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Yelp Lesson Plan – by Kayla Andrews

Teaching Background: I teach at an adult intensive English program at the University of New Orleans. The students I teach are from all around the world, ages 17 to 50+. Some students are immigrants; others are on student or tourist visas for temporary study.

Lesson Title: Using Yelp in Adult Reading Classes to Boost Student Confidence and Curiosity

About Yelp: Yelp is a website and mobile app that publishes crowd-sourced reviews of businesses, particularly restaurants. Anyone can write a review. You can search a restaurant name and read hundreds of reviews written by regular people, who describe and evaluate their experience at that restaurant.

Many Yelp reviews are written in a conversational style, which gives students a chance to learn expressions and slang, while other reviews employ advanced vocabulary and grammar. The novelty of the mix of registers provides a change of pace and keeps students engaged.

Lesson Objective: To strengthen the following reading skills: vocabulary in context, scanning/skimmming, making inferences, summarizing, critical thinking. To boost students' confidence by giving them a self-directed reading experience using authentic material written by internet users.

Time: 50 minutes

Materials: 8-10 descriptions of pairs of people looking for a restaurant for different purposes, cut up and placed in an envelope (one envelope for each group of four students). Each envelope contains the same descriptions. See examples below:

Description Example #1: *Kevin wants to make a million-dollar business deal during a lunch meeting with Jonathan, a potential client. He hopes to impress his client. Where should they go?*

Description Example #2: *Bob wants to take his mother Julia out to dinner for her birthday. Julia does not like fish. She hates spicy food and food from other countries. She doesn't like restaurants that are noisy or dark or very fancy. Where should Bob and Julia go?*

***Adjust the vocabulary and difficulty of the sentences based on the level of the students.

The previous day: Give each student the name of a different local restaurant. Their homework is to look up that restaurant on Yelp and take notes on what people like and dislike about the restaurant. You can provide them with a sheet of guided questions, such as "On which days is the restaurant open for lunch?, How expensive is the restaurant?, What do most people like about the restaurant?, What do some people dislike?," etc.

In addition, review vocabulary for describing/critiquing restaurants, such as:

The service: how the waiters and other staff treat the diners, how quickly they respond to diners' needs

The ambiance: the general feeling of a place

The décor: the colors, decorations, and furniture of a place

Fancy / stuffy / pretentious: for very rich people!

Laidback / relaxed: anyone can feel comfortable there

Overpriced / pricy: \$\$\$\$

Cheap / reasonable: \$

Another option for the previous day is to print some Yelp reviews from one restaurant to look at and discuss together as a class. This will familiarize students with the format of Yelp.

Examples of Yelp reviews:

Galatoire's Restaurant

- **Kim B.** 9/3/2019 -- My BF didn't bring a jacket with him from CA because we had not planned to dine at any place that would require one plus it was so hot and muggy. The host has jackets and (I suppose) if you look clean and otherwise well dressed, he gives you one to wear while dining.

Once seated, it took nearly 10 minutes for someone to come to our table. For appetizer- I had the asparagus with hearts of palm salad and my BF had the seafood gumbo, both delicious. For dinner I had the shrimp au vin that was good but not a stand out. My BF had the lamb chops which were perfectly prepared.

This place has a stuffy vibe yet it has extremely loud acoustics due to the high flat walls, narrow room, etc that makes it difficult to even carry on a quiet conversation.

- **Sean P.** 8/5/2019 -- My expectations were quite high for Galatoire's and they fell short by quite a wide margin. Unfortunately, we didn't see our waiter for over 10 minutes once seated. As for the food, it was hit or miss. We had the Crabmeat Au Gratin and Filet Mignon. The filet was good, but not anything above and beyond. The Crabmeat Au Gratin was overly rich and you couldn't really tell there was crabmeat as it was overpowered by all the other ingredients.

If you're looking for the best fine dining in NOLA, go to Commander's Palace. It's less stuffy and excels in both taste and service.

- **Michele H.** 9/13/2019 -- There was four in our party for dinner and it was delicious. The dinners all came out perfect and all the staff was awesome. The place is simple and clean, all white linen and simple white table settings. You start with bread and butter then you order your meal. All the food is a la carte.
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Procedure:

Part I (10-15 minutes): Put the students into groups of four. Each student must tell the group what they learned about their restaurant. They should also share with the group some new words or expressions that they encountered while reading Yelp reviews.

Part II (30 minutes): Give each group an envelope of the eight to ten different descriptions of two people looking for a restaurant.

The students must take turns pulling one description from the envelope and reading it aloud to the group. The group then decides which restaurant best fits that situation and gives the paper to the student who has that restaurant.

Part III (5 minutes): Each group tells the class where they put each pair of people and why. For example, "We put Kevin and Jonathan at Abdullah's restaurant because it is very fancy so it's good for rich businessmen."

Homework: Write a Yelp-style review of a restaurant that you have been to recently (or anytime in your life, including the campus dining locations). Use vocabulary and expressions that we've discussed in class or that you saw when you were reading Yelp reviews.

Reflection: I've done this activity many times, and I've noticed that students are always excited to be reading actual user reviews on the Internet. It provides a break from drier, more difficult academic texts while still engaging them as readers.

Students tend to be very amused by the occasional angry scathing review. Sometimes students will notice spelling or grammar errors in the reviews – I think that's a great learning experience that strengthens their reading/writing skills, and I always praise them lavishly if they point out errors to me.

Kayla Andrews teaches at the Intensive English Language Program at the University of New Orleans. She has taught adult immigrants in Massachusetts and was an English teaching assistant at a middle school in rural France.