

A BEGGAR'S LIFE

A blue-tinted photograph of a person, likely a beggar, sitting on the ground. The person is wearing a dark, textured sweater and a head covering made of fabric or a hat. Their hands are clasped together in front of them. The background is a rough, textured wall. The overall mood is somber and gritty.

A TALKING POINTS ENGLISH LESSON
FOR READING, VOCABULARY,
SPEAKING AND WRITING

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Professional Beggar

Read Colin's account of his life as a professional beggar below.

It's not like I was really in dire need. I wasn't. But it was so easy.

Too easy, to be honest.

The money you can make from begging is just unbelievable.

I've been doing this for five years now — yes, I suppose you could say I am a professional beggar.

But the first year I did it I was a real beggar. I was a genuine case. I had lost my job, then I lost my house — I had nowhere to live. Things were pretty desperate.

Things were at an all-time low. I was on the streets. I slept in shop doorways, underground car parks — anywhere I could get my head down for the night.

I was begging — but not just surviving.

But I found that begging is like a real job. If you present yourself in the right way and have the right attitude then you can make a lot of money.

About a year later, I was back on my feet. I had somewhere to live and I had money in the bank. But I still didn't have a job.

The job market in my city really sucks. There are no jobs for someone in my industry. I did think about doing other kinds of work but the only vacancies were in places like fast-food outlets and coffee shop chains.

I couldn't do that. I thought I was too old for that kind of job.

So I ended up staying on the streets and that's when I turned professional. I made begging a business.

For one thing, the money was just too good. I now make in just four hours what it would take me all day to make in my last job.

Plus I would have to pay tax on whatever I earned. Begging is tax-free.

To choose to do begging full-time was just a no-brainer to be honest.

If you want to be a professional beggar I can give you some tips.

There are two things you really need to think about when begging — the first is, location is all-important. And the second is how you present yourself.

You can't go to any main tourist spot in the city. Those places are just teeming with beggars and other people trying to scam money out of the tourists.

Avoid those places at all costs.

And the second is make sure you dress the part.

That means shabby-looking clothes, not too dirty or people will just assume you are a drug addict. You need to look down on your luck but still trying to get out of the hole you are in.

Another thing you can definitely try is humour.

I have used a sense of humour to great effect in the last five years. A sign with a funny message or making a little joke as people pass by is all the difference between people giving you money or not.

Humour goes a long way. It brightens peoples day.

People respect and admire someone that can smile through all adversity. They will think of you as a stronger person who is trying to make their life better.

And then they will reward you for it.

I know many people would really look down on me for doing what I am doing. They would say that there are people who are genuinely homeless and in real need.

These people rely on others generosity and kindness.

But to be honest I don't feel bad about it.

I was really homeless myself a few years ago. So I feel that I have earned the right to still beg on the streets.

It's the government's fault — they should be doing something about it. Giving homes to the homeless and making sure they have enough to eat.

But they don't do that.

And if people want to give me any of their spare change, then that is up to them.

Reading Comprehension Questions

How long has Colin been begging?

Does Colin feel bad about begging? How does he describe it?

Describe Colin's life when he first started begging. What were his circumstances?

Where did he sleep?

How long did it take him to get back to a good position in his life?

Is it easy to get a job in Colin's town? Why/why not?

What jobs did Colin consider?

Why did he reject certain job offers?

How long does Colin work at begging to make enough for a full-day in his last job?

What are his two pieces of advice when it comes to begging?

Which place should people avoid if they are begging according to Colin?

What added extra tip does Colin suggest?

Does Colin feel bad about begging? why/why not?

Who does he think should help beggars?

Essential Vocabulary

dire need	a genuine case	pretty desperate
all-time low	on the streets	get my head down
the right attitude	back on my feet	job market
really sucks	vacancies	chains
tax	earned	tax-free
no-brainer	tips	tourist spot
teeming	scam money	at all costs
dress the part	shabby-looking	drug addict
look down on your luck	out of the hole	sense of humour
to great effect	goes a long way	brightens someone's day
admire	adversity	reward you
look down on	in real need	rely on
generosity	earned the right	spare change

Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

Notebook—*a small book with pages of blank paper that students use to make notes when studying.*

“I left my notebook at home so I was unable to make any notes in my English class.”

