Suggestions for use in the classroom

This dictation is appropriate for classes at Upper Intermediate level or above. Although the dictation is only about 1 minute long, the ideas below will need about one hour of class time if you use them all!

1 Lead-in

You can prepare the students for the dictation by using one of the following activities:

Ask students to think about an election. It can be in their own country, or somewhere else. Tell them to imagine all the people going out to vote. Pause for fifteen seconds or so to let them form the image. Now ask them: ‘How do the people make their decision to vote? What are they thinking about when they make their decision?’

Ask them to feedback their ideas in pairs.

Do the following short quiz on the US election:

When was the US election? (November 4 2008)
Who were the candidates? (John McCain for Republicans and Barack Obama for Democrats)
What political parties do they represent?
When does the new candidate take office? (January 2009)
How do Americans decide who to vote for? (see below)

Go through the answers all together. Note that the last question is highly subjective, but elicit student ideas anyway. Explain that the dictation they are going to hear suggests one answer to the last question.

2 The dictation

It is usually best for students to listen to the complete text at least once without stopping before they are asked to take notes. When they listen again, you will need to pause from time to time to allow students to write. The script has suggested pause marks. One of the values of dictation is to train students’ short-term memory, so the sections between pauses should be short enough for the exercise to be do-able, but long enough to be challenging.

You can use one of the suggestions below to vary this procedure.

Play the dictation all the way through once for the students to hear. Tell them not to write anything this first time. Play it through a second time. Then give them the following parts of the text (which are in order). They must work together and try to reconstruct the rest of the text. You could play it one more time for them while they do this.
When people vote . . .
. . . Is it facts, reason and logic? . . . and personal stories?
In the case of America, researcher and psychologist Drew Westen believes . . .
It is not a dispassionate, calculating machine, objectively searching for . . .
There are three things which determine how people vote . . .
. . . and, if they haven’t decided by then, their feelings toward the candidates’ policy positions.
Throughout the last fifty years of American election history, it seems that the Republican Party . . .
Westen argues that politicians like George Bush and Ronald Reagan . . .
. . . while Democrat politicians like John Kerry or Michael Dukakis didn’t.

Choose four to five phrases from the dictation and translate them into your students’ L1 (this is for classes which share the same L1). Now give the dictation yourself, but read out the translated phrases instead of the original English ones. The students transcribe what they hear, then translate the L1 phrases back into English. Here is an example of the first paragraph with Spanish words ‘planted’ in it.

When people vote, what is más importante? / Is it facts, reason and logic? / Or is it emotions and historias personales? / In the case of America, / researcher and psychologist Drew Westen believes the latter tiene más importancia.

3 Follow-up
You can use one or all of the exercises below to explore the language in the dictation.

A Subject-specific vocabulary: Politics
Ask students to find all the words in the text connected to politics. Tell them to use these as a starting point to make a ‘mind map’ connected to the theme of politics. (A ‘mind map’ is a diagram showing words and ideas connected to a central theme; the central idea appears in a circle with the connected words branching off from it.)

Words in the text: vote, political, parties, candidate, policy position, election, politician

Possible mind map categories:
  people: candidate, voter, politician, senator, president . . .
  verbs / verb phrases: vote, elect, legislate, take a position, run for president . . .
  things: ballot, election, voting booth, voting machine . . .
B  Word knowledge – Vote

Draw students’ attention to the headword VOTE. Tell them this is a red, three-star word in the Macmillan English Dictionary. Explain that this classification is an indication of the word’s frequency (i.e. it is used very frequently). Ask students to work in pairs and to brainstorm all they know about the word vote. This might include:

- all the possible forms the word can have (noun, verb, forms the verb takes)
- any other derivatives of the word
- its pronunciation
- any collocations
- any expressions or phrases, including phrasal verbs

When the students have finished, ask them to check the verb vote in the dictionary. How many things did they correctly identify?

You could follow up these activities with a short class discussion on the topic of the dictation. Do students think this is true for their country? How do people vote? Have they heard Barack Obama speak? Do they think he appeals to the emotions?

C  Weblinks – The United States’ political system

As a follow up, ask students to find more information about the United States’ political system on the web. They can do this easily via the weblinks on the CD-ROM. Put the students into pairs or groups and assign each group one of the words below:

A  the Capitol
B  the White House
C  Congress

They should follow the weblink on the CD and find between three and five interesting pieces of information about their assigned word. When they have finished, reorganise the students into groups of three, each containing an A, B and C. They should share the information they have found.