



POWER OF ACTIVE LISTENING

Lesson Plan

SUMMARY

Students will learn about active listening by discussing an audio clip and participating in an exercise to experience what it feels like to listen and have someone listen to them.

OBJECTIVE

- Students will reflect on the power of listening to others, and the power of being listened to.
- Students will understand the definition of active listening.
- Students will learn and practice tips for active listening.

TIME: 45 minutes

PREPARATION:

- Review the lesson below
- Optional: Print out student copies of the Active Listening Student Handout
- Be prepared to model the Listening Lab: Short Silences Activity

MATERIALS:

- Interactive whiteboard; or a computer with connection to the Internet, a projector & speakers
- Optional: student copies of the Active Listening Student Handout

WARM-UP: TELEPHONE (4 minutes)

1. Explain to students that the purpose of this Warm-Up is to get them thinking about what it means to listen well.
2. Ask students to stand in a circle.
3. Explain that you will be playing the game of Telephone. Ask if any student is familiar with the game and would like to explain how to play.



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4. Start by whispering the following sentence into a student's ear: "I want to know what it feels like to listen and what it feels like to be heard."
5. This first student will then whisper what they think they heard into the next student's ear. Students will repeat this process until the last person is reached. The last student will then say the word or phrase they heard out loud for the whole class to hear. More likely than not, the last student will have heard something totally different from the original message.
6. Ask students to move their chairs into a circle.

DEBRIEF

Facilitate a short discussion using the following prompts:

- What happened to the original message?
- Was it easy or difficult to hear the message? Why do you think it might have been difficult?

Responses might include the following:

- "It was hard to hear because the person was whispering."
- "We weren't making eye contact."
- "Students were talking or laughing."
- "It's hard to understand an isolated word or phrase without any context; i.e., without context, words and phrases can sound like they come from out of the blue."

ACTIVITY: CELESTE DAVIS-CARR & AARON (12 minutes)

1. Explain that today students will explore the power of listening to others, as well as being listened to ourselves.
2. Explain to students that they are going to begin this exploration by hearing an audio clip of a StoryCorps teacher Celeste Davis-Carr, and her student, Aaron. Aaron shared with his teacher, Celeste, in a StoryCorps recording that he was homeless. This was their follow up interview.



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3. Play the Celeste Davis-Carr & Aaron Audio Clip for students. You can also access the corresponding transcript.
4. Ask a volunteer to summarize the clip.
5. Facilitate a short discussion using the following prompts:
 - Why do you think that it was powerful for Celeste to listen to Aaron and his story?
 - How did Celeste show Aaron that she was really listening to him?
 - Why do you think that it was important to Aaron that his teacher, Celeste, listened to him and his story? How do you know?

ACTIVITY: WHAT IS ACTIVE LISTENING?

1. Explain to students that Celeste and Aaron's conversation demonstrated not just listening, but active listening.
2. Pass out printed copies of the Active Listening Student Handout, or project the definition below for the entire class using available technology.
3. Ask a student to read the definition of active listening out loud for the class.

Active listening involves attentively seeking to understand a speaker's message, rather than passively hearing the words that a speaker says.

Active Listeners provide verbal and nonverbal feedback to show their sincere investment in what the speaker is sharing.

Active listening can help to build trust within a conversation, thereby allowing the speaker to communicate more easily, openly and honestly.

DEBRIEF:

- Why is listening to others powerful for us personally?
- Why is being listened to powerful for us personally?
- Why is listening to others difficult sometimes?
- What are some things we can do to make others feel like we're really listening to them?



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OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: TIPS FOR ACTIVE LISTENING (8 minutes)

1. Explain to students that it is important for them to have an understanding of what active listening looks like concretely.
2. Tell students that they are going to learn more about active listening through the Tips for Active Listening video.
3. Play the Tips for Active Listening video for students. You can also view the corresponding transcript.

DEBRIEF

- Which of these tips are nonverbal strategies?
- Which of these tips are verbal strategies?
- What are examples of other tips for active listening?

ACTIVITY: SHORT SILENCES LISTENING LAB (9 minutes)

1. Tell students that they are now going to try an exercise to practice active listening strategies, particularly using short silences and not interrupting.
2. Ask students to read the quote by Diana Senechal, an author and former New York City public school teacher, which is listed on the Active Listening Student Handout.

“Listening...involves a certain surrender, a willingness to sit with what one does not already know...Listening requires us to stretch a little beyond what we know, expect or want.”

- Diana Senechal

3. Ask for a volunteer to explain what it means to really listen, according to Senechal. Ask if anyone would like to add to this answer. Some sample responses may include:
 - To understand someone who is different from us, we need to try to see things from his or her perspective
 - We have to put aside what we think we know to really listen.



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4. Explain that students are going to interview each other, using the following prompt:
 - Tell me something about yourself that might surprise me.
5. Further explain that when they interview each other, they should practice using short silences. This means that whenever the narrator stops speaking, the interviewer should pause for six to eight seconds (counting quietly to themselves) before asking a follow-up question. During this period, the narrator is free to add any details to their story. The interviewer will then need to wait for another opportunity to ask a follow-up question.
6. Pair students up by counting off. For example, if there are 20 students, count off one to ten and pair students who have the same number. If there are an uneven number of students, you can participate.
7. Student 1 will tell their story for five minutes total, with Student 2 pausing before they ask any follow-up questions.
8. After you call time, students will switch roles.

DEBRIEF

- Facilitate a short discussion using the following prompts:
- As the interviewer, how did it feel to pause before asking questions?
- Were the pauses helpful when you were telling your story?
- Did this listening exercise differ from the other peer interviews we have done in class? If so, how?
- Do you think people often use this method of 'short silences' in real life?
- What does it feel like when someone interrupts you?
- What do you think might cause someone to interrupt another person?

CLOSING: HANDS UP IF... (4 minutes)

1. Explain to students that the listening exercise they just performed was also used by graduate students, i.e., people who have graduated from



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college and are studying for a master's degree. Read the following statement, written by one of those students:

"This listening exercise ... help[ed] me to realize that interrupting is not only cutting in and talking when someone else is speaking. ... Interrupting someone can go so far as to not let someone fully explore and express the depths of their thoughts, even when it seems they have finished speaking."

2. Ask students to raise their hands if, after completing the exercise themselves, they agree with this quote.
3. Call on a few volunteers to explain why they do or do not agree.