



Topic-based instruction in the EFL classroom
Topic-based lesson ideas for teaching students at the
lower secondary level

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Lokaverkefni til B.Ed-prófs í grunnskólakennarafræði
Háskóli Íslands
Menntavísindasvið



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

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Abstract

The focal point of this project is topic-based instruction in the EFL classroom. It consists of a report and topic-based lesson ideas for teaching students at the lower secondary level. In the report, I seek to explain the advantages of implementing topic-based instruction in the language classroom and to provide a theoretical discussion of language teaching principles that are well served by the method. Following my report are topic-based lesson ideas in three parts; *Lesson ideas for teaching 8th grade students*, *Lesson ideas for teaching 9th grade students* and *Lesson ideas for teaching 10th grade students*. Each section includes a topic which the activity ideas are based on. The three topics are: *The Old American West*, *Ghosts and the Supernatural* and *The Perfect World*. Each activity includes clear objectives and a detailed description of its procedure. The lesson ideas are meant to demonstrate how English can be taught based on content rather than isolated language items. Hopefully, English teachers will find them useful and inspire them to put this learner-centred method into practice.

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1. Introduction

Throughout my teacher education, I have been introduced to various language teaching methods, and inevitably contemplated which of these create a formula for successful English teaching, in order to develop my personal theory of practice. I have found that every method contains something of merit that can be used in language teaching. However, topic-based instruction, sometimes referred to as theme-based instruction, is a method which has opened up a clear and encouraging perspective on English teaching for me.

English has the status of a foreign language in Iceland, which means that learners learn the language in their own native language culture. This project consists of topic-based lesson ideas for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to students at the lower secondary level (8th, 9th and 10th grade). I have assigned each grade with one particular topic, to which I then adopted and designed lesson ideas.

I begin by explaining the reasons why I chose to select this specific area of instruction for my project and explore the current status of English teaching in Icelandic secondary schools. Before the topic-based lesson ideas, I give a theoretical discussion of the Whole Language Approach and a rationale for the use of topic-based instruction in the EFL classroom, with regard to language teaching principles. Hopefully, my lesson ideas and arguments for using topic-based teaching will convince English teachers of the method's effectiveness for language learning, encourage them to implement it in their classrooms and inspire them to be creative in their teaching.

2. Selection of the topic

Teacher education is in many ways a fascinating and diverse field of studies. One of the intriguing aspects about it is that student teachers are studying something that they have already had an experience of, i.e. we have all attended school and received instruction. Reminiscing about our own encounter with teaching methods and approaches helps us to form our own personal theory of practice, as we are bound to have an opinion on what kind of instruction resulted in successful learning – and also which methods did not work for us at all.

Personal experiences of English instruction have been a topic of discussion between me and my fellow student teachers during our time at the School of Education. Unfortunately, most of us agree that the English instruction we received in secondary school was overall very teacher-and textbook-centred, monotonous and uninspiring. We agree that the emphasis was mainly on completing English workbooks and that grammar exercises were carried out in silence which excluded any real communication. The only way to work with literature seemed to be writing and handing in book reports. Our negative experiences of English instruction have encouraged us to do better in our practice as teachers and attempt to change the things we were not content with ourselves.

The way in which we view language learning has advanced significantly over the last decades. As Hafdís Ingvarsdóttir states, “[l]anguage is no longer seen as a set of grammar rules and decontextualized vocabulary to be learned by heart. Language is first and foremost seen as a tool for communication in the variety of social settings where language is used” (2007:333). Despite this change in attitude towards language learning and recommended approaches and methods in the National Curriculum, research carried out in Icelandic secondary schools indicate that traditional grammar-translation teaching methods are still dominant in the English classroom. In 2005-2006, Lovísa Kristjánsdóttir, Laufey Bjarnadóttir and Samuel Lefever conducted an evaluation commissioned by the Ministry of Education (2006). Information about teaching methods in English instruction was gathered through written questionnaires given to English teachers and pupils in grades 5, 9 and 10 in eight compulsory schools. The methods teachers in grades 9 and 10 stated they put the most emphasis on were very

teacher-directed without focus on communication skills; grammar exercises, workbook use, reading English books and listening exercises were the highest ranking activities mentioned (Lovísa Kristjánsdóttir et.al.,2006). These findings are interesting in the light that very little seems to have changed in English teaching since me and my fellow students attended secondary school.

