

HOW TO TEACH READING

LIKE A PRO

32 TOP SECRETS EVERY READING TEACHER SHOULD KNOW & USE

READING

IS SO MUCH MORE
THAN STARTING WITH
THE FIRST WORD
ON THE PAGE AND
MOVING ALONG
EACH LINE TILL YOU
GET TO THE END

INSPIRE THEM
AND GIVE THEM
A LOVE FOR READING.

IT IS EASIER
THAN YOU THINK

 BE WARNED: YOUR CLASS WILL LOVE READING AND MAY WANT IT TO LAST ALL DAY LONG

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6 Easy Steps to Creating a Perfect Reading Unit with ANY Text

EVERY CLASS IS SUITED TO DIFFERENT READING MATERIAL.

As your students progress in their English language skills, the readings you give them should be more authentic, more difficult and have vocabulary that is more complex. Beginning students, on the other hand, need readings that are structurally simple and not weighed down with vocabulary complexity. With such variety in ESL materials, how does the teacher present reading material in a way that reaches all of her students? Simply follow these steps no matter what your material is, and your students will have a successful learning experience in your next reading class.

HOW TO CREATE A PERFECT READING UNIT WITH ANY TEXT: 6 EASY STEPS

1 GET READY

To make sure your students understand everything the text has to offer, get them thinking about the topic before you even open the reading text. The easiest way to do this is by giving small groups of students discussion questions that touch on the topic they will be reading about. The point is to get students thinking about what they already know about the topic, also known as activating the schemata. If this previous knowledge is brought to the forefront before the students read, they will be able to retain the new information in the text with greater ease since they will be connecting it with information they already possess.

2 INTRODUCE VOCABULARY

Your students need to learn the skills that native speakers employ without even noticing: guessing the meaning of words from their context. If your students will encounter new vocabulary in the reading selection you are using in class, give them a chance to preview the vocabulary in their isolated sentences, taken directly from the text. Simply type out the sentence

or two which includes each new vocabulary word, and give your students a chance to guess the meaning with a partner. There is no need to use bilingual dictionaries for this. Just ask your class about each of the sentences, and your students will probably articulate a meaning close enough to the actual definition for the words to make sense in context.

3 READ

Now has come the time to read the text. For the most part, reading aloud holds little linguistic value since it is not a real life language skill, so have your students read the text at home. If you must cover the material in class, make the experience as communicative as possible. Have different students read different pieces of the text and then share those pieces with their classmates. This is known as a jigsaw. Then assign your students to read the entire text at home on their own time rather than during valuable class time.

4 CHECK COMPREHENSION

You will need to check that your students have understood what they have read, and there are many ways to do this. You may decide to use written methods. Have your students write a summary of what they read or answer questions, even write out their own questions. You can also use a more artistic and interactive approach. Have students act out the story, retell it to you or in small discussion groups, or draw pictures that explain what they read. You can also have your students quiz one another or present what they read to the class. Remember, people learn more when they teach material than just read it, so get your students in front of the classroom whenever you can.

5 APPLY SKILLS

Now that your students have read and understood your selected text, use that text as an example as you teach language skills. You should point out

specific grammatical structures that the author uses. For beginning level students, you can point out things like verb tenses or prioritizing adjectives. Even the most simple of texts will have grammar skills you can stress. For more advanced readings along with their students, you may show your students how the author uses relative clauses, dependent clauses or literary elements.

If you teach grammar to this same group of students, you will know the structures they are studying in that class. If another teacher has them for grammar, however, it may be good to have a quick word with that teacher so you have a clear understanding of what the students are learning. Even if you cannot coordinate reading class and grammar class, reviewing grammar is helpful for your students.

6 EXTEND THE ACTIVITY

What next step can you and your students take when it comes to the subject matter they have read? Can they reenact what happened in the story? Can they give a value judgment on that about which they read? Can they connect with native speakers and see if they agree on a theme the reading presented? Close out your reading unit with some activity that applies the information in the reading to a broader situation.

Discussion questions are an easy go to, but surveys, debates, and additional research are among the many ways to creatively extend the reading activity.

NOW YOU HAVE THE TOOLS TO TURN ANY READING TEXT INTO A SEAMLESS LESSON FOR YOUR ESL STUDENTS, SO OPEN UP THE TEXTBOOK, THE NEWSPAPER OR A WEBSITE AND DIVE IN!

10 Simple Ways to Make Reading Class Fun

WHETHER THE KIDS IN YOUR ESL CLASS ENJOY READING OR IT IS THE CLASS THEY MOST DREAD, YOU CAN INSPIRE THEM AND GIVE THEM A LOVE FOR READING, AND IT IS EASIER THAN YOU THINK. Be careful, though. You may not be able to pull them away from their books if you do!

HOW TO MAKE YOUR READING CLASS FUN: 10 SIMPLE WAYS

1 CREATE A STAR STUDDED BULLETIN BOARD

What you use to motivate your students to read can also double as a permanent classroom decoration this school year. Create a star-studded bulletin board that awards kids for reading books on their own. Start by taking a photograph of each child in your class and posting it on the bulletin board. Title the bulletin board "Star Readers" and be sure each child's picture is posted. Then, show your students how to keep a reading log. In the log, they should keep a list of the books that they read and the days they read them along with any other information you want them to provide. Each week, review the reading logs and give each student one star sticker for every book he or she has read. Kids can then put the stars up near their picture on the bulletin board. The more they read, the more stickers they get.

2 HOST A BOOK EXCHANGE

Working with another class in the school, host a class book exchange. Have your students work together to choose the books that they most like to trade with another class. The other class does the same with their own set of books. Bring the two classes together, and have each group say what they like about the books that they chose. Take the books back to your own classroom, and you can then let children borrow the books or read them together as a class.

3 FILL A WAGON

A reading wagon can be fun and functional for your reading class. Acquire a wagon to keep in your classroom and allow your class to decorate it. Then, ask students to fill the wagon with books

that they like most. Even better, gather a collection of books that fit with a theme you are studying in class. During independent reading time, select a student to pull the wagon around the classroom and deliver books to his classmates. As the wagon stops at each child, he or she can choose a book to read from the wagon. When reading time is over, send the wagon around again so kids can return their books.

4 SERIAL STORIES

Some children will never forget the books that their reading teacher shared with the class. Choose a winning chapter book that your class is sure to love, and read a short selection to the class every day. Make sure you stop reading at an exciting part in the book so your class is eager for story time tomorrow! Once the book is finished, make it available to your students to read independently.

5 SOUND OFF

Adding sound effects to your read aloud stories is fun and engaging for students. Assign several students in your class a sound to make when a particular word appears in a read aloud text. For example, if you were reading the three little pigs, you might have one student sound like the wind when you read huff and puff and have another student oink when you read the word pig. Then, as you read allow your students to add the effects to the story.

6 DESIGNATE A PLACE

Providing your students a comfortable and fun place to read in class will motivate them to grab a book for some independent reading time. Many styles of play tents are available for purchase, but even something as simple as an appliance box can be transformed into a reading nook. Cut windows and a door out of the box and let your students decorate it to look like a clubhouse. Put a comfortable chair inside and hang a sign on the door that says, "Shhh! Someone is Reading".

7 A PLACE TO SHARE

Keep your eyes opened for a large, stuffed chair that you can put into a cor-

ner of your classroom. You may find one at a flea market, a garage sale or even on the curb waiting to be taken away. A large chair that will fit two children in your class is best, and then designate it the reading pair chair. Two at a time, students can sit in this chair while they read a book to one another.

8 GET IT COVERED

Bring your students' creativity into your classroom with a bulletin board titled "Reading, We Have it Covered". Whenever one of your students completes a book, allow him or her to design an original cover for the book. You can supply various art materials or simply allow your students to draw a cover. Then post the book cover on the bulletin board. Kids will love creating their own covers, and they will serve double as advertisements for the books to your other students.

9 ENGAGE THE LISTENERS

The next time you have independent reading period, play some classical or smooth jazz music in the background. The music will keep auditory learners more engaged in the activity without distracting them with lyrics. Playing music also creates a different mood in the classroom that your class is sure to enjoy.

10 THE MAGIC CARPET

Kids love imaginary stories that include magic, mythical creatures and fantastical stories, and those tales can have a permanent place on the magic carpet in your classroom. Gather a collection of fairytale stories and put them on an area rug in the corner of your classroom. Tell your students that this magic carpet will take them to far off places and lands where magic flourishes. Kids will enjoy sitting or laying on the rug and reading stories about the far away fantastical places!

THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS TO MAKE READING CLASS FUN FOR YOUR ESL STUDENTS. With a little imagination and some preparation, your reading time can be engaging and inviting, but be warned. Your class may want reading to last all day long.

3 Most Essential Reading Skills Your Students Need

READING IS SO MUCH MORE THAN STARTING WITH THE FIRST WORD ON THE PAGE AND MOVING ALONG EACH LINE TILL YOU GET TO THE END.

Reading is an essential skill for academic success, and we all know how important it is. We wouldn't spend the time we do teaching it if we didn't value reading.

Even though reading is so essential, we often overlook the fundamental reading skills that our students need. Reading isn't just about going from the beginning to the end of a written passage. There are different reading strategies to use for different informational outcomes.

Here are three strategies your students should learn to give them full academic success.

THREE QUINTESENTIAL READING STRATEGIES

1 SCANNING

Scanning is used when looking for a specific piece of information in a given text. When a student scans, he looks over the selection quickly to locate the particular piece of information he needs and reads only that information, but carefully. Once he finds this information, he stops reading. The reading passage could be a selection on a test with reading comprehension questions, but it may also simply be reading a schedule to see when a particular movie is playing or checking a weather map in a newspaper. Scanning is a fast form of reading that does not pay attention to every detail given in the text.

Before students can scan for the answer to their questions, they should think about what form the answers will take. Will they be a time? Will they be a location? Knowing this beforehand will assist students in locating the information quickly.

2 SKIMMING

Skimming, like scanning, is a quick type of reading. Unlike scanning, though, the goal of skimming is to learn the main points in a larger selection of writing rather than answer one specific question. When you skim milk, you take the richest part off the top. Likewise, when your students skim a reading passage, they should be pulling all the most essential information out of a piece.

The most straightforward way to skim a given passage is to read the entire first paragraph, the entire last paragraph and read the first sentence of each additional paragraph in between. In so doing, your students should be able to identify the major themes throughout the passage. Students should also pay attention to italicized or bold words, headings and subheadings. After skimming a passage, students can then decide whether to go back and read the entire selection or to scan for particular information.

Skimming can be a difficult activity for ESL students as they often get bogged down by new vocabulary and confusing grammar. Reassure your students that when they skim a passage, they only need to get the author's primary points. Encourage them to guess at any new vocabulary they come across and not to worry about the details.

3 READING FOR DETAIL

Careful reading or reading for detail is probably the most commonly used reading strategy. This is a slower reading process that starts at the beginning of a passage and proceeds to the end. When reading for detail, students should read every sentence, but they should not try to know the exact meaning of each word.

Even native speakers infer the meaning of unknown words as they read.

Reassure your students that even when reading for information, they do not need to know every word on the page but should try and guess its meaning from the context, a valuable skill in and of itself. If students put too much pressure on themselves when it comes to new vocabulary, the dictionary may become more of a burden than a blessing.

When reading for detail, students should aim to understand about eighty percent of the information they read. If they need an answer to a particular question that they may have missed, they can always go back and scan for it.

READING MAY SOMETIMES SEEM AS EASY AS A, B, C, BUT IN FACT THERE ARE STRATEGIC WAYS TO MAKE YOUR STUDENTS' READING MORE USEFUL AND PRODUCTIVE. BY TEACHING SKIMMING AND SCANNING IN ADDITION TO READING FOR DETAIL, YOU WILL GIVE YOUR STUDENTS THE STRATEGIES THEY NEED TO BE SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS.

How To Teach A Perfect Reading Lesson

WHILE STUDENTS CERTAINLY NEED PRACTICE READING MATERIAL IN ENGLISH, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU INCLUDE SHORT SPEAKING, LISTENING AND WRITING ACTIVITIES WHENEVER POSSIBLE IN YOUR READING LESSONS.

The focus of the lesson may be on reading a particular passage but having a diverse lesson plan will enable students who are good at other aspects of English to still participate and feel confident in their abilities while working to improve an area they are weaker at.

HOW TO PROCEED WITH TEACHING READING

1 WARM UP

Since students will mostly be sitting at their desks during a reading lesson, use the five to ten minute warm up period to get students moving and speaking. You are also going to want to generate some interest in your reading topic so that the warm up activity flows into your introduction of the material. One way to do this is to have students stand in a circle and ask them to tell you what they know about a certain topic. This can be as simple as giving you some related vocabulary. After a student has given you a word or phrase you can write it on the board and he can call on a student to go next.

If appropriate you can bring a ball to class and ask students to gently toss it to the next person. This is good because it actually gives students something to focus on other than the words being written on the board which you will be able to review later.

2 INTRODUCE

Your introduction may have been made quite easy by the warm up activity. Now, while students are seated, ask them to use some of the vocabulary they came up with in sen-

tences and add any key vocabulary to the list. Now you can distribute the reading passage and ask students to read it silently to become acquainted with the new material.

3 PRACTICE

Practice reading the material aloud. You can do this through a series of steps. First have students do some slash reading. You should read the passage aloud pausing where appropriate. Have students repeat each section after you and place slashes in their text. A sample sentence might look like this "For Christmas dinner / I ate ham, / mashed potatoes, / and green beans.//"

This will help students read more naturally. Now you can have students read the passage by repeating sentences after you and then call on students to read one sentence at a time.

If students struggle with the pronunciation of certain words, take this opportunity to practice pronouncing them too. You may wish to have students read the passage again silently to focus on its meaning before moving on.

4 PRACTICE MORE

With reading lessons it is important to ensure that students understand the material as well as any new words. To check vocabulary you can ask students to match synonyms, antonyms or pictures or ask them to complete sentences with the correct vocabulary words. To check overall comprehension, you can start with some true or false questions.

Be sure to ask students why a particular statement is true or false when checking the answers. You can also have fill in the blank sentences or basic comprehension questions in this section.

5 PRODUCE

Prepare some discussion questions related to the reading and some that require students to use key phras-

es in their answers. For beginners, discussions will be quite challenging but intermediate and advanced students will gain a lot from discussing their thoughts and opinions. I

n smaller classes there will be more opportunities for students to share their viewpoints while with larger classes you may simply have to ask who agrees or disagrees with a particular statement and then call on three or four students to express their opinions.

6 REVIEW

Ask students to summarize the reading or what they learned in class. If you have not already done so, you can also have students search for the topic sentence and discuss why students chose certain sentences whether they chose correctly or not.

READING IS A KEY PART OF LEARNING ENGLISH AND THESE LESSONS GIVE YOU AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO INTRODUCE TOPICS OF YOUR OWN. BE CAREFUL WHEN SELECTING AN ARTICLE. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOUR STUDENTS ARE INTERESTED IN THE MATERIAL. THEY WILL BE MORE ACTIVE IN THE DISCUSSION IF THEY FEEL STRONGLY ABOUT A PARTICULAR TOPIC.

Make Sure A Reading Lesson Sticks: 9 Fun Activities with Post-Its

READING IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF MOST ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAMS, BUT IT CAN ALSO BE ONE OF THE TOUGHEST FOR YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS.

Preparing for, understanding and assessing reading can all be a challenge. Even great reading activities can be simple, however. Here are 9 ideas you can use in your reading program that require nothing more than some sticky notes. Not only that, they are fun and easy, too!

Try These 9 Fun and Easy Activities with Post-Its

1 QUESTIONS WHILE READING

Asking questions while reading can be one of the greatest aids to understanding a passage, either at home or in class. For ESL students, though, questions can become a juggernaut making the end of the reading unreachable. Students may become frustrated, and if they had finished the selection some of their questions may have been answered by the remainder of the article. To help your students over this hurdle, give each student several post-its to use as he reads. When he has a question about the passage or finds himself confused, have him write the question on the post-it and stick it near the place he had the question and continue reading. Then, when he has reached the end of the passage, have him return to his notes and see if any of his questions were answered. Any remaining questions, he brings to a reading group of three or four and asks his classmates if they know the answers.

Collect any questions that remain after the discussion groups and talk about them as a class. Your students will eventually have all of their questions answered. Through this activity, your students will also recognize that having questions as you read is okay, and that the questions are often answered by the end of the reading selection.

2 VOCABULARY PREVIEW

Before you introduce a new set of

reading vocabulary to your students, see what they already know or can decipher about the given set of words. Write the new vocabulary on the board and have groups of three or four students copy each word on to its own post-it. Then ask the students to sort the words in a way that seems logical to them. They can use the knowledge they already have of the words, word roots, or part of speech endings. If possible, have them sort the words on the inside of a file folder, and can keep the words sorts until after the reading is complete. Then, once they have read the words in context and learned what they mean from the reading selection, have the same groups resort the same set of words. Most likely, they will decide on a different sorting logic after learning the meaning of the words.

3 COMPREHENSION CHECK

You can use post-its to check your students' reading comprehension as well as teach them how to write a summary. Break your class into groups of four to six students, and assign a reading selection to the group. Once everyone has completed the selection, have your students close their books, and give each person three post-it notes. On each of these notes, each person writes one event or piece of information from the reading selection. Encourage your students to write the most important events, and check to make sure everyone has some understanding of what they have read by reading the notes. Then, the groups of students come together and put all their post-its in sequential order.

They will find it challenging to remember all the events in the reading selection. Once the events are in order, you can show your students how to write a summary from the main points they chose from the story. Your students will not become bogged down in the details of the story when they write from their own highlights!

