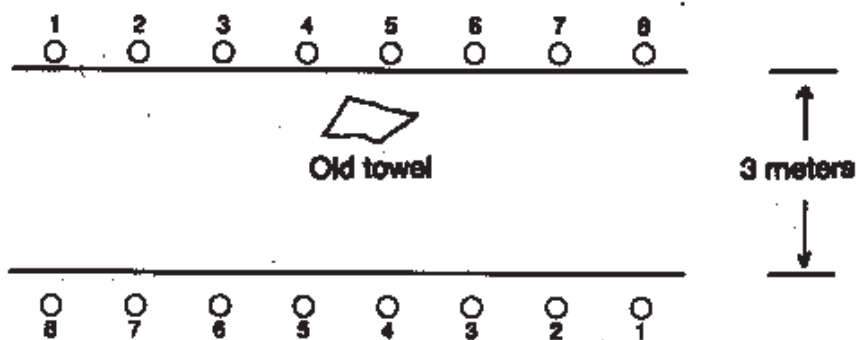


Recycling Games

In a world where people are recycling everything from milk cartons to plastic pudding cups, resourceful ESL teachers are recycling games. I don't mean that someone has pulled "SORRY" out of the closet and repainted it in shocking fluorescent hues to inspire young learners in this modern age. No, it's much simpler than that. Teachers everywhere are putting new twists on familiar games. Here are a few to get you into the recycling mode.

One of my favorite childhood games was "Steal the Bacon". Early in my teaching career, I started using it in my language classes, first for practice with numbers, and later on, for any vocabulary that needed to be reinforced. It requires a rag (an old face towel tied in a knot) for the "bacon", and some space. Two teams face each other about ten feet (3 meters) apart. The "bacon" is placed in the exact center between them. The members of each team are numbered (or if practicing other vocabulary, such as colors, occupations, adjectives, and so on, the same words should be assigned to both teams). The teacher or student in charge calls



Layout for "Steal the Bacon".

out a number or vocabulary word. The two students with that number or word try to grab the "bacon", and carry it back over to their side without being tagged. Neither student may touch the other until someone touches the "bacon". Once a student touches the "bacon" however, the other student may tag him. If one of the students reaches his side without being tagged, then his team receives a point. If a student is tagged after touching the bacon and before he returns to his own side, there is no score for that round. After each student has had two

or three turns, change numbers or words and continue playing.

Bob Jones from REJ English House presents an interesting alternative to "Hangman". After using the game since the start of his teaching career more than twenty years ago, he reached a point where he became uncomfortable about drawing hanging figures on the board. He was inspired to change the game to what he calls "The Disappearing Face". This is how it works:

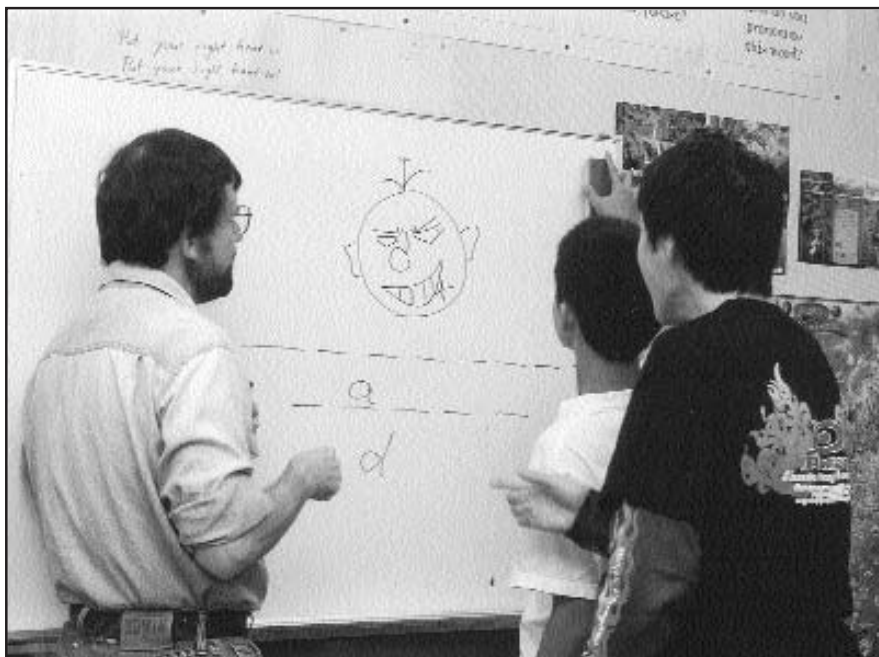
1. Draw a face on the board with ears, nose, mouth, eyes, eyebrows and a wisp of hair at the top.

