

# GAMES IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

» JALINA BT ABDULLAH

The English Language is taught in more interesting and meaningful way nowadays than during my school days. I still remember how the teacher came into the class and talked to us about the language. The lesson from the beginning to the end was dominated by the teacher's voice and only punctuated at intervals by our responses. The lessons were very rule-orientated, solemn, and serious. There was no room for fun, relaxation and excitement.

Today, the emphasis seems to be on teaching students the language, not teaching them about it. It is an undeniable fact that a language can be effectively mastered by using it. Language learning today is probably 80% student participation and only 20% teacher instruction. The emphasis is less on remembering and more on creating and bringing to life the language that is learnt. To achieve this end, it is best if the language be used and practised through situations. One can create a situation through the use of pictures, gestures and other actions, illustrations, language games and songs and a variety of other sophisticated teaching aids.

I would like to single out the use of language games and give them the support they deserve. During my school days, games were taboo in the classroom. They were regarded as 'time-wasting' and 'ineffective'. Children 'played more than they learnt'. On the contrary, games are stimulating and challenging. They enrich the children's experiences. They help to prevent boredom and drudgery in the classroom. Further, they enhance the learning process by generating enjoyment and interest and a more relaxed atmosphere. They make vocabulary and meaning come alive. Games, too, foster good teacher-pupil relationships, which is vital if pupils are to be interested in learning English.

Language games are games that teach language. They must not be confused with party games which are entirely fun-orientated. When administering language games the teacher must bear in mind the following factors:—

- a. The game must involve everyone in the class and must suit the mental age of the pupils.
- b. The objective of the game must be clear. What is the purpose of the game? Is it to practise and reinforce a specific structure or is it to distinguish sounds?
- c. The game must be governed by a set of rules. It must have a proper beginning and ending.
- d. There must be a scoring system in order to motivate the pupils. The scores can be exhibited so that pupils can see their progress.
- e. For a game to be a success, there must be an element of surprise or competition in it. It must be fast-moving too.

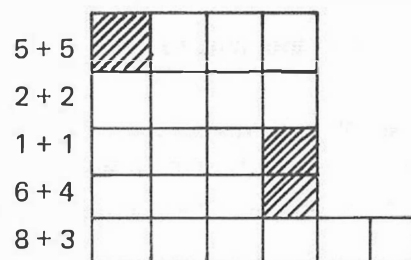
- f. The class must be divided into groups or teams, and once the grouping has been done there should be no further re-arranging.
- g. Each group can be given a name.
- h. The groups must be matched in ability. This means that anyone in the group has a chance of winning.
- i. Class organisation is very important. Ideally each group should consist of 5–6 students. A group leader needs to be appointed but it may be a good idea if this leadership is rotated.
- j. In any group activity insist that the students sit down if a particular game does not require movement. However, when games require movement make sure that pupils have passageways to walk down.
- k. The teacher must, of course, let the class know how the game is played. It is advisable to carry out a practice run of the game before the actual competition starts. Repeat the trial runs until all pupils are sure of what they have to do.
- l. Once a game starts there is bound to be a problem of noise. It is important to insist on as low a noise level as possible. If students still persist in making too much noise, stop the activity for the day. Tell them that they cannot play games until they are prepared to be relatively quiet. I find this tactic works well as students are always very enthusiastic about the games.
- n. Finally, when the game is over, the winners' names must be announced and recorded so that the champion group may be rewarded in the final term.

Below are a few examples of different types of games. They have been compiled through the dual processes of modification and innovation. They are aimed at consolidating the learning of vocabulary, sentence structures and at giving practice in all language skills.

**A: Word-building Games:**

**1. "Sum Time"**

**Preparation:** A diagram like this one with numerical clues.



**Object:** Pupils have to complete the word puzzle to find the name of an item that is used in the bathroom.

**Conduct:** Tell the class this: "Work out these sums to find the name of something that is used in the bathroom."

2. 'Add a letter'

**Object:** Pupils have to build words from the given word using the clues provided.

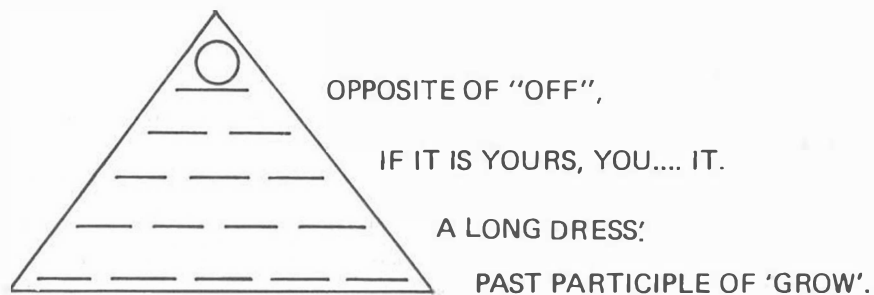
**Conduct:** The teacher writes a word on the blackboard. Then she asks the class to add one letter in front of the word to make a new word which means something else.

