

# **Speaking Up to Landlords**

## **A Thematic Unit for ESL Learners**

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with Tracy Ousdahl**

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## Speaking Up to Landlords

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### CHECKLIST FOR LEARNING:

**In this unit you will be able to:**

- Talk about housing
- Understand vocabulary used in this unit
- Read short stories
- Write about something that happened in the past
- Complete and understand a Tenant Petition
- Use the services of the San Francisco Rent Board

### Warm-up Activity:

Circle True or False and discuss your answers with a partner.

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| 1. I like my apartment/house.                                  | T | F |
| 2. My rent is cheap.   | T | F |
| 3. My landlord / landlady always fixes things in my apartment. | T | F |
| 4. My landlord / landlady raises the rent every year.          | T | F |
| 5. I like my landlord / landlady.                              | T | F |

## 1) Paul's Story

Hi! My name is Paul.

Six weeks ago, my landlady wrote me a letter: "Beginning May 1, 2001, the rent will be \$1,475 per month."

I was very sad.

I wrote a letter too: "Please do not raise my rent too high. My electric and gas bill is very, very high. My pay at my job is not so high."

The nice landlady answered: "OK. The new rent will be \$1,425 per month."

I am very happy. I like my house. I can walk everywhere. I walk to work.

I walk to shop. I walk downtown. I can walk to Fisherman's Wharf, too!

I do not have a car. Sometimes I take the bus.

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### Talk About it:

- What did Paul's landlady do?
- Why was Paul sad?
- What did he ask his landlady?
- Did his landlady listen to him?

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**Language Practice:**

**Complete the Story. Fill in the blanks with the words below.**

rent	sad
electric	landlady
raise	high
job	everywhere
walk	car
happy	house

Hi! My name is Paul.

Six weeks ago, my \_\_\_\_\_ wrote me a letter: Beginning May 1, 2001, the \_\_\_\_\_ will be \$1,475 per month.”

I was very \_\_\_\_\_.

I wrote a letter too: “Please do not \_\_\_\_\_ my rent too high.” My \_\_\_\_\_ and gas bill is very, very \_\_\_\_\_. My pay at my \_\_\_\_\_ is not so high.”

The nice landlady answered: “Ok. The new rent will be \$1,425 per month.”

I am very \_\_\_\_\_. I like my \_\_\_\_\_. I can walk \_\_\_\_\_.

I \_\_\_\_\_ to work. I walk to shop. I walk downtown. I can walk to Fisherman’s Wharf, too! I do not have a \_\_\_\_\_. Sometimes I take the bus.

**Circle 4 words that you know.**

landlady	raise	month	car
rent	job	happy	bus
sad	electric	walk	downtown

**Write 4 sentences about yourself with the words.**

**Example:** My rent is very high.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Apartments and Houses, Good or Bad?**

Look at the vocabulary below. Work in small groups and decide which ones describe a good apartment and which ones describe a bad one. Then add some words of your own to each list.

sunny	garbage/water included	near public transportation
expensive	safe neighborhood	security system
new appliances	close to shopping	leaky toilet
big	broken window	pets ok

**Good Apartments****Bad Apartments**

<b><u>Good Apartments</u></b>	<b><u>Bad Apartments</u></b>

**Complete the following sentences.**

I like my apartment because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

I don't like my apartment because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

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**More Stories:****2) A Bad Landlord**

A family of 6 people, 4 children and the mother and father, paid the landlord \$550 per month for two rooms. The rooms are in the basement. There is no heat. There is no bathroom. The ceiling is 5 feet 1 inch high. The tenants sue.

The Judge rules: The rooms are illegal. The rooms are dangerous to health and safety. The landlord in San Francisco is going to go to jail for 5 days. He is going to pay the tenants. He cannot rent the rooms.

**Check Your Understanding:**

1. How many people are in the family?
2. How much was the rent?
3. Where were the rooms located?
4. What were some of the problems with the apartment?
5. What did the tenants do?
6. Why did the landlord go to jail?

