

## **LISTENING TO LEARN AND LEARNING TO LISTEN**

### **A series of listening activities for young learners of English**

Welcome to **Listening to Learn and Learning to Listen** series by the National Council of Educational Research and Training. This series of listening activities seeks to provide learners a set of opportunities to listen to spoken language. Students need to comprehend spoken language in lectures, in the media (radio, cinema and television), and in face-to-face interactions. Listening is crucial to language acquisition because it provides 'comprehensible input'. Comprehensible input refers to meaningful oral and written language somewhat above the learners' current level of mastery. Such input allows for the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary, which, in turn, makes additional input more comprehensible. Mere exposure to language is insufficient. Learners must take notice of key features of the language to get the maximum benefit out of it.

How do we comprehend spoken language? One model is called 'bottom-up' approach. According to this view, we piece together a message by first understanding the smallest units of language -- sounds. Then, we hear the sound sequences together to form words. Our knowledge of words enables us to understand phrases and sentences, and finally an entire passage. An alternative view is known as 'top-down' approach. In this model, based on our knowledge of the topic and situation, we can figure out the specific meaning of a passage; and the sentences, phrases and words that form the message.

Current thinking suggests an 'interactive' model, in which listeners simultaneously use both top-down and bottom-up strategies. One strategy compensates for the gaps in the other, until the entire message is understood.

You are aware that there are many types of listening. Sometimes we listen for the general meaning of a message and sometimes for specific information. At times, listening is a one-way process (e.g. a lecture or a movie), and at other times it is a two-

way process and involves both listening and speaking as in a piece of conversation. Sometimes, listening entails mainly information exchange. At other times listening may be social or emotional in which feelings are more prominent. Now as practicing teachers, how can we promote listening as a skill in language learning among children? What strategies should we adopt to realize the maximum from listening activities? Let us explore what strategies could work in our classrooms, Try and design your own strategies that suit the local contexts. Here are some tips for you.

- Before administering a listening task, ask students what they know about the topic so that they can recall their prior knowledge. A teacher may also preview vocabulary and ideas prior to listening.
- Following the listening, ask students about the general points of the passage.
- If details are to be recalled, allow students to take notes or work through the handout, if provided.
- Use natural language for a listening passage. It is better to use short pieces of real language at the initial level than artificial teacher-made language.
- Use a variety of listening activities such as one-way and two-way processes through various texts.
- You may chalk out your own strategy for using the audio material. Ask the students to work in pairs, small groups or individually and play the audio more than once (or even many times) to enhance children's learning. If they take time to complete one task followed by listening, repeat playing so that they can understand it fully.

The texts for the listening activities in this series are drawn from various sources and genres consistent with the interests of learners. Activities followed by each listening task are given in print accompanying the CD or the cassette. Learners may be given the worksheet before they begin to listen.

### **Happy Listening**

## References

- Brown, G. (1992) *Listening to spoken language*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London. Longman.
- Brown, G. and Yule, G. (1983) *Teaching the spoken language*. Cambridge, United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press.
- Rust, M. (1993) *Listening in language learning*. London. Longman.

## Listening Activity One

*It is sometimes interesting to meet people who are smart, and sometimes to see the smart people being out smarted by clever or cunning people. Here is such a story. Let's see who is smarter.*

### The Arab and the Camel

It was a cold winters' day. An Arab merchant was travelling through the desert on his camel. At sunset he decided to camp for the night. He pitched his tent by the roadside.

The tent was a small one, so the Arab went in and left the camel outside. A fierce wind was blowing and it was bitterly cold. The camel stood for about two hours in the cold. Then he said to his master, "It's very cold outside. May I put my head and neck inside the tent?" The Arab said, "Yes," and moved to a corner of the tent. The camel put his head and neck inside the tent.

After some time the camel said to his master, "My head and neck are warm now but my body is cold. May I put my forelegs inside the tent?" His master agreed. The camel put his forelegs inside the tent. The Arab Could not lie down.

