

**FUN IDEAS FOR HALLOWEEN, CHRISTMAS, NEW
YEAR'S, VALENTINE'S, THANKSGIVING & EASTER**



**63 ESL
HOLIDAY
GAMES &
ACTIVITIES**

JACKIE BOLEN

63 ESL Holiday Games & Activities:

Fun Ideas for Halloween, Christmas, New Year's, Valentine's, Thanksgiving & Easter

Jackie Bolen

www.eslspeaking.org

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About the Author: Jackie Bolen

I've been teaching English in South Korea and Canada for 15 years to every level and type of student and I've taught every age from kindergarten kids to adults. Most of my time has centered around teaching at two universities: five years at a science and engineering school and four years at a major university in Busan where I taught high-level classes for students majoring in English. These days, I teach mostly Chinese students at an academy in Vancouver, Canada. In my spare time, you can usually find me outside surfing, biking, hiking or on the hunt for the most delicious kimchi I can find.

In case you were wondering what my academic qualifications are, I hold a Master of Arts in Psychology. During my time in Korea, I've completed both the Cambridge CELTA and DELTA certification programs. With the combination of almost 15 years teaching ESL/EFL learners of all ages and levels, and the more formal teaching qualifications I've obtained, I have a solid foundation on which to offer teaching advice. I truly hope that you find this book useful and would love it if you sent me an email with any questions or feedback that you might have—I'll always take the time to respond.

Jackie Bolen around the Internet

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If you can't get enough ESL games, activities and other useful stuff for the classroom in this book, you can get even more goodness delivered straight to your inbox every week. I promise to respect your privacy—your name and email address will never be shared with anyone for any reason. [Sign-up here.](#)

If you're interested in this book, you may also want to check out these by Jackie Bolen. You can find them wherever you like to buy books:

101 Activities and Resources for Teaching English Online

39 Awesome 1-1 ESL Activities for Kids

67 ESL Conversation Topics for Teenagers and Adults (Complete lesson plans)

ESL Games & Activities for Any Holiday, All Levels

Picture Prompt

Skills: Speaking/Listening/Writing

Time: 5 minutes

Level: Beginner-Advanced

Materials: Picture/PowerPoint image

Show students an image about whatever holiday you want to talk about and have them generate questions or speculate about the picture. This is a nice way to help students activate their prior knowledge because it's likely not the first time they've encountered most holidays, except for the unusual ones.

For lower-level students, this can be purely descriptive:

Q: What do you see?

A: I see a Christmas tree, presents and some kids.

Q: How many presents are there?

A: There are 5 presents.

For high beginner/low intermediate students, have an image which can generate questions such as:

What is happening in this picture?

How does that person feel?

Why do you think so?

For advanced students, have an unusual image. Encourage them to create a narrative to explain the story.

Teaching Tips:

If you want to use this as a writing activity with beginner or low-intermediate students, give them a worksheet of questions to answer.

Procedure:

1. In advance, prepare an image, either PowerPoint or a picture large enough for the class to easily see.
2. Divide students into pairs or small groups. This is better for higher-level students. Beginners should do this with the teacher and the entire class.
3. Depending on the level of the students:
 - Elicit descriptive sentences about the image. Encourage them to make their own questions to ask a partner.
 - Have them discuss what they think is happening in the picture, how the person/ people feel and why they think so, etc.
 - Have them create a narrative about the image. (Unusual images work well for this).
 - Absolute beginners can say words that they know (Christmas tree, Santa, presents), or answer simple questions (How many presents are there? There are 3 presents).
 - Optionally, have them write their responses.

Holiday Word Association

Skills: Reading/Writing/Listening/Speaking

Time: 5 minutes

Level: Beginner-Advanced

Materials: whiteboard and markers or butcher (A3) paper and pens

It's often the case that students already know a lot of English vocabulary words related to popular holidays like Christmas, Halloween or Easter. This is a nice activity that helps them activate their prior knowledge and makes any new vocabulary they might learn more memorable.

Write “Christmas” (or any holiday) in the middle of the board or paper and have students take turns adding as many words or images related to that word as possible. For large classes, have students work in groups with separate pieces of paper taped to the wall or the top of the table/grouped desks. After a given amount of time (2-3 minutes, or when you see no one is adding anything new), discuss their answers.

Teaching Tips:

For large classes, butcher paper works best because more students can write at one time. If that isn't possible, have 5-6 board markers available.

If you're using butcher paper (or A3 in a pinch), prepare in advance by taping it to the wall unless students will be working at their desks. If students will be working at their desks, write the word on each table's page in advance, but don't hand them out until you have given your instructions.

Procedure:

1. Write a holiday on the whiteboard or butcher paper.
2. Have students take turns adding as many words or images related to that word as possible.
3. After 2-3 minutes (or less, if no one is adding anything new), discuss their answers.

I'm an Alien

Skills: Speaking/Listening

Time: 5-15 minutes

Level: Beginner-Advanced (best with children)

Materials: None

I love a no-prep, no-materials activity, and students generally enjoy this one. Begin the class by telling the students you are an alien. You landed just a few minutes earlier, right outside the school. Since you are new here, you don't know a lot about a certain holiday that is coming up and need some help understanding it.

For example, you might want to talk about Christmas. For lower-level students, elicit vocabulary words related to the holiday like Christmas tree, presents, turkey dinner, etc. For higher-level students, it might be possible to dig into the traditions and reasons why they exist. Whatever the case, feign ignorance to make this activity more fun!

Procedure:

1. Begin the class by telling the students you are an alien. Since you are new here, you don't know anything about a certain holiday and need help.
2. Students can help you learn some new vocabulary words, or explain the various traditions.

Puzzles

Skills: Reading/Writing

Time: 10-20 minutes

Level: Beginner-Advanced

Materials: A puzzle

Puzzles are an excellent way to review vocabulary and I find that most students enjoy doing them, particularly teenagers. They can also work very well for “quiet” classes that don't have a lot of outgoing students in them where it's hard to do some of the more active games like charades.

It's easy to make puzzles yourself using something like Discovery.com's Puzzlemaker (www.discoveryeducation.com/free-puzzlemaker). It's the best option since you can include all the specific vocabulary that you'd like. I prefer to use the criss-cross option because it has the most educational benefit since it deals with meanings as well as vocabulary words.

For beginners, it's possible to do something like a letter scramble criss-cross. For example:

- b n n y u (bunny)
- a e t s e r (Easter)
- b b r a t i (rabbit)

Procedure:

1. Go to Discovery.com and find the puzzlemaker.
2. Design your puzzle (criss-cross is best!), using words and definitions. Alternatively, give hints about the word related to the context you'd use it in instead of the actual definition. Or, do some word scrambles for beginners.
3. Have students complete the puzzle. I usually make it a bit competitive by putting them in pairs and awarding the first couple of teams a prize

of some sort.

4. It's up to you whether or not to allow dictionaries or textbooks. In my experience, they usually don't help that much.

How Many Candies?

Skills: None, just for fun!

Time: n/a

Level: All

Materials: Candies in a jar

Put holiday-themed candies in a glass jar (candy corn, Easter jelly beans, etc.) and count how many you are putting in as you do it. Seal up the jar well. Then, let each of your students have one guess as to how many candies there are. I usually do this by giving each student a small piece of paper. They have to write their name, class, and guess. Then, the person who guesses closest to the correct number gets the entire jar of candies. They can choose to share, or not!

What Am I?

Skills: Speaking/Listening/Reading

Time: 10-15 minutes

Level: Beginner-Advanced

Materials: Tape or pins and vocabulary words on paper

This is a classic party game that is an excellent way for students to practice asking simple questions. It's possible to do this activity with holiday-themed vocabulary.

Write a bunch of vocabulary words on strips of paper. For example, Rudolf, elf, Christmas tree, presents, Santa, turkey, stuffing, etc. Then tape or pin one to each student's back so that they can't see what it is. They have to go around to their classmates asking yes/no questions to find out what they are. For example, "Am I an animal?" After each question, they can make a guess and the other student will answer "yes" or "no." They can only ask each student one question, so they will talk to almost everyone in the class by the end of the activity.

Teaching Tips:

Be sure to pick vocabulary that you are sure everyone is familiar with. It can be useful to have a word bank of possible answers.

Also, emphasize to students that this game is just for fun and the purpose is to enjoy themselves while practicing some questions in English. While they can just look at their own paper or get someone to tell them the word, it's not useful and it won't feel good to figure out the word through cheating.

Procedure:

1. The teacher prepares slips of paper with the target vocabulary.
2. The teacher pins or tapes one slip to each student's back.
3. Students walk around the class asking one classmate one yes/no question. The classmate answers the question and after each question,

- they can have one guess as to what the secret thing is.
4. If incorrect, they talk to another classmate and follow the same procedure. If correct, they take a rest, or get another paper from the teacher depending on time. A student can only ask one question to each student in the class—they cannot speak to the same student twice.
 5. I have a few extras for the people that guess right away so that they can have another one.

