

TEXT	A TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION (1880)
AUTHOR	Mark Twain
THEMES	Food (unit 10), communication (unit 15), science (unit 16)
VOCABULARY	Telephones and communication
WRITING	Students write a dialogue.
SPEAKING	Students perform their dialogues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Although Mark Twain (1835–1910) is rightly most famous for his novels *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, he was a prolific writer of short stories, sketches and comic pieces. Twain's satirical style is often at its wittiest when he comments on social behaviour and attitudes. *A Telephonic Conversation* must be one of the earliest pieces of writing to feature the telephone. Private phone lines were only available from 1877 and the story/sketch was published in 1880, so Twain was really describing a new phenomenon.

WARMER

Find some pictures of old phones and show them to the students. Ask them to comment on how phones have changed – not only in appearance but also in the way they are used and held.

ABOUT YOU

Use the questions to get students to talk about how much they talk on the phone and how they feel about hearing other people's conversations. If they are in a public place and someone is on their phone, do they listen or imagine who the person on the other end is?

MIXED ABILITY

When students talk in a small group, you can always assign a stronger student to be the 'reporter' – the one who reports back to the rest of the class what the group thought about the questions. This requires the stronger student to listen carefully to what is being said and check she has understood correctly. This in turn gets weaker students to repeat or clarify what they have said.

Read the introduction and emphasise that the text was written when phones were first introduced.

- 1 Students read the text or you can read it out loud. Read the question and ask for suggestions. (Ask students whether they think they are friends or family – if a friend, a good friend or a neighbour perhaps?)

2

Possible answers

- 1 You only hear half of the conversation.
- 2 These might include: cooking, children, visitors, prices, gossip, etc.
- 3 A mistake about cooking – 'I meant, put it in while it's still boiling' and thinking the other person bought a cat instead of a hat.
- 4 They say goodbye a number of times before finishing.

VOCABULARY

As some of this vocabulary might be unfamiliar, give students a few minutes to work in pairs and try to match the expressions with their definitions. Then elicit answers by giving clues – for example, 'Which word is similar to *back?*' – '*Return.*' 'If you can't hear someone, the line isn't clear or good – what's the opposite of *good?*', etc. Alternatively, tell students to use dictionaries to find the meanings.

3

Answers

2 D 3 F 4 C 5 B 6 A 7 G

4

Answers

- 1 signal 2 landline 3 call back, bad connection
- 4 hang up 5 get through, engaged

WRITING

- 5 Students choose (or you can assign) one of the situations and work in pairs to create their conversation. As they will be reading these in the Speaking activity, explain that they can introduce the situation in order to explain who the people are. Alternatively, students read their conversation and the others have to guess who they are and what the situation is. Stress that they can make the conversations funny or silly if they want to.

SPEAKING

- 6 Students practise the dialogue. Encourage them to vary pitch and intonation and underline the words they want to stress. Choose two or three pairs to perform their conversations to the whole class. For authenticity, seat the pairs back-to-back so they can only hear each other.