

What's the Black Country?

Topic: Living in the Black Country

Aims:

- To develop students' ability to take information from quite a difficult listening text
- To develop their deeper listening skills
- To find out a little more about a part of the UK

Level: Intermediate +

Introduction: This lesson explores a listening text about a part of the UK known as the 'Black Country'. In the lesson, students have the chance to listen to someone from that area describing what they like about living there and a little about their life. Students also have the chance to reflect on their own part of the world and finally to do some intensive listening.

Procedure

Lead in

- Ask students if they have ever heard of the 'Black Country'.
- Tell them that it is a part of Britain and that they are going to find out more about it.
- Ask the students if they can guess why it's called the 'Black Country'.

Give them these suggestions and ask them to guess which one they think is true.

1. Because it is always dark bad weather there.
2. Because there is a very big forest there.
3. Because of the coal in the ground.
4. Because the pollution is very bad.
5. Because cars are made there.

If you think your students can cope with the level, show them this text and ask them to quickly find out what the origin of the name is.

The Black Country is a recent name, the expression came from the 1840s. It is believed that the area got its name because of pollution from heavy industries and coal mining that covered the area in black dust. There is a story about Queen Victoria ordering the blinds lowered on her carriage as the royal train passed through. Most people believe that it is

more likely that the name existed even before the industry, because black coal scarred the surface of the local heath, and the presence of coal so near the surface of the earth made the local soil very black.

Adapted from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Country

- Ask the students if they would like to go to the 'Black Country'. Ask them to work in pairs and try to imagine what it might be like. Get some suggestions on the board

e.g. It's very dirty. Everything is black. There's lots of pollution.

Now show them some images of the Black Country. You can do this by searching on <http://www.flickr.com> or if you have a computer and projector in class you can use <http://www.flickrriver.com> and you will get lots of images.

Click on this link to see examples:

<http://www.flickrriver.com/search/black+country/>

Ask the students if the images are similar or different to their expectations.

Listening

- Tell the students they are going to listen to someone talking about the Black Country. Ask the students if the person likes living in the Black Country.
- Let the students listen once and try to decide.
- Get feedback from the students and see what they think and if they can justify their answers. (The answer should be yes.)
- Ask the students to listen again and try to decide what the person likes about it. If you want to make it easier for students you can put these prompts up for them and ask them to listen to see which she likes.

Food

The clothes and fashion

Historical places to visit (Yes)

The accent (Yes)

Going to the countryside (Yes)

The night life

Lots of job opportunities

Good public transport (Yes)

- You students may need to listen a couple of times, but be sure to let them compare their answers between listenings. See if they can justify their answers too.

Post listening discussion

- In the listening text, the girl mentions a number of places. Try to find pictures of these places for your students on <http://www.flickr.com> or <http://www.flickrriver.com> if you have a projector in class.

Statford-Upon-Avon
The Lickey Hills
The Muck Low Hills
The Birmingham Bull Ring

- Show your students images of each of the four places and ask them to work in groups and discuss which place they would most like to visit and why.
- Give your students a few minutes to discuss this, then get them to tell you.
- Tell your students to imagine that the girl from the listening is coming to visit them in their town and ask them to work in groups or pairs to plan a tour of their region of the country for her. Ask them to think about places they could take her and things she might like to do. If you have time get them to make a small map and add some images with explanations of why they would take her there. If you have computer access you could ask them to find some images to add to their map.

Intensive listening

- Tell your students they will listen to the girl again and try to understand her accent.

Ask them to listen to 4 sentences and count the number of words in each sentence.

Play the four clips. Play each one twice as they may find this difficult.

Clip 1 (25 words)
Clip 2 (19 words)
Clip 3 (18 words)
Clip 4 (17 words)

- See how many words they think each sentence has and then tell them the answer.
- Ask the students to listen again now and write down each sentence. Again you may need to play the sentences at least twice more. Give your students a chance to compare their answers.
- Elicit the sentences from them and write them up on the board.

