



Learning English with CBC



A teachers' guide to using Learning English with CBC Calgary resources

Justine Light



Daylight Consulting Inc.

**Government
of Alberta** ■

Daylight Consulting Inc. Project Manager: Justine Light
Daylight Consulting Inc. Project Consultants: Jennifer Foote, Barbara Edmondson & Maroro Zinyemba

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Introduction

Learning English with CBC is a joint project between CBC Calgary, the Government of Alberta and Daylight Consulting. Learning English with CBC can be found at:

<http://www.cbc.ca/calgary/learning-english/> This site uses CBC Calgary radio news and feature stories as tools for ESL learners with a desire to improve their English. These are actual current news items heard on CBC Radio One 99.1 FM and 1010 AM. Each weekly newscast story and monthly feature story has a language lesson attached. An English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor from Daylight Consulting has prepared all the activities. The stories and interviews used in these lessons are a great way for ESL students to learn about their city, community and workplace. They have been developed with a dual purpose:

- As teacher resources for use in ESL classrooms
- As an independent online resource for ESL learners whom it is anticipated may be working independently and in a more isolated context.

The development of these resources has been supported by Alberta Employment and Immigration, and the resources can also be accessed via their website:

<http://www.breakthewall.alberta.ca>

Newscasts (Weekly News Stories) The stories in this section are shorter. They focus on the three current events stories of the week. They are suitable for students who have reached Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) 4.

Monthly Stories (Monthly Feature Stories) The stories in this section are a bit longer. They will feature items of general human interest. They are suitable for students who have reached CLB 6+.

This teachers' guide is intended to respond to questions that arose in the initial phase of this project, during teacher workshops and via the CBC website. It presents quick and easy adaptation ideas for teachers with a desire to utilize this authentic, Alberta-focussed resource with a variety of learners and for a wider range of activities than presented on the website. As much as possible, I have used real questions from my colleagues. In this activity guide, every effort has been made to present tasks and suggested exercises that are connected to sample learning outcomes to demonstrate how such activities might fit into a curriculum. For a more detailed discussion of aligning activities to curriculum outcomes, see the ATESL Adult ESL Curriculum Framework (2011)¹. All activities outlined in this guide are provided for teachers to use freely in their classrooms.

¹ Chambers et al (2011).

² For an excellent discussion of Skehan's framework see Rossiter & Abbot's (2008) presentation on teaching in multi 3

My Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) level 5-6 learners really enjoy listening to the current events covered in the weekly newscast; however, I find the activities a bit too easy for them. Can you suggest ways to quickly and easily adapt the audio lesson materials to match their level?

When adapting materials to make them appropriate for a higher proficiency group of learners there are a few principles that will support this transformation. Skehan (1998) described three elements that impact task difficulty:

Linguistic complexity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What language is required to complete the task?
Cognitive complexity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How familiar is the topic and the task?• How clear is the organization of the information?
Communicative stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the time limits?• Is there speed pressure?• How many participants are involved in the task?• How long is the text?• What kind of response is required?

Table one: Elements of task complexity (adapted from Skehan, 1998)²

Understanding the elements of task complexity enables a teacher to modify the weekly newscast audios for higher-level learners.

Look at this text from the May 27th weekly newscast:

The central U.S was hit by powerful and deadly storms last week. On Sunday, a huge tornado killed at least 130 people in the city of Joplin in Missouri. More than 900 people were believed to be injured. Then on Tuesday, at least 15 people were killed by tornadoes in Arkansas, Oklahoma and Kansas. In Joplin, search teams used dogs and listening devices trying to hear faint sound of anyone still alive underneath the collapsed homes and businesses. The Joplin tornado was the deadliest single tornado since the National Weather Service began keeping official records in 1950. And it was the eighth deadliest in U.S. history.

http://www.cbc.ca/edmonton/eal/newscasts/newscast_may27_2011.pdf

² For an excellent discussion of Skehan's framework see Rossiter & Abbot's (2008) presentation on teaching in multi level classrooms, www.atesl.ca/resources