4 READING CLOZE

You can also use the smallest post-its to create a cloze exercise for your students. Type out a reading passage in a

large font, and use the small post-its to cover every fifth word. (Note: you may have to adjust the spacing of the words to make the post-its fit.) Then, challenge your students to write an appropriate word on each post-it to complete the passage. They can check to see if their words match the original words by looking underneath the post-it, but any word which logically and grammatically completes the blank would be an acceptable answer.

5 KWL BOARD

If you use KWL charts (Know, Want to Know, and Learned) with your students before reading a new reading selection, try this variation, which uses post-it notes. Instead of having students complete individual charts, have them write what they know about a given topic on post-it notes – one idea on each note. As a student completes a note, announce to the class what is on the note and stick it to your board. As your students hear what their classmates know, they may remember facts of their own.

Continue until everyone has written down all of their ideas and you have posted them. In effect, your class will be brainstorming everything they know about the day's topic, but the simple addition of sticky notes will make the activity more energetic and entertaining. Once the first part of the activity is done, have students write down any questions they might have about the topic of the day on separate post-it notes. (Use a different color note, again one note per idea.) Follow the same procedure as you did with the first part. After your class reads their selection, have them write things that they learned on a third color of post-it. These go on the board, too.

When what a student learned answers one of the questions from the second part of the activity, post the third note next to the question note.

6 BOOK REVIEWS

Keep a supply of post-its near your classroom library. When a student completes a book from the library, he

writes a one sentence review of the book on a post-it note. He can write what he liked, what he didn't, or any other thoughts he has after reading the book. Then, when your other students are choosing their next books, they can read the review that the first reader wrote. After this second person finishes the book, she writes her own review and sticks it in the front of the book.

The reading and reviewing continue in this manner, and by the end of the school year, you will have a deep understanding of which books are working for your class and which aren't. Moreover, your students will have peer feedback at their fingertips when it is time to choose a new book.

7 QUICK QUESTIONS

You can get your students to think critically as they read by placing post-it notes in your classroom library books. Write several sticky notes for each book that you have in your classroom, and ask questions such as these: What do you think will happen next? Did the main character make the right decision? What advice would you give the character? Then, place these notes strategically in your classroom books. When a student comes across one of the notes during his or her reading, he answers the question on a separate post-it note, writes the page number on which he found the question, and sticks the note to the cover of the book.

You can then check your students' comprehension by simply looking at the covers of their books and their answers to your quick questions.

8 STEP BY STEP SUMMARY

For students who may have a difficult time writing a summary of a large reading selection or chapter book, they can use post-it notes to write a summary as they read. Simply have students stop at the end of each chapter and write one sentence on a post-it summarizing what happened in that chapter.

Then, at the end of the book, the student takes all the notes and puts them together to complete a summary of the entire novel.

9 READ ALOUD COMMENTS

If you find your students either interrupting you or giving you blank stares when you read to the class, you can use post-it notes to make a smoother and more effective read aloud experience. Whenever a student has a comment or question while you are reading to the class, he writes in on a post-it note. He can then stick the post-it to the front board once your reading session is over.

You can then answer the question for the whole class or write a reply post-it to that specific student. If you are looking for feedback from all of your students, you can also hand out post-it notes to everyone after you are finished reading and have everyone write something that confused them, something that they thought was interesting, or something that they thought of as you were reading.

THE BEST CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES DO NOT HAVE TO BE COMPLICATED.

And what could be easier than keeping a few sticky notes in strategic places in your classroom? You will have a better read on what your students like and what they understand, and they will feel like they are being heard when you use these understated sheets of paper to open the channels of communication in your class!

7 Specific Strategies for Your Next Reading Class

WHEN READING CLASS IS JUST ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BELL, IT IS NOT TOO LATE TO INCORPORATE THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES INTO CLASS. THEY TAKE VERY LITTLE PREPARATION (SOME TAKE NONE AT ALL) AND CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE IN HOW YOUR ESL STUDENTS EXPERIENCE READING CLASS.

So the next time you are looking for a reading strategy on the go, try one that is listed below.

TRY THESE 7 SPECIFIC STRATEGIES FOR YOUR NEXT READING CLASS

1 DO A JIGSAW

Reading large texts in class is probably not the best use of your all too short classroom time. Some in-class reading, however, does provide communicative value to your ESL students. The popular technique known as the jigsaw gives your students practice in reading, speaking and listening. To set your students to a jigsaw, divide your selected text into three or four sections. Break your class into the same number of groups and give each group one section of the text and that section only. Have students read and discuss their section and then mix up your groups so one student from each of the original groups is now in a second new group. Each group member should explain the portion of the text that he read (in his first group) to the rest of the (second) group without showing them the text itself. Each member will need to adequately explain his section so that each person in the group knows all of the important information from the entire text.

2 PLAY A PART

Role-playing a text in class can be a fun and entertaining way to check students' comprehension and aid those who may not have gotten all they should have from the text. After reading a selection, you can have groups of students act out what they read in front of the class. This will ensure they

understand what they have read and will give the rest of the class contextual information about what they have read. Alternately, you can have students act out a text as you read it aloud. This will do double duty as a listening comprehension activity as well. Permit audience members to correct their actors, and switch players frequently as you read. Be sure to use a text that has lots of action and even dialogue rather than description for this activity.

3 MAKE FREQUENT COMPLIMENTS

When you are putting your students into classroom pairs, strategically match students with others whose strengths compliment their weaknesses. For example, if one student excels in vocabulary, pair him with someone whose strength is grammar. If a student has high reading comprehension, pair her with someone who reads quickly. Each student's strengths will step in where the other student is weak, and as a team they will see more success than they might otherwise expect from themselves. You should also try to match students with different native languages with one another since it forces your students to use the English that they do know to communicate their thoughts and ideas with one another.

4 GIVE IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK

Students who might struggle with reading will need fast and frequent feedback. Doing so will nip errors in the bud and will prevent your students from getting into habits and mistakes that will only need to be corrected later. Not only that, frequent correction opens the door for frequent praise for the successes your students make. Positive reinforcement will motivate and encourage your students to continue and give them a positive association and a sense of confidence with reading class.

5 FIND FREEDOM TO FOLD

For some ESL students, a full

page of text can seem overwhelming, and this creates tension and frustration before the student even starts reading. A technique as simple as folding a piece of paper into two or even four sections can give your students the confidence they need to know that they can conquer the short reading selection. When a student finishes with the first section, have him move onto the second and so on. Eventually, he will have completed the entire text and also avoided the unnecessary stress and anxiety that can come from a full page of typeset!

6 MAKE COPIES

If your students purchase their own textbooks, they may already know they can write and mark up the page as they read. However, if your students are using a school owned text, something as simple as making extra copies for your students can aid their reading comprehension and other reading skills. Encourage students to underline or highlight text as they read. They may choose to mark key points in each paragraph or vocabulary that is unfamiliar. You can also encourage students to draw pictures in the margins as it will show they understand what they are writing. The few cents it costs to make those copies will give priceless rewards to your students.

7 BREAK UP THE TEST

Some students may be intimidated by a lengthy exam where page follows page. Instead of asking all your questions up front, give your students different sections of a test in smaller pieces throughout the day. You can still assess the same material with your test, but breaking it into sections can alleviate test anxiety and give your students a better chance at success.

YOU CAN INCORPORATE THESE SIMPLE STRATEGIES INTO ANY READING LESSON.

When you do, you will see your students succeed in new ways which will motivate them, and you will increase your own rewards as a teacher.

9 New Tips for Using Literature in the ESL Classroom

No matter what age group you teach, there is a vast pool of English literature that can supplement your curriculum. Including classics in the ESL classroom though, isn't like teaching a text to native speakers. Here are some tips to keep in mind the next time you teach a novel in your ESL class.

HOW TO USE LITERATURE IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

1 REVIEW LITERATURE TERMS

Though students have probably studied literature in their native languages, you should review the most common English literature terms with your class before starting a literature unit. These terms include vocabulary about people: character, protagonist, and antagonist. They also include parts of the literature: setting, plot, climax and resolution. Giving your students the tools to talk about literature both increases their vocabulary and enables them to express their individual ideas and opinions once they have read the piece. Without the necessary vocabulary, good insights may be lost when your students are not able to express themselves.

2 SELECT AMERICAN OR BRITISH LITERATURE

Though not as noticeable to native speakers, there is quite a difference between American and British English. Make sure when you select your literature that you are choosing the correct style for the dialect you are teaching. Even children's books or abridged books in the wrong dialect will cause great difficulties for your students when reading.

3 CONTEMPORARY NOVELS MAY BE EASIER TO UNDERSTAND

Contemporary novels may be easier

for your students to understand because they are in a more familiar context. It can be hard enough for your student to try to live in and understand a foreign culture, but add a fifty year time gap and the task can approach impossible. Choose novels with contemporary settings as opposed to historical fiction or those with a fantasy setting. Though more advanced students may be able to handle historical fiction, there is no reason to add stress to beginning and intermediate level students with a setting that's hard to relate to.

4 CHOOSE BOOKS THAT HAVE A MOVIE

You can show the movie before reading the piece, while reading it or after reading it. Make the movie available in language lab for students to watch on their own. There are also many activities you can do with the movie.

5 REVIEW CHARACTERS IN THE PIECE

Take time before reading to introduce the characters to your students, and give them a list of the most important ones. If you can provide a description of each character's role in the novel or story you will be giving your students a heads up for comprehension. You can also take time to explain the relationships between the characters to your students. Include the concept of a family tree, if appropriate, and you can lead into a unit on family and relationships as well.

6 PRESENT THEMES

Introduce themes that students will encounter as they read the text. Have a discussion time before reading to talk about these themes. If themes are controversial you may want to look at tips specific for working with a controversial topic.

7 GIVE A SUMMARY

It may feel like cheating, some-

thing all teachers want to avoid, but when it comes to reading a foreign language the rules are a little different. Give students a summary of each reading selection. Make it optional to read. They may want to read the text, then the summary, then the text again. Encourage your students to focus on content rather than structure while they read.

8 REVIEW UNUSUAL VOCABULARY

Before assigning the text, review the vocabulary with your students. There are many ways to introduce new vocabulary. You may want create a vocabulary list for each chapter as you read it. Reassure students that they are not expected to understand every word they read, but encourage them to guess at the meaning of unfamiliar words just as native speakers do. It's a reading skill that is necessary for their future success with English.

9 DISCUSSION

One of the most beneficial activities to come from reading a novel as a class is discussion. Discuss what you read. Discuss what the author's message is. Discuss what your opinion of the issue is. Allow your students to observe what they read, interpret it and apply it to their own lives. Giving discussion questions ahead of time will allow students to think while they read and be more prepared for class discussions.

IN GENERAL, THERE IS A GREAT BOUNTY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE JUST WAITING TO BE USED IN THE ESL CLASSROOM.

Don't let intimidation stop you from opening a new world to your students through reading. You'll see a new world yourself as literature breathes freshness and vitality into your class.

Strategies for Teaching Literature in the ESL Classroom

Stopford Brooke once said that literature is “a pleasure which arises not only from the things said, but from the way in which they are said, and that pleasure is only given when the words are carefully or beautifully put together into sentences.” People all over the world value literature and the beauty of linguistic expression that comes from it. When a person is studying a foreign language, though, appreciating literature in that language can be a seemingly impossible task.

A teacher can make a significant difference in how a student is able to learn from and appreciate literature in a foreign language. The following are strategies for the ESL teacher for teaching literature that your students will not only appreciate but also come to love.

HOW TO TEACH LITERATURE IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

1 START SMALL

When we hear the word literature, we tend to think of classic pieces that have impressed generations, but the classification of literature does not need to be so esoteric. Many types of written pieces can either be considered literature in and of themselves or can be used to guide your students into more mature and well-respected literature. When encouraging your students to read literature, start with your students where they are. There is bound to be some type of writing that is of interest to even the least engaged students. Start by assigning reading from the areas that interest your students. This may mean giving them fables, comic books or songs to read. Once they are comfortable with one of those categories of writing, move to a more complex level of the written word. You can use current magazines, letters, diaries or journals for material in your reading class. The next step is moving your students into the world of the short story. There are many stories on limitless topics - something will be of interest to your students. After the

short story, the step to a novelette or novella or early reader book will be smooth. These give way to the novel and finally the classic literature novel. When you take the time to slowly move your students from one level to the next rather than plunging into a maturity of reading for which they are not ready, you will make larger strides over a shorter amount of time and see more results in your students reading abilities.

A class reading assignment is a great addition to any reading class. Before approaching a piece of literature as a class, give your students some time to discuss the reasons for reading literature in the first place. Why do they read? Why do you read? Have groups brainstorm a list of reasons why someone might read literature and then ask each student to prioritize those reasons for himself. Then pair students and have them discuss the order they determined and explain the reasons behind their choices. Students will find that each person's reasons for reading literature will vary. It also helps to have clear expectations before reading a piece of literature so you can be sure to design your class activities to meet the interests of your students and so they will understand the reasons behind the activities you do as a class.

2 REVIEW THE VOCABULARY

The study of literature uses many specific vocabulary words that will probably be unfamiliar to your students even if they have studied literature in their native languages. You should take some time and review with your students at minimum the following literary terms and give examples of each. This step is important because if your students do not have the tools i.e. vocabulary to talk about their ideas, they will not be able to share them.

Alliteration – a literary technique that uses the same sound at the beginning of a set of words (the large laughing lion languished)

Antagonist – the person who comes against the protagonist or hero. The

antagonist is often the villain. (the Joker is the antagonist to Batman)

Author – writer of the book (Mark Twain was the author of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.)

Climax – the emotional high point of the piece of literature where the reader does not yet know the outcome

Genre – the class of literature to which a piece belongs (includes biography, romance, mystery and science fiction among others)

Plagiarism – Use of another person's words or ideas without proper citation

Point of view – the perspective from which a story is told, usually either first person (I shall tell you of my grand adventure.) or third person (He spoke of lands unknown and people unseen by modern eye.)

Protagonist – The main character or hero of the piece (Tom Sawyer in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer)

Resolution – the completion or correction of the conflict in a story

Setting – the time and place of a story (in The Help the setting is Mississippi in the 1960's)

Symbolism – using one person or thing to represent another (chaos is often symbolized by water)

3 ALL IN THE CLASS

If you have the opportunity to read a piece of literature as a class, you can then move your generalized literature discussion to focus on that particular piece of literature. Start by familiarizing your student with the piece. Discuss the genre and main characters. You may also want to discuss some of the themes that the books presents. Ask your students to give their opinions on a particular topic or theme that they will read about in the book, and ideally have them write about their opinion. Once you have read the book, revisit those themes again and ask your students if their perspectives have changed and if so, how have they changed and what brought about the change. This is a good activity to do in small groups both before reading the book and after.

Whenever you lead a class discussion on a piece of literature, the key to expert facilitation is to try to keep your opinions reserved while encouraging your students to express their own opinions. Ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes, no or other one-word answer. As students express their opinions, encourage them to think deeper and determine why they hold the opinions that they do. Make sure all your students participate in the discussions. If someone seems unwilling to participate, break the class into smaller groups where that person will have to contribute. Then come back together and discuss the same questions as a class. Overall, do not force your own opinions about a book on your class. In literature, each person's opinion is equally valid, and making your own opinion sound like the only option will discourage discussion among your class.

4 CULTIVATE CONTROVERSY

A literary topic that is sure to get your students talking to one another is the idea of banning books. Different groups have been banning books for hundreds of years for many different reasons. Divide your class into groups and ask them to discuss how they feel about banning books. For what reasons might people seek to ban particular books? Do they know of any books that have been banned? What would they do if they disagreed with the banning of a particular book at their school? This can be a great topic about which to have your students write opinion essays or participate in a debate. In this way, your students will get speaking practice and writing practice as well as reading practice in your class.

ESL TEACHERS CAN HAVE SUCCESSFUL AND PROFITABLE EXPERIENCES TEACHING LITERATURE IN THEIR CLASSES - IT JUST TAKES SOME ADVANCE PREPARATION TO HELP YOUR STUDENTS UNDERSTAND.

Making sure they understand what literature is, what parts literature contains and then applying what they have read to their own lives are the keys to a successful examination of literature in the ESL classroom.

10 Simple Real World Reading Strategies You Can Use Today

VERY FEW WOULD ARGUE THAT IN TODAY'S WORLD, READING IS IMPORTANT. FOR ESL STUDENTS, READING CAN PROVIDE GRAMMATICAL INSTRUCTION AND VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT EVEN AS IT CONFERS INFORMATION ON THE READER.

Some ESL students, however, may not be drawn to reading. They struggle with English spelling and text laden pages, and discouragement defeats engagement as they close the book. Your ESL students do not have to fight this inner battle with book in hand. You can encourage them to read and at the same time foster a love of reading within them. Here are some easy strategies you can use in your classroom to encourage reading and all the benefits that go along with it.

10 REAL WORLD APPROACHES TO READING YOU SHOULD TRY TODAY

1 DROP EVERYTHING AND READ

Students who read are better learners, so fostering a love of reading in your students is important for their long term success. By setting aside a specific time each day for independent reading, your students will know that reading is important. To start a drop everything and read session (DEAR) in your classroom, tell students that everyone, you included, will stop everything and read later that day. Have students choose a book that they will read during DEAR before the DEAR period starts. Then, starting with a 5 minute session and growing longer as the semester progresses, everyone drops everything and reads. You may even want to put a do not disturb sign on your classroom door. Tell your students that no one is to talk or ask questions (though dictionary is okay) or move around the room while they read.

2 READER'S THEATER

Reading does not have to be all about internalizing language. Your students can read aloud in a theater simulation, engaging their speaking and pronunciation. You choose from several scripts for your students to use in their productions. To prepare, make a copy of the script for each member of the play. Highlight each part on its own copy. Then give your students time to read and prepare their play before presenting it to the class. It is up to you whether you want students to use props or costumes, but the important thing is that they are reading aloud when they give their presentation. Giving them an opportunity for theater production may be just the motivation your ESL students need to read in front of their classmates and have fun in the process!

