

Cultural Introductions by Way of Storytelling

Unique cultures help to define who we are as individuals, shaping our perspectives as teachers, and in turn, how we share and explore ideas with students.

In this webinar, we will:

- examine how we can share our own unique stories with others using an engaging method which gives value to ourselves, while also celebrating the differences of everyone involved
- explore how to use our voice as a positive tool for constructive dialogue with others, and how a good storyteller not only shares, but listens, too



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Matthew holds a Master's Degree in TESOL from the University of Southern California, and has classroom experience in the United States, Korea, New Zealand, Ethiopia, and China. Matthew is guided by the motto "Learning is Lifelong and Worldwide!"



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“Cultural Introductions by Way of Storytelling”

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Why Do We Share?

Each of us, as teachers or students, has a distinct identity

Our identity is what makes us, as individuals, special, and collectively, our classrooms unique spaces in which we teach and learn

Today, we will share ideas about using “Cultural Ways of Storytelling” to celebrate our individuality as teachers as well as that of our students

What is something that makes you...YOU?

Each of us has something special that we bring to our classrooms:



Share

In the chat, share some things that make you unique:

- Where are you from?
- What is your favorite food?
- What type of music do you enjoy?

Example

Matthew: Los Angeles/tacos/hip hop



Students = Teachers

In our classrooms, student input is valued as much teacher input

We can view a class of 25 students as a group of 25 teachers, too

So, just as we bring unique qualities to the classroom, so too do our students

Let's celebrate each one of these differences!

Why is each student important?

From an academic standpoint, students may have different strengths:

- Speaking
- Writing

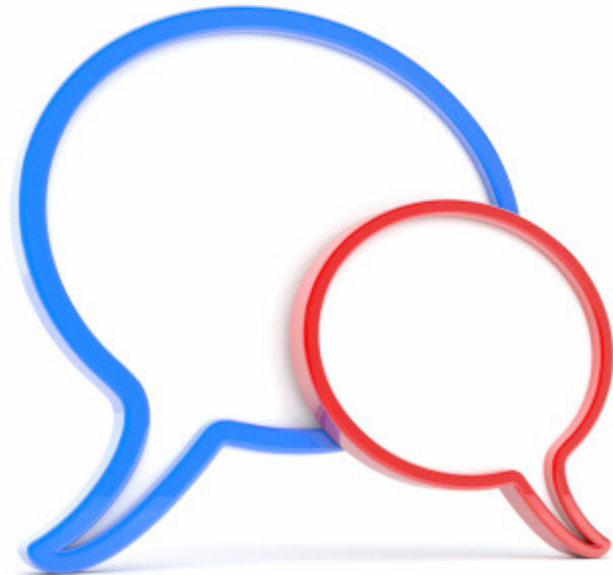
From an individual standpoint, students also have different strengths:

- Sports
- Music



Student Sharing

What are some ways which you already use in class to encourage students to share information about themselves?



Suggestions

- Presentations
- Show-and-Tell
- Journals



Language Accuracy

In self-expression activities, how important is grammar and pronunciation in student output?

Share some ideas in the chat.



Interpersonal Communication

In today's activity, we will focus more on interpersonal communication than language accuracy

Language-focused issues (grammar, pronunciation, intonation, etc.) are an excellent follow-up lesson for this activity

Empowerment

“The use of storytelling has the potential to facilitate understanding of communication concepts in applicable, everyday contexts....”

(Burke, 2000, p.3)

Storytelling

Today, we will explore storytelling options through an interactive activity that you can use in your classrooms

The activity can be adapted for more- or less-advanced applications based on the levels/ages in your classes

Cultural Introductions by Way of Storytelling

by MATTHEW JELICK



This introductory lesson is something I have used on the first day of class with students around the globe. The activity touches on each of the skill sets associated with English language acquisition, with special attention paid to cultural issues that can be applied on a country-by-country basis. No matter what country you use this technique in, the goal is to create an inviting lesson in which students exercise English abilities while sharing their cultural and personal norms (or exceptions). Whether you are a local teacher or foreign instructor, the technique offers many variations, as each of us is unique, with different likes and dislikes to share. Depending on the circumstances in your classroom, the technique can be used as a warm-up activity or take up an entire hour-long session.