Poster Project Group Presentation

Skills: Speaking/Listening

Time: 3-5 hours preparation, 1 hour presentation time (depending on class size)

Level: Beginner-Advanced

Materials: Large poster paper

If you want to do some task-based learning in your class, this is an excellent one to do. Put your students in groups of 2-4 and assign a topic or theme. It could be about holidays in general and each group could take a different holiday. Or, you might do it about a certain holiday and cover various things like food, traditions, how it's celebrated around the world, etc.

Then, students will have to make a poster with some pictures and a minimal amount of text. Emphasize the minimal text because if you don't, many of the posters will be filled with a large amount of text that is impossible to read. It's a good idea to draw a model poster on the whiteboard and draw big pictures with examples of writing size and content. You can point these things out as you give instructions.

Once the poster is complete (give class time, or for homework), the group will make a presentation about the topic. I emphasize that each group member must talk for an equal amount of time and that they must memorize their presentation and cannot read from a paper. Finally, I ask them to prepare a few quiz questions (3-5) for their classmates to test and see if they were listening! You can also include some Q & A time if your class is outgoing and they won't be too shy to do this.

Teaching Tips:

This is an excellent activity to use if you want to focus on intonation with your students. You can show them how to use these things to emphasize the key points, signal a transition or signal what is old and what is new information.

You could also consider introducing some markers that are present in more formal kinds of spoken discourse such as this one. For example, there are standard ways to introduce a topic (Today, I'm going to talk about _____), develop an idea (I'll talk about three main points related to this), transition into another idea (Now that you've heard about A, I'd like to talk about B), or conclude a presentation (Remember the most important points are _____.)

While not a lot of preparation is required for this since your students are doing most of the work, you need to be clear in your head about what your expectations are and you also need to convey this clearly to your students. If you don't, you're likely to be disappointed in the results, but it will be your fault and not the students'. It can be helpful to prepare a list of “Top 10 Dos and Don'ts” on a handout, a class website, or *Facebook* group.

It is extremely important to get students to memorize their speeches and to ensure this, you can allocate a large number of points (20-30%) to it if the assignment is graded. If you don't, the presentation will likely be terrible and will often consist of reading from a PowerPoint or a piece of paper. I do however tell my students to bring their script up to the front with them and they can look one time per person without any penalty in case they truly forget what they need to say.

Procedure:

1. Put students into groups and assign a topic.
2. Give explicit instructions about what is required of them regarding the poster and the presentation.
3. Have students prepare the poster and the presentation, either in class or for homework.
4. Students do their presentations in front of the class.

5. The students ask their classmates some quiz questions based on what they talked about.
6. Question and answer time (optional).

Holiday Pictionary

Skills: Speaking/Listening

Time: 10-15 minutes

Level: Beginner-Advanced

Materials: Whiteboard, marker, eraser

Optional Materials: Flashcards

This is a great review game with no prep required. Divide students into teams and choose which team will go first. That team will choose a representative to go to the whiteboard and he/she will have to draw pictures (I use a pile of flashcards) that their team guesses. The goal is to get as many points as possible in a specified amount of time (two minutes). Then, the next team does the same thing. You can play as many rounds as you wish.

I use this with classes of up to 40 students and it works well as long as no one gets too rowdy. In those large classes, have students sit at tables, rather than individual desks, so that they can work together easily. If you have a large class seated at desks, you should arrange them into groups of 4-8 desks depending on class size. If you have a class of ten or fewer, just divide them into two teams.

This isn't the most student-centred game so I generally only use this for a “party” class to have a bit of fun with my students.

Procedure:

1. Divide students into equal teams of 4-8. Have each team choose a representative to draw.
2. Demonstrate by drawing a picture representing a familiar term on the whiteboard and elicit guesses from the students.
3. The team that correctly guesses the word will go first. The other team representatives will play rock-scissors-paper to determine their order.

4. Have the drawer from the first team go to the whiteboard and show him/her a flashcard. He/she has to draw it.
5. As he/she draws, his/her team guesses the correct word. The drawer takes another card and the team continues to guess. Continue until the specified time is up.
6. Continue until each team has had at least one chance to play.

Charades

Skill: Speaking

Time: 10-20 minutes

Level: Beginner-Advanced

Materials: None, flashcards (optional)

Charades is a fun game which can be adapted to any level for a fun holiday game. One student is chosen to go first or you can go first to demonstrate the activity. Choose a word or phrase the students will know and act it out, but don't make any sounds. To play a more challenging game for higher-level students, add in the traditional categories of book, movie, song, etc. as well as pointing at the ear to demonstrate “sounds like.” The game can either be played so that the winner of a round takes the next turn, or students go in order of their rock-scissor-paper results.

Unless the class is quite small, you will probably want to break students into groups. There will always be students who shout every word they know, hoping to get lucky. To keep the noise more manageable, you may want to lay a few ground rules or use a “class volume” app. For example, if you have a group that is shouting random words, you could make a rule that each group gets one guess before a given group gets a second guess. Apps such as “Noise Down” and “Noise Control” let the class know they are getting too noisy. Noise Down sounds an alarm when the volume reaches a set level, and it's free! You could have a “three strikes” policy, or end the game if the alarm goes off.

Procedure:

1. Demonstrate charades for any students who don't know the game.
2. Divide students into groups of 8-10.
3. Have each group do rock-scissors-paper to determine who will go first. Let them know if they need to remember their results for the order of their turn.

4. If using flashcards, have a different set for each group. Have students take a card from the top of the pile as they begin their turn. Then, act out whatever is on the card. Some sets of flashcards work more easily than others. It's easier to act out actions and emotions than adverbs or classroom objects.
5. Optional: a timer and "class volume" app to keep things moving and at a reasonable volume.

Describing Something Guessing Game

Skills: Speaking/Listening/Reading

Time: 5-10 minutes

Level: Beginner-Advanced

Materials Required: Handout or PowerPoint with approximately 20 pictures

This is a simple warm-up activity that can be used to review new vocabulary words.

Make up a handout or PowerPoint with pictures of the target holiday vocabulary. Give some hints such as:

- It's an animal.
- He helps Santa.
- He has a red nose.

By this time, the students will have guessed Rudolph. Then cross Rudolph off the list or delete it from the PowerPoint. Turn it over to the students and they will take turns describing the other pictures to each other.

Teaching Tips:

A sub-skill that you could focus on using this activity is hedging, which is when we are not sure about something and use language to indicate that. For example, “Maybe it's _____,” “It might be _____,” “Is it _____?,” “It could be _____.”

I emphasize that students should speak in full sentences when they are giving hints to their partners. Saying things like, “animal, help Santa, red” is not useful for helping students improve their English skills beyond the most basic beginners and even then it's questionable. It's useful to put some

example sentences on the board such as “She/He has _____ (hair/eyes).”
“She/He is from _____.” “She/He is a _____ (job).”

As a general rule, the more that you can get your students speaking in full sentences, the better off they'll be in terms of language learning. It's far easier to let your students just say one or two words, but they're not pushing themselves to incorporate grammar constructions into their speech in a meaningful way. But, don't forget that spoken discourse has much shorter sentences than more formal written work, so don't push students to use more complicated grammatical constructions when doing a simple speaking activity like this.

You can put in a few fun pictures to make it more interesting. For example, I'll always include a picture of myself in a situation where it might not look like me because I had a different hairstyle or was wearing glasses. Or, I'll put in a picture of my twin sister (I really do have a twin)! You can also add a picture of a student in the class or another teacher at your school that the students would know.

Procedure:

1. Prepare pictures of holiday-themed vocabulary on a handout or in a PowerPoint. PowerPoint is easier and better, but check how it will look on the big screen first before using it in class. Sometimes low-quality pictures can look terrible when made bigger. Also, be careful if you print out the pictures because you'll often need a high-quality printer to make the pictures easily recognizable.
2. Do one example with the students so they get an idea of how to play.
3. Put the students into partners or small groups. The first student chooses something secretly and describes him/her to his/her partner, who must guess, using hedging if they are unsure about the answer. You can also allow your students to ask some “W/H” questions to their partner if they wish.
4. The students switch roles and continue until the time is up. To avoid frustration, I usually make a limit for each picture of two minutes because there might be one that the guesser just doesn't know.

ESL Games & Activities for Any Holiday, Higher-Level

Draw an Idiom

Skills: Listening/Speaking/Reading

Time: 5-10 minutes

Level: Intermediate-Advanced

Materials: None

Optional Materials: Whiteboard

Give students a holiday-related idiom and have them draw a picture of it. Then, have them share their drawings and elicit possible meanings. Finish by giving them the actual meaning and several example sentences to write in their notebooks. Alternatively, you can have each student draw a different idiom.

