

Vocabulary Jigsaw Review

by CARA M. SCHROEDER AND EDGAR MIGUEL GRAJEDA

LEVEL: Advanced Beginner to Advanced

TIME REQUIRED: One 40- to 60-minute class period (less time as students become familiar with the activity)

GOALS: Students will be able to do the following:

- Employ speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills to review vocabulary and build vocabulary retention
- Engage critical thinking to identify learned vocabulary
- Use individualized roles within a group context to problem-solve

MATERIALS: Scrap paper or small whiteboards (one per group); pen/pencil or dry-erase marker and eraser (one per group); clue cards; PowerPoint slides with vocabulary and instructions (optional)

BACKGROUND:

This activity, in a different format, was introduced to one of the authors (Cara) when she was teaching at a public New York City high school dedicated to English language learners. She used the activity in its original format, integrating it into her curriculum to review vocabulary found in the works of Richard Wright, George Bernard Shaw, and William Shakespeare with her heterogeneously proficient students.

Sometime later, Cara revisited this activity while co-teaching fourth-grade English as a foreign language (EFL) in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, and serving as a trainer and advisor to Fulbright English Teaching Assistants. Adaptations were made to address the local context of non-immersed young learners unaccustomed to regular group work in classes of up to 30 students. The second author, Edgar, further adapted and refined the activity for his students in fourth to sixth grades in Taipei, Taiwan. Due to its popularity with his students, Edgar has integrated this activity into his regular classroom practice to explicitly review unit vocabulary. It is Edgar's adaptations of this activity that are shared here.

PREPARATION:

1. Identify a set number of vocabulary items to review. We recommend reviewing no more than ten to 15 words at a time, depending on grade level, students' proficiency, time available, and students' familiarity with the activity. (You should expect that the activity will take longer the first time it is used. Also, it is likely that more-proficient and older students will be able to move through more vocabulary items during the activity than students who are less proficient.) For the purposes of describing this activity, we have chosen sets of five vocabulary items to be identified and reviewed. Students should already be familiar with the vocabulary being reviewed, and they should know which vocabulary items might be included in this activity.

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water
milk
juice
tea
coffee

Figure 1a. Example vocabulary (for advanced-beginner learners)

confused
satisfied
weary
ecstatic
nonchalant

Figure 1b. Example vocabulary (for intermediate learners)

- 2.** Create a set of clues for each vocabulary item. Clues can be, for example, the following:
 - a. Number of letters
 - b. Number of syllables
 - c. Starting letter
 - d. Ending letter
 - e. Definition
 - f. Synonym(s)
 - g. Antonym(s)
 - h. Illustration
- 3.** (Optional) Create PowerPoint slides reviewing vocabulary items and showing step-by-step directions for the activity.

water
A. Has 5 letters
B. Starts with the letter *w*
C. Ends with the letter *r*
D. Has 2 syllables

milk
A. Has 4 letters
B. Starts with the letter *m*
C. Ends with the letter *k*
D. Has 1 syllable

juice
A. Has 5 letters
B. Starts with the letter *j*
C. Ends with the letter *e*
D. Has 1 syllable

tea
A. Has 3 letters
B. Starts with the letter *t*
C. Ends with the letter *a*
A. Has 1 syllable

coffee
A. Has 6 letters
B. Starts with the letter *c*
C. Ends with the letter *e*
D. Has 2 syllables

Figure 2a. Example clues (for advanced-beginner learners)

PROCEDURE:

- 1.** Review or remind students of key vocabulary. You can do this by using a written word bank, a PowerPoint presentation, or some other means at your discretion.

confused
A. Ends with the letter <i>d</i>
B. Has 2 syllables
C. Antonym of <i>clear</i>
D. Means “unable to understand”
satisfied
A. Ends with the letter <i>d</i>
B. Has 3 syllables
C. Antonym of <i>unhappy</i>
D. Means “pleased with”
weary
A. Ends with the letter <i>y</i>
B. Has 2 syllables
C. Antonym of <i>energetic</i>
D. Means “very tired or bored”
ecstatic
A. Ends with the letter <i>c</i>
B. Has 3 syllables
C. Antonym of <i>sad</i>
D. Means “feeling extremely happy and excited”
nonchalant
A. Ends with the letter <i>t</i>
B. Has 3 syllables
C. Antonym of <i>concerned</i>
D. Means “not seeming interested in or worried about anything”

Figure 2b. Example clues (for intermediate learners)

- Put students into groups—ideally four students per group. For student autonomy, allow students to choose their groups. (This is most effective with older students; younger students may need

more structure.) Assign each group a number.

