

Blackboard Drawings and Stick Figures

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Keeping students active and interested during the English lesson is a problem for most teachers in our primary schools. The use of sound language techniques such as oral drills, dialogues, songs, games, and written exercises considerably helps to ease the problem. So do visual aids. One of the most effective and versatile means of stimulating students to express themselves in both oral and written work is the use of simple blackboard drawings and stick figures. A teacher can draw houses, trees, aeroplanes, boats, animals, and various types of objects by simply drawing their basic shapes and adding a few relevant details. By using a circle for the head and lines for the body and limbs, human figures can be shown engaged in a number of different activities – walking, running, climbing, playing, and so on. Blackboard drawings and stick figures need not be artistic or complicated. As long as they arouse interest and stimulate students to speak, read, or write English, they serve their purpose in the English lesson.

Advantages of Using Blackboard Drawings

As a language device, blackboard drawings and stick figures have a number of distinct advantages for the teacher of English.

1. They can be used to create meaningful situations that might, otherwise, not be shown in the classroom, e.g. going to market, climbing a tree, or a bird flying.
2. They can be used to illustrate points or ideas that arise spontaneously through class interaction or discussion quickly and at any time during a lesson.
3. They can be used to illustrate reading passages, stories, dialogues, poems, and songs.
4. They can be used to stimulate students to do written work, i.e. picture compositions.
5. They can be made by both teacher and students, and thus provide students with an opportunity to participate in and contribute to the lesson.
6. They save valuable teaching time by helping to avoid long, complicated, verbal explanations.

Suggestions on Making Blackboard Drawings

Many teachers claim that they are not artists and use that claim as an excuse for not using drawings or stick figures in their lessons. But drawings are relatively easy to make and require little in the way of artistic talent. They do,

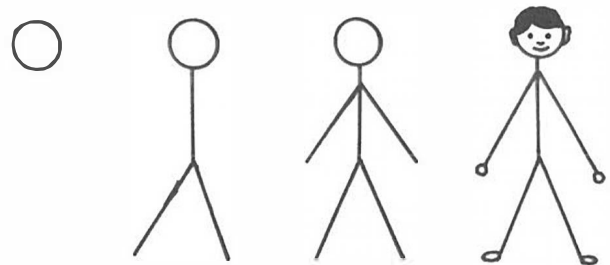
however, require a certain amount of practice if proficiency is to be gained. For a teacher who is interested, five minutes a day of practice can easily lead to a workable repertoire of drawings that can be used as often as needed in the language class.

When making blackboard drawings and stick figures keep the following suggestions in mind:

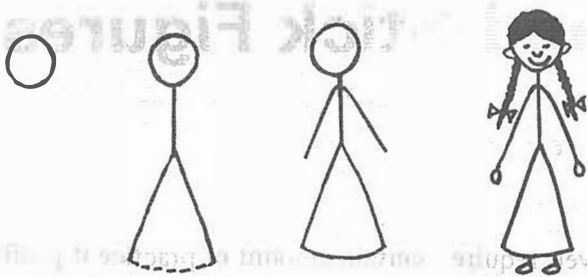
1. *Drawings should be drawn with bold and fairly thick strokes of the chalk.* Avoid broken or scratchy lines that make it difficult for students to actually see what is intended.
2. *Drawings should be large enough to be clearly seen by the entire class,* not just the students sitting in the front rows.
3. *Drawings should be made quickly.* Those that take more than 15 to 20 seconds should be avoided, unless the class is exceptionally well-disciplined.
4. *Drawings should be easy to recognize.* They should obviously look like what they are intended to represent. Students must not be left to guess whether a cow is indeed a cow, or just a large rabbit.
5. *Drawings should be simple and not too detailed.* The child's imagination is a very powerful learning tool, and one that the teacher should strive to arouse.

Some Simple Blackboard Drawings

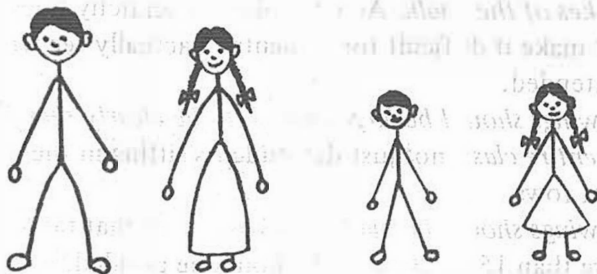
The trick to making good blackboard drawings and stick figures is to visualize the object to be drawn as simply as possible. Pick out its basic shape or the essential lines and add only those details that will help students to identify the object more easily. Here are a few examples to start your repertoire of blackboard drawings:



1. The figure of a MAN can be visualized as a combination of letters from the alphabet: an “O” + an upside down “Y” + an upside down “V”. Add hair, ears, eyes, a nose, a mouth, hands, and feet to make the “man” look even more real.