Procedure:

1. Give students a holiday-themed idiom, such as “dig your own grave” and give them 3 minutes to draw a representative picture.
 2. When time is up, have students share their pictures and elicit guesses about what the idiom may mean before telling students the actual meaning.
-
1. Finish the activity by giving students several example sentences or scenarios using the idiom for them to write in their notebooks.

Here are some holiday-themed idioms for quick reference. There are lots more though so be sure to search on Google for whatever holiday you're doing.

Christmas/Winter Idioms

- a white Christmas
- deck the halls

- Christmas came early
- good things come in small packages
- lit up like a Christmas tree
- the proof is in the pudding
- left out in the cold
- Eat, drink, and be merry
- trim the tree
- holiday spirit
- skating on thin ice

Halloween Idioms

- skeleton in the closet
- scaredy-cat
- scared stiff
- night owl
- dig your own grave
- graveyard shift
- over my dead body
- witch hunt
- in cold blood

Easter/Spring Idioms

- spring into action
- no spring chicken

- a good (bad) egg
- put all your eggs in one basket
- a spring in someone's step
- black sheep
- the grass is greener on the other side
- fly the coop
- get cracking

Thanksgiving Idioms

- to be stuffed
- go cold turkey
- count your blessings
- mixed blessing
- as easy as pie
- eat like a bird
- stuff your face
- the gravy train

Story and Questions About a Holiday

Skills: Writing/Reading/Speaking/Listening

Time: 15-30 minutes

Level: Intermediate-Advanced

Materials: None

Have students write about a memorable experience with a popular holiday. It should be something that all students in your class will have celebrated, which can be a bit tricky with some of the religious holidays. Use your discretion!

Then, distribute the stories to other people in the class. The students have to go around the class, finding the person whose story they have by asking questions. Once they find that person, they have to ask three interesting questions about the story.

It can be helpful to give students some time to read the story and formulate these three questions before letting them get up to mingle. I have students write their questions on the story paper, below the story, or on the back if there isn't room.

Teaching Tips:

Emphasize to students that they are to practice asking good *full-sentence* questions. For example, “Clown Halloween?” is not a good question, while, “Did you dress up as a clown for Halloween?” is much better.

Also, emphasize that students should think of interesting follow-up questions that expand upon their knowledge about that situation. This involves reading carefully so they can avoid asking about things that are already mentioned. Give students a couple of minutes before the activity starts to write down a few questions based on the paper they received to help facilitate this.

This activity provides an excellent opportunity for students to work on reported speech. This is something that high-level students are often surprisingly weak at. With a small class (fewer than 10), students can report what they learned about their partner to everyone. If larger, students can tell their seating partners what they learned. For example, students might say something like, “I talked to Min-Ji. She told me that her family never liked to have turkey at Christmas. Instead, they'd make a big, traditional Korean meal. She said that she loved it and still doesn't like turkey that much to this day.”

Procedure:

1. Have students write about a memory for a certain holiday. Adjust for length and difficulty depending on the level of the students.
2. Collect stories and redistribute them—one per student, making sure a student does not get their own story.
3. Students go around the class asking questions to find the owner of the story. For example, “Did you dress up as a clown for Halloween in high school?”
4. When they find the person, they must ask three interesting follow-up questions about it.
5. Do the optional variation of having students tell other people what they learned to practice using reported speech.

Holiday Quick Read

Skills: Reading/Writing/Speaking

Time: 10 minutes

Level: Intermediate-Advanced

Materials: Worksheet

Give students a short reading passage about a holiday, slightly below their level, and 3-5 comprehension questions. A nice option is a passage of someone talking about a favourite holiday memory from when they were a kid. It should be short enough to be completed in 7-8 minutes.

Procedure:

1. In advance, prepare a short passage using language slightly below the level of the class.
2. Include 3-5 comprehension questions and an example question demonstrating how to answer.
3. Give students 7-8 minutes to read and answer the questions.

Running Dictation

Skills: Writing/Listening/Speaking/Reading

Time: 15 minutes

Level: Intermediate-Advanced

Materials: The “dictation” + some way to attach it to the walls or board.

This is one of my favorite activities which covers reading, writing, listening and speaking. There are a wide variety of English styles you can choose: poems, song lyrics, a short story, famous quotes—the list is almost limitless. For example, you might make up a conversation a few sentences long (no more than ten) of people talking about their plans for an upcoming holiday.

Put each sentence on a strip of paper, and you can also put another strip of paper on top to prevent cheating. You don't have to do this if you have a big enough classroom so that students can't easily read the papers from where they're sitting. Put these around the classroom in various locations at even intervals.

The students will be in teams of two. One person is the reader and one is the writer. The reader gets up and reads a bit of the passage and comes and tells it to the writer. They go back to remember more of it and so on and so on. In the end, students have to put the song or conversation in order. If you have beginner students, make sure it's obvious enough what the correct order should be. Intermediate and advanced students can handle something with a bit of ambiguity. When they're done, I'll check their writing and if there aren't many mistakes plus the order is correct, that team is the winner. How many mistakes you allow depends on the level of your students.

Tell your students before the activity starts that standing at the strip of paper and then yelling to their partner instead of walking over to them is not allowed or they will be disqualified.

Here are 2 examples of running dictations I've used in the past that aren't related to holidays but you can get an idea of what I mean:

[Around the House](#)—Intermediate Level

[Introduce Yourself](#)—Beginner Level

Teaching Tips:

Make sure to let students know what cheating is (yelling, the “reader/speaker” touching the pen, using their phone camera) and if that happens their team will automatically be disqualified.

Make sure to move beyond dictating the sentences down onto the paper into dealing with meaning as well. This is done by requiring students to put the conversation, song or poem in the correct order. They can write “1, 2, 3, 4” beside each sentence instead of re-writing them. Make sure whatever you choose has some sort of logical order to it.

Procedure:

1. Prepare a conversation between two people talking about a holiday and put each sentence on a strip of paper. It could also be a poem, song, or something else with a logical order to it.
2. Put the papers around the classroom on the wall, equally spaced out.
3. Divide the students into pairs: one writer and one reader.
4. The reader stands up, walks to the station and reads a paper, then goes back to the writer and tells what they read to the writer, who must write it. The reader can go back to a single paper as many times as required.
5. This procedure of reading, speaking, listening, and writing continues until the team has all the sentences down on their paper.
6. The two students put the story or conversation in the correct order.
7. The teacher can check for accuracy and meaning and decide if it's acceptable, or not.

Five-Minute Debate

Skills: Speaking/Listening

Time: 10 minutes

Level: Intermediate-Advanced

Materials: Debate topics

Give students an age-appropriate controversial statement about a holiday. In pairs or small groups, have students debate the sides. You may have to assign sides if too many agree or disagree with your premise.

Consider scaffolding with language like, “I think _____, because _____.” “I agree with X, but _____.”

Debate Topic Ideas

- Should religious holidays be celebrated in public schools?
- Christmas has lost its original meaning.
- Holidays are too commercial.
- Fireworks at Halloween should be banned.
- November is too soon for Christmas music on the radio.
- Christmas trees are terrible for the environment.
- Do you always need to have turkey at Thanksgiving?
- Ham or turkey for Easter?

Teaching Tips:

If students need some scaffolding with debate language, it is helpful to write them on the whiteboard or a PowerPoint.

Procedure:

1. Divide students into pairs or small groups.
2. Give students a controversial statement about a holiday. All students can get the same debate topic, or different ones.
3. Give students a time limit to discuss the merits of their side, trying to change the mind of their “opponent”.
4. If necessary, begin with some helpful language, such as, “I feel ____, because ____.”
5. Finish with a quick poll to see if anyone changed their side.
6. If using different debate topics, each pair could give a quick summary of their questions about the main points they mentioned.

“Find Someone Who _____” Bingo

Skills: Speaking/Listening/Writing

Time: 10-15 minutes

Level: Intermediate-Advanced

Materials: Blank “Bingo” grids or blank paper

This is a nice activity to learn about students' traditions on a given holiday. Or, you could use this as a general “holiday” activity and include a mix of questions from various holidays. Here are just a few ideas. Find someone who...

- opens presents on Christmas eve instead of Christmas morning.
- doesn't celebrate Easter.
- has never eaten turkey before.
- dresses up every year for Halloween.
- loves finding good deals on Black Friday.

If I have my own classroom, I keep a stack of blank grids handy, but if I'm moving from class to class, I tend to have students use their notebooks.

To save time, I prepare a PowerPoint with possible items to complete the Bingo grid. I have students read them through and then elicit a few more ideas from the students which I write on the whiteboard.

Rather than have a Bingo caller, students must circulate around the class and ask each other questions to mark out items on their grid. For example, if the topic is Halloween they could ask, “Do you like to dress up every year?” If someone answers, “yes” to that question, the first student can write their name in their square. If the student says, “no,” then they can ask another question or find another student to talk to. Before you begin, give students a target of one line, X, etc. to get Bingo.