3 LITERATURE CIRCLES

Book clubs have been popular for a long time. There is just something unique about discussing your thoughts on what someone else has written. Give your students a chance to have their own book discussions with literature circles. You may want to assign the same book to 4 or 5 students in the same literature circle, or have your students read different books on the same theme. Students should read their books independently, making notes of anything they might like to share with their circle. Then, give them time to discuss what they have read during class. You might want to give your groups some starter questions like the following.

What did you like about what you read?

What didn't you like?

What would you have changed?

What did you learn?

Which of your questions did the book answer?

What questions do you still have?

4 TEACHER READS

Reading aloud to your students is another great way of increasing interest in reading. It shows your class that you value reading, enough to take time from class every day to make it happen. Reading aloud also helps your students increase their reading comprehension. For some students, listening to a teacher read lines up with their learning styles better than words on a page do. For others, just hearing your pronunciation and inflection will make them better speakers of English. Reading aloud also alerts your students to good books that they may want to read on their own, particularly if you include DEAR sessions in your daily routine. So don't depend solely on the librarian to read aloud to your students. Take some time each day to read exciting books to your class, and they will never forget it!

5 READING JOURNALS

Getting your students to write about the books that they read is another way to increase their love for the written word. Having the whole class read one book together gives them a shared experience and can give you an opportunity to have a lively discussion in class. You can also assign students to read books at home, with parents, either student reading aloud to parents or parents reading aloud to students, for about 15 minutes each night. The students can then write about what they read in their reading journal. Stress to your students that you do not want them to simply write a summary of what they read. They should relate what they read to their real life experiences. This personal connection with the book will give students a more positive and emotional connection with reading.

6 READING DATES

Particularly with ESL students, providing every opportunity to have conversation with native speakers is essential. You can schedule reading

dates (something akin to a play date) in which another class in the school visits your class. Have them bring books with them or supply them with books your class has chosen. Then let students pair together, one from each class, and read to one another. If your class buddies with an older class, they will see that reading is valuable to older students and will look to them as role models. If your class partners with younger students, they will be less intimidated when they read and can practice having conversations with young children, a challenge no matter what your first language is.

7 LISTENING CENTERS

Today, many books are available in audio form. Whether you purchase these from a bookstore or online music service or borrow CD's from the library, your students will benefit from having audio books available in the classroom. Listening can be less intimidating than reading, especially if a book is long or seems long to your students. Your students may choose more challenging texts than they otherwise would if they can listen to the audio version. In addition, your ESL students will get more comprehension clues as they come through the reader's voice on the CD. Audio books also help with vocabulary development, and may be easier to understand if a student's listening vocabulary is greater than his reading vocabulary, which often happens with ESL students.

8 READING IN THE CONTENT AREA

Reading does not have to be limited to what is in the literature book. Reading is important for every area of learning, and content area reading material shows your students that there is a greater purpose in reading. They realize that they can read to learn and not just learn to read. For ESL students, content area reading material is particularly useful since your students often know the content though they may not know the language used to express it. This advance knowledge on the content will make reading comprehension easier for your students and may encourage them to keep reading.

9 GENRE BREAKDOWN

Do your students read different genres? Do you introduce different types of reading material throughout the semester? If you do, teaching your students how to classify that material into the different genres may help them become better writers. When your students see the characteristics that define a piece of literature, they will learn to incorporate these characteristics in their own writing. As you read material throughout the semester, show your students what qualities it has that make it fit into a particular genre. Then have your students keep a record of those characteristics in a reading or writing notebook. The next time you assign a piece of writing that fits into a particular genre, have your students bring out their lists to consider as they write.

10 BE A ROLE MODEL

Children learn what they see. When reading is important to you, reading will be important to them as well. Take regular opportunities to read in front of your class, both aloud and silently as they read. As their love and respect for you grows, as it undoubtedly will, so will their love for reading.

Effective Means of Incorporating Reading in a Composition Class

Sometimes nearing the half-way mark of a composition course (and an ESL composition course goes by very quickly), I'll slap myself on the forehead and say, "Oh, no! We've been so busy that I've forgotten to incorporate reading. We really need to do more reading in this class."

But why read in the composition class at all when there's so much else to teach (writing process, essay structure, essay development, grammar, mechanics, etc.)?

REASONS TO INCLUDE READING

By incorporating reading into the composition class, the teacher can

1 Provide models for student writing. One need look no further than E.B. White's "Once More to the Lake," for example, for excellent descriptive writing and the power of the ending. The works of Mark Twain, such as "The Lowest Animal," in which he argues persuasively that humans are the lowest, not highest, life form, is a strong model of satire and irony.

2 Provide topics for students to write about. It can be quite difficult for students to hear some bland definition and instructions and then, "Well, so, that's what an exemplification essay is—now go write one." However, if students read Bob Greene's "How Unwritten Rules Circumscribe Our Lives," about the unwritten rules in American culture (e.g., don't take the tips left for wait staff), students have not only read an excellent model exemplification essay, but they also have a great topic from Mr. Greene on unwritten rules, and are now prepared, even eager, to discuss unwritten rules they know of and write about them. The teacher doesn't even have to go on at length about what an exemplification essay is because Greene shows us so well in

this essay. Also, a good topic and essay can create passion in the reader for writing.

3 Teach idioms and higher-level vocabulary. Students learn more higher-level vocabulary reading than they do watching TV or engaging in conversation, and if they read academic essays, vocabulary gains will be greater still. Just from reading the Greene essay, my students quickly picked up the term "unwritten rule," not difficult linguistically but rather conceptually, and were using it in their own papers with ease and correctly.

So what are some good essays to use?

There are plenty of good ones anthologized or on the web for little to no cost. Some titles follow.

SUGGESTED READINGS FOR STUDENTS

1 "Unwritten Rules Circumscribe Our Lives" by Bob Greene. Greene discusses the various unwritten rules (don't yell in restaurants) that define us.

2 "My Mother's English" by Amy Tan. Tan shows how her immigrant mother's "broken" English affect both mother and daughter.

3 "Once More to the Lake" by E.B. White. White describes the family's annual trip to the lake and how it marks the passage of time.

4 "Grant and Lee: A Study in Contrasts" by Bruce Catton. Catton contrasts these two very different leaders representing two very different value

systems.

5 "A Homemade Education" by Malcolm X. Malcolm X tells the story of learning to read while imprisoned

6 "Letter from Birmingham Jail" by Martin Luther King. His classic letter gives a rebuttal to the charges leveled against him by the addressees

7 "Shooting an Elephant" by George Orwell. In this story about power, Orwell tells the story of being forced to shoot an elephant against his will, although he was the person in authority.

8 "What is Intelligence, Anyway?" by Isaac Asimov. Asimov discusses the nature of intelligence and different kinds of intelligence.

9 "Advice to Youth" by Mark Twain. In this humorous speech, Twain gives some practical advice, such as "Be careful with those unloaded weapons—they kill" which seems remarkably timely.

10 "Why Don't We Complain?" by William F. Buckley, Jr. In this essay, Buckley describes various incidents when people should have complained yet didn't and discusses what motivates people to remain silent in these cases.

Above are some essays and writings that have all proven successful with ESL students, which may be found on the web in most cases at little or no cost. These days instructors also can have their own custom reader designed by places like Pearson Publishing or University Readers.

METHODS FOR INCLUDING READING IN THE COMPOSITION CLASS

1 PRE-DISCUSSION, THE READING, MORE DISCUSSION, WRITING

This is the most common way to incorporate reading in the composition classroom, and for good reason: the success in having students discuss first what an “unwritten rule” might be, then doing the reading to find out, then follow up with discussion of our thoughts on the reading, and finally the students get the composition topics.

2 WRITING, BASED ON A QUOTE DRAWN FROM THE READING

A variation to the above process would be to start the pre-discussion on a quote drawn from the reading: “When you are eating among other people, you do not raise your voice - it is just an example of the unwritten rules we live by.”

Discuss what might be meant by this followed by the reading, discussion, and writing.

3 JOURNAL WRITING

Many teachers like to work the less formal journal in before the more formal essay response.

4 READING, DISCUSSION, DEVELOPING WRITING TOPICS

This is for more advanced writers, farther along in the composition class, who might be more comfortable with the process.

5 EXTENSIVE INSTRUCTION ON QUOTING, PARAPHRASING, AND CITING TEXT

Students often lack this skill of incorporating another author’s work in their own. I’ve had graduate students who claimed not to have written a formal research paper before. Give your students the advantage of this academic skill by explicitly showing them how to locate material in the reading to support their main points, and how to quote and paraphrase it, and how to cite. I often give my students, as an exer-

cise, a handout with some thesis, such as: A lot of society is based on a set of shared assumptions, rather than actual law. Then I’ll ask them to go to the Greene text on unwritten rules and find a sentence to support this, then quote, paraphrase, and cite the sentence.

6 SUMMARIZE IT

Have students write a summary of everything they read in class: essay length works can be summarized in a paragraph. Model this important skill of selecting most important ideas, changing the words, and connecting them into a coherent paragraph.

7 VARIOUS JOURNALS—INSTEAD OF FREEWRITING, SET SOME PARAMETERS

Students may not just summarize—you, after all, have done the reading and know what it’s about. Tell them they must tell you what they think of the piece and focus on that—the writing itself, the ideas, and so forth. Tell them they must include at least three, or five, new words from the reading in the journal. Or pull a quote from the reading and tell them to respond to that.

8 REWRITE ENDING

Have students rewrite the ending of “Shooting an Elephant.” What would they have Orwell do differently?

9 WRITE A LETTER TO THE AUTHOR

(Or email the author) Respond to Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” as if you were one of the addressees of his letter, the coalition of clergymen critical of his actions. What do you have to say to King’s rebuttal in his letter? Or what would you, as yourself, say to King if you had been alive at the time the letter was written?

10 WRITE AN INTERVIEW WITH ONE OF THE CHARACTERS

What would you really like to ask Malcolm X, the icon of the Civil Rights Movement? How do you think he’d respond?

TEACH IN WRITING.

However, teaching reading pays off big dividends and can save time and explicit instruction by providing an effective model.

READING AT TIMES GETS NEGLECTED IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM BECAUSE THERE IS SO MUCH TO

How to Use Reading Selections in Speaking Class

THOUGH MANY ESL CURRICULUMS MAKE DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN AREAS OF LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION, SPEAKING, READING, WRITING, LISTENING, GRAMMAR, THEY ARE REALLY ALL DIFFERENT FACETS OF ONE GEM.

Therefore, the ESL teacher has both the privilege and the frustration of using the same materials across the curriculum, no matter what class or classes she teaches. For most students blurring curriculum lines like using reading material, for example, in the speaking class creates a positive learning experience. Here are some ways you can trade reading material for the speaking classroom in your holistic ESL instruction.

HOW TO USE READING SELECTIONS IN SPEAKING CLASS

1 BE PLAY-FUL

Some of the most interesting literature is that which is heavy on dialogue, and dialogue is a key facet of fiction. If you have read or will be reading a fictional piece heavy on dialogue, use it in speaking class, too, as a play of sorts. You can read the narrative pieces yourself but allow your students to read the dialogue as if it were text from a play. They will have the benefit of hearing the content again as well as getting in practice with diction and sentence fluency.

2 WHAT HAPPENED TO THE THEATER?

Another theatrical use for reading material is creating a classroom theater. Give your students a chance to practice reading a selection aloud. You can either do this as a class or in pairs or small discussion groups. Then have your students take turns reading parts of the selection aloud in front of the class while other students act out the story as if in a theatrical presentation. While some of your students get practice with their fluency and pronunciation, others will be entertained by the creative antics of their classmates. A bonus – you can check the comprehension of the students who are acting the piece out.

3 KEEPING RECORDS

Listening to yourself read can be an insightful experience, especially when English is not your native language. Have individual students read a story aloud and record them reading. Then play it back for them, giving students a chance to hear their pronunciation and fluency. This will make them more aware of how they sound when they read and motivate them to improve their fluency. If you like, set up a tape recorder in a corner of the room as an independent learning station that your students can use when they have free time or during free study periods.

4 STORY TIME

Kids love to see their own creativity come to life, and you can use this to your advantage in speaking class. Give your class a chance to create illustrated versions of their favorite stories. These could be picture books you have used in class, their original stories or any of the material you have covered. Then have story time and allow kids to read their books to the rest of the class. Make sure you give up the teacher's chair to the student who is reading. During this time, you may want to do assessments of your students' pronunciation and general speaking abilities, too.

5 TALK ABOUT IT

After reading material that includes interesting characters, bring them into your classroom with character role plays. Choose two or more characters from a piece or multiple pieces your class has read, and simulate circumstances under which they might meet. It could be in line at a store, playing together at the park, taking a class together – any situation can work. Then have your students play the part of each of the characters in the role play. As they interact, encourage students to use the words or expressions each individual character used in the original piece. This will also help to cement that character specific vocabulary in their minds.

6 PRONUNCIATION POLICE

Because speakers of different native languages tend to have different

pronunciation problems, pairing students with different native languages can help them help each other with pronunciation. By having pairs of students police each other's pronunciation, they can help each other improve overall speaking skills since each will hear problems that the other does not. Once you have established these pronunciation pairs, give students a chance to read aloud to one another while students offer suggestions or corrections on pronunciation.

7 TELL IT AGAIN, SAM

For general speaking practice as well as a reading comprehension check, have pairs of students relate a summary of a reading text to one another. Allow them to use the text as reference, but make it clear that they cannot read from it. This will challenge your students' to increase their elicited vocabulary banks and give them practice with expository speaking.

8 CHANGE IT UP

Take the story retelling a step further and challenge your students to use their imagination as they do. Instead of sharing the actual ending of a piece of literature, have pairs of students tell each other alternative endings for a given reading selection. Challenge your students to make a sad ending into a happy one or vice versa. You can let your class get as creative as they can. Likely, you will hear laughter around the classroom, but you will also see your students using the language they have read in a conversation with their classmates.

BEING ABLE TO USE MATERIAL FROM ONE CLASS IN THE CURRICULUM IN ANOTHER IS REALLY A VALUABLE ASSET ESL TEACHERS HAVE.

Your students will get further experience with the material they use in class, and you will have a way to improve multiple skills at one time. Cross-curricular activities also give you a good opportunity for assessment. So don't be shy about bringing the material from one class into another. It may make your teaching planning easier and will cement the knowledge in the minds and the mouths of your students!

Don't Open the Book Yet! Getting Students Ready Before They Read

WHEN I HAVE A GREAT INFORMATIONAL PIECE I WANT TO SHARE WITH MY STUDENTS, MY TEMPTATION IS TO JUMP RIGHT IN.

I have confidence that the fascinating facts and amazing concepts will draw them in just as quickly as they drew me into the subject. The problem with that, though, is that even if they are already interested in the topic of the day, my students can get so much more out of a text if I get them ready to take it in beforehand. In fact, anyone's reading comprehension will increase when they have some preparation before they go to a text because the preparation helps connect the new facts and ideas to what the reader already knows. This is even truer for speakers of a second language.

So even though you may be as excited as me to jump into today's text with your students, here are some tools you can use to make sure your students get everything they can from your reading selection!

HOW TO GET STUDENTS READY FOR READING: BUBBLE MAPS

1 LOOK AT THE MAP

A bubble map is a great way to prepare your students to read about a factual topic. You can put one on the overhead, draw one on the board or give your students a copy to work with at their desks. This map will help your students realize what they already know about any given topic as well as get them thinking about what they would like to learn about it.

2 FILL IN THE CENTER

The topic you are going to read about goes in the center circle of the map. For example, say you were going to read about families in the U.S. Put that in the middle circle.

3 START ASKING QUESTIONS

After you introduce the topic for the day, have your students start thinking about what types of information they might like to know about that topic. These topics will go in the six circles around the center one, but for now just choose one. So if you were going to read about families in the U.S., your students might like to know about the members of the family and the relationships between those members. Put this topic in one of the six secondary circles around the center circle.

4 ASK QUESTIONS

Now your students will take some time to think about that subtopic in depth. Ask your students to think about questions they might have about that area of information. Challenge them to ask interesting questions, questions whose answers will be most exciting or entertaining to most people. For example, rather than asking the question, "Who does the laundry?" your students might ask the question "How do families work together to do housework?" Make sure questions are open ended and start with the journalistic question words (who, what, where, when, why, how) rather than being yes/no questions.

You may want to have your students decide which questions are interesting and which aren't once they get the hang of the activity. Then, write these questions in the box under the appropriate circle.

5 DECIDE ON SUB-TOPICS

Now, ask your students to think about other areas of information they might like to learn about the main topic. You might throw out the question "What other aspects of the topic might you like to learn?" Let your students choose the subtopics that will complete the other five circles in the diagram. They will also make a list of interesting questions for each of these areas.

6 STUDENTS QUESTION

Now that your students understand how to fill out the bubble map, have them work with a partner or in groups of three to list interesting questions for a second subtopic. After they have had enough time to work, bring the class back together and let students share their questions. You can then list these questions in your model. Let your students work independently to write questions for all of the subtopics, encouraging them to make sure their questions are interesting and that they start with the journalistic questions.

7 THE PAYOFF

Now that your students have some interesting questions in mind and have already done quite a bit of thinking about the topic, they are finally ready to read today's selection! As they read, they will know what type of information they are looking for. Not only that, they will be able to organize that information and their own thoughts as they read. They can even take notes on the bubble diagram and then convert those notes to an outline.

WHEN YOU USE A BUBBLE MAP TO PREPARE YOUR STUDENTS TO TACKLE A NONFICTION READING SELECTION, YOU WILL NOTICE THEIR READING COMPREHENSION INCREASES.

