



Free Talk - General Topics #2

For Intermediate to Advance Level



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UNIT I : ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE



Endangered Tigers

It is a desperate time for the world's tigers. There were once a lot of these majestic creatures throughout eastern and southern Asia. Now, wild tigers live only in small areas of India, China, eastern Russia, and a few other countries. Conservationists have been working for decades to save the big cats but the number of wild tigers continues to drop. There were an estimated 100,000 tigers living in the wild a century ago, compared with no more than 5,000 today.

As people change forests to cities and farms, tigers have lost their living areas. On top of that, poaching—the illegal hunting of wild animals—is a major threat to the cat's survival.

The attitude may change if people become more educated about the plight of the animals and how endangered they are.

Talking Points:

- How important is the preservation of wild tigers?
- What is the major cause of their endangerment?
- What can ordinary people do to help?

Vocabulary/Expressions

Majestic - great

Conservationist - a person who is worried about the world and wants to protect the animals and plants

Poaching - to catch and shoot animals illegally so that you can sell them or their parts

Plight - the bad situation that the animals are in

UNIT I : ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE



Parks Instead of Cars for the World's Cities



More than half of the world's population lives in urban areas. Traffic and pollution are becoming a big problem in big cities all over the world. In megacities like Mexico City, Shanghai or Cairo the quality of the air is getting worse every day. In the United States commuters spend more time sitting in traffic jams.

Today city planners around the world are looking for ways to provide more room for living and less room for cars. Through traffic jams people do not only lose time in getting to work, cities become dirtier too. Too much space is taken away from nature and used for streets and parking areas. In the past city governments have not been spending enough money on public transport systems that work.

For Third World cities the problems have just started. Traffic is getting worse as more and more people can afford to buy a car.

Talking points:

- Describe the pollution and traffic situation in your city.
- What would you rather use, a public transportation or a private car?
- Can building parks really help in solving or at least minimizing traffic and pollution?

Vocabulary/Expressions

Urban - city

Megacity - a very big city with millions of people

Commuter - person who has to travel very far to get to work every day

Afford - to have the money to buy something

UNIT I : ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE

Mountain Gorillas - Endangered Primates in Eastern Africa



Mountain gorillas are one of the most endangered animals in the world. Scientists think that there are only about 600 mountain gorillas left. They live in the higher regions of the rain forests in Rwanda, Uganda and Congo.

Life for mountain gorillas, however, is not peaceful. They are endangered in many ways. More and more people are moving to live in the rain forests. There they burn down trees to get more farmland, build roads and settlements. The habitat of mountain gorillas is getting smaller and smaller.

Still many Africans are working hard to protect mountain gorillas. The African Wildlife Foundation has established a conservation program to save the last mountain gorillas.

Talking points:

- Are there any endangered animals in your country?
- Are some species more important to save from extinction than others?
- Name other endangered animals that you know.

Vocabulary/Expressions

Endangered - in danger of dying out

Settlement - towns and villages

Habitat - the natural home of a plant or animal

Establish - set up, create

Conservation - the protection of something

UNIT I : ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE



Green Resolutions for a New Year

From buying local to saving water, here are a few ways to make our world greener.

- Persuade your boss to take action- When you're at home, you probably already turn off the lights when you leave the room. But what about at work?
- Take the family on an eco-friendly holiday - Not having to fly or drive is the simplest way to cut down your contribution to global warming.
- Buy local, organic, seasonal products.
- Say no to plastic bags.
- Exchange clothes - Rather than add to the 900,000 tons of shoes and clothes that are thrown away in the UK each year, people are getting together with friends to swap the things they never wear to the items they've always wanted.
- Save water.

Talking Points:

- What's your idea about the phrase, "*making our world greener*"?
- Enumerate other ways to make our world greener.

Vocabulary/Expressions

- persuade** - to try to make someone do something that you think is right
- eco-friendly** - friendly to the environment
- organic** - something that is grown naturally, without chemicals
- swap** - exchange; to give something to someone and get something else in return

UNIT II : CULTURE AND TRADITIONS



Chinese New Year

Chinese New Year is the most important holiday of the Chinese calendar. The celebration starts with the second new moon after the beginning of winter (December 21) and lasts until the next full moon.