Teaching Tips:

Rather than make a PowerPoint, write the items on the board. If you want to give students more autonomy, select a topic and have them brainstorm in small groups of things they could write. Of course, this works better for higher-level students that can handle less structure for something like this. Have more items than will fit on the grid so there is some variety in the Bingo sheets, but you can use 3X3 or 4X4 grids if you want to make the activity go more quickly.

I encourage students to move around by only allowing each name to be used once per board in a large class. If the class is quite small, two to three times on a 5x5 grid may be necessary. This depends if you require only one line, or if you require the entire board to be done, for example. The goal is to have students practicing the target language, rather than standing with one person and saying, “Do you like apples? Oranges? Bananas? Pears? Melons? Bingo!”

Procedure:

1. Optional: prepare Bingo grid cards and a PowerPoint with questions before class. Otherwise, have students use notebook paper. Tell them what size grid to draw: 3x3, 4x4, or 5x5.
2. Have students fill in their grid with items from the PPT or whiteboard, or create their own, according to a given topic.
3. Have students mingle and ask questions to match students to their grid spaces. For example, student A asks, “Do you have ham on Easter?” If student B answers, “Yes, I do,” student A writes their name in the “Easter-Ham” box and moves to the next student.
4. The first student to get a Bingo by finding different students to complete their grid is the winner.

QR Code Hunt

Skills: Speaking/Listening

Time: 15-60 minutes

Level: Intermediate-Advanced

Materials: Internet access, printer, tape/Blu-tack, student phones with QR code reader apps installed

This activity requires a bit more preparation than others, but (as of writing) the novelty factor is high enough to draw some students in who might otherwise be too cool for school. Classtools.net makes it easy to put together a QR code hunt, so don't worry if you haven't used QR codes before—if you can type, you can do this activity.

I generally use this activity for fun holiday trivia.

Procedure:

1. In advance, write your trivia questions in a Word document.
2. Go to <http://www.classtools.net/QR/> and copy and paste.
3. Create the QR codes and print them.
4. Post the printouts in various places around the class, or better yet, a larger area around the school.
5. Before dividing students into groups, make sure at least one member of each group has a QR code reader on their phone. If not, give them a minute to download an app—there are plenty of them and most older students will already have one.
6. Divide students into groups of 3-4 and give them a time limit to find and answer all of the questions.
7. Wrap up the class with a group discussion of the answers.

Holiday Boggle

Skills: Writing/Reading

Time: 10 minutes

Level: Intermediate-Advanced

Materials: “Boggle” grid on PowerPoint, whiteboard or paper

You've probably played the word game Boggle before. You shake up the letters and then have a certain amount of time to make some words with connecting letters.

It's easy to play it with students but you don't need the actual Boggle game. Make up a grid on the whiteboard, PowerPoint or piece of paper. I make a 6x6 grid and put some obvious words in it related to the holiday.

Then, students divide into pairs and have to make as many words as possible that are at least three letters. If I'm using this activity in a holiday lesson, I'll make a rule that for each Christmas (or Thanksgiving, etc.) themed word, students get a bonus point. However, they can also make other words not related to the holiday but they won't get the bonus points. In the end, students count up how many points they have. Double-check for any errors and then award a small prize to the winning team.

Procedure:

1. Prepare a “Boggle” grid.
1. Students divide into pairs and try to make as many words as possible with three or more letters. Students cannot use the same letter in a single square twice within a single word.
2. Give a bonus point for a holiday-themed word.
3. Students add up points. The teacher checks the answers of the top two or three teams.

s e u t h m

a a n r a i

p e e k f l

r y s n s y

n i t f g r

p m n i l a

Some possible words from this board:

Santa, tree, ham, turkey, present, gift, family, rag, fit, rip

Agony Aunt

Skills: Listening/Speaking/Reading

Time: 15-20 minutes

Level: Intermediate-Advanced

Materials: Printed advice column questions and answers

This activity will get students talking because everyone knows how to solve other people's problems! If students are a bit more advanced, use actual advice columns. These can easily be found by searching on the Internet for "advice column" etc. The lower the students' level, the more you'll need to grade the language, or write your own advice column. It can be related to whatever holiday you'd like but it's easier to come up with some family get-together drama for Christmas or Easter.

I've done several variations of this activity and it has always been a hit. I begin with an introduction that shows a few advice column letters and answers. Discuss them a bit—most students will be familiar with the concept. Then, give students a copy of a letter (not the same one from the introduction).

Version 1:

All the students receive the same letter. Each person has 3-8 minutes (depending on the level) to come up with some advice (separately). The class has a short discussion about what advice each person would give and why. Consider having students discuss their advice in small groups if you have a larger class.

Version 2:

All the students (small classes) or groups (big classes) receive a different letter. As above, each person/group is given time to read and think of some advice. Begin the discussion time by having each person quickly summarize the problem they have read about, then give some advice and discuss that.

Procedure:

Show some level-appropriate advice column letters. Read them together and discuss.

Version 1:

1. All students get the same letter (not one from the introduction).
2. Each person has to read the letter and come up with some advice (separately).
3. Discuss each person's advice.

Version 2:

1. The students get different letters.
2. Give some time to read the letter and come up with some advice.
3. Discuss the problems and their advice.

Survey Activities

Skills: Speaking/Listening/Writing/Reading

Time: 15-30 minutes

Level: High-Beginner to Advanced

Materials: Survey handout

Give students a sheet of paper with some holiday-themed questions and tell them they need to find one of their classmates who will fit each slot. My general rule is that one question equals around two minutes for intermediate to advanced students so 10 questions would equal a 20-minute activity; it's one minute per question for beginners because they will not be as good at asking follow-up questions and are more likely to just rush through this activity so that they can be done with it!

Here are some example questions for a Thanksgiving survey so you can get an idea of what I mean. Find someone who...

- loves turkey.
- doesn't celebrate Thanksgiving.
- usually has Thanksgiving dinner with more than 10 people.
- doesn't like turkey.

Then, if their partner answers yes (encourage students to answer in full sentences!), they write down their partner's name and ask them one (beginner) or two (intermediate to advanced) more questions to elicit some extra information. They can only ask each classmate one question. If their partner's answer is no, they should choose another question to ask them.

Prep the activity well before you turn students loose by saying what you're looking for: only speaking English, everybody standing up, talking to everybody in mostly full sentences, writing the answers in English. Get a

student to ask you one of the questions first and then ask a student one of the questions so your students have two models of what they need to do.

Teaching Tips:

This is my favorite ESL speaking activity that I regularly use in class (at least once a month). It's perfect for beginner to advanced students and it's one of the most student-centered activities that I know of. It's ideal for holidays or just about any other topic, vocabulary set or grammatical point.

Surveys are an excellent way for students to practice some important speaking sub-skills, especially responding appropriately based on what their partner tells them. For example, if they are surprised they could respond with, "Really?" If in agreement, they could say, "Yeah, me too." If in strong disagreement, they could say something like, "Wow! Why do you think that?" You could even put three categories on the board for "Agree", "Disagree" and "Surprise" and elicit a few ideas from the students about appropriate things they could say in response to a statement.

Another important speaking sub-skill is turn taking. I emphasize to my students that there are times when in-depth and lengthy discourses are necessary (a presentation) but doing a survey activity like this mimics small talk. In small talk, the keys are to listen well, ask some interesting questions and follow-up questions, give short, concise answers and not to ramble. I will sometimes give my students an example of a rambling answer and they usually find it funny, but I hope that they get the point too!

Procedure:

1. Prepare the survey, based on the holiday.
 2. Hand out surveys and write up one or two of the questions on the board, making it look the same as the handout. Do two example questions with students, one with you asking a student a question and vice-versa for the second one.
-
1. Students stand up and talk to one classmate asking them one question (any order is okay). If the answer is "yes," they write in the name and ask a follow-up question. They can write one or two words in the appropriate slot based on the answer their partner gave them.

2. If the answer is no, they must ask another question from the survey until they get a “yes.”

1. The pair splits up and each student finds a new partner to talk to.

2. The activity continues until the allotted time is finished.

Four Corners

Skills: Listening

Time: 5 minutes

Level: Intermediate

Materials: None

This is an opinion poll activity related to the holidays. Students start in the middle of the classroom. Designate each corner as strongly agree, strongly disagree, no opinion, don't know about the topic. (You can give other options, if you would rather they choose a definite opinion.)

Give students a controversial statement, or at least something most will have an opinion about. Have them move to the corner that matches their opinion. For the people with the strongest opinions, I like to elicit 1-2 answers from each group as to why they think so. For example, "It's better to not celebrate Valentine's Day on Feb. 14th." If someone strongly agrees, they might say because it's easier to get a reservation and who wants to be in a crowded restaurant during a pandemic!

Once everyone has moved, give them another statement. Continue for five minutes, or 5-10 statements. Some examples related to the holidays are as follows:

- Couples should celebrate Valentine's Day not on Feb. 14th.
- Christmas is too commercialized.
- Too many people jump on the Irish bandwagon on Saint Patrick's Day.

