Classroom Activities

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This section presents three stand-alone language-learning activities related to the theme of birds. Each activity is designed for students at the proficiency level indicated.

Wild Goose Chase

Level: Beginner and Intermediate

Time required: 15–30 minutes

Goals: To energize the class; to practice teamwork; to practice using prepositions of location

Background: A "wild goose chase" is usually a complicated search for something you don't find. In *this* Wild Goose Chase, students will be successful, but they might be a little wild. Students in groups are going to search for pictures of geese hidden around the classroom.

Preparation:

Dave

You will need to draw (at least) six simple pictures of geese. Draw them on small cards or scraps of paper, perhaps one-quarter the size of a full sheet of paper. The geese can look different from one another.

Once you have the pictures of geese, give them names. Write the names on the pictures. (They might be Dave, Hamlet, Lucy, Cleopatra, Scooter, and Goosinka.) Any names will do.

Before students get to class, hide the geese throughout the room. Use adhesive tape or sticky putty to attach the geese to walls, the door, a window, the backs of chairs, the side of a bookcase, behind the wastebasket, or other places around the room. Keep one rule in mind when hiding: students must be able to find the geese *with their eyes only*. They are not allowed to open cupboards or drawers or touch anything. (This instruction ensures an orderly activity.)

You might want to put one of the geese in a place

that all students can see clearly; you can use that goose when you demonstrate the activity.

If you do not have a lot of good hiding places in your classroom, you might have to make the geese smaller. You could also move the Wild Goose Chase to an area with more hiding places such as the hallway, cafeteria, or the outdoors.

On the board, write whatever prepositions you want students to practice:

on, under, behind, near, next to, in back of, between, on top of, in front of, above, below, on the side of

Draw this chart on the board:

Find the goose	Where is it?
1. Dave	
2. Hamlet	
3. Lucy	
4. Cleopatra	
5. Scooter	
6. Goosinka	

Procedures:

1. Tell students that six geese are lost in the classroom. The geese are hidden around the room. Go over the names of the geese. Tell students that they will work in teams to find the lost geese.

2. Divide students into teams of 3 to 6. Keep them in their teams; do not let them move around the room yet.

3. Ask each team to make one copy of the chart above.

4. The first time the class plays Wild Goose Chase,

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or a variation of it, you will want to provide an example that all teams can do together.

Ask the teams if they have seen any geese around the room. By this time, they certainly will have found one goose—because you put it in an obvious place where everyone could see it. For example, perhaps Dave the goose is taped to the wall beside the door.

Ask the class where the goose is. Ask for the name of the goose.

Tell students to write Dave's location on their chart.

Find the goose	Where is it?
1. Dave	on the wall beside the door

5. Tell students that in just a moment, they will get up and search the room for the remaining geese, but they have to wait until you give the "Start!" signal. And before the signal, teams will need to understand these important rules:

Rules

1. Stay in your desks until START is signaled.
2. Do not touch or move things in the classroom. Do not open desks or cupboards. All the geese are visible. Look up, look down, look above and behind, but don't touch!
3. Do not touch the lost geese when you find them.
4. Do not point or shout when you find a lost goose. That will reveal the location to other groups. Instead, pretend you see nothing for a moment and continue looking. Eventually make your way back to your group and write the location. (*Note*: It's a good idea to demonstrate how to look casual despite making a discovery; you can use the goose named Dave as an example and pretend to "discover" Dave while not showing any reaction.)
5. Do not remove the chart from your group's desk. (It's best to tape the chart to the desk. Keeping the chart on the desk ensures that all students in a group participate in the task; one student cannot take the chart and do all the work.) Team members can search the room on their own. After you find a goose, return to the chart and write down its location.
6. When you have written all locations of the lost geese, return to team headquarters and raise your hands.

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6. Start the search: "Start!" It will take students 5 to 10 minutes at this stage, depending on how well your geese are hidden. Remember, when students find a goose, they tell no one, but instead write the goose's name and location in their group's chart.

7. It's not necessary to put too much emphasis on winning the competition, but you might want to write the order of team finishes on the board. (Students like competition!) But remind students you still have to review what they have written.

8. When all groups have finished, compare written answers, praising any groups that provided extra-detailed descriptions of the locations. You might also ask groups to get together to compare answers—where they found the geese and how they described the geese's locations.

Variations

There seem to be a lot of rules to this game! But activities that allow students to move freely need planning and clear instructions.

This activity is only complicated the first time you do it. Bring this activity back into the class and it will go more quickly and smoothly. The basic format of this activity can be adapted for other purposes:

More location information: Next time students play, ask them to be more specific. For instance, advanced groups might be required to use three prepositions in very precise descriptions: For instance, "Hamlet is (1) on top of the coat rack, (2) next to the teacher's desk, (3) in the southeast corner of the room."

