

# Six Group Activities for Teaching ESL Children

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From experience, the best way to teach children English is to not only get them physically involved within the lesson, but also to create the illusion that they are simply playing games. And rather than focus on individual development, it is also a very good idea to promote class interaction as far as possible. Here are some easy inspirational ideas to try or to adapt within your classroom.

## Cultural Charades

Before the lesson, fasten cards under the children's desks or seats. When the class begins, ask the students to read the word that is on their card, but to keep it secret. Put the name of each child into a hat, and pick out a name at random. When called, out the child must come to front of the class and try to describe the object on their card. When the class correctly guesses the right answer, write the word on the blackboard. Continue the process until every student has had his or her turn.

Next, ask the students to read all of the words on the blackboard that they have described, and to tell you which could be grouped together. This is easier if you choose specific topics when initially writing the card, for example, animal names, types of clothes, different sports etc. This game can be adapted to fulfill any topic that the class may need to cover, or to improve upon.

## Word Association

Arrange the seats or desks in the classroom into one wide ring. Decide on a topic, and begin with just one word. One by one go around the circle in an counterclockwise direction and ask the children to say another English word that they think links to the previous word. (E.G. If you began with 'hot', the next word might be 'cold', and then 'ice', 'snow', 'sledging', and so forth). If a child hesitates for too long or calls out a word that does not really fit with the previous utterance, ask them to move out of the circle. The person on their immediate right will then begin an entirely new topic with a word of their choosing. Continue the process until there is just one winner left, and award the child a sticker or a badge.

A harder variation of this game is to ask the child to give a word that begins with the last letter of the previous one. This can be as topic specific as you wish. For example, if your first word is 'animal', it could be followed by words such as 'liddle', then 'elephant', 'tiger', 'rabbit' etc. If the game is going slowly put a time limit on the students for giving the next answer.

## Description Groups

Split the class up into small groups, and ask them to secretly elect one member. Supply each group with a very large piece of paper, and several differently coloured pens. Then ask the students to describe the elected member within the group by writing down adjectives on the paper. Firstly, ask the group to describe the elected child physically, using just one colour of pen. Then get the group to ask the elected student questions about themselves in English. Ask them to record the answers in different colours – for example, 'likes' in green ink, and 'dislikes' in red.

Next, ask the groups to come to the front of the classroom one by one. Pin up their large piece of paper, and ask the rest of the class to guess whom the group have been describing. If time allows, the class can ask the elected members questions about what has been recorded. For example, if it has been written that the elected member dislikes slugs, ask why, and then ask the rest of the class to raise their hands if they agree or disagree. This exercise also has strong benefits regarding student bonding.

## Pass the Question

Arrange the desks or chairs into a rough circle and stand in the center with a small ball in your hand. Ask a question, and then pass

the ball to a student at random (for example, 'what is two plus two', or 'what is the capital of England'). If the student knows the correct answer they should pass the ball back to you as they answer. If they don't know they must call out 'sorry, I don't know', and throw the ball to one of their classmates. If the second student knows the answer they return the ball to you, if not they pass it on again. Continue the process until you have the correct answer, and then begin again with a new topic. It is a good idea to repeat questions that the students have struggled with at a later stage in the game.

## Memory Momentum

Prepare a tray of objects at the front of the class – the more items the better. Ask the class to file around the table for a short amount of time, cover up the objects and the students to sit back down again. The class should then write down the English names of as many objects as they can remember, and then call out the objects so that you can write them on the board. When the list is complete, ask the children to tell you a bit more about what they can remember, for example, 'What was the banana near to?', 'What was at the back of the table?', or 'What was in the middle of the table?'. (In the event that the students cannot remember, simply uncover the objects in order to enable further learning).

As an extension of this exercise you could move the objects around, so that the class can practice describing comparative positioning. Try to get the students to use as many different words to describe the same things as possible. For example, if the banana was in the middle of the table, move it to the back of the table, and ask them 'Where it is the banana now?', or 'What it is the banana now next to/ beside/ opposite to/ adjacent to?'.

## Holiday Fun

Tell the class to pretend that they are going on a holiday or a field trip, and ask them to bring in one small item or object that they would need to take with them. Use a large suitcase as a prop, and put it on a desk at the front of the classroom. Ask the students to come to the front of the class one by one and describe what they have brought, and explain why they have brought it. Try to get the children to be as specific as possible, for example, if a child has chosen to bring a t-shirt ask them what colour it is, what the logo says and other questions.

When all of the objects are 'packed' in the suitcase you can develop the idea further, by asking the class what they have forgotten to pack. As they call out the items write the words down on the board – toothpaste, camera, sandals – and then get them to group the similar objects together.

## Telling Tales

Arrange three separate bags at the front of the class, and put slips of paper in each of them. The first bag should hold the name of a person, the second the name of a place, and the third should contain an action. For example, 'The Queen', 'beach', 'skipping'. Ask the students to select one slip of paper from each bag, and then to write a short story that includes all three elements. This can be as fictitious as they wish, so long as it makes grammatical sense. One by one ask the children to read out their short paragraph to the class, who should then try to spot any grammatical mistakes. The more random the words on the cards the better, as humour and comedy are perhaps the most prolific teaching tools in existence.