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CREATIVE ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING LANGUAGE

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Introduction

Creative Activities for Language Learning energizes students to think and to use language in new ways. By injecting humor whenever possible, motivation grows and develops. Used regularly, the group, pair, and single-person activities found here allows students to communicate on a vast array of subjects and try on an endless series of linguistic strategies. They combine the serious tasks with fanciful and creative thinking, self-disclosure and out-right silliness. The activities are also highly teacher-friendly. The groups are chosen, the topic explained, and the students converse until obliged to stop. Students talk, write and think creatively, all at the same time.

There is much in the literature to suggest why these activities are so successful. It is possible to apply a Vygotskian ($x+1$) perspective, see them as an outgrowth of "Creativity Theory" or "Frame Theory" or stress the advantages of interactive settings. After thirty years of testing in many environments—World Languages, middle school through college, ESL and EFL in many countries, language arts, speech pathology, and special education--it is clear that these activities are extremely effective in promoting lateral and creative thinking while

teaching language skills. They have proved to be an excellent supplement to many teaching and therapeutic styles.

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CREATIVE ACTIVITIES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

1. Quick stuff and warm-ups

Short-term pairings

The students work in pairs or threes. After doing the activity the first time, they change places and do it again. (Many of these activities can also be done with the entire class.)

The teacher suggests:

- Give the person next to you a complement. That person reacts to the complement.
- Students complement each other over and over again and again.
- Ask the person next to you for a favor. That person agrees to do it or comes up with excuses.

- Describe the person next to you in great detail to a third person.
- Act as if you are delighted to see the person next to you; after all you've been apart for several of years
- Tell some gossip to the person next to you. That person passes the gossip on to a third
- Give something you have with as a gift to the person next to you
- Try to sell something you have with you to the person next to you. That person haggles with you.
- Ask advice from the person text to you. That person gives you good (or bad) advice.
- Ask *an important* question to the person next to you.
- Tell something profound or amazing to the person sitting next to you.
- Build a story from a puppet, a picture or an old hat. Tell the story to several different people.
- One person talks for as long as possible, the other urges one on with statements of encouragement and surprise; then they reverse.
- One person speaks for as long as possible while others try to be distracting (chat, tease, sing)
- Make a list of several important events and changes that have occurred in the last several years. Then, you meet an old and dear friend. Bring each other up to date; be emotional about it
- Tell each other about someone who dumped you. Use disparaging adjectives.
- For two minutes, say a long good-bye, sorry to see you go, send regards--don't forget to write!

- Support with details an extraordinary statement like: "I just swam the Atlantic" or "I watched all 162 Celtics games on TV." Each student tries to outdo the previous claim. Each student begins by claiming "That's nothing! I ..."
- Write down the names of three good teachers (other than the teacher of this course, of course). Compare notes.
- Make plans to go out for lunch or dinner today. Together, choose the restaurant.
- Decide on a movie to see together. The movie has to be at least three years old.
- You **are** something odd—a candy bar, a truck, a tulip—describe yourself without mentioning what you are.
- Show how to solve a difficult puzzle or a problem of logic.
- Do a magic trick; then, explain how it is done.
- Try to scare your classmates by telling them a story about ghosts, phantoms and other dangerous and inexplicable forces.
- Describe a psychic experience without logical explanation that you had or a "coincidence" that was just too unlikely.
- Predict a future event that you are sure will take place.
- Praise excessively your hero or heroine.

High structure

The students work in pairs. They complete the statements in a logical fashion.)

Borrowing

Joe, can you lend me _____?

I wish I could, Pete, but _____.

That's no problem. I _____.

In that case, _____

Invitation

Sue, I'd like to invite you to _____

I'd like to but, _____

Right now, I _____

Well, okay, _____

Looking bad

What happened to you, Bill? You look _____

Well, Melissa, I _____ and _____

Really, did you _____?

Yes, and it _____

Gossip

Hey! Sam. Did you hear that _____?

I can't believe it! Tell me more.

Wow! _____

Sales pitch

Can I interest you in _____?

Those are nice, but _____

How about _____?

Better. Do you _____?

Certainly, we _____

Then _____

Directions

1. Can you direct me to _____?

Sure, _____, then _____.

You mean _____?

Yes, just _____

2. How would I get to _____?

Do you mean _____ or _____

First, _____
you _____ then _____

Are there _____?

Sure, first, you'll see _____, and
then _____

So, I _____?

Yes, _____

Open question

What did you do on Saturday?

Well, I _____

Really? _____?

Opinions

What do you think about _____?

In my opinion, _____.

