The Golden State?

Level: Intermediate upwards

Timing: Approximately 90 minutes

Material needed: One copy of the student 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 article first published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 6/2011. The article is written by Elizabeth Zach, an American expat living in Germany, who talks about how the situation in her home state has changed in recent years. Although it looks at the current economic difficulties and their negative effects on property prices and the community in general, the article ends on an upbeat note. It is written in American English.

The tasks in the student worksheets encourage the students to learn and use new business vocabulary and functional language, and also to develop and practise skills that could be useful in business situations.

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 extension tasks (for in class or as homework).

California

The warmer questions are intended to introduce the topic and provide the teacher with an idea of how much pre-knowledge about the topic the students are able to bring to the lesson. It also provides an interesting insight into the students' preconceptions about, and associations with, California.

Key words

Looking at these key words before reading will help the students understand the article. Finding them in context (i.e. within the article in a sentence) will help them to understand in which way the words are used.

Note: the words are numbered in the order that they appear in the article – this is helpful for the students to know as some of the definitions are similar to each other.

Key:
1. paradise; 2. budget; 3. deficit; 4. funding; 5. property values; 6. revenue; 7. real-estate; 8. foreclosures; 9. grave; 10. municipal; 11. bankruptcy; 12. legislature

After reading

This task requires the students to look more closely at four idioms or metaphors that the author uses in the article.
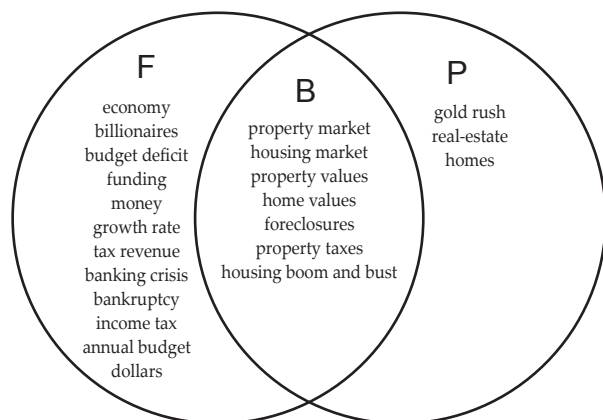
Key:
1. a place where there is more than enough of everything
2. that there are now problems in what was once considered to be the ideal place or situation
3. nothing happening; extremely quiet (often: as quiet as a grave)
4. an economic cycle. During a 'boom' period, buyers find themselves paying increasingly higher prices until the 'bust', at which time the goods and commodities for which they have paid inflated prices may end up as valueless or nearly so.

As an additional task, students could be asked to find out the origins of theses idiomatic phrases, including when they were first used.

Specific vocabulary

For this task, students should skim-read the article again, looking for words relating to finance, property or both. Set students a time limit (e.g. five minutes) to find the words and write them into the correct sections of the diagram.

Key:

F: economy, billionaires, budget deficit, funding, money, growth rate, tax revenue, banking crisis, bankruptcy, income tax, annual budget, dollars

B: property market, housing market, property values, home values, foreclosures, property taxes, housing boom and bust

P: gold rush, real-estate, homes

The Golden State?

Teaching and learning strategy: Specific vocabulary

ESP, or English for Specific Purposes, has many different definitions. But, generally, it is agreed that when we talk about ESP, we mean the language that learners need in their particular field of work to do and talk about their job. These words are not as necessary or relevant for other learners of English who work in different fields or are learning general English (sometimes called ENSP – English for no specific purpose).

Although we like to talk about special language fields for different areas of business, not all specialist vocabulary fits neatly into one category as exercise 4 shows. It is, however, worth pointing out or highlighting words that are more likely to be used in one or more specific contexts and grouping them together for easy reference and revision purposes.

Encourage students to keep a personal vocabulary notebook in which they can separately record specific words or phrases that are relevant to them. As a teacher, highlighting the specific vocabulary in a text before you use it in class will help you decide which students the text or lesson plan is most likely to be successful with.