In my second year of education studies, I took the course Teaching English to Younger Learners, where one of the assignments was to design and plan a set of topic-based lesson plans around a topic of own choice. I particularly enjoyed working on the assignment, because I realised the possibilities that such instruction could offer, and also because of the chance to transfer my own creativity into the classroom. On this occasion, English teacher Björg Jónsdóttir visited our class and gave a lecture on her work with topic-based teaching. She presented to us how English teaching can be completely independent from traditional workbook completion. Björg bases her teaching on various topics that are given a certain amount of time within the classroom, and she has gathered an extensive amount of material which she uses for every topic. She has had the courage to reject the traditional grammar-translation methods and use a learner-centred and highly motivating technique for teaching English. Her confidence in the theory of topic-based instruction and enthusiasm for effective teaching was truly contagious and inspirational. As I listened to her in awe, everything became clear to me, and I knew what kind of English teacher I would like to become. Although Björg's work mainly focused on younger learners of English, I thought that topic-based teaching could just as easily be implemented with older learners, i.e. students at the lower secondary level (grades 8-10), so I used my teaching practice periods to experiment with a variety of topics within that age group. Due to my firm certainty in the effectiveness of topic-based teaching and experience with it in practice, I decided it was the most obvious choice for my final project towards a B.Ed – degree.

3. Goals

As stated above, I took the opportunity during my teaching practice to use topic-based teaching with students at the lower secondary level. Luckily, my supervising teachers at Egilsstaðir Secondary School always gave me the freedom to plan and teach

whatever I wanted to, so I was not restrained in any way by the workbooks that each class had to complete before the end of the school year. Instead, I tried to come up with various topics for instruction and design suitable activities for each. Some of these were a great success, and inevitably, others were less of a triumph. I learned that in order to develop a good topic-based set of lessons, the teacher must not hesitate to take risks. The key is to reflect upon which activities work and which are less effective, and use the experience to develop the lessons further. My supervising teachers were very content with how my lessons turned out. They told me the topic-based lessons were a nice change from the workbook and grammar activities the students were usually engaged in. I was honoured when some of them asked my permission to use my ideas and materials with their upcoming English learners. Topic-based instruction is clearly an appealing teaching method for English teachers, but the pressure of having a certain amount of material covered by the end of the school year seems to prevent them from implementing it in the classroom. The lessons seemed to provide students with an enjoyable learning experience, as they were overall highly motivated and active during the lessons. I hope that English teachers will find my topic-based lesson ideas featured in this final project helpful in their teaching. I hope the lesson ideas will inspire teachers to reduce the focus on traditional workbook teaching and rote learning and see how much they can do in the classroom by activating their own creativity – without lowering positive learning outcomes.

4. Theories in language teaching

4.1. The Whole Language Approach

In order to understand the ideology which supports the implementation of topic-based instruction as a method in the EFL classroom, it is appropriate to discuss the approach from which the method is derived, i.e. the Whole Language Approach.

To avoid confusion, it must be stated that Whole Language is not a method in itself or an activity within a lesson (Edelsky, 1993). What started as an approach to teaching reading, Whole Language was used to describe the way in which language is seen as a whole in contrast to breaking it up into linguistic bits and pieces (Brown, 2001). Today, the term has taken on a broader meaning, shifting from the teaching of reading in the

native language to foreign language teaching. The Whole Language approach is completely opposed to the decoding approach to language teaching, which focuses mainly on fragmenting the language into smaller units such as phonics, grammar points and vocabulary (Ping, n.d.). The decoding approach to language teaching is supported by bottom-up processing of language, where learners build up understanding of the language based on their knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and sounds, whereas Whole Language requires learners to construct meaning holistically, founded on their general background knowledge and life experiences (Nunan, 2003). One of the key principles of the Whole Language Approach is the integration of the four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). Teaching techniques that involve integration are supported by the fact that reinforcement of one skill by another often occurs. Brown argues that “...we learn to speak, for example, in part by modelling what we hear, and we learn to write by examining what we can read” (2001:234).

