

Scavenger Hunts in ELT

by LAURA LODER BUECHEL

Do you remember your favorite childhood birthday party? It may have involved some sort of scavenger or treasure hunt. Scavenger hunts can also be used in the classroom—there are many variations, and they can be used for learners of all ages in myriad ways. This article presents ideas for using different kinds of hunts for various English language teaching (ELT) purposes.

The hunts described below are listed in order of complexity and are introduced with general considerations and common language that students can practice with them. However, the hunts can be adapted for all ages and levels of learners, and they can meet a variety of language aims. Scavenger hunts are active, so you need good classroom management, and for group work, learners should be paired in groups that can be trusted, as some hunts involve leaving the classroom. (See Buechel [2020] for ideas on how to motivate learners to stick to English in such open settings.)

Generally, these hunts are a way for students to apply language from traditional exercises by providing an authentic context. Scavenger hunts promote cooperation and teamwork, which are necessary in a world where practice with discrete items and basic language exercises can easily be done on a computer, and valuable time in class can be spent in interpersonal communicative settings—which these ideas provide.

SEE, DON'T TOUCH!

- *Considerations: For use in the classroom and good for children and classes that need careful control*
- *Language: General A1 / A2 levels (e.g., there is / there are; prepositions; ...)*

This hunt is best used at a time of year when sweets—such as Halloween treats and chocolate Easter eggs—are commonly given out, but it can be effective at any time of the year. Instead of sweets, teachers can use other small items, particularly ones that students will find attractive or interesting.

- “Hide” treats around the room in plain sight. Learners should be able to see them from where they are seated—on the windowsill, above the fire alarm, under a desk, perched at the top of the chalkboard, and so on.
- Instruct the learners when they enter the room that they are not allowed to touch any of the items! They should sit down and remain seated.
- Now it's writing time. The following suggestions and the amount of time you allocate depend on the age and language level of the learners.
 - Tell the learners to write down as many sentences as they can describing where a treat is—for example, “There is a chocolate egg under Tom's chair.”

The hunts can be adapted for all ages and levels of learners, and they can meet a variety of language aims.

Choose the language you would like to practice, such as “there is/there are” structures, colors of the items or wrappers, vocabulary related to things in the classroom, possessives, and so on.

- Tell the learners to describe where the item is without saying precisely; that is, if it is on the floor under the blackboard, the learners might write, “There is a chocolate egg somewhere low, near the blackboard.”
- Tell the learners to write “two truths and a lie” about where they see treats. In other words, they would write three statements: two would describe the locations of items accurately, while the third would be an inaccurate statement (e.g., “There is a small box on the windowsill,” when in fact nothing is there).
- Peer-correct. Have the learners swap papers and do two things: (1) indicate whether the location is accurate and (2) correct any language mistakes.
- Have the learners rewrite their texts on a different sheet of paper. This step could be omitted, but often the rewriting process is neglected, and as this activity is motivating (the learners might get a treat at the end of it, or the teacher might promise to play a game), it is a good opportunity to focus on accuracy. As an alternative to rewriting by hand, learners can type their revised texts into a computer for additional feedback

(with Microsoft tools or various online correction tools).

- Once the texts are rewritten correctly, learners can practice reading their texts to different partners, who locate the treat, point, and say, “Oh, yes, I see it there!”
- Finally, each learner can take a treat (or two, depending on the ratio of treats to learners)!

GO TO ... !

- *Considerations: Learners write and plan in pairs in the classroom but then go around the school or neighborhood in small groups. It may be good to have little prizes available (such as stickers or treats).*
- *Language: General A1 / A2 levels but easily adaptable to higher levels (e.g., giving directions; descriptions of place; locations; positive reinforcement; past tense; ordinal numbers)*

For more-controlled language practice, learners can have fun creating treasure hunts for one another. This can work in the following way:

- Each pair or small group lists five to eight spots. A sample list might be the fig tree at the back of the school, the teachers’ lounge, the swings, a restroom, and the gym. The hunt will start in the classroom and end with the final place listed.

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As a follow-up, learners can rewrite the paths they took, perhaps practicing the past tense or ordinal numbers (e.g., *First, we went to the fig tree.*).

