

AMNESTY

Level: Intermediate +
Aim: a speaking activity with emphasis on oral fluency; students give reasons for releasing people from prison
Language point: lexical chunks to give reasons

Warmer

Play hangman with the word Amnesty. If the students get the word before you finish the hangman, explain that he has been given amnesty. Do the students know what it means? Explain that in some countries after an election or a war the government offers amnesty to prisoners. Does anything like that happen in their country? Has there ever been an amnesty in their country?

Before going on to the next stage, if you have more than ten people in your class, divide them into groups of five or six.

Stage One

Write on the board: NEW PRESIDENT OFFERS AMNESTY! Explain that a new president has been elected and as a gesture of goodwill wants to release some prisoners. She has called a meeting of her advisors (the class) to decide which prisoners should be released. The president has provided each group of advisors with a list of potential prisoners. She wants her advisors to recommend which SIX prisoners should be released from jail.

Stage Two

Distribute the lists and tell the groups that they have ten minutes (or whatever time limit you choose) to decide who will be released. They must discuss each case and be prepared to give reasons at the end. They must do this IN ENGLISH.

While students do the task, circulate and take note of any interesting language or mistakes.

Stage Three

Conduct a short correction slot, highlighting some common mistakes on the board and asking students to correct them. Now tell the groups that they have to present their choices and give reasons. Give them the following language to help:

In view of the fact...
 The main reason why..
 Due to...
 Seeing as how...

... Because of this...
 ... On account of this...
 ... That's the reason why...

Stage Four

Students present their decisions to the class. The class as a whole could vote afterwards, or if you (the teacher) have decided to be autocratic and take the role of the president, well then you decide based on the best arguments!

Possible Follow Up

This speaking lesson could possibly be followed up by a writing lesson. Instruct the students to write a formal letter regarding their decision (using the language they have learnt) for the Office of the President.



Memo

To: Amnesty Committee Advisors
From: The Office of The President
Re: List of Prisoners

Note: To preserve the prisoner's identity from the press, names have been withheld from this memo.

Here follows a list of the nine prisoners up for a possibility of amnesty. All are considered as very little risk to society. Please inform the President of your final decision.

Number 1 is a 20-year-old student. He broke into the police's computer system and tried to erase his previous criminal record (some parking tickets). He was also charged with fraud after police discovered he had hacked into a pizza company's computer and ordered himself free pizzas for over a year. He is serving a five-year sentence.

Number 2 is a 55-year-old engineer. He was charged with manslaughter after he hit and killed a child while driving drunk. He has no previous criminal record. He is serving a ten-year sentence.

Number 3 is a 30-year-old mother of two. She was charged with drug dealing when police found half a kilogram of marijuana in her apartment. She says it was for personal use, but drug laws are very strict in this country. She is serving a five-year sentence.

Number 4 is a 24-year-old student and activist. He was arrested during an anti-globalisation protest and charged with terrorism. He is a leader of a non-violent social movement and did not participate directly in any violent acts during his protests. He is serving a three-year sentence.

Number 5 is a 40-year-old businessman. He was charged with fraud when police discovered that he had stolen over \$2 million from his company using a false system of accounting. He is serving a ten-year sentence.

Number 6 is an unemployed woman. She was arrested for stealing food from a supermarket. This was not the first time that she had stolen food, and she had been warned. She is serving an eight-year sentence.

Number 7 is a prisoner of war. He was taken prisoner during the last war with the country's neighbours six years ago. He was a marine and engineer and was responsible for bombing a small village in the mountains. He says he was following orders. The two countries are now at peace. He is serving a twenty-year sentence.

Number 8 is a landlord. He was arrested for keeping a block of flats in very dirty, and some cases dangerous conditions. He was also renting the apartments to illegal immigrants and charging a lot of money for them. He is serving a seven-year sentence.

Number 9 is a politician. She was a leading member of the Ultra political party, an extreme group who believed that criminals should be executed and immigrants expelled from the country. The Ultra party is very weak now. She was arrested for stealing party funds and is serving a ten year jail sentence.