But how can English teachers put the Whole Language approach into practice? Richards and Rodgers point out that: “Each language teacher is free to implement the approach according to the needs of particular classes” (2001:112). One of the ways to apply the approach to the ESL classroom is through topic-based instruction.

4.2 Topic-based instruction in the EFL classroom

The main characteristic of topic-based instruction (often referred to as theme-based instruction) in an EFL setting is that the teaching, learning materials and classroom activities are organised around a particular topic or theme. Its main goal is for students to acquire second language competence by working on certain topic areas (Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989). Although more common with younger language learners, topic-based instruction can be put into practice with students of all ages, and revolve around practically any area of content (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008:93). With topic-based teaching, emphasis is put on the lesson content, which can serve the various interests of students, while still remaining focused on language objectives. The method is practical and promotes effective language learning (Brown, 2001). The aim of English teaching is for students to develop their language skills effectively, and using topic-based instruction to accomplish that goal is supported by several valid reasons. Brown

(2001) identifies four major underlying principles of second language learning which are well served by topic-based instruction. The principles are those of automaticity, meaningful learning, intrinsic motivation and communicative competence.

According to Brown (2001), automaticity refers to the tendency to acquire language through subconscious processing, i.e. learning a language without focusing too much on its forms, bits and pieces. This tendency is much stronger within children than adults. It supports the use of topic-based instruction because the method focuses on a topic area rather than isolated language forms. *“Overanalyzing language, thinking too much about its forms, and consciously lingering on rules of language all tend to impede [the] graduation to automaticity”* (Brown, 2001:56).

The effectiveness of topic-based instruction can also be attributed to its rich potential for meaningful learning. Ausubel (1963) argued that meaningful learning occurs when new information can be related to learners’ prior knowledge and existing cognitive structures. Meaningful learning can hence be contrasted with rote learning, i.e. memorising bits and pieces of language without connection to what the learner already knows. Based on those theories of cognitive development, Brown states that *“[m]eaningful learning will lead toward better long-term retention than rote learning”* (2001:57). Rote learning is not emphasised within topic-based instruction. On the contrary, it revolves around themes which are meaningful and relevant to learners, which in turn gives them a better chance to acquire the language. Furthermore, meaningful learning has a direct effect on enhancing learners’ intrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation is an important factor in second language learning. The term refers to learners performing different kinds of tasks, simply because they find them interesting or fun, not because they expect any kind of rewards from their teacher (Brown, 2001). Deci explained intrinsic motivation as follows: *“Intrinsic motivated activities are ones for which there is not apparent reward except the activity itself. People seem to engage in the activities for their own sake and not because they lead to an extrinsic reward...”* (1975:23). Designing lesson activities which reinforce intrinsic motivation within students is a challenge for teachers, but one way of accomplishing it is through topic-based instruction. When choosing topics to work with in the classroom, the teacher can take students’ personal interests into account and even

give them the opportunity to choose the themes they work with themselves. This way learning becomes fun for students, the activities become relevant to them and they see a purpose for doing them – they have made an investment in their own learning. For teachers, the rewarding experience of working with intrinsically motivated students in the classroom is worth the effort to design interesting and meaningful topic-based lesson activities.

