



## Unit 2

# Teenspeak

### Cross-curricular – Language

#### 1 Answer the questions.

- 1 Look at the pictures. What are the people doing?  
.....
- 2 What do you think *teenspeak* means?  
.....
- 3 If you had a job, do you think you would speak differently at work from when you are socialising?  
.....

#### 2 Read the article. Who might say the following? Match the opinions (a–d) with the people (1–4).

- |                      |                       |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 Jean Gross .....   | 3 John Bald .....     |
| 2 Tony McEnery ..... | 4 David Crystal ..... |
- a I don't think academics understand the richness of teenagers' language. They communicate well when they want to.
  - b I am worried about the way teenagers speak so I am working to improve the vocabulary that they use.
  - c I have studied the language of teenagers extensively and found some words used only by them.
  - d I think teenagers choose to use a small vocabulary as a form of rebellion.

#### 3 Choose the correct answer according to the text.

- 1 According to the first paragraph, experts believe that teenagers
  - a learn too few words while they are growing up.
  - b usually use only part of the vocabulary that they know.
  - c can't communicate because of constant use of electronic equipment.
- 2 Jean Gross says that teenagers need to learn
  - a to chat online and text less often.
  - b to use richer language for texting and chatting.
  - c to change the language they use in different situations.
- 3 David Crystal says that experts' judgements about teenagers' language are based on
  - a the wrong principles.
  - b evidence from too few teenagers.
  - c out-of-date research.

#### 4 Read the opinions in 2 again.

- 1 Which do you agree with most? Why?  
.....  
.....  
.....
- 2 Explain why you disagree with the other opinions.  
.....  
.....  
.....



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### Teenagers' vocabulary fails for work

A generation of teenagers who communicate via the Internet and by text messages are risking unemployment because their daily vocabulary consists of just 800 words, experts have warned. According to recent surveys, they know an average of 40,000 words, but they favour a 'teenspeak' used in text messages, social networking sites and Internet chat rooms. Communication expert Jean Gross thinks that the lack of range will affect their chances of getting a job. Miss Gross is planning a nationwide campaign to ensure children use their full language potential. She wants to make sure that teenagers do not fail in the classroom and later, in the workplace, because they are inarticulate. It will target schoolchildren and she is asking celebrities to support her campaign. 'Teenagers are spending more time communicating through electronic media and text messaging, which is short and brief,' she says. 'We need to help them understand the difference between their textspeak and the formal language they need to succeed in life – 800 words will not get you a job.'

She plans to send children with video cameras into workplaces to observe the range of words used by professionals and share their findings with classmates. She also wants parents to limit the amount of TV that children watch, replacing it with conversation.

Her concern was raised, she said, by research conducted by Tony McEnery, a professor of linguistics, who examined 10 million words of transcribed speech and 100,000 words from teenagers' blogs. He found that teens use their top 20 words in a third of their speech, and also discovered words likely to be unknown to adults, including 'chenzed', which means tired, 'spong' (silly), and 'lol', the shorthand version of 'laugh out loud'.

John Bald, a language teaching consultant, said the poor use of language was a rebellious act. 'There is undoubtedly a culture among teenagers of deliberately stripping away language,' he said. 'When kids are in social situations, the instinct is to simplify. It's part of a wider anti-school culture that exists among some children which parents and schools need to address.'

But David Crystal, honorary professor of linguistics at Bangor University, argues that experts did not understand the complexities of teen language. 'The real issue here is that people object to kids having a good vocabulary for hip-hop and not for politics,' he said. 'They have an articulate vocabulary for the kind of things they want to talk about. Academics don't get anywhere near measuring that vocabulary.'