

Success and Fame

This double topic deals with success, something we are all keen to have in our lives and fame, something many of us are not. Differences of opinion lead to more discussion so always choose topics that are likely to exploit this, within reason of course.

This lesson was created for Intermediate level students but could be adapted for other levels. It is a two-hour lesson but depending on the students could vary.

Keeping students of any level talking for two hours on one topic doesn't just happen automatically. Even subjects close to their heart or relevant to their lives can run out of steam long before the end of the lesson.

Planning a series of different activities on a single theme helps move a class from short idea-building conversations to more involved discussion or debate in which they have more freedom to express themselves and build their spoken confidence. It also helps break the topic down into more manageable sections.

I normally organise my conversation lessons to take students from short activities in which they build and explore their ideas on a topic, to longer activities allowing free expression of these ideas.

Although I encourage its use, I don't compel students to reproduce language learned in the early part of the class because I am firmly of the opinion that free and open expression is the best way to improve fluency.

Preparation

Make copies of:

- Worksheet A – One copy per pair
- Worksheet B – One copy per pair
- Worksheet C – One for each group of four
- Worksheet D – One copy for each pair
- Pictures of famous people, to suit the class, I recommend 6 to 8
- Names of famous people (try to vary it), maybe two for each student in the class (see Stage 8 for information).

Procedure

Stage 1

Success is ...

- Write this short statement on the board and ask students, working in pairs or small groups to complete the definition according to their own opinions. Monitor and make suggestions where necessary, but only allow four or five minutes maximum for this part.

- Then, working as a group, I take definitions from the class and write them on the board. I also teach more language to suit, although there is no set list. We have a brief discussion about each one, and decide which is the best.

Stage 2

- I tell the class that they are going to read some other people's definitions of success. After pre-teaching the vocabulary I give them a short list of famous quotations (**Worksheet A**) and ask them to make discussion about each in the same pairs or groups, ultimately choosing the ones that most closely reflect their own opinions.
- We have a brief follow up discussion as a group, just to explore what people have said but also so I can see how the group feel about the subject.

Stage 3

- Now we start to reflect about how success is defined in real terms. To do this, I give students a list (**Worksheet B**) of situations in which people have achieved something. Their task is simple in theory, to decide which of the situations are examples of true success, but it's most certainly not all black and white, there are plenty of grey areas (which is of course where students really get chance to talk).
- It can pay to swap students around after the main exercise to compare their answers with other groups, but use your judgement, and remember that it's *not always* helpful for learners to repeat things several times. Nevertheless, I'd always bring the class together to summarise what they'd agreed, and of course I get chance to ask a few questions of my own.

Stage 4

- A chance to shine. Have the class discuss some of their own successes. Remind them that it doesn't have to be saving the world or scoring the winning goal in the world cup... success, as we have seen, is also the little things. But one tip, have them do this part in pairs, modesty can be a very great barrier to group conversation.

Tip: A possible modification to this would be to ask students to list their main successes and rank them in terms of proudest, most difficult to achieve, most useful today and have them compare and discuss their lists after.

Stage 5

- To prepare for the role-plays, we need to explore the idea that success is relative.

One person's success is another person's failure

- I generally write this on the board and ask students to discuss it without introduction or preparation. I monitor and try to make sure students are on the right lines but it doesn't matter too much, it's very open to interpretation.
- When the conversation comes to a natural conclusion, I bring the class together and we compare ideas. To be honest, students usually miss the point here but it's OK, the role-plays are simple enough.

- Put students into fours and explain that they are all successful, in their own eyes. But will the others agree?
- I hand out the role cards (**Worksheet C**) and explain that each of them has reason to believe him/herself successful, but that they must justify it to the others. Not only this, they have to challenge the others' idea of 'successful'. They usually do this very well in ten minutes, after monitoring and making suggestions, I stop the activity when people start running out of ideas, and promptly ask the whole class who they think the most successful people are, and why.
- We discuss this for a few minutes before I introduce the second part of the topic...

Stage 6

- I put a few pictures of super-famous, famous, and maybe not so famous people on the board. (Interestingly, in my experience the most recognised person of all is Bruce Lee, even more than David Beckham.)
- The question is simple and students by now should be well versed in the discussion of success, so it needs no explanation:

Who are these people, and are they successful?

- This shouldn't take too long, I guess it depends who you choose, but I slowly shift the focus away from success now, the remainder of the lesson will be taken up talking about fame.
- When students have finished, I normally don't ask them to summarise what they've said, rather ask them to tell me who the most famous one is.
- Then we talk about the most famous person in their country, and in Britain, and then in the whole world. I don't structure this part of the discussion, there's always plenty to say.

Stage 7

- Hand out the discussion questions (**Worksheet D**) and ask students to make conversation about their answers, in pairs. (I use set questions as a way of getting students focused on a topic, giving them chance to say a lot but without requiring them to invent or create too much, it can be quite a burden to have to do this for two hours).
- Monitor and take part to suit, and then bring the class together again to share answers.

Stage 8

- As a group we talk about famous people, those we admire, those who inspire us, those we resent. We talk about those who we think are good role models and those whose behaviour is sometimes brought into question. Then we talk about those we think are important and those who are just 'professional objects of curiosity'. This leads into the final activity, *balloon debates*, which is a great way to round off the lesson.
- Most teachers are familiar with balloon debates. For those who are not, the idea is that certain characters are in a troubled hot air balloon that must lose some weight to avoid crashing. I.e. one passenger. Each person must argue their case, why they should not be 'thrown out'. (You may prefer an alternative where something a little less gruesome is at stake.)

- So I introduce the situation by means of a picture on the board and some exaggerated acting, put students in fours, hand each one a famous person's name and tell them to debate for their lives. Why are they important, why should they stay in the balloon? After one debate has done its course, swap names among the students (not within the same groups) and have them do another one.
- I monitor, but only intervene when absolutely necessary.

Ideas for follow on activities or lessons

- Students make a list of five famous people they admire and discuss their choices with other students
- Students design their own celebrity
- Students write and host chat show type interviews with famous people, ideally those from the balloon debate
- Students familiar with the UK honours system award MBEs and knighthoods etc to people in their own country, they could even role play being the Queen at the awards ceremony (just a thought)
- The class plays a game called snowball fight. In this, students write the names of five famous people they admire on a piece of paper. They don't write their own name. Then they screw their papers up and throw them round the room at each other for thirty seconds. Then they pick one up and they try to identify the person who wrote it, making conversation along the way.
- Students write to real life celebrities
- Students all become very famous and give their teacher their autograph.