

Most of the games mentioned below will give both children and teachers a lot of fun. We cannot hope that our pupils will make much progress in learning English simply by formal teaching of grammar items from the syllabus. They need to enjoy themselves, to move about both inside and outside the classroom, and to be exposed to the informal language of their teachers who, we hope, will keep up a constant commentary on what is happening, in simple language.

Some of the games require no language use on the part of the pupils. The enterprising teacher, however, in the informal situation while the game is being played, will get at least some of the pupils to talk by asking them what they are doing, what they will be doing, what they have done, why certain things happened, etc.

Back inside the classroom some of the games can be reenacted with more formal language work being the main focus of the activity. Exactly how much language work can be squeezed out of such games will depend very much on the imagination of the individual teacher, but he should always remember that the prime reason for playing them is to allow the children to enjoy themselves. School does not have to be a bleak experience!

Comment: Instructions for games may have to be given in the pupils' own language so that everyone understands what they have to do. Once the teacher is sure that the pupils understand, all the language he uses afterwards should be in English.

1. Follow My Leader

Players line up, one behind the other, without touching or holding one another. The first in line can be chosen by the teacher. All the others are required to follow him wherever he goes, doing exactly what he does and imitating his every gesture. If he hops, they hop, etc. Any player who fails to 'follow the leader' is out of the game. Those players win who remain in line at the end of each round or pre-determined round.

Variations: Instead of allowing the leader to choose what actions to perform, the teacher can call out commands e.g. hands on your head, left leg out, hop, etc, etc. He will have to make sure beforehand exactly what he wants to tell them.

2. Musical Chairs

Chairs are set up back to back in two more or less equal rows. The players line up, forming a circle around the chairs. The teacher's job is to start and stop the music (a cassette-recorder, preferably with a pause button, is necessary for this game.) Any music will do, but use English songs if you have them.

At the start of the music all players start walking or running around the island of chairs. Whenever the music stops, each player must try to sit in an empty chair. No two players may occupy the same chair. The player who is left standing is out of the game. Another chair is removed before the music begins again. When the music begins again, players get up and walk or run as before — and so on. The player who manages to sit in the last remaining chair wins the game.

Variation 1: Musical bumps. The same rules apply as before, except that the game is played without chairs. Place sheets or squares of paper in a row on the floor, one less than the number of players. When the music stops each player tries to find a square of paper on which to sit. The player left without paper is out of the game. Remove one square of paper each time before starting the music again. Players continue to march or run around the line of paper squares, playing as at first. The last remaining player wins the game.

The game may also be played without paper squares, in which case the last player to sit on the floor, when the music stops, is out.

Variation 2: Pass the parcel. Players form a circle, standing or sitting. A wrapped sweet is passed from one to the next while the music plays. That player who holds the sweet in hand at the moment when the music stops is out of the game.

The last player to remain in the game is the winner and may eat the sweet. Alternatively, the sweet may be wrapped in numerous layers of paper. The player holding the parcel when the music stops attempts to unwrap it, but must pass it on when the music starts. The player who finally unwraps the sweet may eat it.

Comment: The teacher again can either work out beforehand exactly what language he wants to use, making good use of the opportunities created for the repetition of the items he wants to highlight (e.g. Who has the sweet now? Get ready, I'm going to turn the music on in a minute, Who's going to unwrap the parcel now? Ah Chong has unwrapped it, etc, etc.), or simply keep up a running commentary in English so that the pupils get some exposure to 'authentic' English.

3. Three-legged Race

Players pair off. Each two players stand side by side and tie the right leg of one to the left leg of the other, using a cloth or twine. Make sure that legs are not tied tightly and circulation is not restricted. All players line up at a starting line and race towards a finishing line marked at a convenient distance. The first pair of players to cross the finishing line are the winners.

Comment: The opportunities for controlled language work are boundless, e.g. Who wants to run with Ali? Who's going to tie their legs together?, How far are they going to run?, Who do you think is going to win?, Are you two running together?, How many players shall we have in each round?, etc, etc.