Well, you may be right, but _____

What happened to...?

Have you heard what happened to _____?

Was it _____?

Not only that but _____

Contents and themes

In small groups, students are told to discuss a familiar topic. They are given no further instructions. Some possible themes:

- "Mothers" "Fathers" "Grandmothers." "Sisters" "A person you admire" "Roommates" "Professors" "Courses" "Exams" "My best job" "My worst job" "It changed my life!"

Card play

Students receive cards that contain complementary tasks:

The long good-bye

A) You are saying goodbye to your language teacher at the end of the year.

B) You are a language teacher saying goodbye to a student at the end of the year.

Old before his time

A) Being one hundred years old, you are clearly the oldest student in this class. The other students have been pestering you to tell them how things really were when you were young. You are going to be

interviewed by a reporter from the campus newspaper. Tell about events and people who were important to you many years ago. You have had some unusual experiences and as you talk you get carried away and begin to exaggerate.

B) As a reporter for the campus newspaper, you have been asked to interview the oldest student in this class. Since this student is one hundred years old, you will be able to learn a great deal about how things were many years ago. Because this student has a tendency to exaggerate about the past, some of the information you get may be less than factual.

Good trip/bad trip

A) You have just returned from a vacation in Shangri-la where you had the time of your life. In your opinion, everything was perfect: the weather, the beaches, and the food. The local people treated you as their guest.

B) You have just returned from a vacation in Shangri-la where you had an awful time.

In your opinion, the weather was miserable, the beaches dirty, the food inedible and the local people tried to cheat you.

Where the action is

A) Last night you attended an absolutely amazing party at _____ To your surprise, _____ and _____ were there. You left early, just as your partner was arriving late. Together, piece together what took place over the course of the entire evening.

B) Last night you attended an absolutely amazing party at _____. To your surprise, _____ and _____ were there. You arrived late, just as your partner. Together, piece together what took place over the course of the entire evening.

Identity

A) You've known Moose McGraw for your whole life. You know everything about him.

B) You are a reporter trying to write an article about Moose McGraw. You want to know everything about him.

Needs Work

A) You are having an interview for a job you really want. Sell yourself to your prospective employer. Emphasize your good qualities and downplay your weaknesses.

B) You are an employer interviewing candidates for an entry level job. You are interested in learning as much as possible about the candidates. You are not looking for perfection, just potential.

Futures

A) What will you be doing in 20 years? Where will you be? What will you be like? With a partner, compare and comment upon your predictions.

B) What will you be doing in 20 years? Where will you be? What will you be like? With a partner, compare and comment upon your predictions.

Take the Cake - 4 parts-

A) "Sweets" has a reputation for being an extremely friendly bakery-café—people don't just buy something and leave—they stop to chat with the staff about recent events in the neighborhood. They may ask for advice about what to buy. As a staff member who has worked there for years, chat with each of the customers and give them advice about what to buy.

B)) "Sweets" has a reputation for being an extremely friendly bakery café—people don't just buy something and leave—they stop to chat with the staff about recent events in the neighborhood. They may ask for advice about what to buy. You are a customer who wants to buy something for desert for a romantic dinner. While you are in the store, be sure to catch up on the latest local news.

C) "Sweets" has a reputation for being an extremely friendly bakery café—people don't just buy something and leave—they stop to chat with the staff about recent events in the neighborhood. You are a customer who wants a cake for your child's birthday party. While you are in the store, be sure to catch up on the latest local news.

D)) "Sweets" has a reputation for being an extremely friendly bakery café—people don't just buy something and leave—they stop to chat with the staff about recent events in the neighborhood. You are customer who wants something for a friend who is on a diet. While you are in the store, be sure to catch up on the latest local news.

2. Listening hard

Overheard

In pairs or small groups, Students listen to ambiguous statements quoted by the teacher. They reconstruct the story suggested by a the exclamation.

Over heard at a party:

- "And then, he escaped through the window!"
- "No thanks, it has too many calories."
- "Two months in Europe? Incredible!"
- "First he hit him with a right, then with a left!"

Over heard outside:

- "Oh, come on, it wasn't that bad."
- "Stop right there!"
- "That makes me sick!"
- "You are so right!"
- "Why don't you look where you are going?"

Toasts

Students stand and make toasts

- Write a toast celebrating the person sitting next to you. Point out his or her fine qualities. You may have to ask some questions before you write. Present the toast at a class get together.
- Mr. John Augustus, teacher here for forty years is retiring. In two weeks there will be a banquet in his honor. Since all of you number among his favorite students, it would be an excellent gesture if you could each write a short speech in Augustus'

honor. Be sure to tell how he influenced your life. Be prepared to give the toast at the banquet.

