

Pre-Reading Activities

A: Using Prior Knowledge

Work in small groups and discuss the following questions:

1. Today's article is about students in Baghdad, Iraq. Using your knowledge of the situation in Iraq, what do you think might be some particular difficulties experienced by students there?
- 2a. In your groups, brainstorm some of the words you might expect to find in today's article. Write them down.
- b. Share some of these words with the class.



Reading Activities

A: Checking Predictions

Skim today's article quickly and underline any of the words from the list your group compiled in Pre-Reading Activity 2a. How many words did you find?

Schools out as Baghdad bloodshed kills education

BAGHDAD Thu Dec 7, 2006 (Reuters) - Ahmed waits outside his school's gates on a 1. [] midweek morning, holding his textbooks by his side. But as the majority of pupils and teachers fail to arrive, the 18-year-old, who is in his final year at high school, has to put off learning for yet another day. "It's canceled again today," he said, 2. [] frustrated. "Only 15 out of 200 students in my year turned up."

Three years ago, after the fall of Saddam Hussein, teachers and students talked 3. [] about excising the compulsory pages on the dictator from their textbooks and freeing academia from interference from the ruling Baath party.

Now, sectarian venom has struck deep at the heart of Iraq's education system as militants from both Sunni and Shi'ite groups attack schools, universities and personnel. The prevailing anarchy has also poisoned society, bringing 4. [] violence into classrooms in a way not seen before.

Mohammed, a teenager at school in central Baghdad's Karrada district, told this week how he leapt a wall to escape as militiamen dragged his headmaster, pleading for his life, through the school yard in revenge for an alleged insult.

Abu Abdullah, once a teacher at Baghdad's Al Quds secondary school, says he quit after a student he caught trying to cheat in an exam brought a gang into school to attack him. "When we stopped him from cheating, he left the school and returned with 15 of his knife-wielding friends. They slashed my colleague's face with a long knife and beat me up," he said. Abu Abdullah said militants also killed Arabic teacher Hadi Farhan, one of his 5. [] Shi'ite colleagues, two weeks ago. "We warned him to stop talking politics. His killing affected the school, only 14 out of 42 teachers still work there. The Shi'ites have transferred to schools in their area and many others just left," he said.

One 16-year-old, who asked not to be named, said teachers at her school 6. [] order students into the corridors as mortars crash down nearby and that some were now urging their more eager pupils to stay away from classes. "Very few students are com-

ing," she said. "One of our teachers even told us to agree between ourselves not to turn up so the teachers can all stay at home during this 7. [] time."

STAYING HOME

Soad, a Baghdad housewife, keeps her 6- and 8-year-old at home all the time, terrified of a repeat of a 8. [] day when she arrived at the end of classes to find them both cowering in a corner with a handful of other children -- the teachers and other pupils had fled hours earlier when a rumor spread that a militant group was about to attack. "I can't bear not to have them with me the whole time now," she said -- a sentiment shared by thousands of other parents.

An official at the Education Ministry said the situation was terrible. "The so-called mujahideen are trying to terrify and terrorize the people. This is a 9. [] great disaster. We are trying to provide protection to these schools," he said. But in the end, said the official who was too 10. [] to give his name, it was up to parents and neighbors to defend their schools: "If you don't protect yourself, who will protect you?"

The situation in the capital's colleges and universities is no better -- tit-for-tat **sectarian** attacks on professors have left many dead and hundreds more are fleeing the country in a "brain drain" which makes many fear for Iraq's future.

This week Sunni insurgent group Ansar al-Sunna distributed leaflets in Sunni areas of Baghdad ordering minority Sunnis to stay away for the rest of the academic year. It said the group was "protecting" Sunni academics from Shi'ite assassins.

Shi'ite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki assured Iraqis this week that security at universities would be provided and warned that those who did not attend could risk losing their place. But the two main universities in the capital and 11. [] schools in Sunni areas remained virtually empty.

12. [] education is not confined to the capital....

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B: Completing A Sentence Summary

Read today's article quickly and then complete this sentence summarizing the article's main idea.