It was midnight. The camel looked at his master and said, "Half of my body is inside the tent and half of it is outside. We can't close the door and the cold wind is blowing into the tent. Both of us are shivering. I'd better come into the tent and close the door."

"No. no, You can't do that," replied the Arab. "The tent is too small for both of us."

"Yes, it is," agreed the camel. "The tent is too small for both of us, so I'm coming in and you can go out." Saying this he stepped further into the tent and pushed his master out of it. "Kindly close the flap of the tent as you leave so that I may be nice and warm," he said.

Now find who is smarter by attempting the following.

1. Why did the Arab allow the camel to put his head into the tent?
2. The merchant was
  - (i) kind
  - (ii) charitable
  - (iii) merciless
  - (iv) Generous
3. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
  - (i) The camel was cunning.
  - (ii) The Arab was clever.
4. At midnight the Arab was forced out of his tent. How do you think he spent the rest of the night?
5. Do you think camels feel cold? Do people cover camels with blankets?

## Listening Activity Two

### The Legend of Pygmalion

*A Legend is a traditional story of a famous person or hero. Here is one such Legend. Would you be surprised if you see a statue talking like anyone else? Listen to the story of Pygmalion, the Greek sculptor who made a statue that came to life.*

Pygmalion was the king of Cypress. He was a sculptor who created beautiful statues out of stone and ivory. One day he made an extremely beautiful statue of a woman. So great was the beauty of this piece that Pygmalion fell madly in love with it.

Day after day, nay, hour after hour, Pygmalion wished that his stone figure would come to life. At last the wish was granted by Aphrodite (also known as Venus), the goddess of love and beauty in Greek mythology. Did the miracle make Pygmalion happy?

When Pygmalion had finished the statue he smiled. It was the innocent smile of a child at having found something new and unique. Of course, the piece of sculpture was perfect, almost unsurpassable. So greatly was he impressed by the beauty of the statue that he felt like falling on his knees in the posture of worship before it. Although his studio was full of a number of stone creations he realised that he had never done anything like that before. In fact he had created a masterpiece. He named this beauty Galatea.

Evening came and Pygmalion still sat in his studio, looking at the beautiful Galatea in the fading light. He had no desire to move away, instead, he climbed up the pedestal and gave the stone lips of the statue a kiss, wishing it alive. He soon realised the stupidity of this act and lowered his eyes in shame. And the eyes blinked and the miracle took place! Galatea came to life in the arms of Pygmalion. Venus, the goddess of love had granted the artist's wish.

Galatea did not speak; she smiled with an expression of astonishment upon her radiant face. Like a child she stretched out a hand to touch Pygmalion's hair. As she parted the dark locks she laughed. It was a clear laugh. He spoke a few words and for the first time the smooth forehead wrinkled in an effort to understand.

Galatea was soon asleep because moving life is more tiring than a motionless masterpiece of Sculpture. In flesh and blood she did not look a goddess but a sad thing seeking the shelter of love. All night Pygmalion kept watch over this tender life. Next morning when she woke up she did not speak. Pygmalion took up the role of a teacher and guide. Standing, she always looked like a goddess. And Pygmalion felt so proud for he could create, like God, in flesh and blood; or so he thought. For sometime he lived with Galatea — almost happy.

As time passed signs of age and weariness started showing in Galatea's appearance. This made Pygmalion very unhappy for, like the true artist that he was, he believed that beautiful creations must remain permanent. He was afraid that his beautiful creation would eventually grow old and perish. And he did not like this idea. Galatea also seemed tired of life, for the pain and suffering of living was a bit too much for her to bear. She used to compare herself with the marble statues in the studio. She realised that stone that knows neither grief nor age was permanent, and she wished to die.