2. As in "Hangman", draw a line of dashes to represent the number of letters in the target word.

3. Again, as in "Hangman", correct guesses are rewarded by writing the letters above the appropriate dashes, but here is the difference: incorrect guesses are penalized by erasing various parts of the face, instead of building a scaffold.

4. The game finishes when either the target word is guessed or the face is completely erased.

Options: 1) Divide the class into teams and award one point for every letter guessed correctly and three points for every word guessed correctly. 2) Reinforce the vocabulary of facial features by asking the children which parts of the face should be



Bob Jones and his students playing "The Disappearing Face".



Students stacking building blocks as they play the game.

erased. Include left and right. 3) Add other items to the face, such as glasses, earrings, beard, mustache. 4) Draw seasonal faces – a Jack O’Lantern face at Halloween or a snowman’s face at Christmas.

Peter Warner, ETJ Aichi Secretary, has used tiny wooden blocks very successfully in his classes ranging from 4-year-olds to junior high school students. The game is in essence counting practice, but includes elements of suspense and competition. It also promotes authentic English pair conversation, using some basic expressions. (“Hey, that’s not fair!” “That’s my block!” “Safe!” “Dangerous!” “Oh no!” “All right!” “I didn’t!” “Not me!” “Pardon?”). All students love this game, and they never get tired of it. Best of all, teachers can walk away from the students and they’ll keep going without you. Here’s how to play:

Make up a large bunch of nicely-cut wooden blocks – small ones, with square corners. Some kindergartens use small wooden blocks for individual math training sets. But if you can’t get any of those, or need more blocks, try cutting “Jenga” blocks in half (carefully!). Give each student about

twenty blocks to get started. Pair them up, and have them make a stack of blocks by taking turns adding to the stack, calling out the number of the block they are adding. If the students lose count, they have to count all the blocks in the stack again in order to keep going. (The stack usually falls over somewhere in the teens, so they get LOTS of practice where they need it most). When the stack falls over, all the blocks in the fallen stack go to the student who DIDN’T add the last block. This way, the student who stacks carefully is rewarded by “winning” the fallen blocks. After a few minutes, switch pairs, each student continuing with the blocks that they have accumulated. When you want to finish, call time out and have students count how many they have.

Commercial games can also be adapted to fit language acquisition activities. Stephen Shrader of the Language Institute of Japan has adapted the block tower game “Jenga” for use in his classes. The basic adaptation is just to make the game a turn-based way to practice language, that is, a student performs a language function from a cue, then takes a block out and puts it on top. It

can also be made into a team game to practice yes/no questions. Give students a choice of flashcards, for example cat, dog, panda, octopus, and then secretly choose one. The teams try to guess which one was chosen (for example, “Is it an ant?”), and the first team to guess correctly gets a shot at doing “Jenga”. If the team member succeeds in putting a block on the top, his team will get points, but if he knocks over the set, the team will lose points.

Other commercial games that are fun to use:

“Twister”—for practicing body parts. (Takako Kikuchi)

“Clue”—for practicing questions, vocabulary for guessing (Dale Ann Sato)

“UNO”—for “Concentration” or pick-up games, calling out both colors and numbers (Bonnie Perry)

“Junior OUTBURST!”—good for practicing vocabulary groups. (Greg Berlin)

“Scrabble”—Instead of the traditional rules, spread the letters on the table facedown, and have students turn them over one by one. When a student can spell a word, he gets to keep the blocks. The student with the most blocks wins. (Richard Goodall)

Instead of racking your brain for a new game, why not re-visit some of those games you loved as a child or still enjoy as an adult, and see how useful they can be in your classroom? You will be surprised and pleased.

(Names in parentheses indicate contributor)