Modifying the task difficulty by increasing the cognitive complexity

Activity example:

Possible specific learning outcome: *Demonstrate comprehension of main ideas in a story*

Listen to the audio without previewing the vocabulary or an extended pre-listening discussion

Present the task to the students:

- We will listen to the audio again. You will not be able to take notes.
- After you listen, in a group of three, you will write on this poster paper, seven main points from the news story.
- Your group should check the spelling of the words in your points.
- Your paper will be posted in the classroom and we will compare each group's points.

It may be necessary to recap with your students how to discriminate between a point and a main point.

Play the audio again

Want to make it even harder? Repeat this activity with all three stories from the weekly newscast in one activity, so students have to summarize three-times as much information.

I have a mixed level class with learners at CLB level 3 – 4. They really enjoy listening to the weekly news but I need alternative, easier activities for the learners at the CLB 3 level. Any suggestions?

This question has arisen very frequently during our workshop with teachers. I suggest a tiered task approach.

Possible specific learning outcome: *Demonstrate comprehension of factual details and some inferred meanings in a story in a news item³*

Example 1:

Two young people from East Central Alberta are in hospital with serious injuries after Tuesday's earthquake in New Zealand. Jenna Benoit is from Lloydminster, and Patrick Lee is from Kitscoty. The pair were in Christchurch when the quake happened. Jenna's father says she suffered a number of injuries including a fractured skull and damaged liver. Larry Lee is Patrick's father. He says his son's condition improved after surgery on his head

³ Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000

Wednesday night. Jenna Benoit and Patrick Lee are both in their early twenties and had been backpacking around New Zealand since November.

http://www.cbc.ca/edmonton/eal/newscasts/newscast_feb21_2011.pdf

<p>Group A (CLB 4)</p>	<p>Listen to the audio and answer the questions found in the lesson plan on the CBC website: Listening Activity: Short Answer Read and answer the questions below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are Jenna and Patrick from? • Where were they when they were injured? • What injuries does Jenna have? • Why is Patrick's condition better now? • Why were Jenna and Patrick in New Zealand?
<p>Group B (CLB 3)</p>	<p>Listen to the audio Students match ready-made question and answer cards to the same questions as above.</p>

The cognitive and linguistic complexity of this activity is much easier for the CLB 3 group. The added bonus is that students can pair up across the groups to compare their answers.

Example 2:

Possible specific learning outcome: *Demonstrate comprehension of factual details and some inferred meanings in a story in a news item⁴*

<p>Group A (CLB 4)</p>	<p>Listen to the audio and complete a cloze exercise with a focus on grammar function words, ex. Articles, verb tense endings.</p>
<p>Group B (CLB 3)</p>	<p>Listen to the audio and complete a cloze exercise with a focus on content words.</p>

The cognitive and linguistic complexity of this task varies for the two groups. The content words being focused on by the CLB 3 learners tend to be emphasized in speech, whereas the grammar function words are not as emphatically stated in speech and require more knowledge of grammar, as well as, higher level listening skills to complete.

Once again as an added bonus is that students can pair up across the groups to compare their answers.

⁴ Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000

I have a mixed level class with learners at CLB level 2-4. They really enjoy listening to the weekly news but I need alternative activities for the lower level learners. Any suggestions?

Example 1.

Again with a multi-level class, one of the quickest fixes is to use a tiered task approach – use one task but tier the difficulty of completing the task.