Variation: Only have two opinions: strongly agree/disagree or love/hate.

Teaching Tip:

Prepare your classroom in advance, so there is room to move around the class and room to gather in the corners. If your classroom is too small, try

the variation with only two opinions, so students only need to gather on one side or the other.

Procedure:

1. In advance, clear enough space in each corner of the room for students to gather.
2. Designate each corner as strongly agree/strongly disagree/no opinion/don't know about the topic. Alternatively, you could divide the classroom in half: agree or disagree.
3. Give students a controversial statement. Prepare 5-10 statements in advance, focusing on recent news items, or other topics your students are likely to have an opinion about.
4. Have students move to the corner/side which matches their opinion. Elicit some opinions as to why students have this opinion.
5. Continue for about 5 minutes or 5-10 statements.

Only 1 Question

Skills: Listening/Speaking

Time: 10-20 minutes

Level: Intermediate-Advanced

Materials: Pen, paper

In pairs, students have to think of one single question about a certain topic. For example, if you're teaching about holidays, they could use any of the following:

- What's your least favorite holiday?
- What did you do last _____?
- What do you think about Valentine's Day?

Or, the questions could be about a specific holiday. For example:

- What's your favourite Christmas dinner item?
- When do you open presents in your family?
- What's your favourite Christmas tradition?

Once students have done this, they ask at least 10 people their question and quickly record their answers with 1-2 words. I generally get one student to ask the question and the other one to record answers to make this go more smoothly.

After the time is up, they tabulate the answers and can quickly report to another pair what they found out about the topic. Ask each small group to share the most interesting thing they learned with the entire class.

Procedure:

1. Give students a topic and have each pair make one *interesting* question about it. Give them examples of interesting versus boring questions. Circulate around the class to prevent duplicate questions.
2. Each pair talks to 10+ students, using the same question. They quickly write down answers with 1-2 words.
3. Students tabulate the results and report them to another pair (or the entire class if fewer than 10 students).

120-90-60 Fluency Activity

Skills: Speaking/Listening

Time: 15 minutes

Level: Intermediate-Advanced

Materials: None

If you want to help your students speak more quickly and fluently, this is the perfect activity. Give students a topic that they know a lot about. For example:

- Favourite and least favourite thing about Christmas.
- Their perfect Thanksgiving dinner.

I often give half the students one topic and the other half another just to make it a bit more interesting to listen to. Give students 3-5 minutes to prepare, depending on their level. But, emphasize that they should just write one or two words for each point, and not full sentences because it's a speaking activity and not a writing one.

Then, with a partner, the first student has to give their speech and talk continuously for two minutes, while their partner listens. It is sometimes necessary to reduce this amount of time for lower-level students.

To encourage good listening, I require that the person listening asks at least one follow-up question. I use an online stopwatch so that the students can see the clock countdown. Then, I give the students another two minutes and they switch roles.

After that, the students have to find a new partner and the activity repeats, except that they have to include ALL the same information as before, just in 90 seconds. Then, switch again, with 60 more seconds. One way that you can help your students make the transition to less time is by giving them 30 seconds between rounds to think about how to say something more

concisely, go over in their head the part of their speech where they had to slow down for some reason or to think about where they could use conjunctions.

Give an example of something like this: “I like watching The Simpsons. It's funny. It's interesting. My mother, father, brother and I watch while we're eating dinner almost every night of the week”—> “I like watching The Simpsons because it's funny and interesting. I watch with my family almost every night while eating dinner. ”

Emphasize that students must include all of the key information even though they have less time to say it. Speak more quickly or more concisely!

Teaching Tips:

It can be difficult to find good speaking activities that are focused on fluency instead of accuracy, but this is an excellent one and I try to use it a couple of times per semester.

Emphasize to students that they must include all the same information they included the first time, so they'll either have to say things more concisely or speak faster. Present it as a difficult, but attainable challenge that they can achieve. In the end of the second and third rounds, ask students how much they were able to include as a percentage. If they did well, tell them to pat themselves on the back for achieving something that wasn't easy. A small motivational moment in your class!

Something that you can remind your students of is that spoken speech is more informal than written discourse, particularly in the areas of sentence length and connectors. When we write, things like “however,” “although,” and “moreover” are common but in spoken speech, we mostly just use simple connectors like “and,” “but,” and “or. ” In spoken discourse, the length of an utterance is much shorter and we don't need to use complicated grammatical constructions.

Procedure:

1. Give students a topic and some time to prepare their “speech.”

2. Students give their speech to a partner, talking for two minutes without stopping. The person listening has to ask a follow-up question to encourage active listening. Switch roles and the second student gives their speech.
3. Students find a new partner and give their speech again, this time in 90 seconds. Switch roles.
4. Students find a new partner and give their speech again, but in 60 seconds. Switch roles.

Dictogloss

Skills: Speaking/Listening

Time: 10-15 minutes

Level: Intermediate-Advanced

Materials: A short story

This is a simple activity for higher-level students that helps work on listening and memory skills, as well as substituting vocabulary words if the original word is no longer accessible to them. Find a short, interesting story of some kind or make up one yourself. I've used various things from children's stories to a story about something I did on the weekend. Just about anything can work but it should be related to whatever holiday you're talking about.

Read out the story at a slightly faster pace than usual for the level of students. They can take notes. Then, students will have to go in groups of 2-3 to retell the story. Emphasize that they won't be able to recreate the exact story that you told, but that they should try their best to keep the meaning the same. Then, read it out again and students can add more details to what they have.

Each team can pair up with another team to compare. Then, tell the original story again so students can see how they did.

This activity works well as a writing activity too.

Teaching Tips:

It's very helpful for students to compare answers with a partner before they have to say anything in front of the class so be sure to put them in partners or groups of three to work together on this activity. It's useful for the weaker students to have a stronger student getting them up to speed. It also gives students confidence that they're on the right track and they're less nervous to share their answers with the class.

If you use something “scandalous,” it will make the activity a lot more fun! Of course, it should still be appropriate so just picture your boss observing your class to decide if you should use it or not.

Procedure:

1. Prepare a short story to read to the students.
2. Put students in groups of two or three and read the story to them.
3. Students take notes and try to remember the details of the story and compare with their partner. I usually only allow them to do this by speaking.
4. Read the story again and students attempt to recreate the story more closely, again by speaking.
5. Read the story again (depending on level and difficulty of the story) and students again attempt to recreate it, even more closely.
6. Elicit a couple of teams to tell their story to the class (in a small class). Or, put two teams together and they tell their stories to each other (in a larger class).
7. Read the story one final time for students to compare their own.

ESL Games & Activities for Any Holiday, Lower-Level

Categories

Skills: Speaking/Listening/Writing

Time: 5 minutes

Level: High-Beginner to Intermediate

Materials: None

Optional Materials: Butcher paper/A3 paper

Students can review by brainstorming words they know in a given category, such as Christmas, Halloween, Easter, etc. I never give out prizes to the winning team because it's up to the teacher's discretion in many cases whether or not a word fits into a certain category. But, I like to play for fun!

Variation 1: Students work in small groups, making a list of all the words they can think of for that holiday. The group with the longest list wins.

Variation 2: Students take turns adding one word at a time to the list. If a student repeats a word or says a word which doesn't fit, they are out. This variation is better suited to small classes or groups working independently.

Procedure:

1. Begin by dividing students into groups of 3-5. Small classes can work as a whole.
2. Give each group a piece of A3 or butcher paper. (For a speaking/listening activity, have students take turns adding a word. If students can't add a word, they are out.)
3. Give the class a holiday and a time limit (about 3 minutes) to brainstorm and write as many words that match the category as possible.
4. The group with the most words that fit into the category wins.

Me, Too!

Skills: Speaking/Listening

Time: 5-10 minutes

Level: High-Beginner to Intermediate

Materials: None

This is a simple activity to uncover what students have in common with one another related to a certain holiday. If possible, arrange the seats in a circle, so everyone can see each other.

Begin by sharing a fact about yourself that you don't think is unique or unusual. For example, "I like to dress up for Halloween." Any student in the class who also enjoys dressing up should stand (or raise their hands) and say, "Me, too!" Go around the circle and have each student share one fact about themselves. You could extend the activity by keeping track of numbers and noting which facts are common to the most number of students.

Teaching Tips:

You may need to remind them that these do not need to be unusual facts; these should be things they expect to have in common with at least one other person.

Procedure:

1. If possible, arrange the seats in a circle.
2. Begin by sharing a fact about yourself that you don't think is unique or unusual. For example, "I love to do fireworks in the park at Halloween."
3. Ask any students in the class who also enjoy fireworks in the park to stand (or raise their hands) and say, "Me, too!"
4. Go around the circle and have each student share one fact about themselves.