The technique is based on the notion of a "Mad Lib." You, as the teacher, make up a creative story to share with the class, leaving

blank key cultural and personal references particular to the country and individual students. By incorporating examples of celebrities, foods, music, places, and other culture-specific customs, this activity enables the students to finish their own stories, highlighting their individual preferences as the unique part that completes each sentence.

You can decide on the vocabulary used in the story, allowing for specific skill-level application in accordance with the class's collective mastery of English. Length can be adjusted as well, shortening or expanding the exercise based on the class's ability. There is no story too basic or too short to use as a framework for this technique, and in fact, only a sentence or two could replace a full paragraph.

Before students complete their own stories, it may be a good idea to demonstrate a sample story aloud to clarify vocabulary while

Activity Context

Semester/Course Timeframe	Near the beginning is best
Lesson Length	10 minutes (icebreaker) 1 hour (extended lesson)
Student Level	All: beginning to advanced
Materials	Chalkboard (simple) Handouts (extended)
Teacher Preparation	Prepare materials and examples

Location, Food, and Music and as Culture

Reflection:

Why do geography, food, and music play an important role in who we are?

Share some ideas in the chat...



Getting Started

My hometown is _____.

My favorite food is _____.

I like to listen to _____.

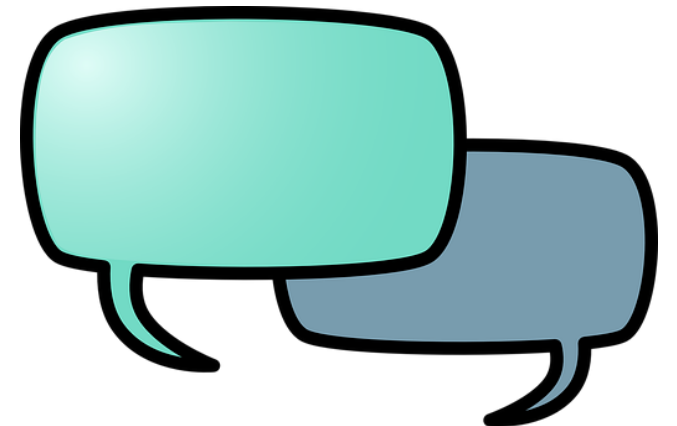
Creating Your Own

What other topic categories can you ask your students to share their interests about?

Examples:

- Sports
- Movies

Write another example in the chat...



Implementing the Activity

Step 1: Teacher Example

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Step 2: Student Example

A blue arrow pointing downwards from the bottom right corner of the Step 2 box to the top right corner of the Step 3 box.

Step 3: Student Sentences

Step 1: Teacher Example

1. Teachers write and share their example on the board, complete with the “blanks” filled in with the teacher’s responses.

Example:

In my hometown of Los Angeles, I like to eat tacos while listening to hip hop.

Step 2: Student Example

2. Students write the same sentence, substituting their own answers in the respective blanks.

Example:

In my hometown of _____, I like to eat _____ while listening to _____.

Step 3: Student Sentences

3. Students write their own sentences, creating three new blanks to fill in.

Examples:

My favorite athlete is _____, who plays my favorite sport of _____, which I enjoy watching with my best friend, _____.

My favorite actor/actress is _____, who is in my favorite film, _____, which I have watched _____times.