3. 'Word-Pyramid'

**Preparation:** The clues must be prepared very carefully beforehand.

**Object:** Students have to build longer words from a single letter using the clues provided.

**Conduct:** The teacher writes a letter, say 'O', at the top of the pyramid. Then she gives a clue which helps the students to make the second word that has two letters. The third word will be a four-letter word and so on. The pyramid can keep on broadening at the base until there are no more possibilities.



B. Sentence-Building Games

4. "A Miming Game"

**Preparation:** Write out some activities like "ride a horse", "run very fast", "drive a car", etc. on slips of paper.

**Object:** Pupils are to guess the correct activity by interpreting the mimed action.

**Conduct:** Call a pupil to the front of the class and ask him to choose one of the slips of paper. He then has to mime the activity that is written on the paper.

The game should go in this way:—

**Teacher:** He's going to show you what he did when he was a young child.

**Pupil A:** (mimes the activity)

**Pupil B:** When you were small you rode a horse.

**Pupil A:** No. I didn't.

**Pupil C:** When you were small you ran very fast.

**Pupil A:** Yes, that's right.

Then Pupil C will take A's place.

The 'actions' on the slips of paper should not be so obvious and so different from each other, that pupils will have no trouble naming them.

5. "Telling a Story"

**Preparation:** On a few slips of paper (one for each group) the teacher writes the same words. The words belong to all parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.). The words are carefully selected so that they will form a story.

**Object:** Pupils are to compose a story from the words on the slips.

**Conduct:** Each group is given a slip of paper. The members work out an interesting story using the words, in the order in which they occur. The story is to be no longer than x number of sentences. When the groups are ready they come out in turn and each student says a sentence which contributes to his group's story. The sentences must be in sequence. Members of the class will judge the stories along with the teacher. A greater element of competition can be added by imposing a time limit when pupils are composing their stories.

C: **Listening and Speaking Games:**

6. "Pass it Along"

**Preparation:** The teacher writes down a short message on a piece of paper.

**Object:** The message is passed from person to person by whispering, and the aim is to see if pupils can produce the message correctly after it has 'passed through many hands'.

**Conduct:** Divide the class into groups of ten pupils. The teacher gathers the group leaders together and gives them the same message written on a slip of paper. After reading it they go back to their groups. The leader whispers the message to the second pupil who in turn whispers it to a third person. This process continues until the last person has received the message. When every group is finished, the last pupil in each comes forward and repeats the message aloud. The teacher then checks the accuracy of each message and, by doing so, can gauge how well pupils have listened to the message.

7. "Touch and Guess"

**Preparation:** The teacher produces a bag in which she has placed several objects like a piece of sandpaper, a rubber ball, a stone, etc.

**Object:** Pupils have to guess what the object is from its description.

**Conduct:** The teacher puts the bag of objects onto a table. She calls out a pupil from Group A. The pupil puts his hand into the bag and feels for an item. Without showing the object to the class he will describe it and his team members have three guesses as to what it is. If all of their guesses are incorrect, Team B has a chance to have one guess. Points are given to teams for correct answers.

8. "Noisy Neighbours"

**Preparation-** The teacher records some sounds peculiar to animals, vehicles, birds or objects in motion.

**Object:** Pupils have to guess what the sounds are. They must use complete sentences and correct answers score points for the group.

**Conduct:** The teacher plays the first sound she has on her tape. The sound is not repeated. Pupils listen and try to identify the sound.

Teacher: What is the sound? Team A?

Pupil (from A): It is a....

Teacher: You are right. One point. Listen to the next sound, Team B, and so on.

Suggested sounds for recording: a doorbell ringing; a telephone ringing, a door banging, a bird chirping, wind in the trees, dogs barking, etc.

D. **Reading (Skimming and Scanning) Games:**

9. **“Quicksilver”**

**Preparation:** Each pupil is to bring the same copy of a local newspaper (in English) to class.

**Object;** Pupils are to look for certain information in the paper.

**Conduct:** The teacher tells the class to look for information such as: “As quickly as possible, find the name of the Malaysian Minister who is visiting China at the moment.” The first person to find the answer scores a point for his team.

The game continues with the teacher asking a variety of questions such as:

“What film is at present showing at the Odeon?”

“Who is selling a Mercedes for \$22,000?”

“Who won the ladies’ 400 metres in the Asian Games?”

10. **“Search”**

**Preparation:** Make enough copies of some reading material for each pupil in the class. Ask the pupils to read through the passage silently before the game begins.

**Object:** To locate sentences in the passage.

**Conduct:** After the teacher has distributed the handouts and the pupils have read the passage she says:

“I’m going to mime (or act out) a sentence found in the first paragraph. Watch my actions carefully. Then, look at the passage and find the sentence I’ve mimed.”

The first pupil to find the sentence scores a point for his team and the game continues.