Pygmalion foresaw her inevitable fate and when night came he took his chisel and struck her bosom a blow. He saw a second miracle: Galatea was returning to the original marble. All that night he chiselled in an effort to give a new shape to the stone. Next morning what he saw in the daylight was something quite different, compared to the original.

The lips had lost their great beauty; the eyes told of the grief of living; the whole body was bent towards the earth. In brief, the whole night, in the dark, he had been sculpting the very face of grief. And Pygmalion wept.

Now answer the questions that follow.

1. Why was Pygmalion so happy when he had finished the statue?
2. What was Pygmalion's desire after he had created the beautiful Galatea in marble and who granted it?
3. How did he feel when the stone Galatea turned into a beautiful, living woman?
4. What made Pygmalion unhappy after his wish was fulfilled?
5. Why did Pygmalion weep after he had given completely different shape to the marble Galatea?

### **Listening Activity Three**

*A Fable is a very small story. It usually has animal characters assuming roles. Now listen to some fable and think about the characters you meet there.*

#### **Some Fables**

The fox thought he was very clever. One day he told a cat, “You know, I’m very clever. I know hundreds of tricks, so my enemies can’t catch me.” The cat smiled and said, “I know only one way.”

Just then they heard the dogs bark and saw some men. The cat quickly climbed up a tree and hid in the branches. The fox began to think. He could not decide on the way of escape. It was too late. The dogs and men caught the fox and killed it.

A cock was walking up and down a farm looking for food. He was hungry and had not got even a single grain since morning. Suddenly he saw something white and shining in the hay. “Ho, Ho,” cried he, “that’s for me,” and he picked it up.

“Oh! It’s not food,” he cried out. He found it was a pearl and he threw it away in disgust.

“I need food,” he said, “What will I do with a pearl?”

There were a lot of fishes in the sea. The big fishes were proud of their size. They said, “We’re the terror of the sea. Everyone is afraid of us but we’re not afraid of anyone. “They often ate up the small fishes. The small fishes tried to fight them. The big fishes said, “Do not waste your strength. You cannot fight. We can easily catch you.”

One day a fisherman threw a net into the sea. The net was large and strong. The big fishes were caught but the little fishes escaped through the holes.

Now listen to the Fables again told by your friend.

Discuss the fable with your friend. How were the characters and actions in them?

What you do feel about them?

Share such stories / fables that you know with your class.

## Listening Activity Four

### Androclees and the Lion

*Here is a popular story you might have heard many a time. The man who rescued the lion in trouble was saved in the same way. Listen to the story, Androclees and the Lion*

Long long ago the Romans were very powerful. They had a very big empire and hundreds of slaves. Androclees was one of them. He got up at the crack of dawn and worked hard throughout the day but he was not happy. He loved freedom and hated the life of a slave. Besides, his master was a cruel man. He gave him very little to eat and a few rags to cover his body. The master often abused him and sometimes beat him mercilessly.

One night Androclees ran away from his master's house and went into the jungle. He saw a cave inside of a mountain. Androclees decided to live in the cave and sleep on a bed of dry grass. He collected lots of dry grass and carried it into the cave.

As Androclees spread the grass on the floor, a lion entered the cave. The lion was groaning in pain. He came towards Androclees and held out his left paw to him. The paw was red and swollen. There was a big thorn in it.

"You poor lion," said the brave Androclees, "you must be in pain. I'll pull out the thorn for you." He took the lion's paw in his hand and gently pulled out the thorn. The lion sighed in relief and licked Androclees's hand. Androclees and the lion became good friends. They lived in the cave together and shared each other's food.

One day the Roman soldiers came to the jungle. They found Androclees and caught him. Androclees was a runaway slave and the king punished such slaves severely. They were thrown into the arena and made to fight lions. The arena was an open ground round which sat the king and the people of Rome. They liked watching these fights. Androclees was brought before the king. The king ordered, "Androclees will fight a huge, hungry lion tomorrow." The next day Androclees went to the arena. He stood in the centre. A soldier opened a lion's cage and a huge lion came roaring

out of it. He was in a bad temper as he was hungry. Androclees stood still. He did not move. The lion came bounding towards him. As soon as he reached the Greek, he stopped. Instead of killing him he fell at his feet and began licking his hands. Androclees bent down and patted the lion. It was his old friend who had shared his cave.

