



Sharing the Power of Learning

Conversation Curriculum

Small Talk

Learning Objective:

1. Students will demonstrate that they know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate topics for small talk in the US.
2. Students will initiate at least three brief small talk conversations with classmates using prompts provided.

Before class: Review the lesson plan and make sure you have enough conversation starter strips cut for each student.

- Write the following question and list on the board:

What is small talk? Are these topics good for small talk with your co-workers, strangers or new friends?

- *the Twins*
- *your health problems*
- *your home town*
- *who you will be voting for*
- *your children*
- *the weather*
- *traffic*
- *books*
- *the latest news*
- *your weekend plans*
- *how much money you make*
- *your religious beliefs*
- *a new movie*

Warm-up activity (15 minutes): As learners arrive, get them into pairs.

- Ask pairs to read the topics on the board with their partners.
- Ask them to write down two lists: appropriate and inappropriate topics for small talk.

I do/We do activity (15 minutes):

- Go over any vocabulary/general questions from the list.
- Ask for a volunteer to come to the board to circle topics that are appropriate for small talk in the US and place an “x” by topics that are inappropriate for small talk in the US. If they are appropriate topics, ask how to talk about them.
- Choose two appropriate small talk topics and model a small talk conversation with a student volunteer. Keep the conversations under one minute.

They do activity (20 minutes):

- Hand out one conversation starter strip to each student.
- Go around the room and have each student read their assigned setting aloud (i.e., “at a party”)
- Explain to students that they must mingle and begin small talk conversations with their classmates. Students will tell their classmate what their setting is and choosing one small talk prompt from their list. To keep the conversations brief, explain that you will clap your hands at one minute and the students must switch roles.
- Continue until students have each initiated at least three conversations, going on if time allows.
- Ask for a student pair to model a conversation they tried.

Journal Writing (10 minutes): Learners will write in their dialog journals about one of the four following topics:

- Respond to the last entry (i.e. continue the dialog)
- Introduce yourself to the teacher (for new students)
- Is small talk a part of your culture?
- Do you feel comfortable using small talk? Where do you use it the most (school, work, church, the grocery store?)

Small Talk: Conversation Starters

Talking about the weather	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What a beautiful day!• Can you believe how warm it's been?• They're predicting 2-4 inches of snow tomorrow.• I'd give anything to be in Florida right now.• Cold enough for you?• We couldn't ask for a nicer day, could we?• How about this weather?
Talking about current events	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Did you see that story on the news?• Can you believe the all the talk about stadium construction?• I heard the light rail is finally coming to the neighborhood.• How about those Vikings? Do you think they're going to go all the way?
At work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any big plans this weekend?• How long have you worked here?• Wow- that was a busy lunch shift!• You look like you could use a break!
At a party	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• So, how do you know Jenny?• Did you get any of that spicy dip? It's delicious!• Having a good time tonight?• What a gorgeous house!• I just love your dress. Can I ask where you got it?
Waiting at bus stop/in line	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I can't believe the wait!• There must be a lot of traffic.• It looks like we are going to be here a while, huh?• I'll have to remember not to come here on Mondays.• How long have you been waiting?