

Language Learning Games: Gotcha & The Spelling Officer

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Gotcha

You have been a teacher for some time and you can tell Ann from Mary but... do you really know your students? Getting to know your students is as important as getting them to work. Here's your chance to do both things at the same time in a new and challenging way, thus supplementing the 'Introduce Yourself' session or doing without it altogether! Students draw pictures and write about themselves while you play the shrink for a day or two.

A word of warning before we go on: the activity is roughly connected to some projection tests psychologists give their patients to find out what is going on in the latter's minds at any given time. You do not have to be an expert to do the activity and enjoy it. However, as deep feelings and odd situations are occasionally revealed (once I learned that one of my students was a drug user), you are expected to keep your findings for yourself and/or refer them to a professional. The activity, though, is usually fun, as it gives the students and yourself a break from routine. You'll certainly be surprised to see the great number of first-class artists sitting in front of you.

What To Do:

- Tell students that for a few minutes they are to draw whatever thing/s come to their minds on a clean white sheet of paper. They had better not know what your intentions are: otherwise some will cheat. To their eyes, the whole thing should appear as an ordinary class activity. Allow 8-10 minutes for this stage, but don't tell them. Just say 'stop!' when time is up (when you see most of the students have produced quite a few things.) Again, this is to ensure that students let their minds -and their pencils- fly as freely as possible.
- Dictate or write on the blackboard the following questions (to be written down and answered on a separate piece of paper.)
 - a) What have you drawn?
 - b) Why have you drawn that? 'Because you asked me to' is not a valid answer!
 - c) Write a story about that person/place/animal/thing or whatever it is. If you have not drawn anything, write a short composition on a topic of your choice. In either case, use about (90) words.
- Collect the students' output and, if there is still time, briefly show them to the class.
- Look at the pictures and mark the compositions in the usual way. Now for the most interesting of all: the interpretation of the students' works (to be done privately, while you mark them.) Trust your intuition and good senses. The following is a very rough guide indeed.
- Some of the pictures may not be clear; the answers to questions b) and c) help to refine your analysis.
- Some students do not pay any attention to the activity. Watch them! They may be troublesome, or perhaps they are begging for a change in your methodology. Do make a few changes if there are many of these.
- A few students draw nothing at all. Their self-esteem and/or their concentration powers are often too low. Try motivating them. Read their compositions anyway and work out why they chose that particular topic. Pay attention to what they say and do. - A number of students just copy their neighbour's pictures. They are probably lazy or unimaginative. Wake them up! Or perhaps

they are simply cheeky. If so, let them know there's no kidding with you!

- There might be a group who rub their pictures out too often. You can tell by the marks on the paper. These students find it difficult to make up their minds or either they are rather perfectionist. Both extremes can cause problems, in class and in life.

Recurrent Pictures

- Some students draw their teacher, their classmates or any object they have in front of them at the time. These are often the ones who do not work hard enough. They find the quickest and easiest way to do things and do not want to be bothered with details or hear about making efforts.
- Hobbies (music, computer science, sport) and personal situations (love, people the students admire, pets, characters from books or the TV, favourite places) appear often. Make these the topics of your following lessons!
- A few students show deep feelings (family life, religion or school) Pay attention to these philosophers. They give you a lot to think about!

As you will have understood, this is not a final character analysis, although the activity will no doubt enhance communication with your students if you play your cards right and, in any case, students do some writing in a new and original way.

The Spelling Officer

'Here today, gone tomorrow!'. That is often said of street vendors, but it is also true of words and grammar: whatever we teach will be forgotten unless we do some revision from time to time. This includes simple things, such as the alphabet or basic vocabulary. Here's a simple activity to revise both.

Start by writing the alphabet from A to Z on the blackboard and ask students to read the letters in order a couple of times. Then do the following:

Choose a student to act as the "Spelling Officer". This student will read out the letters according to the list below. These are not in order but, conveniently arranged, they form a word. Check that the students have got the letters right, give them the accompanying clues and ask them for the words. When that has been done, ask the class to spell the words correctly. Afterwards, practise with new categories and new words if you wish. These can be objects in the classroom, vehicles, drinks, adjectives, toys, insects, adverbs, vegetables, and pieces of furniture. Happy spelling!

P - L - I - U - T	A flower	(TULIP)
M - I - J	A person's name	(JIM)
B - L - A - T - O - L - O - F	A sport	(FOOTBALL)
D - I - N - I - A	A country	(INDIA)
N - D - L - O - N - O	A big city	(LONDON)
L - U - E - B	A colour	(BLUE)
A - G - R - I - O - L - L	An animal	(GORILLA)
E - T - C - R - A - T - I - H - C	A job	(ARCHITECT)
O - Z - O	A place	(ZOO)
N - O - E - P - L - H - Y - X - O	A musical instrument	(XYLOPHONE)
H - A - D - E	A part of the body	(HEAD)
N - E - U - E - Q	An important person	(QUEEN)