

READING A UTILITY BILL

Lesson Length: 1.75 hours + Extension Activity

Vocabulary & Expressions: Common vocabulary found in utility bills such as: total amount due, current usage, account number, last payment date, due date, bill date, water, sewer, landfill fee, electricity, service period, etc.

Language /Culture Point: Terms on bills with similar meanings

Objective: Students will be able to read and understand utility bills

Materials: Overhead projector, sample utility bills, red, green, and yellow Signal Cards, practice checks, *toy phones*



STEP 1: ACTIVATE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overhead Projector - Sample Utility Bill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brainstorming - Authentic Materials

TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Ask students if they know what utilities are. Ask students to brainstorm different utilities, and write a list on the board as the students answer. Common utilities are: electricity, gas, water, and garbage collection.
2. Put up a sample of a utility bill on the overhead projector. If possible, find samples from utility companies in your area. Sample utility bills can be found here:

 <http://bit.ly/2ek7POw>

Note: if you aren't able to use an overhead projector, you can put students into pairs or small groups and provide each of them with copies of the utility bill.

3. Ask students if they have ever seen a bill like this before. Work together with the class to identify the key vocabulary on the utility bill, such as due date, amount due, etc. Create a list of the key vocabulary on the board as you go along.

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STEP 2: MINI-PRESENTATION WITH PROMPT

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overhead projector - Sample utility bill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Think Aloud - Authentic Materials

TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Display another sample utility bill.
2. Refer to the list that the students created in Step 1, and locate the corresponding parts of the utility bill while doing a Think Aloud. For example:

“I just received my utility bill in the mail from (name of utility company). Here’s my address. Let me see. It looks like this bill is for the electricity I used last month, 9/1/16 to 9/30/16. They sent me the bill on 10/12/16. And it looks like I need to pay it by 10/26/16. So I have two weeks to pay it. Here it tells me that last month I paid \$____. This month I have to pay \$____. That’s what it says next to “amount due.” My account number is over here on the top. If I pay by check, I need to include the account number. I can mail my check to the return address here, and I have to write the check to (name of utility company). Or I can pay online. I think I’ll write a check.
3. Highlight or underline the important vocabulary you see on the bill as you go along.

STEP 3: DISCUSSION AND COMPREHENSION CHECK

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overhead projector - Sample utility bill - Red, green, and yellow Signal Cards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authentic Materials - Signal cards - True/False Quiz

TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Keep the utility bill up on the overhead projector.
2. Make a series of true/false statements about the utility bill. Have students use their Signal Cards to indicate True/False/I don’t know. You may make statements such as:

The address of the customer is...



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- The return address is...
- The account number is...
- The billing period is from...to...

3. Try to highlight as many different parts of the bill as possible to check for comprehension. Go over any vocabulary words that may be confusing to the students. students use their Signal Cards to indicate True/False/I don't know.

STEP 4: HIGHLIGHT LESSON FOCUS AND MODEL TASK

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
15 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Overhead projector- Sample utility bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Authentic Materials- Question Asking and Answering

TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Tell students “today we’re talking about reading and understanding utility bills. Let’s practice reading utility bills and writing checks.”
2. On the board, create this question and answer pair:
“What is the _____?”
“The _____ is _____.”
3. As a class, use the utility bill that is displayed to fill in the blank or the question. For example, you can write, “What is the total amount due?”
4. Next, fill in the blanks for the answer using the utility bill.
5. Once all of the questions are answered, draw a blank check on the board.
6. Using the answers to the questions, complete the check. Include the account number on the utility bill in the “memo” line.

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STEP 5: GUIDED PRACTICE

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overhead projector - Sample utility bill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authentic Materials - Question Asking and Answering

TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Erase the answers to the questions and the information you entered into the blank check.
2. Put a new sample utility bill on the projector. Call on a strong student and ask them a question about a section of the bill. The student will find the information on the bill and answer the question. When they do so, fill in the blank.
3. Once all of the questions are answered, complete the check using the new information.
4. Repeat the process with another utility bill and another student volunteer. This time, have the student ask the questions and complete the check while you provide the answers.