They will be better prepared to understand and remember the content that they read, and they will have a clear mental organization of that information. From here, the options are limitless. You may want your students to do further research to answer questions that the selection did not address. You may want them to write a summary of what they read or what they learned. You may have them discuss with a classmate the most interesting thing they learned from the piece. Ultimately, it comes down to this. When you give students some preparation before reading, the positive effects appear in each of your follow up activities.

Get Them Ready to Get It: Preparing for Reading Comprehension

- Did you understand what you read?

- Yes.

- What did the article say?

- I don't know.

Unfortunately, this conversation is far too common in the ESL classroom. For whatever reason, and there are many, students fail to understand a reading passage and are unwilling to admit it. It can be frustrating for teachers and students alike. We may not be able to change how students will answer our questions, but we can help them increase their reading comprehension with a simple prereading activity.

HOW TO HELP STUDENTS INCREASE THEIR READING COMPREHENSION

1 MAKING CONNECTIONS

Helping ESL students increase their reading comprehension starts by making connections to what they already know. In technical terms, this is called activating the schemata. In practical terms, it just means bringing what they already know to the forefront of their minds so they can anchor the new material to what they currently know. For example, if you tried to memorize a list of groceries you need to pick up, you might not have much success. However, if you know that you need bread to feed the ducks when you go to the park, water to take on your walk there and a cake to have for the party later that afternoon, you might have a better chance of remembering what you need. You are connecting your grocery list to the schedule you already have established in your mind. Your ESL students will have better understanding of the text that they read when they can make similar connections to what they already know or have experienced. How do you do that? Get them thinking about the topic at hand before you have them read.

2 JUST ASK

You do not have to use a tricky or subversive means to figure out what your students already know about a particular topic, just ask them. The most straightforward way for your students to organize

what they already know is in a K/W/L chart. If you have never used one before, it is a simple, three column list labeled Know, Want to Know, and Learned. As a class, in small groups or individually, ask students to fill in the first column of the chart. For example, if your students were preparing to read an article on American football, ask them what they already know about the sport. On the board, you would list the facts as they give them to you. "It's played in the U.S. It uses an oval ball. Men run into each other. It is a professional sport." Some students' responses might jog other students' memories. You would continue with the exercise until no one had anything new to add to the list.

3 THEY ASK

Then, you move on to the second column, what you want to know. Ask students what questions they would like to have answered about the topic. If it were football, they might want to know why the ball is shaped the way it is, what the different positions are on the team, or how a team scores. Continue brainstorming this list until there are no more questions from the class. Through this activity, your students will see that they have more to learn about the topic at hand, and it may raise their curiosity and motivate them to engage more with what they read.

4 EVERYONE LEARNS

At this point, you would introduce the reading material to your students. After they have completed the reading, they would move to the last column of the chart. Here they would list the facts that they learned from the reading. Some facts may answer questions in the class noted in column two, but they do not have to. The point is that your students will remember the new facts that they learned because they have linked them to what they already know about the subject. Not only that, they will have confidence that they can understand a complex topic and make headway as they learn even if they are reading in a second language.

5 SORTING

Sorting is another great way of getting students engaged in material that they will read about. The most simple

sorting activity uses important vocabulary from the reading. Rather than just going through a list of new words to prepare your students, write each important word from the text on an index card. Your words should include both new vocabulary as well as words with which your students are already familiar. You will need one set of the same cards for each group of 3 to 4 students. Once students have the cards, ask them to sort the cards in a way that seems logical to them. Encourage them that there is no wrong way to sort their cards, but they will need to explain their reasoning behind the sort. Once each group has finished sorting their cards, give them an example of how you sorted the same group of words.

For example, if you were going to read about football, you might give your students words such as field goal, quarter back, lineman, coach, score, field, players, run, throw and defense. Then you could show your class your sorting technique which groups people (player, coach, quarterback, lineman) and actions performed in the game (throw, run, score). It is okay if students are unable to fit some words into their sort (field goal, field, defense in this example). Simply explain that you will need to fit these words into your sort after reading the material.

6 SORTING FICTION

If your students will be reading a fictional piece, you may want to have them sort with a different strategy. Still give your students the important pieces of vocabulary in the reading, but then ask them to sort those words into these categories: character, setting, conflict and resolution. Once students have sorted the words, ask them to predict what might happen in the story. If you like, you may want them to write out their predictions or have them share the predictions with a partner.

SORTING AND K/W/L CHARTS ARE JUST TWO SIMPLE GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS YOU CAN USE WITH YOUR ESL STUDENTS TO GET THEM THINKING BEFORE INTRODUCING A TEXT FOR THEM TO READ. When you start by getting kids thinking rather than just jumping into the material, your students will be more successful readers and retain more information than they would otherwise.

4 No Stress Methods for Assessing Reading Comprehension

AT FIRST GLANCE, READING COMPREHENSION SEEMS SIMPLE. DID THE READER UNDERSTAND THE WORDS ON THE PAGE? IN REALITY, THOUGH, READING COMPREHENSION IS SO MUCH MORE.

It depends on not only language ability – the stuff we ESL teachers love to dream about – but also experience and intelligence. Along with that, vocabulary, genre and personal interest can also play a part in how much a reader understands. All of this goes to say that reading comprehension is not as cut and dry as educators may once have thought. All these pieces work together to determine just how much of a text a reader “gets”, and when limited English proficiency plays into the equation, reading comprehension can be downright complicated. The good news is that there are ways to assess ESL and LEP students that depend less on language skills and look more at overall understanding.

HOW TO ASSESS READING COMPREHENSION IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM: 4 NO STRESS METHODS

1 TALK AMONGST YOURSELVES

Researchers have argued that conversation, or discourse, is truly the basic unit of communication rather than isolated words and syntactic structures. With this in mind, you may be able to get a better feel for how much of a passage your students have understood when they have a discussion about that passage. By observing what your students say about what they have read and not relying on multiple choice answers to determine what they know, you may get a more holistic read on how much they have really understood from the passage. During discussion, your students will also have a chance to present what they did understand from the passage rather than creating anxiety over what they did not understand in what they read. To do this

type of reading assessment, put your students in pairs or groups of three, and ask the groups to talk about the passage that they read. What information was presented? Why was the information useful or not? What can you do with the information you read? How can you apply it to your life? Vary the questions depending on what type of passage your students read. The listen in on the conversations to see if students discuss the passages appropriately. You may want to use a rubric for grading purposes.

2 PUT THEM TO WORK

Another way to check your students' comprehension without relying on linguistic feedback is to set practical applications that use the information they have read. In simple terms, this means have them do something with what they read. This type of assessment may be particularly useful for nonfiction reading passages. You can give your students a series of instructions, written in paragraph form or list form, and have them follow those directions. Experiments, art projects, assembly instructions and other similar processes can all be used with your ESL students depending on what they read. Watch to see if your students can complete the task outlined in the reading. Not only will this process give you a measure of reading comprehension, it will also require your students to use higher order thinking skills with the information they read!

3 TELLING THEIR OWN STORIES

ESL students, like all other language users, have a larger receptive vocabulary than productive vocabulary. This means that we all understand more language than we can produce verbally or written. To help your students around this production barrier and check their comprehension in the process, have them produce nonlinguistic responses to questions about the material they read. You can do this by using puppets, drawings, or other

nonverbal means. Another option is to have your students retell the story. Again, use pictures, puppets or other nonverbal means. When you assess your students' comprehension, look that they include important elements of the story such as setting, character, problem, resolution, and ending.

4 ASSESS ACROSS PASSAGES

Because an isolated reading passage does not take into account many of the nonlinguistic factors influencing reading comprehension, assessments across passages may provide a better read on students' comprehension abilities. To look at the improvement your students achieve over the course of a unit, semester or year, you may want to use the improvement in reading comprehension rather than the raw score on one passage. Choose two similar passages – in difficulty level, subject and genre – and write the same number of comprehension questions for each passage. Give one passage with its questions to your students at the beginning of the grading period. Then at the end of the grading period, give your students the second passage and its questions. Use the improvement between the first and second tests to get a better idea of how much your students have learned. By using two separate passages, you reduce the influence personal interest, genre and experience have on your students' test results.

ASSESSING READING COMPREHENSION IN ESL STUDENTS CAN BE DIFFICULT TO SAY THE LEAST.

When you make intentional choices, though, to look beyond your students' words to what they really know and understand, you might get a bigger and better picture of what they are capable of. Try one of these or a similar assessment method the next time you test reading comprehension in your students. They may find the process less stressful, and you may find the results more reliable.

Keep Them Involved:

10 Active Reading Strategies

ONE OF THE PROBLEMS OF A READING CLASS IS THE TENDENCY FOR STUDENTS TO BE PASSIVE.

Face it, sitting by yourself and reading silently can be really boring, no matter how interesting the piece. And how, after all, does the teacher know most of the time students are actually reading the assigned passage until it comes time for comprehension questions, which may very well be at the end of the class time, depending on the length of the reading? How do you know students are even awake? (It's not uncommon during "silent reading" to have truly silent students, snoozing behind their texts.) Here are some ways to avoid that pitfall.

TRY THESE TOP 10 ACTIVE READING STRATEGIES WITH YOUR CLASS

1 CALL ON STUDENTS TO READ ALOUD

Calling on students randomly to read a part of the instruction aloud is a perennial method, and for a reason—it is very effective in keeping students involved in the lesson, as they are more likely to listen to a peer read aloud, and stay aware of where the class is in the reading, in the event of being called on.

2 READ ALOUD IN GROUPS

Assign students to groups and have them read to each other. This is also very valuable in keeping a focus on the reading while being less intimidating than reading in front of the whole class. Using this method, students often stop during the passage to ask each other questions without being prompted. The teacher can circulate and provide additional help.

3 THE TEACHER READS ALOUD

Some teachers, particularly teachers of students at the beginning levels of language learning, are reluctant to have students read aloud. The teacher can then fulfill this role, and, especially if reading dramatically, varying intonation, and using gestures, can keep students as involved as if they were reading themselves. Students appreciate this method

also because they can hear the correct pronunciation of words and sentence intonation. Also the teacher can pause frequently so the class can reflect or ask questions.

4 HAVE STUDENTS ACT OUT PORTIONS AFTER READING

This works especially well for narrative works—putting students in groups to act out a scene from in the reading can be very effective for increasing comprehension: seeing the piece acted out, or taking part in acting it out, makes the static words on the page come to life. Also, if you tell students they are going to be acting out the piece after reading it, they become more motivated to read and understand the piece.

5 QUICK WRITE BEFORE AND AFTER

Ask students to write for several minutes on the topic of the reading at the start of class: write what you think about police use of force, for example, before reading the classic Orwell essay "Shooting an Elephant," in which Orwell writes about his experience as a British police officer in Burma, when it was part of the British Empire, and how he was forced into shooting an elephant when he didn't want to, to uphold his tough image. Then have them read the essay and write what they think now about the use of force. How do students feel about the British officer and how he acted? Has their view on the use of force changed? Why or why not?

6 ADOPT WORD

Select three new words from the passage and learn about them. Learn their definition, parts of speech, synonyms, antonyms, write sentences with them, etc. Have students write the information on the index cards: the word on one side, the analysis on the other. Have them come to class prepared to share their words. Collect and shuffle the cards and redistribute. Students should learn their peers' words and teach them to another group. Spend 15 minutes on the words for a week and test on students at the end.

7 REWRITE FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Tell the story from another viewpoint. Again using George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant," have students rewrite the story from the viewpoint of one the Burmese. How do you feel about the British officer and how he acted?

8 REWRITE THE ENDING

What do you think about how Orwell acted? Could this incident have ended any other way? Have students discuss in groups, come up with alternate solutions (walking away, leading the elephant away, electing someone else to lead away the elephant, contacting its owner, etc.), and rewrite Orwell's ending.

9 ANALYZE

Analyze the essay: take apart the argument the writer makes and analyze how well he or she proves the main claim. In "The Right to Arms," Abbey in essence says the Second Amendment, the right to bear arms, is necessary in a democracy. This is his main claim: that is, is that, in a democracy with free citizens, weapons are necessary to protect freedoms against government encroachment on those freedoms. On what assumptions is this claim resting? Do you think he supports his claim well? Why or why not?

10 ARGUE FROM THE OPPOSING VIEW

What are some arguments against the right to bear arms? Take a stand and argue against Abbey. It doesn't matter if you actually agree with him. Many times lawyers, for example, are asked to argue for or against something they don't actually believe, or employees for a company may have to promote a product they don't necessarily support. Then have a short debate with a person or team representing each side. The rest of the class will then vote for or against.

SO DOES READING CLASS HAVE TO BE BORING? ABSOLUTELY NOT! These are just a few ways to keep students interested, active and involved.

Reading Stronger, Faster, Better:

5 Activities for Teaching Reading

READING IS PARAMOUNT TO LANGUAGE LEARNING, YET, MUCH TO THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF TEACHERS, IT CAN BE A DIFFICULT SKILL TO TEACH.

How do you teach students to become better readers, especially with academic texts? As a teacher, you can arm students with specific reading strategies that will help students navigate and comprehend any given text.

TRY THESE 5 ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING READING STRATEGIES

1 SCANNING

One of the most essential reading skills is scanning for specific information. By training students to scan the page to look for key words, they learn to group specific letters together and quickly identify words, thus improving their fluency over time. Scanning is also a critical test-taking skill that allows students to read questions carefully and know how to look back in the text quickly to find the answer.

Activities: A good scanning activity is a “running race.” To do this activity, prepare 9 or 10 questions about the details of a text: these questions should not be subjective but have one clear objective answer. This activity can work both before students read the text or as a review activity when students have finished the reading. Put students into pairs with each student having a copy of the text in front of them and make enough copies of the questions for each pair. Cut the questions so they are in strips of paper, and give each pair question number one only. When you tell students to start, they should race to find the correct answer to the first question, and then one partner should run their written answer to your desk to show you. If the student is correct, give them question number two, and so on until a group has answered all of the questions correctly. This activity works well

with any text but can be especially challenging if you give students the classifieds section of the newspaper. For more advanced students, you can mix-up the order of your questions so that they do not follow in order with the text.

Another scanning activity is to do a “find the word” race. With the text in front of them, write down a word on the board that only occurs once in the text. When students find the word, they should stand up. Wait until all students are standing to have the first student point out the sentence that the word is in. A more challenging alternative is to only say the word aloud without writing it down. This is a good way to pre-teach vocabulary by drawing students’ attention to these words and discussing the meaning of these words. This activity also works as a way to preview the text as it can lead to a discussion of what the students believe the story will be about based on the words you select from the text.

2 SKIMMING

Skimming is an essential skill because it previews the text for the learner. Just like knowing the topic of a conversation beforehand helps us be better listeners, knowing the main idea of a text is extremely beneficial before students begin to read closely. A general understanding of the broad topic will prepare them to read for understanding and allow them to read faster.

Activity: Have skimming activities where you copy the text, blocking out everything but the title, pictures, first lines of each paragraph, and the last paragraph. From this information, get your students to identify the main idea and why the author is writing this story. Have a discussion about what they already know about the text and what they think they will learn in the details.

3 MAIN IDEA

Main idea is one of the most difficult skills for students because it’s

one of the only test questions where the answer can’t always be found in an exact line within the text. Students need to be able to comprehend an entire text and then decide what is the big picture idea. While the skimming strategy described above helps students to determine the main idea before reading, the main idea strategy is for students to understand the “big picture” after reading the text.

Activities: Give students the “6W questions” to ask about the author’s purpose after reading an entire text. Who is writing this text and who did the author want to read this text? What is the author saying? Why is the author saying this? When did the author write this story? Where does this story take place? How did the author write this story? By getting the basics of the author’s purpose, we can more easily understand what the main idea is.

Alternatively, you can try the main idea builder after reading a text in its entirety. Ask students to close their books and tell you what this article is about in one word. For example, if we had just read a story about the ancient Mayan civilization and some of their customs, the one word response would be “The Mayans.” After giving you one word, then ask them to put more description on that one word, such as “Mayan civilizations.” Slowly add onto your description one or two words at a time until you get a full, complex sentence that highlights the main idea of the story. An alternative to this activity is to have students close their books, and then describe their article to a partner, but they must pretend that their partner has never read the story. You can also have students write a letter to their family member describing the story to them.

Another activity that emphasizes main idea is outlining. Give students a blank outline form that asks them to fill in the author’s thesis, main points, details, and examples. If the text you’re working with doesn’t lend itself well to

the rigid structure of an outline, have students write down one sentence for each paragraph that expresses the main idea that paragraph. When they are finished, they should be able to put their main idea sentences for each paragraph together to find the main idea of the whole story.

4 CONTEXT CLUES

Many times students are too reliant on their dictionaries - they use their dictionaries every time they encounter an unfamiliar word which disrupts reading fluency and sentence comprehension. A better and more realistic approach to help them master unknown words is discovering meaning through context. Context clues can be found in other words nearby and also from the grammatical structure of the sentence.

Activity: Choose a made-up word (for example, noubit) and use it in many different contextual sentences, and ask students to determine the meaning of this non-word. Keep the same made-up word for each sentence, but use appropriate word endings to illustrate the change in part of speech (i.e. noubits, noubiting, nubition, nubitous, noubitously, etc.). Using the same non-word throughout the exercise will prevent them from relying on their dictionaries while also keeping them from thinking that this word is a real word. Your sentences should be rich with context so that students can determine the meaning, for example "The invention of the car has made transportation much easier. In the past, people had to use noubits to get around which took a long time." Emphasize to the students that it's not always necessary to get the exact, precise meaning of the word. For example, in the above sentence, "noubits" could be horses, bicycles, or feet, but any of those meanings will still allow them to comprehend the importance of the invention of the car. As long as students can understand the meaning of the sentence, that will be enough for them to finish reading, and they can look up the specific word in their dictionaries later. Also, some of your sentences should include grammatical clues, such as appositives, for example, "The task was so noubitous, or strenuous, for the students." Take time to go over each question as a class so that you can model for your students how to identify and effective-

ly use these context clues.