Complete the information

Students should read the state file on California and insert a suitable word into each gap. Ask them to say why they chose which word for each gap. To encourage the students to engage with the content, ask them to cover the words below the file and try to guess or work out what words are needed to fill the gaps before they see the words.

Key:
1. Sacramento; 2. San Francisco; 3. Spanish; 4. judicial;
5. Democratic; 6. African American; 7. Hawaiian; 8. 1848;
9. entertainment; 10. technology; 11. Silicon Valley; 12. 2010

Discussion

These questions aim to personalize the topic of the economic crisis. Developing the topic beyond what has been read in the article, students are encouraged to talk about what has happened, or any changes they have noticed, where they live and work.

Writing

Jack London's quote about his beloved California is rather poetic. Students may not be able to create a quote of this standard but they should be able to (with a bit of linguistic help and encouragement) write a couple of lines about their hometown or another place that means a lot to them.

Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all the new and useful vocabulary they have learned during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

More on related topics

For follow-up lessons on the same or related topics, go to the following lesson plans on onestopenglish:

Business Spotlight: Africa's broken heart:
http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/africas-broken-heart/551151.article

ESP: Banking and finance: Vocabulary of banking and finance:
http://www.onestopenglish.com/esp/banking-and-finance/banking-and-finance-vocabulary/vocabulary-of-banking-and-finance/153229.article
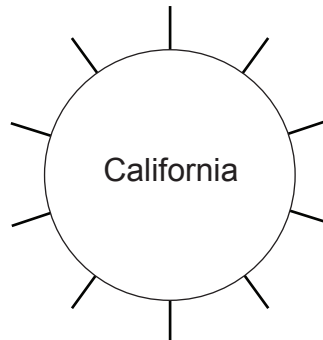
You may also find topical and relevant *Guardian* news lessons here on onestopenglish:
http://www.onestopenglish.com/skills/news-lessons/

Business Spotlight

onestopenglish.com

The Golden State?

1 California

Write ten words that you connect with California onto the word wheel. Then compare these with other students.

California

2 Key words

Match these key words and expressions from the article with their definitions and then find them in the article to read them in context.

> municipal foreclosures real-estate funding budget legislature
>
> deficit bankruptcy revenue property values paradise grave

1. a perfect place _____

2. the amount of money a person or organization has to spend on something _____

3. the difference between the amount of money or goods that a country or business has and the amount that it has spent or that it owes _____

4. money that a government or organization provides for a specific purpose _____

5. the monetary or financial worth of buildings such as houses, factories and offices _____

6. income from business activities or taxes _____

7. land and the buildings on it (American English) _____

8. the act of taking someone's property because they failed to pay back the money that they borrowed to buy it _____

9. the place where a dead body is buried _____

10. belonging to or relating to a place that has its own local government _____

11. a situation in which a person or business officially admits that they have no money and cannot pay what they owe _____

12. a group of people who are elected to create laws in a particular area, especially a US state _____

The Golden State?

by Elizabeth Zach

Even the former land of the gold rush has been affected by the collapse of the property market. Yet Elizabeth Zach looks optimistically into the future of her home state.

1 For years, California towered above the rest of the US. It is the world's eighth largest economy. With its lovely beaches, Silicon Valley and Hollywood, the Golden State is second only to New York as a center for Fortune 500 companies. It also has the highest number of billionaires in the US. With its permanent sunshine and the happy optimism of Californians, it's easy to view the state as the land of milk and honey.

2 But there's trouble in paradise these days – something I recognized during this year's visit home. I've spent 11 years away from California (I now live in Berlin) but happily return home every spring.

3 Wherever I went, I heard of job insecurity, of misery in the housing market and of frustration with the state's budget deficit. I heard worried remarks about schools losing funding, shortened school days and the disabled receiving less money from the state.

4 California's GSP growth rate has been slowing for the last three years, mostly because of falling property values, which means less tax revenue for the state.

5 The US real-estate and banking crises have been felt strongest in California, where, in the early 2000s, median home values were as high as $650,000 (about €458,000 or £410,000). By 2007, they had dropped to less than $300,000. The state has also seen a huge number of foreclosures. After Nevada, California has the second highest unemployment rate in the nation. When driving into any one of California's cities, one can see the results: masses of newly built, but empty, homes. Newspapers regularly report shop closings.