- Determine which students in each group will be assigned A, B, C, and D; this can be determined by you or by students in each group. See Figure 3 for a diagram showing groups and student assignments within each group. If one group has an uneven number of students (e.g., the class has five groups of four students and one group of three students), consider having a student double up on roles—that is, that student can be Student A *and* Student B.
- Distribute one piece of scrap paper and a pen or pencil (or a small whiteboard, dry-erase marker, and eraser) to each group.
- Instruct Student A in each group to write their group number at the top of the paper and to write the numbers 1 to 5 vertically. More numbers can be added, depending on the time allotted for this activity and how quickly students move through it.
- Model the activity by using the board. You can choose a vocabulary item as an example and start by reading the clue that tells the number of letters in the word. Draw a horizontal line for each letter. You can then read the clue telling what letter this word starts with and write that letter on the first horizontal line. Next, read the clue telling the last letter of the word and write that letter on the last horizontal line. Figure 4 shows an example with the word *water*.

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6
A1 B1	A2 B2	A3 B3	A4 B4	A5 B5	A6 B6
C1 D1	C2 D2	C3 D3	C4 D4	C5 D5	C6 D6

Figure 3. Groups with student assignments (A, B, C, and D) within each group

**Tell students that they will take turns
during the activity and that every student
will have chances to get the clues and write the clues.**

Note: You may wish to select a student to act as the “clue-giver” during this activity so that you can monitor the activity while it is taking place. This might be particularly useful in larger classes. Refer to Variation 4 for details.

- 7.** Tell all the groups that you will ask Student A from each group to come to get the first clue. You should also tell the groups that every Student C will be the first “writer” or “scribe,” so each Student C should be ready to write the first clue when Student A returns to the group. Tell students that they will take turns during the activity and that every student will have chances to get the clues and write the clues.

- 8.** Tell Student A from each group to meet privately with you—or the clue-giver, if someone else is giving clues. This can be done by stepping outside the classroom or off in a corner or the front or back of the room. The clue-giver shares with Students A the first clue for the first word. (We recommend having the clues written down; see Note and Tip 1.)

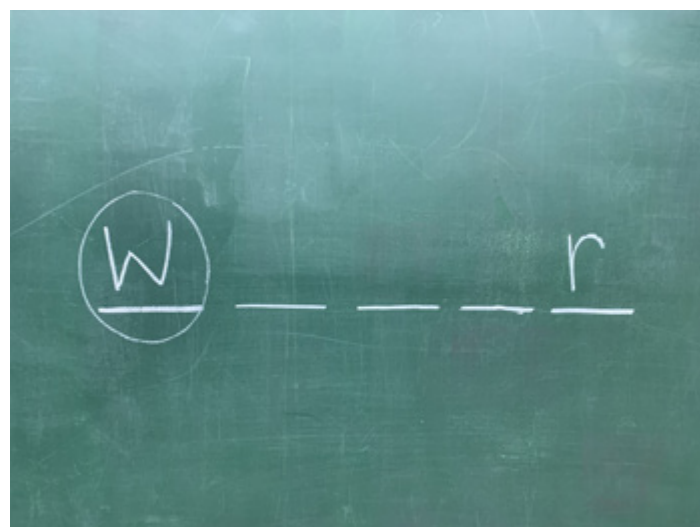


Figure 4. Example showing the first and last letters of the word *water* filled in

For example, the clue might be, “Word #1 has 5 letters.” See Figure 5 for an illustration of what is happening during this part of the activity.

- 9.** Students A return to their groups and share the clue. Students C act as the scribe and write the clue down on their group’s paper.

