

# Talk a Lot

## Problems

### Role Play with Non-Literal English

1. Practise the role play with a partner. Find and underline **nine** examples of non-literal English\* and match each one to a category below:

|                        |                  |                                      |
|------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. puns                | 2. phrasal verbs | 3. non-standard grammar              |
| 4. cultural references | 5. idioms        | 6. politically correct (PC) language |
| 7. hints               | 8. slang         | 9. catchphrases                      |

\* For more information about each category, please see pp.37-39.

Three teenage girls are at school watching a boring netball match:

Tracey: Have you seen that new girl? What's her name?  
Mandy: Susan Jacobs.  
Tracey: Do you know who she reminds me of? What's her name? Marjorie Dawes from *Little Britain* – "Fat Fighters".  
Mandy: Oh, I love that show! (*Putting on a funny voice*) I'm a lady!  
Tracey: Look at her running. She's such a whale.  
Lena: Tracey!  
Tracey: What?  
Lena: You can't say that!  
Tracey: Why not?  
Lena: You shouldn't pick on her because of her size. She told me that she's been fighting a losing battle with her weight recently.  
Tracey: So what would you call her then?  
Mandy: Lena would probably say that she's horizontally-challenged.  
Tracey: (*Laughing*) Ha ha! That's a bit better than whale, ain't it?  
Mandy: Personally I think that Susan is fat-tastic!  
Lena: I wouldn't call her anything. Why don't you two just be nice to her?  
Tracey: OK, Lena. Forget it. OK? Listen, next week it's my birthday, and I'm not saying I really want earrings but... Well, I'm not going to say any more. (*She winks*)

2. Replace each example of non-literal English with one of the literal words or phrases below. Practise the role play using only literal English, then using non-literal English. What differences do you notice? Which version sounds more natural? Why? Which do you prefer?

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| a) putting on weight, despite trying not to    | b) I want you to buy me some earrings                 | c) fat person  |
| d) isn't                                       | e) bully  | f) a fictional character from a popular TV comedy series |
| g) I know a famous line from that TV programme | h) a person that I can ridicule because of her weight | i) overweight  |

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Answers:

| Feature of Non-Literal English:      | Example in this Text:                                      | Literal Translation:                                     |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| 1. puns                              | fat-tastic   | h) a person that I can ridicule because of her weight*   |
| 2. phrasal verbs                     | pick on  | e) bully   |
| 3. non-standard grammar              | ain't  | d) isn't   |
| 4. cultural references               | Marjorie Dawes from <i>Little Britain</i> – “Fat Fighters” | f) a fictional character from a popular TV comedy series |
| 5. idioms                            | fighting a losing battle with her weight                   | a) putting on weight, despite trying not to              |
| 6. politically correct (PC) language | horizontally-challenged                                    | i) overweight  |
| 7. hints                             | I'm not saying I really want earrings but...               | b) I want you to buy me some earrings                    |
| 8. slang                             | whale  | c) fat person  |
| 9. catchphrases                      | I'm a lady!  | g) I know a famous line from that TV programme           |

\* There is no literal translation for “fat-tastic”. It is simply a combination of two words: “fat” and “fantastic”. The pun works because “fat” sounds very similar to “fan”, sharing two out of three phonemes (individual sounds) – /f/ and /æ/. By making this joke, Mandy is showing her contempt for Susan: “a person that I can ridicule because of her weight”.

Note: in general, using non-literal English will help students' spoken English to sound more natural, because native speakers of English often favour non-literal forms – such as idioms, phrasal verbs, and slang – over the more literal, “dictionary definition” words and phrases that they replace.