

The art doctor

Level: Intermediate and above

Timing: 90 minutes plus

Material needed: One copy of the worksheets and Vocabulary record per student

Group size: Any

Overview

This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work business students is based around an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 6/2009. The article deals with a self-made businessman and his decision to step into the unknown and dramatically change his career path many years ago. We read about what led him to that decision and the consequences it has since had on him and his life.

The tasks in the worksheets will encourage the students to learn and use new business vocabulary and functional language related to the topics of employment, new beginnings, and a career change, and also to bring their own professional experiences into the classroom.

The teacher's notes provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies as well as ideas on how to present the tasks in the classroom, any necessary answer keys, and follow-on extension tasks and lesson plans.

Introduction

The article is about an older British man from an underprivileged and largely uneducated background who drastically changed his career path 38 years ago. The article tells us about his background and offers us some information as to what turned him into a successful self-made businessman. It tells us about his business philosophy and allows us to form a mental picture of the kind of man he is and what (still) drives and motivates him.

Warmer

The article has been made into a word cloud. The bigger the size of each word in the word cloud, the more often it appears in the article.

Explain what a word cloud is to the students and then ask them to look closely at it and say what they think the article is about. They should be able to guess that 'Mitchell' is a person's name - but is it a first name or family name? Beyond that, ask them to make suggestions as to what they think the article is about by using words

that they can read in the word cloud. Use this as a chance to go through some of the vocabulary that will come up when they read the article.

Teaching and learning strategy: Word clouds

Word clouds are a stimulating and fairly new and novel way of introducing and leading into an article or text. To make a word cloud the article needs to be available in electronic form. Copy the text and paste it into the software to create a word cloud. You can choose from a variety of layouts, fonts and colours, but for teaching and learning purposes black script on a white background is probably the most easy to work with. The words that occur most frequently in the article will appear largest in the word cloud. Small words, such as articles and prepositions, are ignored unless you specifically tell the programme to include them. In the case of this article, we can clearly see that the most frequently occurring words are the name *Mitchell* followed by *business*, *paintings*, *world*, *art*, *conservation*, etc. Using this information, students should be able to work out that the article is about someone called Mitchell who deals with art, paintings, conservation in his work or business, possibly on a worldwide scale.

Word clouds have many other uses, for example, to aid recreation of a text after having read it, or for vocabulary revision. The word cloud of the article was made using the free online programme www.wordle.net

Skimming for information

Ask the students to quickly skim-read the article to find the answers to the questions. If they are not used to skim-reading, set them a time limit of three minutes after which they can compare their answers with another student. For skim-reading teaching and learning strategies see the lesson *Business Spotlight: Making a Start*.

Key:

1. He started work as an electrician at 16.
2. Germany
3. He's an oil-painting conservator and a gallery owner.
4. in Surrey in the south-east of England
5. His wife and his son.
6. He's a football coach. He also advises artists and gives advice to customers.

Article summary

By circling the correct option in each sentence students will be able to summarize the main points of the article. After they have decided on the correct answers they should check their answers with a partner and together come up with two more sentences about Robert Mitchell. Where in the summary would they place their sentences

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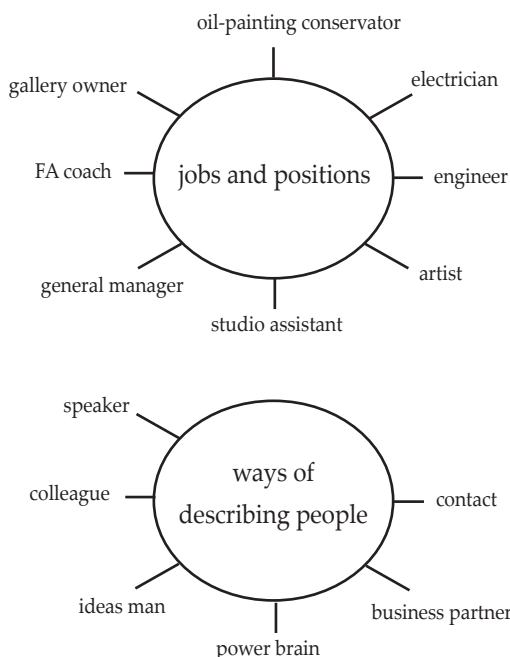
so that they do not disturb the chronological order?

Key:

Robert Mitchell was born in 1941. His family were poor because his father was killed in the Second World War. Mitchell always had good ideas and started his first business at the age of 9. After leaving school he started working as an electrician. By the age of 21 he had worked his way up to being a factory foreman. He decided to change his career after a colleague asked him to build a conservation table. He worked every day of the week before he had built up a healthy business three years later. These days Mitchell runs a successful painting conservation business together with his family members near his home. He has learnt a lot about restoring paintings over the years and is constantly looking for ways to improve his way of working. Although he doesn't have much free time, what he does have he spends as a football coach / a speaker / an adviser to artists (all three answers are correct).