5. You could extend the activity by keeping track of numbers and noting which facts are common to the most number of students.

Talking Bag

Skills: Speaking/Listening

Time: 5-10 minutes

Level: High-Beginner to Advanced

Materials: Questions cards, bag/box/bowl

Procedure:

In advance, prepare a bag (or box, bowl, etc) full of question cards about the holiday you're covering (lamine them if you plan to use them more than once).

Variation 1: Draw a question from the bag and read/write it. Have students ask and answer the question with the person next to them.

Variation 2: Choose one student to draw a question. That student asks the question to one other student, who then draws a question to ask a third student. Before beginning, set a time limit or decide how many students will have a turn. This is best with smaller classes.

Variation 3: Divide students into small groups of 3-5. Have one member of each group draw one question to ask, and have each group member take turns answering.

OR

Have each student draw one question to ask their group.

Basketball Holiday Vocabulary Challenge

Skills: Listening/Speaking

Time: 10-15 minutes

Level: Beginner

Materials: Empty trash can, “balls”

This is a fun game that children love! It's possible to play with the entire class if you have fewer than eight students. You can also play teams if you have more, but you need a big space to play it, such as a large classroom with few desks, gymnasium or outside.

Place the empty trash can in the middle of the open space. Arrange the students around the room as far from the basket as possible (touching the wall, behind the chalk line, etc.) and give each student a ball. They can be real balls, but I find that a piece of scrunched-up scrap paper works best. Then, place a line of holiday flashcards in front of each person leading toward the basket. Five per player works well.

Going in order one student at a time; the students have two choices: aim for the basket, or say the vocabulary word on the flashcard immediately in front of them and move up closer to the basket. If they aim for the basket but miss, they are out of the game and must go sit down. If they say the word correctly, they move up closer and wait until the next round when they have the same decision. If they say the wrong word, they are also out of the game. Continue in a circle until all the players are out of the game, either because they missed a shot, got a shot in the basket or said a vocabulary word incorrectly. You can give a point or small prize to the first player to get a shot in the basket.

An optional variation is to give different points for various shots as you would in a regular basketball game. For example, from flashcards #5/4 = 3 points. Flashcards #3/2 = 2 points. Flashcard #1 = 1 point.

Procedure:

1. Place an empty trash can in the center of a large playing area.
2. Arrange five holiday flashcards per student leading from the perimeter to the basket.
3. Line students up at the perimeter behind a row of flashcards. Each student has to be holding a ball of some kind.
4. Students take turns in order and have two choices. The first choice is to shoot their ball at the basket. If they miss, they are out of the game. If they make the basket, they get a point. The other choice is to say the word on the flashcard closest to them and if correct, they move up to that location and wait until their next turn. If incorrect, they are out of the game.
5. The winner is the first student(s) to score a basket. Or, if you're giving different points for the various shots, you can play 3-5 rounds and add up the scores from each round.

Chain Spelling

Skills: Speaking/Listening

Time: 5 minutes

Level: Beginner

Materials: None

To give students some practice spelling holiday vocabulary words, use this game. Have all the students stand up and the teacher says a word. The first student says the first letter, the next student the next letter, and on and on. If someone makes a mistake, they sit down and then start with the next student and a new word. Continue until there are only 1-2 students standing. This is an excellent “filler” game if there are a few minutes left over at the end of class—just use whatever vocabulary you had been covering that day.

Procedure:

1. All students stand up.
 2. The teacher says a word.
 3. The first student must say the first letter.
 4. The next student must say the second letter, etc.
-
1. If incorrect, the student has to sit down. The teacher says a new word.
The game continues until there are only one or two students remaining.

Holiday Hot Potato

Skills: Speaking

Time: 5-10 minutes

Level: Beginner to Low-Intermediate (best with children)

Materials: Flashcards, timer, “potato” (an object for students to pass around)

This is a simple vocabulary review game, spiced up with a timer. There are plenty of phone app timers, but a kitchen timer works well. To play, start the potato, which can be a whiteboard eraser, ball, or any lightweight, easily-seen object, moving around the class from student to student. If there is not a practical way to play in a circle, have a contingency for the last student getting the potato back to the first student, such as pausing the timer.

When the timer goes off, the student holding the potato is shown a holiday-themed flashcard. If they can correctly identify the word, they stay alive, but if they are wrong, they are out and must sit down. Vary the length of time for the timer, generally 5-15 seconds, with an occasional longer or shorter spell.

A variation is to have two potatoes which look different. The person holding potato A must ask the person holding potato B a question about the flashcard, and that student must answer. For example:

A: Do you like eating turkey?

B: Yes, I do/No, I don't.

Teaching Tip:

If the class is large, this can be a very long game and the students who are out will lose interest quickly. So, I would break large classes into groups of 10-15. All groups use the same timer and flashcard—I say, “Three, two, one,” and the students holding potatoes all say their answers together.

Procedure:

1. If possible, move students into a circle. Have them stand around the edge of the classroom. If the class is very large, divide it into groups of 10-15 and make the appropriate number of circles.
2. Begin moving a “potato” around the circle.
3. Set a timer for a random (brief) amount of time. Five to fifteen seconds is good, with an occasional shorter or longer time.
4. When the timer goes off, show a flashcard (or PowerPoint image).
5. The student holding the potato must correctly identify the image or sit down. If playing with more than one group, count 3, 2, 1, and have them answer together.
6. The winner is the last person standing.

Last Person Standing

Skills: Speaking/Listening

Time: 5-10 minutes

Level: Beginner to Low-Intermediate

Materials: None

Have the students stand up in a circle. Clap your hands in a beat 1-2-3 and say a word related to the holiday. Continue the 1-2-3 rhythm and have the next person in the circle say a different word related to the topic. If students repeat a word, or don't have one, then they must sit down and the game continues with the remaining players. The game finishes when there is one person standing.

Procedure:

1. Have students stand in a circle.
2. Clap your hands in a 1-2-3 beat and say the first word related to the holiday.
3. Continue the rhythm and have the next student say a different word related to the holiday. If students repeat a word or don't have one, they must sit down.
4. The game continues until there is one person left standing.

Password

Skills: Speaking/Listening

Time: 10-20 minutes

Level: High-Beginner to Intermediate

Materials: List of words, whiteboard

This activity helps students review vocabulary and practice an important skill: describing something they don't know the word for. Divide students into two groups. The groups will alternate sending a team member to stand at the front of the class with his/her back to the board. Write a word over the person's head, so the teammates can see it but the student cannot. The team must give that person hints until he/she guesses the word or time runs out (20-30 seconds). The team with the most points wins.

Variation:

Have one team's turn last until they run out of time (2-4 minutes) and then switch. This gives an advantage for correctly guessing more quickly. Pause the clock between answers so a new team member can take the hot seat.

Procedure:

1. In advance, prepare a list of words related to the holiday. These can be vocabulary taught in class or just words you expect your students to know.
2. Divide the class into two groups.
3. Have groups alternate sending a member to the front of the class, or give each group a time limit of 2-4 minutes and rotate team members as soon as one guesses a word, until the time is up.
4. Write a word on the whiteboard over that person's head, so his/her team can see it, but the student cannot.
5. That student's team must give the person hints until he/she guesses the word or time runs out (20-30 seconds).

6. The team with the most points at the end of all the rounds is the winner.

Steal the Eraser

Skills: Listening/Speaking

Time: 10-15 minutes

Level: Beginner-Intermediate

Materials: 2 chairs, a table or desk, eraser

Divide the students into two teams. Have two desks at the front of the class, facing each other with an eraser in the middle of the two desks. One student from each team comes and sits in the hot seat. Rotate through the class so that all the students get a chance to play at least once.

Ask a question of some sort related to the holiday, which is best prepared beforehand (one round = one question/2 students. Two rounds = one question/student. Include a few extras for a “bonus” round). The first person that grabs the eraser can try to answer the question. Here are a few holiday-themed example questions:

- What can you find under a Christmas tree?
- What day is Christmas?
- Who comes down a chimney?
- Name 3 traditional Christmas foods.

A helpful rule is that the student can take the eraser whenever they want, but the teacher stops talking as soon as the eraser is touched. The student then has ten seconds to answer as you count down on your fingers. If correct, they get one point. If not, the other player gets a chance to answer the question after you repeat the full question one more time.

To make it even more exciting or if one team is behind by a lot of points, have a "Bonus Round," where the teams pick their best three players and each question is worth three points.

Teaching Tips:

Emphasize that the first student to touch the eraser must take it to prevent any chaos. I also require students to keep their fingers on the edge of their desks when I begin the question. It's important to stop talking the instant one student touches the eraser. If not, students will just grab the eraser and wait for you to finish the question, which is unfair. It's best to use questions that have very well-defined answers so you don't have to make any judgement calls because half the class will be unhappy with you no matter what decision you make.

