

CAPE Alumni Internet Connection: English Teacher Talk

CAPE Internet Talk was started as part of CAPE follow-up activities to continue ties with CAPE alumni and those who are interested in professional development in English teaching. It is hoped that this would increase our bond and aloha among former participants, and that the information in the TALK would help our alumni and friends/members review what you know and deepen their understanding of issues of interest in the ESL field.

Using Drawings in the Language Classroom

Sandra Lee McKay
Professor Emeritus, San Francisco State University

There are several reasons why using drawings in language classrooms can be highly beneficial. First, drawings provide students with topics to write and talk about. Second, the act of drawing can provide motivation in that it is creative and tactile. Finally, combining print and visuals more closely resembles the kind of reading students do on the Internet where print is often embedded in visual contexts. However, for drawing to be used effectively in language classrooms, tasks must have a clear language focus. What follows are some tips for having students draw, as well as several suggestions on tasks you might use in your classroom.

When you introduce drawing to your class, it is helpful to begin by having students draw from their imagination rather than from their observations. Drawing from imagination allows students to be inventive rather than to feel they have to replicate something in front of them. Be certain to emphasize to students that there is no “right” or “wrong” way to draw. Instead they should allow their imagination to determine what they will draw. All of the following examples encourage students to draw from their imagination.

One activity that could be used with young and less proficient students is to have students draw an imaginary animal. The writing task could be twofold: in the first paragraph, students can describe their imaginary animal. In order to do this, students have to be familiar with the verb to be in the present tense (i.e., my animal *has* six legs and whiskers) and with descriptive adjectives (e.g., furry, smooth, wrinkled, etc.). Then in the second paragraph, students can describe what their animal eats, when it sleeps, where it lives, what it likes to do, and so on. Here students can be quite creative in what they write; however, from a language learning perspective they are practicing the use of verbs in the third person singular and getting used to adding the third person singular –s.

For more advanced students, you might use the theme of an imaginary trip on a boat to practice the use of the conditional. To begin, students could be asked to draw the kind of boat they would like to have. It could be a raft, a canoe, a sailboat, a motor boat a cruise ship or a completely imaginary boat they design. For the writing or speaking task, students can describe what they would do if they had this boat. For example, they could write ideas such as the following.

- If I had this boat, I would take my friends out for an all night cruise.
- If I had this boat, I would paddle out on a lake and have a picnic.

- If I had this boat, I would sail it at sunset time.

In this way, the topic provides an ideal context for practicing the use of the unreal conditional structure and does so in context that requires imagination and creativity.

In order to encourage students to practice giving directions and using prepositions of location, you might have students draw a treasure map that pirates might use to find a buried treasure on land. To begin, students are asked to draw an imaginary map of where the treasure is buried and to indicate with an X where the treasure is. Then students have to describe how to get to the treasure from where they first land. Hence, students might write something like the following.

- First look for a tall palm tree.
- Walk to the palm tree and look for a large rock.
- Walk to the rock and follow the path that begins there.
- The path will take you to a lake.
- Walk around the lake until you find a large stump. It is next to a small hut.
- The treasure will be under the stump.

This topic then gives students practice in the use of the imperative and of prepositions of location.

Finally, to encourage students to use complex sentences, students could be asked to draw their favorite object. It could be a coffee cup, a ring, a photo, or anything they treasure. Then students need to describe why this possession is so important to them. Here they should be encouraged to use complex sentences such as the following.

- I treasure this photo since it was the last time my family was all together before my grandfather died.
- I cherish this coffee cup because I got it from my best friend who moved away from my town last year.
- I like this painting because it has my favorite colors and makes me feel happy when I look at it.

The possibilities for drawing topics are endless. What is important is to encourage students to be creative in their drawing and not to be worried about correctness of form. Even more critical is to be certain that the writing or speaking that accompanies the drawing has a clear language learning objective and that students are introduced to the structures they may be using before they are asked to write or talk about their drawing.

*Contributor: Dr. Sandra McKay, Professor Emeritus, San Francisco State University
Jai-Ho Yoo, CAPE President*