Informal Observations

As students work on their sentences, the teacher should roam around the classroom, conducting informal observations, but not intruding on student creativity



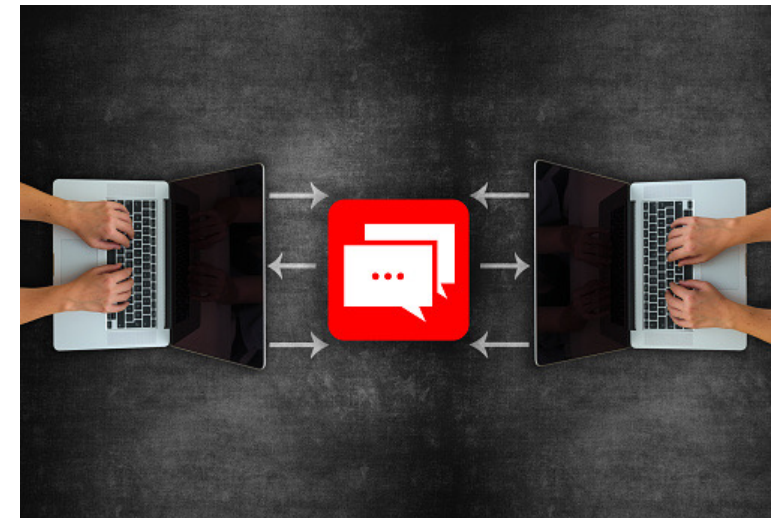
(Achmad & Yusef, 2014)

Encourage Peer-to-Peer Sharing

After students have completed the example sentence from the board as well as one of their own sentences, have them share with a partner.

What are some benefits of sharing with a partner?

Share some ideas in the chat...



Video

In the short 30-second video, look for two things:

1. What is the role of the teacher?
2. What is the role of the students?



Student Sharing: Cooperative Learning



Sharing the Activity

Step 1: Students write on board



Step 2: Students share their own story



Step 3: Student share their partner's story



Step 1: Completing the board example

1. Teacher invites a student to come to the front of the class and write fill in the blanks from the original example.

Example:

In my hometown of _____, I like to eat _____
while listening to _____.

Step 2: Reading their own example

2. Teacher invites a (different) student to come to the front of the class and read the original sentence frame that they created.

Example:

My favorite athlete is _____, who plays my favorite sport of _____, which I enjoy watching with my best friend _____.

Step 3: Reading their partner's example

3. Teacher invites another student to come to the front of the class and read the example which their partner created.

Example:

My favorite actor/actress is _____, who is in my favorite film, _____, which I have watched _____times.

Follow-Up Questions for Students

To promote continued dialogue, teachers can ask the students follow-up questions about the stories they read aloud



Follow-Up Question Examples

Hometown: *You said you're from Addis Ababa, how is the weather there?*

Food: *What are some ingredients in your favorite stew?*

Music: *You mentioned jazz, who is your favorite jazz musician?*

Follow-Up Questions

What do you think is a good follow-up question to ask students about sports?

Share in the chat...



Letting Students Ask Questions

After the teacher has asked students questions, it is important to transfer responsibility and have students ask each other questions.



Letting Students Ask Questions

Since they have already discussed with their partners, have other pairs ask questions of the students who are verbally sharing in front of the class.

For time, limit this to one or two questions from different students.

Large Classes

In the chat box, share how student-student questions could be handled in a large class (50 or more students).



Modeling a longer story

Once students have grasped the activity concept, the teacher can provide a longer story template:

My pet _____ and I walked through the city of _____. We became tired. “I need something to drink” I thought. I saw a market that sold my favorite drink, delicious, cold _____. Inside the store, we heard music from _____ playing from the speakers. We found our drink and a delicious snack of _____. After paying, we left.

Process Activity (5 Steps)

1. Teachers write the model story on the board (not filling in the blanks)
2. Provide students with a template so they can fill in the blanks with their own answers
3. Pair students so that they can share their completed stories with each other
4. Write the same story (with blanks) on the board
5. Have one student fill in their respective blanks on the board to share with the class