Teaching English as a foreign language requires teachers to be constantly aware of the ultimate language classroom goal, which is for students to achieve communicative competence to be able to function in unexpected, real life situations outside the classroom. The communicative competence we want students to achieve can be defined as *“the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication goals. The desired outcome of the language learning process is the ability to communicate competently, not the ability to use the language exactly as a native speaker does”* (NCLRC, n.d.). Consequently, language instruction in the classroom should focus on fluency and authentic contexts, not just accuracy and drills (Brown, 2001). Topic-based instruction serves the goal of achieving communicative competence as it highlights automaticity more than overanalysing language forms and performing grammatical exercises. Topic-based instruction allows teachers to incorporate real life issues into the classroom – authentic issues which students can work with whilst developing their language skills. It gives students the chance to encounter authentic language which can support them later in situations where they must apply their language skills in order to communicate effectively.

Finally, topic-based instruction allows for the integration of skills, which is, as stated above, one of the key principles of the Whole Language Approach. Language teachers should make every effort to help students to become proficient in the four language skills, i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008). Teachers who use topic-based instruction in their classrooms avoid teaching the skills as separate units, but seek to integrate them, since it is the theme itself that controls the selection and sequencing of language focus. This replicates real life situations, where effective communication demands control over multiple language skills at the same time (Nunan, 2003).

Based on this discussion, it can be stated that topic-based instruction is an appropriate method to apply the Whole Language Approach to the EFL classroom, and that it has strong potential for resulting in effective language learning.

5. Introduction to the lesson ideas

My lesson ideas are suitable for teaching English in grades 8 to 10. Accordingly, they are divided into three sections; *Lesson ideas for teaching 8th grade students*, *Lesson ideas for teaching 9th grade students* and *Lesson ideas for teaching 10th grade students*. Each lesson idea section includes a topic which the activity ideas are based on. The three topics I chose are: *The Old American West*, *Ghosts and the Supernatural* and *The Perfect World*. Objectives are listed for each lesson idea, a warm-up activity is suggested and the procedure of the activities explained in detail.

It is important to note that the following material is a set of lesson *ideas* – not lesson *plans*. Therefore, the activities do not need to be carried out in the exact order in which they appear here. Teachers should choose the activities they think suit their group of students and sequence them as they wish.

My focus when deciding on topics for each grade was to choose themes which were likely to be of interest and relevance to students of this age. Students need to identify a purpose for doing the activities, so engaging them in something they find interesting to examine adds to their intrinsic motivation. *The Old American West* is a topic that I experimented with during my teaching practice. The idea originated from my own interest in American culture. I felt that my enthusiasm for the topic would enhance my students' motivation, and found that it was quite easy to engage them in it. Students' motivation was also my reason for choosing *Ghosts and the Supernatural* as a topic. During my teaching practice, I asked a few students to tell me what topic they would be interested in learning more about in English class. All of them mentioned the supernatural as a fascinating topic to explore. As with *The Old American West*, I experimented with *The Perfect World* as a topic during teaching practice. The activities I chose were well suited for 10th grade students and they got genuinely focused while doing them. The topic has potential for the integration of

English and Life Skills, to encourage students' critical thinking and allow them to express their personal views on relevant real life issues.

After choosing the topics to work with, I set out to come up with activities based on them. The activities are carefully chosen to ensure variety, allow for integration of the four language skills and to suit student's language level. The emphasis is on authentic language input and tasks which often rely on communication in English. It is hence very important that teachers themselves speak English in the classroom. The majority of the lesson ideas are based on activities that I have used successfully during my own teaching practice. Some of the ideas are adaptations of ideas received from various sources such as teaching handbooks, which are cited accordingly.

6. Conclusion

Despite the attitude change towards language learning in recent decades and recommended teaching methods in the National Curriculum, English instruction in Iceland still relies heavily on traditional teacher-centred methods. My personal theory of practice includes a strong belief in the advantages of topic-based instruction in the EFL classroom for students to acquire English successfully, and I believe that teachers should be unafraid to experiment with the method. Topic-based instruction serves major second language learning principles which strongly support its implementation in the classroom. The method gives students the opportunity to acquire English by using the language in meaningful and authentic contexts, promotes automaticity, communicative competence and intrinsic motivation. It allows for integration of the four skills, which is similar to what happens in real life situations where control over multiple language skills is needed for effective communication.

