trade Deal

Amnesty International: Syria Killed Thousands in Hangings

Uber Asks NASA Engineer to Develop Flying Cars

Is China Ready for Possible Conflict with US?

Militant Groups in Afghanistan Make Money Smuggling Minerals

America's Most Expensive Home Is $250 Million

Running in Cold Weather Improves Performance

For Highest US Court, a Harvard or Yale Education Is a New Technology Helps Move Hearts

Lesson 44: Making Healthy Choices
Learning English Word Book

Word Book a-z

A list of words used in Special English programs on radio, television, and the Internet.

VOA Special English Edition
News Stories Level 1

- For beginning English learners
- Articles generally have one idea per sentence, with 500 words or less
- Most words can be found in the VOA Learning English Word Book, or they are explained at the bottom of the story

Words in This Story

- **benefit** – *n.* a good or helpful result or effect
- **bilingual** – *adj.* able to speak and understand two languages
- **gender** – *n.* the state of being male or female
- **leverage** – *n.* influence or power used to achieve a desired result
- **proficiency** – *n.* good at doing something
- **rank** – *n.* a position in a society, organization, group, etc.
- **rote memorization** – *n.* a memorization technique based on repetition
- **tumult** – *n.* a state of confusion or disorder
- **sensitive** – *adj.* easily upset by the things that people think or say about you
News Stories Level 2

- For intermediate learners of American English
- Stories are often more than 500 words, and may use more complex sentences or language
- New words are explained at the bottom of the story
- Stories may include audio from newsmakers
- There may be a quiz to test your understanding
News Stories Level 3

- Are aimed at non-native English speakers who have studied American English and wish to improve their reading and listening skills.
- Articles are usually more than 500 words in length and may include audio from newsmakers.
- Some may use more complex sentences or language.
- New words are explained at the bottom of the article.
News Stories - Comments section
Using Learning English News Stories in your Classroom

- **Who**
  - Who is the story about?

- **What**
  - What happened?

- **When**
  - When did the story take place?

- **Where**
  - Where did the story take place?

- **Why**
  - Why did it happen?
On Tuesday, the private education company Education First (EF) released the 2016 English Proficiency Index report online.

The English Proficiency Index is based on the online test scores of 950,000 adults from 72 countries.

The results do not show the English ability of a country’s entire population. They are based on people who took an online test, the EF Standard English Test (EFSET), during 2015.

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A News Jigsaw Activity

1. Assign your students a number
2. Have students get in groups with the same number
3. Give each group a different news story
4. Groups analyze the story
5. After, assign each person in each group a letter
6. Have students get in groups by their letter
7. Each person in the group should have read a different story
8. In the new groups, have each person take turns summarizing their story to the group
Learning English Podcast
Making Podcasts in Class

**Group Podcast**
- Put students in groups, and have each student in a group research a current event and write a news story.
- Have groups record themselves reading each of their news story.

**Class Podcast**
- Have each group research one current event per group and write a news story.
- Record each group reading their news story.

If you don’t have audio recording equipment, then have groups read stories out loud as a podcast “role play.”
News Words - Video
News Words Activity

- Create a list of vocabulary from current events
  - Example: “Practical”

- Put students in groups. Give each group a word, and have them find a news article that uses the vocabulary word
  - Example: “Students Live in Floating Shipping Containers” by Deborah Block

- Students create presentation where they define word, and read part of news story that uses word
This Day in Photos

Jockeys take the start of a traditional camel race during the Sheikh Sultan Bin Zayed al-Nahyan Camel Festival, held at the Shweihan racecourse, in the outskirts of Abu Dhabi, UAE.
This Day in Photos

- What do you think is happening in this photo? WHY?

- If you were to give this photo a title, what would it be?
This Day in Photos

A ceremony participant spits water on a sword as he takes part in Hei Neak Ta, or procession of the spirits, which marks the end of the celebration of the Lunar New Year for the Chinese community in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
1. Give the video title and ask students what they think the article is going to be about

2. Give post-video comprehension questions

3. Give students a prompt for a follow-up reaction to the video
The video’s title is:

“3D Printers Allow Tanzania Hospital to Make Artificial Limbs Quickly”

What do you think the video will be about?

Share your ideas in chat box.
1. The video’s title is: “3D Printers Allow Tanzania Hospital to Make Artificial Limbs Quickly”

2. How did Pendo James get her prosthetic leg?

3. What do you think of this new technology? Share your thoughts.
Have students watch the video clip without sound, and write what they think the story is about.
Interviews

- Assign your students to write a current events story for class
- Require at least one interview for the story
  - Requires both listening and speaking skills
  - Gives students the opportunity to hear different accents of English
Role Plays

- Assign your students a current events topic
- In groups, have your students research the topic, and write their own summary
- Have them make a skit and present the current event as a newscaster
- To create more speaking opportunities, assign multiple current event topics to each group
A Class Project With Current Events

1. Put students in groups, assign them a current event.
2. In groups, students research the current event, and find the information to answer who, what, when, where, and why.
3. The students then go out and interview people outside of class for the story.
4. Students take their research and interviews and write summaries of the story in news form.
5. Students present their current event summaries in a role-play as newscasters.

- **Reading/Listening**
- **Listening/Speaking**
- **Writing**
- **Speaking**
Other VOA Learning English Resources

- Let’s Learn English
- People in America
- Everyday Grammar
I’m hungry. When I’m hungry, I only want to eat junk food!
Let’s Learn English Video Series

Quiz
Listen to short videos and test your listening skills with this quiz.

Question 1
What does Anna say about the times she is hungry?

- She usually eats healthy foods.
- She never wants to eat junk food.
- Two sides of her tell her to eat healthy food.
- Two sides of her fight about what to eat.

Submit Answer
Next Question

Speaking
In this video, learn how to say the new words. Then learn the difference between "must" and "don’t have to.

cholesterol - a substance that is found in the bodies of people and animals. High percentage raises the risk of coronary heart disease.

Pronunciation
Use this video to practice the pronunciation of "must."
Melissa Fitzgerald: From Hollywood Actress to Passionate Activist

Something that has inspired me for many years is the Martin Luther King, Jr. quote
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4. Learn how to use Voice of America resources in the English language classroom
Resources

- Voice of America - www.voanews.com
- VOA Learning English - www.learningenglish.voanews.com
- Breaking News English - www.breakingnewsenglish.com
- News in Levels - www.newsinlevels.com/
- English Club - www.englishclub.com/efl/category/listening-news/
- Education World - www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson072.shtml
References

Thanks for Attending!