Starting on September 1st, Alberta drivers talking on cell phones or texting when driving will face fines. Transportation Minister, Luke Ouellette says the province's distracted driving legislation will also ban behaviour such as watching DVDs, putting on makeup or combing their hair while driving. Alberta is the last province in Canada to have distracted driving legislation. But, Ouellette calls the legislation the most comprehensive of its kind in the country. Ouellette says that anything that takes a driver's hands off the wheel is subject to a \$172 fine. The law has been criticized by some people for not also banning hands-free cellphone use while driving as well. Ouellette says the law can be changed in the future.

http://www.cbc.ca/edmonton/eal/newscasts/newscast_jun24_2011.pdf

Group A (CLB 4)	Listen to the audio and answer open-ended questions
Group B (CLB 3)	Listen to the audio and answer multiple choice questions
Group C (CLB 2)	Listen to the audio and fill in cloze gaps

Bonus: This type of tiering of the task does not take too much preparation time for the instructor.

Example 2

In this tiered task, the students are all completing a very similar task but the linguistic complexity is adapted for the different levels in the class.

Vancouver has had a difficult week. First, a painful loss in the Stanley Cup final, and, second, widespread riots. Very large crowds in downtown Vancouver became violent after the Canucks lost the Stanley Cup final to the Boston Bruins. The riots caused millions of dollars in damage and theft to downtown businesses, at least 150 injuries as well, including 9 police officers and a very bad international image.

Police chief, Jim Chu, defended how the police handled things, saying the riot was under control in 3 hours. Chu said the rioters wanted to attack police officers, including one officer who was hit with a brick and needed 9 stitches. British Columbia Premier, Christy Clark is promising to prosecute the criminals.

http://www.cbc.ca/edmonton/eal/newscasts/newscast_jun17_2011.pdf

Group A (CLB 4)	Listen to the audio and complete a cloze exercise
Group B (CLB 3)	Listen to the audio and complete a cloze exercise using a choice of words, minimal pairs, or frequently confused words Example from the above
Group C (CLB 2)	Listen to the audio and complete a cloze with missing words provided on cards

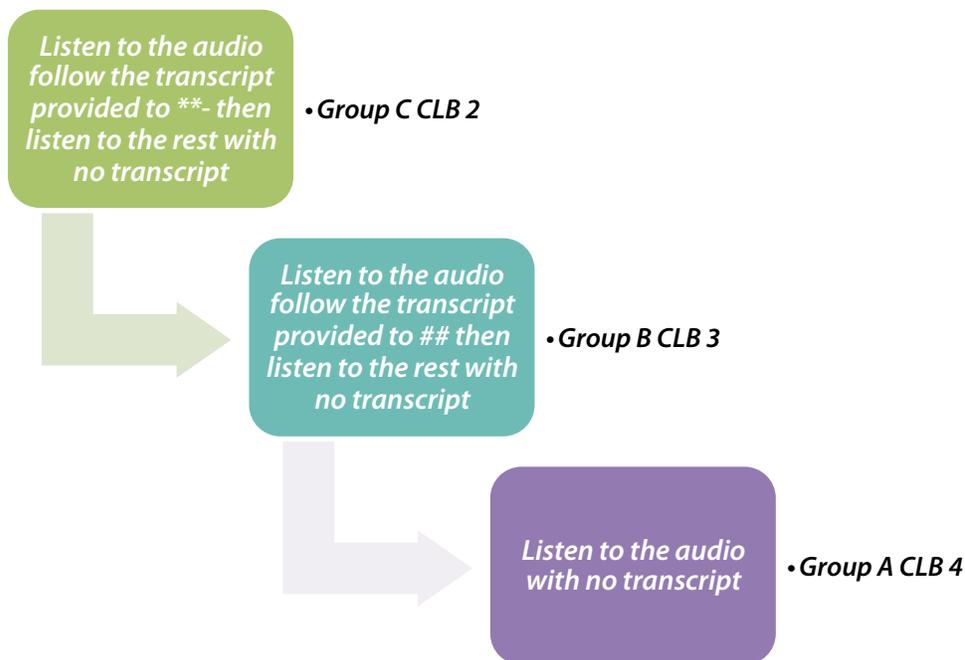
Example 3

Another example of modifying the linguistic challenge:

Thousands of fans in red, white and blue Jets jerseys were cheering and waving flags when they heard that the National Hockey League is coming back to Winnipeg##. The party began after a Winnipeg group said it has bought the Atlanta Thrashers hockey team and is moving the team to Winnipeg for the start of the season that begins this fall**. No decision has been made about a name for the team but the Jets is the fan favourite. Jets was the name of the team when it was in Winnipeg before. The Jets left Winnipeg 15 years ago and became the Phoenix Coyotes.

http://www.cbc.ca/edmonton/eal/newscasts/newscast_jun03_2011.pdf

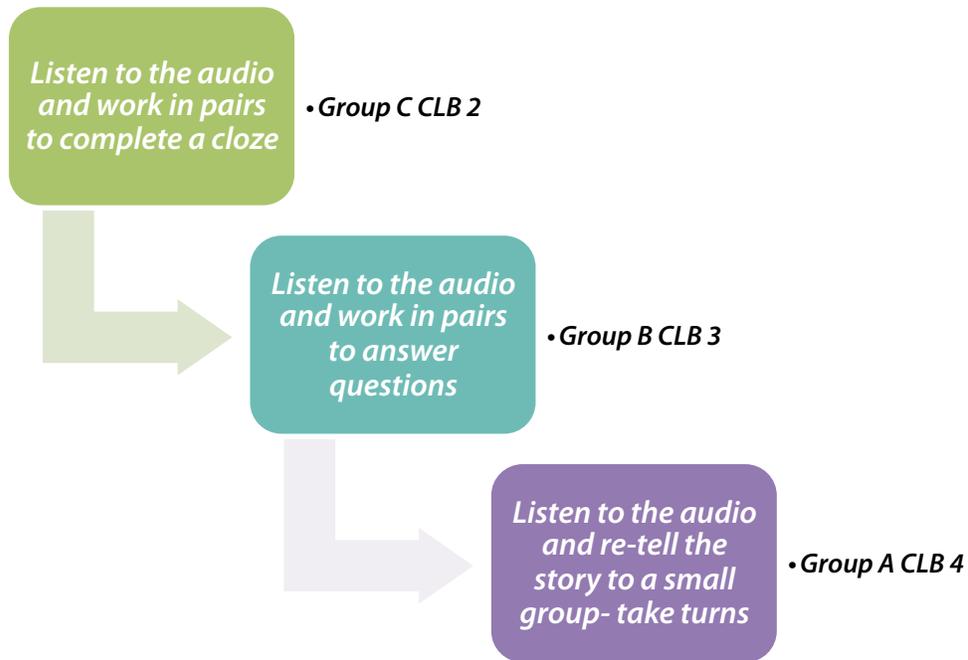
Tiered listening activities by modifying the role of the transcript



Example 4

Modify the communicative stress

Groups listen to the same audio but the stress and linguistic challenge in the task is tiered.



I noticed that in your weekly newscast lessons the activities are focused on listening and vocabulary. I would like to incorporate some grammar exercises to go along with this resource. How could I do this?

In order to produce the weekly newscast in a timely way, we have very limited opportunity to create activities. Time is our limitation but there is no doubt that the audios and transcripts lend themselves to integration of grammar.

Example 1:

Work through the activities for a newscast audio, as described in the lessons.

After the listening and vocabulary have been worked through, give students a copy of the transcript.

Prince William and Kate are coming to Canada for two of the summer's biggest parties. They will arrive in Canada June 30 and leave July 8. The royal newlyweds will begin their first official trip in Ottawa where they will attend Canada Day celebrations and end it with the Calgary Stampede. In the middle, there will be stops in Quebec City, Montreal, Yellowknife, Charlottetown, and Summerside, P.E.I.; Kate is said to be a big fan of "Anne of Green Gables." William and Kate will not be coming to Edmonton. This will be the third time Prince William has toured Canada. It will be Kate's first visit.

http://www.cbc.ca/edmonton/eal/newscasts/newscast_jun03_2011.pdf

Possible activities could include:

- Highlighting all of the verbs in the passage – identify from a list the tense and aspect of the verbs
- Link the verbs to the subjects
- Look for passive verbs
- Highlight all of the auxiliary words associated with the verbs

My students enjoy the topics covered and want to discuss them. Rather than just chatting in small groups, I would like more targeted activities that focus on Benchmark 4 proficiency descriptors for speaking.

