Speaking & Listening: Chat show: who is to blame?

How it works

In addition to being speaking and listening practice, this is a lively exercise in getting students to explore in detail the characters and the morality of the text through an extended role play.

The resource gives useful starting points, with a quotation for each character and a number of lines of enquiry for answering the question ‘who is to blame?’ Students adopt a role and prepare their initial arguments before the chat show classroom event takes place.

Try this!

I probably wouldn’t do this as an assessed activity because of the potential for mayhem that makes trashy daytime TV chat shows such popular viewing. Really, if you’re going to do this, let rip and have some fun, otherwise you’ll spend half the time telling students off for only doing what they’ve seen on TV. The fun is in the high stake verbal confrontations, the tears, and the recriminations. If you’re using it to try and assess standard English performance and sensitive listening, you’ll probably just confuse your students. But as a dramatic exercise in its own right, and as a way of really probing attitudes and ideas about character and morality, this technique can push hard and generate original and exciting ideas. You just need to make sure that you capture them. Try videoing the event for subsequent review (get students being the studio crew!) and/or adopting an observer’s role (let someone very feisty in the class be the show host).
The Chat show: who is to blame?

In groups, prepare a ‘Jeremy Kyle’ style debate on who is to blame. Each of you must present a particular point of view at first, but you must also listen and respond to the arguments of others. Choose your role from one of the following:

- The host of the show. He or she must manage the argument so that everybody gets to speak, and steer the debates where necessary.
- Mr Birling - ‘That wretched girl has been nothing but trouble…’
- Sheila - ‘It’s the only time I’ve ever done anything like that…’
- Gerald - ‘I didn’t feel about her as she felt about me …’
- Mrs Birling - ‘I did nothing I’m ashamed of …’
- Eric - ‘And I didn’t even remember - that’s the hellish thing …’
- The Inspector - ‘Each of you is guilty …’

The audience members should question the above characters, and argue their point of view. Start with the suggested points, but obviously you will need to really develop these if you are to argue your case effectively.

- Mr Birling - he set Eva off on her destructive path …
- Gerald - he broke Eva’s heart …
- Mrs Birling - she refused Eva help when she was desperate …
- Eva herself - she allowed herself to get in a mess …

Make sure you:

- make a significant contribution
- engage with the ideas of others - build on and challenge where possible
- promote a point of view - be persuasive!
- speak fluently and purposefully
- always listen closely.