A lot of things are done for Chinese New Year. Houses are cleaned from top to bottom in the days before the beginning of the holidays. People write merry wishes on red paper and hang them all over the house. Rooms are decorated with flowers, plants and oranges.

On New Year's Eve firecrackers send out the old year and welcome the new one. On New Year's Day children and adults who are not married get red envelopes with money in them. This is a symbol of good luck and wealth in the new year.

The last event of the 15-day celebration is the Lantern Festival. Some people hang glowing lanterns in temples. Others carry lanterns in a moonlight parade.

Talking Points:

- How do you celebrate the new year in your country?
- What are the similarities and differences of your new year traditions and activities compared to the Chinese new year?

Vocabulary/Expressions

Celebration - event of celebrating, having a party

Merry - happy, cheerful

Decorate - to make something look more beautiful by putting nice things on it

Wealth - a lot of money; being rich

UNIT II : CULTURE AND TRADITIONS



Passover – Jewish Feast of Freedom

Passover is celebrated at about the same time as Easter and lasts for 7 or 8 days. During Passover Jews around the world remember their freedom from slavery in Egypt.

The word Passover comes from the tenth plague. The firstborn son of every Egyptian family was killed. God told the Jews to mark their door posts with the blood of a roasted lamb to show him that they were His children. In this way the firstborn sons of the Jews survived.

Today, many Jews gather in synagogues every year to retell the Passover story. The most important food of this holiday is “matzo”, which is bread made of flour and water. It is flat because Moses and his followers didn’t have time to let the bread rise. Many families sing songs and say prayers during the holidays.

Talking Points:

- Talk about a similar tradition done in your country, if any.
- Are you aware of any religions/religious traditions forbidden in your country?
- What are your thoughts about places/countries where certain religions/religious traditions are prohibited?

Vocabulary/Expressions

Easter - the resurrection of Jesus Christ

Jew - a person whose religion is Judaism

Plague - disease

Synagogue - a building where Jewish people meet to pray

UNIT II : CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

Bullfighting - A Big Attraction in Spain



Bullfighting is a great event that attracts many tourists to Spain and Spanish speaking countries. There it is an important element of culture and has a great tradition. Modern bullfighting goes back to the 1700s when the first bullrings were built in Spain.

A bullfight takes place in bullring. The matador, or bullfighter, has special training and is often a national hero in his homeland. The bulls used for bullfighting are very powerful, wild animals that are bred to attack. They weigh up to 500 kg or even more. Today many animal activists are against bullfighting because bulls are treated in a cruel way and have to suffer pain in the arena. Bullfights can also end with a matador's death or injury if he is pierced by a bull's horns.

Talking Points:

- In your opinion, is it okay to continue this kind of tradition?
- How important is **safety** with regards to celebrating culture and traditions?
- Would you be willing to participate in events, celebrations or traditions that endangers lives?

Vocabulary/Expressions

Attract - to pull towards; bring to

Bred - past tense of **Breed** which means to bring animals together so that they can have babies that are very good or strong

Pierce - to make a small hole into something with a sharp object

Cruel - brutal

UNIT II : CULTURE AND TRADITIONS



Jeans – History and Popularity of Great Clothes



Jeans have become one of the most worn pieces of clothing in the world. Everybody wears them, from the rural farmer to the urban lawyer and from models to housewives.

Jeans were first designed as durable trousers for farm workers and miners in the states of the American west. They became popular instantly and soon many people bought them. At first jeans were worn only by workers, especially in factories. In the eastern part of the US jeans were hardly worn at all. They were associated with rural people and the working class. But when rich easterners went on holidays to escape everyday life they often put on jeans.

Jeans were also worn because they made people equal. You could afford them and they couldn't be torn so easily. They had practical advantages as well. Today jeans are an essential part of our lives.

Talking Points:

- What do you think is the impact of jeans in history?
- How is the history of jeans an example of cultural change?
- Enumerate at least 3 practical advantages of wearing jeans.

