

A Bag Full of Tricks

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Introduction

Busy teachers are often pressed for time and might on some occasions find themselves walking into class not fully prepared for the day's lesson. These are the times when it is useful to have a few backup mini activities ready to keep students occupied (and learning of course) so that we can collect our thoughts and find our bearings. This presentation introduces a number of tried and true mini activities for just such times.

Shadowing

Students listen and repeat as the teacher introduces a lesson, describes a procedure, reviews important points, or tells a story. This is a fun and useful way to get students listening more carefully and can be used for language practice such as pronunciation, enunciation, intonation, rate or stress.

Dictation & Dictogloss

Students listen and write down what they hear. Teachers can dictate three to five questions to activate schema or review a previous lesson. I normally read each question two times and then all of the questions one more time. Students can compare their questions with a partner, write short answers on their own and then compare answers with a partner. With dictogloss, students listen to a short passage and then write the passage down as they remember it. This encourages remembering idea by idea and not word for word.

Four-frame stories

Using four-frame cartoons from the newspaper or Internet, students take turns telling two-minute stories. Teachers can white out any captions if needed. This is a fun way to get students talking and using their imaginations. Depending on the story, this is also good practice with connecting phrases and other parts of language.

Line-up Dialogues

Make dialogues come alive by dividing students into two groups and having two students at a time practice increasing amounts of lines from a dialogue. Students go to the end of the other line after each performance. Treat it like you are on the set of a movie and see what kind of Academy Award hopefuls you have in your class.

Mystery Items

Put various items from the house or office in a bag or box and have students come up one by one to reach in, secretly select an item and explain it to the class without saying exactly what it is.

Strip Stories

Cut a one or two-page story into sentences and have students try to reconstruct the story. This works better when there is one natural arrangement. This also works with songs or poems.

Alternate Conclusions

Students read the first part of a short story and think of their own endings. For a fun follow up, you can change the letters in the real ending into symbols using a word processor. 🌀 ❖ ℳ ↗ ◆ ■ ✎

Envelopes

Two or more groups (or individuals) take turns reading a prompt on an envelope and then writing their answer or response on an index card. Each group puts their index card in the envelope (without looking at the other answers/responses). Finally, a group who hasn't had a chance to reply pulls out all the index cards and evaluates the answers/responses based on a predetermined criteria. Evaluation is conducted by splitting 100 points among the various cards. The idea for this activity and the next came from Framergames by Thiagi (www.thiagi.com).

Group Grope

The GROUP GROPE Framergame is also used to elicit responses to some prompt. After brainstorming for as many responses as possible, individuals choose the best responses. Teams are then formed and work together to prepare some graphical representation of their top three responses.

Minute Follow Ups

To get students to reflect on what they are learning, I sometimes ask them to spend the last few minutes of class writing down their impressions, opinions and questions. I ask them to reflect on both content and delivery, and to share their ideas for how to improve the lesson. I collect these papers and use any questions as a starting point for the next lesson.