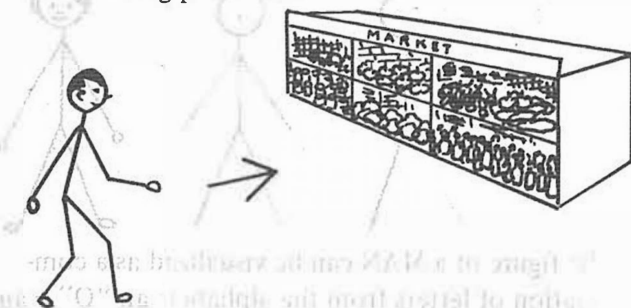
2. A **WOMAN** is always a bit more complicated than a man, but she too can be visually analysed and simply drawn. The basic figure used to draw a man can be used to draw a woman as well: “O” + an upside down “Y” + an upside down “V”. Simply join the two prongs of the “Y” to form a skirt or dress and add facial features, hands, and feet.



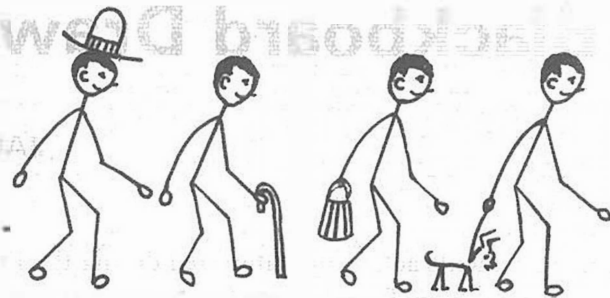
3. A **FAMILY** can be drawn by combining several of the above figures. The difference between a father and his son can be shown by the size of the figures – a tall figure for the father and a short figure for the son.



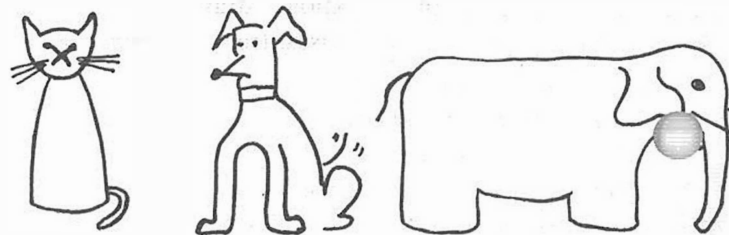
4. Similar stick figures can be used to show various **ACTIONS** – walking, running, jumping. The angle of the arms and legs to the body indicates which action is being performed.



5. Here a stick figure is shown **GOING TO A MARKET**. Note the arrow that denotes “going to”. It is an exceptionally good directional indicator.



6. The type of figure shown above is used to show **POSSESSION**. The man has a hat, a cane, a bag, and then a dog. This is a source of delight for children when they are encouraged to come to the blackboard and draw the different objects.



7. **ANIMALS** are a particular source of delight to children. Above are a cat, a dog, and an elephant. Simple, easy-to-draw animals that can be put to good use in a language class. Try to draw a few animals and see how your students react to them.

These are only a few examples of the many simple blackboard drawings and stick figures that can be used in the teaching of English as a second language. They have a myriad of possible combinations for teaching structural items, for illustrating stories or rhymes, and for stimulating written work. Try making the drawings and stick figures shown above. Combine them to form new situations, or change them to make them even better. Experiment a bit by making your own drawings. See how creative and imaginative you can be.

Let the Students Draw Too!!

Blackboard drawings and stick figures are fun for both teacher and student – and they produce learning. Children are charmed by their simplicity and respond to their use with enthusiasm and interest. The best drawings are those the teacher and his class devise together. Encourage students to use the blackboard as often as possible. Their drawings can easily be integrated into a number of lessons. Short talks, reports, or other assignments are enlivened when a student illustrates what he is talking about. The sense of involvement in the lesson is heightened only by the pride a student feels when his work is the centre of attention. Blackboard drawings help to make learning a two-way process between the teacher and his students, rather than a one-way street where the teacher does all the talking.