STEP 6: PAIR OR SMALL GROUP WORK

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
20 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sample utility bills - Practice checks  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authentic Materials - Question Asking and Answering

TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Have students get into pairs and hand each pair a different utility bill and a blank practice check.
2. Students should take turns going over all of the different parts of the utility bill using the question and answer from Steps 4 and 5. Students will work together to find the answers to the questions and will complete the check once they've answered all of the questions.
3. Once the students have answered the questions and completed the blank check, collect

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all of the utility bills and have students switch partners. Hand each new pair a different bill and another practice check, and have them repeat the process over again. Students should switch partners at least once throughout this activity.

4. If there is time at the end of the activity, have students come up to the front of the class to present their questions and answers to the class. Have the students write their answers on the board as they discuss the utility bill they have.

STEP 7: HIGHLIGHT HOW ENGLISH WORKS

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
15 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overhead projector - Sample utility bills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authentic Materials - Question Asking and Answering

TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Explain to students that today in class we used a number of different utility bills because they aren't all the same. Tell students that sometimes the terms on different bills will be different but will mean the same thing.
2. Illustrate this idea by writing the term, "current usage period" on the board. Explain to students that the terms, "billing cycle" and "statement period" mean the exact same thing. Write all three terms on the board in a list:
 - Current usage period
 - Billing cycle
 - Statement period
3. Go around the room practicing pronunciation with these terms.
4. As a class try to think up more terms on bills that are different but mean the same thing, for example, "amount due" "total amount due" and "payment due". Write these terms in a list as well.
5. Display a bill on the overhead projector. Choose one list of terms and go around the room asking and answering the question from Steps 4-6. After going through one list of similar terms, repeat the process with another list of terms that mean the same thing.



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STEP 8: QUICK CHECK AND REVIEW

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
10 minutes	- Sample utility bills	- Exit Check

TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Hand out a sample utility bill to each student.
2. As each student leaves the room ask them a question about a section of their bill such as, "What is the current billing cycle?"
3. The student should find and provide the answer to the question, and hand you the bill as they leave the room.

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EXTENSION ACTIVITY: CALLING A UTILITY COMPANY

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
Varies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overhead projectors - Sample utility bills - Toy phones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authentic materials - Role play

TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Tell students that today we are going to go over calling the utility company to pay our bill. Using the overhead projector, put up a different utility bill and pretend to call the utility company.
2. Create this dialog on the board and go over it as a class. Fill in the blanks using the utility bill on the projector.

Representative: Hello, thank you for calling (company name). How can I help you?

Customer: Hello, I would like to pay my utility bill.

Representative: O.K. What is your name?

Customer: My name is _____.

Representative: O.K. What is your account number?

Customer: My account number is _____.

Representative: Is this for the current billing period from (date) to (date)?

Customer: Yes.

Representative: O.K. I see your total amount due is _____ and your due date is _____. Would you like to go ahead and submit a payment?

Customer: Yes, please. I would like to submit a payment.

Representative: O.K. No problem. May I please put you on hold for a minute? I have to pull up another screen and then I can process your payment for you.

Customer: Sure, take your time.

3. Choose a strong student and hand them a toy phone. Role Play as the representative while the student acts out the role of the customer. Then, switch roles, and read the dialog again.
4. Next, hand the toy phones to two other strong students. They will go over the dialog as well, switching roles after they are done.
5. Give each student a toy phone and then put them all into pairs. Give each pair a copy of a different sample utility bill. Have the students practice the dialog with each other using the utility bill given to them with one student being the representative



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and one student being the customer, being sure they each play both roles.

6. Have students switch partners at least once throughout the course of this activity.
7. In the last 5-10 minutes call on pairs to come up to the front of the room to read the dialog aloud to the class.

NOTE: If students feel comfortable and have memorized the dialogue, have them practice without looking at the dialogue.