



TI-AIE

Community resources for English

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What this unit is about

In this unit you will explore ways to teach English using the spoken and written English that you and your students come into contact with every day. This 'everyday' English can provide you with interesting teaching resources that can be motivating to students.

English is used in India for different purposes and in different ways in each part of the country. In the big cities, many people use English every day. English is seen on street signs, in advertisements, newspapers and magazines, and is heard on FM radio, in popular music and at the cinema.

In remote villages, English in the community is less common but is often present. English words like 'bus', 'car', 'phone', 'TV', 'radio', 'fridge' or even 'school' are now a part of the everyday vocabulary in most parts of the country. When you look for it, you may find more written English than you expect – on food packets, tickets and clothing labels, and in music. Every village has a bus or train link where people come and go to nearby towns or cities. Such people can be resources for English. They can share their experiences about communicating with people from outside their own village, and how they use English and other languages to do so.

As a teacher, you can bring English from your immediate community and from the wider community into your classroom. This unit is designed to help you get started.

What you can learn in this unit

- To locate English resources in your community.
- To learn what students already know about English.
- To connect English inside and outside the classroom.

1 What is everyday English?

You will start by thinking about what 'everyday English' is and how you can access this as a resource in your community.

Activity 1: What is everyday English?

In India, most communities use several languages. This means that many students come to school speaking more than one language. Because of the presence of English in our societies, students may also regularly use some English words in their day-to-day talk, even though they may not be aware that these words are English.

In our everyday language we often use English words for common objects and activities. For example, those of us who live in cities have *holidays*, we work in *factories* or *offices*, and we go to *school* with a *bag* full of *books*, *pens*, *pencils* and *water bottles*, travelling in *buses* on *roads*. Even those who do not live in cities may know many English words. For example, the words '*post office*' and '*bus stop*' are

understood all over India. Some of our new highways now collect a road toll, or 'tax'. Many people have learned what these words mean without being explicitly taught to say them in English.

What everyday English words do you know? Make a list of them and mark the words that you use in the classroom. Do your students also know these words? Highlight the words on the list that your students will know.

When students try to understand the English they see and hear in the community, they are focused on understanding the meaning. They can forget that they are also learning the language. When you build on your own and your students' knowledge of everyday English, you are helping them to learn authentic English – that is, English they can use in the real world outside the classroom.

Activity 2: Everyday English – a planning activity

Think about your own community and about which of the following resources in English you think that you and your students could have access to:

- magazines
- newspaper articles
- advertisements
- sports reports
- popular songs
- restaurant menus
- street signs
- shop signs
- tourist information brochures
- maps
- tickets
- comic books
- greeting cards
- bus schedules
- T-shirts
- calendars
- wrapping from food or medical products
- cinema
- radio
- television
- the Internet.

Over the next few weeks carry around a small notebook. Make notes of the English that you see and hear in your community. Add these to the list you made in Activity 1. If there are words that you don't recognise, use a dictionary to find out their meaning. Write the definitions in your notebook to help you learn the words.

Are there certain places where you are more likely to see or hear English? What are these places? Why do you think that you see or hear more English being used there? Some examples of everyday English that may give you some ideas are shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Examples of English in the community: (a) on packaging; (b) in an advert for mobile phone services; (c) on children's T-shirts; (d) in an advertisement on a village wall; (e) on a bilingual sign in a school; (f) on a street sign.

Once you have made your list, review it and think about whether your students will also be likely to encounter English in these places. Will they be familiar with the language? Are some of the words and phrases that you teach in your language lessons also present in the local environment? Can you draw on some of the examples that you have collected and use them in your classes?

See Resource 1, 'Using local resources', to learn more about how to draw on the community resources around your school.

2 Find out how much English your students know

Your students might already know more English than you think they do. In Case Study 1 a teacher finds out what his students know.

Case Study 1: Mr Nagaraju learns what his students know about English

Mr Nagaraju is a teacher of English in Class I–III in a tribal school in Orissa. He speaks Oriya and Hindi, but only has a little knowledge of the local language, Savara.

The students I teach are from a very poor background and many come from environments that are not 'print-rich'. If I taught in the city, I would expect that students might hear English spoken at home or that their parents might read English newspapers. I didn't think that the students I taught in the village would be exposed to much English in their local environment. I was wrong!

One day I asked the students about the games that they like to play. Not surprisingly, all of them responded with 'Cricket!' What surprised me was that the students knew a number of cricket-related English words. So I started writing these words on the board. After some time, the list got so long that I started to use a notebook to keep track of all the words they knew. Within a few days, this list grew from words and phrases about cricket to other sports as well.

By the end of that week, I had made a list of more than 100 English words and phrases that the students already knew: words used in the market, words for professions and words relating to transport and vehicles – the latter because their parents or other family members were often truck drivers, guards and transport workers. They knew words like 'Jeep', 'tyre', 'brake' and 'lights', and words relating to the maintenance of vehicles and any associated tools: 'wash', 'polish', 'water', 'air', 'petrol', 'nut', 'bolt' and 'pana'. I didn't know the last word. Then from the students' gestures and description, I realised that this was their word for 'spanner'. I then introduced them to the equivalent English word.

Soon I had many lists. I started to think of ways that I could use them with students to help their learning. First I went through the lists, looking for words that also appeared in their lessons. I started to think more and more about how I could remind the students of what they already knew when teaching the lessons from the textbook.