Procedure:

1. Prepare two desks facing each at the front of the class, with an eraser in the middle.
 2. Divide students into two teams.
 3. Each team sends up one person to the front and they sit at the desks. I don't let students choose the person for each round but make them go in the order that they are sitting.
 4. The teacher asks a question related to the holiday (prepare the list beforehand), but stops speaking once the eraser is touched. Alternatively, you can have each team appoint a captain who takes turns reading the prepared list of questions to increase student talking time.
 5. The first player to touch the eraser must answer the question within ten seconds. Count down the time on your fingers.
 6. If correct, he/she gets one point and the next two people come up to the front for another question.
 7. If incorrect, the teacher reads the question (in full) one more time and the opposing player gets a chance to answer the question within ten seconds.
 8. If correct, they get one point. If incorrect, both players sit down and the next pair comes up. You can share the correct answer with the class before saying a new question.
-
1. Continue until all students have had a chance to play at least once.

Telephone

Skills: Listening/Speaking

Time: 5-10 minutes

Level: Beginner

Materials: None

Everyone has probably played telephone before. It's a nice way to review holiday vocabulary. Students make two (or more, depending on class size) lines and the teacher gives the first student in each line a sentence containing some of the target vocabulary words. Consider the level of the students carefully when choosing the sentence—make sure the first students can understand it easily.

The first students whisper the sentence one time to the next student. That student whispers it to the person in front of them, etc. The last person to hear the sentence must correctly state, out loud what they have heard.

The team with the closest phrase is the winner. You may need to explicitly forbid students from using their L1. This is usually obvious if the ending sentence has the same meaning as the original but uses synonyms.

Teaching Tips:

All teams can have the same sentence or you can give each a different one. I like to take the heads of each team into the hall, give each a different sentence and allow them the chance to have it repeated before we begin. Then, the students return together and the game begins.

Keep the teams to about 6-8 students or fewer to increase speaking time. Remember that students will only say one sentence each per round. Remind students that even if they didn't hear the sentence clearly, they need to make their best guess and tell *something* to the next person instead of nothing.

Procedure:

1. Divide students into teams, unless you have a very small class. Larger teams will make for funnier results.
2. Have the teams stand in line, starting from the front to the back.
3. Have the first students from each team join you in the hall. Give each a sentence to repeat and return together when each is satisfied they know what to say.
4. The students whisper the sentence once to the next person, who whispers it to the next person and so on.
5. The last student in each line says the sentence they heard.
6. The group with the sentence closest to the original wins.

Concentration

Skills: Reading

Time: 10-15 minutes

Level: Beginner

Materials: Concentration cards

Concentration is a memory game designed to help students remember holiday vocabulary words and definitions. Make up sets of cards with words on half the cards and the matching definition on the other half. A total of 16 cards (8 sets of words and definitions) works well. Make enough cards so that there is one set for each group of four students.

Students mix up the cards and put them face-down on the desk in an organized fashion. The students play rocks-scissors-paper. The first student chooses two cards and places them face up on the desk so that everyone can see them. If they make a set, the student keeps the cards (they're removed from the game), gets one point and can choose again. If they don't make a set, the student places them face-down in the *same spot* (it's a memory game!) and the game continues with the next student.

Procedure:

1. Make concentration card sets of words and definitions (16 cards per set, one set per four students).
2. Have students mix the cards and place them face down on the desk in an organized manner.
3. The first student chooses two cards and places them face up on the desk. If they make a set, the student keeps the cards and gets one point. If they don't make a set, the student places them face down in the same spot and the game continues with the next student who reveals two more cards.
4. The winner is the student with the most points.

Disappearing Words

Skills: Reading

Time: 10 minutes

Level: Beginner

Materials: Whiteboard

This vocabulary game is an easy way to get students to keep a set of new vocabulary words in their heads, or to review past words. Write down 10-15 words on the whiteboard and give students 1-2 minutes to study them.

Then, if you have a big class, ask everyone to close their eyes as you choose one or two words to erase. Students open their eyes and have to tell you what is missing and where it was. If you have a small class, choose individual students to close their eyes and then tell you the missing word(s) after you've erased them. Either write those words in their spots again or add new words to the mix and continue the game.

Procedure:

1. Write down 10-15 vocabulary words on the whiteboard.
2. Have student(s) close their eyes as you erase 1-2 words.
3. Students open their eyes and tell you which words are missing and where they were.
4. You can write those same words back in, or add new words to the mix in those same spots and continue the game.

Flyswatter

Skills: Listening/Reading

Time: 5-10 minutes

Level: Beginner

Materials: Whiteboard, 2 flyswatters

This is a game that can energize a class at the end of a long day or semester. It makes an excellent way to review new vocabulary. Write the target words on the board in a random fashion. Use 10-20, depending on the age and level of students.

Divide the students into two teams. One person from each team comes up to the whiteboard and each person is given a flyswatter. Give hints to describe one of the words and the first student to hit the word with the flyswatter gets a point for his/her team. Start with more general hints first and then get to specific ones. For example,

- Everyone likes this.
- They are usually different colors.
- You can find them under a Christmas tree.

Answers: Presents or gifts.

If two students go for a word at the same time, the one on the bottom of the flyswatter stack gets the point. If a student makes an incorrect choice, he/she is out (no second chances) and then the other students get a chance to choose, after hearing the remaining hints. I usually start with a very general hint and progress to more specific ones where the answer is quite obvious. It's up to the student whether or not he/she wants to risk it and guess before the answer is apparent to everyone.

Procedure:

1. Divide students into two teams.
2. Write 10-20 vocabulary words on the whiteboard in a random fashion.
3. The first two students come to the board and are each given a flyswatter.
4. The teacher gives hints for one of the words, starting with general ones and getting more specific.
5. The student hits the word with his/her flyswatter when he/she knows the answer.
6. If correct, his/her team gets a point and the next two students come to the board. If incorrect, the other student is given a chance to guess the word and the teacher can give more hints if necessary. If both students are incorrect, both will sit down and neither team gets a point.

Alphabet Game

Skills: Writing

Time: 5 minutes

Level: Beginner

Materials: None

This is a simple way to introduce a holiday lesson. Have pairs of students write down A~Z on one piece of paper. Give them 2-4 minutes to think of one word/letter that fits that is related to the holiday. Students get no extra points for coming up with multiple words that begin with the same letter.

If you want to increase the difficulty or if you have a small class, you can make a rule that if two teams have the same word it doesn't count. This forces students to think more creatively because most people will choose S: Santa if doing this for Christmas but they could choose sledding instead. This is a nice warm-up activity if students already know a fair bit about the holiday, or a review activity at the end of class if they don't.

Example: Topic = Christmas

C: Chimney

D: December

G: gifts

S: Sledding.

T: turkey

Etc.

Procedure:

1. In pairs, students write down the alphabet on a piece of paper.
2. Give students a topic and a certain amount of time.

3. Students think of one word per letter about the topic.
4. Check who has the most words at the end of the allotted time. Option for small classes: don't count repeated words so students have to think more creatively.

Halloween Activities

Here a few Halloween-specific games and activities to consider trying out with your students.

Dress Up Contest

A fun Halloween activity is to hold a dress up contest. I like to do this because it gives students the option to participate, or not but I do try to encourage participation by getting some prizes that people want! Check and see if your school has a budget for it.

There are a number of ways to judge this kind of thing but I usually have the teachers and admin each choose their three favourites and then tally up the votes.

Trick or Treat

If your school has a budget for this kind of thing, consider doing some trick-or-treating when teaching children. In the class before the activity, have the kids make Halloween-themed baskets for trick-or-treating and then on Halloween, they can go from class to class and get a treat.

It's best to do this on a schedule with a kind of Halloween parade so that all the students can see the other costumes. For example,

- Class A, 1:00
- Class B, 1:15
- Class C, 1:30

The amount of time it requires to move through all the other classes depends on how big your school is. I generally play a Halloween movie during this time in my own classroom and then just put it on pause when we get a group of students in.

Halloween Songs

I love to include some singing in my classes! The only hesitation I have is that I'm a terrible singer. However, the good news is that there are a lot of great Halloween songs on YouTube that are designed for this kind of thing. Consider using some of them, particularly with kids.

Touching Scary Things

Try out this fun activity with kids, teenagers and university students. Make bowls of “scary things” and then cover them somehow so that students can't see what they are. There are various ways to do this, but something that works well is one of those puppet show screens. Or, you could use cheesecloth with a slit in it that is held in place with a big rubber band. Have some paper towels on hand for easy clean up.

Students have to reach their hands into the bowl and then try to guess what body parts the things are. Here are some ideas:

- peeled grapes (eyeballs)
- raw hide dog bones (bones)
- boiled cauliflower (brains)
- cooked spaghetti (intestines)
- cocktail sausages (fingers, toes)
- sliced almonds (fingernails)

There are lots of other ideas online too. Just search for “Halloween feel box.”