Power phrases

With the teacher's help, students collect phrases that are helpful in showing emotion or asking questions and giving directions. In specified situations, they must use these phrases.

- Selling phrases – sell something you have here/you don't have here
- Warning phrases – Cautioning tourists about local dangers
- Encouraging phrases – Cheering at sports events
- Angry phrases – Claiming you've been cheated
- Questioning phrases -- Doing a survey
- Giving directions phrases -- Getting someone from here to there

Pair or Round-Robin activities

Each student tries to direct the flow of conversation by using phrases such as:

- "Speaking of . . ."
- "Returning to the topic,"
- "Regarding. . ."
- "Tell me more!"
- "I can't believe it!"
- "And then. . ."
- "In my opinion. . ."
- "Yikes!"

Tussles – Longer Activities

The students roll-play in situations that force them to use certain vocabulary and phrases that help them move the conversation along.

Practice session

To give warning; to reject a warning --

If someone tells you that they are about to do something stupid or even dangerous, you have to say something--right? Unfortunately, warnings are often disregarded or even the subject of derision. The following phrases will help you when you want to give a warning or to one given to you.

To make a warning

To reject a warning

Be careful when...

I'm not worried about...

Think about...

I don't believe that...

If I were you,..

Don't be absurd!

If you continue in this fashion....

It won't be a problem when.....

Calm down! I....

It's not a good idea for

It's not a big deal if you...

It will be disastrous if

You're being silly when you say.....

It doesn't make sense that...

In pairs, you are going to practice giving warnings and rejecting them. Student A will warn Student B about certain dangerous situations. Student B will reject those warnings.

Example for practicing the procedure:

Student A: I wouldn't go to that rock concert, if I were you. I could be dangerous.

Student B: Don't be absurd! Nothing ever happens in those concerts.

The next two students will take their turn at playing A and B while the rest of the class listens. This pairing continues until all have participated. All should use the new expressions.

Full-fledged argument

To give warning; to reject a warning --

On a farm located a few miles from a town called Dismal, there is an old dilapidated house. It is rumored to be a "haunted house." In this ruined dwelling live an old lady with her black cat, but it has been years since anyone has actually seen them. Travelers passing by claim to have heard a macabre laugh and to have seen strange lights which seem to come from the small cemetery behind the house.

Michael Medway, a university student, has decided to visit the house to resolve the mystery once and for all. There are many thunderstorms during this season and Michael's car doesn't work very well in the rain. But, in spite of this, Michael is intending to drive out to the house this evening.

His friend Wilfred Lamston is a prudent and cautious person. He believes that life is dangerous enough as it is. He decides that he had better warn his friend of the risks he will be taking.

With a partner, act out the conversation between Michael Medway and Wilfred Lamston. During the conversation, use the new expressions.

Doing Business

Convincing, Resisting

When trying to make a sale, it is often necessary to convince the potential buyer of the advantages of the product or at least its that its price is reasonable. It may be necessary to present a number of arguments supporting the product or service. The person who is interested in making a purchase has his own preferences, how much to spend and even when to buy. The shopper may resist the seller until all doubts are satisfied.

These phrases are useful when trying to convince or to resist.

To convince

Look here...

You have to.....

It's a good idea that...

There is nothing better than.....

But,

To resist

You know that.....

The problem with that is...

For me, the most important

thing is.....

Speaking of.....

If I were you, I'd.....
Have you thought of.....?

Yes, but.....
No, but.....
Remember that.....

In pairs, practice convincing and resisting. Student offers to Student B a used car that is for sale. Not wanting to buy, Student B resists.

Practice

Student A: You have to take a close look at this car. It belonged to a little old lady who only drove it on Sundays.

Student B: The problem with that is that some little old ladies race cars for a living.

Full-fledged activity

Jim Anderson is a salesman for Coat-of-Many-Colors, Inc., a company that produces paints, brushes and other tools for the "do-it-yourselfers". Jim has been with the company for several years and truly believes in its products. Today he has an appointment with Samuel Lewis, the owner of a chain of hardware stores. Lewis always tries to offer his customers, at a good price, the most modern products available. He has seen Coat-of-Many-Colors' advertising and finds it interesting, but he is not yet convinced that he wants to sell their products in his stores

In pairs, play Anderson and Lewis. Use the phrases as you discuss and bargain over the paint and other products. You may want to make a deal

3. Thought-creating

Scenarios and jumping off points

The teacher tells the story. In groups the students come up with a solution to the predicament.