Do you think this would work?

Yes, these authentic listening texts can easily form the basis of speaking tasks at the CLB 4 level. Performance conditions are an important aspect of CLB 4 speaking tasks.

Consider:

Speech rate is slow to normal

Speech is guided by specific questions

Topics are common everyday matters

- Pick topics from weekly newscast that are accessible to the learners. Each week there is a range of stories, at a range of complexity levels. In general, the stories about animals, the weather and national holidays are more easily understood than those about politics, criminal trials and international crises.
- Choose a more familiar and concrete story.

Possible general learning outcome: *Learner can take part in short, routine conversations about...familiar topics of personal relevance*

Possible specific learning outcome: Open, develop and close small talk conversation

Activity:

Whole class – Review previous class discussion of what topics are appropriate for small talk

Look at the page for the weekly newscasts cbc.ca/eal/newscast.html

Which news stories are about topics suitable for small talk?

Listen to the story about the return of National Hockey League player Ryan Smyth to Edmonton.

Hockey star Ryan Smyth is returning to the Edmonton Oilers from Los Angeles. Smyth says he and his wife wanted to come back to Edmonton because it is home for he and his family. Smyth was a fan favourite for over a decade. Smyth started his N.H.L. career with the Oilers in 1994, and left in a surprise deal that saw him traded to the New York Islanders in February 2007. Smyth asked for the trade back to Edmonton.

http://www.cbc.ca/edmonton/eal/newscasts/newscast_jul01_2011.pdf

Students work in pairs to create a small-talk dialogue about this story and present their dialogue to the class.

I already use the weekly newscasts with my CLB 4 level class – I would like to use the monthly stories from time-to-time. How can I use these stories with lower proficiency learners?

For a full discussion of Skehan’s framework for task differentiation, please see page 3 of this guide.

To adapt a more difficult listening text for your learners you could create an activity where

• The language difficulty required to complete the task is reduced	A
• The topic is more familiar	B
• The task required is familiar to your learners	C
• The task accompanying the listening text requires decreased cognitive complexity	D
• The communication stress resulting from undertaking the task is reduced	E

Example 1: February 2011 Monthly feature – Champions of Change

Activity: The story below has been one of the most popular we have featured on the website and many teachers have asked about adapting it for lower levels. Here is one suggestion that incorporates Skehan’s approach to task differentiation as previously described above.

Possible specific learning outcomes: Learner will be able to relate a detailed sequence of events, Learner will be able to identify the main ideas and details of a narrative presentation

- Complete all of the pre-listening vocabulary and food for thought questions.
- Relate the topic of the listening to the students’ lives. As a whole group, discuss a person in their lives who have made a large contribution to their community.
- Students complete a cloze exercise while listening to the audio – with a focus on awareness-raising of a specific grammar form – they check their responses in pairs.
- Have a debrief with the class.
- Collect the cloze version of the transcript.
- Replay the audio, stopping at the end of each speaker.
- In pairs, students take turns re-telling the main points from that speaker’s section.

- Present the pairs with a set of 12 sentences outlining the main points of the story, in a jumbled order, to sequence correctly.
- Have a debrief with the class.