I hope that my topic-based lesson ideas will be of use to English teachers in Iceland and encourage them to take a step towards more learner-centred teaching methods. Moreover, I hope they demonstrate the variety of what can be done in the EFL classroom by organising the teaching around topics. We, as teachers, must always remember that students have the ability to learn English – it is our job to provide them with the suitable learning environment to do so.

7. Lesson ideas for teaching 8th grade students

Topic: The Old American West

Warm-up activity: Who Is It?

Objectives:

- Getting students focused on the topic
- Checking students' existing knowledge

Find a picture of the American outlaw Jesse James. Print a large copy of it and hang it on the wall/whiteboard. Ask students if they know this person. If they don't know Jesse James, ask them to guess by looking at the picture what kind of person he was, when and where he lived, what occupation he had, etc. Afterwards, you can tell students about Jesse. Did anyone guess correctly?

Old West Biographies

Objectives:

- Practising reading for gist
- Practising speaking

Give your students several short biographies of legends from the Old West, for example Frank and Jesse James, Billy the Kid, Calamity Jane, Butch Cassidy, the Dalton brothers, etc. You can find biographies online and adapt them to your students' language level. Students read the biographies (point out to them that they do not need to understand every single word) and discuss what they found interesting about the legends.

Lucky Luke

Objectives:

- Practising creative writing

One of the most renowned cowboys – Lucky Luke – is likely to be of interest to your students. Photocopy a Lucky Luke comic strip, but erase the text inside the

speech and thought balloons. Based on what is happening on the pictures, students write their own texts into the balloons.

You can collect the comic strips and either hang them on the wall of the classroom or create a small Lucky Luke comic book, which the class can enjoy browsing through. That way, everyone gets a chance to read what others have written.

Running With Lyrics – The Past Tense With Jesse James

Objectives:

- Practising listening for details
- Practising correct writing
- Practising speaking
- Raising awareness of the past tense form of verbs, both regular and irregular

The folk song *Jesse James* is a catchy tune which your students will enjoy hearing. The song is six verses, which could be too much. You should cut it down to three or four verses. Find the lyrics to the song online and print a few copies.

Divide students into pairs and ask them to push the tables and chairs to the sides of the classroom. The pairs go to one end of the classroom while you stick the lyrics on the wall at the other end. Each pair chooses who is going to be the secretary and the runner.

The secretaries are lined up seated, facing the wall. The runners race over to the lyrics and memorize the first line, race back and recite it for the secretaries, who must write it down. This goes on until the lyrics are complete. Students then go up to the lyrics sheets and correct their writing.

After this activity, it is ideal to play *Jesse James* for students. You can find the song on Youtube by various artists – Bruce Springsteen’s live version is recommended.

Writing Cowboy Limericks

Objectives:

- Practising creative writing
- Getting a feel for rhythm and rhyme
- Introducing students to poetic structure

Hand out, or write on the board, a standard limerick. Example:

*There was a young man from Bengal,
Who went to a fancy-dress ball.
He went, just for fun,
Dressed up as a bun,
And a dog ate him up in the hall.*

Explain to your students that a limerick is a five-line poem which is comical. Lines 1, 2 and 5 rhyme, and also lines 3 and 4. The last line of a limerick is often the joke.

Next, read the limerick to them and clap your hands with its beat. Ask your students to read the limerick aloud with you.

Tell your students that they are going to write limericks about cowboys, but before they do so themselves, they must exercise. Help them to complete the following exercise:

There was an old cowboy named _____ (a 1 or 2 syllable name)
Who liked to go shooting some _____ (a noun, must rhyme with line 1 name)
He borrowed a _____ (a 1 or 2 syllable noun)
To the town he did _____ (a verb, must rhyme with the noun in line 3)
And shot a bird old and _____ (an adjective, must rhyme with lines 1 and 2)

Now, students have a feel for the limerick rhyme scheme and it is time for them to try and write their own cowboy limericks, preferably in pairs. Students can read their limericks for their classmates. You can also make the class' limerick collection and ask students to illustrate it (Lindstromberg, 2004).