Other hidden items, more items: You can hide other items: plastic animals, household items, vocabulary words printed on paper. Instead of 5 hidden items, you might try 10, 20, or more. If you are learning kitchen vocabulary, you could hide a real spoon, knife (blunt, and no touching!), fork, cup, plate, etc. If you are using a lot of items, make sure most are easy to find.

If you use different items, you can also add a variation to the way students "check" their answers. Have a group read its description of one of the hiding places, and have another group (or the whole class) name the animal or item that was hidden in that place.

Other charts for other information: Let's say you hide 10 plastic animals, but don't tell students what the animals are. Students must find them and provide information in the chart:

Animal	Location	Feature(s)	Colors
1. Rhino	beside the dictionary on the teacher's desk	It has a horn.	mostly gray
2.			

Other places: Hide things outside the classroom: in the corridor, outside the school building, etc. Make sure that each team's information chart remains inside the classroom. And remind students to be respectfully quiet outside the classroom.

A Bird Parable

Level: Upper Intermediate/Advanced

Time required: 30–40 minutes (longer if the Extension is used)

Goals: To practice critical and creative thinking skills; to explore the inter-relationships between animals, people, and the environment; to write a parable

Procedures:

1. Have students read "The King and the Birds." You can make copies and hand them out, or you can write the text on the board or on a large sheet of paper that you can tape to the wall. You might also read the story aloud or dictate the story.

The King and the Birds

There once was a king who did not like birds.

He disliked them most of all in spring when they made such noise with their singing, cooing, chirping, and cawing.

So the king sent people, carrying bags of gold, to nearby countries to buy cats, thousands and thousands of cats. And the people brought the cats back home. There, the cats hunted the birds. And hunted. And hunted. After a few weeks the trees and the sky were silent, and the king thought, "Ah, now it is peaceful."

But with the birds gone, new creatures arrived: flies, mosquitoes, and all those little buzzing things that birds like to eat and that fly around people's heads. The creatures came by the millions, and by the tens of millions. And with them came fleas, and the fleas jumped on the cats and bit them and made them yowl, often at night.

Now the king's country was noisier than it had ever been. "Where have the birds gone?" the king thought, his head aching from the noise. "Where are the birds?"

2. Explain to students that "The King and the Birds" is a kind of parable. A parable is a short story that illustrates a lesson or moral. Tell students that many parables include the moral as a final sentence. "The King and the Birds" does not; instead, students will decipher the moral (or morals) themselves.

3. Divide students into groups of 3 or 4. Ask them to discuss possible morals for the story and to write at least five morals. If students are having trouble coming up with morals or grasping the concept, you might give an example. For instance, in the story, the king noticed only the "bad" things that the birds did and ignored the "good" things they did. So a moral might be something like "Don't look so much at the bad parts of a thing that you forget about the good." Other morals might relate

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to the king's plan, the results of humans trying to control nature, the behavior of the "new creatures," and so on.

4. Have groups share, compare, and contrast the morals they have come up with. You could also have groups share their morals with the entire class and perhaps explain them.

Extension: Write Your Own Parable

1. Tell students that since they now have a good idea of what a parable is and what a moral is, they are going to write their own parables. Explain that parables are often very short, which makes them fairly easy to write.

2. Help students start by working together as a class to brainstorm a list of "openers." As a writing frame—or pattern—you can use the first sentence of "The King and the Birds":

> There once was a _____ who … .

Some other first sentences might look like these:

> There once was an owl who wanted to go to college.
>
> There once was a king whose beard grew too fast.
>
> There once were two mountains who fell in love.

You might notice that the second and third examples change the writing frame somewhat: "a king *whose* …" and "There once *were* … ." That's fine: frames exist to help and support our writing, and there is no reason we must follow them exactly.

3. After the class brainstorms openers, put students in small groups. Each group will choose one of the opening lines from those written on the board, or you can encourage them to write a new opener of their own.

4. Give students the following pattern to use for writing their own parable:

> Paragraph 1: **The Opener**
>
> Paragraph 2: **The Problem**
>
> Paragraph 3: **First Action**
>
> Paragraph 4: **Something Unexpected**
>
> Paragraph 5: **The Big Result**

You might want to give an example of how the pattern can be applied to one of the sample openers. This story is called "The Owl Who Wanted to Go to College."