6 In the city of Vallejo, outside San Francisco, Jim McEntee, a criminal defense lawyer, says about the downtown area: "It's as still as a grave. Even businesses that have lasted for years are disappearing." The city's revenue was cut following the housing boom and bust, forcing many municipal employees out of work. Vallejo declared bankruptcy in 2008.

7 In 1978, California voters approved Proposition 13, which lowered – and limited yearly increases of – property taxes. The measure also requires a two-thirds majority in both legislative houses for future increases of any state taxes, including state income tax.

8 In early July, California governor Jerry Brown and the state legislature agreed upon California's annual budget. But the state still has a heavy $28 billion deficit. This is equivalent to the budgets of 12 US states combined. In developing this year's budget, lawmakers passed cuts to California's schools, universities, prisons and social programs. State parks will also lose millions of dollars in support.

9 On a recent walk through the Jack London State Historic Park in the Napa Valley, I remembered London's words describing his beloved California: "The grapes on [the] rolling hills are red with autumn flame. … The afternoon sun smolders in the drowsy sky. I have everything to make me glad." And, like a true Californian, I'm optimistic that better days will come again.

ELIZABETH ZACH, an American living in Berlin, studied journalism at Columbia University. She writes about travel and politics in California and Germany.

The Golden State?

3 **After reading**

Find these expressions in the article and explain what they mean in this context.
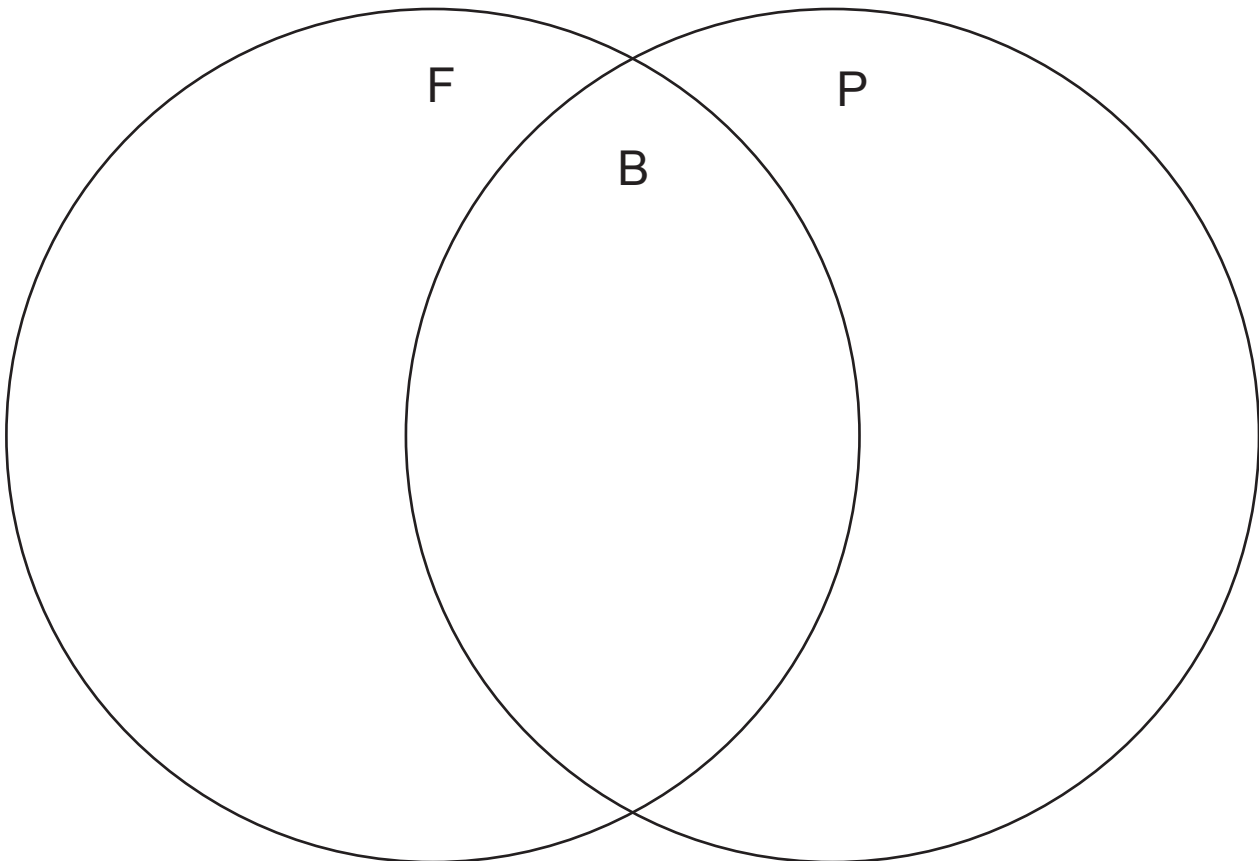
1. land of milk and honey _____
_____

