

BT All Talk

CONTACT: BT.COM/ALLTALK
REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

A learned friend of mine and I were chatting about language last week and I knew he would at some point upstage me with one of his gems. It didn't take long. He said, in an unnecessarily loud voice, 'My dear boy, language is driven by an on-going, iterative process of self-referential contextualisation.' A spontaneous response on my part wasn't forthcoming but a colleague kindly stepped in and knocked the bails off his wicket with, 'Brian, you do talk utter crap sometimes'. I smiled and marvelled at the beauty of language and how we use it and interact with it.

I don't think there has been a better time in schools actually to learn about spoken language and engage students in its dynamism, especially with some fabulous resources a click or two away – such as BT's all-singing, all-dancing All Talk.

What is it? All Talk is a 15-unit multimedia resource for learning about spoken language and interaction in everyday life, designed for teachers to be used as a stimulus for discussion, role-play and reflection. It achieves this with aplomb and absolutely guarantees to



get tongues wagging in every classroom.

Once you register on the All Talk website you get access to a whopping workbook that gives you tools galore for planning lessons, activities and homework so students can get to grips with how we interact with each other and how oral language is used. There are 116 pages to get explore and plenty to go at. It includes links to 35 You-Tube videos of young people chatting about language from their experience, and under the spotlight you will find talk about slang, regional accents, multilingualism and British Sign Language. All Talk also examines communication by computer, mobile phones and social networking sites. Furthermore, the website contains 200 pages of extra information, videos and links to other sites that you can use to make your lessons even more exciting.

The workbook units are organised into five main areas: You Talk, Offline/online Talk, Street Talk, School Talk and Public Talk. Each section is packed full of talking points and activities and you are bound to gravitate towards some more than others. I found the You Talk section absorbing, especially discussions focusing on the unique language fingerprints we leave behind in every conversation. The web-extras here are well worth checking out, particularly forensic linguistics and how individual language patterns can help solve crimes. Who would have thought a misplaced full stop on a forged suicide note spotted by a word sleuth would trap a murderer? In The Public Talk section you cannot fail to be inspired by the art of performance poetry and the work of the Poetry Society's Slambassadors UK especially Jamal Msebele's truly brilliant 'Bees' poem. John Cooper Clarke would be a welcome addition here. Trouble Talk was extremely interesting, because it shows very clearly how key words and phrases can shape an interaction in a tense situation. The videos offer the perfect springboard for similar drama-based scenarios and an exploration of how language can shape success or failure.

All Talk is a triumph for immersing students in exploratory talk. The student activities are creative, language rich, thought provoking

VERDICT:
Tried and tested
 BT has carved out a bit of a reputation for funding free educational aids that are top-notch and All Talk stars if there were a Michelin Guide to gratis English resources.

and challenging. The teacher guides and notes are clear, concise and easy to follow and adapt. There aren't many resources that are this interactive, dynamic and effortlessly inspiring (although it did get me thinking – is dissecting our language a barrier to effective communication? Shut up, Brian...)

You've probably gathered that All Talk is a 'mint' resource but I think one thing is missing and that is a link to the classic 'Tricky Linguistics' sketch from the groundbreaking comedy show 'A Bit of Fry and Laurie'. Dig out the sketch on You Tube and delight in the words of Mr Fry as he tells us what language is to him. LOL.

When it comes to free resources you very often get all icing and no cake. Not from BT though; this is proper good. Find the website or dig around your department for one of the 5,000 free copies that BT sent to all state secondary schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in October 2011 and plan your lessons with confidence.

But talk isn't everything. On holiday in Scotland I stumbled across a café called The Wee Blether. As I sat there with a frothy coffee eavesdropping on people's conversations, a van pulled into the car park sporting the slogan 'Does my broadband look big in this?' A knowing teenager on a neighbouring table read it out and asked his mum what it meant. She gave him a basilisk stare that could knock a wall down. Sometimes non-verbal communication says it all.

ART OF THE MATTER

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