- Learners choose or create a prize that can be left at the final place on the list. This might be a little “happy card” that says, “You did it! Have a great day!” Or the groups can bring in stickers or treats. Again, these will be left at the final spot.
- In the classroom, learners write cards that guide their other classmates to the correct stops. This can be done with various degrees of complexity, depending on the class:
 - Basic instructions: “Go to the fig tree at the back of the school.”
 - Giving directions: “Exit the classroom. Turn right. Walk about 100 meters to the end of the building. Turn left. Leave the building. Turn left again. Take six steps.”
 - Simple riddles: “Go to a place where you can eat some wonderful fruit that is ripe in the fall!”
 - Play with language: Write rhyming words for the place—for example, “pig see” or “rig free” for “fig tree.”
- After the cards have been written, the learners place them in the correct spots so the readers (that is, another group of learners) can follow the clues. In this example, the learners start in the classroom. Group A follows group B’s first clue, which is to go to the fig tree. At the fig tree, they will find the clue to the next spot. (Each group could have a cheat sheet so they remember where they put the clues: 1. *Fig tree --> Teachers’ lounge*; 2. *Teachers’ lounge --> Swings*;)
- At the final spot, there is a little prize or a card with some well wishes!

As a follow-up, learners can rewrite the paths they took, perhaps practicing the past tense or ordinal numbers (e.g., *First, we went to the fig tree.*). They can also swap and complete other groups’ searches. All in all, this is a good way of practicing reading and writing while adding movement and fun to the lesson!

GOING ON A GOOSECHASE



- *Considerations: Electronic devices are necessary. This hunt can be kept to the classroom and used with basic stations. However, it is more fun when learners can leave the classroom and go to different parts of the school or the neighborhood.*

- *Language: Any level*

The Goosechase app is a tool to use with learners who have access to cell phones or other devices during class time. It offers a variety of possibilities for exploring a neighborhood or school, discussing topics, and delving into literature. The teacher creates the following categories of missions:

- Text missions, where learners write (words or sentences);
- GPS missions, where learners have to find a specific location;
- Video missions, where learners record themselves (30-second maximum); and
- Photo missions, where learners take a picture of themselves doing something.

Each mission is assigned a certain number of points, decided by the teacher. The learners form teams and then have a specific amount of time to complete this series of missions. (The teacher can determine the time, based

General mission	Specific mission	Points	Upload
Go to a specific location.	 <p>Find the end of the road (see picture). Go there!</p>	400	Specific location (GPS location)
<i>Adaptations: This mission requires learners to identify a picture in their community; it could also be a small detail within their school (e.g., the picture of a spider in some corner). Learners could also be given written instructions to (for example) “go to the place where you see several signs in red” for reading comprehension.</i>			
Sing a song or recite a poem about a specific topic at a specific location (e.g., a food chant in the cafeteria).	Old town road: Now you are at the old road from Zurich to Winterthur! Do you know any songs about roads or bridges in English? As a group, sing a few lines from a song about a road or bridge here. Film yourselves!	500	Video—open answer
<i>Adaptations: This mission requires the students to have associations and work together as a group to decide, but the mission could also be for them to sing a song or recite a poem taught in class, perhaps as a review from earlier in the year. The learners can ALL sing, or they can take turns with lines, and they can work together to decide how they are going to present this.</i>			
Find a particular building and take a picture in front of it.	 <p>Church: Take a group picture of EVERYONE at the entrance of the church!</p>	500	Picture—open answer
<i>Adaptations: This mission requires learners to read instructions to locate a place. This could be something collaborative (e.g., “With your group, decide on the best place for some quiet study time. Go there and take a picture.”), where they have to read and then discuss. It could also be simply basic reading comprehension (e.g., to locate a place by following directions, such as the classroom across from the principal’s office).</i>			
Find a particular building and note down something from a sign in front of it.	<p>Church languages: Answer these questions about the church.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Which church is this (in English)? 2) There are signs over the front door. What languages do you see? 	400	Text—specific answers
<i>Adaptations: This task encourages learners to observe something. As it is a text submission, it could also simply be to submit all the nouns or verbs from a text or to copy their favorite quote from a story. Learners have to agree as a group what to submit.</i>			

