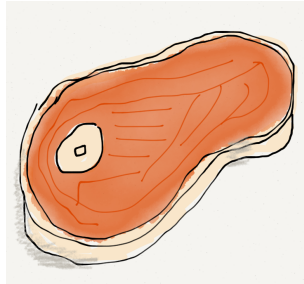


I Have a Beef!

by Roger Dupuy



This has been a staple in my teaching for years. This is a presentation project. Students will negotiate a topic with the teacher, then on a pre-agreed class meeting, the student will deliver the speech. Kinda sounds like standard fare.

Read on, because it's not.

Topic choice

Students must pick a topic that reveals something that has gone on or is going on in their lives that makes them angry. They need to complain. They need to share what's been bothering them for a while. They need to share "a beef" about something or someone with the rest of the class.

Delivery Method

The topic and speech delivery date need to be determined and approved by the teacher. This (very important) is *done in secret* from the rest of the class.

The date of the speech is determined in the first week of class. The presentations should be marked down on a calendar. Make sure the 'Beefs' are spread throughout the rest of the term. Try not to get too many in one week. Since the date of the Beef is known only by the teacher and the presenting student, when that day comes for a student he or she must interrupt the lesson, and announce that "they have a beef today." In fact, they must say, "I have a Beef!". Interruption is, of course, not really interruption because the teacher already knows it's coming, BUT the other students don't know, and they are genuinely surprised. This is part of the drama and fun of the assignment. To the other students, it could happen anytime, any day of the class, and the students relish this.

Of course, the teacher's lesson is interrupted, but that's OK. The teacher then promptly sits down and gives the student with the beef the floor.

The student then delivers his or her beef.

That's basically it.

Grading

Grade using a your speech rubric but include possible points for 1) interruption, and 2) emotive power.

Final Thoughts

In my 13 years of doing this, the "I Have a Beef" speech has been the best speech my students give. I have never been disappointed. In fact, this has usually been the highlight assignment of the term. Plus, I and the class get to really know what's going on with their classmates. I have had some really breakthrough moments with the students with this assignment. This activity gives the students a forum to vent and to share what's really going on in their lives. It's an opportunity to give students validation for their affective experiences in learning English. Topics I have witnessed have ranged from AIDS, war, abuse, starvation, relationship issues to more mundane things like parking tickets, dealing with traffic, or the noisy eating habits of their roommate. These disclosures have made our class a warmer, and safer place to learn together.