5 INFERENCE

Like main idea, inferences can't be found directly in the lines of the text - you must teach your students to read between the lines. Being good at making inferences relies a lot on critical thinking skills which can be a difficult thing to teach.

Activity: Using riddles with your students is a good way to illustrate the importance of inference. Start with something simple like, "I love my job. I go to the hospital everyday, and I take care of my patients. What am I?" Students should easily be able to identify the description of a doctor/nurse. Ask them how they knew that when you never explicitly stated what your job was. Similar to the context clues example above, students may have similar but different answers, such as a doctor and a nurse. Many times we won't be able to identify exactly what the author is inferring, but if we can determine something that retains the main meaning, we can still understand the text appropriately. As students progress, give more challenging riddles.

Another activity to do is to find short mystery stories or "whodunit" stories. The very old book series Encyclopedia Brown works great for this reading skill, and there are countless others to be found on the web. These activities will teach your students close reading skills and force them to think critically about what is both in and not in the text, thus helping them become better at inferences.

SKIMMING, SCANNING, MAIN IDEA, CONTEXT CLUES, AND MAKING INFERENCES ARE THE FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS NECESSARY TO DEVELOP YOUR STUDENTS AS STRONG READERS.

Model and practice these skills with your students regularly and watch over time how they will be reading stronger, better, and faster!

3 Simple Strategies for Aiding Reading Comprehension

READING CAN BE AN INTIMIDATING PIECE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PUZZLE. LARGE PAGES DENSELY FILLED WITH WORDS CAN TURN STUDENTS OFF BEFORE THEY EVEN READ A LINE.

You can help your students and their attitudes towards reading with any of these simple strategies aimed at aiding reading comprehension.

SLOW DOWN & PREDICT

Most of the time when we read, we start at the beginning and make our way to the end. We may then think about what the author is trying to say to the reader, or we may think about how we feel about the writer's assertions. When a student is reading in a second language, like your ESL learners are, an entire text is often too much to digest in one dose. A simple way around this is to give your students a moment to think about what they are reading as they work their way through the material.

1 STOP & THINK

Whether you read the material to them, they read in a partner setting or they read independently, pause one third to one half of the way through the text and ask students to think. Use a prompting question, one that is open ended to get them thinking creatively. For example, if your students were reading a fictional piece, you may have them stop at the climax of the piece. Then ask them to think about how the main character might solve his or her problem. For a nonfiction piece, ask them to identify causes or effects for a particular situation (e.g. what causes reality television to be so popular) that relates to what they are reading.

Give them a few minutes to formulate their ideas. At this point, they may be thinking in their native languages or they may be thinking in English. Either way is fine, as long as students are digesting what they have read and

thinking about the next step in the plot.

2 SHARE YOUR IDEAS

Now, have your students share their ideas with a partner. They will need to speak in English at this point, especially if you have a multicultural classroom. When they do, they will convert the ideas that may have been abstract or articulated in their first language into logical English sentences. Partners can ask questions for clarification, and your students may decide to work together to create one larger answer to the question. They will also be getting conversation practice when they do, and that is always the goal for communicative language instruction.

3 SHARE WITH THE CLASS

As a final step, have your students share their ideas with the class. Since they have practiced this idea sharing with their partners, they should have confidence to express themselves. This will give them additional conversation practice, and it will give them additional practice speaking publicly.

TEACHER THINK

Another way you can help your students increase their reading comprehension is by showing them how you read something. Taking a short passage, read aloud to your students, but as you do, take time to share your own thoughts as you read. When your students hear the questions you pose to yourself and the analysis you make as you read, they will begin to model their own thought patterns while reading after yours. For example, if you were demonstrating a teacher think as you read "Jack and Jill" it might sound something like this. (*Italics are your thoughts spoken aloud to your students.*)

Jack and Jill went up the hill. I wonder how steep the hill is, and if they are going to be safe. To fetch a pail of water. So they are carrying something

as they go, and they've got to bring this water back down. It is probably going to be heavy if the bucket is full. Jack fell down and broke his crown. Here is where he gets hurt. I wonder if he had the water already or if he is just clumsy. What is Jill going to do? And Jill came tumbling after. She is just like him. She should have known to be more careful after he fell, unless she didn't see what happened to him. I still don't know much about the hill itself, but it must have been somewhat dangerous."

TANGIBLE READING

Though this method takes somewhat more preparation than the other two, it is valuable for the ESL student as she strives to understand the text that she reads. Having tangible objects that relate to the reading will give your students a sensory experience of the piece. If you are reading a fictional piece, bring in objects that appear in the story. For example, if you are reading "Jack and Jill" you could bring in a bucket, or take your students to a large hill to read the story. If you are reading a nonfiction piece, giving your students objects that relate to the reading and allowing them to touch and experience these items will increase their overall understanding of what they read. If you were going to read a piece on different types of weather, you could bring in a thermometer, a barometer or a weather map. Not only will these items give your students nonlinguistic information about the subject, they will help her connect the things she reads to tangible experiences she has had.

READING DOES NOT HAVE TO BE A BIG MYSTERY FOR YOUR ESL STUDENTS.

With these simple strategies, you can increase their reading comprehension, their love for books, and their self confidence in their English abilities.

Teaching Discussion in the Reading Class

Last semester in my reading class, we were discussing the session's reading, Kate Chopin's "Story of an Hour," her classic short story about the joy a young woman feels on hearing the news of her husband's death — not that she had hated him - she had just felt shackled by matrimony, and now she felt free.

At the end of the story, when her husband unexpectedly returned home, the news of his death a mistake, the woman dies — "of a joy that kills." In discussing the story, I went over some of its themes and the common perspectives on those themes — that women in the story's time, the mid-nineteenth century, were often oppressed by marriage, and that widowhood in fact could give a woman a certain amount of freedom and status she wouldn't have enjoyed as a married woman.

After class, a young student came up to me and expressed her shock that a woman would feel joy on her husband's death. And I agreed with her that it was pretty shocking, and the author may have intended that, and so forth. We talked some more about the story and came to some agreement that the character was probably feeling mixed emotions on her husband's "death." As she was leaving, the young woman said "So I can see this differently from you?" The question surprised me, and I responded that not only could she do that, she should, that it was encouraged for students to form their own opinions on course material. The incident brought home for me that often college students, especially young ones, really aren't used to the process of evaluating information, drawing conclusions, and forming some opinion on that information because they have often come from school systems where they are just given information and are expected to accept it without evaluation. If this is true of students raised in the United States, a culture that promotes freedom of thought and expression, it would be even more true for those not

from such a culture.

ISSUES IN TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING FOR DISCUSSION

Often instructors will avoid teaching this process of developing one's own stance on material through critical discussion because it is a difficult process, time consuming, and somewhat messy. A class engaged in heated exchange of ideas is not always an orderly class. In addition, it does take time and effort, as students do not develop critical thinking and speaking skills overnight and may well be resistant to a process they are not used to. However, teaching this process is worth the time and effort invested as it pays off large dividends in the quality of student discussion, which almost inevitably carry over to writing skills as well, and essays become more thoughtful and developed.

On the other hand, students who have not learned the process of an academic exchange have discussions that are quiet, easy, short—and boring. Everyone agrees with each other, answers the discussion questions, and then pronounces "We're done!" as they, too, would just as soon avoid the difficulty of a more critical examination of the issues.

Following are steps to improve the quality of your class discussions to avoid the "We-all-agree-and-we're-done" phenomenon.

KEYS TO HAVING SUCCESSFUL DISCUSSIONS IN A READING CLASS

1 TEACH DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FACT AND OPINION

Sometimes students fail to go much beyond discussion of the facts of a story—"The family lived in New Orleans a long time ago"—because they

have a basic confusion of the difference between a fact and an opinion. Address this confusion by modeling the difference between fact and opinion with examples such as "The story is set in New Orleans" and "New Orleans is an appropriate setting because of its long and colorful history."

Then have students label a series of such statements as either "fact" or "opinion" and go over as a class. You may follow this up by having students take "fact" statements—"At the story's writing, women did not yet have the vote in the U.S."—and turning them into opinions.

2 TEACH THE RULES OF DISCUSSION

Students often have flat, short, and boring discussions because they don't know the rules of an academic discussion. Often students are good at agreeing with each other but don't know how to politely disagree or even that this is possible. A good discussion, however, almost demands disagreement—a discussion in which everyone agrees is not really an academic discussion but merely a conversation. Learning this, that discussion requires disagreement, is a major hurdle.

Therefore, learning some basic language like "Well, I understand your point, but I disagree, and here's why" is important. Finally, students need to learn they must contribute to a discussion and advance it: they can't just say "I agree with Jorge," and be done. They must elaborate on why they agree because the other students -- having been trained to -- will ask them why. Finally, the teacher will not give them points for just agreeing.

3 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS THAT GO BEYOND BASIC INFORMATION

Sometimes, of course, the teacher is at fault for boring discussions. If students are given "discussion ques-

tions” such as “Who are the main characters?” and “Where is the story set?” then of course students will have discussions that stay on a superficial, factual level. However, a question like “How does the setting contribute to, or fail to contribute to, the story?” will spark more disagreement and discussion.

4 INTRODUCE AN OPPOSING POINT OF VIEW

If, after the above steps, the students continue to insist “We all agree” during discussions, the teacher can himself take the opposing view: “I think the main character’s reaction to her husband’s death is perfectly understandable,” forcing the students to argue that stance with the teacher because they can’t claim, if they are opposing views, that they agree with each other and also agree with the teacher: they’re forced into defending their view.

5 HAVE STUDENTS DEVELOP OWN DISCUSSION POINTS

After students have had some practice with “real” discussions that go beyond the surface, have them start developing their own discussion points. After doing a reading, students can work together to come up with points they’d like to go over in discussion. Then for the next session, they should come prepared to discuss those points.

DOES AN ESL TEACHER HAVE TO RESIGN HERSELF TO BORING DISCUSSIONS IN THE READING CLASS IN WHICH STUDENTS EITHER DON’T TALK AT ALL OR JUST AGREE WITH EACH OTHER? ABSOLUTELY NOT!

With some careful training, students can hold engaging discussions that will prepare them to write better and succeed in their college lives.

10 Ways to Check Reading Comprehension

THE PROCESS OF READING, BEING ABLE TO CONNECT SEMANTIC INPUT WITH THE LETTERS ON THE PAGE, DOES NOT MEAN MUCH IF LANGUAGE LEARNERS CANNOT UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY HAVE READ.

The following exercises, modified from Sherrill Flora's Everyone Reads! will give you and your students some fun ways to make sure the meaning came through the words on the page.

TRY THESE 10 GREAT WAYS TO CHECK READING COMPREHENSION

1 GRAB BAG GOODIES

After your students have read a story, check their comprehension with this sequencing activity. Write the major points of the story on note cards, put those cards into a grab bag, and shake it up. Each member of a small group should then pull one of the cards from the bag and place in its correct place in a sequence. Once group members have put all the cards in their correct place in the timeline, ask the rest of the class to check if the sequencing is correct. If it is, the group should then retell the story using the cards.

2 THE FUNNY PAPERS

Blank comic panels are a great resource for the reading teacher. Once your students have finished a story selection, give each person a blank comic page in which to retell the story. (You can find dozens of empty templates online.) Your students should then retell the major events in the story by filling in the empty blocks with pictures and dialogue (when appropriate). Once students are finished, you can display the comics on a bulletin board or compile them into a book for students to read during independent reading time. You will know if they understood what they read, and they will enjoy expressing their comprehension in a creative way!

3 GOOD BOOK GLIMPSE

Your students may enjoy a different creative expression of a book they have recently finished reading, and their classmates may enjoy seeing it as well. So rather than a book report, try this activity with your ESL students. Ask each person to bring in a shoebox for the activity. She should then choose a favorite scene from the book and illustrate it on a piece of paper the same size as a small inside panel of the shoebox. (You can also have your student illustrate the scene and then trim it to fit on the short side of the box.) Once she is done with the illustration, she should glue the picture inside the box, and you should cut a small hole on the opposite side of the box. When she looks through the hole, she sees the illustration. She can also attach items inside the box to give a 3D effect for the viewer. On the top of the box, have each student create an original book cover that includes the title and author of the book she read.

If you keep a collection of these peep boxes in a corner of your classroom, you may find that your students are inspired to read the books that their classmates have also read, and then he can create his own peep box on that book for the book box collection.

4 FAN FICTION

Reading a good story can easily cross over into a writing activity for your ESL students. When your students find a character they love in something you have read, ask them to write about the further adventures of that character. This will not only help them understand what they read, it will give them practice using vocabulary specific to that character found in the piece your class read.

You can compile all these short fan fiction pieces into a book for the rest of the class to read at their leisure during independent reading time.

5 BIG BOOKS

If your students are a fan of big books, this comprehension activity will be perfect for them. As a class, create your own big book for a story you have just read. Prepare 5-8 pieces of poster board for the book and write a description at the bottom of each page retelling each piece of the story. Working in groups, have your students illustrate what is described at the bottom of the page. Once all the pictures are complete, let your students decide what order they should appear in the book. Then secure the pages, read the book back to your class and make it available to your students during independent reading time.

6 OUTSTANDING MOMENTS

Let your students relive their favorite moments from a story you have read with this activity. Ask a student to share his or her favorite moment from the reading selection, and have him write it on a notecard or write it on one yourself. Ask another student and then another to do the same. When you have about a dozen cards completed, ask your students to organize them in any way that is logical. There may be several organizations which are possible.

7 MAP IT OUT

After finishing a fictional selection, ask your students to create a map of the setting for the story or book. They can either draw the setting or create a three dimensional model of it using cardboard cutouts. Have your students include any characters in the map as well.

8 CLASS VOTING

Give each of your students two notecards and have him write true on one and false on the other. Then, read aloud a statement about the selection your class read. Make sure some of your statements are true and others are false. Each person should hold up his vote and his card after you read

each statement. Have students check each other to make sure all agree. For the false statements, ask your students what they would need to do to make them true.

9 ACT OUT

Encourage your students to act out in class with this post reading activity. Ask individuals or groups of students to pose as the characters in the story in a particular scene. Then, take a photo of your students. After printing the pictures out, bring them to class the next day and ask your students to explain what is happening in the book at the moment they are acting out!

10 CAST THE CHARACTERS

After reading a selection as a class, ask pairs of students to write a description of each of the characters in detail. Then, have the pair decide which of their classmates is most like the characters in the story. If you like, you may want to have the students then reenact parts of the story.

READING IS ONLY THE START OF WHAT READING CLASS IS ALL ABOUT. MAKING SURE YOUR STUDENTS UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY HAVE READ IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS THE WORD-BY-WORD PROCESS.

Hopefully these comprehension exercises will inspire you and your students not only to read but also to understand and then put that knowledge into practice.

Fable Time: Using and Writing

Fables in the ESL Classroom

Almost every culture of the world includes fables in its literature bank. These short stories using animals, forces of nature or plants and other inanimate objects are meant to teach us lessons that are universally applicable. Besides their moral value, fables can be useful in the ESL classroom because of their simplicity and their ability to draw the reader in regardless of culture. Here are some activities you can do with fables that will benefit your ESL students.

USING AND WRITING FABLES IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

1 ANIMALS IN THE MIDST

One characteristic of a fable is that it uses animal characters to portray human characteristics. Each particular animal will act in a human way. For example, the fox will be a crafty or sly animal. The lion will be a brave individual. Before reading any fables in your classroom, take some time as a class to brainstorm a list of animals and the characteristic for which they are best known. Encourage your students to notice if these characteristics apply across cultures or whether each culture views a particular animal in a different way. You may also want to talk about specific animals which will appear in the fable or fables you plan to read with your class. Ask each of your students to choose one of these animals which he or she thinks is most representative of himself or herself as a person and write a description of himself as that animal.

2 A MORAL TO THE STORY

Since the point of a fable is to teach a moral or a lesson to the reader, have your students start this activity by talking about what it means to give advice. In groups of three or four students, have your class discuss the following questions. What are some situations in which you might want advice? What are some situations in which you would not want advice from another person? What would you do if you wanted to give advice to a friend but he or she did not want any advice? How can you communicate your opinions without giving advice?

Explain to your class that a moral is a general truth or piece of advice that is generally true. Ask your class to think of stories they have read or heard that have a moral or give advice. Make a list on the board of these stories. Have groups of students then work together to make a list of lessons that they have learned or lessons that they have been taught using the list of stories on the board for inspiration. This would also be a good opportunity to introduce the concept of a proverb to your class since they are often the moral of a fable.

3 A CLASSIC TALE

One fable that many of your students may already know is the tale of the tortoise and the hare. In this story, the hare is so confident in his own abilities that he makes poor choices and ends up losing a footrace with the tortoise. Read this story to your class two times and then ask the following questions. Who are the characters in the story? What is the problem? How does the story end? What is the moral or lesson of the story? Now give your students a chance to retell the story. Have your class arrange their chairs in a circle. Start the story by telling one sentence in your own words. Have your students continue telling the story, one sentence and one person at a time, until you make it all the way around the circle. At logical points in the story, ask your students how the characters probably felt, and have your class make faces to show these feelings.

After your students have finished retelling the story, tell your students how stories or dramas were communicated in ancient Greece – through theater. Actors used masks of happy and sad faces to communicate the character's feelings to the audiences. Give your class a chance to make their own theater masks that they will use to retell the fable. Give each person two paper plates and two tongue depressors. Allow your students to decorate their masks – one happy and one sad - using whatever art supplies you have available and then tape a tongue depressor to each mask. Once all the masks are finished, get in your circle again and have your students retell the story. This time in-

stead of making faces to show how the characters feel, let your students hold up the appropriate mask. If desired, you can have your students decorate their masks even further to represent either of the main characters of the story.