**Vocabulary:**

**Complete the sentences with the correct word from the story.**

1. The \_\_\_\_\_ pay the landlord \$550 per month.
2. The landlord \_\_\_\_\_ two rooms to a family of 6.
3. The tenants \_\_\_\_\_ the landlord because there is no heat and no bathroom, and the ceiling is 5'1" high.
4. The \_\_\_\_\_ goes to jail.
5. The rooms are \_\_\_\_\_ because they are dangerous to health and safety.

### 3) Tenants Sue Ex-Landlord

Three people in Oakland are suing their ex-landlord.

They say that he did not fix the roof. The rain leaked into the building.

The rain makes everything wet. The electric wires are wet,too.

It was very dangerous.

The three people complain. They complain on television, too!

The landlord is angry.

He fixes the roof.

He rents the apartment to new tenants.

The three people rally in front of his office.

They sue him.

He sues them, too. He says they “defame” him!

He is a deputy state attorney general!

#### Check Your Understanding:

##### Circle Yes or No

- |   |     |    |
|---|-----|----|
| 1.The new tenants are angry.                | Yes | No |
| 2.The landlord is a lawyer.                 | Yes | No |
| 3.The landlord sues the tenants.            | Yes | No |
| 4.The old tenants rent the apartment again. | Yes | No |
| 5. The roof is leaking now.                 | Yes | No |
| 6. Wet electric wires are dangerous.        | Yes | No |

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**Language Practice: Vocabulary Building**

**Practice saying these words with your teacher:**

roof	sue	leaked
building	wet	rally
dangerous	defame	complain
tenants	attorney	landlord

**Choose 6 words from the list above. Read the story again. Copy a sentence from the story with the words.**

**Example: The landlord is angry.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_



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**Taking Action:**

**What can you do if your landlord is not fair or responsible?**

**Below is a list of things people can do when they think their landlord is not fair or responsible. Add other things to the list.**

- Move
- Write a letter to the landlord
- Rally in the street
- Talk to a friend
- Get a lawyer
- Go to the Rent Board
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Talk About It:**

What did the 3 people in Oakland do?

What did the family of 6 in San Francisco do?

Which things are easy to do?

Which things are hard to do?

What things can you do?

What things can you NOT do? Why?

#### **4) Resource: San Francisco Rent Board**

##### **Office:**

San Francisco Rent Board  
25 Van Ness Ave. (at Market St.)  
Suite 320  
San Francisco, CA 94102-6033  
Office Hours: 8A.M. -5P.M.  
Monday-Friday excluding holidays

##### **E-Mail:**

rent\_board@ci.sf.ca.us

##### **Counseling: Drop In**

A counselor is available at the counter from 8-5 each day.

##### **Info To Go**

24 hour pre-recorded information line **252-4600**

**Phone Counseling Number** **252-4600**

9 AM-Noon and 1-4PM on work days (M-F, except holidays)

**Fax Number** **252-4699**

You can also fax your question. Be sure to include your phone number so that we can call you back.

**Website** **[sfgov.org/rentboard](http://sfgov.org/rentboard)**

##### **Check Your Understanding:**

- What is the address of the San Francisco Rent Board?
- Is it open everyday Monday-Friday?
- Do I need to make an appointment to see a counselor?
- What telephone number do I call if I have a question about my rent?
- At what time can I speak to a counselor on the telephone?
- Can I get information from the internet? At what address?

**Language Practice: Tenant Petition**

**Fill out the tenant petition form with your own information.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Name ) (Middle Initial) (Last Name)

Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

I have lived at \_\_\_\_\_  
(street number) (street name) (Apt. #) (zip code)

since \_\_\_\_\_  
(Month/Day/Year)

Number of units in building: \_\_\_\_\_

My building was built before 6/13/79. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

I receive some rental assistance from a government agency \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

My current base rent is: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ My rent was last increased on the following date:  
\_\_\_\_\_

My rent is paid to: \_\_\_\_\_ the owner \_\_\_\_\_ the manager  
\_\_\_\_\_ the master tenant

The person or business I pay my rent to is: \_\_\_\_\_

The owner's name is: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Name) (Middle Initial) (Last Name)

The owner's mailing address is: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

The manager's name is: \_\_\_\_\_

The manager's mailing address is: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

The name, mailing address and phone number of MY \_\_\_\_\_ representative  
\_\_\_\_\_ attorney \_\_\_\_\_ interpreter is : \_\_\_\_\_

(First Name) (Middle Initial) (Last Name)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

(street number) (street name) (city and state)

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**Story:**

**4) I Became Strong with Knowledge**

Years ago, rents were very expensive in San Francisco.