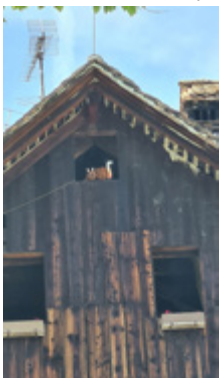
General mission	Specific mission	Points	Upload
At a certain location, perform a role play or a dialogue (e.g., borrowing a book at the library).	<p>Example 1: Welcome to our town! Go to the information sign near the grocery store. One of you plays the tour guide. The others are tourists. Tour guide: Tell the tourists about the history of Schwamendingen. Tourists: Ask one question each!</p> <p>Example 2: Cats and Crows—Where was this picture taken? Go there! Play theater! Act like cats and crows! Film yourselves!</p>  <p>Specific house in Zurich, Switzerland</p>	1,000	Video—open answer
<p><i>Adaptations: It is helpful to provide a context, such as having students act as tourists and a guide (as long as perhaps a discussion on stereotypes is also held in the local language), role-play a teacher and their class, or represent some event from their environment. Videos here should be no more than 30 seconds, which helps students learn to get quickly to the point, and they often redo their work several times until it is right, which is beneficial for language learning. Finally, such short role plays are great for practicing functional, useful language—for example, “Find the janitor’s closet. One of you is the janitor; the others ask nicely for a mop because you spilled a drink.”</i></p>			

Figure 1. Example missions for exploring a neighborhood

on learner level and the difficulty of the missions.) As learners carry out the missions, they can see each other’s posts; meanwhile, the teacher monitors from the classroom and can send real-time comments, add points for excellent work, or take away points for some reason. Afterwards, in class, learners can view each other’s products.

For example, the mission description below is based on the book *The Sandwich Swap* (Al Abdullah and DiPucchio 2010), which the class has already read. Learners follow the

script and make a short video of themselves acting out the situation.

When you make up with a friend, you become friends again! Think about the scene in the book where Lily and Salma become friends again and act it out! Everyone in your group must act! Include the principal and a few classmates if you need more characters.

Generally, agree in advance with the students if they don’t want to be filmed, that they can cover their faces, or that you

will delete the data right away after the Goosechase is finished. There are similar apps, such as Actionbound, PlayTours, and Scavify, which have free or paid plans, depending on your needs. Many of these missions can also be done by having learners post their tasks on a Padlet or simply by having stations in the classroom. The digital element of Goosechase, however, has the following benefits: performance is captured, learners can see each other's work, and the teacher has reference to the work for later, in order to see who needs to practice which skills.

Goosechase example 1: Using a book

On the Goosechase platform are many pre-existing and publicly available Goosechases that are based on literature in general and specific books. A quick internet search for *Goosechase for literature* leads to many ideas, and these can be made more specific, depending on your target public and topic. The following missions were created for pre-service teachers learning English and preparing to be elementary-school English teachers. They worked with the story *The Sandwich Swap* (Al Abdullah and DiPucchio 2010).

- Sticky food! (600 points) In this story, the food STUCK to the ceiling! It STUCK to the floor! Reenact this scene. Pretend to throw food and say WHERE

it is STICKING or where it STUCK.
Act it out!

- Where's the cafeteria? (400 points) In U.S. schools, students eat lunch in the cafeteria. Go to the one in your school and check in!
- English books? (500 points) Stay on site. Where can you find stories and picture books in English? Take a FUNNY picture with your team and books you might use in the English language classroom!
- Let bygones be bygones! (500 points) In this story, Salma and Lily did lots of things together, and then they had a fight, so they didn't do these things together anymore. Later, they did those things together once again! For instance, they ate together. Then, they didn't eat together. Afterwards, they ate together again. Your mission: Think about the story and find two more things they did together, then didn't do together, and then did together again! In total, you will have six sentences! EVERYONE in your group MUST SPEAK!

