English Language Learning Program Newsletter

July/August 2024

Upcoming Tutor Event

What makes an effective language lesson? How do you tailor a lesson to a learner's goals? What's the best way to correct students' mistakes? How can we help students practice conversation while also teaching them vocabulary, grammar, and more?

These are some of the questions that we will explore in an upcoming event for ELL tutors, featuring two special guests joining us from abroad: Camila Meireles, a Portuguese teacher from Brazil, and Paola Martinez, a Spanish teacher from Colombia. Both teach on a platform called italki, where language learners can book online lessons with teachers from around the world. Camila has taught over 8,000 lessons to over 500 students on italki, and Paola has taught nearly 10,000 lessons to nearly 400 students. Both are outstanding teachers, with a five-star rating and numerous excellent reviews.

This event will take place on Monday, July 29, at 7:00 p.m. on Zoom. You can sign up here. I hope to see you then!

Learner Profile

Dalit came to the United States from Israel in 2021 because of her husband's job. She is an engineer, working for an Israeli company on water desalination projects, including some in the United States. She has been meeting with her tutor, Beth, for about two years. (Dalit, left, is pictured above with Beth.) She applied to the ELL Program because she wanted to be able to communicate better and accomplish "basic stuff in English," such as talking to her children's teachers and making doctor's appointments. "When you are in a new place, you have challenges of speaking and how to manage the daily life for yourself and for your family," she explains.

She and Beth started out with reading comprehension exercises, but Dalit realized that they were not what she was looking for, because the topics were "far away from my life and my needs. The questions were not helping with my daily challenges." Since then, they have found reading material of greater interest, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee and *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus. (They have also watched the movie and miniseries adaptations of these books.) As they read, they discuss unfamiliar vocabulary and other things that Dalit doesn't understand. In addition, they chat about their weeks and the challenges that she has had; for example, they discuss her children's experiences in school, and Beth gives advice about how to help them. "She is helping me a lot," Dalit says. "I feel like she is kind of mentor for myself."

Dalit thinks that tutors should try hard to understand their students' needs and tailor their lessons accordingly — not just use a generic set of materials. "There are a lot of English books that you can bring and you can practice, but maybe it's not what is needed," she explains. She likes the fact that Beth pushes her to do things beyond what she is already good at: "She find where is my weakness, and she's trying to practice there." Overall, Dalit feels that Beth is not only a creative teacher, but a dear friend. "I deeply appreciate Beth's effort, and I am very happy that I had the option to be part of this program."

Take a Virtual Vacation

Want to explore the Great Wall of China? Drive through the streets of Moscow? Take a stroll down Copacabana Beach? Check out the Taj Mahal? These are all possible with a website called Virtual Vacation, which features video footage from cities and historic places around the world.

The videos could serve as prompts for conversation or writing; you might have your student describe what they see or explain the differences between the scenes in the videos and life in the United States. If your student is from one of the dozens of countries represented in the videos, you could have them explain some of the signage or cultural aspects that may be unfamiliar to you. There is also a fun guessing game in which players try to identify where in the world a video was filmed.

Two other online tools that you could use to explore spots around the globe with a student are Google Maps and Google Earth. Both make use of Google Street View, which consists of billions of photos taken on streets around the world. Type in your student's hometown or the address where they used to live and have them show you around while telling you all about it!

Grammar Corner

This is the third in a series of mini lessons about common grammar issues among English learners.

Why do learners sometimes say things like "the Brazil" or "the China"? Why do they make sentences like "I live in USA"? These errors could be due to first-language interference; in Portuguese, for example, the article "o" or "a" is used before country names ("o Brasil," "a China," and so on). There could also be confusion due to the fact that while we don't use "the" (the definite article) before most country names, we do use it with some, like *the* United States. So what's the rule? Put simply, for most country names, "the" is incorrect. However, we use "the" with country names that end in "s" (the Philippines, the Maldives, the Netherlands) or that contain words like "republic" or "kingdom" (the Dominican Republic, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic).

I would tell an English learner that we don't use "the" in front of country names, except for "the United States" (as well as "the U.S." and "the USA") and a few others. Here are some ways to help your learner practice this:

- Have them read a news article and identify examples of country names with or without "the."
- Create a fill-in-the-blank exercise in which they have to decide whether to write "the" before country names in a variety of sentences.
- Have them write a paragraph about countries that they would like to visit, using "the" appropriately.
- Do a verbal drill in which you name a country and they have to complete a sentence, such as: "Last year I visited _____."

Program News

- Due to our growing waiting list – currently about 200 learners – we have decided to put a pause on applications from students interested in having a tutor. (As you may recall, we put a pause on applications about two years ago, and it lasted about seven months.) Interested students can fill out this form or a hard copy at the library to be notified when we are accepting applications again. New students will still be able to participate in our group classes, and we are still accepting applications from interested volunteers!
- A new document containing program expectations has been shared with all active volunteers. If you did not receive it, please let me know.
- Due to construction taking place at the library this summer, the study rooms on the third floor will be inaccessible from July 29 until August 23, and the ELL office will be relocated. The ELL collection will remain accessible.
- You may have heard that NewMo, the City of Newton's ride-sharing service, has been replaced by GoGo Newton. This link is on the ELL website, along with some others, in the "Helpful Links" section.

Until next time,
Andrew

Andrew Shapira
ELL and Literacy Coordinator
Newton Free Library
330 Homer Street
Newton, MA 02459
617-796-1364
newtonfreelibrary.net/ell