



## Teaching about Gemstones in the EFL Classroom



by Anthony Torbert (Kobe Gakuin University, Japan)

Gems are an attractive commodity for teaching purposes for a number of reasons. First and foremost is that most are assigned an economic value by the market, but have no intrinsic value aside from being attractive to the eye. This allows the instructor to open the class with the question “What is the most valuable or expensive thing you possess, and why is it valuable or expensive?”

Having students define how value is different from monetary cost is a worthwhile exercise in itself, and helps to get students considering the topic in a broader fashion. Although most students may not have the financial wherewithal to afford them, they no doubt have family members, friends or significant others who possess precious and semi-precious stones. Another way to approach this is to hold up a ring with a gemstone and ask students how much it is worth.

A quick survey of the typical classroom will show that few students know the origin of most gemstones, and fewer still know the background or history of the market. Many may be familiar with diamonds, but their knowledge is generally limited. They may mention that diamonds come from Africa. If so, a good follow-up brainstorming activity would be to ask them questions such as “Why are so many people in diamond-producing countries so poor?”

After more warm-up questions, I have students read the comprehension questions, then read the passage silently (page 13). While they read, I have them highlight any challenging vocabulary which

makes it easier for me to know which are the most problematic items that deserve specific attention.

After reading the passage, I have them work with a partner on vocabulary, then read the article aloud to work on pronunciation and reading fluency. After reading the passage twice, they then read to answer the comprehension questions.

Depending on time, I give a 5-10 minute mini-lecture using powerpoint slides that contain maps, famous gems and industry-related problems. I also show short 1 - 3 minute Youtube videos of mining operations (see below) to give them a better feel for what mining is really about.

Class homework can range from having students create more comprehension questions, quiz a partner in the next class or create a report on a particular gem of their choice.

A good option is to show the Leonardo DiCaprio movie *Blood Diamond*, which focuses on the illegal diamond business in Sierra Leone. If showing the entire movie is too much, it's still worthwhile to choose a few 5-minute excerpts that illustrate the hardships of forced recruitment of soldiers and workers, especially the end of the movie which describes the 2003 *Kimberly Process* of diamond certification.

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- **Conflict Diamonds** (Amnesty article)  
[www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/business-and-human-rights/oil-gas-and-mining-industries/conflict-diamonds](http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/business-and-human-rights/oil-gas-and-mining-industries/conflict-diamonds)
- **Global Witness Info on Conflict Diamonds**  
[www.globalwitness.org/campaigns/conflict/conflict-diamonds](http://www.globalwitness.org/campaigns/conflict/conflict-diamonds)
- **Synthetic Gems** (explained in detail)  
[www.gia.edu/gem-synthetic](http://www.gia.edu/gem-synthetic)
- **Jewelry and Gems** (website for children)  
<http://gemkids.gia.edu/jewelry>
- **Amnesty study guide** (with detailed teaching points for the Hollywood film *Blood Diamond*)  
[www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/bd\\_curriculumguide\\_0.pdf](http://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/bd_curriculumguide_0.pdf)

- **Diamonds in Sierra Leone**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TT3NfoeDrc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TT3NfoeDrc)
- **Pictures of huge mine in Russia**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=0v1RqSOPezo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0v1RqSOPezo)
- **Gemstone business in Pakistan**  
<http://video.xin.msn.com/watch/video/pakistans-gemstone-industry-hit-hard-by-unrest/yqpdiff4?preview=true&sf=Relevancy>
- **Gem mining in Sri Lanka**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMVgHrUPpI0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMVgHrUPpI0)



### Blood Diamond (2006)

*Blood Diamond* is a powerful Hollywood film about conflict gems set in Sierra Leone which stars Leonardo DiCaprio and Djimon Hounsou.