

# Suggested Activities and Topics for Conversation, by Caroline Borer

## Pairing Listening Comprehension and Discussion

Having students listen to a song, a story, a newscast, etc. from local or national radio stations in the US (or UK) is a great way to not only practice (and check) listening comprehension but use the song or story as a catalyst for discussion. Plus, everyone loves songs.

The following websites I have used successfully with English classes and conversation groups at IPA/ CERP:

[www.thisamericanlife.org](http://www.thisamericanlife.org)

This website has an enormous data base of compelling stories from all walks of life in the United States. Some topics Uruguayan groups found interesting were:

- Health Care: <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/437/old-boys-network>

- Job Creation

<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/435/how-to-create-a-job>

- University Life

<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/396/1-party-school>

- Urban Legends

<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/406/true-urban-legends>

- Rest Stops/ American Travel

<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/388/rest-stop>

<http://www.npr.org/programs/morning-edition/>

This website has daily news and information from the US.

<http://www.npr.org/series/tiny-desk-concerts/>

This website for the Tiny Desk Concert Series has brief (no more than 15 minutes) concerts from musicians around the world. There are accompanying videos which can help with comprehension. Also, there are many instrumental artists which can be a catalyst for more abstract conversations. Some artists I have used with success have been:

- Rodrigo y Gabriela (to discuss music, imagery and ethnicity)
- Esperanza Spalding (to discuss the Grammy's)
- Ghost of a Saber Tooth Tiger (to discuss John Lennon's legacy)

[www.bbc.co.uk/radio3](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3)

This website has lots of archives of music from the UK, US, and entire world. They also have news stories about certain genres of music and musicians.

## Topics for Liceos

Here is a list of topics that work well for teenagers in liceos (or even 6th year of primaria).

- Different Genres of music. Play music other than pop or hip hop that students are already familiar with. Find samples of distinctly American music like blues, country, bluegrass, jazz, indie rock, traditional ballads or folk music.
- Food. Talk about food specific to your hometown or region in the US.
- American Breakfast and dispelling the myth that Americans eat pancakes, bacon, eggs and potatoes every morning.
- Finding the American equivalent to Uruguayan foods. For example, Americans have barbecues and Uruguayans have asados.
- American High School schedules and the differences between Uruguayan and American high schools
- Facebook. Anything and everything related to Facebook is a great conversation starter: how long they spend on Facebook, what types of things they put on Facebook, etc.
- The Simpsons. High Schoolers are familiar with the Simpsons in Spanish and like to compare with the English version. The Simpsons is also good American social commentary.

- Festivals. Talk about different Uruguayan and American festivals and celebrations. Both cultures have a lot.

## Games

These activities can be modified for any group and any language level.

- 2 truths and a lie. Students must say two true facts about themselves and one lie. The rest of the class has to decide which statement is the lie.
- Simon Says. This is a great review of body vocabulary, and it gets the students moving.
- Memory. Sit students in a circle. One student will begin by saying one word (or phrase for more advanced learners) of a specific category (celebrities, music, food, religion, etc.). The next student in the circle will have to repeat the first word, then add another (i.e. If the category was animals: Dog....Dog, Cat.....Dog, Cat, Fish...Dog, Cat, Fish, etc...). This continues until either the chain of words is broken or everyone in the circle participates.
- Charades. Split students into two teams. One person from team one has one minute to act out an English word, phrase, movie, celebrity, etc. At the end of the minute, the game continues with team two. The two teams alternate, guessing in ENGLISH the word that is being acted out.