Tapestry

(The Instructor brings a patterned piece of fabric to class.)
I have with me today a very unusual piece of cloth. It was made according to a secret process by weavers who died long ago. As far as I know, this is the last piece left. The cloth is extremely useful and has many wondrous qualities. I'm glad that you are all here today. As experts in cloth manufacture and design, you can help listing the

possible uses of this cloth and then analyze the religious system symbolized by the repeating patterns in the fabric.

Quick Sale

I have urgent news. School fees have been increased. To avoid collection problems, the administration has declared that the students must pay the difference immediately. In order to raise money, you must sell to your classmates something that you have with you now. You'll have to write advertising and then try to sell, sell, sell.

Perfection

It bothers me a lot that every single person I meet is imperfect! I'm really tired of it! Everyone I know has faults, weaknesses, bad habits, and other imperfections. I'm asking you, as anthropologists, to design the perfect person.

Sound Stage

Last summer, while I was traveling in a faraway country, I heard music that was different from any I'd ever heard. It intrigued me. Fortunately, I was able to purchase a recording of this music. Being in a hurry to catch a flight, I didn't have time to inquire about the origins and meanings of the music. I do remember hearing, though, that the people of that region use music to tell stories and pass on history from generation to generation. Since all of you are expert ethnomusicologists, please figure out what this music is playing. (Instructor plays a short piece of unusual music.)

Zoo Story

I just received a phone call from the director of the local zoo. She tells me she is worried because attendance at the zoo is the lowest it has ever been. It seems that the animals no longer interest the public. She asks that you, expert biologists, invent a new, more interesting animal. It would be very helpful if you could describe this animal along with its habitat, food, habits, and other special features.

Fit for a King

I want to thank all of you for volunteering to work at the Good Friend Shelter. Every Thursday evening, this shelter provides for the homeless people in the local community. Since all of you are well-known for your cooking abilities, you are being asked to plan the menu for a five-course meal for next week. You'll need appetizers, soup, salad, main course and dessert. You'll also need to specify the beverages. Be sure to use nutritious foods in ample portions. Try to

make the menu varied and interesting. Feature local foods and specialties as well as those from far away.

Come Visit Us Soon!

In spite of its location in the Purple Mountains, its ancient buildings, and the cordiality of its inhabitants, the town of The Heights has never attracted many tourists. The few tourists who do arrive there don't have any idea of how to best enjoy the local attractions.

The Committee for Tourism in The Heights has decided to do something about the situation. They will certainly advertise, but they believe that advertising alone will not be sufficient. They have concluded that a guidebook to the town and its surrounding would help a lot. But they don't want their guidebook to look like those already available. They want it to reflect the very special qualities of the town.

Since no one in The Heights is an expert in guidebook writing, the committee has asked you, editors and travel writers, to create a book for them. It ought to contain:

- a description of the town, its architecture, its history, and its people
- a description of the countryside
- places of interest and scenic drives in and near the town
- sports centers
- little-known places

- restaurants
- routes that lead to the town
- hotels, inns, and other lodging
- local holidays and celebrations
- local customs

Write the guidebook in a way that it will bring people to The Heights. Emphasize the special qualities of the town. Later, you will have the opportunity to show your guidebook to the class.

Good Company

After seemingly interminable negotiations, the executives of Smith & Co., makers of clocks, and Jones & Co., makers of electric appliances, have reached an agreement for the merger of the two companies.

This is only one problem yet unresolved. The new agreement is in danger because the two groups cannot reach a compromise about a name for the new company; in a similar fashion, they have not been

able to settle on a logo nor a slogan. Heated discussions have led nowhere.

In desperation, they have decided to communicate with you, well-known commercial artists and highly experienced consultants. They request that you find an original and appropriate name--Smith & Jones and Jones & Smith are not acceptable--that you design and eye-catching emblem, and that you invent a slogan that will reflect the spirit of the new company.

Divide into groups of four to six commercial artists. Each group should choose a secretary. First, decide on the name of the new company. Second, draw the logo. Third, invent an appropriate slogan. Later, you will be able to show your work to your classmates.

Myth-making

Heraclautus, wise man, entertainer and teller of myths in the faraway country of Grekia, has run out tales to tell. After so many stories about Zeus and Hera, Apollo and Dianna, he simply cannot think of anything else to add. This is a serious problem because Heraclautus is under contract to produce four new myths a year—one for each season. Having heard that all of you know a great deal about mythology, Heraclautus asks urgently that you help him out. He asks you to create a new myth. You can use traditional characters or make up your own. Remember that in myths, gods act like humans, just on a bigger scale. Mythical stories contain messages that teach about nature, society and human life itself.

