

Lesson plan 57: Free!

Language

Idioms

Level

Intermediate (equivalent to CEF level B1–B2)

Comment

This lesson is about three different internet-based networks which encourage people to do things free of charge. It allows students to engage in an up-to-date social issue and to become aware of common idioms.

How to use the lesson

- 1 Write up on the board the common saying, *The best things in life are free* and ask the students to discuss it in small groups. After a few minutes, ask them for some reasons for or against – eg *When things are free, no one values them* or *You can't put a price on family and friends*.
- 2 Give out the worksheet. Students read the text to complete exercise 1. Encourage them to read quickly to improve their skimming skills and also to use their imagination to match the paragraphs to the correct title. If necessary, teach them the meaning of *couch*. In feedback, consider asking students to summarise the main purpose of each of the organisations. If students ask about the idioms in the text, encourage them to guess from context and tell them you'll be dealing with them later.
- 3 Exercise 2 gives detailed reading practice. Encourage students to underline in the text where they found the answer, so that in feedback, they can explain their answers.
- 4 Exercise 3 highlights a number of common idioms included in the text (in the same way as lesson 55: Junk Mail highlights phrasal verbs). Do a couple of examples together and encourage students to copy the phrase in the infinitive form, using *your* if a personal pronoun is required (as in question 1). Use these first examples to explain what an idiom is. Ask the students why *find your feet* is an idiom (because the literal meaning of the words is different from the meaning that it expresses). In feedback, if you wish, ask students if there are any idioms in their language that can be used to express some of the meanings in exercise 3. Students may like to know that 'the sixty-four thousand dollar question' idiom comes from an old television game show – sometimes people also say 'million-dollar question' – even idioms have inflation!
- 5 Exercise 4 gives the students the chance to consolidate their knowledge of the new idioms through a personalised context. To make it more challenging, students could try to complete exercise 4 with exercise 3 covered up, so that they have to try and remember the idioms.
- 6 Exercise 5 gives the students personalised speaking practice in which they have further consolidation of the new vocabulary. As with any personalisation questionnaire, it's a good idea to remind students of phrases they can use if they prefer not to answer, such as *To be honest, I'd rather not say*. Encourage students to respond naturally to answers, using phrases such as *Really?* etc and to ask relevant follow-up questions, such as *Why do you say that?* It may be a good idea to demonstrate by asking students to ask you some of the questions.

- 7** Ask the students to discuss these questions in small groups. As an alternative, or a follow-up, you could play the 'Giving' game. Each student writes down on a paper, a city they would like to visit (if you wish, you could specify the country or continent), two cities where they have homes (they can imagine this!), three things they would be happy to give away and three things they would really give an arm and a leg for and finally one skill they can offer and two skills they would really appreciate help with. The students then mingle trying to find people who can help them. If they find a match, for example, someone who has a home in a place where they want to stay, they sit down and make arrangements. When it's over, they can report back and the class can, for instance, decide who's been most 'giving'.
- 8** For homework, students could find out more about the organisations through their websites and report back to the class on what they found. If they enjoyed the focus on idioms, they may enjoy following up with the idiom tasks from the MacMillan dictionary blog (see *Related websites* below).

Answer key

1

1 para 4

2 para 3

3 para 2

2

1 T

2 F (they can, but there's nothing in the text about having to)

3 F (Freecycle does this)

4 F (it is not about exchanging services, but about people freely offering their services without necessarily receiving anything in return)

5 F (not everything has much monetary value, which means that it has some)

6 T

3

1 find your feet

9 know your stuff

2 give the lowdown

10 take (something) for granted

3 pay through the nose

11 (would give) their right arm for

4 what's in it for (somebody)

12 the sixty-four-thousand dollar question

5 in a nutshell

13 red tape

6 on your doorstep

14 part with your hard-earned cash

7 out of the blue

15 a win-win (situation)

8 draw the line (at ...)

4

1 on your doorstep / out of the blue

6 for granted

2 a nutshell

7 the line

3 through the nose

8 out of the blue

4 the lowdown

9 their stuff

5 your feet

10 their right arm for

Related websites

The following websites might be useful, for either yourself or your students.

<http://www.freecycle.org/>

<http://justforthe loveofit.org>

<http://www.couchsurfing.org>

<http://www.macmillandictionaryblog.com/in-search-of-fluency> (exercises on idioms)