

ESOL Level 5

Listening to StoryCorps

The following information is from the StoryCorps website.

<http://www.storycorps.net/about>

StoryCorps is an independent nonprofit project whose mission is to honor and celebrate one another's lives through listening. By recording the stories of our lives with the people we care about, we experience our history, hopes, and humanity. Since 2003, tens of thousands of everyday people have interviewed family and friends through StoryCorps. Each conversation is recorded and archived for generations to come at the Library of Congress. StoryCorps is one of the largest oral history projects of its kind, creating a growing portrait of who we really are as Americans.

Using StoryCorps stories in Level 5.

I chose these stories for a few reasons. They are short, self-contained, and interesting. They offer portraits of a wide variety of Americans. They include different accents and rhythms of speech. They include conversations, which are typically challenging for non-native speakers.

These can be used in various ways. Each story provides opportunities for global listening, discrete listening, and inferencing. The stories also provide a great practice for summarizing and can serve as a springboard to conversation and writing topics

I have listened to many of the stories in the collection and chose a group that I thought most appropriate and interesting for our students. However, stories are being added continually, and there are surely other stories in the collection that would work as well. I encourage teachers to think about other ways you could bring the idea of StoryCorps into the classroom. For example, students could think about someone they could tell a story to, or hear a story from, and then go out and have that conversation. I think this would make a good project for a spring quarter, if you had a core of students who had been in level five since fall and were familiar with the concept.

If you access the stories through the NPR website, there is a link to contact the person. If a story was particularly interesting or moving to your class, students could write to the storyteller.

If you access the stories through the NPR website, you will find a short summary, not a transcript, of the story. You will also find a picture of the storyteller. Each story is

introduced by a National Public Radio host. The host gives some general information about the StoryCorps project and the particular story we are going to hear.

After using these stories for a few years, I have decided I prefer to access the stories directly through the StoryCorps website, because the NPR introduction makes the summarizing too easy. But I encourage you to check out both ways. If you are searching for these stories on the NPR website, type the title of the story between quotation marks.

All the materials have been edited to be used with the stories directly from the website. That is, there are no questions that rely on information provided from the NPR host's introduction.

Activities:

I typically have the students work in groups of 4 or 5. I play the story a few times. They are only listening for the overall main point. In their groups, they write a summarizing sentence and put it on the board. We talk about them in terms of content, then grammar.

On subsequent listening, each table is assigned one of two of the questions to listen for. If there is an inference question, I usually have all the tables try it. The group writes the answer on the board in a complete sentence. We go over them together checking first for content, then for grammar.

I have included some thematically related conversation/writing questions at the end of each story. I like to use them first as conversation starters, then as writing prompts.

At the end of the quarter, on one of our last days in the lab, I typically prepare a story as a listening assessment. The students access it from the website, and can listen to it as many times as they want as they try and answer the questions.