

## **IN A NUTSHELL**

START TO LISTEN consists of two parts: a listening activity and a class discussion. For this website we have compiled a (growing) list of sound clips. The idea is, in each session, to listen to one of the clips (in the proposed order) and then to discuss it with the class.

We have put together a list of stock questions that you can use as a springboard for these discussions. A detailed explanation can be found below, as well as tips for how to approach the listening questions. You will also find some detailed examples.

START TO LISTEN works best when the listening activity is made a fully-fledged, recurring feature in the classroom schedule. Below we will also take a little look at the practical side of the activity and offer some tips regarding the class dynamic.

START TO LISTEN has been developed for 9 to 10 year old kids but the materials can of course be used for other age groups. We very much hope that it can become an enjoyable classroom ritual.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions that are not answered here.

## **SOUND CLIPS**

We have collected a wide variety of sound clips, ranging from modern music to sound art, soundscapes and field recordings. With this collection we hope to offer children a completely different listening experience that goes beyond what they hear on a daily basis and in this way to stimulate a broad development in their listening skills.

We advise listening to the clips in the proposed order. In putting together the collection we have tried to build stepping stones and seek out a good variety of styles and atmospheres.

START TO LISTEN may at first be met with raised eyebrows: the sound clips may be considered very strange and the questions sometimes cryptic. All new things take a bit of getting used to, and that certainly applies here. The longer you work with START TO LISTEN, the clearer things will get and the easier it will become to listen attentively for long periods. The classroom discussions will most likely also become longer, deeper and more intense.

## **LISTENING QUESTIONS**

START TO LISTEN comes with a stock of questions that can be used as a point of departure for classroom discussions. We have provided a variety of questions, from the concrete to the philosophical. The questions are grouped by theme.

We suggest that you select a handful of questions for each listening activity, with a mind to creating a good cocktail of different themes. This will help to keep things varied. Try to select questions that appeal to different styles of thinking and communicating.

How to choose? Just follow your intuition. Listen to the clip yourself beforehand and then look at which questions you'd like to reflect on with your pupils. You can prepare your own answers, but keep these to yourself until the discussion is well underway so that the kids don't simply copy your answers.

In the beginning it certainly helps to bear in mind the general dynamic of the class in order to pick out the most suitable questions. The more the children get used to this kind of activity, the more challenging you can make the questions.

There are no right or wrong answers. The questions are intended to stimulate different ways of listening. They provide a formal structure to guide the journey of discovery. We would like to encourage you to make connections between the different impressions shared by the children in order to encourage them in turn to go deeper in their listening and in the articulation of their experiences. Pupils should feel free to follow their own paths. Casting judgement on the answers – whether together with the pupils or otherwise – therefore holds little additional value in our view.

In the beginning some kinds of questions may be more difficult than others. Simply start with the questions that speak to you the most and integrate more difficult questions in the group discussion step by step. Abstract and philosophical questions may seem difficult, but the pupil's answers can be fascinating. It's not so important that they give direct answers to the questions; the main thing is to facilitate a fascinating discussion about sound, music, silence, hearing and listening.

## **PRACTICAL PREPARATION**

As an activity, listening is inexpensive and can be done whenever, together or alone. The only thing that's needed is a good quality playback device. Once you've got that, countless fascinating listening activities are within reach.

If your classroom does not (yet) have a good sound installation, we advise that you obtain a substantial playback device. The installation should be powerful enough to play the sound clips such that they are clearly audible for the whole class without pumping the volume up to the max (which would only result in sound distortion). We also recommend you avoid devices that put out (a lot of) hissing/interference.

It wise to find a system that allows for as wide a stereo image as possible. Good computer speakers that can be positioned far apart, for example, will usually be more effective than a Bluetooth speaker, the stereo image of which is often very narrow.

Beyond that, it is of course important to limit environmental sounds as much as possible: close the windows and have your pupils tidy away their pencil cases and other distractions. It is definitely worth taking a few minutes to make everything quiet and to assume a comfortable sitting posture, before starting the activity.

