

Tapescript of “He said what?”

Hello, Mr. Jamison? This is Jim Burke from upstairs ... Yes, that's right, I'm the neighbor living just above you ... My son told me that he held a rather noisy party that didn't break up until late Saturday night. I'd like to apologize for the noise. I'm afraid he disturbed all the neighbors ... No, no, we were out of town — unfortunately ... No, he didn't tell me that you came over to complain ... He said what? ... I had no idea. I'm extremely sorry ... No, I promise it won't happen again ... You have my word for it.

Mr. Burke and his wife, who live in an apartment, went away for the weekend, leaving his seventeen-year-old son home alone. That Saturday night, the son threw a noisy party that lasted late into the night. Now his father has to phone the neighbors and apologize for his son's behavior. He has just phoned Mr. Burke, who lives in the apartment just below their apartment.

As pre-listening preparation, point out to the students that they will be listening to only one of the two speakers in a telephone conversation. As a result, it will be necessary to infer — make guesses — about what the other speaker says from what they hear.

It might also be useful to do some language work before playing the tape (or reading the script). Because some of the answers involve inference, the phrases ‘probably’ and ‘probably not’ should be taught. In addition, other phrases on the tape might be taught — ‘He said what?’ indicating surprise at what happened; ‘I'm afraid that ...’ indicating that the speaker is unhappy that something happened; ‘I had no idea’ indicating a total lack of knowledge; ‘to break up late’ meaning to end late; and, ‘You have my word for it’ showing a promise.

Play the tape recorded passage. Ask the students simple questions that only require the answer ‘yes,’ ‘no,’ ‘probably,’ or ‘probably not’. Although students have to understand the question, they only have to produce a short answer.

- a. Is Mr. Jamison making the phone call?
- b. Does Mr. Burke live just above Mr. Jamison?
- c. Did Mr. Burke's son tell Mr. Jamison about the party?
- d. Was Mr. Burke home at the time?
- e. Did Mr. Jamison come over to complain?
- f. Did the son tell his father about everything?
- g. Did the boy say something rude to Mr. Jamison?
- h. Did Mr. Burke promise that it wouldn't happen again?

Play the tape recording a second time. Ask the students questions with ‘or.’ Of course, the students have to understand the question, but when they answer they just repeat a short phrase they just heard spoken in the question.

- a. Do the Burkes live downstairs or upstairs?
- b. Did the party end early or late?
- c. Was the party quiet or did it disturb the neighbors?
- d. Did Mr. Burke call to complain or to apologize?
- e. Were Mr. and Mrs. Burke home or out of town at the time?
- f. Did Mr. Burke make a promise or not?
- g. When his son said something to Mr. Jamison, did he say something rude or something polite?
- h. Is his son in big trouble or not?

Play the tape for a third time. Ask the students questions that can be answered with a word or two or a phrase. Now, the students need to produce their own phrases. The questions cannot be answered simply by repeating words found in the questions.

- a. Who made the phone call?
- b. Where do the Jamisons live?
- c. When did the party break up?
- d. Why did Mr. Burke phone Mr. Jamison?
- e. Where were Mr. and Mrs. Burke at the time?
- f. What did his son say to Mr. Jamison? Something polite? Or, something rude?

Play the tape recording for a fourth time. These questions are more difficult still. Most require that the student produce at least a short sentence to answer them. By the time the students have worked through the sequence of easier questions, some of them will be ready for these; others will not.

- a. Who phoned who?
- b. Where do the Jamisons live?
- c. Why did Mr. Burke phone Mr. Jamison?
- d. Why didn't Mr. and Mrs. Burke stop the party?
- e. When Mr. Jamison came to complain, what happened?
- f. What did Mr. Burke promise?
- f. What did Mr. Burke mean by 'You have my word for it?'

Undoubtedly more valuable than this particular exercise is understanding the technique used here. By asking a series of systematically more and more demanding questions, it is possible not only to help the students to cope with a very difficult text but also to learn a great deal of language.

In much the same way, a series of questions can be used to help the students cope with a difficult reading passage.

Teachers who have taken the time to master this technique have found it a very valuable tool.