Vocabulary/Expressions

Durable - strong; hard-wearing

Trousers - an outer garment for the lower part of the body, covering each leg separately

Associated - connected; linked

Essential - very important

UNIT III : ENTERTAINMENT



The Nintendo Wii



The *Wii* is a video game created by Nintendo that uses a wireless controller to show the movements of your body, hands and legs on a television screen. It was first presented to the public in November 2006

There are many advantages of Nintendo's *Wii*. It is easy to use and the controller is fast and accurate. Objects move on the screen exactly the way you would expect them to. The *Wii* turns a video game into a physical activity that is fun too. It is also used by doctors and therapists who show patients how to balance themselves or build up muscles after an operation or illness.

With the *Wii* you cannot only compete with other players in your own living room. You can connect the console to the Internet and play with people around the world.

Talking Points:

- Do you own a *Wii* or any other video game? If yes, how often do you play?
- In your opinion, what satisfaction can one get from playing video games?
- At what extent should children be tolerated in playing video games?

Vocabulary/Expressions

Advantage - the good side of

Controller - an object that is connected to a game console and used to play video games

Accurate - exact

Console - a panel or unit accommodating controls for electronic or mechanical equipment.

UNIT III : ENTERTAINMENT



Motion Pictures

Motion pictures – also called movies or films – belong to the most popular forms of entertainment today. Early movies were black and white and had no sound. In the 1920s sound was added to movies, the first colour movies were produced in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Movie became a big business. Hollywood became the centre of the American film industry and later on developed in other countries. Great Britain, France and Italy became major film producing nations in Europe. In the past few decades India has become the biggest film producer in the world.

Movies cost a lot of money and the people who make them hope to make a lot of profit and achieve worldwide fame.

Millions of people all over the world go to cinemas to enjoy an entertaining story and to see their favorite movie stars.



Talking Points:

- What do you think is the greatest movie ever made?
- How often do you watch movies? Do you think it's worth spending your money with?
- Give at least 3 movies you love and say something about it.

Vocabulary/Expressions

Entertainment - things such as films, television, music performances etc.. that people watch or go to

Produce - make

Profit – money

Fame - if you are known by many people because you are successful

UNIT III : ENTERTAINMENT



Beyoncé Knowles- Her Rise To Fame

Beyoncé Knowles is an American multi talented star. She is a singer, songwriter, record producer, actress, dancer and fashion designer. She became famous as the lead singer of Destiny's Child.

At the age of 7, she attended dance school and later on became a solo singer in her church's choir. Together with a few of her friends she started a quartet and at first performed in their back yards. In 1996, the group signed up with Columbia records and became very successful in the early 2000s.

Beyoncé released her first solo album, *Dangerously in Love*, in 2003. With its singles *Crazy in Love* and *Baby Boy*, it rose to the top of the charts in the UK and America. In 2004, she earned five Grammy Awards.

In 2006, she starred in the film adaptation of a Broadway musical, *Dream girls*. She was nominated for two Golden Globes including Best Actress.

Talking Points:

- Why is Beyoncé Knowles a multi talented entertainer?
- How did she start her career?
- Who is your favorite entertainer? Why?

Vocabulary/Expressions

multi talented- someone who has many talents

choir- group of people who sing together

adaptation- new and changed version

UNIT III: ENTERTAINMENT



James Bond- Actors, Movie and Gadget

James Bond is an English secret agent who was created by Ian Fleming in his first novel *Casino Royale* in 1953. Bond, also known as agent 007, is an attractive man who likes women. All James Bond movies have been made into successful films. All of them have made a net profit of over \$4 billion. Sean Connery was the first Bond. He played the role in six movies from 1962 to 1971. George Lazenby took over the role for one film "*On Her Majesty's Secret Service*", but gave it back to Connery for one more film. From 1973 to 1985, Roger Moore portrayed Bond in more like a playboy way. Timothy Dalton played James Bond in two movies and Pierce Brosnan starred in four movies from 1995 to 2002. Daniel Craig is the present Bond, starring in *Casino Royal* in 2006 and *A Quantum of Solace* in 2008.

Bond films always have the same ingredients: a lot of action, car chases, leaps from high mountains, gunfights and narrow escapes. James Bond always drives in extravagant cars that have included an Aston Martin, a BMW Z3 and a Lotus Esprit. He also is the first to test MI5's latest inventions- deadly darts, watches that explode and special guns.

Talking Points:

- Who is James Bond?
- What are some of Bond's special weapons and gadgets?
- Do you like watching these kinds of movies? Why or why not?
- Do you want to be like James Bond?

