

SWAPSHOP

Send in your teaching suggestions, ideas or anything you would like to share with your fellow teachers. However simple they may seem to you they could be new to someone else. We shall publish your ideas here.

Cusenaire rods and the passive

Cusenaire rods come in different lengths and colours and have many uses in Education. For EFL teachers with small groups they can be useful for teaching certain structures, such as active to passive transformations.

Assign a colour to each part of speech (e.g. white for verbs, yellow for subject nouns, red for object nouns, blue for prepositional phrases, green for the word 'by, etc.). As you explain the transformation and change of position of sentence elements you simply move the rods around, taking and adding pieces as required.

After you have demonstrated a couple of times get the students to move the rods round themselves as they perform passive transformations.

Incidentally, if you don't have Cusenaire rods pieces of Lego™ may provide a useful substitute. For larger classes a magnet board or colour cards and Blue-tack™ can provide a similar effect. If the cards are large enough you can write the phrases on them.

Cusenaire rods offer a multitude of possibilities and yet are virtually unknown by most EFL teachers.

Buried Treasure

Treasure hunts (or Scavenger Hunts) are a useful activity for raising motivation and giving a less serious tone to your teaching. Here's an idea that will give a bit of fun reading practice.

Students work in pairs from a worksheet prepared by the teacher. The worksheet contains all the instructions but the teacher is at hand if there is any need. The instructions are in fact simply a list of 'items' that students have to find, with an optional time limit if suitable. The first pair to find all the items (or the pair to find most items within the time limit) are the 'winners' and their 'prize' could be to prepare the next Treasure Hunt. (This could also be set as an individual homework task but it is more fun to do with a partner).

The 'items' are taken from books, dictionaries or other material that is equally available to all. Sample questions might be:

- find the sixth noun on page fourteen
- find the words before and after a given word on page nine.
- find which chapter/unit is about 'Education'

These are just examples - obviously questions would be graded according to the reading ability of your students. By asking questions not necessarily concerned with the 'content' of the text you are practising different reading skills and also enabling to students to work at reading for specific information fast.

Let your fingers do the walking

If you have older students (secondary/adult) and you can manage to get hold of a copy of the Yellow Pages (from an English-speaking country) this last game can be modified to include a list of 'needs' which can be reasonably authentic. E.g. "You have lost a screw from your glasses and need to get them fixed"; "You need to get a bus ticket from A to B"; "You need a clown for a children's party", etc. They find a suitable solution, consulting the Yellow Pages.

It's probably a good idea to keep the needs in accordance with what your students might realistically be expected to want to do. The complexity of the task can be varied by the level of English in the instructions.

The 'talking stick'

The 'talking stick' is an Amerindian tradition which holds that when a largish group of people meet only the one holding the stick (or whatever) talks and all the others give that person their undivided attention. The same strategy was adopted by the shipwrecked boys in William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*, only their 'stick' was a large conch.

This could be a useful way of getting boisterous younger learners to listen to each other (and maybe to the teacher too!). The 'stick' can be decorated in a way that is relevant (and fun) to the group. It also instills one of the basic tenets of civilised society - respect for and willingness to listen to another's point of view, which can't be all bad.

Creative vocabulary-building

For more advanced students an entertaining way to brainstorm vocabulary for writing tasks is to take a lexical area word like 'Sports' and write it vertically on the left hand of the board. Students then have to call out words in some way related to the theme that begin with the initial letters. Something like this:

S	stamina, suppleness, Saturdays, ...
P	practice, professionalism, prizes, ...
O	Olympic games, offside, obstruction, ...
R	...
T	... & etc.

Encourage discussion and debate of why/whether a certain word is relevant to the theme or not - this will generate more ideas which may be useful for the writing task.

A variation of this is to get your students write a 'poem' using the letters of a word that is related to the theme of that word. Imagine the word is 'Business'. The students can set out the word vertically but each letter can occupy any position. One possibility might be as follows:

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          Business is
        A funny thing
      Yet businessmen
    So rarely sing
      When riding on
        the bus to town
    They never smile
      But always frown
  
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This has the virtues of being fun as well as creative and the effort to find solutions will oblige the student to think up and discard many possibilities.

The Dictocomp

This idea has been around for a while now and could be interesting for teachers to try. Give short texts to students (from magazines, readers, etc.) and, in pairs, one student reads his text to the other twice (without showing him the passage). Student B can not see the passage or take note. Then they switch, student B reading his passage to student A. Then they write (in their own words) their understanding and memory of the text.

An alternative of this method is for the teacher to read a passage to the whole class and then get them to write down their version.

The Dictocomp differs from conventional dictations as it checks understanding more than orthographic skills.