Crested

As you well know, in olden days, families would have their own crests or symbols. These crests would show the notable qualities of the family in picture form and would have a one-line motto written below, often in a foreign language. It's time to bring back this grand tradition. Design a crest and motto for your group.

Let's Go to the Fair!

Preparation: Choose an object to bring to class. It should be a bit strange.

Before class: Prepare a speech of about a minute in length intended to sell your object to your classmates. The sales pitch ought to include:

- the physical properties of the object
- why it is special or unique

- where it comes from
- its history
- the advantages that come from owning it
- the price

You can invent a slogan or even a jingle. If you exaggerate a bit, don't worry. Exaggeration is nothing new in advertising.

In class, the students are standing and milling around as it is the day of the fair.

Today, you will have the opportunity to "sell" your object to your classmates. Use all possible arguments and answer any questions made to you. Bargain if need be. Each student will have three minutes to make the presentation.

Guide for the Perplexed

The managers of Studentlife, Inc., a company that produces pens, writing paper, erasers, and other things used by students, has decided to enter another type of business. They intend to put together a catalogue filled with "perfect gifts for students". Knowing that students, in general, have little money to spend, the executive are not planning to send the catalogues to them, but rather to their relatives (including any rich uncles they may have) and to other acquaintances who have the tendency to be generous and who have the money to be so.

However a problem exists. Studentlife, Inc. has always sold the same products. Its managers do not know anything at all about the taste and preferences of today's students. Neither are they familiar with the products and services which interest young people. Therefore Studentlife Inc. is asking that you, experts, in what students like, make up a list of what ought to be included in the catalogue. They would like to offer a mix of expensive and inexpensive things. They prefer unusual things. It is important that the pages of the catalogue be filled with unforgettable gifts.

Divide into groups of four to six experts. Choose a secretary. Compose a list of articles and services to be included in the catalogue. They can come from many sources. Then choose your favorites so that Studentlife Inc. can highlight them. Later, you will have the opportunity to describe the catalogue to your classmates.

Variations: Make lists of gifts for parents, professors, teachers, children, graduation, school administrators, grandparents

Time Marches On

Have you heard? A time capsule, filled with documents and things from around here is being prepared. It will be placed in an earthquake proof container. On its surface, instructions will be written in twenty-five languages and, besides that, there will be pictures. If all goes well, the time capsule will remain untouched until 2200. All of you have been asked to select the papers, books, and things to be put in the capsule. Put in as many things as you like, but each article should clearly suggest what it is like to in this place at this time and what people of this day and age find to be important.

Finding Out

Some discoveries are not as well known as that of the atom or the polio vaccine. But sometimes these other discoveries have as much practical effect as more famous ones. Describe how the invention of the wheel, kite, paper clip or scissors must have taken place. Discuss the source of the original idea, what problems arose during the discovery process and how these were resolved.

Season's Greetings

It has just been announced that Nature Day will be a new national holiday. Since it is a brand new holiday, no one knows how to celebrate it. Invent many ways to celebrate Nature Day.

Talk it up.

I know that it is hard to believe, but there are students who don't want to study foreign languages. They say that it is a waste of time, and anyway, they will forget what little they learn. As a student dedicated to language learning, write an editorial in which you convince other students to learn languages. As part of your argument use statistics, anecdotes, things you've read about and other relevant information. Be sure to point out the advantages of knowing other languages.

Wrong Turn

I think we're lost. We passed that pond about an hour ago, and here we are again. We're going in circles, and it's getting too dark to continue. It's very cloudy, and it looks as if it may rain. We thought this would be a day hike, so all we have in our packs are matches, knives, jackets, water and a little food left over from lunch. We've got

to organize ourselves and plan how to proceed from here. In group, figure out how to go home.

Pretty as a Picture

(Instructor brings six unusual photographs to class.)

My uncle Oscar, who died recently, left me his entire collection of photographs. Photography had been his lifelong hobby, and so his folders are filled with hundreds of prints, snapshots, negatives and blowup. Oscar was a careful man, and most of the materials are meticulously labeled and catalogued. However, in one packet, I found some pictures that are different from the others. They are unidentified and seem to have been taken a long time ago. The pictures are oddly familiar, but I just can't make out who is in them and where they were taken. All of you have lots of experience in looking at pictures. Could you please help me out and tell me what these pictures show. Who were these people and what were they doing the day these pictures were taken?

