

Combining Teaching Language and Culture Using a YouTube Video (or Getting to Know New York a New Way)

As teachers, we always search for ways to make our lessons interesting. We sometimes go to great lengths just to maintain pupils' interest in our classes.

Well, culture can be used to heighten the interest and motivation of our pupils. In the prism of culture, language classes instantly become exciting and educational experiences.

In our technologically advanced and globalised world there are a lot of exciting ways to bring the world into our classrooms. Using online resources we can add value to our lessons, and these resources make it possible to learn language from music videos, commercials, news, inspiring talks, cartoons, and more. Video offers our pupils excellent stimulation of the senses. It is the next best thing to spending some time in the country of interest. A few minutes of it can show so much culture, our pupils can feel like they're strolling down the streets of New York, Sydney, Seattle, or London, watching the whole city pass them by.

New York City on video

Last March, while teaching about New York I decided to search YouTube for interesting ways to bring textbook pages to life and I stumbled across two interesting videos:

"New York City Walking Tour by New York Tour 1 – Part 1: Midtown Manhattan" and "New York City walking Tour by New York Tour 1 – Part 2: Downtown Manhattan".

It is important to say that these videos weren't filmed for the purposes of language learning. Instead they are authentic material.

Exposing my pupils to this authentic material had two positive effects.

First, it gave my pupils an insight into how language is used on a day-to-day basis by native speakers. It took the language out of the classroom and into a natural setting.

Second, they familiarised themselves with the target (New York) culture, including its customs, way of life, entertainment, media, art, fashion, history, geography, and national landmarks, in a new and fun way.

The facts were given in a very easy-going and interesting style. The history was told through a series of interesting anecdotes about important and influential people and interesting background stories were told about national landmarks and historic events. The tour guide also mentioned what places in New York City were used as filming locations.

I played only the first video, "New York City Walking Tour by New York Tour 1 – Part 1: Midtown Manhattan", for my pupils. It took us two lessons to watch it in full, pausing for additional explanation when needed. The biggest set-back of the video is the acoustics, since the video was filmed in the street and the surrounding noise of the bustling city muffles the voice of the tour guide in certain scenes.

The tour starts in Times Square and continues with the interesting historic Diamond District, Fifth Avenue, famous for its expensive shops, St Patrick's Cathedral, and Rockefeller Center. From the top of 30 Rockefeller Center, tourists can admire the New York City skyline – Central Park, Upper East Side, Upper West Side, the American Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Empire State Building, the World Trade Center 1 (Freedom Tower), the Bank of America Tower, the new headquarters of the New York Times, the Chrysler Building, and further in the distance the Statue of Liberty. The guide takes the group back to the streets of New York City to the Radio City Music Hall which was built in order to revive Vaudeville in the USA, to Bryant Park and the New York Public Library, the Chrysler Building, Grand Central Terminal, and ends on the platforms of the subway. After watching the video, I made a PowerPoint presentation and a questionnaire for my pupils to solve. We also explored Google Earth maps to better visualise the landmarks mentioned in the video.

The video went down well with my pupils, and even those pupils who struggle with grammar and vocabulary understood most of what they heard in the video. Moreover, they memorised a lot of trivia because they found it interesting.

New York City (the Big Apple)

1 New York, often called the _____, has five boroughs: Manhattan, _____, _____, The Bronx, and _____.

2 Manhattan is an island 21.5 km long and 3.7 km wide. Four hundred years ago Manhattan was the home of the _____.

In 1626 they sold Manhattan to a Dutchman _____ for 60 guilders (about \$1,000 in 2006). Minuit built some houses and called the little town _____.

In 1664 the _____ took the town from the Dutch and changed its name to New York.

3 It is not difficult to find your way around. Most of the streets and avenues go in straight lines. Streets go _____ and avenues _____.

The fastest way to get from one place to another is by taking the _____.

4 _____ is one of New York's two grand train stations and the only one still standing today.

5 The third tallest building in NYC is the 102-story _____ in Midtown Manhattan, which was finished in 1931 and rises to 381 m, increased to 443 m by its antenna.

6 The _____ is the fifth tallest and it was the world's tallest building from 1930 until 1931.

7 _____ is a large complex consisting of 19 high-rise commercial buildings in New York City. It is located in the centre of Midtown Manhattan, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. It is famous for its annual Christmas tree lighting. All the biggest radio corporations – ABC, CBS, NBC, RKO – made their home here. During winter, there is an _____ on the Lower Plaza of this complex.

Some 200 flagpoles line the plaza at street level. Flagpoles around the plaza display flags of _____ and the U.S. states and territories. During national and state holidays, every pole carries the flag of _____.

8 _____ is an art deco theatre and it opened in 1932 as part of the Rockefeller Center. It also hosts concerts and the Tony Awards. What saved the building was the _____ who would dance before the movie.

9 _____ in New York Harbour was given by the French people as a gift to the Americans in 1886.

10 St. _____ is the largest Catholic church in the U.S. J.F.K.'s memorial service was held here as per Jackie Kennedy's wish. It was completed in 1878.

11 _____ is an art museum located in Midtown Manhattan. It is often identified as one of the largest and most influential museums of the modern art world.

12 _____, colloquially "the Met", is the largest art museum in the United States and among the most visited art museums in the world. Its permanent collection contains over two million works.

13 _____, located on the Upper West Side of Manhattan in park-like grounds across the street from Central Park has 45 permanent exhibition halls, in addition to a planetarium and a library.

14 With nearly 53 million items, _____ is the second largest public library in the United States (behind the Library of Congress). In the 1980s the central research library expanded below the ground level.

15 _____ completed in 1873 is the largest manmade park on the planet. The architect designed it in such a way that even skilled New Yorkers get lost inside.

16 _____ is famous for fashion and very expensive shops.

17 _____ was built in 1903. It was called Long Acre Square because it was one acre (4,047m²) in area. This area is named after the _____.

18 _____ is known widely as the heart of the American theatre industry.

19 _____ is a neighbourhood on the west side of Lower Manhattan. It has been known as an artists' haven and the Bohemian capital.

20 _____ is one of the oldest bridges of either type in the United States. Completed in 1883, it connects the boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn by spanning the East River.