Old West Role Play

Objectives:

- Practising authentic communication
- Practising listening
- Promoting interaction among students

Ask your students to come up with situations that could have happened in the Old American West. Each situation should involve 2 persons.

Examples: *A bank robber robs a bank, but the clerk refuses to hand over the money or Cowboy A walks into a bar and has an argument with cowboy B. Cowboy B challenges A to a duel outside the bar.*

When you have come up with the sufficient amount of situations (amount depends on the size of your class), put students into pairs. Each pair gets one situation to use for a role play. They act out the situation as well as they can, using English only. Afterwards, some students may be willing to perform their role play for the class as a whole.

Wanted!

Objectives:

- Practising descriptions
- Practising speaking
- Practising listening for details
- Asking questions
- Practising writing detailed descriptions

Find and print a poster of a villain from the Old West who was wanted, dead or alive. Do not show your students the picture right away. Announce that there has been a bank robbery in the nearest bank, and you have a picture of the suspect.

Divide the class into pairs. One student in each pair is the witness, the other the Sheriff. Show the poster to the witnesses for 10 seconds while the Sheriffs turn around. The witness then describes the suspect to the Sheriff in as much detail as possible. The Sheriff asks questions to establish a better description. The Sheriffs write the description on a piece of paper. Finally, show all students the poster so they can check if their description is correct (Norman, Levihn & Hedenquist, 1986).

8. Lesson ideas for teaching 9th grade students

Topic: Ghosts and the Supernatural

Warm-up activity: Guided Fantasy

Objectives:

- Getting students focused on the topic
- Practising listening
- Practising oral expression of own thoughts

For this warm-up activity, arrange the classroom so that students can lie on the floor. Preferably, turn off the lights and light some candles to create a mysterious atmosphere. Tell your students to close their eyes, relax and listen.

Now, you lead your students through a guided fantasy with a ghostly feel to it. You must prepare your storyline beforehand, and make sure that it leaves room for the imagination by asking various questions. For example, you could start by saying: *“It is dark and you are standing on a hill, looking down a valley. What is the weather like? You see a large building in the distance, what does it look like? You walk towards the building and knock three times on the front door. Is there an answer? You grab the doorknob, turn it and push the door open. Is someone in there?”* etc. Your storyline can get very exciting if you include opening more doors, boxes, closets, etc. When you finish the guided fantasy, ask students to share and compare their experiences orally in English (Wright, 2005).

A Ghost Story

Objectives:

- Practising listening for gist
- Making predictions
- Practising speaking

Find a chilling ghost story online. You can for example find a range of ghost stories and stories about the supernatural at this American Folklore website:

<http://www.americanfolklore.net/spooky-stories.html>. Dim the lights in the classroom and light some candles to create a chilling atmosphere. Read the story to your students. Pause regularly during the reading, and ask students to predict what is going to happen next. You should practise reading the story beforehand and do your best to give your students a lively and gripping performance of it. That way, you are more likely to engage them in the activity.

The Fortune Teller – Role Play

Objectives:

- Practising authentic communication
- Practising listening
- Promoting interaction among students

Divide your students into two groups. Tell one group that they are going to play the roles of fortune tellers, the other group the roles of persons who want to have their fortunes told. Give the fortune tellers 10 minutes to prepare their fortunes; the fortune receivers the same time to prepare what they would like to ask the fortune teller. Now, pair up the fortune tellers and fortune receivers and tell them to act out the situation using English. Props could be used to help create more atmosphere, e.g. a crystal ball, a tea cup, horoscope or fortune telling cards.

