
MAKING SPEAKING FUN

Getting students to speak in English class is often a challenge. Many learners hesitate to talk in class because they have a lot of anxiety about making mistakes, especially in front of their peers. For this reason, it is important for teachers to plan activities that encourage learners to interact and relieve the pressure they often feel to speak perfectly. This week in the Teacher's Corner, we will examine some fun ideas to get students talking in the English language classroom.

ACTIVITY ONE: MYSTERY BOX

During this activity, students ask yes or no questions and compile information to try and determine what object is inside the mystery box. The activity can be completed in one session, until students guess correctly, or spread out over several class meetings.

LEVEL

High beginner and above

GOAL

To improve students' speaking skills by encouraging them to ask questions and seek information about an unknown object.

MATERIALS

- A box that can be closed securely or has a lid (such as a shoebox)
- A chalkboard/whiteboard and chalk/markers
- A mystery object (suggestions in procedure)

PROCEDURE

1. Prepare for the activity by choosing what you will place in the box. It should be something that is familiar to students, either at school or in their everyday lives. Ideas include classroom objects, popular packaged foods like candy or canned items, a mobile phone, a book the class has read, fruits or vegetables (that won't spoil too quickly), or objects that represent familiar places like a popular area of your town or city. Keep in mind that students will be able to pass the box around, shake it, listen to any noise it makes, as well as feel the weight of the object.
2. Place the object inside the box and secure the lid. You can make this activity more fun by decorating the box with question marks and labeling it as the mystery box. This also helps if you plan to repeat the activity frequently.
3. Explain to students that there is something inside the box and they must ask you *yes or no questions* to try and guess what it is. Tell the class that they will be able to shake the box, listen for noise, and feel how much the object weighs before the questioning starts.
4. Decide how you will keep track of the information during the activity. You will need to keep a list of the characteristics and other information that students learn about the object. You can either do this yourself on the board or chart paper, or assign a student to be the scribe for the duration of the questioning session.
5. Students can sit in a circle or at their desks and pass the box around so everyone has a chance to examine it, but they must not open it.
6. Once students have had a chance to hold the mystery box, the questioning can begin. You can either have students ask questions one at a time in a specific order, or allow them to raise their hands if they would like to ask something. Remember that the questions can only elicit a response of *yes* or *no*. Some examples of questions are:
 - Does one use the object at school/home?
 - Can a person eat it?
 - Is it round? (other shapes)

- Is it hard/soft?
 - Does it smell?
 - Is it red? (other colors)
 - Is it a fruit/vegetable?
 - Does one usually buy it?
 - Is it used for _____?
7. As the class asks questions, write down what is learned about the object on a list or monitor the student scribe you have assigned. This list will help students, especially those who need visual support, to synthesize the information and make better guesses about what is in the box.
8. After the allotted amount of time for questioning has passed, students can try to guess what the object is. They may solve the mystery quickly, or it may take several days of questioning to figure out what is inside the mystery box.

VARIATIONS

- Use the mystery box activity as a review of a text that students have been studying. For instance, if your class has been reading a novel, put something in the box that represents a character or part of the plot. Students then have to ask questions related to the story to figure out what is in the box and/or what it represents.
- This activity can also be used to review informational topics in different subjects, such as science. If students have been learning about different characteristics of animals, you can put a small toy version, figurine, or photo of an animal into the box. Students then have to ask questions about the animal's habitat, diet, or characteristics to guess what is in the box.
- Make the mystery box activity completely student-led. Once you have repeated the whole process a few times with your class, you can get the students more involved by allowing each one to take turns placing a mystery object into the box. Then, the student who chose the object can

lead the activity by answering questions from his/her classmates. You can even take a turn to ask a question yourself! Another variation on this same procedure is to have students complete the activity in small groups. Both of these are a great way to give students a chance to take on a different role, and to build a consistent discussion-based activity into your classroom schedule.

ACTIVITY TWO: "FIND SOMEONE WHO..." BINGO

During this activity, students mingle and ask questions to determine if their classmates have had certain experiences or possess characteristics listed in spaces on a bingo board. The winner is the first person to complete a row on their card, shout bingo, and be able to verbally tell the class how their spaces were completed. This is an excellent activity to get students talking to each other at the start of a new school year or term.