The king and all the onlookers were amazed. They had never seen a hungry lion licking a man's hands. "Androclees," the king called out, "how did you make friends with this ferocious lion?" Androclees told him the whole story.

"You're a kind and brave man," said the king. "I'll set you free. You can take your friend with you," and the lion followed Androclees out of the palace gates like a faithful friend.

That was the story of Androclees and the Lion. Can you laugh at misfortune?

Did it move you? May be we can listen to it again. This time the story is told by someone like you?

Would you like to be brave like Androclees? I hear you say.” “Yes I am brave like Androclees”.

A girl like you tells the story again. Lend your ears to her.

Now answer these questions.

1. Why did Androclees run away from his master’s house?
2. Androclees decided to live in a cave because he did not want
  - (i) to work hard
  - (ii) the king’s soldiers to find him
  - (iii) to go back to the city.
3. How did he and the lion become friends?
4. Why did the lion not attack Androclees in the arena?
5. Androclees left the arena with the lion. Do you think\_\_\_\_\_
  - (i) he kept the lion with him? If so, how did he feed him?
  - (ii) he took the lion to the forest and set him free?
6. Ask you friend “Is it correct to keep a lion with us?”

## Listening Activity Five

### Can you Laugh at Misfortune?

*Would you laugh at other man's suffering? If so how will you feel when someone else laughs at your suffering? The following story presents such a situation. Listen to it and decide whether you want to laugh at someone's misfortune.*

Amir was a prince of Khorasen. He had a thousand camels and a lot of gold and silver. He often had to leave Khorasen and visit the neighbouring cities. Whenever he went out, a caravan of five hundred camels went with him. Three hundred of them carried his pots, pans and provisions.

One morning Amir left Khorasen at the head of his long caravan. On the way he met his enemy, Caliph Ismail. There was a fight between them and the Caliph defeated Amir and made him his prisoner.

It was evening. Amir sat in a small cell of the prison. Bakr, his cook, sat near him. "Bakr," he said, "I'm hungry. Could you please cook something for me?"

"I'll try my best, Your Majesty," replied Bakr. He went to the kitchen. There was only one pot with him. All the other pots and provisions of Amir were with the Caliph. Bakr found a piece of meat. He put the meat in the pot and placed the pot on the fire. Then he went out to the kitchen garden to look for vegetables.

A dog got scent of the meat. He came to the kitchen and put his head into the pot. The mouth of the pot was small and it stuck to the dog's head. The dog could not take his head out. It was afraid and it ran out with his head in the pot.

Amir saw the dog and laughed. His friends were surprised. They said, "The dog is running away with your dinner and you're laughing.

Amir replied, "I'm laughing at myself. This morning I was a rich man. Three hundred camels carried my pots and provisions. Now I'm a poor man and a prisoner—and one dog can take away all my provisions!"

Amir laughed at his misfortune. Can you also laugh at misfortune?

**Now answer the following questions.**

1. Was Amir a rich man? Given an example to prove your answer.
  
2. The dog ran away with his dinner. Amir could have hit the dog or scolded Bakr.
  - (i) Did he do so?
  
  - (ii) What did he do? If he had cried, would it have helped him?
  
  - (iii) What do you do when your books/games/ice-cream/sweets are spoiled by other?

## Listening Activity Six

### How the Cock Sparrow got Specks of Black

*A Fable is a story which has birds and animals as characters and how he got the specks of black. Listen to the story.*

Long long ago a Cock Sparrow and a Hen Sparrow lived in their nest, which was in the roof of a hut. Hen Sparrow worked hard, kept the nest neat and brought food for herself and her husband. Cock Sparrow was lazy. He did no work but slept a lot. When he awoke he gossiped with the other sparrows and with the flowers and the butterflies, and laughed at the hardworking ants and bees.

