**Lesson: Stairs that Shape Our Lives**

**Lesson Text From:** [**https://www.ted.com/talks/david\_rockwell\_the\_hidden\_ways\_stairs\_shape\_your\_life?language=en**](https://www.ted.com/talks/david_rockwell_the_hidden_ways_stairs_shape_your_life?language=en)

**Level: B2-C1**

**Warm Up: Pronunciation** (5min)

**Directions:** How do you pronounce the following words? Practice their pronunciation with the help of your teacher:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **/ɛ/** | **Vs** | **/ɝ/** |
| stairs | stirs |
| fair | fur |
| pair | per |

**Note!** **/ɛ/** sound is open and similar to a Spanish /e/, while **/ɝ/** is closer and with an /r/ influence.

**1. Vocabulary: Before you listen!**  (5 min)

The following terms are not commonly used in every-day language, but they will be necessary for you to understand the lesson text in a deeper way. Discuss their meanings with your teacher:

* **malleable** (adj.): (of a metal or other material) able to be hammered or pressed permanently out of shape without breaking or cracking. (**Spanish**: *maleable*)
* **tread** (n.): the top surface of a step or stair.
* **riser** (n.): a vertical section between the treads of a staircase.
* **nosing** (n.): a rounded edge of a step.
* **stringer** (n.): A stringer is the vertical support board that runs along each side of a staircase. The treads and risers are fixed into the stringer.

**2. Listening Comprehension: The Stairs that Shape our Lives** (10 min)

**2.1. General Comprehension**

**Question:** What is the text about?

**2.2. Specific Comprehension**

a) Where does the author think stairs come from?

b) What were the earliest stairs like? What were they created for?

c) In the author’s opinion, as we move across a stairway, how does size and form influence our relationship with the space around us?

**3. Lesson Text: Stairs that shape our lives.** (10 min)

**Directions:** Under your teacher’s supervision, practice reading the video transcript for pronunciation purposes. Pay close attention to blended sounds, as you read.

*I think stairs may be one of the most emotionally malleable physical elements that an architect has to work with.*

*At its most basic, a stair is a way to get from point A to point B at different elevations. Stairs have a common language. Treads, which is the thing that you walk on. Riser, which is the vertical element that separates the two treads. A lot of stairs have nosings that create a kind of edge. And then, the connected piece is a stringer. Those pieces, in different forms, make up all stairs.*

*I assume stairs came to be from the first time someone said, "I want to get to this higher rock from the lower rock." People climbed using whatever was available: stepped logs, ladders and natural pathways that were worn over time. Some of the earliest staircases, like the pyramids in Chichén Itzá or the roads to Mount Tai in China, were a means of getting to a higher elevation, which people sought for worship or for protection.*

*As engineering has evolved, so has what's practical. Stairs can be made from all kinds of material. There are linear stairs, there are spiraled stairs. Stairs can be indoors; they can be outdoors. They clearly help us in an emergency. But they're also a form of art in and of themselves.*

*As we move across a stairway, the form dictates our pacing, our feeling, our safety and our relationship and engagement with the space around us. So, for a second, think about stepping down a gradual, monumental staircase like the one in front of the New York Public Library. From those steps, you have a view of the street and all the people around you, and your walk is slow and steady because the tread is so wide. That's a totally different experience than going down the narrow staircase to, say, an old pub, where you spill into the room. There, you encounter tall risers, so you move more quickly.*

*Stairs add enormous drama. Think about how stairs signaled a grand entrance and were the star of that moment. Stairs can even be heroic. The staircase that remained standing after September 11th and the attack on the World Trade Center was dubbed the "Survivors' Staircase," because it played such a central role in leading hundreds of people to safety.*

*But small stairs can have a huge impact, too. The stoop is a place that invites neighbors to gather, blast music, and watch the city in motion. It's fascinating to me that you see people wanting to hang out on the stairs. I think they fill a deeply human need we have to inhabit a space more than just on the ground plane. And so; if you're able to sit halfway up there, you're in a kind of magical place.*

**4. Vocabulary in Use: Synonyms for verbs and verb phrases!** (5 min)

**Directions:** What synonyms can we used for the verbs in **bold**? Re-express the following sentences changing the bolded verbs into a synonym.

* A stair is a way to **get** from point A to point B.
* Those pieces, in different forms, **make up** all stairs.
* I **assume** stairs came to be from the first time someone said [this]…
* As engineering **has evolved,** so has what's practical.
* Stairs can **be made** from all kinds of material.
* As we **move across** a stairway, the form **dictates** our pacing, our feeling, our safety and our relationship with the space around us.
* So, for a second, **think about** stepping down a gradual, monumental staircase like the one in front of the New York Public Library.
* Stairs **add** enormous drama.
* Think about how stairs **signaled** a grand entrance.
* The staircase that **remained** standing after September 11th and the attack on the World Trade Center was dubbed the "Survivors' Staircase".
* The stoop is a place that **invites** neighbors to gather, blast music, and watch the city in motion.

**5. Grammar for Communication: Comparison of Similarity Between Two Actions** (10 min)

Let’s analyze the following text line more deeply… “*As engineering has evolved, so has what's practical*.” What does it express, exactly?

Now, let’s analyze its sentence structure:

**As** + **subject** (*engineering*)+ **Verb** (*has evolved*) Vs. **So + Auxiliary Verb** (*has*) **+ Subject** (*what’s practical*)**.**

**Other Examples:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***As* clause…** | **…*so* clause** | **Auxiliary Verb** |
| As engineering has evolved,  | …so has what's practical. | **Aux have (perfect tenses)** |
| As engineering evolved, | …so did what’s practical. | **Aux Did (simple past)** |
| As engineering evolves, | …so does what’s practical. | **Aux Do (simple present)** |
| As engineering will evolve, | …so will what’s practical. | **Aux Will (simple future)** |
| As engineering should evolve, | …so should what’s practical. | **Aux Should** |
| As engineering is evolving, | …so is what’s practical.  | **Aux Be** |

**Notice!** The auxiliary verb and the subject should be inverted in the second clause (the “so” clause).

**5.1. Grammar Practice**

**Directions:** Fill in the blanks with the correct auxiliary form of the verb.

**a)** As I’m afraid of heights, so \_\_\_\_\_\_ my son.

**b)** As columns add beauty, so \_\_\_\_\_\_ stairs.

**c)** As we would enjoy that experience, so \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ you.

**d)** As life changed, so \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ modern architecture.

**e)** As new constructions will increase, so \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the need of engineers.

**f)** As people must all cooperate with urban development, so \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ governments and institutions.

**g)** As he could help you, so \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ I.

**h)** As you love with European architecture, so \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ my daughter.

**i)** As hotels are reducing stairways for the handicap, so \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ condominiums and residential areas.

**j)** As multiple-floor constructions developed in modern days, so \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ staircases, elevators and escalators.

**6. Speaking: Life from Higher Points**

**Directions:** Answer the following questions in the form of a brief monologue. Feel free to add any extra information.



* Are you afraid of heights? Do you suffer from vertigo?
* Do you anyone who’s afraid of heights?
* Do you think it’s possible to treat this kind of “phobia”?
* What has been the highest point you’ve ever been at? Did you enjoy the feeling? What was the experience like?
* From a more personal viewpoint, do you like double-floor houses (with indoor stairs) or you prefer flat properties?
* If you lived on the first or second floor of a building, would you take the stairs or the elevator to get home?