Idioms – Ghosts

Objectives:

- Building up vocabulary
- Exploring the meanings of English language idioms related to the topic
- Promoting authentic communication among students

Begin this activity by explaining the concept of idioms to your students. Tell them that an idiom is a phrase or expression that means something else than its words suggest. Give them an example: the idiom '*raining cats and dogs*' means that it is raining heavily but not that cats and dogs are falling from the sky! Get your students to

brainstorm about idioms in their first language and discuss with them how their true meaning differs from their literal meaning.

Give your students some common English language idioms related to ghosts.

To be pale as a ghost

To give up the ghost

Not a ghost of a chance

To lay the ghost of something to rest

In groups of four, students discuss in English what they think the idioms mean, and write their definitions down. Each group then reports to the class what they decided on.

Next, give your students the true definitions of the idioms, and ask them to write two sentences including each idiom.

To be pale as a ghost: to look very pale.

Not a ghost of a chance: not even the slightest chance of something happening.

To give up the ghost: **1.** to stop trying to do something because you have no chance of succeeding. **2.** to die. **3.** to stop working, often used for machines.

To lay the ghost of something to rest: to stop worrying about something you have been worried about for a long time.

Afterwards, you should ask your students to illustrate their sentences. Put them on a classroom wall as the class's idiom collection.

Superstitions around the world

Objectives:

- Practising online research on a particular topic
- Practising oral presentation on a previously researched topic

Divide your class into pairs or groups and assign each pair/group a country. Students do online research on superstitions in their assigned country. Let your

students choose the form in which they gather the information they find, for example a leaflet, PowerPoint presentation, a collage, a video clip, etc. Finally, the pairs/groups present their findings and their product orally in class.

The Ghost – Creative Group Writing

Objectives:

- Practising reading for gist
- Practising creative writing
- Promoting creative language use

During this activity, you should assist less able students as much as you can and make sure that you do not put too much pressure on them.

Place each student at a computer and tell them to open a new Word document. Tell them that they are going to write ghost stories in English and that each one must think of a catchy title for their story. They write their title at the top of the document.

The next step is the story writing. Tell your students to begin their story by writing the first two lines. Make it clear to them that they should not worry too much about grammar or spelling. When everyone has finished, you tell everyone to stand up and switch computers, i.e. each student sits down at the next computer. They must read what the prior student wrote and continue the story by writing the next two lines. The same procedure goes on for as long as you like, but when you decide to stop you should tell your students to write the ending of the story. Note that the longer the stories get, the more time students need to read what has been written.

You will probably have some very entertaining stories on your hands after this writing session, and be sure that every student will want to read them. You can either read them aloud in class, or print them and give everyone a copy to read.

This writing activity works very well with computers. Using computers adds to your students' motivation, plus makes it easier for them to correct their writing and read what others have written. If you do not have access to the sufficient amount of computers, you can have them work in pairs or simply write on paper.

Classic literature – Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*

Objectives:

- Introducing classic English literature to students
- Developing reading comprehension
- Vocabulary extension
- Practising speaking
- Encouraging students' extensive reading

If you are teaching the topic of Ghosts and the Supernatural around Christmas time, you can introduce Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* for class reading. The classic ghost story is almost certain to catch your students' interest.

Purchase an abridged edition of the book including an audio CD (available from Oxford University Press). Create a comfortable atmosphere in the classroom – dim the lights and give each student a candle to have on their table. Play one chapter at a time from the audio CD and have your students follow the reading in their books. Between chapters, check their understanding by asking questions, and ask them to predict what is going to happen next.

A Christmas Carol has various possibilities for further class work. Students can make character maps, do research on the author and watch a film adaption of the story. They can discuss the message of the story, its characters and themes or write personal opinion essays. The key is to figure out what best suits your class.

9. Lesson ideas for teaching 10th grade students

Topic: The Perfect World

Warm-up activity: Brainstorming session

Objectives:

- Getting students focused on the topic
- Checking students' existing knowledge
- Practising speaking

Write '*The Perfect World*' in the middle of the whiteboard. Ask your students to think about what the world needs to become perfect for living in. Write their ideas on the board and discuss them.