Masked Ball

In the far off country of Bethinia, an ancient and unusual style of theater remains quite popular. It is said in Bethinia that it is evil for one person to pretend to be another. Therefore, plays as we know them can not be performed there. However, the entertainment-loving Bethinian people devised their own kind of theater. In their plays, actors and actresses stand behind masks that are as tall and as wide as they are. Made out of all sorts of materials, these masks represent real people as well as strange beings that are part-human, part-beast, and part-spirit.

However, the art of mask-making, long a treasured skill in Bethinia, is disappearing. The few mask makers left are very old; right now no one is studying the art. Soon all theater in Bethinia may cease. After searching the globe, the Theater Guild of Bethinia has learned that all of you have been making and wearing masks for years, especially on Halloween. They ask that you keep the tradition alive and design all the human sized masks necessary for a Bethinian play.

My Hero!

The country called Thousand Rivers doesn't have a hero or a heroine. There is no George Washington or Joan of Arc. No figure stands out from among the founders of the republic. Simply put, the Riverines don't have a historic figure to venerate or whose face they can immortalize on their small change. The leaders of Thousand Rivers have decided to remedy this intolerable situation. They are asking

you, a well respected historian to invent a hero or heroine and create a life story worthy of him or her. By the way, you should also draw a picture of the new money they will have.

Help! I need somebody!

There is a serious emergency in this building. Fortunately, one of you has a phone and can dial 9-1-1. With the others in your group, agree upon what you need to tell the emergency dispatcher.

Couldn't put it down

The Idea Bank Bookstore wants to advise its customers about books that really have an effect on their readers. Since all of you are avid readers, the manager has asked to put together a list of books that have made a difference in your lives. For each book you suggest, give a short description of why it affects people.

Future Perfect

Acting as your own personal fortune tellers, look into your crystal ball. Write down what will happen to all of you in the next three years and in the next twenty years. Speak about your work, your health, and your other activities.

Fit for a King

Thanks for volunteering to work at the Good Friend Shelter. This shelter provides dinner for the homeless in this community. Since all of you are well-known for your cooking abilities, you are being asked to plan the menu for a five-course dinner to be served next week. You'll need appetizers, soup, salad, a main course and dessert. You'll also need to specify the beverages. Be sure to use nutritious foods in ample portions. The meal should be delicious and healthful.

Games People Play

The Thrill-A-Minute Game Company is in a state of crisis. They have been making popular board games like "Tough-N-Up" and "Cover Your Eyes" for many years now. But they've run out of ideas. None of their designers has been able to come up with a new game. Since all of you spend large amounts of time playing board games, "Thrill-A-Minute" is asking you to invent a new game. Make up the rules. Design the board and the pieces. Time permitting, actually construct the game and play it with the members of your group.

A good alibi

Last night between eight and eleven, there was a robbery in the library. You have been accused of the crime. Compose an alibi.

Explain where you were during the time in question, with whom, and how you intend to prove it all.

School story

The dog did eat your homework. Explain how that happened or come up with another excuse.

Who Knows?

Last night, at a time that has not yet been determined, there was a bloody murder at the mansion which is home to the Diamund family. Lance Diamund, the unmarried brother of Leland Diamund, the mansion's owner, was found in the study, dead from a pistol shot in the forehead. The police have no ideas at all about who could have been the murderer. They don't believe it was a family member, since the rest of the family is away on a European vacation.

At this point in the investigation, the police would like to know the motive for the crime and what sort of person could have committed it. As far as is known, Lance did not have enemies or a history of criminal activity.

When the police arrived at the crime scene, they found some papers, articles of clothing, and a variety of other things. They are sure that some, if not all, of these things have to do with the crime; but they have not succeeded in interpreting them.

On the writing desk were found:

- Volume Ec-Fr of the *Universal Encyclopedia*
- a map of Ottawa, Canada
- a frog made off jade
- an envelope bearing a postmark from Zurich, Switzerland; there is no return address, and the letter is missing

On the floor, they found:

- a silk scarf with a blood stain on it
- a drinking glass with red lipstick stains on the rim
- a bow from a violin (the violin was not found)

In the pockets of the victim were found:

- a unused ticket to the opera dated last December 12
- a broken key

- a small knife with an ebony handle

The police ask that you, expert detectives, help them solve this case.

Divide into groups of four to six detectives. Each group should choose a secretary. Study the clues and come up with a theory about the personality of the murderer and the motive behind the crime. Remember that not all the clues will be useful to you investigation. Some are simply misleading. Later, you will have the opportunity to present your conclusions to your classmates. Don't waste time! The criminal is at large and may kill again.