LEVEL

Intermediate and above

GOAL

To improve students' speaking skills by encouraging them to ask each other questions and find out information about their classmates.

MATERIALS

- A list of characteristics or experiences relevant to your class (see ideas below)
- Blank bingo cards
- Pencils/pens

PROCEDURE

1. Prepare for the activity by brainstorming a list of characteristics and/or experiences you will include on the bingo card. It helps to have more ideas than spaces, so that the cards will all be

different. Students can also help with the brainstorming if you explain the activity to them beforehand. Here are some ideas to include on the bingo card:

Find someone who...

- is an only child
- plays soccer/cricket/tennis/etc.
- has flown on an airplane
- was born in another country
- is a vegetarian
- has a job
- has more than five siblings
- likes to dance
- has a pet
- walks to school
- has traveled to another continent
- likes spicy food
- rides a motorcycle
- speaks more than 3 languages
- has a computer at home
- likes to wake up early/stay up late
- has been to a concert
- loves/hates to eat _____
- reads comic books
- is the youngest/oldest child in their family
- has been to an amusement park
- knows how to swim

2. Explain to students that they will choose twenty-five items from the list of characteristics and experiences and randomly write them in spaces on their bingo card. Tell them that during the activity, everyone will mingle throughout the classroom and ask each other questions using the bingo card. For example “Do you like to eat fish? Are you an only child? Do you play soccer? Are you the youngest in your family?” The goal is to find one person who meets the criteria in each space, write the person’s name, and be the first student to complete a row vertically, horizontally, or diagonally. It is important to inform students that they may not tell other classmates in which space to write their name. Instead, they must only respond to their classmates’ questions with *yes* or *no*.
3. Tell students they must yell “Bingo!” to signal that they have completed a row. In order to win, a student has to share with the class the information from the completed row on the card. For instance, “Juana has flown on an airplane. Li likes to dance. Nur reads comic books.”
4. Give students time to fill their bingo cards with items from the list. If you choose, you allow students to include a free space on their cards.
5. Once students have finished creating their bingo cards, instruct them to stand up and get ready to mingle. Remind the class that they must ask each other questions in order to complete their cards. Give students a signal to begin talking to each other. Circulate around the room and monitor students’ discussions during the activity.
6. When the first student yells “Bingo!” ask the rest of the class to pause and listen. The student with a completed row must explain which of their classmates met the criteria on his/her bingo board. If the student has in fact completed a row, they are designated the first place winner. The game can continue until there are second and third place winners, so that students can get more practice speaking to each other.
7. To wrap up the activity, ask students to share something new that they learned about a classmate. If needed, provide a sentence frame such as “I learned that _____ likes to eat

_____” or “I learned that _____ has _____.” You can call on students individually or ask for volunteers.

VARIATIONS

- This game can be used to review vocabulary or information about a topic that students have been studying. The activity works well at the end of a unit or when preparing for an exam because you will have a lot of vocabulary to use. First, compile a list of definitions or information that you want students to review during the game. You will need to make a small card with the vocabulary word for each of the definitions you choose. The definitions should be relatively short, as they will fill the boxes on the bingo board. For instance, if you are reviewing vocabulary associated with polygons, the definitions could be *has eight equal sides and angles* or *the prefix meaning six*. The activity can be completed exactly as in the procedure outlined above, except that students will write definitions on their bingo board. Additionally, you will need to distribute a word card to each student. This will be their assigned word during the game. When people ask “Does your word mean *has eight equal sides and angles*?” the students must answer *yes* or *no*. When the student finds a match, they should write down the word and the name of the student who had the card. Remind students that they may not tell their classmates the vocabulary word they have been assigned, or give information other than yes or no answers. If you have more students than words, you can make multiples of some of the word cards. When someone gets bingo, they can explain how they completed a row by saying “(Name of student) had the word _____ which means _____.” You can also make the review more comprehensive by requiring students to complete the whole card instead of a single row to earn bingo.