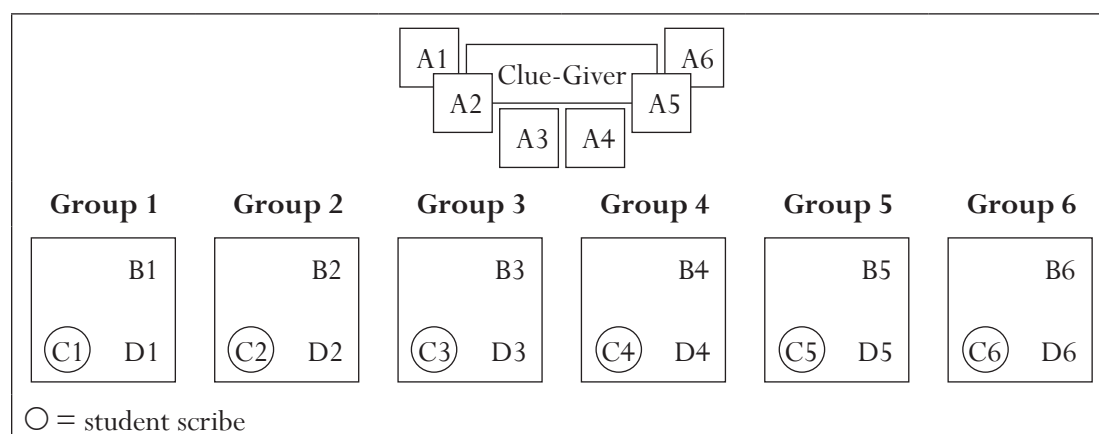


Figure 5. Student A in each group meets the clue-giver to receive the clue; Student C in each group prepares to write down the clue that Student A brings back.

It's a good idea to write out the clues to each vocabulary item on cards for the clue-giver to show students who come for the clues.

- 10.** Tell groups that now every Student B will come to get the second clue, and every Student D will be the scribe who writes down the clue that Student B receives.
- 11.** Student B from each group meets privately with the person giving the clues. The clue-giver shares with these students the next clue for the first word. For example, the second clue might be, "Word #1 starts with the letter *w*." See Figure 6 for an illustration of what is happening during this step.
- 12.** Students B return to their groups and share the clue. Students D act as the scribe and write the clue down on their group's paper.
- 13.** The activity continues, with students rotating roles. Next, Students C meet privately with the clue-giver, receive a clue, and report it to the group, while Students A are the scribes. (For example, the third clue might be, "Word #1 ends with the letter *r*.") Then, Students D get a clue, and Students B are the scribes.
- 14.** Students confer, using the clues to determine the correct vocabulary word and write it on the paper. For example, "Word #1 is *water*."
- 15.** Repeat Steps 8 to 14 for each word, but be sure to continue rotating roles. (That is, if Student B was the last person to receive a clue for the first word, then Student C should be the first person to receive a clue for the second word.) This process may go rather slowly the first time through, but it can become fast-paced as students get into the rhythm of the activity.
- 16.** After students have written their guesses for each word on their group paper, have them turn in their papers to you or the clue-giver.
- 17.** Distribute each group's paper for another group to check as the class goes

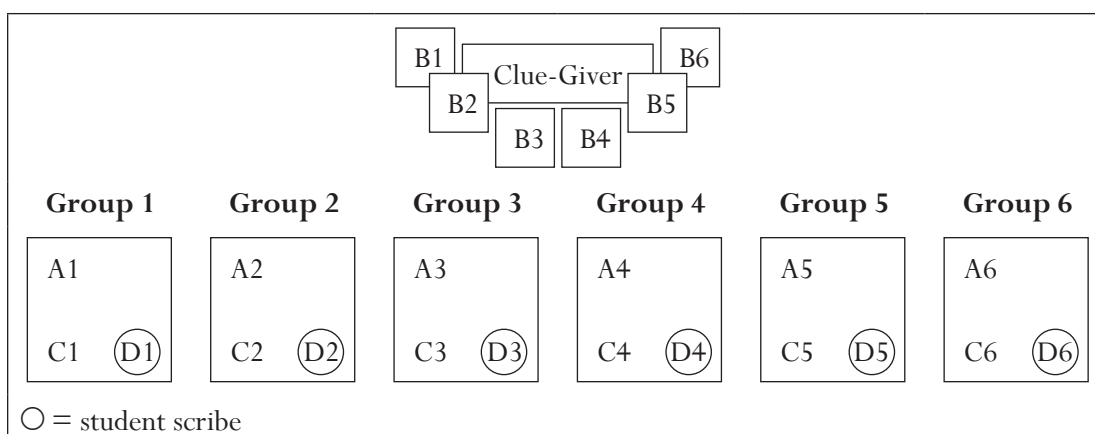


Figure 6. Student B in each group meets the clue-giver to receive the clue; Student D in each group prepares to write down the clue that Student B brings back.