Vocabulary/Expressions

novel- a long written story with fictional characters.

starred- to have a leading role in a film

extravagant- something that is extravagant and costs a lot of money

UNIT IV : SOCIETY



Cyber bullying on the Rise

Cyber bullying happens when a child or teenager is threatened, embarrassed or put in danger through modern means of communication like the Internet.

A study by a Canadian University found out that half of the young people interviewed reported that they were being bullied in cyberspace.

Cyber bullies act in many different ways. They harass others by sending photos or text messages to cell phones or by posting them on Facebook. Sometimes they send junk mail with sexual remarks or steal passwords of other children or teenagers and log on to websites with false identities.

This kind of bullying has become extremely popular because it allows teens and children to stay anonymous. Many think they won't get caught. But cyber bullying is not as harmless as many people think. In some cases it has even led to suicide. Many countries have conducted campaigns to make adults and children aware of the dangers of cyber bullying.

Talking Points:

- Why is cyber bullying become popular?
- Have you experienced cyber bullying?
- What can the government do against cyberbullying?

Vocabulary/Expressions

cyber bullying - the act of harassing someone online by sending or posting mean messages.

cyberspace - virtual world of computers

anonymous - having no known name, identity or known source

UNIT IV : SOCIETY



Is Marriage Becoming Old-fashioned?



More and more Americans think that marriage is out-of date. According to a survey, 40% of over 2,500 people asked said that marriage was a thing of the past and does not work in our society any more. When the same survey was conducted thirty years ago, only 11% of Americans thought that marriage was old-fashioned. Marriage is still important but not as important as it once was.

Of the people asked, most of marriage's supporters were seniors, 65 and older. Groups that thought marriage was obsolete included blacks and high-school graduates, as well as people from lower income groups. Data collected in America has shown that people marry less, and when they do, they marry at a higher age. Today more and more couples get married simply because they love each other. Financial stability no longer seems important any more. Young people are more serious about marriage because they often witness their parents separating.

Talking points:

- Why are young people more serious about marriage today?
- Why do some people think that marriage is old-fashioned?
- Do you think marriage is still important? Why or why not?
- What do you think are the secrets of a successful marriage?

Vocabulary/Expressions

- out-of date** - no longer valid or fashionable
- a thing of the past** – something that does not exist anymore
- obsolete** – no longer in use

UNIT IV : SOCIETY



Social media networks are changing our relationships

Communication technology is invading our life more than ever before. Psychology experts have noticed that more and more marriages are breaking up because of social media sites.

One of the reasons may be because Facebook makes it possible to communicate with old friends from high-school or former boy or girl friends that you have not had contact with in ages. Couples are not communicating with each other as they should in real life. They do not argue about things in the usual way, they tend to carry out quarrels in public. Emotions are reduced to Likes or Dislikes, smiley faces or other emoticons.

They don't share with each other, they share with everyone. Facebook has defined privacy in a new way. Many things that should be private have become public.



Talking points:

- How does communication technology invade people's lives?
- What are the effects of internet to our personal relationships?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of social networking sites?

Vocabulary/Expressions

invading - to enter and affect injuriously or destructively

carry out- cause to happen

in ages – for a long time

emoticons- A representation of a facial expression (as a smile or frown) created by typing a sequence of characters in sending email

UNIT IV : SOCIETY



Women Are Better at Dealing With Money Than Men



An international survey has found out that women are better at managing money than men. They work harder to become financially independent and they are not as likely to get into debt as men.

The survey showed that both men and women think the same. Almost 5,000 men and women in 12 countries were asked. Although 40% of women said they used credit cards; most of them thought that having more than one credit card could lead to financial problems.

The results of the survey also revealed that women who share their money with their husband often suffer more when a relationship ends. Some of them have saved up money if they get into such a situation, other simply don't care.

Talking Points:

- What could happen if someone has more than one credit card?
- How do you handle your finances?
- What is the best way to save money?

Vocabulary/Expressions

survey – a detailed critical inspection

debt – obligation to pay something

financially independent - someone who can provide his own resources (housing, food, and other living expenses).