4 A MODERN PERSPECTIVE

Though the morals that fables teach are universal, the stories through which those morals are taught do not necessarily correspond with life in the modern world. In this activity, your students will take a universal moral and apply it to a modern situation. Start by dividing your class into groups of five students, and assign one fable to each group. You can find hundreds of fables free online. One site where you can find these stories is aesopfables.com which has over 650 fables, some in audio files as well as text files. Have each group read their fable and then discuss how the story can be modified to portray a more modern or contemporary story. Working together, your students should rewrite the story in a modern way. After the group rewrites the story, give them some class time to practice two dramatic presentations of the story, one the original version and one the rewritten version. Have each group then perform their skits: one as the traditional story and the second as their modernized version. After each presentation, ask your class what the moral of the story was and how it was communicated in each version. Have a short discussion on the similarities and differences between the two versions. Then take a vote as to whether the class liked the traditional or the modernized version better.

BECAUSE FABLES ARE SHORT STORIES WITH UNIVERSALLY APPLICABLE MORALS, THEY ARE A GOOD WAY TO INCLUDE LITERATURE IN THE ESL CLASSROOM.

Your students can have fun learning, telling stories and acting out original tales that carry a deeper message. A bird in the hand may be worth two in the bush, but a fable in the classroom may be worth an entire volume in the library. Try one with your ESL class and you just might see how useful fables can be!

Once Upon a Time: Fun with Fairy Tales

ONCE UPON A TIME, A DEDICATED TEACHER WANTED HER STUDENTS TO EXCEL IN ENGLISH.

One day, she met a great wizard who needed her help. She gave him a peer evaluation and in return, he shared some fun activities with fairytales she could do with her English students. The teacher used these activities, and she and her class lived happily ever after.

HAVE FUN WITH FAIRY TALES IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

1 SET THE STAGE

Start your fairytale themed lesson with a few fairytales from around the world. You can use examples from the brothers Grimm (e.g. Cinderella or Hansel and Gretel) or something more contemporary like Misoso: Once Upon a Time Tales from Africa by Verna Aadema. Give your students an idea of the story's plot and characters, and then read it aloud to your class. See how high their listening comprehension was with a short true/false quiz or group discussion questions. After your students have answered the questions, read the story again and give them a chance to change their answers.

Once they have heard one or two examples of fairytales, discuss what the word fairytale means and the characteristics of a typical fairytale. Most will begin with "Once upon a time" and end with "and they lived happily ever after." Other qualities you should look for include that they are made up stories and they often teach a lesson to the reader or listener.

After your students understand the basics of a fairytale, take the discussion to a deeper level. Help your students understand that fairytales often portray a conflict between opposite types of people: good and evil, rich and poor, clever and mean. Other

characteristics often found in fairytales are help in a magical way and a happy ending for the main character.

If you have time and your students have the courage to do it, break your class into groups and give each group a well-known fairytale. Allow your students some time to plan a skit, and then have each group act out the fairytale in front of the class. This will give your students practice in their reading comprehension as well as their public speaking not to mention giving the rest of the class some free entertainment.

2 MAKE A PLAN

Now that your students understand what fairytales are and what elements they usually contain, have them start thinking about their own fairytales. If they were going to write an original fairytale, what would they say? Have each student create a story plan which outlines what his or her tale will be about. Your students should decide on good characters and bad characters that will play a role in the story. They should then determine the problem or conflict and the solution to the problem or the resolution. If your students are not familiar with these vocabulary terms, explain them before the brainstorming session.

Once each student has a plan in place, pair them together to review the plans with a classmate. If the other person has any questions or thinks a part of the story is unclear, let your students revise their plans before they sit down to write the whole story out.

3 WRITE ON

Now is the time for your students to use their plans to write their fairytales. They should follow the plan they have already laid out and make sure that the fairytale has all the elements of this type of story. Have them check for good and bad characters, a beginning, middle and end, magical help and a lesson for the reader. If your students are not at the proficien-

cy that they can write an original tale, have them retell a fairytale that they know, perhaps one from their native language. Either way, your students will get practice writing and communicating their ideas through the written word.

4 SHARE THE LESSON

Once the fairytales are written, give each student a chance to read his or her fairytale aloud to the class. After each presenter, have groups of students discuss what they liked about the story. Also, challenge them to look for the typical ingredients of a fairytale. Then have the groups compare and contrast the story to well-known fairytales. If you have younger students in your school, you may want to set up a reading date with another class so your students can read their fairytales to the younger students.

Finally, bind the stories your class has written into a large volume (you can use a three ring binder) with a fanciful cover. Title it "Once Upon an ESL Class" or another title that you prefer. Give each student the opportunity to illustrate his story and then make the book available to your students so they can read it during free reading time.

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE YOUNG TO ENJOY FAIRYTALES. NO MATTER WHAT AGE YOUR STUDENTS ARE, YOU CAN HAVE FUN WHILE PRACTICING LISTENING, SPEAKING, READING AND WRITING SKILLS ALL WITH LESSONS BASED ON FAIRYTALES AS YOUR STUDENTS LOOK AT SOME WELL-KNOWN STORIES AND THEN WRITE AND SHARE THEIR OWN.

Perhaps you will find that your class, too, will find a happily ever after!

Using Reader's Theatre To Spice Up The Reading Class

Reading is one of the most essential skills to teach language learners, but it can also be one of the skills students are least motivated to learn, especially low-proficiency students. Students who struggle with reading grow to resent reading time and avoid reading in English at all costs. Fortunately, it doesn't have to be this way.

Reader's theatre is a fantastic way to increase motivation for students of all ages. It's a reading strategy that drives students deeper into the text and gets them to read it multiple times. Students read a text, create a script based on the text, and then read it aloud with expressive voice, motions, and any other theatre elements you would like to include. The main benefits of this strategy are that it lowers students' affective filter by encouraging them to produce language in a non-threatening way, improves reading fluency through repeated exposure to the text, and increases their motivation by giving them a real purpose for reading. Reader's theatre requires no props and very minimal set-up: ideal for any teacher!

HOW TO USE READER'S THEATRE TO SPICE UP YOUR READING CLASS

1 BREAK STUDENTS INTO GROUPS

As with any collaborative learning activity, it's best if the groups are teacher-selected. Pair high-achieving students with lower-achieving students so that they can help encourage one another. Based on your knowledge of your students, try to put at least one enthusiastic or outgoing student in each group. This student will help to encourage the other shyer students come out of their shell while reading aloud.

2 CREATE A SCRIPT BASED ON AN APPROPRIATE TEXT

Choose a text that your students have been reading that would make a good script. It doesn't have to be the entire text - just a portion would be enough, especially for the first time you do the activity. If the texts you're reading with your students wouldn't make appropriate theatre

pieces, picture books are also ideal. Students of any level can be creative in coming up with a dialogue that uses vocabulary appropriate for their level. It might be helpful the first time you do this activity with your class if you write the script. This will allow students to focus on the expressive reading and give students a better idea of what reader's theatre is. The next time you do the activity, they will be better informed as to what a script should look like.

With your student groups, you can either have all of the groups do the same text or give them each a different text. If you give each group the same text, it can be interesting to see the different variety of scripts and approaches to the performance that your students come up with. You can also make it a competition to see who has the most creative performance. Alternatively, you can give each group a different text. This works best when you split up a longer text and have each group do different sections of the same novel or story.

3 MODEL

As the teacher, the students look to you for an example of what you expect from them. Before doing reader's theatre, read aloud to your students and model expressive reading. Demonstrate how to adjust your voice for different emotions, and how you can change your pronunciation and word stress to convey additional meaning.

4 MARK THE SCRIPTS

Show students how to annotate and make notes on their script for emotion, intonation, stress, and inflection. Go from group to group and help them with their first few lines and then allow them to practice doing it on their own. Marking the text encourages a deeper comprehension of the story by understanding the speaker's emotions and purpose.

5 PRACTICE, PRACTICE...

The primary objective of reader's theatre is not to turn your students into Oscar winners but to have them read a text again and again and again. This repeated exposure reinforces the vocabulary and sentence structure that

your students are learning. By frequently revisiting the text, students are also improving their reading fluency. By using reader's theatre, you are giving students a very clear purpose for reading: they are going to put on a performance. With this objective in mind, they are more highly motivated to continue reading a text even though they have read it many times before. Remind your students that they don't have to memorize their lines: that may happen incidentally, but their goal is to practice reading from the page.

6 OPTIONAL PROPS

Some of the best reader's theatre performances have been those where students simply sit on chairs in a row in front of the audience with nothing but their scripts. By limiting the visual aids, students must rely on their voices and expressive reading to convey the story's meaning to the audience. Students in the audience are also challenged to rely on their listening comprehension and vocabulary knowledge to understand the story. Depending on your time and resources, you can incorporate props into the performance. By correctly utilizing props, students are engaging the text on a deeper level and indicating a thorough knowledge of the story and character they are portraying.

7 PERFORM FOR AN AUDIENCE

Whenever possible, gather an audience for your students. Whether it's an administrator with a few spare minutes, another class that comes to visit, or the students from the other groups within your own class, having an audience gives the students additional motivation and purpose to do their best work.

REGARDLESS OF THE AGE OR PROFICIENCY LEVEL OR YOUR STUDENTS, YOUR CLASS CAN BENEFIT FROM READER'S THEATRE. The adaptability of reader's theatre makes it easy to modify the activity to fit any lesson plan time frame or context. After completing the activity with your students over time, you will see improvements in their reading fluency and comprehension skills. Most of all, it's a fun way to build a cooperative environment in your classroom while building students' reading proficiency.

Making Reading Work One on One: 5 Never Fail Tips

ONE ON ONE TEACHING CAN BE A VALUABLE EXPERIENCE TO ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE STUDENTS. WITH INDIVIDUALIZED ATTENTION, THEY CAN LEARN AT THEIR OWN PACES, GET INSTRUCTION SPECIFIC TO THEIR AREAS OF WEAKNESS, AND COVER MATERIAL TARGETED TO THEIR INTERESTS AND NEEDS.

Sometimes, though, one on one dynamics can be challenging. Students do not want their teachers to hover, but teachers want to make sure their students get the attention they deserve. This awkwardness can be especially challenging when teaching reading in an individualized setting. Still, it is possible to teach a great reading lesson even when you teach a class of one. Here are some tips to keep in mind when planning for and conducting an individual reading class.

MAKING READING WORK: 5 NEVER FAIL ONE ON ONE TIPS

1 WARMING UP

Before giving your student a text to read during your session, spend a few minutes talking about the general topic that the article or text covers. You may want to ask your student what he already knows or what he would like to know about the topic. Because you only have one student, you can tailor your material to his specific interests and aspirations. This will keep him engaged and interested in the material as well as give him something to say about the topic from the start. For lower level students, you may want to modify a selection from the newspaper or a magazine, or use a selection from a textbook. For more advanced students, try to bring in authentic English material rather than selections written specifically for ESL students. Doing so will better prepare your student for the language he will encounter once he has completed your ESL program. Your text should be challenging but not overwhelming or intimidating. Find the right balance, and for each student that balance will be in a slightly different place.

2 PREVIEWING VOCABULARY

Previewing vocabulary with your students serves 3 purposes. By reminding your student with topic specific vocabulary she already knows, you bring to mind ideas about the subject at hand. She remembers past experiences, and this will enable her to retain what she learns in her present class experience more easily. Secondly, by defining the preview vocabulary words she does not know, you aid her comprehension as she reads the text. Because her comprehension is higher, she feels confident and makes good emotional associations with the topic and learns better. Finally, by previewing vocabulary that the text presents, you give her some context for making predictions about what she will read.

Making predictions also helps aid in comprehension and language retention. So before you introduce your student to the text you plan to use, choose some topic specific vocabulary she will find in her reading as a preview. Doing so will aid her comprehension and retention as she reads.

3 READING

Generally speaking, you should not ask your student to read aloud once you give him the text. Asking a student to read aloud, especially on the first read through a new piece of literature, may cause your student to feel uncomfortable. Having the teacher hover and listen to every syllable can be almost paralyzing and could set your student up for failure. Instead, allow your student to read to himself, and you do the same. This way you can review the content of the text and prepare to answer any questions your student had with the reading. Anticipate any sections he may struggle with, and have him make notes as he reads of anything that he finds difficult to understand.

4 CHECKING COMPREHENSION

Checking comprehension after your

student has read the selection is important, but do not trust her to tell you what she may not have understood. When asked if they understood, students will generally answer yes, whether they did or not. So make sure your student understood what she read by having her retell the information given in the selection. This can be as simple as asking her to retell what she read. You may want to give her some guidance by allowing her to refer back to either the text itself or the vocabulary you used in your preview time. If you want to challenge her even further, ask her to apply the information from the reading to solve a problem or give direction in regards to a case study.

5 WORKING ON PRONUNCIATION

If you are teaching more than reading to your ESL student, you may want to use this one on one time to work on his pronunciation. No one else will be around to criticize, and you can target specific pronunciation issues for your student. To do so, ask him to read part of the selection aloud. When he encounters a troublesome series of words, have him follow your own example by repeating what you read.

Remember, when a student is struggling with pronouncing a multisyllabic word or phrase, start with the last syllable and have him repeat after you. Then add one syllable at a time and repeat, working backwards until he can pronounce the entire phrase correctly. Reading aloud can also offer a good opportunity to practice sentence inflection or reductions, which can be overlooked in pronunciation class.

BY TAKING NOTE OF THESE SIMPLE STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING READING ONE ON ONE, YOUR STUDENT CAN BENEFIT EACH AND EVERY TIME YOU MEET TOGETHER, BUT DO NOT LET IT STOP THERE.

These strategies can be modified for use in the traditional classroom, and your students will continue to thrive in their language learning.

10 Top Reasons to Teach with Nonfiction in the ESL Classroom

STORIES ARE GREAT. We love following our favorite characters through adventure after misadventure. We can imagine ourselves in a different setting, perhaps a different world when stories take us to imaginary places or locations across the globe. Since readers get so much entertainment value from reading fictional pieces, they may be our automatic choice in the ESL classroom. For those of us, though, who have realized the great benefits nonfiction has to offer, we may think twice before choosing fiction over nonfiction. Here are some benefits your students and you are getting.

HOW TO TEACH WITH NONFICTION

1 PERSONAL INTERESTS

No matter what age your English students are, nonfiction offers topics that tie into their personal interests. Younger children are naturally drawn to information about animals, cars and other topics while older students are fascinated with technology and music. Whether younger or older, your students can find nonfiction material to satisfy their curiosity and interest in their favorite topics. When your students are interested in reading about a given topic, they are more self motivated to read and fulfill that curiosity, and you can watch as their literacy levels rise as they do! Using nonfiction texts in your classroom ties into these personal interests and may even spark new passions in some of your students.

2 INCREASE VOCABULARY

Many ESL students unintentionally limit their vocabulary bank to words used in conversational settings. By using nonfiction in your ESL classroom, your students will expand their vocabularies in areas that do not necessarily come up in everyday conversation. Nonfiction will challenge your students, but it will also give them a broader vocabulary base, especially texts from the fields of science and social studies.

3 REAL LIFE CONNECTIONS

Many nonfiction books include photographs to illustrate the authors' points. Photographs can be a great aid to your students as they strive to understand English text. Photos offer more detail and a clearer depiction of the world around us

than do illustrations. When they are able to refer to photographs, your students will increase their comprehension level and make connections to the real world they see around them.

4 CURRICULUM DESIGN

One of the best curriculum strategies for ESL students follows a cyclical pattern. By introducing specific sets of vocabulary several different times during the year, your students will internalize that material better and retain it longer. Nonfiction lends itself perfectly to a cyclical curriculum because similar content and vocabulary can be used to introduce different and increasingly complex grammatical concepts. Because your students will be familiar with the information and vocabulary your nonfiction text offers, they will be freer to absorb more complex grammatical and linguistic concepts introduced through that content as the year goes on.

5 COMPREHENSION CLUES

Nonfiction has a lot to offer ESL students in the way of comprehension clues, too. Teaching your students how to read nonfiction elements like the index, glossary, table of contents, headings and subheadings will give them a head start once they begin reading the text itself. Teach your students to look at these items before they read the text and make predictions about what their reading will reveal. Also, point out photos, diagrams and captions and ask your students to predict what they might read. This will help prepare them to understand more before they tackle the text.

6 WRITING MODELS

While we sometimes ask our students to write fictional pieces, most of what we assign as writing projects results in nonfiction pieces. Reading and breaking down nonfiction text will give your students a model to follow as they write their own nonfiction essays, reports and compositions. When you read a nonfiction text in class, take time to look at the organization and point out to your students how the author places his information. Then challenge your students to employ that same model when they write their own pieces.

7 WRITING MATERIAL

Not only will reading nonfiction help your students know how to write, it will give them ideas of what to write about as well. When students are encouraged to pursue and research the topics that interest them, they will have more information to draw on when they write their own nonfiction pieces. Show your students how to use a writer's notebook to record ideas for future compositions, and encourage them to add to this notebook as they read about interesting topics.

8 HIGHER ORDER LEARNING

More and more, younger students are expected to go beyond the simple reporting of facts and use critical thinking to analyze what they read. Your students who read nonfiction will use higher order thinking skills as they read and analyze texts, and that will help become better learners. If your students take standardized tests, you can also be confident that those students who can think critically will perform better on standardized tests.

9 CULTURAL AWARENESS

Students who are new to the U.S. or whose lives at home do not reflect that of the typical U.S. student may have a difficult time relating to the main characters of fictional texts traditionally used in classrooms. Reading nonfiction eliminates the cultural barrier that fiction may place between internationals and main characters. When you use nonfiction in your classroom, your students may also develop a more global perspective on their lives and the lives of their fellow students. Likewise, you will have more opportunities to promote cultural acceptance and understanding among your students when you read about people and places all over the world.