Your Show of Shows

A. With teacher guidance, the class chooses a format for a TV show. Some possibilities are talk-show, game show, radio hour, variety show. The structure should be clearly understood and the same for all groups.

B. Divide the class into groups of about five. Mix stronger and weaker students or have more mature students choose their own groups.

C. Set aside two class periods for developing the scene and practicing. (The students are told that they will need more time and should meet outside of class or at least communicate by phone).

D. Each student should have three minutes of show time; no student should dominate. Tell them they may use costumes and props.

All-group events

Mixers

Mixer 1 The class chooses 4 common conversational topics. They then pair off and start discussing one topic. On teacher's command they change to another topic and another. On the teacher's command, they change partners and begin again. Ideally, the changing goes on until students have spoken to all of their classmates about all of the themes. Of course, the activity doesn't have to run that long.

Mixer 2 Just like mixer 1, except that the themes are more abstract or in other ways more difficult to talk about: men, women, kids, the economy

Mixer 3 In successive pairs, students discuss the same topic—animals, music, movies. Change of partner is signaled by the instructor. This can go on for half an hour.

Everyone in the pool

All students participate at the same time.

- You have been shipwrecked, organize yourselves and make plans
- The 10th Homecoming of this class or an invented group
- Family get-togethers
- Dinner parties are acted out; they must discuss certain topics
- “Intellectual” discussions which must include reference to the readings done in the course
- Stories around a campfire—scary, entertaining, cliff-hangers, moralizing
- Prepare skits based on well known formats such as talk shows, game shows, take-offs on sitcoms or on target culture shows. A full week may be devoted to writing, rehearsing and presenting. Students follow certain ground rules.

4. Get it in writing

Quick Messaging

- Write the postcard that Christopher Columbus could have written from Cuba in 1492 to Luis Santángel, a friend who stayed back home in Spain. Design the illustration that would have appeared on the other side of the card.
- The editors of *Geographicus* magazine are always looking for articles about little known places. They ask that you, as a highly experienced traveler, to write an article in which you describe a remote and fascinating place. It doesn't matter if you make up some details. No one will know the difference!

- Since you know a great deal about life, the editors of *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul* are asking you to write a short story or an essay directed at teenagers between 14 and 17 years old (high school age) for their new edition. Your work should show that you understand this group and that you can advise young people through the examples you use.
- Write a letter to your favorite actor or actress. Explain that, for you, he or she is the actor or actress whom you most admire, the importance that he or she has had and still has for you. Mention important moments in his or her career and tell why you just loved his or her latest movie.
- If you could travel to the past, which time or period would you visit? Write about what you would be doing in that moment of history.
- Write an article for a fashion magazine. Describe the two competing stores. Mention the kinds of clothing they sell and describe a few particularly outstanding things from each store. Note the atmosphere in the stores and the service offered by their clerks.
- Write a fictional story in which you are the main character. There should be at least three other characters. The story should include suspense, danger or romance. As the story ends, you should gain a greater understanding of how the world works.
- You are a reporter for the *Financial Times*, a business daily. It is your job to write an article about the merger of Smith & Co. and Jones & Co. Explain to your readers the reasons behind the merger. Focus on the personalities of Fred Smith and Fred Jones, "the two Freds," and the problems that may arise when they work together in the same office. Mention what you have found out about the future of the new company.
- During your entire career, you have worked for Smith & Co., a firm that has just merged with Jones & Co. Now you are worried. Write a long letter to your boss explaining your worries about the changes that the merger of the two companies is likely to bring.

- You have taken an amazing trip. Write an article for the travel section of a local newspaper in which you describe what you saw and did.
- On the island of Seraphim, the weather is always wonderful. Put together some advertising that will attract even more tourists. Mention the many ways to have fun outdoors on Seraphim.
- On Desolation Island, the weather is always awful. Put together advertising that will attract even a few tourists. Explain how it is possible to have fun on Desolation Island in spite of the weather.
- A year after the problems in West Borough, you have been asked to write a magazine article in which you are to explain all that has been discovered about what occurred there. You are also to describe the changes that have taken place in the city during the year since those terrible days.

More ambitious

The Play's the Thing

Martha Rojas, the director of Theater Omega is looking for new works to include in her company's repertoire. Every year they put on Works by the great playwrights like Moliere, Lope de Vega, Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Strindberg. But Martha wants to create opportunities for new contemporary playwrights.

Martha Rojas asks you, a playwright with a growing reputation to write a one-act play. . . You can deal with any theme you like and include any number of characters you prefer. She has only one requirement: the play must have a happy ending. . . Martha Rojas thinks that there is already too much tragedy in this world.

