

Interesting Things for ESL Students (<http://www.manythings.org/>)

A free website for ESL and EFL students with word games, puzzles, MP3 reading and listening texts, and other computer-assisted language learning activities.

Internet TESL Journal (<http://iteslj.org/links/ESL/Reading/>)

Primarily a teacher resource site but with links for students as well; includes puzzles, riddles, and a wonderful collection of questions to help with conversations on dozens of topics; also includes bilingual quizzes in dozens of languages.

Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab (<http://esl-lab.com/>)

A three-level collection of short authentic-like audio files on a wide range of everyday topics. Each one has pre, during, and post listening tasks. At the lowest level, students can read the transcript while they listen.

ReadingMatrix.com (<http://www.readingmatrix.com/directory/pages/>)

A database with nearly 150 links to interactive online reading activities such as analysing text, proofreading, and stories for learners of all levels.

**Bookends: Lessons to Open and Close the School Year**

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I work as a native speaking assistant language teacher (ALT) in a large junior high school in a suburb of Nagoya, Japan. There are hundreds of English speakers like me employed in a wide variety of cultural and linguistic communities around the world. Essentially, we serve as cultural ambassadors for the English speaking world and assist host country English teachers in providing their students with an opportunity and need to communicate in English. However ALTs are a mixed bag. Some are dedicated and well-trained language teachers; others lack experience, training, and dedication. The majority probably fall between these extremes. Similarly, our host teachers may or may not have an understanding of communicative language teaching or effective team teaching practices. Consequently, they often do not know how to utilize the assistance of ALTs, and ALTs often do not know how to be useful. Team teaching partnerships are further strained by a lack of time, resources, planning, and coordination.

Despite these obstacles, there are bright spots. Most students are interested in getting to know their ALT, and most ALTs are interested in the young people that they work with.

In this article, I describe a lesson plan that I have used successfully to build on this interest and initiate communication between students and myself on the very first day that I meet them. It also introduces my host nation colleagues to the notion of communicative language teaching and sets the stage for additional communicative activities throughout the course. I close with a lesson that I use to give our relationship some closure and to get some student feedback on my work. While these lessons were designed to help students get acquainted with an assistant language teacher like me, they could be adapted for use by any language teacher who wants to set a tone of cooperation and communication from Day 1.

Getting Acquainted

This lesson can be used with any group of students who already know basic wh-questions in English. The objectives are to work cooperatively with a small group of classmates and become acquainted with their new teacher. You will need lined paper and photographs or other objects that reveal something about yourself such as your interests, hobbies, family, hometown, travels, friends, and so forth. For example, you might bring a photo of yourself playing tennis, or you could bring your tennis racket. There should be one object or photo for every small group of four students.

Procedures:

1. Divide students into groups of four and give each group one of your photos or objects.
2. Tell students their goal is learn as much as they can about the object and how it connects to you. They should work together, and when they have questions, they can raise their hands to call you over for help.
3. Give the students time to think and talk about their object. It may take a few minutes to warm up, but as soon as one group begins asking questions, others will follow their example. Often one or two students in each group will ask most of the questions. Do not worry. The other students are getting valuable input from listening to the interaction even if they do not directly ask a question.
4. Move quickly around the class answering as many questions as possible.
5. When it is clear that everyone has collected some information, give each group a sheet of lined paper and tell students that now they have to put the information they have collected into written form so that other groups can read and learn from it.
6. This new task will probably spark additional questions. Answer them as needed.
7. To close, or in the next class, put all the objects on display where students can see them. Redistribute the compositions so that each group has a new one. Have students read and try to determine which object is being described. Encourage them to ask you additional questions as they read. When they finish, they can

exchange papers with another group until they have read several of the papers.

There are numerous ways of varying, reviewing, or extending this activity. For example:

- Guess which one. Display the objects at the front of the room. Have the class form the same groups they did in the first lesson. Read the compositions aloud to the class, one at a time being careful to omit language that directly identifies the object. The students should guess which object each composition is about. If a student guesses correctly, his or her group gets a point.
- Review and recycle. Display the objects at the front of the room for reference. If desired, give each object a number for easier identification. Write the basic *wh*-question words on the board as a prompt. Form new groups of four students who were originally in four different groups. Have students take turns asking one member of their group questions about the object that he or she learned about earlier. If time permits, make new groups once again and repeat the conversations.
- On your own. A few days after writing the original group composition, have students try writing individual compositions. Alternatively, after they have talked, read, and heard quite a bit of information, have them compose a short biography about you incorporating all of the information that they can.
- Dig deeper. The original lesson about you as a person can be extended to learn more about your home country or other places you have lived.
- Culture talk. Have students bring pop or folk culture artifacts that they can use to teach you about the history, culture, customs, and fads in their country.
- Your turn. Have students bring their own personal photos or artifacts from their life outside of school. Use the routines described above to help teachers and classmates learn more about their lives, particularly their lives outside of school.

Saying Goodbye

At the end of the school year, it is time to reflect on your shared experience and say goodbye. The objectives of this lesson are for students to hear a goodbye message from you, talk about their experiences in your English class with several partners, and write their own goodbye message which serves as an informal class evaluation and self reflection. You will need to prepare several open-ended but easy-to-understand questions for students to answer about their experience in your class. Write them on the board. For example:

- Tell about something you *liked* in English class.
- Tell about something you *learned* in English class.
- What would you like to do in English class next year?

Write your goodbye message to the students. Your message should be in simple, comprehensible English and contain your answers to the same questions. Your message will serve as an example for the students, so determine the best way to share it—spoken only, written on the board, or printed on a handout.

Procedures:

1. Show students how to use the questions on the board as a conversation prompt to find out what each other enjoyed or learned in the class.
2. Form groups of three or four students and give them a few minutes to talk. Circulate and answer language questions as needed. If time permits, form new groups and repeat.
3. Read your goodbye message to the class. Ask them to try to notice how you answered the questions that they have been discussing.
4. Tell students that it is time for them to write their own answers to the questions. Give 10-15 minutes of writing time. Answer their language questions as needed.
5. Collect the papers and say goodbye to the class.
6. Read each paper noting the points that will help you plan for the next year. Write a short personal message of encouragement or best wishes on each one.
7. Arrange for the papers to be returned to the students by the homeroom teacher.

Conclusion

These lessons were originally designed to help my students and colleagues get to know me at the beginning of a course and provide me with some feedback at the end. However, the same procedures can be used to consolidate learning and foster both oral and written communication periodically throughout a course, whether there is an ALT in the class or not.

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