

16 August 2003 :::

6 pm edt

29 hours

There are fifty million blackout stories. This is one.

Our part of Manhattan was the last to get power. For 29 hours, we had no water. It takes electrical power to pump water to high-rise apartments. No power, no water. No water, no bathing, and no flushable toilet.

You discover that the tiled bathroom is the linchpin of civilization. You can live without light, without computers, without clocks, without TV, radio, CDs and DVDs. You can live without answering machines, cordless phones, and cell phones. You can, although it is not convenient, live without elevators, refrigeration, and air conditioning, even in summer heat. But toilets are another story.

They say the spike that plunged 50 million people into blackout lasted ten seconds. It felt longer. I was designing a logo when my screen went black, my network hubs and power supplies began flashing like dying fireflies, and the silence of the studio was pierced by an ear-splitting throb, throb, throb. It sounded like nuclear disaster. My first foolish thought was that our network had been attacked; then I thought my Mac's power supply had shorted out; then I noticed the other computers were frozen and the phones were dead.

The hall was as black as Tut's tomb. The stairwell, too. There should be service lights. If a fuse has blown, there should be emergency lights. Nothing but darkness and a new empathy for the blind. A disposable Bic lighter guided me down eight long flights of stairs. Outside, the streets were a gaudy carnival. The whole world had left work and was wondering how it would get home and what was happening, anyway. No one said terrorists or 9-11, but this is New York City and you could see how many people were thinking it.

A crowd formed around our building as people found their way downstairs or massed out front, afraid to enter. One guy had a portable radio. Bending our heads toward it, we heard Queens, Long Island, fire, Con Edison, Toronto, Detroit, Cleveland, Niagara Falls.

That night and the long next day the landlord did nothing about the lack of light on the stairs. That night and the next day the doorman worked three shifts in a row. Every time an unprepared tenant needed to go upstairs, the doorman walked that tenant up with his flashlight. Up 21 flights and down. Up eight flights and down. Up 16 flights and down. That man was a hero, although he did not make The Daily News or CNN.

[...]The next morning on the street we heard that Brooklyn and Queens had come back online.

Someone said Mayor Mike had announced that New York City was back. It wasn't.

By four o'clock everything north of 41st Street seemed to be back on the grid, and we expected that soon we too would have power again. It didn't happen that way, though.

Each time we climbed the still-unlighted stairs, each time we gazed sweating out the window, each time we longed to bathe or engage in other fundamental health amenities, I thought about the sweltering tenements in Gangs of New York, or about people in Iraq who have no water and no power.

[...]On the second night of the blackout, our neighbor, a kind-spoken middle-aged gentleman, fell down the dark staircase. He was bleeding and had no feeling in one of his legs. An ambulance took him away.

Soon afterwards, the landlord hastily installed tiny sticky lights along the stairwell.

A few minutes later, the power came back. :::

Jeffrey Zeldman

ZELDMAN.COM is the personal site of designer, author, and stunt double Jeffrey Zeldman.

<http://www.zeldman.com/daily/0703b.shtml#twentynine>

Teacher's notes

- Express capacity, obligation, suggestion
- CAN, Have to, should
- Compound nouns
- Reading comprehension
- Pair work
- Vocabulary linked to electricity
-



Pre reading activity

1. Get the students to react on the cartoon from from: <http://cagle.slate.msn.com//news/Blackout>

You will be able to introduce words that are used in the text:
**Blackout, flashlight, lighter. **

Encourage them to say what happened, don't give any detail apart from vocabulary when necessary. This is an appetiser!

2. Introduce the vocabulary that the students will need to understand the text:

Copy the following words on an OHP transparent (they should be written big enough for all the students to see. Scatter them well on the page).

Blackout, power, light, black, darkness, nuclear disaster, network, shortout, hero, dead (adj) a fuse, blind (adj) sweat, fall down, the blind (noun) a lighter, emergency lights, crowd, flashlight, a tomb, doormann, flight of stairs, service lights.

Make sure they understand them all (they should not write anything at this stage). Then explain they will have to remember as many as they can.

Leave them 2 minutes to do so.

Then turn your OHP light off and leave the students 5 minutes to write as many words as they can remember on a sheet of paper. They should work in pairs.

The group who has the most read them out, ask other students to complete if necessary.

3. Prediction

Ask students to predict what the text is about? They should try to use all the words you've just given them. Students should work in pairs.

Listen to their different suggestions.

Hand out a copy of the text, let the students read it and see how close they were to it.

nuclear disaster

blackout power lights

black darkness

network shortout

hero dead a fuse blind

sweat fall down

a lighter

emergency lights a crowd

flashlight

a tomb doorman

flight of stairs service lights

Worksheet one:

1. Reading comprehension:

- Date:
- Duration :

(I.1 to 11)

- **Find out what consequences the blackout had on people.**

-List what people couldn't do :

.....
.....
.....

-What Jeffrey Zeldman missed most :

.....
.....
.....

(I.12 to 26)

- **The people's reactions**

- What was the author doing when it happened? How did he react?

.....
.....
.....

- What about the people in the street? Pick words or expression showing they were caught by surprise.

.....
.....

What did people fear? Why?

.....
.....

- **L27 to 43 Consequences on people's everyday life**

-The doorman

.....
.....

-The neighbour

.....
.....

-Jeffrey Zeldman

.....
.....

- **Comment upon the last sentence:**

"Soon afterwards ... the power came back"

would you say it is sad ironical pessimistic optimistic sarcastic

.....
.....

2. Civilisation:

Make sure you know what the following words or expressions refer to and that you can locate the geographical areas:

(use a dictionary or refer to the Internet if necessary)

- Tut's tomb :
- 9-11:
- Queens, Long Island:
- Con Edison (try this to help you <http://www.coned.com>) :

- Toronto:
- Detroit:
- Cleveland:
- The Niagara Falls:
- The Daily News:
- CNN:
- Gangs of New York:
- The grid:

3. Grammar

Compound words

-Look at at the text and find at least 6 compound nouns:

.....
.....
.....

-Compound adjective

Find two compound adjectives in the text:

.....

With the help of a grammar book or Your Way item 35 page 242 study how the compound words are formed and be ready to explain them.

Interactive exercises :

compound adjectives : <http://www.quia.com/cm/8496.html>

Compound nouns :

Play Games with English 3 Macmillan publishers : p.23 connections3 for a game on compound nouns

Follow up:

- Can you imagine a full weekend without any electricity. In what way would it affect your routine? What would you miss most. What would you probably have to do?
- “Such incidents are a good thing. They make us appreciate how lucky we are. They should happen more often”. Do you agree with this opinion?
- Comment upon the cartoon.



from : <http://cagle.slate.msn.com/news/Blackout/1.asp>