



## The Homeless Coder

by Paul Walsh

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**Language:** Vocabulary from news articles/ collocations/ useful phrases

**Activity:** Reading/ Discussion/ Writing a letter

**Level:** B2+

**Time:** 90 mins

**Materials:** Pen, Paper, Whiteboard, Laptop and Video Projector.

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## Preparation

I emailed learners this [slideshow](#): 'Celebrities who were once homeless' and asked for their reaction. This 'started the conversation' about homelessness.

I stuck three news articles on different walls of the classroom. These articles covered different aspects of the 'Homeless coder' story which was popular in 2013:

[Experience: I taught a homeless man to code](#) by Patrick McConlogue, The Guardian, Saturday 2 November 2013

[Patrick McConlogue, Startup Founder, Suggests Homeless Learn To Code. Is Shocked By Backlash](#) by Alexis Kleinman, The Huffington Post 21st August 2013.

[Why Leo 'the Homeless Coder' Remains on the Streets One Successful App and \\$10,000 Later](#) by Sage Lazzaro, BetaBeat 27th May 2014.

## Procedure

1. I gave learners slips of scrap paper, 5 to 10 strips each.
2. The learners went around the classroom reading the three different articles about the same theme - the story of 'The Homeless Coder'. While reading, they wrote down new words or phrases they were unsure about and put them in a cup in the centre of the room.
3. I asked learners if they had any questions they would like to ask or observations they would like to share after reading the story of 'the homeless coder.'
4. We watched the video 'The Real Story of the Homeless Coder' (Mashable) [here](#).
5. I wrote the following discussion questions on the whiteboard, and learners discussed these questions in pairs or groups:

What surprised you about the story?

What do you think of the motives of Patrick McConlogue?

What do you think Leo got from the whole experience?

Do you have any questions for Leo?

6. Feedback, we all discuss together the questions. There was some interesting vocabulary that came up here, such as 'do-gooder'!



7. I told learners that they were going to write a 'letter to Leo' and I suggested a structure for their letter:

- introduce yourself, say where you heard about the story
- talk about how you feel about the story (e.g. surprised, saddened)
- ask Leo questions about his experience and future ambitions

8. I told learners to write a rough draft of their letters in class.

9. I told learners to email me their 'Letters' and that I would get Leo to reply to their letters.

10. I explained 10 of the new vocabulary items from stage 2. Then I distributed the rest of the vocabulary items to the learners, and asked them to look up the definitions of these words and write the definitions on a [quizlet](#) flashcard set that we shared as a group.

## Post-Task

11. I received the learners' letters, highlighted mistakes and emailed them back.

12. I replied to all the learners in a group email, playing the role of Leo myself!

I used an anonymous email sender - [anonymousemail](#) to send the letter - it worked really well (but doesn't do group emails unfortunately). You don't have to put a real email in the 'From(Email):' box just something like for example, leothehomeslesscoder@newyork.com. This is the address that learners will see in their inbox! Learners can also respond and the responses will go to your inbox (if you fill in the 'Optional Reply-to' box).

13. If learners respond to Leo's email, then bring learners' responses to class and peer-correct them.

## Follow up

Learners print out their 'letters to Leo' and compare the mistakes they made in pairs or groups e.g. with word choice, level of formality, grammatical errors.

## Images

[The Real Story of the Homeless Coder](#). Screenshot from Mashable. Youtube.