10 PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Ultimately, giving your students plenty of practice reading nonfiction prepares them for their futures. 86% (!) of what adults read is nonfiction. Whether on the job or in the classroom, your students will be better prepared for the reading requirements of adulthood when they are well versed at reading nonfiction in your classroom.

10 Tips for Using Graphic Novels in the ESL Classroom

Comics are not just for little kids anymore. In fact, today's graphic novel can fill many useful roles in the modern ESL classroom. Their minimal text paired with interesting illustrations aid comprehension and give students who may not be able to read a novel the confidence that comes with useful language skills. With a little imagination, these illustrated series can become some of your most purposeful tools while getting your students excited about reading and writing!

TRY THESE 10 TIPS FOR USING GRAPHIC NOVELS IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

1

Because graphic novels have less text and more illustrations than a traditional novel, they can be a ready resource for getting your ESL students interested in reading in English. There will be less lengthy description and more focus on plot and dialogue because the amount of text is so limited. Your students will feel a sense of accomplishment when they finish a complete book even if it has significantly less pros than a traditional novel with the same number of pages.

2

Another advantage to working with graphic novels is the comprehension clues in the illustrations. The pictures will aid in comprehension, and your students will be more comfortable inferring the meaning of new vocabulary words. They will run to the dictionary less often and take steps to true language acquisition.

3

Reading the dialogue in graphic novels is also a fun way to get in some pronunciation and intonation practice. Have your students read the dialogue between characters on one or a few pages. In addition, because so much action happens on each page, the dialogue in graphic novels may supply a rare opportunity to talk about stress and volume in natural English speech.

4

Graphic novels can also be a natu-

ral place to connect the native culture of your students with their English language studies. Many popular graphic novels are translations from other languages, and these original pieces are often very popular with young people in foreign cultures. Your students may feel more comfortable with the material and the cultural implications of the story itself.

5

You can also find graphic novel interpretations of classic works of fiction that would otherwise be too difficult for your class to digest. Graphic novels are available for such classics as the Grimm brothers' fairy tales, *Frankenstein*, *Moby Dick* and countless others. The material is even better for your class when the story is something familiar. That way the emphasis is on language use and comprehension rather than the story or plot. Of course, it never hurts to read something with action and drama!

6

Today, the subjects addressed by graphic novels are as broad as your imagination. Because of this, you can use graphic novels to supplement the content-based material you are covering in your class. For example, if you find yourself teaching about World War II in a history class, you may want to include the graphic novel *Maus* in your curriculum. Other theme units will coordinate with other graphic novels. If you need some direction, ask the clerk at your local comic book store for some advice but always preread the material before giving it to students.

7

Pages from a graphic novel can serve as a blank canvas for writing original dialogue as well. Select a story that is popular with your students or choose one that touches on content you are covering in your class. Then make copies of one or more pages with the dialogue whited out but the speech bubbles remaining. Either individually or in pairs, have your students write dialogue that fills each of the speech bubbles and is appropriate for the illustrations that are provided. You can have fun with your class by posting the completed dialogues and asking your

students to vote for the one they think makes the best story. Then show them the original dialogue and have them compare what the author wrote with what they and their classmates wrote.

8

You can also leave the original dialogue in place and cut the frames apart from one another. Give pairs or small groups of students each a set of the frames and challenge them to use the information given there to sequence the panels. They will have to use the context of the language as well as the pictures to find the correct order of the panels.

9

If you are looking for a way to elicit more original material from your students, you can take photocopied pages from graphic novels, with or without their original dialogue, and give them to your students as story starters. Starting with the pictures and possibly the dialogue, have your students retell the story using paragraph form. They can write descriptions of what they see in the pictures and detail the action that is happening in the frames. Again, this activity helps focus more on language and less on content since the story is already provided.

10

You can take the inspiration a step further and have your students create their own villains and heroes modeled after the ones they read about in the graphic novels, or have them create nemesis to combat the characters already in print. Either way, your students will have to think of the strengths and weaknesses their hero or villain possesses and what his greatest desire is. They can then use those characters in their original fiction or graphic novel.

THESE ARE ONLY SOME OF THE WAYS GRAPHIC NOVELS CAN BE USED IN THE ESL CLASSROOM. THE MORE FAMILIAR YOU BECOME WITH THAT GENRE, THE MORE USES YOU WILL FIND FOR THEM. So the next time you are choosing a book from the shelf for your class reading project, pick up a graphic novel and see where your imagination will take you.

What You Can Do With Comics:

10 Creative Activities

EVERYBODY LOVES A GOOD LAUGH, AND WHAT BETTER PLACE TO GET THAT LAUGH THAN IN THE FUNNY PAPERS? Take a look at these activities

that you can do with comics, and you will find that there is more to the three framed gems than you may have thought.

HOW TO USE COMICS IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

1

Even though classes do not meet on Sundays, that does not mean that your class cannot practice their reading skills by reading the comics from last week's paper. Start collecting the Sunday comics section from your newspaper one to two months before you plan to share them with your class. Then divide up the papers you have and pass them around. Let your students read the pages, and then talk about the humor expressed in some of the more popular strips. You can point out to your students that most of the writing in comics is dialogue between characters. Allow your students some time to share their general thoughts on what they have read.

2

With that in mind, why not use comics as a jumping off point for writing dialogue of your own? You can point out to your students the correct way to punctuate dialogue when it is written in pros (using quotation marks) rather than in speech bubbles. You can even have your students compare and contrast the two types of written dialogue.

3

After your students have practiced writing traditional dialogue, challenge them to exercise their funny bones by writing new dialogue for short comic strips. Take a black and white, three-panel comic strip and use white out to remove the current dialogue. Then make copies of several strips for your students and ask them to write new dialogue. They should remember to make the dialogue consistent with the pictures in each panel. Post all the new dialogues and allow your class to vote for their favorites.

4

Comics are also a good resource to talk about character in fiction. The main characters of comics run the gamut between very realistic people to strange and humanized animals. Have a class discussion about what types of characters they see in comics. Why do they think each of these character types is included? What purpose or role does each character play in the comic as a whole?

5

Now that your class has practiced writing comic strip dialogue and talked about characterization, why not ask them to create their own comics? You can find printable comic panels at several web sites. Just print out a variety for your class to choose from and let them create their own comic book heroes or characters.

6

Are you looking for a creative activity that is not as involved as writing comic strips? If you can, get a hold of Ed Emberley's Complete Funprint Drawing Book and copy some of the pages for your class. This book teaches how to turn fingerprints into cartoon characters or simple drawings. Let your student look at some of the examples, and then let them express their own creativity with a stamp pad and a pen. The results are sure to be refrigerator door worthy.

7

Just because a cartoonist appears in a national newspaper does not mean he or she does not want to be connected to fans. Encourage your students to make connections with their favorite cartoonists by writing a fan letter. Start by asking your students which of several comics they like most, then point out the creator's names on the printed material. Then, after reviewing how to write personal letters, have your students write a letter of thanks saying how much they enjoy the comic strips. Mail the letters and see how many students get a response from the artists. You can even post the responses in your classroom so the entire class can enjoy them.

8

Comic strips are also a ready resource to work with sequencing. Cut apart the frames from a six-panel comic from the Sunday paper or from a collection of comic strips. (You can find these collections at your library and then photocopy pages for the activity.) Have your students read the dialogue and look at the pictures, and then ask them to put the frames in the correct sequence. They will have to use logic and context to make the correct decisions. Then have them explain how they came to their decision and check to see if they were right.

9

Now that your students have put the frames in the correct sequence, have them write a description of the comic strip's events. They can tell the story of the comic strip in pros form. This is also a natural opportunity to review reported speech with your students, so make sure they are using this format when retelling the events of the comic strip.

10

Finally, let your students' creativity come out in full force with a wild reinterpretation of a comic strip. Provide your class with a variety of single panels (you can use the ones from activity #8 or put together another set) of either one comic or a variety of comics. Then challenge your students to select between four and six panels, not necessarily featuring the same characters, and put them in an original order. They can then compose a piece of creative writing that tells a new story that follows the frames they have chosen. You can have your class read their stories if they feel comfortable doing that or compile them into a class book for everyone to enjoy during free reading periods.

COMICS ARE NOT JUST FOR SUNDAY MORNING AS THESE ACTIVITIES HAVE SHOWN. BRING THESE LIVELY AND CREATIVITY BOOSTING PROPS INTO YOUR ESL CLASSROOM FOR SOME FUN YET FOCUSED LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES. You and your students are sure to have a laugh if you do.

The Movie-Novel Connection:

Practical Tips for Using Movies

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR A GREAT ACCOMPANIMENT TO THE NOVEL (FULL LENGTH OR ABRIDGED) THAT YOU ARE READING IN CLASS? TRY THE MOVIE.

No, that's not instead of reading the book but along with reading it. Classroom novels that have also been made into movies offer a great resource for ESL teachers, and you can do a lot more with them than just watch the movie after finishing the book.

HOW TO TEACH USING MOVIES WITH NOVELS: PRACTICAL WAYS

1 BEFORE THEY READ

There are several activities you can do with film clips to prepare students for a novel.

- One of the easiest ways to use the movie is to introduce the characters. There are a couple of ways to do this. First, you can show the students the credits at the end of the movie. They can then use this list of characters (and the actors who play them) as a reference list while they scan the novel for those characters.
- Another way to introduce the characters is to show clips or still frames of the characters in the movie and have groups of students compile descriptions of these characters. These descriptions should go beyond mere physical detail and include guesses at the personality and intentions of the character based on what they can see.
- You can also introduce students to the setting of the book by previewing it in the movie. Pair students and have one watch a clip without sound. The other should ask their partner questions to determine details about the setting. Have them work together to describe the setting and the possible conflicts the characters may encounter.
- Another way to use the movie before your students read the novel is to give them a general idea of what they will be reading. Give your students an opportunity to watch the film's trailer. You can also let them look at the movie poster if it is

available and the book jacket. Can your students guess what the opening scene of the movie will be? Let them discuss it, and then play the opening scene so they can see how close they were.

- Plot can also be introduced through film. Play some clips at various points of the movie (don't spoil the end) and have groups of students discuss what they think may happen in the book. They can also make predictions about chapter titles.

2 WHILE THEY ARE READING

Use the film with your students while reading the book to aid in comprehension. There are many ways to do this.

- You can have students read a passage that is also presented in the film and compare and contrast the two.
- You can also give them specific dialogue from the book and ask them to describe the changes that the filmmakers made for the screenplay.
- Another way to use dialogue and film is to start with the students' native language. If subtitles are available in your students' first language, play a scene for them with those subtitles but without sound. Then have students write in English what they think the dialogue might be.
- Have students convert selections of reported speech in the book into the dialogue that might be used in the film. Then check by watching the film and see how close they were.
- Students can also compile time lines of major events in a chapter or a selection of the book. Then play the film clip for them (don't go longer than ten minutes) and ask them to determine if the sequence of events in the book and film are the same.
- You can check listening comprehension, too, by playing the audio without the video for certain scenes. Can your students name the scene in the book? Can they name the characters who are speaking?

3 AFTER THEY READ

There are several opportunities to

use film as a review of a novel that students have completed.

- If students are familiar with movie commentary, you can allow them to write their own commentary for a given scene in the movie. Have them work in pairs and choose a favorite scene. They can then write their own commentary and either record it and share or perform it live for the class. This is sure to entertain while giving a little public speaking practice.
- Another performance possibility is to let students transcribe the dialogue for a given scene. They can then record a voice over for the scene and present it to the class with the video from the movie. It can be especially fun to see the actors on screen speaking with voices your students hear around them every day.
- You can review characters in the book by showing clips of significant scenes for a given character. Then have students discuss that character, whether they liked him or her, what that character did that was most significant and whether they would behave the same way if they were that character. This is also a great opportunity to practice the conditional tense with "If I had been... I would have..."
- Another writing activity could be to write a review of the film. This could be a short review intended for a local paper or a longer more analytical review for a national magazine. Make your expectations clear to your students and review vocabulary they might need to write about the film.

In general, a movie version of a novel you read as a class can be a great resource at any point: before reading the text, while reading it and after your class has completed the selection. With a little planning and practice, you can make your class interesting and engaging, and entertain your students at the same time.

SO THE NEXT TIME YOU PICK UP A CLASS NOVEL, GRAB THE DVD, POP SOME POPCORN AND ROLL 'EM. YOUR STUDENTS ARE SURE TO THANK YOU.

Have a Good Chuckle with these Amusing Poetry Activities

Do you include poetry in your ESL classes? If you do, you know that working with verse is both a challenge and a joy for English language learners. If you do not, you may want to give it a try. These activities are fun based learning that use poetry to further language learning for your ESL classes. Give them a try and your day is sure to end with a smile!

TRY THESE AMUSING POETRY ACTIVITIES IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

1 RHYMING

Many poems follow a specific rhyming pattern. The rhymes most often come at the end of each line, and a poet can achieve different patterns of rhyme by rhyming different sets of lines. For example, a poet might describe a simple rhyming pattern as AA, BB, CC in which A and A are two lines that rhyme one way. B and B are two more lines that rhyme another way, and C and C are two more lines with their own unique rhyme. Other patterns that rhyming follows are ABCB or AABBA. There are seemingly limitless ways to rhyme the lines of a poem. You can start this activity by giving your students some examples of different rhyming patterns in poetry. If you are able to get a copy of Shel Silverstein's *A Light in the Attic*, you can find several useful examples. Start with "Stop Thief!" which follows the AABB pattern. "How Many, How Much" follows the ABCB pattern, and the smile worthy "The Dragon of Grindly Grun" is a great example of AABA. Read these poems with your class, reviewing any unfamiliar vocabulary, and point out how each follows a rhyme scheme.

With all of that in mind, give small groups of your students 4 words to rhyme. You can choose any words you like, tying in a current vocabulary word perhaps, or use the following: spy, shack, blue and bill. Now your groups should compile a list of all the words they can think of that rhyme with the given words. Challenge your students to see which group can come up with the largest list for each word, then compare lists and put them all together to make an all-inclusive list.

Using one list of words, then, challenge each person to write one sentence using as many words from the list as possible. For example, someone might write, "I dye flies with lye." Then move on to a new list and a new sentence. Repeat with each of the four lists. For the person able to include the most rhyming words in one sentence, award a rhyming prize, a can of green beans, perhaps.

2 REWRITE A POEM

Part of poetry is creative use or words in a way which gets a message through to the reader. Poets are not limited by grammatical rules as other writers are. For this reason, you should point out to your class when a poet chooses to break grammatical convention for the sake of rhythm, rhyme or impact. Explain to your class that this is called poetic license. Though not something that you would teach your class during a grammar lesson, encourage your students to be creative with the way they arrange words and communicate a message through verse. Do this by challenging your students to rewrite a professional poem.

Start by giving your students a collection of words to use for their poem. To do this, choose a favorite poem from the collection of Shel Silverstein, William Cole or another favorite poet or someone you have read in class and type them in random order into a table in your word processing program. Make sure you do not copy them in the order in which they appear in the poem. Then, make copies of the table for each of your students and have them cut apart the words to make small slips of paper each with one word on it. (These small slips of paper will resemble the pieces from a set of "Magnetic Poetry" (see our next article down this book) if you are familiar with that great word use activity.) Challenge your class members to arrange the words in any order they would like to create their own poem. Your students can use the small slips of paper to shift and rearrange the words until they are happy with the final version. Each person should try to include all of the words and only those words in his poem. Then

have your students copy their final versions onto pieces of paper. Have your students compare what they have written with what their classmates have written pointing out that words can be arranged in many different ways. Once your students have had adequate time to share, give each person a copy of the original poem and see how the poet arranged those same words into his or her piece. Encourage your students to talk about how their poems are similar to and different from the original. Which do they prefer? Why?

3 UNUSUAL SHAPES

Some poems work more with the look of the words on the page than with rhymes or rhythm. The term "concrete poem" is used to identify this visual arrangement of words on a page to convey a meaning. If you do an image search in Google of concrete poem, you will see many examples which you can print and show your students. Raindrop is a good example to show your students. The words about raindrops are arranged in the shape of a raindrop. Your students can write concrete poems, too, and it does not have to take a lot of effort. Simply print off a black and white picture for your students of some animals (coloring pages work well for this) and let them choose which one they would like to write about. Then each person should use Raindrop as an example and write his or her poem within the outline of the animal. If you like, you can have your students cut out their poem (minus the original outline of the animal) and see what their concrete poem would look like as a standalone piece. You should display these pieces on a bulletin board with a title like "Picture This" at the top. Encourage your students to read their classmates' poems and give feedback.

POETRY IS A USEFUL ELEMENT IN THE ESL CLASSROOM, AND THE MORE FUN YOUR ACTIVITIES THE MORE LIKELY YOUR STUDENTS ARE TO DEVELOP A LOVE FOR VERSE.

The next rainy day you are looking for something creative to do, try your hand at some poetry and watch your students' imaginations flourish!

Celebrate Poetry – 10 Activities You Can Use When Teaching Verse

April is national poetry month, but you do not have to wait until those rainy days next spring to do fun poetry activities with your students. Try one or all of the following activities with your ESL students to help them appreciate the finer language of verse.

10 FUN ACTIVITIES TO TEACH VERSE

1

Make a poetry connection a cultural connection for your Japanese students by writing haiku as a class.

