

1. INTRODUCTION	Newspaper articles Using photos to introduce the topic
2. VOCABULARY	Latest news coverage: economic downturn, bushfires and floods
3. READING & COMPREHENSION	News articles: Stimulus package & bushfires
4. CONVERSATION	News stories and current affair questions
5. WRITING	Writing about news stories: Behind the news

As the news has been occupied with stories about the current economic situation, floods in Queensland and fires in Victoria that may impact on our students in some way, it is important that they understand what is happening around them. You can help them to do this by teaching them some of the basic vocabulary relating to these events to slowly build up their knowledge. However, please be aware that reading the newspaper or watching the news is a very high level task because of the language often used. So please explain this to your student and don't expect them to master this skill quickly.

Introductory Exercise

Take along to your lesson news stories with pictures that use simple vocabulary (try the Daily telegraph or Sunday papers). Introduce vocabulary relating to the picture and headlines and discuss what is happening in the pictures. This is a good introductory exercise for all levels of students. If your student is intermediate to advanced, you can then discuss the article with them.

All exercises below can be used for different levels, so just pick and choose what your student may be capable of. For beginner students the lesson may involve just looking at news photos, introducing basic vocabulary and short sentences around the news stories. For intermediate and advanced students you should be able to cover all the activities.

Vocabulary

Practice the pronunciation of the words below and ask your student to look up the definitions in the dictionary or explain the meanings within context.

economy	bushfire	floods
crisis	fireman	disaster
recession	blaze	victims
interest rates	death toll	donation
reserve bank	arson	volunteer

Reading

Stimulus Package

"Nathan Bazley" reporting (24 February 2009) from 'Behind the News'

The world economic crisis has stretched into the new year and doesn't even look close to being over. Many countries are suffering, including Australia.

But the government has announced a pretty interesting way of helping us ride through this tough period. They're giving a lot of us a whole lot of cash... and they want us to spend up big!

But is it as good as it sounds? The global financial crisis has wilted our economy, leaving it looking pretty droopy. But a plan to give it a helping hand has been announced. It's called a 'stimulus package'. When an economy stops growing it's called a RECESSION and that's not a good thing!

So what food will get the economy growing again? Well, we feed the economy cash, and lots of it!

It all works on the theory that if we're given more money we'll go on a spending spree. That will increase sales for shops and other businesses, which will make more jobs, which will help the economy to grow.

The package is worth around 42 billion dollars and nearly 10 million Australians will get a slice. People earning under \$100,000 a year will get as much as 900 dollars each. Some farmers, parents and students will also get a share.

All this free money and spending sounds really great, but there is a downside. If you keep giving out more and more and more and more money, you'll eventually go into debt. And the government is estimating the package will push us into the red 22 billion dollars!

It's for that reason that the opposition is against the idea. They say that it's too much debt for the country to handle, because the government and taxpayers will have to pay it back at some point.

Also - some critics think the plan might not work because most people will just save the money instead of spending it right now.

The government has admitted that they're not even sure if this very expensive plan will work but they say this economic crisis is so bad that we have to do something. And we're not the only ones. England, USA and many other countries are all doing the same thing and holding their breath for the results.

Comprehension

Ask your student if they understood what the author was comparing the economy to (a wilted plant). If not, explain this analogy, pictures may help.

1. What was the article about?
2. How is the government going to help us?
3. What is a recession?
4. What food will get the economy going again?
5. If we're given more money what will we do?
6. What will make more jobs?
7. How much will people earning under \$100,000 receive?
8. What is the downside?
9. What do some critics think?
10. What other countries are doing something for their economy?

There are many colloquial phrases used in this article, underlined below. Ask your student if they understand the meanings, if not provide explanations for them.

1. But the government has announced a pretty interesting way of helping us ride through this tough period.
2. they want us to spend up big!
3. The global financial crisis has wilted our economy, leaving it looking pretty droopy.
4. But a plan to give it a helping hand has been announced
5. So what food will get the economy growing again?
6. It all works on the theory that if we're given more money we'll go on a spending spree.
7. Some farmers, parents and students will also get a share.
8. And the government is estimating the package will push us into the red 22 billion dollars!
9. England, USA and many other countries are all doing the same thing and holding their breath for the results.

