

Useful activities for the English classroom

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Abstract

When children start learning English at Primary school in Primary Education, we need to focus on listening and speaking skills. Through listening to English, children are led naturally into speaking. From using single words and formulaic language, children gradually develop the ability to interact with others in a more extended and deep way. So that, we are going to provide workable ideas and solutions for English teachers at Primary Education stage.

Keywords: activities, English, primary education

Título: Actividades útiles para la clase de inglés.

Resumen

Cuando los niños empiezan a aprender inglés en la educación primaria, necesitamos enfocarnos en las habilidades auditiva y oratoria. Escuchando inglés, los niños son conducidos naturalmente a hablar. Uso de palabras y lenguaje formulista, los niños desarrollan gradualmente la capacidad de interactuar con otros de manera más extendida y profunda. Por lo que vamos a proporcionar soluciones e ideas que pueden ser realizadas para profesores de inglés en la etapa de educación primaria.

Palabras clave: actividades, inglés, primaria.

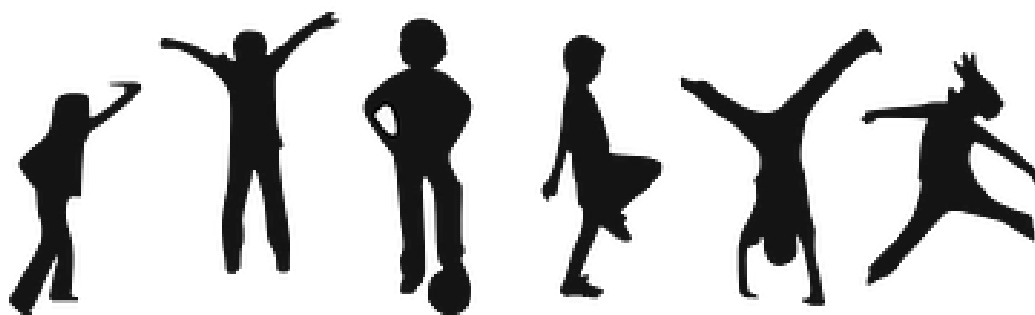
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GYM SEQUENCE

The aim is to listen and respond to instructions, to focus attention and harness children's physical energy in a positive way.

Language focus: imperatives, action words or parts of the body.

Materials: none or aerobic music.



1 Ask the children to stand up.

2 Give instructions for a short gym sequence in a rhythmic way and do the actions with the children in time with the music, if you use this, eg Hands in the air. One, two! Touch your toes. One, two! Bend to the left. One, two! Bend to the right. One, two! Run on the spot. One, two! Turn around. One, two! And sit down. One, two! Let's begin!

Comments and suggestions

- This activity works well as a routine for starting lessons. Change or add to the instructions regularly but always remember to demonstrate new action first.
- Ask the children to put their chairs under their desks and move away from these before starting. This is important for safety reasons.
- Avoid actions like stretching arms out sideways in order to prevent physical contact between the children and possible disruption.
- Increase the level of challenge either by giving more complex instructions, eg *Put your left elbow to your right knee!* Or by going faster, or by not modelling the actions yourself.
- With older children, you can ask pairs to prepare their own instructions for a gym sequence and take turns in different lessons to do these with the rest of the class.
- With younger children, keep the sequence short, introduce variations less frequently and avoid using 'right' and 'left'. Alternatively, you can simply say, eg *Do this! One, two!* In a rhythmic way and children copy your actions.

MIME WHAT HAPPENS

The aim is to listen to a sequence of events, to show understanding through mime, to supply missing language in the sequence.

Language focus: Present simple, clothes, places, actions, food, personal possessions.

Materials: none.

1 Invent a simple sequence of events about something that happens to the children. Tell the events to the children and get them to respond by miming what happens. Do this with them at first, eg *One day it's very cold. You put on your coat, your gloves and your hat. You get your bike and you ride to the park. Suddenly you see a friend. You're very happy and you wave to your friend. You get off your bike. You put your bike on the grass and you and your friend play football together.*

2 Repeat the sequence. This time, if appropriate, do the mimes but leave gaps in the telling. Children do the mimes and supply the words, eg *One day it's very (mimes shivering)...cold!*



Comments and suggestions

- This activity can be graded depending on the language you use as well as whether you model the actions for children to copy.
- Through miming the events, children associate language and meaning kinaesthetically, which helps to make it memorable.
- With younger children, it is best not to include more than four to six short sentences to mime, as more than this is likely to be confusing, eg *One day you go for a walk to the jungle, you hear a noise, you look behind the tree. Oh no! There's a lion! You run away as fast as you can. Now you are safe.* You need to do the mimes each time you repeat the sequence with this age group.
- With older children, you can repeat the sequence, leaving more and more of the language for them to supply, until they are reconstructing the events independently. As a follow-up, you can ask them to write or complete a version of what happens or to prepare another similar sequence of events to tell the class in the same way.

COLOUR DICTATION

The aim of this activity is to listen and colour a picture on the board, *eg as below, and ask the children to copy this, or give out copies of the picture.*

Language focus: be, present simple, colours, vocabulary related to any topic.