1. What I found with the West Midlands is, you only have to travel for about half an hour and you're out in the countryside.
 2. I don't know who came up with that idea, but I think they completely go the wrong market.
 3. But the other thing that's been great in the last ten to fifteen years is the tramline.
 4. If you go out to the towns, I think we're still quite proud of the accent.
- This may take some time. Be prepared to write up the sentences as the students give them to you complete with all the errors. Then highlight where words are missing and play the sentences again and get them to try to hear the missing words. This kind of intensive listening can be very useful for students but also quite tiring, so if they find it really difficult just do one or two of the sentences.
 - Finally to finish the lesson you may want to give out the script from the listening and let students listen to the script and read along.

Audio transcript

Interview with Bajjit Sidhu

Interviewer: Can you just tell me a little about the part of the UK that you're from?

Bajjit Sidhu: Okay, I'm from West Brom, which is a part of Sandwell, which no one even really knows what Sandwell is anymore 'cause there's lots of discussions about getting rid of Sandwell. But it's part of the wider Black Country, like a little collective number of towns, and you feel, like, kinship with these towns. So, there's, like, Oldbury, Smethwick, Worley, Wednesbury, Wolverhampton. So these are the kind of areas that you would class, like, as a Black Country.

Interviewer: And tell me a little bit about what you like about this area.

Bajjit Sidhu: What I found with the West Midlands is, you only have to travel for about half an hour and you're out in the countryside and you don't get that in London. You travel for half an hour in London and you're still in London.

Lots of history as well, like Stratford-Upon-Avon. There's the Lickey Hills and there's Muck Low Hills. There's just so many places and I'm really proud of the area. So when we have friends coming, they're out for two days basically, we're just taking them around everywhere.

Interviewer: And would you say there have been some big changes in this area since you were a little girl, say?

Bajjit Sidhu: Well, West Brom has got the Public, I don't know if you've heard about the

Public. It's like one of the most expensive art projects in mainland Europe. So, if you imagine West Brom, it's quite a run-down area really and the town centre's really rundown, so you can imagine lots of pound shops. But now we've got this, like, amazingly expensive, massive, purple, modern art building; slap-bang in the middle of West Brom now. Now that was supposed to regenerate the area, but it went into administration before it was even opened. I don't know who came up with that idea, but I think they completely got the wrong market. Because what's really sad is even though it's cost so much money and there's been so much press, like, I work in Birmingham and no-one in Birmingham knows about it. So if no-one in Birmingham knows about it, I don't know how they thought, like, people were going to like, travel to West Brom, you know - from wider areas, to see it. So that's really sad.

But the other thing that's been great in the last ten to fifteen years is the tramline. We've had a tramline put in, so before when you used to live in West Brom, Birmingham used to seem like a mile off, like, it used to be a trek to get to Birmingham - like, an hour on the bus. But now we got tramline and twenty

minutes into Birmingham and that kind of changed my life. 'Cause the tramline came about when I was sixteen, I was able to get my first like, weekend job and I was able to travel to Birmingham and that was like a massive deal for me. So that's been great for us.

Interviewer: And, what is this region famous for?

Bajit Sidhu: Well, I mean, obviously industry. You know, it was famous for industry. Now, what is... Birmingham is famous for it's accent, I think. You know, that's the one thing that more than anyone, if you tell them you're from Birmingham, they go 'oh, ah, yeh, all right, all right'. And you know, so, I think the accent – rightly or wrongly, seems to be the thing we're most famous for. But, you know, things like the Bullring, an amazing piece of architecture and you know, something that was really central to the city-centre, kind of.

Interviewer: So you've said really, a little about the accent. But could you just tell me – how would you say people speak in this region? How do they view themselves in the way they speak and how they speak?

Bajit Sidhu: Well, it's kind of weird, like if you go to West Brom; there's a bit of a Black Country twang, which, to outsiders may not sound very different from people from Birmingham – they're like 'no, that's a Black Country accent, that's not a Brummie accent, we speak differently'. But I think if you go out to the towns, I think we're still quite proud of the accent.