Bushfire Disaster

"Nathan Bazley" reporting (17 February 2009) from 'Behind the News'

Australia has been shocked by the worst natural disaster in the nation's history. The massive bushfires that ripped through Victoria killed at least 180 people but that number is expected to increase as hundreds of burnt buildings and cars are searched. Thousands of people have also been left without anywhere to live and have lost all their clothes and possessions.

Fire - it's one of our most useful tools and a part of daily life. But out of control it can instantly become one of the deadliest forces on the planet.

The weekend from hell started with dire warnings from fire-fighters and the weather bureau. They were expecting high winds, dry air and record temperatures. All in all, they feared that if any fires started, they would be impossible to fight. And they were...

Thirty-one fires ripped through the state, destroying whole towns in minutes. Residents in their path were given little or no warning of how bad it would be. It was easily Australia's worst natural disaster in history.

There are a few factors that can make a small fire turn into something like Saturday's destructive blaze. The weather is a big one. On the day of the fires, there was 47 degree heat in Victoria, along with very dry, but very powerful winds. The heat made fuel - like wood and leaves - burn much easier.

Wind pushed flames through the bush at more than 120 kilometres an hour and blew burning embers up to 15 km from the fire itself.

Another factor that made this fire so devastating is the areas that it hit. Much of the parts of Victoria that were burnt are hilly and covered in eucalyptus trees. This also helped the fire move so quickly - fires travel much faster uphill and eucalypts are highly flammable because of the oil in their leaves.

Most of the people living in these areas are nestled right in amongst those trees and hills. For many, there wasn't anything they could do.

Some sheltered in their houses, others decided to evacuate. Some found themselves in cars, or the middle of nowhere. But all said the heat that came off this fire was like nothing they had ever experienced.

Comprehension

Ask your student to underline any new vocabulary and look up the definitions in the dictionary or explain the meanings within context.

1. How many people did the bushfires kill?
2. Thousands of people have been left without
3. What can fire become when it is out of control?
4. What were the fire fighters and weather bureau expecting?
5. What was the temperature on the day the fires started?
6. What kind of trees were in the areas that were burnt? Why are they flammable?
7. Do fires travel faster up hill or down hill?
8. The that came off this fire was like nothing they had ever experienced.

Conversation

Ask your student to look through a newspaper and find a story or photograph that interests them. Ask them to tell you about it and what they know about the issue. Alternatively, they can tell you about a news story that they heard on the radio or watched on television. If they find this too difficult you can have a discussion about current affairs using some of the questions below to guide you:

1. What do you know about the bushfires in Victoria in February 2009?
2. Do you know how many people died in the bushfires? Why do you think they died?
3. How are bush fires started?
4. Do you know anyone who has been affected by a fire? What happened?
5. What type of natural disasters are common in your home country? Are bushfires common?
6. What do you know about the floods in Queensland in early 2009?
7. Where is Queensland on an Australian map? Have you been there?
8. Is flooding common in your home country? Have you ever been involved in a flood? What happened?
9. What do you know about the global economic crisis?
10. How have you or your family been affected by Australia's economic situation?
11. How might you be impacted in the future?
12. Has anyone you know been made redundant? What happened?
13. What is a recession?
14. What are interest rates?

Writing Practice

For homework ask your student to find a newspaper article on one of the topics above. Ask them to read it and write down any vocabulary they are not sure of. Then ask them to write in their own words a small paragraph of what the article was about.

Alternatively, your student could watch the news and write a small paragraph of what the story was about, or even just the words they understood. Your student may only be able to comprehend a small amount to begin with but ask them to keep practicing as it will build up their listening skills and vocabulary.

'Behind the news' on ABC is a useful program aimed at school children that covers news stories in simpler language. If your student is able to watch this, or you are able to tape it for them it may be easier for them than watching mainstream news.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/btn/>