

Charles Atlas Lesson Plan

Learning Objectives: To learn phrasal verbs and practise reading comprehension through a text on 'the world's most perfectly developed man' Charles Atlas.

Preparation Time: 20 minutes

Completion Time: 60 minutes

Skill/Grammar: Reading, Vocabulary/Phrasal Verbs

Age/Level: Intermediate–Upper Intermediate

Resources: Charles Atlas Text, Phrasal Verbs, Charles Atlas Comprehension

Warm-Up (5–10 minutes)

- Ask students to get into pairs or small groups, ideally with a mix of both genders.
- Write the word **Beauty** on the board and ask them to discuss their idea of beauty, and what the word means to them.
- After a few minutes, bring the whole class together and ask them whether they think the word means a different thing to men and women.
- Ask what they think men and women do to make themselves beautiful. If you like, you could write their ideas in different columns on the board.
- Hopefully, one of the students will come up with the idea of working out, or bodybuilding.

Presentation (15–20 minutes)

- Tell students that they are going to read a text about a famous bodybuilder, but that first they are going to work with some phrasal verbs.
- Tell them that there are two exercises on the worksheet you are going to give them, and that the first contains six particles to use with **to set** while the second contains eight verbs with the same particle, **up**.
- Tell them that they may already know some of the phrasal verbs but that they should attempt to work out the ones that they don't know.
- Tell them that they will already be familiar with all the particles and all the verbs.
- Hand out **Phrasal Verbs** and give them about ten minutes to do both exercises.
- If you feel they need help, you could write the missing particles and verbs on the board.

Phrasal Verbs

Exercise 1

Fill in the blanks with the missing particles.

1. Louis set decorating his new house in blues and yellows.
2. I'll set early to avoid the traffic.
3. The secretary will set an appointment for you with the manager.
4. Kate set..... on her journey to China early in the morning.
5. Try to set some time each day for exercise.
6. Environmental experts said the lack of funding would set further research.

Exercise 2

Fill in the blanks with the missing verb before the particle *up*.

1. The committee is up of representatives from every state.
2. Come on then, up your coat and let's go.
3. The shops have started to up Christmas decorations.
4. His name up in the conversation.
5. up the good work!
6. She will me up tomorrow to tell me how the game went.
7. Did you have to up the subject of money in the conversation?
8. Could you up, please? We cannot hear you.

Phrasal Verbs Key

Exercise 1

- 1 about
- 2 off
- 3 up
- 4 out
- 5 aside
- 6 back

Exercise 2

1. made
2. do
3. put
4. came
5. keep
6. ring/call
7. bring
8. speak

- Check their answers.

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Practice (15–20 minutes)

- Tell students they are going to read a text about a bodybuilder called Charles Atlas.
- Ask them if they have heard of him and tell them they will find out about him in the text.
- Tell them there are two exercises on the worksheet, that the first requires them to answer some comprehension questions and the second requires them to locate some vocabulary in the text by matching it with the words in Exercise 2 in **Charles Atlas Comprehension**.
- Hand out **Charles Atlas Text** and **Charles Atlas Comprehension**.
- Give them about ten minutes for both exercises.
- Check their answers.

Charles Atlas Text

Defining moment: Charles Atlas brings muscles to the masses, February 1929

By Anthony Lavelle

When Charles Atlas won the “world’s most perfectly developed man” contest at Madison Square Garden, New York, in 1923, the promoter, Bernarr Macfadden, decided it had to be the last such event.

Atlas had also triumphed the previous year, and Macfadden was a realist: “What’s the use of holding them?” he said. “Atlas will win every time.”

The competition prize was either a screen test for a Tarzan film or \$1,000. Atlas took the money and used it to set up a mail-order company to sell the secrets of his training routine – unlike other bodybuilders, the strongman chose not to lift weights, preferring an isometric technique that he had devised after watching a tiger stretching at the zoo (“Did you ever see a tiger with a barbell?” he liked to ask). Unfortunately, Atlas was considerably better at growing his muscles than he was his business, and the enterprise foundered.

In 1929, though, Atlas found a business partner in Charles Roman, a former advertising executive known for his marketing flair. The pair launched Charles Atlas Ltd and Roman set about revamping the Atlas brand, coining the term “Dynamic Tension” and devising the company’s now-iconic ad “The Insult That Made A Man Out Of ‘Mac’”, a cartoon strip that told the story of a scrawny “97lb weakling” who, after having sand kicked in his face by a beach bully, transforms himself into the “hero of the beach”.

The business flourished even in the face of the Great Depression, as tens of thousands of American men, many of whom had little or no access to gyms or expensive apparatus, each paid \$30 for a booklet instructing them on breathing, exercise and diet – all of which could be done at home. Soon the ads were translated into six languages as demand for Dynamic Tension went global.

The ad campaign, which continued to appear in comics and pulp-fiction magazines until the 1970s, became one of the longest-running and most successful in history. When Atlas died in 1972, Roman took control of the business, before selling it in 1997. It continues to this day.

Charles Atlas was selected by Forbes Magazine as one of the 20th century’s super salesmen, but for many he will best be remembered as the man who transformed so many “Macs” into men.

From The Financial Times

Charles Atlas Comprehension

Exercise 1

Answer the following questions about the text.

- 1 Why did Bernarr Macfadden decide that the 1923 “world’s most perfectly developed man” contest should be the last?
- 2 Why was Charles Atlas different from other bodybuilders?
- 3 What happened to the mail order company that Atlas set up with his winnings?
- 4 What two things did Charles Roman do to revamp the Atlas brand?
- 5 What was so good about Dynamic Tension for many American men?
- 6 What happened to Dynamic Tension after Charles Atlas died?

Exercise 2

Find a word/words in the text with a similar meaning to the words below. The words are in the same order as they are in the text.

- 1 triumphed
- 2 established
- 3 thought up
- 4 talent/skill
- 5 prospered
- 6 interest/desire
- 7 till now
- 8 chosen

Charles Atlas Text and Comprehension Key

Exercise 1

- 1 There was no point in holding it because he thought Charles Atlas would win it every time.
- 2 All the other bodybuilders lifted weights, but Atlas used an isometric technique.
- 3 It did badly.
- 4 He created the name "Dynamic Tension", and he devised an advertisement.
- 5 They could do the exercises at home.
- 6 Charles Roman took control of the business until 1997, when he sold it, and it is still going now.

Exercise 2

- 1 won
- 2 set up
- 3 devised
- 4 flair
- 5 flourished
- 6 demand
- 7 to this day
- 8 selected

Closure (5 minutes)

- When you have checked their answers, ask students to think of someone else who has had an effect on the way people look.
- When you have collected some names, ask students to research someone they are interested in and to write a short article on their work and influence.

To view the original FT.com text visit <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/fd8a92e2-ca6c-11dd-87d7-000077b07658.html>