Haunted House Classroom

If you teach in a school that has a homeroom style to it (instead of students just taking a few hours of English classes each week), then consider having students make a haunted classroom. Each class can choose a theme and then decorate their classroom, The goal is to make it as scary as possible. Other students can tour around each one.

This is a nice activity to invite the parents to as well!

Thanksgiving Activities

All about the Food

Thanksgiving is all about the food, right? That's why I love to share with my students what a traditional Thanksgiving meal looks like in Canada. Then, I get them to share with me what a traditional meal looks like where they're from.

What are you Thankful For?

I love to include a lesson on being thankful in my classes around Thanksgiving. There are lots of things you can do but I love to get students thinking about things they're thankful for and then sharing them with a partner, or with the class. This makes a nice writing activity as well.

American Football

If your students are into sports, talking about American football can be a nice lesson. First, ask students if they know any of the rules. Then, give them a quick primer, or find a video that explains them simply. Next, watch a previous Superbowl and get the students' reactions to it.

To take this activity to the next level, get students to bring in some snacks, potluck style and you can have a small Superbowl party.

How to Cook a Turkey

Almost all students will know that people in North America and Europe generally eat turkey on Thanksgiving but very few of them know how it is prepared. Show a video or do a reading activity that explains it step-by-step.

After that, get students to explain how to make a food that they like to eat. They can share it with a small group in a bigger class, or with the entire class if small enough.

At Thanksgiving Dinner, I'm going to Eat

Do you know that game, “I'm going on a picnic and I'm going to bring...”? The way it works is that the teacher has a secret rule to start the game off, except I change it to Thanksgiving. “At Thanksgiving dinner, I'm going to eat stuffing.” Then, students can say what they want to eat and the teacher says if they can come, or not.

The rules can vary, but in this case, it might have to start with the letter S (sausage, sauerkraut, some turkey, etc. but not gravy or pie) or it might have to have more than 5 letters (turkey, cranberries, etc. but not pie or a bun).

Christmas Activities

Here are a few Christmas-specific games and activities to consider trying out with your students.

Making Christmas Cards

Making Christmas cards is a fun activity that students of all ages enjoy. First, show students some sample cards and then teach some possible Christmas greetings to include. Students can give the cards to whomever they'd like—another teacher, student, family member or friend.

Singing Christmas Carols

I'm terrible at singing but the good news is that there are lots of people on YouTube who aren't! I like to have a small sing-a-long in my classes to some popular Christmas carols. I generally take requests and then search for something like "Jingle Bells Karaoke" so we can see the words if students don't know them already.

2 Truths and a Lie Christmas Traditions

A fun way to talk about Christmas traditions around the world is to assign each pair or small group a different country. They can use their phones to do a bit of research about Christmas traditions in that country.

Then, they have to write down three traditions. 2 are true and they can make up a false one. The goal is to fool their classmates! Go around the class and each group can share their three statements, while the other students guess which one is false.

Decorating Christmas Cookies

This activity does require some extra preparation and a small budget but students love it! Make (or buy) some plain Christmas cookies in a variety of shapes such as Christmas trees, Santa, reindeer, etc. Then, bring in icing in a variety of colors.

I get students to each bring one type of sprinkle or candy to share with the class when they're decorating, plus their own plastic container with a lid and knife or whatever they want to use to decorate with. I always bring some extra wooden chopsticks and paper plates in case some students forget.

Play some Christmas carols or a Christmas movie in the background and you'll have yourself a great Christmas class!

Easter Activities

Here are a few Easter-specific games and activities to consider trying out with your students.

Easter Egg Decorating

Easter egg decorating is always a big hit with students. There are many ways to do this, with varying levels of difficulty:

- The real deal! This involves making a small hole in an egg and extracting the yolk and the white. And then using wax and dyes. If you have the motivation and loves arts and crafts, this can be quite a fun thing to do. Look on the Internet for directions on how to do this. However, it does require a ton of work to organize and I'm usually not that motivated.
- Boil some eggs and have students decorate them using dyes. This involves less work but the eggs don't last forever.
- Print off some Easter egg coloring worksheets and have students do that. It's a fun way to decorate the classroom if you do this a few days before Easter.

Easter Egg Hunt

An Easter egg hunt is a fun way to celebrate Easter. When the students are outside for lunch or recess, have the teachers hide some Easter eggs around the school. Once the students come back in, the hunt can begin! Keep some eggs in reserve for the students who are unable to find any. However, buy cheap chocolate eggs so that there are lots to go around (at least five per student).

Easter Traditions Around the World

There are as many Easter traditions as there are countries around the world. I love to find some of the more unusual ones and have a discussion about them. Look on YouTube and you'll find lots of excellent videos in a variety of levels to consider showing students.

Egg Drop Contest

This is a fun way to celebrate Easter in a science kind of way! Put students into pairs or small groups and give them each an egg. Then, scavenge around the staff room, recycling boxes, etc. for a variety of materials from which students can make a device to protect their egg when dropping it off the roof or out a classroom window. Things like popsicle sticks, string, and straws work well too.

When it comes to dropping the eggs, it's best to have two teachers, or get an admin person to help you. One teacher can remain with the eggs and students dropping them (if out a classroom window) at the top, while the other one can do crowd control with the rest of the students at the bottom. If dropping them off the roof, it's best not to bring all the students up there too. The teacher can bring all the eggs up and do it themselves, while the students wait on the ground. It's extremely important to make sure nobody gets injured so choose a low-traffic area and set up a perimeter using some tape or pylons in which no student is allowed to enter on the ground.

Drop the eggs and then get each group to open their package to see if their egg survived.

Valentine's Day Activities

Here a few Valentine's Day specific games and activities to consider trying out with your students.

Valentine's Day Cards

A classic Valentine's Day activity is to make some cards. Share some common sayings and phrases that are typically found on these cards, bring some craft supplies and let the students get to work.

Depending on the class, be sensitive to the fact that some students may not get any cards. A way to combat this is to require students to write a nice card for everyone. Or, to make cards for another class.

Write a Love Poem

Just for fun, I get students to write a love poem. It can be to a romantic partner but it could also be to their pet, mom or dad, grandma, favourite teacher, etc. I generally use a haiku, but it depends on the level of the students.

Valentine's Day History

Most people don't know the history behind this popular holiday. Find a YouTube video with details about it, show it in class and then have a discussion. First, see if anyone knows the history before watching, or let students see if they can guess.

Famous Couples Matching Trivia

Think of some famous couples. They can be real people or couples found in movies, TV shows or books. Then, put students into small groups and they can match up the first names of each. The first group to correctly match all the couples is the winner.

Relationship Deal Breakers

A very interesting discussion topic for a Valentine's Day lesson is to talk about deal breakers. By this, I mean those things that people have absolute rules about not dating someone who does or is this certain thing. For example, someone who smokes, or someone shorter than they are.

Dating Etiquette

A funny and interesting topic for a Valentine's Day class is to put students into small groups and have them each do a short presentation about dating etiquette. I generally set it up as if someone is new to their country and they need some advice for dating the locals and then what are their top three tips.

New Year's Activities

Here a few New Year's Eve and New Year's Day specific games and activities to consider trying out with your students.

New Year's Resolutions

An interesting topic around the end of December is for students to talk about their upcoming New Year's resolutions. You may first have to explain what they are and then give some examples. In some cases, students aren't familiar with them, or they may not be familiar with them in English.

2 Truths and a Lie New Year's Traditions

A fun way to talk about New Year's traditions around the world is to assign each pair or small group a different country. They can use their phones to do a bit of research about New Year's traditions in that country.

Then, they have to write down three traditions. 2 are true and they can make up a false one. The goal is to fool their classmates! Go around the class and each group can share their three statements, while the other students guess which one is false.

Year in Review

The beginning of January is always a good time to look back on the past year. Something like this makes a nice writing assignment:

- What were some of the highlights of (2021)?
- Where were some of the difficult things?

Or, you could use this as a lesson topic for class.

Before You Go

If you liked this book, please leave a review wherever you bought the book. It will help other teachers like you find the book. Also, be sure to check out Jackie Bolen's other books. You can find them wherever you like to buy books.

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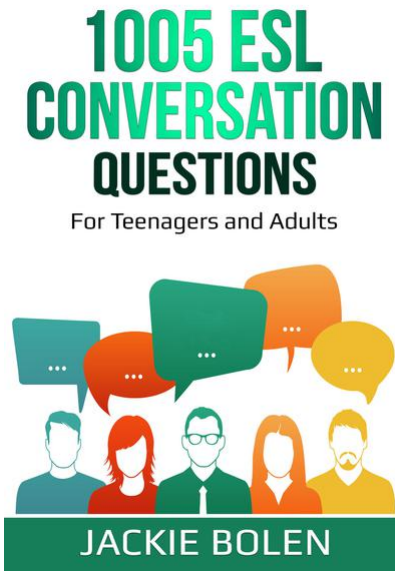
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