

ESL Games

for

Kids and Adults

Alibi

This is a simplified version of the detective board game Alibi. Students need to find out who committed a fictional crime by interrogating suspects in the class. It is somewhat challenging and typically requires more class time than other games.

Preparation

Think of a hypothetical crime scene to present to your students. If you prefer, beforehand, write a short paragraph that is approximately five sentences. You can customize the paragraph and match it to your students' reading level.

Teacher Example

Describe the crime scene and write your paragraph on the board:

Last night, a small grocery store was robbed. All of the money was taken from the cash register. Unfortunately, the camera surveillance system malfunctioned so there was no recording of the robbery. The suspects are unknown. However, the police have determined that the culprits of the crime could be in this classroom.

Since this activity is for more advanced learners, we will focus on the students' tasks instead of modeling a lengthy example during class time.

Student Tasks

After explaining the crime scene, select two students to be the suspects.

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Outside of the classroom, the two student suspects prepare their story. They should make sure that the story matches (with specific details) and be ready for interrogation.

Inside the classroom, divide the remaining students into two groups: police officers and detectives.

Both groups should prepare a list of 10 questions to ask the two suspects.

The groups will then interrogate each suspect with their question lists. The goal for each group is to find holes in the suspects' stories. If the stories match, then they are innocent of the crime.

On the other hand, if the suspects have different answers to the questions, then they will be found guilty.

In some cases, one group could find the suspects to be innocent, while the other group could determine them to be guilty. If this occurs, then the group who found the suspects to be guilty could be awarded a prize for being the better interrogators.

Teaching Tip

To increase participation, divide the class into smaller groups of four. This way, you can have two suspects, one police officer, and one detective. The smaller group size will allow everyone to have more opportunities to talk and use the target language.

Apples to Apples

This is an adaptation of the award-winning card game Apples to Apples. The game consists of two types of cards: nouns and adjectives. In this version, students create customized cards in class before playing the actual game.

Preparation

Before class, cut up several small rectangles of paper. The students will write on them in class to create their own Apples to Apples cards.

Teacher Example

Draw several rectangles on the board to represent the “noun” cards. Then, draw two faces to symbolize Student A and Student B. Next to each face, draw three rectangles to represent the “adjective” cards. The students hold the following adjectives:

Student A: strong, beautiful, wealthy

Student B: intelligent, delicious, enormous

Circle one of the noun cards. For instance, the noun could be something like “ice cream.”

Ask the class which adjective from the students’ cards best describes ice cream. Most likely, everyone would select “delicious” as the best match.

As a result, Student B would get a point. For a bonus point, Student B needs to create a sentence with the noun and the matching adjective.

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For instance, they could say, “Chocolate ice cream is the most delicious ice cream in the world!”

Student Tasks

Now that the students understand the rules of the game, divide the class into small groups.

Hand out the blank paper cards and have the students create a stack of noun cards and a stack of adjective cards. Give them five minutes to create their customized cards.

Once completed, tell them to swap their card stacks with another group in the class.

Finally, every group plays Apples to Apples with the new cards.

Teaching Tip

To increase the difficulty of the game, encourage the students to explain why they think their adjective is better than their classmates’ adjectives. If their explanation is extremely convincing and creative, then they score extra points.

Axis and Allies

The aim of this classic board game is to conquer the world by asking and answering trivia-based questions about countries. Students create their own questions by researching the information online, then play the game together in class.

Preparation

Prepare a few example questions relating to world geography and culture. Get some dice or download a dice app on your smartphone. Also, access to a projector would be useful for displaying a world map on the board.

Teacher Example

Display a large map of the world on the board. If you don't have a projector, you can draw your own map.

With your marker, divide the map into six continents: North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. Include Antarctica if you have more than six teams.

Draw three fighter jets and three tanks on each continent. The jets are used for attacking other regions while the tanks are for defending the home/captured regions.

Also, add some "flight path" spaces between the continents. The fighter jet pieces travel on these spaces by rolling the dice.

First, tell the class where your home region is. For this example, we will use North America.

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Roll the dice and move one of your fighter jets a few spaces along the flight path towards South America.

Then, ask a student to roll the dice for South America. Perhaps the dice lands on a 6. Move the South American jet all the way into Canada.

On the board, write a multiple-choice question about the country.

1. Where is Canada's largest shopping mall located?
 - a) Montreal
 - b) Toronto
 - c) Edmonton
 - d) Vancouver

Ask the student to guess the correct answer. If they say the correct answer, then they destroy one of North America's tanks. However, if they choose the incorrect answer, they lose their jet.

For this question, the correct answer is (c) Edmonton, where the West Edmonton Mall is located.

