

Amnesty International's annual letter-writing campaign as a source of authentic materials and interesting activities used in teaching legal English.

Teaching legal English for almost two decades made me aware of the importance of providing students with interesting authentic materials. In order to practice new vocabulary or language functions willingly, they need to get really involved in a task that follows. Being a law graduate myself, I know from experience how monotonous the legal matters might be. Therefore, searching for attractive, up-to-date content became my everyday job. While selecting the activities and topics which could easily be tailored into a proper English lesson, I have to match them precisely with a relevant area of law.

An excellent source of authentic materials that I have come across recently is Amnesty International's annual letter-writing campaign. Before I go into detail, let me briefly refer to the organisation and its action. Amnesty International, which is a non-governmental organisation, was founded in 1961 by a British lawyer Peter Benenson to help people claim their human rights. As for the letter-writing campaign (also known as "Write for Rights") it was first organised in 2001 by Polish activists working for Warsaw branch of Amnesty International. Its aim is to write letters to various authorities in favour of prisoners of conscience and people whose human rights are being violated. Every year different victims are chosen to become heroes of the current edition, and the whole event concentrates on their painful struggles for justice. Amnesty International shares a set of videos, podcasts and numerous texts on its website which then can become valuable teaching resources. The materials provided can be easily adjusted to individual needs of a particular class, so the possibilities are really endless.

For those who take part in the event for the first time it would be advisable to start by familiarising students with the history of Amnesty International and Peter Benenson, as well as explaining why the campaign takes place around the 10-th of December (it's the anniversary of signing the UN Declaration of Human Rights of 1948). Videos can be used as listening exercises and articles as reading tasks. Podcasts, on the other hand, can give more insight into the political and historical background of all countries involved. Finally, vocabulary and speaking activities can be created on the basis of the materials available (e.g. introduction of human rights terminology or debates on controversial issues such as death penalty or surrogacy).

To sum up, involving students in a letter-writing campaign is not only educational as far as language learning is concerned, but also eye-opening. As citizens of an independent country, we tend to take freedom for granted instead of cherishing it. We should also show solidarity with those who aren't as fortunate as us and remember that whoever saves one life saves the entire world.