One day /some friends of the Hen Sparrow called on her. “Soon,” they said, “you’ll be getting pretty babies so we’ve brought gifts for you and the little ones.” Hen Sparrow blushed and looked happy. She opened the gifts she brought for her. There was a pretty dress in a box. She put it on and stood in front of the mirror.

“My dear,” said the Cock Sparrow, “you look lovely!”

“Ah I” she sighed.

“What’s the matter?” asked her husband.

“I only need one thing to make me beautiful,” she said, “and that’s kajal for my eyes.”

“I’ll go and, get it for you,” volunteered her husband. “But tell me where I can find it.”

“You could ask the Darkness of the Night to give you some kajal,” suggested the Hen Sparrow.

“O.K. I’ll do that,” agreed her husband. “I’ll get up early in the morning and request Night to give me some kajal.”

The next morning it was very cold. Inside the nest it was nice and warm. Hen Sparrow called out to her husband many times but he did not get up. He only put his head deep under his wing and slept. Then at last the Cock Sparrow woke up. Darkness of the Night was not there. He told his wife, "I'll get up early tomorrow morning also and get you some kajaI." He could not get up early the next morning and could not get any kajaI for his wife. This went on for days together.

Hen Sparrow was sad. Her husband too was unhappy. He knew he had failed to make her happy. He sat on a branch all by himself and thought. "Hello!" he called out to his wife. "Can't I get kajaI from the Koel?" Hen Sparrow's face brightened at once and she said with a smile, "Of course, you can. I never thought of it."

"Then I'll go and get some for you," said Cock Sparrow.

"You'd better not go now," advised his wife. "Koel comes to the plains during summer. She comes when the mangoes start ripening on the trees."

Soon it was summer and Cock Sparrow said he would go to the koel.

"Yes, do that," said Hen Sparrow. "But come back soon, for in a day or two the little ones will come out of the eggs and I want them to see me with kajaI in my eyes."

"I'll go like lightning, my dear," said Cock Sparrow and away he flew to a mango orchard.

"Koo-oo! koo-ooo !" sang the Koel.

Cock Sparrow greeted the Koel and requested her for some kajaI. "Oh! I'll give you some but you have to keep it in a bottle," she said. "Go and get one."

"No, I'm afraid I can't do that," he told Koel. "I've to take back kajaI with me today for my wife." Cock Sparrow looked miserable

"Don't worry," said the Koel cheerfully. "I'll find a way out. Take some kajaI on your chest and some on your wings." Cock Sparrow readily agreed.

The Koel put some kajaI on his chest and wings. The Sparrow thanked the Koel and flew away happily.

Cock Sparrow came back with kajal all over him. His wife was delighted. She put some on her eyes and looked beautiful. Cock Sparrow fell in love with her again and danced about on the roof of the hut. “Now what’s this? Some of the kajal is still on your coat! Wait, I’ll wash it for you,” said his wife.

Meanwhile the little ones arrived and with all the work in the house Hen Sparrow could never find time to wash her husband’s coat. Many days later on a warm summer morning. Hen Sparrow sat looking at her husband. “My dear,” she said, “you look very handsome with the kajal on your coat. I want you to wear this coat always.”

“I’ll do anything which makes you happy,” promised her husband. And the Cock Sparrow still has kajal on his chest and his wings.

Based on your listening try the following

1. Hen Sparrow was hard working. Could you cite two examples to prove this?

(i) \_\_\_\_\_

(ii) \_\_\_\_\_

2. How do you say that the Cock Sparrow was lazy?

3. Whom did Cock Sparrow carry the *kajal* from?

4. How did he carry the *kajal*?

5. Have you seen a sparrow in your locale? Try to draw a sparrow here.