By association

Students make lists

Write down everything that each of these makes you think of:

- Sherlock Holmes
- a crystal ball
- the signs of the horoscope
- black magic
- the Egyptian pyramids
- the Bermuda triangle

- the witches of Salem
- psychoanalysis
- Tarot cards
- the Masons (or another lodge)
- mud

Composing

- Invent and draw a logo for yourself. It should represent your personal qualities. Also compose a slogan that reflects your beliefs and hopes. Later, explain in writing the logo and slogan.
- Describe a business that you would like to start. Explain the product that you would make or the service that you would offer. Tell how the business would be organized.
- Create publicity for a new horror movie.
- Acting as your own personal fortune teller, look into your crystal ball. Write down what will happen to you in the next three years and in the next twenty years. Speak about your work, your health, and your other activities.
- Describe a mystery that actually took place in your own life. Explain how it was solved. It needn't have been very important, but simply something that surprised or confounded you.
- Invent a spell that you would like to cast on someone (enemy, friend, some one you find interesting). Invoke the appropriate forces; use potions and amulets if necessary.
- Describe a little-known natural phenomenon that you have seen. Give the details. What was strange about it? Was there an explanation? Do you accept it?
- Supply the first two sentences of a mystery story; students have to complete the story.
- Describing a "a great day."
- Write a poem according to a format (sonnet, doggerel) or from a group of related words.
- Write a short story developed from one line composed by the class

- Create full page singles ads for themselves
- Create an animal story; acting it out
- Create a story around already existing fragments or paragraphs of text.
- Write very, very short plays.
- Make up a story with one character in it; write a short story in which you are the only character.
- Write a new episode for Curious George, Winnie-the-Pooh, or other well known children's figure.
- Write a biographies of this group's hero/heroine.
- Write a biography of an ancestor, living family member or best friend.
- Write newspaper/ magazine articles about strange happenings-- include who, what, where, when, why.

5. Presentations and talks

- Bring to class a souvenir that you have saved from a trip you took. Explain what it is, under what circumstances that you acquired it and the importance it has for you.
- Describe the geography--the rivers, the hills, the mountains, the coast--of a region that is very different from the area around here. Since it is probable that most of your classmates are not familiar with the area, describe it in detail. If you can, bring to class some photos or a map of the region.
- Explain a scientific experiment (in physical or social science) in which you participated.
- Describe the experiences that you had when you were learning to drive or to use a car, a surfboard, a motorcycle, or anything else that you have recently begun to use.

- Describe an object that has great personal meaning to you.
- Describe a bargain you recently bought.
- Describe the best job (paid or volunteer) that you've ever had.
- Describe the worst job (paid or volunteer) you've ever had.
- Show how to solve a difficult puzzle or a problem of logic.
- Describe a piece of art you really like.
- Describe a building you really like.
- Try to scare your classmates by telling them a story about ghosts, phantoms and other dangerous and inexplicable forces.
- Describe a psychic experience without logical explanation that you had or a "coincidence" that was just too unlikely.
- Do a magic trick, and then explain how it is done.
- Explain why you are running for office.
 - React to a story by creating something in another genre—write a story, poem, or play, journalism, blogging
 - React to a story creating something in another art form—paint a picture, do sculpture or a installation, write a piece of music, design a building or museum space.

6. Still more activities

- Finding new uses for an old building
- Choosing art for an art museum
- Describing the content of an art work
- Giving a missing persons description
- Planning trips to real or imaginary places, space travel/what to take along

- Reporting on trips to real or imaginary places or space travel/journals or history books
- Advertising for a product: a billboard or an entire campaign
- Planning a political campaign
- Describe Susana Heartrob, an invented "celebrity"
- Redecorating a home or dorm room in a particular style
- Creating history, the real stuff is too depressing
- Fill up a Time capsule,; find a Time capsule, empty it
- Making lists of books that the library should purchase
- Explain things to foreign student who has just arrived here
- Interior traveling – tell about places you know very well
- Write a ballad tango, or other set form of song, then sing it for the class,
- Write a political stump speech
- Dedicating the new _____; give impassioned short speeches
- Inventing sports trivia
- Composing Yellow pages entries
- Writing postcards to historical and fictional characters as well as real friends; draw the picture on the card
- Writing pen pals, real and invented
- Read out loud a letter found in a floating bottle. Some of the words are illegible.
- Draw a Wanted poster; write about the outlaw
- The Theatre Trunk got lost – listing all its contents

- Planning a trip, weekend, meal for this pair of students, for this group