SPEAKER	TITLE: BOB DAVISSON – CHAMPION OF CHANGE	TIME
Ron Wilson	I want to introduce you to a guy this morning whose name is Bob Davisson. Bob is making the lives of poor children in Haiti immeasurably better. Since he retired from his own business and being a Mountie, he has built dozens of schools in Haiti, a country where nearly half of the people are illiterate. That's why Bob Davisson is one of the top ten finalists in the CBC's Champions of Change. Here's Jennifer Keene with his story.	0:00
Bob	[So we had to trench, everything from here, dig down, waterline, sewer...]	0:25
Jennifer	Bob Davisson takes me back to his garage on a suburban street in Medicine Hat.	0:31
Bob	This is a big part of our fundraising to help the schools, is we have a Lifeline blend of coffee that we use, to try to cut down on the fundraising. [We develop it through business]	0:37
Jennifer	So you have a, you have a roast house? Here in the back?	0:51
Bob	[Yeah, so this this is our...]	0:54
Jennifer	All of the profits from this backyard coffee roastery go to Lifeline Haiti. Bob Davisson founded the charity 5 years ago after being invited by Christian missionaries to visit the country. He was struck by the poverty he saw there. It reminded him of his own life, growing up poor in Rutland Saskatchewan, raised by his single mom.	0:55
Bob	I saw a little boy that was about 4 years old. He had a stick in his hand, it had a nail through it, and at the end of the nail was a plastic lid and it was acting like a wheel. And he was pushing this. And that took me right back to my childhood where that's the only toy I had – was a stick that had a nail through it and a wheel on it and I played with that thing and pushed that through the hills for hours and hours. And that really took me back to my childhood.	1:17
Jennifer	Inspired by what he saw, Davisson finished what the missionaries had started. He raised enough money to build his first school.	1:48
Bob	That was 81 children, in Chabin, of January of '06. To see the joy on their face was incredible.	1:56
Jennifer	Today, Lifeline Haiti has 51 schools, mostly located in remote regions. Davisson can't fund them all yet but he's determined to give Haitians a hand-	2:06

	up. He's started a number of businesses in Haiti, hoping to plough the profits into schools. Lifeline owns and operates 2 water trucks, a cinderblock plant, and Davisson has other plans as well.	
Bob	One of our goals is to have a smelter where we can take all of the wasted steel that's abandoned trucks and buses that are along the side of the road and the steel that's there. Melt it down and and make it into rebar. And the same with the cinderblock plants. I'd love to build maybe 4 or 5 or 6 more around the country and be and supply a high quality cinderblock that would withstand a high impact earthquake.	2:29
Jennifer	Davisson works 4 to 5 months every year in Haiti. It's hot, it's risky, but...	2:56
Bob	The hardest part for me is being separated from my family. From my wife of 40 years, from our children, and now we have a granddaughter who has just turned three, who is just the apple of my eye. And it's hard; it was just not long ago she came over and she was visiting and she saw a little suitcase on the bed. And she looked at it and she looked at me and she says, "Papa, Papa no go Haiti." And that's probably probably the hardest part.	3:02
Jennifer	He goes, knowing there are thousands of children waiting for him in Haiti.	3:33
Jennifer	For CBC Radio, I'm Jennifer Keene.	3:38

http://www.cbc.ca/edmonton/eal/stories/story_feb09_2011.pdf

I have a multi-level class ranging from CLB 5-8. Would you recommend using the monthly stories and how could I quickly adapt these resources?

For a full discussion of Skehan’s framework for differentiating tasks, please see page 3 of this document.

Example 1: May monthly feature story – Jobs, jobs, jobs

In this monthly story, the True False questions already included in the lesson plan could form the ready-made materials for this tiered task.

http://www.cbc.ca/edmonton/eal/stories/story_may26_2011.pdf

The Audio

In this story, you will hear CBC journalist Adrienne Lamb and Presenter Mark Scholz, discuss the opportunities in the Alberta Economy. Adrienne interviews a number of experts in Edmonton about current employment opportunities in the province.