Attacks and violence in _____ in Baghdad are crippling the capital's education system.

C: Filling Gaps

Some adverbs and adjectives have been removed from today's article. Use the adverbs and adjectives listed below to fill the gaps in the article.

afraid, casual, chilly, disrupted, excitedly, hard, many, outspoken, recent, regularly, very, visibly

D: Inferring

Think about what evidence there is in today's article for the following statements about education in Baghdad. Underline or write down what evidence there is. If there is no evidence in the article for a statement, explain what the article really says.

1. Many students are forced to stay home instead of attending school.
2. In 2003 there was a feeling of optimism among educationalists.
3. It is harder to control educational abuses like cheating.
4. Religion has an extremely strong influence on society.
5. Despite the threats of violence, many students still want to come to school.
6. Education personnel believe that the government can guarantee the safety of teaching staff at schools.
7. Iraq will probably not have enough professional and academic personnel in future years.
8. The problems outlined in the article do not affect other parts of the country.

Post-Reading Activities

You may do one or more of these.

A: Describing Qualities

What qualities do you think a teacher needs? Work in small groups and make a list. Two examples are given to you.

A teacher needs to be patient.

A teacher needs to be a good listener.

B: Discussion

In the past it used to be said that nurses, doctors and teachers and people in similar employment needed to have a **vocation**. The word vocation in the above sentence means someone who has a feeling that they are specially fitted or suited for a certain type of work or way of life.

In pairs answer this question:

How has teaching or nursing changed in your country? Do you feel people who do these jobs are dedicated to them?

What pressures do they face now that they may not have had to face thirty years ago?

C: How Can We Help?

As a class look at the project below:

Are there disadvantaged students in your community or in a country near you?

Could your class do anything to help them?

Use the Internet or contact charity groups to find out what you could do as a class.

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TEACHERS' NOTES AND ANSWER KEY

Pre-Reading Activities

A: Using Prior Knowledge - Notes

1. This gives students a chance to share any knowledge they have about the difficulties faced by people in Baghdad and make predictions about the content of today's article. Do not indicate whether their predictions are right or wrong at this stage.

In 2. students brainstorm words that might be used in today's article about students in Baghdad. Encourage them to work in their groups and pool their ideas. The list of words they compile will be used in Reading Activity A.

Reading Activities

A: Checking Predictions - Notes

Students quickly skim the article looking for the words they brainstormed in Pre-Reading Activity A. Set a time limit appropriate for the level of your class which encourages them to work quickly and not try to read every word or focus on words they do not know. At the end you may want to ask students how many words they found in the article that were from their list or go straight on to the next activity.

B: Completing A Sentence Summary - Sample Answer

Attacks and violence in **schools and universities in Baghdad** are crippling the capital's education system.

C: Filling Gaps - Answers

1. chilly, 2. visibly, 3. excitedly, 4. casual, 5. outspoken, 6. regularly, 7. hard, 8. recent, 9. very, 10. afraid, 11. many, 12. disrupted.

D: Inferring - Suggested Answers

1. Yes, so many students and teachers stay home because of fears of violence that school is then canceled for everyone.
2. Yes, in 2003 educationalists were excited about what might happen.
3. Yes, the example is given of the teacher who is attacked after catching a student cheating is given.
4. Yes, the article emphasizes that some of the problems are caused by religious differences.
5. Yes, the article gives the example of a school in which teachers asked students to stay at home so that the teachers themselves could stay home.
6. No, the article does not say this. One Ministry spokesperson says in the article that whilst they are trying to provide protection in schools, in reality it is up to the parents and neighbors to do this effectively. (The government has tried to assure people that there is security provided at the universities.)
7. Yes, there is a brain drain as academics leave the country.
8. No, the end of the article says that the problems are not just confined to Baghdad.

Post-Reading Activities

A: Describing Qualities - Notes

If your students quibble and say that teachers of different ages need different qualities, you may wish to restrict discussion to a particular area i.e. teachers of children, teachers of university students etc.