After demonstrating a few more moves and example questions, the students should have a better understanding of how to play. Finally, explain that the goal of the game is to destroy the other teams' pieces to conquer the world.

Student Tasks

Divide the class into six teams. This way, every team should now have a designated continent for their home base.

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In their teams, the students must create a list of multiple-choice questions about their home region. They can use their smartphone to research the questions and answers.

This should take some time, so give them about 10 to 20 minutes to complete the task. Dividing the work amongst the team members will help speed up the process.

After the teams have finished writing their questions, begin the game.

Every team rolls the dice and strategically moves across the map, attacking the opposing teams' tanks and jets.

Again, for every correct answer, the attacking team destroys the opposition's game piece. However, for every incorrect answer, the attacking team loses their game piece.

The war ends and peace is declared when only one team remains on the map.

Teaching Tip

To simplify the game, the students can create true/false questions instead of multiple-choice. If you have time restraints, use half of the world map and divide the class into fewer teams. For example, one team could be North America and the other could be South America.

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Balderdash

In the game of Balderdash, students create definitions of unusual words alongside their true definitions. Students earn points if someone else in the class picks their definition and double points if they guess the correct definition.

Preparation

Prepare a list of difficult words that you think most of your students will *not* know. If your students are advanced, search online for “Balderdash words” to get some ideas.

Teacher Example

On the board, write a strange word that none of your students will know the meaning of. For instance, write the word “scuppernong.” Say that the word is a noun, but nothing more.

Ask the class if they can select the correct definition of the word from the following definitions:

- a) an insect from South Africa
- b) a sweet yellow grape from the United States
- c) a medicinal tea from India

The students discuss what they think the answer is with a partner for a minute. Then, ask a few people what they believe is the correct answer.

Tell them that the correct answer is letter B. A scuppernong is a sweet yellow grape from the United States.

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To clarify the game's reward system, give a point to anyone who guessed correctly and give yourself a point if anyone guessed answers A or C.

Student Tasks

Divide the class into small groups and make sure that they have some paper to write on. Assign one writer for each group. They can take turns writing for each round.

Write your list of Balderdash words on the board. Circle one word and tell the students to create a definition for it. Give them about three minutes to complete the task. Also, tell them to put their team's name on their paper.

While they are writing, you write the correct definition of the word on a separate piece of paper. Then, collect the papers so that you have all of their definitions. Read each definition aloud and ask them to choose which one they think is correct.

Give two points to any team that selects the real definition. Give one point to any team that has their fictional definition selected by an opposing team.

Teaching Tip

If the students have a lower level of vocabulary, simply shorten the definitions. For instance, for the "scuppernong" example, you could use *an insect*, *a grape*, and *tea*.

Battleship

The original Battleship game involves head-to-head naval battles between two people on a divided gameboard. In this modified version, you can use the same concept to teach various language skills in the classroom.

Preparation

Create the mini Battleship boards that each team will use to draw their ships on. Make a simple grid with five rows and five columns in a Word Doc or Google Doc. Label the rows from A to E and the columns from 1 to 5.

If you are time-constrained, bring some blank paper for students to create their own grids on.

Teacher Example

Draw a grid on the board with five rows (A to E) and five columns (1 to 5). Next to the grid, write the following:

Battleship: 3 spaces, 3 shots

Submarine: 2 spaces, 2 shots

Destroyer: 1 space, 1 shot

Tell the students that you have aligned those three invisible ships on the grid somewhere. On a separate piece of paper, draw a mini version of the grid with your ships' locations filled in. The students' goal is to locate your ships and sink them all.

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Ask a few students to guess where a ship is located by calling out the correct row letter and column number. For instance, a student may guess “4-B” and successfully sink your battleship. On the board, cross out the three spaces where your battleship was located.

Then, to score extra points, the student must answer a question correctly in English. The question could be about grammar, pronunciation, idiomatic expressions, or any topic that you have covered in class.

Continue with the game until the students have sunk the other two ships.

Student Tasks

Divide the students into pairs (or small groups). Hand out the paper grids to everyone. Explain to the class that they should take turns trying to sink their partner’s ships.

For the first round, both players get one shot. For the second round, both players get two successive shots.

Every round thereafter, the number of successive shots they take depends on how many ships they have remaining on the board.

For example, if a student still has all three ships, then they can take six successive shots in a row. However, if they only have a submarine (2 shots) and a destroyer (1 shot), then they can only take three successive shots.

The more ships they lose, the fewer shots they can take per round.

Again, whenever they sink a ship, remind the students to ask a question in English to score bonus points.

Teaching Tip

When playing Battleship, students can use their English textbooks to find questions to ask each other for the bonus points. Alternatively, you could create a list of questions beforehand if you want them to focus on a specific language skill or topic.

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