I was lucky to have a nice house.

The rent was cheap for a house with two bedrooms, a yard, and a garage.

On December 1, 1999, I received a letter from my landlord.

The letter said that I had to move on December 31, 1999.

I had no money to move. I had nowhere to go. I was scared.

I went to the San Francisco Rent Board to have a meeting with a counselor.

The counselor explained my rights as a tenant.

I had a meeting with my landlord.

I told him that I knew my rights.

I told him my rights as a tenant.

He told me that I didn't have to move.

I felt very strong, smart, and happy.

**Talk About It:**

**Write 3 questions about the story. Ask your partner the questions.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Language Practice:**

**Complete the story. Use the verbs in the box below. You may use some verbs more than once.**

received	had	was	were
move	have	went	go
felt	explained	told	knew
said			

Two years ago, rents \_\_\_\_\_ very expensive in San Francisco.

I \_\_\_\_\_ lucky to \_\_\_\_\_ a nice house.

The rent \_\_\_\_\_ cheap for a house with two bedrooms, a yard, and a garage.

On December 1, 1999, I \_\_\_\_\_ a letter from my landlord.

The letter \_\_\_\_\_ that I \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ on December 31, 1999.

I \_\_\_\_\_ no money to \_\_\_\_\_. I \_\_\_\_\_ nowhere to \_\_\_\_\_.

I \_\_\_\_\_ scared.

I \_\_\_\_\_ to the San Francisco Rent Board to \_\_\_\_\_ a meeting with a counselor.

The counselor \_\_\_\_\_ my rights as a tenant.

I \_\_\_\_\_ a meeting with my landlord.

I \_\_\_\_\_ him that I \_\_\_\_\_ my rights.

I \_\_\_\_\_ him my rights as a tenant.

He \_\_\_\_\_ me that I didn't \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

I \_\_\_\_\_ very strong, smart, and happy.

## Checklist For Learning:

Check the words you know. Add more to the list.

### I. Vocabulary

#### Nouns

- Apartment
- Tenants
- Landlord
- Attorney
- Rent
- Rights
- Bill
- Appliances
- Neighborhood

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#### Adjectives

- cheap
- leaky
- high
- sad
- broken
- dangerous
  
- illegal

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#### Verb

- raise
- leaked
- rally
- walk
- sue
- rent
- fix
- complain
- defame

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### II. Now I can:

- understand vocabulary in this unit
- read short stories
- write about something in the past
- complete a tenant petition
- talk about housing
- use the services of the San Francisco Rent Board

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## **Back**

**A. In this unit I learned** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**B. I want to study more** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**C. The activity I liked best was** \_\_\_\_\_ **because** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**D. The activity that I liked least was** \_\_\_\_\_ **because** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Thematic Unit Field Test Form  
First Amendment Plus**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

School or program \_\_\_\_\_

Title of unit tested \_\_\_\_\_

1. General description of your program: size, goals, general curriculum focus:
  
2. Description of class: proficiency level, size, #hrs/week
  
3. Description of students, i.e. country (ies) of origin, age, native literacy level, goals for learning English
  
4. Overall reactions:
  - a. What did you like best about this unit, overall?
  
  - b. In general, do you have any suggestions for improvement? Anything you would add, delete or change in the unit as a whole?

This whole unit took \_\_\_\_\_ hours over the course of \_\_\_\_\_ weeks

Did you add or skip any segments? Please comment.

Please send Thematic Unit Field Test Forms and/or notes written directly on units to:

Gail Weinstein  
[gailw@sfsu.edu](mailto:gailw@sfsu.edu)  
English Department  
San Francisco State University  
1600 Holloway Avenue  
San Francisco, CA 94132