Create mystery by giving students the least revealing clues first.

over the answers (and for a final review). Papers are then returned to their original groups.

NOTES AND TIPS

1. It's a good idea to write out the clues to each vocabulary item on cards for the clue-giver to show students who come for the clues. For students who may need more linguistic support, this visual can aid in their understanding of the clue; showing written clues can also prevent other students, back in their groups, from overhearing the clues. An option is for the clue-giver to show the written clue while also reading it, for further support.
2. As students from each group are meeting privately with the clue-giver to get a new clue, the remaining students should work with their groupmates to guess the word, using the clues they have already received.
3. Use checks for understanding while giving instructions to ensure that the activity runs smoothly once it gets started.
4. Give students choice, as appropriate in your context:
 - a. Let students determine their own groups.
 - b. Let students determine their group name.
 - c. Let students decide who are Students A, B, C, and D in their group.
5. Adjust the number of clues and roles according to the group size and difficulty of the vocabulary, as needed.

6. Depending on students' familiarity with the words being reviewed, allow (or don't allow) students to refer to vocabulary lists or texts during the activity.

7. *Create mystery by giving students the least revealing clues first.* For example, if several of the words being reviewed have only one syllable or are five letters long, share these clues first to add mystery and increase student engagement.

VARIATIONS

1. Student roles can be predetermined for differentiation purposes. For example, if students are put into mixed-ability groups for this activity, a less-proficient student in each group can be given the role of Student A. The clue for Students A is then one that is easier for them to remember, or perhaps Students A can bring their group paper when meeting privately with the teacher for the clue and are able to write it down before returning to their groups to share.
2. A competitive element can be added, with points awarded to the group that correctly identifies each item (or all the words) first. Likewise, a running-relay element can be infused, with students running—or walking quickly, for safety—back to their groups to share the clues they obtain from the clue-giver.
3. Teachers who prefer to monitor or assist learners during the activity, especially in larger classes, can be taken out of the clue-giving role. Here are two options:
 - a. Establish a clue board where written clues are revealed for each round. For example, the clue for Students A is revealed only when it is their turn. The next clue is revealed for

Students B when it is their turn. You could post each round of clues in different places around the room to prevent overcrowding of one area.

- b. Nominate one or more students to serve as clue-givers, or ask for volunteers.

4. With older or more-advanced learners, consider including more vocabulary items to be reviewed. Rather than having designated students meet with the teacher/clue-giver for clues, you can provide clue cards to each group.

- a. Each group receives a set of four cards: A, B, C, and D (depending on how many students are in each group). Each card has a unique clue for each of the vocabulary items. If possible, you might want to use different colors for the cards (e.g., Card A is green, Card B is blue, and so on). Different colors add to the visual appeal of the activity, and they can make it easier for you to see which card is which when you are handing them out or collecting them afterward.
- b. Each student takes out a piece of scrap paper and numbers it according to the number of words being reviewed.
- c. The student with Card A chooses a number from 1 to 10 (or however many words are included in the activity) and reads the clue on the card.
- d. The students with Cards B, C, and D read that number's clue, in order.
- e. The group works together to determine the answer, which each member then writes down on their paper.
- f. (*Optional*) After a turn of picking the

clues, the cards are rotated clockwise so a new student has Card A.

- g. When all words have been determined, a member of the group obtains an answer sheet from the teacher, or the groups compare/discuss answers. This can be an opportunity for students to talk about the clues as well, discussing which were most helpful, which might have been confusing, etc., and explaining why.

5. While students are waiting for a new clue, instruct them to review their answers and use the clues to generate other vocabulary items that fit the clues. These “extra” words can be then awarded bonus points. For example, with beverage-related vocabulary using the example list in Figure 1a, students could generate other relevant words they know that begin with the letter *c*, such as *cola* and *coconut juice*.

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