UNIT V : TRAVEL



The Oasis of the Seas

The Oasis of the Seas is the world's largest cruise ship. It has a weight of 225,000 tons and is five times the size of the Titanic. It can carry up to 6,200 passengers and 2,000 crew members. It has a total of 15 decks and is as high as a twenty-storey building. It was built in Finland and is owned by Royal Caribbean International. Its maiden voyage was December 2009. The ship is stationed in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, from where it will go on week-long cruises of the Caribbean Sea.

Amenities:

- a small golf course
- an ice rink
- 24 restaurants
- giant open-air theatre for 750 passengers that is a swimming pool by day and an entertainment arena at night.
- a basketball court
- two rock-climbing walls
- park full of real trees and exotic plants.

Talking Points:

- What makes The Oasis of the Seas different from other cruise ships?
- Would you like to take a cruise? Why or why not?
- Compare traveling by plane and ship.

Vocabulary/Expressions

- cruise ship** – passenger ship built or used for personal cruises
- voyage** – a journey or travel
- amenities** – things that make you comfortable and at ease

UNIT V : TRAVEL



The World's Most Dangerous Countries

A list of the world's most dangerous countries was put together by a risk assessment group that rated crime, police protection, the risk of terrorism and stability in the world's nations.

Somalia was number one on the list for many reasons. The biggest danger is piracy. Modern pirates have captured over 40 ships in the past year; however, the country itself is also deep in chaos. Warlords and paramilitary groups rule a state, in which there is no real government. Afghanistan came in second. It is a war-torn country in which the Taliban still have much power. Many political experts believe that it is still a main base for Al Qaeda terrorists. Iraq still has an unstable government. Nobody knows what will happen when the Americans leave Iraq.

The most dangerous states in the world have one thing in common: no democracy. They have always been ruled by dictators or foreign countries that left nothing behind.



Talking Points:

- What are the three most dangerous countries? Why are they dangerous?
- Would you like to go to those countries? Why or why not?
- Is your country a safe or dangerous place?

Vocabulary/Expressions

terrorism– the use of violence and threats to intimidate or coerce, especially for political purposes.

chaos– a state of extreme confusion and disorder

democracy- a political system ruled by the people, either directly or through elected representatives

UNIT V : TRAVEL



Airline Accidents- More and More People Survive

In December, a Continental Airlines jet slid off the runway and caught fire in Denver. A British Airways plane also crash-landed in London. A US Airways jet had an emergency landing on the Hudson River in January.

What do they have in common? Nobody was killed.

The airline industry says that everything, from building a plane to keeping them in a good condition, has been improved. Seats have become stronger and hardware on planes is better. Flight attendants and pilots are even more professional. Everyone survived on the Hudson and in Denver because flight attendants and crew were able to get the passengers out quickly.

Another reason for the higher survival rate may be the fact that flight attendants are getting more experienced and have better training because airlines have not taken up many new people after 9/11.



Talking Points:

- Why is it much safer to ride airplanes nowadays?
- Did you ever travel by plane?
- What do you think is the best way to travel: through air, land or water?

Vocabulary/Expressions

runway– strip of level paved surface where planes can take off and land

crash-landed - (air travel) make an emergency landing

professional – extremely competent in a job

UNIT V : TRAVEL



Hostels in Europe- How They Have Changed



Hostels all over Europe have changed greatly in the past years. Years ago hostels were mostly used by hikers and walkers in the countryside, but today youth hostel organizations have found out that hostels in big cities attract people who don't want to stay at a hotel.

Most travelers spend nights at hostels because of the low rates. Group rooms with 4 beds and a shared bath for the whole floor can be as low as 15€ a night. A single room with a private bath can cost up to 50€. Some modern hostels even offer penthouses. It may sound strange, but the economic recession that started in 2008 has meant more business for hostels. Many travelers cannot afford expensive hotels any more.

The managers of hostels say that the kind of guests they get has also changed. Student backpackers mix with young urban professionals, families with children on holidays, business travelers and even older tourists.

Talking Points:

- Why are hostels getting popular these days?
- Which do you prefer to stay in when you travel: hotels, hostels, or another type of place?
- What is your most memorable experience in a hotel or hostel?

Vocabulary/Expressions

- hostels**- a hotel providing overnight lodging for travellers.
- Backpackers**- a hiker who wears a backpack
- penthouses**- apartment located on the top floors of a building
- recession**- state of the economy declines



Thank You !

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