## **CLASS DYNAMIC**

When starting out with START TO LISTEN, it's certainly worthwhile to take into account the dynamic of the classroom. Are the pupils usually quite good at concentrating, or do they find it hard to sit still? Are they curious about new things or do they sometimes feel uncomfortable with the unfamiliar? Are they enthusiastic about sharing their opinions, or are they more timid, preferring to hide behind what they consider the more socially acceptable answers? Based on your experience of the general classroom dynamic, you can try to gauge how the pupils will react to the sound clips. Your own emotional reaction may also provide a good benchmark.

Especially in the case of the first listening sessions, it's wise to anticipate the reactions of your pupils and in this way to seek out a possible context for the listening activity. You might be able to link the activity to a vocabulary lesson on the topic of sound, for example. A word cloud containing verbs that describe a kind of sound (squeaking, cracking, scratching, whistling, screeching, buzzing, humming, grinding, etc.) for example, or word pairs such as high–low, fast–slow, dull–sharp, soft–hard, quiet–loud, varied–monotonous, smooth–jagged, and so on. In this way the children will acquire a basic vocabulary, which they can use in the class discussion, and you are able to make a spontaneous transition to the listening activity. For example, a first question for the pupils could be to indicate which words apply to the clip they have just listened to. From there you can further develop the discussion.

With listening, like with physical activity, it's best to start off gently and be well prepared. Our ears sometimes need a stretch, too. Try to find a suitable 'warm-up' to the listening activity as you would with any other classroom activity. Assuming a good sitting posture and closing the eyes for a short while can certainly help. You can even have a literal stretch: take a moment to stand up and loosen up your hands and feet by shaking them, roll your shoulders, grab your ears and flap them back and forth, massage your ear lobes ... then sit back down and prepare to listen.

START TO LISTEN can only be a complete success when it is made a fully-fledged, recurring classroom activity. It pays to stick with it! Whether the teacher decides to limit the activity to 15 minutes or allows it to go on for a longer period is of course up to them. However, we do hope that this material will be paired with a genuine interest in sound, music and listening skills.

## **DRAWING SOUND**

When we speak of 'drawing sound' we're not talking about the source of the sound but the sound itself, as well as the shapes, colours, etc. that you associate with it. This task is intended as a means of reflecting on our perception. It is both a non-verbal way to express

our experience and a way to explain the way we listen. By drawing a sound (or moving to it) we are also encouraged to listen for all the various details (harmonics, pauses, intensity, dynamics, etc.). This is another situation where 'right' and 'wrong' are irrelevant; it's ultimately about perception and intuition. The drawing can tell us something about how we listen to a sound clip as individuals. Different drawings reveal different nuances. After all, our way of perceiving things is inseparable from our own unique frame of reference, personal history, cultural background, and so much more.

## **MORE TIPS & TRICKS**

- We listen more precisely when our eyes are closed.
- It can be fascinating to return to certain questions for different clips and compare the answers. E.g., how did we draw the clip from the day before yesterday compared to the way we drew today's? Why the differences?
- You can of course listen to the clip more than once if it might facilitate the discussion.
- With the more philosophical questions, too, you can get fascinating results by discussing the same question once at the start of the activity and again at the end.
- In the first instance the list of questions draws heavily on the pupils' verbal skills. Certain questions are focused more on drawing or on movement and are therefore well suited for stimulating the less vocal or articulate children in the class. Many of the questions can be answered both verbally and, for example, with a drawing.
- A special challenge: pick one question and keep it in mind the whole week: during the listening activities but also at home, out and about, on the weekend, etc.

Ten extra general questions about sound, to supplement the other questions, to be used as an introduction, warm-up, or at any other point during the activity:

1. What is your favourite sound? How was it made?
2. Which sound fascinates you? Can you describe it?
3. Which sound reminds you of home?
4. When do you feel a sound in your body?
5. How many sounds can you hear at once?
6. From how far away can you hear a sound?
7. Can you hear everything that there is to hear?
8. How long can you listen for?
9. When are you not listening?
10. Which sound makes you shudder?