Vocabulary: Jobs, positions and ways of describing people

Students should complete the two word wheels with vocabulary from the article. After a couple of minutes ask them to compare what they have written with what another student has written. If there are any words that they have not included, they should add them to the wheels. If they have written the same words but on different wheels, ask them to come to a decision as to which wheel the words would best fit with and giving reasons why.



Teaching and learning strategy: Word wheels

Word wheels are a visual way of recording new vocabulary, especially lexical groups. Some people prefer to list words, others prefer to record them non-linearly, e.g. in word wheels. Two benefits word wheels have over lists is that they can be easily added to and that they do not show order of importance. Encourage the students to record vocabulary in the way that works best for them.

Writing

Students should first look at what kind of information is required. Then they should think of, and write down, questions they could ask to obtain this missing information.

Once they all have questions, the students should work in pairs and take turn in asking their questions and giving the information from the article. For example: *When was Robert Mitchell born? He was born in 1941.*

Key:

Robert Mitchell
Date of birth: 23 September 1941
Nationality: British
Current position: oil-painting conservator, painting dealer, frame manufacturer
Work experience: electrician; dry-cleaning engineer; general manager of a group of dry-cleaning shops
Education and training: self-educated and trained
Family: wife Vicki and son Darrell, 40 years old
Hobbies: advising artists, FA coach and speaking

Discussion

In this task the students have the opportunity to bring in their own personal experiences and to offer advice and suggestions to others in the group. Allow the students to first think about their answers and make some notes before putting them together in groups to discuss the questions and their answers to them.

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Extension task: Career test

Students could do one of these online personality tests either at home or in class. If in class, allow students to work in pairs if they would prefer. In any case, encourage students to discuss the results the programmes give them and also whether they think this kind of test is useful or not.

Although efforts have been made to make sure all the links work and do not contain any offensive material, please do check them before using them in class. Onestopenglish is not responsible for the content of external internet sites.

More about careers and career changes

For follow-up lessons on the same or related topics go to the following lesson plans in the Business and ESP section on onestopenglish:

- Chance and opportunity: <http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=59913&docid=156546>
- Decisions: <http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=59913&docid=156460>

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by Rebecca Perl

- 1 Robert Mitchell was an ideas man from a young age. He remembers his first business at the age of nine: "I cut out old Christmas cards, stuck them on cardboard with small calendars and tied on ribbons. I sold them for sixpence outside the Watney Brewery down the road."
- 2 Born in Richmond, in south-east England, in 1941, Mitchell says his family was "as poor as church mice" because his father did not return home after the Second World War. Education at the time was very bad, according to Mitchell, so he largely taught himself and had to grow up quickly.
- 3 After entering the working world as an electrician at 16, Mitchell went into dry-cleaning engineering at the age of 18. By 21, he had worked his way up to becoming the foreman of a factory in Richmond. As a BÖWE Permac engineer, he gained a wide knowledge of the German machines used there, which he describes as "beautifully designed and built".
- 4 Mitchell says: "I was in my early twenties when I realized I had a very powerful brain. My mind is quite Germanic when it comes to electrical machinery. You have to understand the brain of the machine." He went on to manage a chain of dry-cleaning shops – but it was around this time that his unusual journey from the engineering world to the art world began.
- 5 He was asked to create a vacuum surface for a work colleague who wanted to bond a picture on to a new canvas. Mitchell built him a vacuum-conservation hot table, using German technology and parts. By doing so, three career choices suddenly opened up to him. He had to decide between staying in dry-cleaning engineering (where he was safe), building more conservation tables to sell, or using the conservation table to start restoring paintings himself.
- 6 The last option was by far the most difficult route Mitchell could have chosen, and it was the one he took. "I left my job as general manager with one month's salary, one conservation table and two contacts in the business. I had a wife and two young children to support, so I gave myself three years to make it work."
- 7 Mitchell worked seven days a week. It wasn't an easy time, but by the third year, he had built up a healthy business as an oil-painting conservator.
- 8 Thirty-eight years later, the business is still successful; he has conserved over 60,000 oil paintings, making him one of the most experienced conservators in the world. Mitchell owns a gallery in Addlestone, Surrey, and a conservation studio in nearby Chertsey. He lives between the two and says he likes to



Photo: Rebecca Perl

stay within the "Mitchell triangle" – commuting is wasted worktime, as far as he is concerned. His son Darrell, 40, is his business partner, and Vicki, his wife, is his studio assistant.