Materials: Crayons, optional: a photocopy of any line drawing.

1 Draw a simple picture on the board, *eg as below, and ask the children to copy this, or give out photocopies of the picture.*

2 Say sentences to describe the picture, *eg The house is green. Children colour the picture following these instructions.*

3 Once the children have finished, either ask questions, *eg What colour is the house? Or get children to describe the picture, eg The house is green.*



Comments and suggestions

- If you draw a picture on the board for children to copy rather than use a ready-prepared picture, encourage the children to predict and guess what you are drawing as you do this.
- With younger children, using a ready-prepared picture is recommended, as copying one from the board will be too challenging and time-consuming.
- As you describe the picture, get the children to put only a dot of colour on each item. They then finish colouring at the end. This avoids the problem of children colouring at different speeds. It also helps you to manage the class if the children are sharing crayons.
- Alternatively, you can make the dictation collaborative by asking the children to suggest the colours. This also enables you to provide richer language input as you negotiate these.
- The speaking part of the activity can be turned into a memory game by asking children to turn over the completed picture before describing it. Alternatively, if you colour the picture on the board differently from the instructions you have given or, if you prepare a copy of the same ready-prepared picture coloured differently, children can be asked to find the differences between this picture and their own.

SENTENCE ROUND

The main aim in this activity is to complete sentences following a given starter.

Language focus: Any, for example, present simple, feelings, likes and dislikes...

Materials: A small object like a soft ball or toy.

1 Ask the children to sit in a circle.

2 Choose a sentence starter for them to complete which relates to the topic or language of the lesson and either say this or write it on the board.

3 Give one student the object to pass round the circle and invite them to complete the sentence with something which is true for them.



4 They pass the object to the child next to them, who completes the sentence in a similar way, and so on round the circle.

Comments and suggestions

- This activity provides a framework for practising a particular language pattern in a personalized way.
- Through passing the object, a clear protocol is established for turn-taking and when to listen and when to speak.
- The repetition of the sentence starter provides repeated modelling for children who may be more hesitant about speaking.
- With very young children, you may like to pass round a familiar puppet and ask the children to tell their sentences to the puppet rather than to the whole group. This is more intimidating and may feel less pressured for some children. If you use a soft ball, you may find it works better to roll the ball to different children in the circle who say the sentence and then roll the ball back to you each time, rather than passing round the circle. This also keeps the children alert as they do not know who you will roll the ball each time.
- With older children, you may like to precede the sentence round with a pair work task in which children find out about their partner and use the sentence round to report, eg *When Pepe grows up, she wants to be famous actor.*

CLASSROOM SHOP

Here the aim is to ask for and give things to people, to ask and say prices, or to use thank you and please.

Language focus: Present simple, have got, can, How much...?, shops, shopping, classroom objects, numbers, colours.

Materials: Classroom objects, optional: plastic toy money to use instead of paper money.

1 Divide the class into pairs or groups of four.

2 Ask each pair or group to choose six classroom objects from among their possessions to go into their classroom shop.

3 Ask the children to decide the price for each item, write the prices and make a display on their tables.

4 Elicit and practise language you want the children to use and demonstrate the activity with one pair, eg Good morning, have you got any rubbers? How much are the rubbers? Two euros, Can I have this rubber, please? Yes, of course. Here you are, thank you.

5 Ask the children in an individual way to write a shopping list of three/four things they want to buy.

6 Give out paper money (The same amount to each child).

7 Divide the class in half and assign the role of shoppers to one half and shopkeepers to the other half.

8 Children visit the shops and buy three or four things.

9 At the end, ask the children to show and tell what they have got, eg *I've got a red pen, a green sharpener, and a rubber* and how much money they still have left, eg *I've got three euros.*

10 Children then change roles and repeat the activity.



Comments and suggestions

- This activity needs careful attention and management. If you are concerned about having half of the class as shoppers and at the same time, it is best asking fewer children to take turns to visit the shops.
- The currency can either be the currency of the children's country (euro), or the currency of the language they are learning (British pounds or American dollars). With younger students, it is better to use the currency they are familiar with and with older students, it may be appropriate to use dollars or pounds.
- After this activity, children can compare pounds or dollars with their own currency and use the internet to find out current conversion rates (just for older students).
- This activity can be done in a similar way for a variety of different shops, eg clothes shop, pet shop, toy shop, grocers shop. For these, you will need to either prepare or download from internet pictures or items to sell in the shops or use plastic fruit or real toys.

THREE THINGS ABOUT ME

Concerning the aim, it is to say things about yourself, to ask and find out about other people or to show interest and respect for the opinions of others.

Language focus: like + -ing, sports and free-time activities.

Materials: Small pieces of paper and paper clips.