Imagine – John Lennon's Perfect World

Objectives:

- Practising vocabulary related to war and peace
- Listening for details
- Practising answers to questions of personal response
- Practising authentic communication within a group

Find the lyrics to John Lennon's Imagine online, print them and cut up each line into strips. Divide your students into pairs and give each pair a set of the cut up lyrics.

Tell your students that they are going to listen to a song by John Lennon, where he describes his ideal world. As a pre-task, students try to arrange the cut up lyrics before they listen to the song. While they listen, they check if they have put the lyrics into the correct order. Allow them to listen to the song as often as they need – some of them might even like to sing along.

Next, have students form discussion groups of four. Give each group a copy of the following discussion questions and tell them to use English only. If your students are reluctant to speak English, it is fundamental that you speak English to them

yourself. You can also introduce a reward system, for example a game where students loose points for speaking Icelandic.

1. What is the main theme of the song Imagine?
2. ***“Imagine there’s no countries”***. What would the world be like without countries?
3. ***“...and no religion too”***. Why does Lennon mention religion in his song?
4. How does religion affect peoples’ lives in the world today?
5. What do you think the world would be like without religion?
6. ***“Imagine no possessions”***. What do you think the world would be like without possessions?
7. How do possessions affect peoples’ lives?
8. What are the main reasons for war in the world that we live in?
9. Would you like to live in the world that John Lennon imagined? Why?/Why not?
10. Do you think there will ever be peace in the world? How can we accomplish peace?

My Perfect World – Essay writing and oral presentation

Objectives:

- Practising the expression of personal opinion in writing
- Practising oral presentation of a previously prepared topic
- Creating and expressing an argument for a personal opinion

Instruct your students to write one page about their perfect world. Give them the following list of things to keep in mind while writing:

What do you think is wrong in our world today?

What kind of world would you like to live in?

Why do you want that kind of world?

Do you think it is possible to achieve your ideas? How?

Based on their writing assignment, students now prepare notes to give a 1 minute talk in class about their perfect world. Emphasise the importance of preparing good notes before giving an oral presentation and that they are not supposed to simply read their writing assignment aloud. Assist your students with their note preparation. Students give their presentations in class from a podium.

Dictogloss: ‘I Have A Dream’ – Martin Luther King

Objectives:

- Improving listening skills
- Practising listening for gist
- Creating grammatically correct sentences
- Promoting communication among students

Before you start the dictogloss, you need to prepare your students. You can do this by telling them about Martin Luther King, his accomplishments and the circumstances in which he gave his famous ‘*I Have A Dream*’ speech. You can find the information online.

Locate Martin Luther King’s ‘*I Have A Dream*’ speech on Youtube and play the recording three times. Students listen first. During the second and third listening, they take notes from the speech, listing key words or sentences from it.

Next, have your students meet in groups of four to compare their notes. They write down their reconstruction of the speech and try to make it as similar to the original as possible. Finally, one member of each group reads the re-creation of the speech. Compare the groups’ speeches and discuss what parts were difficult to reconstruct.

Afterwards, generate a class discussion about Martin Luther King’s dreams. Ask your students about their own dreams. Also, ask them what they thought of the speech, how it made them feel and why it is considered a great speech (Herrell & Jordan, 2008).

Talk Show – People Who Changed the World

Objectives:

- Practising online research on a particular topic
- Practicing oral communication

Give your students a list of people who have made an effort to change the world for the better, for example:

Nelson Mandela

Martin Luther King

Mahatma Gandhi

John Lennon

Rosa Parks

Princess Diana

Mother Teresa

Florence Nightingale

Explain that you are going to have a talk show in class, similar to television talk shows that they are familiar with. Divide the class into pairs and have them choose one person from the list. One will play the talk show host, the other will play the person they chose.

The pairs do online research on their selected person and based on the information gathered, write a talk show interview.

Give students time to practise the interview. When everyone is ready, they perform their interview for the whole class. In order to give students more authentic communication practise, you can allow questions from the audience which have not been previously prepared.

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