

Little Dorrit: Circumlocution Office

Lesson type – reading (with speaking extension)

Level – Upper-Intermediate and above.

Main Aim – To develop skills of reading for gist and detail.

Subsidiary Aim – For students to produce humorous dialogues.

Materials – Sheet with exercises (copy back to back) and Dickens text (ditto).

Time – 90 minutes

Suggested timetable fit - (a) As a humorous end to previous lessons on the topic of government processes/filling in forms/dealing with officialdom (possibly on a business English course).
(b) As a stand-alone lesson.

Procedure

Stage and stage aim(s)	Timing	Interaction	Procedure
Focus on topic (to focus students on topic of obstructive bureaucracy)	10	T – st st – st T - st	Tell students briefly (c. 2 min) about a time when you were obstructed by petty bureaucracy. Invent a time if necessary. Students in groups of c. 4 tell each other about similar episodes. Feedback - ask 2 or 3 students to relate what happened to another member of their group. Try to pick out interesting stories you heard when monitoring the group work.
Pre-teach Vocabulary (to help lighten comprehension load)	10	st – st T - st	Pairs work through exercise 1, guessing meaning from context for words neither knows. Encourage guessing if they really have no idea, to encourage working out meaning from context as a skill. Feedback to check answers. Cover pronunciation (eg by drilling) of any items students are interested in acquiring.
Gist reading (to develop the skill of skimming for main ideas)	5	St st - st T - st	Give (and keep) strict time of 3 min to answer question in ex 2. It is an easy question to answer, and sums up the entire passage. Pairs check quickly. Feedback (answer = 'No').
Detailed reading (to understand the	20	st st - st	Individuals work through exercise 3, referring to text (c. 10 min). Pairs check answers.

reading more fully)		T - st	Feedback, and deal with questions.
Speaking; preparation (for students to personalise the topic and produce language)	25	st-st	Students in groups of 4 or 5 decide on a scenario containing bureaucratic obstruction such as that Clennam faced. Ideas could come from stage 1 of this lesson, or others (applying for a driving license/passport, querying your phone/electricity bill, arranging insurance, almost anything to do with a call centre). Students prepare and rehearse their mini-plays. Teacher helps with ideas/vocabulary/pronunciation tips etc.
Speaking; performance (for students to enjoy their colleagues' production)	20	st - st	Groups take it in turns to perform their mini-plays. To ensure that the rest of the class follows each one (rather than doing last minute rehearsals of their own) set a task. For example 'for each mini-play, what is the person trying to accomplish, and what blocks does he face?'. Feedback, possibly including delayed correction (a focus on intonation is a natural follow up to mini-plays).