2. trouble in paradise _____
_____

3. still as a grave _____
_____

4. boom and bust _____
_____

4 **Specific vocabulary**

Find at least 20 words and two-word expressions in the text that are specifically used to talk about finance (F), property (P) or both (B). Write them into the appropriate part of the diagram.

F   B   P

The Golden State?

5 **Complete the information**

The words needed to complete the file are in a box at the bottom of this page. Try to guess what they are *before* looking at them and writing them back into the file.

State file: California

Map: Nic Murphy

GENERAL

Official name: California

State capital: _____ [1] 2,149,127 (2010 census, metropolitan area)

Main cities: Los Angeles 18,897,109; _____ [2] 4,335,391; San Diego 3,095,313; San Jose 1,975,342 (2010 census, metropolitan areas)

Main languages: English 57.6%, _____ [3] 28.2% (2005)

Time zone: Pacific Standard Time = Central European Time – 9 hours

Currency: US dollars ($)

POLITICS

Type of government: the government is divided into an executive branch, a legislative branch, and a _____ [4] branch

Head of state and government: Governor Jerry Brown of the _____ [5] Party (since 2011)

ECONOMY (IN US $)

GSP (gross state product): $1.812 trillion, the largest in the US

Personal income per head: $42,548 (2009)

Unemployment: 12.1% (2011 est.)

PEOPLE

Population: 37,253,956 (2010)

Population growth: 10% (2000-2010)

Foreign-born population: 26.8% (2005-2009)

Population groups: white 57.6%, Hispanic or Latino 37.6%, _____ [6] 6.2%, American Indian and Alaska native persons 1%, native _____ [7] and other Pacific islanders 0.4%

High-school graduates: 80.5% (persons aged over 25, 2005-2009)

DID YOU KNOW?

■ California has enjoyed several economic booms. The California Gold Rush, in _____ [8], was the first. In the early 20th century, Los Angeles became the centre of the US _____ [9] industry, and the end of that century saw the development of the _____ [10] and information sectors in _____ [11].

■ There were over 650,000 millionaires in California in _____ [12], more than in any other state in the US.

■ Los Angeles County is the most populated in the US.

■ Over seven percent of the population of California consists of illegal immigrants, more than half of whom come from Mexico.

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Silicon Valley	San Francisco	Sacramento	Spanish	African American
Hawaiian	Democratic	judicial	entertainment	technology	2010	1848

6 Discussion

Discuss the questions below in small groups.

- How does the author of the article feel about her home state?

- How has the economic crisis affected property values where you live and/or work?

- What is the unemployment rate in your area? How does this compare to the country in general?

- Are you optimistic about the future of your area? Why? Why not?

7 Writing

The article ends with a quote about California from the well-known author Jack London.

> The grapes on [the] rolling hills are red with autumn flame.
> … The afternoon sun smolders in the drowsy sky.
> I have everything to make me glad.

Write two lines about your own hometown or the place where you now live or work.

The Golden State?

Vocabulary record: The Golden State?

verb	noun	adjective (+ opposite)	adverb (+ opposite)
collapse			
	increases		
		social	
			optimistically