

Search-a-Word Puzzles

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that commercially published puzzle books almost always include several of them).

Producing the Puzzles

If you want, get a book with a variety of pre-done search-a-word puzzles on a wide variety of subjects, topics, and various degrees of difficulty. These can be modified and reproduced quite easily.

If you do not have access to a copy machine, do not dismay. You can have students make their own puzzles. Begin by having the students mark a grid on their papers. Follow this with a grid-quiz on letters. For instance, "In the first row at the top, write the following letters from left to right T, A, C, B, X, etc.," Have students exchange and correct each others' papers; then hand them back. Tell them to find as many names of animals as they can think of, find in a zoo, or see every day. (The hidden word is CAT in the example above.)

Adaptations and Variations

There are many ways to have students work with these puzzles. They can work in pairs or on teams, or the class as a whole can search for the words. Another fun alternative is to let the students make up their own puzzles and share them with the class.

The puzzles can easily be upgraded for adults by covering topics that are of immediate interest to them (housewives=things in house, businessman=things in office or place of work, young ladies in junior college=fashion, junior/senior high

school students=sports, music or movie stars, etc.).

Rather than giving a list of words to find, you can supply hints such as the following for a group of stockbrokers: "If you want to make a lot of money fast, perhaps you should invest in the stock market. The following grid contains 20 words related to the stock market. See how many you can find, and write them on a separate piece of paper." This could be used as an introduction to the topic with discussion or class work to follow.

If you did not supply a list of words to find, a discussion of answers might follow. For example, "What animals did you/your team find?" "We found a/an X." "Oh, good. How do you spell X?" "It's spelt XXX."

An interesting variation is to use a combination of pictures and search-a-words. Students are shown a picture or drawing and asked to find the words that name the objects they can see in the picture. This is a very good way to contextualize and review previously taught vocabulary.

In short, these puzzles can be used to do a great variety of things. All that is really needed is paper, pencil, and some imagination.

About the Author

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Search-a-Word Puzzles as Language Teaching Tools

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Most people are familiar with the search-a-word type of puzzle. These are composed of a grid in which letters appear to be placed in random order. In fact, words within a given topic area have been written from top to bottom, bottom to top, across, diagonally, and backward and forward, and any extra spaces have been filled in with random letters. A list of the "hidden" words is usually provided and the object is to find and circle them on the grid.

Advantages

These search-a-word games are ideal for teaching and practicing a variety of language skills (e.g., letter recognition and formation, spelling, word recognition), and they also serve to increase student interest and motivation. They are also much easier to make than crossword puzzles, so students can make their own and share them with the class.

In addition, search-a-word puzzles can be tailored to fit particular geographic areas and climatic zones so that words can be included for things (such as, birds, flowers, animals, objects in the classroom or place of work) which students encounter every day but which are seldom included in textbooks designed for worldwide distribution. Children and adults find these items especially interesting, as they are the very things that language learners often want to know the names for.

Because they are relatively easy to make, even beginners are assured of almost instant success. All anyone needs is a dictionary and a little patience.

Word games of this type are certainly not as challenging as a crossword puzzle, but people of all ages seem to find them very enjoyable (as witnessed by the fact

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