Obviously the teacher will match his language to the pupils' capabilities, or teach the relevant items before the game is played.

4. Cat and Mouse

All but two players form a circle. They may not hold hands. Of the remaining players, one is chosen 'cat', and other 'mouse'. The cat stands inside the circle, and the mouse remains outside. The object of the cat is to try to get outside the circle to 'tag' (= touch) the mouse. It is the object of the players in the circle to try to prevent the cat's escape. The mouse may not ever enter the circle. The game ends when the mouse has been touched, or if the cat is unable to escape the circle after a pre-determined time period.

Comment: Possible uses of language: You mustn't hold hands, You mustn't let the cat escape, Be careful, he's trying to get out, Run away, mouse, Don't let the cat catch you, Poor little, he's been caught, etc, etc.

5. Tag

One player is chosen 'it', and tries to chase and tag any of the others. As soon as he tags another player, the tagged player becomes 'it', and so on.

Variation 1: Touch Tag. In this game, players agree beforehand on a common material – wood, metal, or any other. Whenever a chased player touches the specified material, he is safe for the time being, and 'it' must chase someone else. But players must start running again as soon as 'it' moves away.

Variation 2: Carry Tag: requires an object that is passed from player to player. 'It' may only chase and tag a player who holds the object. The object must be always be in sight when carried by one of the players.

6. Wheelbarrow Race

Make a starting and finishing line 4.5 metres (15 feet) or more apart. Players pair off and line up behind 'start'. Each pair decides who shall play the part of the wheelbarrow first. The wheelbarrow player gets down on his hands and knees. The second player of each team picks up his partner's feet and, on the word 'start' from the referee, guides his wheelbarrow towards the finishing line. The 'wheelbarrow' must walk all the way on his hands only. On arriving at the finishing line, the players of each pair change places, he who first wheeled the wheelbarrow becoming the wheelbarrow in turn. Each pair then returns to start as before, as quickly as possible. The winner is the pair which first crosses the starting line.

Comment: Possible language: Shall we play wheelbarrows today? How many people are going to play? Who are you going to play with, A? Right, now, we've got 8 pairs. O.K. Line up over there. etc, etc.

7. Hunt the Thimble (or Hot and Cold)

This game is especially useful for teaching children to get used to following and to giving directions accordingly. The object (it should be quite small but need not be a thimble) is hidden while one player, chosen to be 'it', is not in the room. He is then brought back and asked to find it. Other players tell him when he is 'hot' or 'cold', depending on whether he is approaching or going away from the place where the object is hidden. When the player has found the object, he then takes his turn by hiding it and joins the rest in directing the next player.

Variation: Once the child has learned to follow and give these simple instructions, this game may be played using 'right' and 'left', or 'forward' and 'backward' as the guiding words.

Comment: The player looking for the 'thimble' can be asked to make questions such as: Is it under the table? Is it inside the drawer? Is it on your desk? Am I near it now? Can it be seen? etc, etc. (Class answers)

8. Grin or Bear It

One player is chosen to be 'it' for the first turn. The rest line up facing him. The object of 'it' is to make any other player grin or laugh. The lined up players try to keep their faces completely immobile and serious. The first player to smile or laugh at 'it's' antics become 'it' in turn, and changes places with him. Play continues until players tire of the game.

Comment: Possible uses of language: Who's going to be 'it'? How will you make them laugh? I will smile, make ugly faces, screw my face up, stare at them, pretend to tickle them, etc, etc. Did you smile? I think you're out. It's your turn to be 'it' now, etc, etc.

9. I Spy

One player, chosen by lot, decides on any person, animal or object that is in plain view of all the others, without letting them know who or what was selected. He then announces: 'I spy with my little eye something beginning with A,' or with whatever letter of the alphabet his, her, or the object's name begins. All other players guess who or what it might be. Each player is allowed one guess per turn. The player who first guesses correctly becomes the next to ask the question.

10. (For older children) What is my job?