Finding Mitchell in his gallery surrounded by 400 paintings, one might think that he has always had an interest in art, but that is not the case. In fact, he describes art as something that "happened to him". Since that event,

Mitchell has gained a fine understanding of the subject, and restoring paintings is more than a job for him – it's a passion. "I stop further damage, so that paintings won't need restoring for another 200 years, if at all," he explains. He has taught himself to look at paintings in a different way, and can immediately tell their age and condition.

For many years, Mitchell spent his limited spare time working as an FA (Football Association) coach. This experience has helped him in the art world, as he advises a number of artists, trying to bring out the best in them in order to improve their skills.

Mitchell is the kind of person who never sits still for long. He likes to help processes develop and is constantly improving his methods. He has branched out to build up a healthy picture-frame business. He also provides advice on art to his customers, visiting their homes and advising them on the best places to hang their paintings.

Mitchell's most recent business idea is giving talks for up to 30 people at the gallery. He hasn't publicized the talks but word-of-mouth has brought a constant stream of interested groups. His knowledge of, and passion for, art and conservation is immediately evident, making him a fascinating speaker.

With no retirement plans on the horizon, Mitchell says: "I always wanted to work for myself and to start a business from home." He has also reached his goals. From starting with nothing, Robert Mitchell has built up a small art empire.

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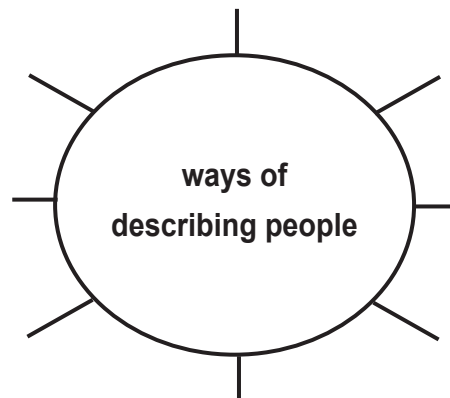
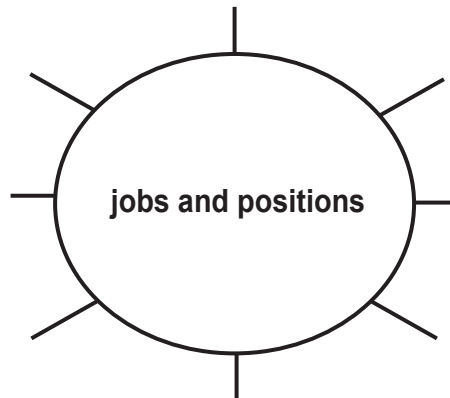
3 Article summary

Circle the right answers according to the information in the article.

Robert Mitchell was born in **Germany / 1941 / Chertsey**. His family were **poor / rich / unhappy** because his father was killed in **Germany / 1941 / the Second World War**. Mitchell always had good ideas and started his first business at the age of **6 / 9 / 16**. After leaving school he started working as **a/an engineer / mechanic / electrician**. By the age of 21 he had worked his way up to being **a/an artist / engineer / factory foreman**. He decided to change his career after a colleague asked him to **conserve a painting / build a conservation table / manage a dry-cleaning company**. He worked **every day of the week / for three months / for thirty-eight years** before he had built up a healthy business **two / three / four** years later. These days Mitchell runs a successful painting conservation business together with his **German business partner / family members / artists near / far away from / in** his home. He has learnt **a little / a lot / a bit** about restoring paintings over the years and is constantly looking for ways to **retire / improve his way of working / slow down**. Although he **doesn't have / has / would like to have** much free time, what he does have he spends as **a football coach / a speaker / an adviser to artists**.

4 Vocabulary: Jobs, positions and ways of describing people

Complete these word wheels with vocabulary from the article.



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5 Writing

Write the questions you would need to obtain the missing information in Robert Mitchell's short CV below. Work in pairs and complete the table.

| Robert Mitchell | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Date of birth: | 23 September |
| Nationality: | |
| Current position: | |
| Work experience: | |
| Education and training: | |
| Family: | |
| Hobbies: | |

5 Discussion

Robert Mitchell decided to make a big career change. Have you made any big changes in your career? Would you consider doing so in the future? What would encourage/discourage you to make a big career change?

Extension task: Career test

Do a free online career and/or personality test, for example:

<http://similarminds.com/career.html>

<http://www.sixwise.com/Survey/FreeCareerTestWhatsYourCareerPersonality/FreeCareerTestWhatsYourCareerPersonality.aspx>

Were you surprised by the information? Did you find it accurate or even revealing?

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Vocabulary record 4: Career change

| verb | noun | adjective (+ opposite) | adverb (+ opposite) |
|----------|-------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| conserve | | | |
| | restoration | | |
| | | limited | |
| assist | | | |
| | improvement | | |
| | | experienced | |
| | | | passionately |
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Vocabulary record

