

INTRODUCING TOPICS AND ACTIVATING STUDENTS' BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Last week's installment of the Teacher's Corner discussed questions to consider when selecting authentic materials as well as possible benefits and challenges when using them in instruction. This week will focus on warm-ups and activities to help students connect to authentic materials and create a meaningful context for practicing English.

THINKING MAP

Time: 10 minutes

Goals:

- To encourage students to consider what experience they have with a topic or what they already know about it (their background knowledge).
- To participate in a discussion in English.
- To read and write in English.

Materials: Writing utensils and paper for each group of students, or a chalkboard/whiteboard and chalk/markers if the activity will be completed as a class

Preparation:

1. Consider the authentic materials you plan to use with your students. Use the materials to create a few questions for students to consider when creating their thinking map. Some example questions are shown below.

Authentic Material	Questions for Students to Consider
Recipe for bread	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of bread do you eat? • What ingredients are needed to make bread? • What are the steps to making bread?
News clip or article about popular celebrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is this celebrity? What is his or her name? • What do you know about him or her? What makes them famous?
Brochure or website for an international travel agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you were going to travel to a different country, what steps would you take to prepare? • What would you pack for your trip?

2. Decide if you will have students create thinking maps in small groups or as a whole class.

Procedure:

1. Explain to students that they will soon participate in an activity to examine a recipe (or article, website, etc.). Tell students that first, they will think carefully about what they may already know about the topic.
2. Model how to create the thinking map by writing the topic in a circle on the board. For instance, topics from the examples in the table above would be *bread*, [*celebrity name*], and *international travel*. In the following steps we will use the recipe for bread as an example.
3. Write the questions that you want students to consider on the board.
4. Model your thought process for students: Say “One type of bread that I eat for breakfast is *roti canai*, so I’m going to add that to the map.” Draw a line out from the circled topic and write the words *roti canai* at the end of the line.
5. Continue by saying “I know that flour is used to make bread, and that some types of bread require time for the dough to rest.” Add two more lines to the map and write *flour* and *time for dough to rest* to continue modeling for students.
6. Answer any questions students have about the process for creating the thinking map. If students will work in small groups, distribute necessary materials and have students form

groups. If the whole class will work together on one map, allow students to contribute ideas by coming up to the board to add information.

7. Stop the activity after about 10 minutes or when students have finished adding all of their ideas to the map. If students worked in small groups, display the maps in different areas of the room and allow the class time to move around and read all of the ideas each group wrote down.
8. If you choose, the map(s) can remain on display in the classroom as students continue to work with the materials about the topic.

Variations:

1. Allow beginner-level students to include illustrations or words in their native language on the thinking map if needed. They can discuss what they drew or wrote and the class or a peer can help them label it in English.
2. Students' background knowledge can also be activated by completing a similar activity to create a word cloud or word splash. Word clouds or word splashes are simply groups of words or phrases about a topic written in a large bunch. The words are often written in different sizes and in different directions. These can be created on paper or online using free generators such as www.wordle.net or www.wordclouds.com. A word splash can be created by using guiding questions as in the activity above or by using a photograph or single word or topic.

ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Time: 10 minutes

Goals:

- To encourage students to consider their existing level of knowledge or their opinions about a topic.
- To read and participate in a discussion in English.

Materials: Notebooks and pencils, a way to display statements for all students to see (e.g., a chalkboard/whiteboard or projector), prepared statements about the topic

Note: An anticipation guide activity works best with topics about which people usually have strong opinions or different levels of experience. News stories, documentaries, or materials that reflect things students might do in their own lives work best.

Preparation:

1. Consider the topic presented by the authentic material your students will be using. Think about the different opinions and levels of familiarity your students might have about this topic.
2. Prepare a set of 5-8 statements inspired by the topic. As an example, let's assume the authentic material being used is a travel brochure (this was also an example in the table in the Thinking Map activity, above). The table below contains some example statements inspired by a travel brochure.
3. Decide how students should respond to the statements. They can label each statement true or false, indicate if they agree or disagree, rate their level of agreement on a scale of 1-5, etc. (If using a rating scale, the following levels can be helpful: 1 = disagree, 2 = mostly disagree, 3 = unsure/neutral, 4 = mostly agree, 5 = agree).

Authentic Material and Topic	Example Statements
<p>Material: Brochure or website for an international travel agency</p> <p>Topic: International travel</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. International travel helps open people's minds to different cultures and ways of living. 2. International travel costs too much and is not really worth the money. 3. Traveling to different countries is a valuable way to spend time. 4. I would enjoy traveling to any country in the world. 5. It takes a lot of time and effort to organize an international trip.

Procedure:

1. Explain to students that they will soon participate in an activity to examine a brochure (or news clip, article, website, etc.). Tell the class that first, they will respond to a set of statements about the topic.
2. Tell students how you expect them to respond to the statements (true/false, agree/disagree, rating scale, etc.).
3. To provide students with an example, you display the first statement and model your thinking. For example, if you were using a rating scale, you could say, “Well, I think this is false,” or “I agree with this statement, but not all the time, so I’ll rate this a 4.”
4. Answer any questions the class may have.
5. Display the statements you have prepared or write them on the board. Explain to students that they will copy the statements into their notebooks and then indicate how they feel about each one. Tell students they should think carefully and prepare to justify their opinions in a discussion.
6. Give students time to copy the statements, consider how they feel about them, and make notes in their notebooks. This should take about 5 minutes.
7. When students have completed the task, explain that they will share their responses and reasoning with classmates. This can be done in several ways. Students can share with a partner, move around the room and find a new partner for each statement, or share in small groups.
8. To wrap up this activity, have students return to their seats. Ask the class to share any similarities or differences of opinion they encountered as they shared ideas with classmates.

Extensions:

1. Have students keep these statements to refer to later. After completing more activities with the authentic material, students can revisit and reconsider the statements and note whether their feelings have stayed the same or changed and why. Follow the same steps from the procedure above and have students discuss why their feelings stayed the same or changed as a result of the lesson.

The two activities presented this week will help students consider what they know or how they feel about a topic before interacting with authentic materials. Activities like this can help build students' confidence and motivation before they encounter authentic materials that may contain unfamiliar language structures or vocabulary. A warm-up that activates students' background knowledge and introduces a topic in an accessible way is beneficial regardless of a student's English proficiency level.

Next week's Teacher's Corner will discuss strategies for using authentic materials to teach and practice vocabulary words.