If your students know how to count syllables in words, they can write haiku. This simple three-line poetry form follows a pattern of five syllables in the first line, seven in the second, and five in the third. Haiku also typically contains the mention of a season or an image from the natural world. Get your students thinking about the natural world around them, and if possible take them on a nature walk. Encourage your students to use all of their senses while on the walk and then to translate those sensory perceptions into their haiku. If you want to add a whimsical note to your haiku experience and have access to the DVD's, play for your students the scene from *Avatar: The Last Air Bender* where Sokka loses a haiku battle with a matronly teacher. (Book 2, "The Tales of Ba Sing Se")

2

While you are in the competitive mood, why not host your own poetry slam.

In a typical poetry slam, participants recite a poem for the audience who judges the performance based on the poem itself and the performance. You can find details on hosting a poetry slam at poetryslam.com and get a feel for what a poetry slam is like. Feel free to allow your students to perform either their own poems or those of favorite poets, and have the class vote for a winner by applause. Your students will benefit from memorizing poetry and have fun with the perfor-

mance aspect of their reading, just make sure you provide adequate time in class or at home for your students to memorize their poems.

3

You can make poetry personal for your students by introducing them to the popular piece *Keep a Poem in Your Pocket* by Beatrice Schenk de Regniers.

After reading this poem with your class, use envelopes to make and decorate pockets that your students can attach to their desks. Each day of your poetry unit, have your students copy a favorite poem on to an index card and put it in their pocket. At the end of your unit, have your students make a cover and bind the index cards into a book. You can also challenge your students to memorize one of the poems they copied. You can ask them to perform the poem in front of the class or simply share with a friend or family member and relay the details of the experience.

4

Are you looking for an easy poetry activity for an independent learning center? Why not give your students access to a set of *Magnetic Poetry*?

This simple collection of magnets (magneticpoetry.com/product/original-magnetic-poetry-kit/) sports one word on each piece of magnet. If you give students a magnetic white board or other magnetic surface, they can compose their own free verse poems with the available words. Your students will have fun exercising their creativity through play. Even if they only use the words to create long sentences, they will be practicing their grammar skills and word order rules through an activity that feels more like a game than language studies.

5

Once your students are in the poetry mood, you can have them write their own simple poems based on "Beans, Beans, Beans" by Lucia and James Hymes in *Hooray for Chocolate*.

Read the poem to your class and then write it on the board. Go through the poem and label each "beans" as a noun and each of the words that describe the beans as adjectives. Then write a class poem modeled after "Beans, Beans, Beans" using the noun pie, for example. Brainstorm a list of different pies and then arrange them to fit into the poem in place of the different types of beans. Your students will find this poetry puzzle enjoyable, and then challenge them to write their own poems in the same style. They can use the noun bugs or pickles or books - any noun will do as long as they can think of descriptive words for it. You can have your students illustrate their poems and then display them on a bulletin board for the class to read (and giggle at) during their free time.

6

A lesson on poetry is also a good time to review the phonics of vowels with your students.

Though many words with the same final spellings rhyme, that is not always the case. Review with your students the different sounds that vowels and vowel combinations make. Point out to your students that although word pairs like "look" and "spook" are spelled the same (after the initial consonant sound) the words do not rhyme. If you can, let your students look though a rhyming dictionary to find other pairs of words which do rhyme but are not spelled the same.

7

Once your students have become familiar with some poems, you can give them an independent assignment using the computer lab.

Have each student or pair of students choose a favorite poem of at least five lines. Then have him create a power point presentation to illustrate the poem. He should write out one line per slide and find a picture that goes well with the line. Once all the presentations are complete, have a poetry "reading" in which you play the presentations for your class. You may want to lead a short discussion following

the “reading” asking your students how the slide shows helped them understand the poems.

8

A study of poetry is also a good time to review stress in pronunciation.

Many poems follow a pattern not only for syllables but also for stress. The most well known stress pattern in poetry is probably the iambs which traditionally make up a sonnet. An iamb is a two-syllable word or pair of words which follows the pattern of unstressed/stressed. Iambic pentameter, five sets of iambs, is the structure of one line of a traditional sonnet. If you like and your students' have the language ability to do so, look at one of Shakespeare's sonnets and have your students identify the stressed words throughout. Then have your students try their hands at writing their own sonnets. They do not have to be love poems - you can write a sonnet about anything. If you happen to be nearing Feb. 14th, though, you may want to encourage a romantic feel in your students' work.

9

Limericks are another fun poetry pattern that your students may enjoy composing.

You can find a more detailed explanation and example at Wikipedia.com, but the basic pattern of a limerick is five lines following the rhyme pattern AABBA. The A lines should have three sets of three syllables each, and the B lines should have two sets of three syllables each. Limericks are often humorous and lighthearted, sometimes making a joke. You can encourage your students to be funny if they can when writing limericks, and be sure to share some examples with them, but keep them clean.

10

Shel Silverstein is one of today's most enjoyable children's poets.

If possible, keep a collection of his books in your classroom for your students to read during their free reading periods. For national poetry month 2003, he made available on his web site several activities with poetry and

rhyming. You can use these activities (shelsilverstein.com/pdf/poetry.pdf) with your class for homework, class work or time fillers during your poetry unit.

POETRY DOES NOT HAVE TO BE AN INTIMIDATING SUBJECT FOR THE ESL TEACHER. THERE ARE SEVERAL CREATIVE AND ENJOYABLE ACTIVITIES YOU CAN DO WITH YOUR CLASS WHEN STUDYING VERSE.

Hopefully, this top ten will whet your appetite for the delicate language of poetry and set you and your students toward a lifelong love of poetry.

Don't These Phrases Mean the Same Thing? Teaching Connotation

ONE OF THE HARDER THINGS TO TEACH IN VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION IS CONNOTATION, OR THE UNDERLYING MEANING AND ASSOCIATIONS OF A WORD.

This was driven home for me as a teacher one day last semester when I was teaching Maya Angelou's essay ironically titled "Finishing School," about her first work experience as an African American maid in a wealthy white home. In discussing the title and what it might mean, my students, mostly urban, first-generation minorities with at least some ESL background, were stumped until one student blurted out "It's where you'd go to be learn to be a woman." I replied, "Close, but actually, it's where you'd go to learn to be a lady." Again, confusion — isn't "lady" and "woman" the same thing? No, not exactly — they are denotatively, according to dictionary meaning, approximately the same — adult female. But the connotation, the underlying, secondary meaning, is different. One learns to be a lady from other ladies, it seems to me — to walk correctly and sit correctly and pour tea. One learns to be a woman from a man, in all probability, given the sexual connotation to the phrase.

Connotation is subtle, indirect, and to an extent, subjective, containing emotional content. Just the word "lady," for example, for many has pleasant associations, conjuring up images of their mother or favorite teachers. To others, however, the term "lady" might suggest confinement and oppression, with its association with rules and propriety and even social class. Although a difficult concept, connotation should be taught. Not understanding the connotations of words can lead to misunderstandings and embarrassment: while an extreme example, the mistake of calling a male "pretty" rather than "handsome" is one that a student wouldn't want to make.

SO HOW DO YOU TEACH CONNOTATION, GIVEN ITS DIFFICULTY?

1

Start by raising awareness on this issue "connotation." Teach the terms "denotation" and "connotation." Illustrate their relationship, perhaps graphically, with "denotation" and "lady" and on top and "connotation" on the bottom with "lady's"

connotations: polite, proper, neat, etc.

2

Illustrate the concept with a word with numerous synonyms, like "good-looking." Brainstorm the synonyms to "good-looking": beautiful, cute, pretty, handsome, etc. What is the difference in connotation between "beautiful" and "pretty"? What is the difference in connotation of "cute" when applied to man and a woman? A child? An inanimate object, like a house?

3

While reading, take note of the author's word choice and discuss connotation. "Why do you think he called his brother a 'clever' businessman in the second paragraph? What's the connotation of 'clever' here?" Other possible questions to ask: What are some connotations to "clever"? What are some other words that mean about the same thing as "clever"? How are their connotations different: what is the difference between being "clever" and being "intelligent"?

4

Watch a clip from a TV or movie, preferably related to the course reading, and take note of the characters' word choice. "When she said 'sorry' in that particular tone, 'sorry,' with the stress on the second syllable, does the meaning change from the usual meaning of 'sorry'? What is the connotation? Is she really sorry?"

5

Act it out. Take a short scene from a reading and act out a scene with a peer. Vary the connotation through varying sentence and word stress as above. How does even the meaning of "Good morning" change when said as "Good morning!", stressing the last syllable? How does the speaker feel about the morning?

6

Have students practice connotation in journals, using the same word in different contexts, or using synonyms of the same word, varying connotation. For example, challenge them to write about

a "smart" person and come up with different synonyms for "smart," varying the connotation appropriately: e.g., "She's intelligent because she understands math very well but also crafty because she can beat you at cards."

7

Have students read a newspaper article on an important topic, such as the upcoming national election. Note the author's use of connotation. How are key terms like "politician" used? Are the connotations positive or negative? Why? Can we judge something about the author's perspective on the topic from the choice of words and connotation?

8

Have a student describe something for the class: for example, the park near the school. Let others know his or her perspective by use of connotation. Describing it as "stark, bare, and lonely" sounds very different than "solitary, quiet, and peaceful," although it might apply to the same place. The class will listen then decide what the speaker's feelings about the place are based on the use connotation.

9

Or describe a person for the class. See if the class can tell your relationship to the person by your use of connotation. Is it your mother, girlfriend, little sister, professor? Does use of connotation vary with each?

10

Do it in writing. Students can describe something, like the classroom or the quad, using pleasant connotations. Then they can pass their papers to a partner, who will describe the same thing in negative terms, by changing connotation.

CONNOTATION CAN BE DIFFICULT TO TEACH BECAUSE IT IS SUBJECTIVE IN NATURE.

Not understanding how to interpret connotation and how to use it can lead to embarrassment and missing out on important information. There are, fortunately, specific elements to this important concept that can be defined, practiced, and taught.

10 American and English Writers ESL Students Should Know

AS ESL TEACHERS, PART OF WHAT YOU AND I DO IS BRING REAL LIFE LITERATURE INTO OUR CLASSROOMS.

Our students benefit from the vocabulary and grammar challenges that come hand in hand with some of the most interesting stories we can offer our classes. This fantastic literature would not be possible without the authors who write it. Perhaps you already include some of these authors in your classroom material. If not, you may decide to once you know a little bit more about them.

DO YOUR STUDENTS KNOW THESE WRITERS?

1 MARK TWAIN

Mark Twain is one of the best known and beloved of American authors. His famous works including *Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are frequently included in reading requirements for English classes, from middle school to college and beyond. His work is useful for ESL students because of its relatively modern English and its engaging content. If you have ESL students who plan to attend universities after their language studies, they may find that at least one of Mark Twain's famous pieces is on the required reading list for incoming freshmen.

2 MAYA ANGELOU

Maya Angelou is a beloved contemporary author and poet. She is most famous for her series of autobiographies, which some have called autobiographical fiction. The most well known of these is *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. She writes in a unique style that challenges the genre of autobiography and makes her readers think. She is well known for her depiction and defense of black culture and her experience with the U.S. civil rights movement. ESL students will find her work eye opening as they glimpse a culture with which they may not have had much experience.

3 ROBERT FROST

Robert Frost is another well known and well loved American poet. His generally short poems are written with simple language and beautiful imagery. ESL students will enjoy reading his selections,

which often focus on nature and the natural world. His work can be found in many American literature anthologies and can easily be incorporated into many ESL lesson plans.

4 STEPHEN KING

A far cry from some more traditional authors, Stephen King is the master of the thriller. Teachers and students should be choosy about including his work for reading assignments, but he does have one great quality to offer. Many of his books have been made into movies, and showing movies concurrently with reading a novel can be a great benefit to ESL students. Be choosy with the works of King that you bring into the classroom, but as a popular contemporary author, he has a lot to offer students of English. You may want to start with his short story "The Body" and its movie version *Stand By Me*.

5 THORNTON WILDER

Thornton Wilder is a Pulitzer Prize winning American playwright, and he may be best known for his piece *Our Town*. Because of his simple language and depiction of U.S. culture, his work is often read in ESL programs. When reading his work, your students may see into a society long past but one that has helped make the U.S. what it is today.

6 LANGSTON HUGHES

Langston Hughes was an American poet and one of the early innovators of jazz poetry. He uses beautiful imagery to capture and communicate the life of the African American in the first half of the twentieth century. His simple language communicates powerful messages that touch the heart. ESL students will likely find his material easier to read than that of many contemporary writers, and his children's literature may be a good place for you to start bringing Hughes' work into your classroom.

7 JOHN GRISHAM

Though not traditionally included in collegiate literature classes, John Grisham is a name your students will want to know. Many of his exciting and suspenseful tales are available through Penguin

books in ESL friendly versions. Your students, even those at the beginning levels, will enjoy his exciting tales and will welcome a movie day when you watch the movie version of your completed novel!

8 J.K. ROWLING

Harry Potter and his magical friends have been popular for several years, and he is one of the most beloved characters in modern youth literature. Your students have likely seen the movies based on this book series by the famous British author, and may enjoy reading one or more in class. The first book, *The Sorcerer's Stone* is particularly suited to ESL classrooms since it is easy to understand and introduces the engaging characters Rowling is so famous for.

9 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Though it is unlikely that your students will be reading Shakespeare in its original form, more than likely they already have some familiarity with the famed British playwright. If you choose to include a classic romance or tragedy in your classroom, you can find modernized versions which will be far more ESL friendly. Since many students will already know the stories, they will be able to focus on the language rather than the content.

10 AGATHA CHRISTIE

For students and teachers who like mystery novels, none compares to Agatha Christie. Though often looked down upon by her contemporaries, Christie's novels have continued to entertain readers of English for generations. Because she is a British author, make your students aware of any expressions particular to British English that may be unfamiliar to them. Additionally, be on the lookout for any dated expressions your students may not know.

WHEN LITERATURE IS PART OF THE CLASSROOM, STUDENTS WILL FIND A NEW WORLD (OR WORLDS) AWAITING THEM. There is no need for ESL teachers to shy away from literature just because their students are studying English as a second language. These authors and many more have a lot to offer any student who takes the time to read them, whether in their first language or second.

Top ESL Activities You Can Do in a Library

One advantage to teaching ESL in a school setting is, no matter what age your students are, you probably have a library at your school. A library is always convenient for research and reading material, but there are many more activities you can do in a library to help your students improve their language skills. Here are some ideas you can try with your class the next time you take a mini-field trip to break up your regular class routine.

TRY THESE ESL ACTIVITIES... IN A LIBRARY!

1 MAGAZINES

Books are not the only resource your library has to offer. Most library collections boast subscriptions to several magazines, and these magazines offer a far greater subject range than the magazines you bring into the classroom from your own limited mailbox. You can give your class several activities centered around the magazines they find on the library shelves. Start by having your students each choose a magazine that interests them. Their choices may be business related, hobby or crafts themed, social and celebrity magazines, news magazines or any other that grabs their interests. Have each student browse the articles and headlines and choose one article to read in depth. Using the information from that one article, have your students distill the information. You may want them to write an outline which focuses on the structure and organization of the article. You may have them write a summary of the piece in which they must decide which information is most important and which details can be left out. You may have your students write an opinion piece in which they agree or disagree with what the author has written. You may simply want your students to select unfamiliar vocabulary words and try to define them from the context of the article. Any of these activities will help your students improve their English writing skills. At the same time,

they will be engaging with the subject matter since it was of their own choosing. You can even have your students check the magazine out for further use throughout the week.

2 VIDEOS

In a section of the library perhaps near the magazines or maybe on another floor, most libraries also have a collection of videos available to patrons. If you are lucky enough to have a library that also has audiovisual equipment you and your students can use, you can assign numerous video activities to your students while your class is at the library. You may encourage students to view a play or movie which corresponds to something you have read as a class. If so, challenge your students to come up with 5 or more ways the written material and the video material differ. Also list 5 ways they are the same. You can ask your students to view a documentary and relay the information from that video to the class in a presentation. If you decide to do this, giving your students some time to do further research on the project will also be a benefit to the presentation. Your library may have instructional videos or lectures that your class can watch. If so, those videos are useful for teaching your students how to take notes during a lecture. Give the class some instruction in note taking before heading to the library, and then let them watch a video and take notes on it at their own paces.

3 COMPUTERS

Your school may have an independent computer lab, but if it does not, the library often has several computers available for students. With internet access, your students can do countless activities on computers! Have your students watch videos on YouTube and react to them in a written piece, answer comprehension questions, or write their own skits modeled after the one they viewed. You can assign specific videos, perhaps from a local television channel's newsroom,

and give your students comprehension tests. Teach your students how to do effective online searches by choosing the right keywords, and then have them practice choosing the web pages that will best meet their research needs. You can even show your students how to use an interlibrary loan system if it would benefit their future studies! There are also many sites that offer interactive grammar quizzes that would benefit your ESL students.

4 LIBRARY WORKERS

Have you ever thought to yourself that the librarian is your best friend? If not, you might want to consider the possibility. The folks that run the library are a great resource for you and your students. Ask one of the library workers to give some instruction to your students about the resources that the library has to offer. This will challenge their listening comprehension and also give them tools for further study. If your students are too young for library research, ask a children's librarian to read one or more selections to your students to practice their listening comprehension. You may want to ask them to summarize what they learned from the librarian or discuss the information he or she presented in small groups once you return to class. You may even want your librarian to explain to your class how to apply for a library card and then have them fill out the applications!

THERE ARE LIMITLESS ACTIVITIES YOU CAN DO WITH YOUR ESL STUDENTS IN YOUR SCHOOL LIBRARY, AND THE ONES HERE ARE ONLY A PLACE TO GET YOU STARTED.

Of course, the activities you choose to do will depend upon the resources your library has to offer, the ages of your students and what language skills you want to reinforce. No matter what you choose, the change of scenery from the classroom can be just the spark your students need to get them even more excited about learning English, and the library will give them the tools they need.