This example could also simply be a replacement for station work around a book. The functions of filming, taking

<p>Group "WREATH"</p> <p>On your way, find:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> _____ Green things _____ Red things _____ Twigs _____ Branches _____ Leaves _____ Anything else natural! <p>Stop 1: Hauenstein carts Which word do you find? _____</p> <p>Stop 2: Kindergarten Bölli gate Which word do you find? _____</p> <p>Stop 3: Post office bulletin board Which word do you find? _____</p> <p>Stop 4: Götze School Write the words you found in chalk on the pavement. Make a CHRISTMAS TREE with what you collected.</p> <p>Presentation (EVERYBODY SPEAKS!):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We made a • It is made out of • What do you think? _____ • Thank you for your attention! _____! 	<p>Group "CANDY CANE"</p> <p>On your way, find:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> _____ Green things _____ Red things _____ Twigs _____ Branches _____ Leaves _____ Anything else natural! <p>Stop 1: Tannenwäg pool Which word do you find? _____</p> <p>Stop 2: Post office bulletin board Which word do you find? _____</p> <p>Stop 3: Mrs. Buechel's garage door Which word do you find? _____</p> <p>Stop 4: Götze School Write the words you found in chalk on the pavement. Make a CANDY with what you collected.</p> <p>Presentation (EVERYBODY SPEAKS!):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We made a • It is made out of • What do you think? _____ • Thank you for your attention! _____!
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Figure 2. Instructions handed out to each group

**For many of these examples, the focus might be
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the prompts (missions) and then work together
to decide who does what.**

pictures, and writing short text already lived up traditional written-exercise station work and often make learners perform better, as what they are doing is being recorded.

Goosechase example 2: Exploring a neighborhood

In this example, missions were created for learners to go to various places in their neighborhood and carry out tasks. Some groups who could be trusted went alone. Others had a parent or classroom assistant with them. The examples in Figure 1 show a general formulation for each mission as you might write it in Goosechase and then the specific mission related to the tasks in a neighborhood in Zurich, Switzerland. The points are just a suggestion, but it's good to make a mix, with some tasks worth many points and other, simpler tasks worth fewer points. "Upload" refers to what the learners submit.

For many of these examples, the focus might be on negotiating meaning: learners

have to understand the prompts (missions) and then work together to decide who does what. They have to produce language—relatively openly—and from this, the teacher can perhaps later pick up on common mistakes or let the learners watch their own videos and correct their performances.

AROUND THE TOWN

- *Considerations: Learners should be responsible enough to wander around school premises or possibly leave them.*
- *Language: Following directions; collecting items in a list; expressing holiday wishes*

Swiss learners are allowed to explore their towns in the upper-elementary school grades, and this hunt made for a fun end-of-year adventure for a group of sixth-graders (12-year-olds). Each team was given a name (e.g., "Group Wreath" or "Group Snowperson") and provided with a pencil,



Figure 3. Examples of collected messages written on the pavement

[Scavenger hunts or treasure hunts] encourage learners to take ownership of their learning and focus on success.

a dictionary, and an empty bag. Instructions were also handed out to each group. The groups had 20 minutes to run around town and collect the items listed in Figure 2 and then go specifically to the “Stops” listed where the teacher, in advance, had hung up words to make a phrase. For example, Group Wreath found “have a” at Stop 1, “holly jolly” at Stop 2, and “Christmas/holiday” at Stop 3. Then they returned to the school, wrote their words (see Figure 3) on the pavement with chalk, and created a picture with the items they had collected. Finally, each group gave a little presentation, and then there was a fire with hot chocolate for everyone.

This example can be kept more local (on the school grounds) and be made to match any context—for example, quotes from famous people, kind wishes, or steps in a recipe.

CONCLUSION

Scavenger hunts or treasure hunts in the classroom provide many elements described in gamifying a classroom (Chou 2019). They can offer epic meaning by having learners create stories and unlock challenges. They allow for a sense of accomplishment, by having learners either complete a task or

write an entire scavenger hunt of their own. They are empowering and encourage learners to work together. They can be unpredictable because, depending on the challenge, it might take more time or be more complex. Most of all, they encourage learners to take ownership of their learning and focus on success. These hunts take a bit of planning, but they are extremely adaptable to any situation and worth the effort in the name of teamwork and creativity.

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Photos courtesy of Laura Loder Buechel