Discussion Questions

What do you think about Colin? Is he a good person or not? Why do you think this?

Do you think he should stop begging? Why/why not?

Could Colin have tried harder in getting a job? Explain your reasons.

Should he have accepted a job in the coffee shop? Why/why not?

How would you describe Colin's personality? Is he stupid? Clever? Go into detail and describe what kind of person you think he is.

Do you think it is possible to become a professional beggar?

Do professional beggars exist in your country? Give some details about this.

How do you know if a beggar is real or not?

Does your city have a homeless problem? What is being done about it?

Should people give money to beggars? Why/why not?

Have you ever given money to beggars? If so, why did you do so? If not, why did you not?

In your country, can beggars work in organised gangs? Talk about this if you can.

A Beggar's Life

Look at the list below of the dangers of being homeless. What measures can the local community take to prevent these things happening to homeless people?

Get into small groups and make an action plan for each item.

No Regular Meals

Homeless people don't usually have regular meals. They might eat two meals on one day, then nothing the next.

Victims of Violence

Homeless people are often the victims of unprovoked attacks from other homeless people. But also from members of the public – often drunk people.

Cold Weather

Homeless people often die in the cold winter. As they usually sleep outside on the streets, when the winter comes many homeless people die due to the freezing weather.

Mental Health Problems

Many homeless people suffer from mental health problems. As a result, this makes their life all the more traumatic on the streets.

Legal Issues

Homeless people are often moved on by the police. There may be laws about begging in the streets, disturbing the public or not being allowed to sleep in certain areas on the streets.

Drug/Alcohol Problems

Many homeless people have drug or alcohol problems. This makes it very difficult for them to function properly and they are unable to change their situation.

Nowhere to Shower

Being homeless, it is very difficult to wash regularly. Sometimes homeless people only have a shower once a week – if they are lucky.

Debate

This is a debate activity. Divide the class into two groups of equal number.

You should also choose or elect a debate chairperson. This person must chair the debate and ensure everyone gets an equal opportunity to speak.

Portable Showers for the Homeless

An action group called Clean Break wants the city to install portable showers for the homeless. These will be paid for by the taxpayer and the plan is to buy 250 units.

They cost \$2000 each and to maintain all 250 units will cost around \$10,000 a year.

But the showers will provide places for the homeless to shower which could then enable them to improve their lives and maybe even find a job.

Divide the class into two teams – for and against.

For Team

You have to highlight all the positives of this action. Explain why your city needs to provide these showers and how it can help people, help the city and make the city a better place.

Against Team

You see many problems with this action. You think taxpayers money could be better spent on much better things. You also think this will encourage more homelessness.

You believe actions should be taken to get all the homeless people off the streets.

In your groups, spend some time to come up with some strong, valid points that you can bring up in the debate. When you are ready, begin the debate.

Role Play

This is a role play exercise.

There are two characters in the role play:

1. A Homeless Person

You are homeless and you are trying to get back on your feet. You hate being homeless and you did not choose to have this kind of life. You would like to work and have your own home but now that you are homeless you feel like you are trapped in this life.

2. A Shop Owner

You own a shop – it is a good business and in a very popular location. But there is a homeless person that sits in front of your shop and you think it makes your business look bad. You would like the homeless person to move on and stay away from your shop.

The Situation

A homeless person is in front of a shop all day. The homeless person begs people for small change and makes enough money to eat and live.

But the shop owner is very unhappy about this. They think the homeless person is affecting their shop business.

The two people get into a discussion to express their views.

Will they have an argument?

Or can they understand each other's life and circumstances?

Get into pairs and choose a role to play in the activity.

Spend some time preparing your role play then show it to all the class.

Writing

Write a short story about a homeless person and one night of their life.

Your story can have a happy or sad ending – it is up to you.

Think about one thing that happens in the night that could change the homeless person's life forever. It could be something very good – or terrible.

When you have finished your story, submit it to your teacher or read out loud in front of the class.

Credits

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