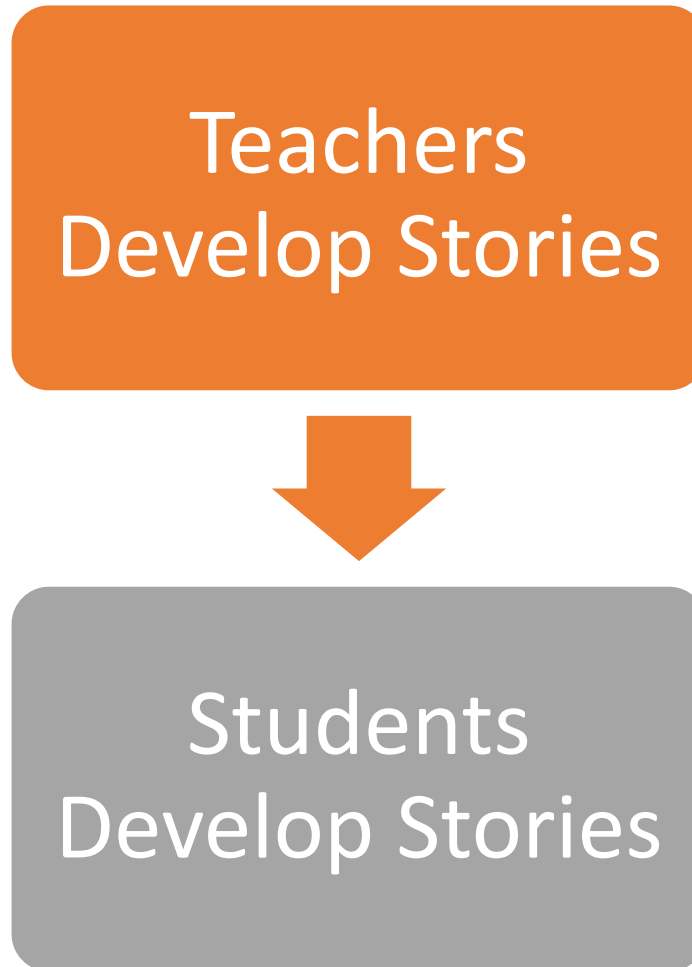
Process Activity (Alternative)

1. Teachers write the model story on the board (not filling in the blanks)
2. Provide students with a template so they can fill in the blanks with their own answers
3. Pair students so that they can share their completed stories with each other
4. Write the same story (with blanks) on the board
5. Instead of having one student fill in all the blanks, call on five different students to each fill in only one blank

Example

My pet dog and I walked though the city of Seoul. We became tired. “I need something to drink” I thought. I saw a market that sold my favorite drink, delicious, cold milk. Inside the store, we heard music from K’naan playing from the speakers. We found our drink and a delicious snack of peanuts. After paying, we left.

Transferring Ownership to Students



Students Develop Stories (5 Steps)

Step 1: Have students create their own stories, leaving blanks for others to fill in

Step 2: Have them exchange their “unanswered” stories with their partner

Step 3: Have students fill in the blanks of their partner’s story

Step 4: Have them share, orally, with each other

Step 5: Rotate partners

Teacher Role

In the chat, describe how the role of the teacher changes as this activity develops...



Academic and Social Benefits

In addition to creating a platform for constructive verbal communication with peer feedback, this activity does something perhaps more important:

It builds peer-to-peer relationships among everyone in the classroom, and gives insight into who they are as people, not just students.

Take-Aways

- This activity aims to give value to student voices through storytelling
- The teacher can model, but as the lesson develops, the students gain responsibility and ownership
- Extended information can be found in the [Teaching Techniques](#) section of *English Teaching Forum* 53 (3)



References

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- Burk, N. M. (2000). [Empowering at-risk students: storytelling as a pedagogical tool](#). Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association (86th, Seattle, WA, November 9-12, 2000).
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Thank you!

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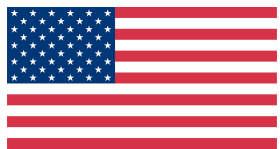
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Reflection Questions

1. How might you/how do you design learning activities that encourage students to creatively express their interests and opinions? Why might these types of activities encourage student engagement?
2. When focused on “getting to know each other” or idea-focused activities, how and when—if at all—should you address language accuracy issues in student production?
3. When monitoring student pair or group work during informal assessment, what types of information might you want to collect? How might you capture and use that data?



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