

Topic	Talkin' Black	Duration	90 minutes
Type	Lesson Plan		
CEFR level	B2		

GOALS/PURPOSE/AIMS

- To introduce students to the concept of African American Vernacular English (AAVE).
- To challenge stereotypes about AAVE.
- To encourage students to apply AAVE in their writing.
- To introduce students to the limerick, a form of silly poetry.
- To equip Students with the Tools for Advocacy Against Accent Discrimination.

MATERIALS/RESOURCES USED

- Documentary *Talking Black in America* by the Language and Life Project (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QFpVgPl9tQ>)
- AAVE Overview: [StudySmarter AAVE Overview](#)
- Group Research Tools & Internet: Computers/tablets, phones (academic articles, books, studies)
- Slideshow Software: e.g. Google Slides, Microsoft PowerPoint
- Writing Materials: Pen/pencil, paper

- Song Analysis Resources: Lyric website (<https://unclegoose.com/blogs/blog/how-to-write-a-limerick-in-4-steps>)
- Whiteboard & Markers

PROCEDURES (STRUCTURE)

1. Warm-Up: Class Discussion Prompt (20 minutes):

The teacher discusses and recaps the documentary *Talking Black* with students, which they had been previously asked to watch at home.

The teacher might ask the following questions:

- *What is the main idea behind the term “sounding Black” or “talking Black,” based on the documentary?*
- *What is the difference between “talking black” and “talking white”?*
- *What is African American Vernacular English (AAVE)?*
- *The documentary mentions the Ebonics controversy in the 1990s. What was it all about?*
- *What does the documentary say about theories explaining how AAVE was created? What historical circumstances account for its evolution?*
- *Is AAVE an incorrect, lazy way of speaking, or simply slang, or is it a legitimate language, a system of its own, according to the documentary? Why is it so?*
- *What is code-switching? Why do some African Americans feel the need to “code-switch” between AAVE and Standard English?*

- *How do black people face discrimination with their language? What is meant by “language gives you access, and it’ll give you a barrier”?*
- *How do the speakers in the documentary describe the relationship between language and cultural identity in black communities? Can you think of some specific examples/explanations from the documentary?*
- *How do the media and mainstream society contribute to the stigmatization of AAVE? What effect does it have on people in work and academic environments?*
- *How has the perception of AAVE changed over time? How is it perceived today in popular culture, especially among the youth?*
- *What did you think of the documentary overall? Did you like it? Did it change your views in any way?*

2. Identifying AAVE features: Teacher presentation (10 minutes):

The teacher asks students if they recall several features of AAVE mentioned in the documentary. Then, they follow by asking them if they are familiar with some other AAVE traits they might have noticed in popular hip-hop or rap songs, movies etc. All the identified features are listed on the board. Finally, teacher expands by identifying and writing down on the board other most notable AAVE features regarding phonological, grammatical, syntactic and vocabulary differences. (An AAVE overview: <https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/english/global-english/african-american-english/>).

3. Group Research Project: Debunking Myths about AAVE (30 minutes):

The goal of this activity is to further familiarize students with AAVE by focusing on critical thinking and evidence-based arguments to counter common misconceptions about AAVE. The teacher divides students into groups of 3 or 4 and assigns 1 or 2 myth(s) to each group. Students' tasks are to research and collect information on the myth from reputable sources (e.g. research projects and scientific studies, academic articles, book excerpts, documentaries, etc.) to debunk their myth. Following the research, students should prepare a brief digital slideshow with four elements:

1. presenting the myth;
2. introducing the factual evidence that debunks it;
3. Tie this in with the role of black history, culture and identity;
4. conclude with the social significance of debunking the myth in terms of reducing accent discrimination.

Some of the myths that the teacher can ask students to explore might be:

- *AAVE is just a "ghetto" way of speaking.*
- *AAVE is ungrammatical.*
- *Only uneducated people speak AAVE.*
- *AAVE is just a 'bad' version of English.*
- *Only Black people speak AAVE.*
- *AAVE is a recent invention.*

- *AAVE is just a version of Southern English.*
- *AAVE is only spoken by young people or in certain subcultures.*
- *AAVE speakers are lazy or don't care about language.*
- *AAVE is always unintelligible to non-speakers.*
- *AAVE speakers are not capable of using Standard English effectively.*
- *AAVE is only used in music or pop culture.*
- *AAVE is a “uniform” way of speaking for all African Americans.*

4. Limerick Writing: Pair work (30 minutes):

After being introduced to the most prominent AAVE characteristics, the teacher asks students to apply the newly acquired knowledge through a fun activity: writing a limerick incorporating some AAVE features. The teacher explains that limericks are humorous one-stanza poems originating from the Irish town of Limerick in the 18th century that quickly became popular throughout England and Ireland. They have aabba rhyme scheme, where the bb lines are shorter than the other three.

For more on the structure and advice on how to write a limerick see <https://unclegoose.com/blogs/blog/how-to-write-a-limerick-in-4-steps>.

The teacher can read silly limericks as examples of what they are like. Below are some samples. When everyone is done writing, students read their limericks out loud.

*There once was a man from the wood
Whose limericks weren't so good
'Cause try as he may
The rhymes were okay
But he always tried to shove as many syllables into the last line as he possibly could*

*This limerick goes in reverse
Unless I'm remiss
The neat thing is this:
If you start from the bottom-most verse
This limerick's not any worse*

*There once was a man from Bombay
Who was making explosives one day
He dropped his cigar
In the gunpowder jar
There "once" was a man from Bombay*

There once was a man named McDew Whose limericks ended at two

5. Homework (individual):

Each student should choose a song of their own choice by a black artist that uses AAVE. Task:

- a) Identifying at least three features of AAVE in the song.
- b) What message does the song convey about Black identity and culture?

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Increased understanding of AAVE as a linguistic system.
- Students' ability to differentiate myths from facts about AAVE.
- Students will learn how to write a funny limerick.
- Students produce some features of AAVE in their own limerick writing.

ASSESSMENT/REFLECTION

Speaking:

- Student participates actively in discussions in a coherent way.
- Student demonstrates the ability to present findings on a myth in clear, coherent and cohesive way.

Listening:

- Student demonstrates comprehension of the video material by answering comprehension questions in the class discussion.
- Student extracts relevant information from the documentary to support their arguments/ answers.

Writing:

- Student produces a creative and funny limerick using some AAVE.
- Student notes down features of AAVE and the underlying messages found in a black artist's song.

Collaborative skills:

- Student works effectively in a group (contributes to the group project, listens and incorporates peers' comments, shares responsibilities).