



So many forms of text surround us in daily life—store signs and package labels, road maps and VCR manuals. You can take some of this everyday text out of its usual setting and bring it into the classroom to use in learning activities. The following are just a few of the ways you can do this.

The Phone Book: One Heck of a Thick Textbook

The phone book may not be an edge-of-your-seat thriller, but you can find a lot of good stuff inside, especially if you're trying to help students get better acquainted with the city or town where they live.

► The Local Scene

Many phone books contain sections with all sorts of information about the local area. For example, you might find:

- descriptions of points of interest, including historic sites. Discuss with students what they can learn about local history just from reading these descriptions.
- a listing of library locations. Help students figure out which libraries are closest to their homes.
- a city map. Practice map reading with students. Ask them to write directions for getting from one part of the city to another. Teach the spelling of street names.
- diagrams of local performance centers and stadiums. Check out where the best seats are. Ask questions based on diagram details. Examples: What sections of the arena border State Street? If you're sitting in section 7, where's the nearest door?

► The Nitty-Gritty

Of course, it's helpful to make sure students are well acquainted with the ordinary yet essential ways to use the phone book. You might try preparing a phone book scavenger hunt. Make a list of questions that students must go to the phone book to answer. You might ask questions like: What's the phone number of your bank? What's the name of the first person listed under C in the Residence Listings? How many companies are listed under *Flag Poles* in the Yellow Pages?

► Charting Information

Have students make a simple chart to organize information they will gather through phone calls to businesses. Plan to have them call five local hotels. (If students have an actual need for other information, they can call appropriate businesses instead of hotels.) Ask students to make a grid. They should write the hotel name at the top of the first column. They can label the other columns with such headings as *Phone Number*, *Address*, *Room Cost Per Night*, *Checkout Time*, *Swimming Pool*, and *Cable TV*. As they make their phone calls, they can fill in details for each hotel.

Plenty of Everyday Choices

Remember, you have many sources of text to choose from. What are your students interested in? Consider basing lessons on:

- street signs
- bills
- receipts
- owner manuals for cars, VCRs, and other equipment
- brochures on banking services
- information you print from websites
- newspapers
- travel brochures
- maps
- catalogs
- labels
- junk mail
- directions on product packaging
- ads
- menus

Signs Around Town

Take photos of billboards, store signs, and other kinds of signs along a route your student frequently travels. You might want to give your student a disposable camera to take photos of signs that have particularly attracted his or her interest. Make sure the signs are photographed at a distance close enough to allow you to read them later.

Get the film developed and bring the photos to class. Teach any new vocabulary. Use the photos as word cards. Pick out words in the photos to use for working on sounds, blends, or other aspects of language.

Newspapers

The newspaper is a constantly changing, always up-to-date teaching tool. Here are just a few ideas for how to use it for instruction.

► Writing Creative Classifieds

Have students open to the real estate classified section of the newspaper. Together, read several ads for houses or apartments. Make a list of abbreviations used, and after each abbreviation, write the full word. Then ask students to write a rental ad for their dream home.

You can do the same sort of activity using personal ads if your students are comfortable with that. They could write personal ads for themselves and for their ideal mate. Or they could write a personal ad for one of the newsmakers mentioned in an article elsewhere in the newspaper.

► **Organizing News by Topic**

Before meeting with students, cut out stories or other items that clearly belong in one section or another of the newspaper. Make a whole stack. Keep a copy of the index that lists sections of the newspaper; have students use this as a reference. In class, ask students to go through the stack of items and categorize them by section. This builds reading comprehension and critical thinking skills, and also familiarizes students with where they can find certain kinds of information in the newspaper.

► **Following the Structure of Newswriting**

Explain that the first one or two paragraphs of a standard news story are known as the lead. Point out that the lead tries to cover the “Five W’s and H”: *who* did something, *what* the person or group did, *where* it happened, *when* it happened, *why* it happened, and *how* it happened. (Often, however, details about why and how something happened aren’t addressed until later in a story.) With students, look closely at specific leads to see which details are addressed.

Then have students write the words *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how* on separate lines on a piece of paper. After each word, students should list an appropriate detail about some event in their lives. For example, after *who* a student might write her own name. After *what*, the student might write *started a new job*.

Next, have students use this information to write their own lead. If they want to, they can add a few more paragraphs giving additional details and create a full story.