The first player describes a job, naming only tools and an end-product, without defining the occupation itself, e.g. 'I use a hammer and a saw and I make tables. What is my job?' The second player must then define that occupation by title, e.g. 'A carpenter'. If he answers correctly, he asks the next player (in a game of more than 2 players) or the first (in a game of 2) to name an occupation that he describes in the same manner as the first player did. The game continues in turn. Any player who fails to give a proper definition, or one who asks the question in an unanswerable fashion loses his turn.

Variation 1: Players may be asked, at their turn, to act out an occupation in mime. All other rules remain as in the game described above.

Variation 2: What am I? The player describes not a job but an animal or object e.g. 'I live in the house and I catch mice. What am I?' (A cat.) 'I am made of paper and you put your letters inside me. What am I?' (An envelope.)

Comment: The teacher could make sure this game went well by practising all the necessary vocabulary some time before, and then introducing the game as a revision exercise. Again, careful preparation of the language items necessary will have to be ensured.

QUESTION BOX

How do I teach precis? Most pupils find it boring to do summary work.

The teaching of precis poses a problem for secondary English teachers to which there is no short answer. However, a few points are worth mentioning here. First, teachers should try their best to impress upon their pupils the usefulness of summary work. Unconsciously, we are summarising all the time – when we read the newspaper, when we watch television or listen to the radio, when people talk to us. We have learned from experience to pick out the bits and pieces of information we want to know while at the same time discard details unimportant for our purposes. Summary skills are therefore very practical and useful. It is the formal and routine classroom exercise which makes precis appear to be artificial and meaningless. Second, familiarising pupils with the basic summary techniques can also be helpful, e.g. making generalizations, selecting/rejecting ideas, simplifying vocabulary and syntax, using appropriate connectives. Preliminary exercises in these skills should be introduced before any formal exercise begins. In fact, at the initial stage, some guidance from teachers is always necessary. For example, oral comprehension geared to follow-up summary work can help pupils see the salient points and detect the red herrings ingeniously put in by the writer. Finally, when selecting material for precis work, one should avoid as much as possible themes either too abstract or too remote from pupils' experience. Needless to say, the language should be simple enough for them to cope with.

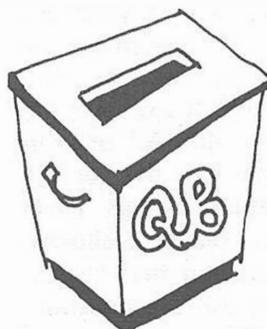
C.E.N.

In the first place, it must be realized that language learning, especially second language learning, is a long term accumulative process. Before one can really master the structure or vocabulary of a new language, one has to be thoroughly taught the items and then provided with ample opportunities to practise using them. 'Completing' the syllabus, therefore, does not necessarily mean that the pupils have already learned and mastered all the language structures and vocabulary in the primary school and yet they are unable to write or speak even a few correct sentences at the secondary level. Consequently we believe that it is important (for pupils in the primary school in particular) that they should be given sufficient practice to enable them to form correct language habits at the formative years of the primary school course and in the lower forms of secondary school. If the standard of the pupils is not very high, it would be advisable to proceed more slowly and thoroughly in order to bring about more satisfactory learning. If the set course book cannot be thoroughly covered in one year, it should continue to be used in the following year in order to allow pupils to proceed at their own pace. On the other hand, heads of English departments and school administrators often tend to insist on completing the syllabus because they have to face parental pressure. It seems that the best thing to do is to bring out this question of how much is to be covered in a term for discussion during PTA meetings so that both the teachers and school administrators can put forth their points of view and some sort of a workable compromise can be arrived at which would bring about more benefit to the pupils.

N.A.Y.

I find there is too much material to be covered in one year in the Lower Secondary Syllabus. Some English inspectors advise us not to rush through the syllabus but it is impossible to do otherwise as the Headmaster insists on it. Is there any way of dealing with this problem? I teach lower secondary forms whose standard is not very high, and feel they would learn much more if, say, two years could be spent on one year's items of the syllabus.

If you have any queries or problems on the teaching of English write to:



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