Tier the task quickly and easily in the following way:

Group A (CLB 5)	Present only the correct sentences from the answer key on individual cards and have students put them in the correct order as they listen to the audio
Group B (CLB 6-7)	Complete the True/false activity from the materials
Group C (CLB 8)	Present with open ended questions adapted from the true/false statements

Accompanying the audio is a set of true/false statements:

Here are the correct answers from the answer key:

1. The economy in Canada is starting to improve really quickly

FALSE The economy in Canada is still not very good, but the economy in Alberta is improving quickly.

2. Britney and her husband moved to here from Saskatoon so that she could get a good job with a national grocery chain.

FALSE They moved here so that her husband could get a better job.

3. Britney was able to make more money here than she could in Saskatchewan.

TRUE

4. Last month more jobs were created in Alberta than in all of the other provinces combined.

TRUE

5. Ontario and Alberta are the only provinces with notable employment gains.

FALSE Only Alberta had notable employment gains.

6. All of the jobs being created are in oil and gas, construction, and healthcare.

FALSE Oil and gas, construction, and healthcare are examples of some of the kinds of jobs being created

7. According to Sandra Jardine, it has been difficult to find enough nurses, lab tech, and IT experts for the past couple of years.

FALSE Until recently they were not hiring very many people because they were worried about money.

8. In an employee market, workers can ask for more money and salaries because it is difficult for bosses to find good people.

TRUE

9. Shelley Tobin believes that soon there will be even greater shortages of employees than there was during the economic boom in.

TRUE

10. Bob Walker thinks that if you are thinking about building something new, it is better to wait until next year.

FALSE Bob Walker thinks that if you are thinking of building, it is good to do it soon.

Example 2: May monthly feature story – Jobs, jobs, jobs

http://www.cbc.ca/edmonton/eal/stories/story_apr29_2011.pdf

The Audio

In this story, you will hear CBC journalist Niall McKenna and Presenter Peter Brown, discuss one Edmonton family who lost touch with their Aboriginal culture but are working to make sure their son understands his culture. They take part in a school activity called Wichitowin nights to ensure Aboriginal children grow up knowing and understanding the importance of their heritage and culture.

The listening activities that accompany this audio on the website are quite different in linguistic and cognitive complexity. Rather than have students work through both exercises assign the appropriate levels to different students in the class.

Lower cognitive and linguistic complexity:

While you are listening, complete this table.

Compare these childhood and adult experiences of the adults in the story. Put a checkmark in the column for the issues and situations Matt has experienced, which ones Caroline has experienced and which they have both experienced.

Experiences	Matt Foster Boucher	Caroline Foster-Boucher
Attended residential school		
Raised in foster care		
Former drug addict		
Former alcoholic		
Tried out different religions		
Adopted by a non-Aboriginal family		
Reconnected with their Aboriginal culture		
Raising a child with a connection to their culture		

Higher cognitive and linguistic complexity:

Use the information from the podcast to answer the following questions.

- 1) What were the causes of Matt losing his aboriginal identity?
- 2) How did residential schools impact Caroline’s childhood?
- 3) How did visiting their home reserves help Matt and Caroline learn about their heritage?
- 4) Why were educators concerned before the Wichitowin nights were started?
- 5) Why are some aboriginal parents nervous about visiting older schools in Edmonton?
- 6) Do you think a lot of people attended Wichitowin night at Inglewood school? How can you tell?

Feature your ideas in this document:

The questions in this guide are adapted from questions asked by ESL teachers throughout Alberta as we held workshops to introduce this resource or via the CBC website. Teachers always provide the most interesting classroom adaptations and activities. If you have a great idea using either the monthly or weekly stories and you would like to share it with your TESL colleagues, please submit it to Justine Light at daylightconsulting@shaw.ca . We will add your idea to the ATESL database version of this document which can be viewed at www.atesl.ca/resources .

Labour market enhancements:

If your students have enjoyed the activities on the Learning English with CBC Radio, check out the new online ESL activities for learners at the CLB 6 level. These units are themed around employment, including such topics as networking, the hidden job market, cold calling, health and safety. These eight units can be found at the Alberta government website www.breakthewall.alberta.ca

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