



# Tips for Teachers

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## Using Mime in the Language Classroom.

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English language teachers generally want to plan engaging, motivating, challenging learning experiences for their students. However, many factors contribute to making this goal difficult to achieve. Hot, poorly lit, overcrowded classrooms, curricular demands, and outdated teaching materials can be de-motivating for students. Sometimes, our teaching methods may be boring, particularly when we fall back on traditional lectures about grammar rules as a means of imparting knowledge about English.

In my English classes, I look for opportunities to use games, role-play, and other fun activities as a means of brightening up my lessons and cheering up my students. When they can laugh and smile, they are more inclined to participate and to discover that language learning can be immensely pleasant. Ironically, one of the techniques that is most effective in helping my students achieve this level of enjoyment is one in which they do not have to speak—pantomime. Mime requires a person to use body language, facial expressions, and gestures to convey meaning. Mime activities can be successfully incorporated into a variety of language lessons as the examples below illustrate.

### Activity 1: Using Mime to Show Sentence Meaning

Example of sentence to be mimed: *I was walking along the road when a mad dog bit my leg.*

1. A student writes these words on the board: . . . *the road* . . . *bit* . . .
2. He acts out the first action of walking.
3. A partner acts out the second action of the dog bite.
4. The class guesses what the complete sentence is.
5. Another pair of students takes a turn at miming a sentence.

This activity can be varied by having one student, rather than a pair, try to act out the sentence. In a large class, students can work with the sentences in smaller groups so that more are likely to be actively engaged at one time than if the whole class is

observing only one or two people. Other sentences that work well with this activity include the following:

- I was reading a book when the telephone rang.
- I was sewing when a mosquito bit me.
- I was cooking when my bowl fell on the floor.

### **Activity 2: Using Mime to Describe Objects and Their Use**

1. A student stands in front of the class and holds an imaginary telephone.
2. Without speaking, she mimes using the telephone to chat with someone.
3. The rest of the class, or a pair of students working together, names the imaginary object, describes it, and explains its function in five sentences.
4. New students take turns acting and describing.

Example student answer:

It is a telephone. It is used for communication. It is found in most homes and offices. We use the telephone to call our friends. It is fun to chat with friends and relatives.

Other objects that work well for this activity include a basket, shoes, scissors, spectacles, a tennis racket, a book, a ring, a toothbrush, and a ball. The possibilities are endless.

### **Activity 3: Using Mime to Tell a Story**

1. Students are divided into groups.
2. In each group, one student is the narrator. He reads or tells the story.
3. The other students listen carefully and mime what is happening.

An example story that works well with groups of three:

One morning John woke up, stretched, and took a shower. He turned on the tap but the water was too hot. Ouch! The water burned his shoulder. Then he wiped himself dry, put on his clothes, and combed his hair. He cooked eggs for breakfast. He put some salt and pepper on his eggs and ate his breakfast hungrily. Next he put on his shoes and went to his car. It was a very hot day, so he was perspiring. He drove to the library and read a few books. After that, he went to visit his friend. He knocked on the door. His friend was happy to see him. They drove to the discotheque. They had drinks and danced. They enjoyed themselves thoroughly.

This activity can also be done without the narrator. Students write key words and phrases on the board or on cue cards and then mime their story. The audience or class

uses the cue words to tell the story. Some additional storylines that work well include a robbery, a drowning incident, a love story, and a visit to the doctor or dentist.

#### **Activity 4: Using Mime to Explain a Procedure**

1. Make groups of three or four.
2. Depending upon the proficiency level of the students, give them, or have them create, a topic and steps to describe a familiar process such as how to bake a butter cake, how to check a book out of the library, or how to check into a hotel.
3. Students work together to determine the key words and phrases that their audience will need. For example: For the cake baking procedure, they may choose *bowl, grams, sugar, butter, flour, eggs, mix*, and so forth.
4. They decide on roles and practice their mime.
5. The groups take turns presenting their mimes.
6. They begin by writing their key words on the board.
7. Then, they act out the process.
8. The rest of the class tries to describe the process.

#### **Closing Thoughts**

In addition to the suggestions mentioned above, my students have used their creativity and imagination to come up with storylines that include a tragedy, a shopping trip, a ghost story, and even an argument about interracial marriage. Although all of these activities include an element of mime, readers will notice that only a few students are actually required to be silent at any one time. In fact, most students are engaged in guessing, making suggestions, or trying to describe. By placing the focus on the mime, rather than on speaking, students relax and find it fun to enter into the description or narration activities. Even reticent students are inspired to cooperate, mime, and often try their hand at describing as well. I typically close my miming activities with a short writing assignment in which students review the sentences or retell their stories.

#### **About the Author**

*Peggy Pek Tao Tan teaches English at the University of Science in Penang, Malaysia. She has been an ESL tutor for 27 years and is particularly interested in using games and drama techniques to enliven her language classes.*