

Learning English via Activities

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Introduction

This presentation took the form of a workshop; the participants actively engaged in the activities. Out of all the four skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—it concentrated on speaking and listening.

The activities were modified to suit the relatively high level of the class, but have been taught to false beginners as well.

The first one was a whole class activity focusing on self-introductions, interviewing for specific information, and appropriate leave-taking strategies.

A guessing game simulated conversations in quick question-answer sequences. Questioning, which forms the basis of English-style conversations was employed in the pair work endeavor.

The song provided training in listening, plus production.

Find Someone Who

Each student was given a handout on which was listed the following:

_____ has been to a foreign country.

_____ was often scolded when he/she was a child.

_____ is confused by mathematics.

_____ has been bitten by a dog.

_____ was called a nickname in elementary school.

_____ is often told he/she is good at something.

_____ was raised in a small town.

_____ lives in a house that was built more than 30 years ago.

_____ is interested in computer games (or another hobby).

_____ is interested in canoeing (or another sport).

_____ is confused by mathematics.

_____ can speak more than three languages.

_____ was born near the ocean.

_____ is fatigued today.
_____ owns a (car, computer)
_____ has been to a foreign country.
_____ has a younger sibling.
_____ can play a musical instrument.

Prior to doing the activity, the teacher reviewed four possible phrases to use—*are you; were you; do you; have you ever been*. Unfamiliar vocabulary was explained. The teacher modeled the activity with a student and added sample self-introduction and leave-taking gambits. If the students wished, they could change the question. Each student asked the other students the questions. When someone said yes, they wrote their name on the line. The first to complete the handout with one name on each line was the winner.

Adapted from English Firsthand by Marc Helgeson.

Twenty Questions

Each student was given a handout with these questions on it:

1. What color is it?
2. How big is it? (How many centimeters by how many centimeters is it?)
3. How much does it cost?
4. How much does it weigh? (How many grams or kilograms is it?)
5. Where is it usually?
6. Where is it now?
7. When did you use it last?
8. Why did you buy it?
9. How do you use it? (gesture!)

WHAT IS IT?

The teacher previewed the vocabulary and pronunciation, with attention to “*by*,” “*use it last*,” and weigh (not weight). She demonstrated with an object that she thought of. The answers were:

1. gold
2. 1 cm by 14 cm
3. about \$60
4. about 70 gm
5. in my purse
6. 20 minutes ago

7. for notes
8. (scribble, scribble, scribble)

“Answer: This is a pen! First lesson in English, right?”

Other possible answers were given such as rectangular, irregular, long and narrow. The students found a partner. For interest, a time limit was set. The winning pair was the one who had the most exchanges (successful guesses of each other’s objects).

This game is good for lower level learners, but can be adapted for intermediate students by providing only the key words of each question: color, size, shape, cost, weight, where ... usually, where ... now, when ... use it last, why ... buy, how ... use.

This Land is Your Land

1. A handout was prepared as follows: An A4 paper was folded into 16 “squares” (rectangles). A rough pictorial representation of each of 16 lines of the song were drawn on each square. On the back were printed the 16 lines, one per square.
 2. The students received a sheet, picture side up. The teacher sang the song* slowly and the students followed. They turned it over, following the words as she sang it again. Vocabulary and pronunciation were attended to.
 3. The students turned it picture side up, ripped (tore) it into 16 pieces, and lay them on their desks in random order. As the teacher sang it, they arranged the pictures.
 4. The students turned the pieces over and placed them on their desks in random order. As the teacher sang it, they arranged the lines.
 5. Finally the teacher invited the students to sing along, faster and faster.
- *Non-songbird teachers could play the song.

In pairs is a variation, especially useful if the desktops are small.

This was one of the most fun classes that I have ever taught. The students were so eager and dove right into the exercises with great delight and laughter.

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