- 1 Give a small piece of paper to each child.
- 2 Ask them to draw three small pictures to show what they like doing in their free time, eg *a TV, a book, a football*, and attach the paper to their fronts.
- 3 Explain and demonstrate that children should walk round the class, look at each other's drawings and talk about them, eg *I like watching TV. Do you? No, I don't. I like reading books.*
- 4 At the end, ask children to stand next to the person they have talked to whom they have most in common with.
- 5 Ask a few pairs to report back to the class, eg *We both like playing basketball.*

Comments and suggestions

- This activity personalizes language and the pictures play an important part in providing a focus and prompt for children to speak.
- It is advisable to get the children to rehearse the language they are going to use before the activity, eg *through choral repetition.*
- It may be a good idea to set a time limit for both parts of the activity, eg *drawing the pictures two or three minutes and mingling five minutes.*
- If the class is large, you may prefer the children to remain seated and do the activity in groups. Alternatively, if the children are seated in rows, you must ask them to just mingle with the children in their rows.
- The activity can be used to practise a variety of language structures and vocabulary, eg *I can play the guitar, I want to go to England, I like salad, I'm going to the park.*



PHOTO OF ME

The aim is to identify friends in photos, to describe what you were like when you were younger, to show interest in others, to become aware of the way you change as you grow older.

Language focus: verb to be, have got, present simple, parts of the body, adjectives to describe people, toys, favourites.

Materials: Photos of the children when they were babies (one photo of each child).

1 During the previous week, ask all the children to bring in a photo of themselves when they were babies.

2 Give each photo a number and stick them on the walls round the classroom.

3 Divide the class into pairs.

4 Ask the children to write the numbers in a list in their notebooks.

5 Ask them to go round the class together identifying who they think is in each photo.

6 Ask the pairs to report back to the class who they think is in each photo, and encourage them to justify their answers.

7 Give each photo back to their owner as it is identified.

8 If children are A1 level, ask them to hold up the photo and tell the class one or two things about themselves. If children are A2 level or higher, ask, eg *What were you like when you were younger?* And children respond eg *I was fat, I had curly hair, I liked milk...*

9 Alternatively, divide the class into pairs and ask children to tell each other five things about when they were younger.

10 They then report back to the class and write a description of themselves or each other.



Comments and suggestions

- A few children may either forget to bring a photo or not have one. In this case, you can ask them to draw a picture of when they were a baby.
- Children usually find it very enjoyable looking at each other's photos and talking about when they were younger. Interest and curiosity in each other's past also helps develop self-esteem.
- This activity can also be done in conjunction with the rhyme that you want.

FASHION SHOW

Here the aim is to prepare a fashion show and to describe what people are wearing.

Language focus: Present continuous, have got, clothes and accessories and colours.

Materials: Clothes for the fashion show.

1 In the last session, ask the children to prepare and bring in clothes from home for the fashion show. These can either be their own clothes or dressing-up clothes borrowed from members of their family.

2 As part of their preparation, ask children to be ready to describe themselves in the clothes they choose, eg *I'm wearing a long, purple skirt, a pink scarf.*

3 Divide the class into groups of four or six children each group.

4 Ask each group to decide each order for their show and who is going to present 'models'. If there are any children who do not want to participate in the fashion show themselves, they can be asked to do commentaries. Ask the children to prepare and write the commentaries for their fashion show in their groups, using a framework.

5 When the children are ready, move the desks, if necessary, to create a 'catwalk'.

6 Ask the groups to take turns to present their fashion shows to the rest of the class.



Comments and suggestions.

- At higher level, children can prepare more detailed commentaries with more complex vocabulary.
- As the groups do their fashions shows, you can give a task to the rest of the class in order to focus their attention while they watch.
- You can organise a class vote to find out which fashion show the children think is best. However, it is best not to do this if you think it may lead to disappointment and loss of self-esteem.
- If you have a digital camera with a video function, you may like to video the shows and download and watch them later with the sound down so children can reconstruct the commentaries. Alternatively, you can take photos of the children and they can use these to write descriptions and make a display of their show.

MY IDEAL BEDROOM

The aim is to plan, draw, and describe your ideal bedroom and to compare ideal bedrooms of your classmates.

Language focus: Furniture, prepositions of place, asking questions.

Materials: Optional will be pictures of the children.

1 Show children the picture of a child's bedroom if you have one.

2 Ask them to name bedroom furniture and write the words they suggest in a list on the blackboard on one side of it. Remind them of others if necessary.

3 Draw a plan of a bedroom on the board and ask the children to copy this onto a page in their notebooks or give out sheets of plain A4 paper for them to do this.

4 Explain that you want them to design their ideal bedroom and to decide where each item of furniture should go on the plan.

5 Demonstrate this by drawing shapes and labelling them on the plan on the board.

6 Children work individually and design their bedrooms. Set a time limit.



7 When they are ready, divide the children into pairs.

8 Without looking at each other's plans, get them to ask each other questions and find five differences.

9 At the end, children compare their plans and check the differences they have found.

10 Ask a few pairs to report to the class.

Comments and suggestions

- Children enjoy the design side of this activity. However, it may be important to stress that the plan is ideal and to be sensitive to the fact that, in real life, children's rooms may well be small and shared with siblings.
- At lower levels, the activity can be done with as few as six items of furniture and the prepositions next to, opposite or between.
- As a follow-up, children can be asked to draw and label plans of their real bedrooms at home. They can either take turns to describe these in the next lesson or write a short description.
- This activity can also be used for children to design for example their ideal living room or their ideal garden.

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