

Topic Letter writing and censorship during the First World War

Level A2

Time 80 minutes

Aims

- To develop students' reading and discussion skills
- To give practice of present simple and present continuous
- To introduce the concept of censorship during the First World War

Introduction

This lesson looks at letter-writing during the First World War. It gives students practice identifying and using present simple and present continuous tenses through the medium of letters. The letters help to bring the period alive and also provide a backdrop for a discussion about censorship.

Preparation and materials

If possible, set up a computer and projector before the class in order to show the PowerPoint slide show ('**Letters home photos of trenches**') which accompanies **Task 2 – Life in a trench**.

Procedure

Warmer – Discussion about letter writing (10 mins)

- Write the word 'Letters' on the board in a circle. Draw lines coming out of it, like a mind map and ask students to tell you different reasons for writing a letter.

Suggested answers: thank you letters, letters of condolence when someone is sick or has died, job application letters, letters of complaint, love letters, letters giving a reference.

- Ask the students which kind of letters are the hardest to write
- Ask the students if there are some occasions when they still write letters
- Ask the students if they like writing letters/receiving letters
- Ask the students if they have relatives who work in another country. Ask them how they keep in contact. Ask them if they sometimes write letters, or if they always Skype/email etc.

Task 1 – Quiz about letter writing in the First World War (10 mins)

This short quiz is to introduce students to letter writing in the First World War and raise their awareness of the idea of censorship, which will be explored further in **Tasks 4 and 5**.

- Distribute the handout
- Put students in pairs to discuss the multiple choice questions in **Task 1** and complete the quiz
- When students have finished, go through the answers
- Elicit feedback about the quiz. Ask the students if they were surprised by any of the answers
- Ask them if they would feel comfortable about someone checking their letters before they were sent home.

Answers for Task 1: Quiz about letter writing in the First World War 1.a 2.c 3.c 4.a 5.c
6.b 7.a

Task 2 – Life in a trench (10 mins)

This exercise is to introduce students to conditions in the trenches where letter-writing took place and provides a backdrop for **Task 3 – Dear Albert: Present tense grammar practice**.

- Hand out **Task 2 – Life in a trench**
- Show students the PowerPoint slide show (**'Letters home photos of trenches'**) and tell them to circle the adjectives in the box that would most accurately describe life in a trench
- Check the answers as a whole class.

Suggested answers: noisy, damp, uncomfortable, dirty, dangerous, crowded

- Ask students if they can think of any other adjectives (*smelly, cold in winter, hot in summer*).

Task 3 – 'Dear Albert': Present tense grammar practice (20 mins)

- Ask students to read the letter and decide whether Tom's life is hard (*yes*), and ask them if they think they could manage to live in a trench
- Tell them to read the short grammar presentation and check understanding
- Then ask students to read the letter again and find two sentences which use the present simple and two which use present continuous
- When students have finished, elicit and check answers.

Suggested answers:

Present simple

Example: We wake up early every morning.

I hope you're well.
I'm fine
It's very noisy here.
We don't sleep much at night.
After breakfast we dig new trenches.
After lunch we repair the road.
I feel too tired.

Present Continuous

Example: Are you working hard at school?

Living in a trench is difficult, but I'm making friends.
Right now we're having a rest.
Some of the soldiers are playing football.
I'm not playing today.
Other soldiers are smoking or cleaning their boots.
My friend Sandy is mending his jacket.

Task 4 – Missing words (10 mins)

This exercise gives practice in reading skills and more exposure to present simple and continuous. It also prepares students for **Task 5 – Censoring a letter**.

- Hand out **Task 4 – Missing words**
- Write the verb: *to censor* on the board. Ask students if they know or can guess what *to censor* means (*to change or delete something*). Tell students that letters sent home from the war were always checked for sensitive information. Ask them what sensitive information might mean. (*Anything that might upset/worry those at home or help the enemy*). Explain to students that an officer, or someone in charge, checked, or censored all letters. The officer crossed out any sensitive information, so it could not be read by the soldier's friends or family.

- Ask the students to work with a partner, read the new letter from Tom to Albert and try and match the missing words to the gaps in the text
- Elicit answers.

Suggested answers:

Dear Albert

*Thank you for your letter. Just to let you know I'm well. However there isn't enough food here. Every day we **feel** hungry. Also, there's a lot of snow now. Our boots **don't protect** our feet. Every night our water **freezes** and we can't drink it. Some soldiers **are dying** of cold. We all **miss** home. One of the soldiers is very young. Right now he **is crying** for his family. Please can you ask mother to send me some more socks.*

Love from Tom

Task 5 – Censoring a letter (20 mins)

This exercise allows students to practice their speaking skills and also gives them a hands-on approach to censorship that will help to stimulate discussion during the **Extension Activity**.

- Ask the pairs of students to join with another pair to make a group of four
- Tell them to imagine that they have the job of censoring the third letter from Tom to Albert
- Ask them to read the letter as a group and cross out anything that might upset Albert and his family or help the enemy. They are only allowed to delete five words and so they must decide as a group which five to choose
- When they have finished, ask groups to feedback their decisions to the whole class.

Extension Activity

Class discussion – Ask the students if they think it was fair/unfair to censor Albert's letter. Ask them if they feel guilty about censoring the letter.

Homework

Ask students to imagine that they are a soldier in a trench. Tell them to write a letter home using the present continuous and present simple to describe their everyday routine, feelings and experiences.