Paragraph 1: The Opener. Start the story; usually one sentence is enough.	*There once was an owl who wanted to go to college.*
Paragraph 2: The Problem. Explain what problem your main character has, or what he/she/it wants to change.	*Even though the owl was wise, he was still an owl, and owls were not allowed to go to college.*
Paragraph 3: First Action. Show what the main character did to solve the problem or to get what he/she/it wanted.	*For months the owl practiced walking, talking, and dressing like a person.*
Paragraph 4: Something Unexpected. Describe how the First Action led to an unexpected consequence.	*When the owl took his entrance exam, he acted and sounded so much like a person that no one noticed anything strange about him. But halfway through the test, a mouse ran across the room. The owl pounced on the mouse and ate it.*
Paragraph 5: The Big Result. Because of the unexpected consequence in Paragraph 4, there will be a long-term result.	*Now everyone in the hall was looking at him, and <u>not</u> as though he were a student, but as if he were an owl that had just killed a mouse. Then the people chased the owl out of the building.*

4. Now students can continue working in groups to write complete parables. Give groups time to complete their parables. Each parable should have a title, and each group should think of a moral for its story.

5. Have each group copy its parable neatly on a large piece of paper—or on several pieces of paper taped together. These papers can be attached to a wall, door, or window with tape or adhesive putty. Note that groups should *not* write the moral on the paper that will be displayed.

6. At this point, ask all groups to move around the room, reading each parable. Each group should also decide what they believe is the best moral for each story. In a notebook or on a sheet of paper, the group members should then write the title of the parable and the moral they have come up with for it.

7. Afterwards, you can convene as an entire class or have groups get together to compare morals. Did a visiting group have a moral similar to that of the writing group?

Variation

Ask groups to write their own parables but omit the Big Result at the end. Other groups can read the parables and come up with their own Big Result for each parable; afterwards, in a whole-class setting, groups can compare the Big Results they have written.

Birds Are People, Too

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Time required: 30–45 minutes; you can reduce the time by doing fewer definitions.

Goals: To practice writing creative definitions; to collaborate; to learn bird/people vocabulary

Procedures:

1. Write the word *chicken* on the board. Ask students to share what they know about chickens.

2. Read the following passage:

Have you ever watched chickens carefully? They are often active, walking here and there. They make different sounds— sometimes loud, sometimes soft. They peck at their food. They clean their feathers. They get scared easily and will run away from almost anything.

In what ways are people like chickens?

3. Ask students to volunteer answers to the question at the end of the passage. (If students are not responding, you may have to reread the passage.)

4. Write on the board "A chicken is a person who _____." Tell students to complete the sentence. Encourage them to use their imaginations. Give students a few minutes to write.

5. After students have written their sentences, ask for volunteers to write theirs on the board. Students may offer several answers, such as these:

A. A chicken is a person who makes different sounds.

B. A chicken is a person who pecks at food.

C. A chicken is a person who cleans himself or herself.

D. A chicken is a person who gets scared easily.

E. A chicken is a person who is active.

What's the correct definition? In informal English, a "chicken" is a person who gets scared easily, so (D) is closest. However, if we focus only on the correct answer, we won't recognize other creative and clever definitions. Besides, there's a chance the class will not suggest the true definition.

6. Take a vote. Which definition do students *like the best*? Not "Which definition is correct?" but "Which definition do you like the best?" Ask the entire class. Count the votes for each definition.

Some student definitions will be thoughtful; some will be creative and fun. By allowing a vote, you will be recognizing all student efforts.

7. Have students work as teams (3 or 4 students per team) to create definitions for other bird words. They will use this simple model:

A(n) _____ *is a person who ...*
(bird word)

8. Make sure each team has at least one pencil or pen and a piece of paper. Then write these bird words on the board:

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early bird

night owl

silly goose

9. Each team will discuss the three bird words and create a definition for each. It is fine if students do not know the true definitions. The idea is to guess or just invent a *possible* definition. Creative or funny definitions might earn more votes. (The actual definitions are provided at the end of this activity.)

Teams should not show their written definitions to other teams. Give students 10 to 15 minutes to create these definitions.

10. When teams have written their definitions, it is time to share. Start with *early bird*. Bring up a volunteer from each team to write definitions for *early bird* on the board, just as you did with the chicken examples. If you have six teams, you will have six definitions on the board.

11. As a class, vote on the definitions. Every person gets to vote once for the definition he or she likes best. Total the votes to see which definition is the most popular.

12. Reveal the real definition of *early bird*: a person who wakes up early in the morning. You might want to ask students if they are early birds and find out why. You could also ask students what they liked about the definition they voted for.

13. Ask a different volunteer from each team to write the definition for *night owl*. Follow the same procedure until you have voted on all three bird words.

Extension

For advanced classes, you might follow up at a different time with more difficult bird words:

culture vulture

dead duck

dove

rare bird

ugly duckling

Definitions

chicken – a person who is easily scared; a coward

early bird – a person who wakes up early in the morning

night owl – a person who works late at night

silly goose – a person who makes others laugh by doing something funny or silly, often in a childish way

culture vulture – a person who loves to attend cultural events, go to museums, etc.

dead duck – a person who is in a very dangerous position, or is certain to fail or be hurt

dove – a person who promotes peace

rare bird – a person who is odd or unusual

ugly duckling – a person who is unattractive or ugly but has potential to change and succeed

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