

Introduction

Purpose, scope and use of this book

This book is designed to provide short, topical and achievable teaching ideas for teachers of English to young learners, whether they are following a required syllabus or textbook, or preparing a curriculum that is targeted at their own group of learners. The particular value of the book is that it provides teachers with a store of activities that they can use, at long or short notice, to meet a specific learning objective, or to fill a gap (or reinforce a learning point) that becomes apparent as children study the scheduled curriculum or textbook. When chosen carefully by the teacher to suit the current theme and to meet the planned objectives, the activities in this book can be used in several ways. They can act as supplementary mainstay activities in the planned curriculum to support the progress of learning already underway. They can also act as reinforcement activities if children need to focus a little more on a particular aspect of learning. And (so long as their use is consistent with the overall teaching goals) they can be used simply to liven up the class, to inject interest or adrenalin, and to give the children five minutes of fun. We recommend that you keep this book at your side when you do your planning, and handy when teaching, ready for those moments when children need reinforcement, or have shown that they can take on another quick challenge.

The audience for this book

The audience for this book is teachers of English to children aged from six to twelve years of age. They may be teachers of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) or ESL/EAL (English as a Second Language / English as an Additional Language). EFL teachers are teaching English in a situation where English is seldom heard outside the classroom. ESL teachers are teaching English to children who are learning English as the main language of communication and learning in their classrooms, school and community. For both EFL and ESL teachers, the activities in this book can be used as mainstay or supplementary reinforcement activities.

Five-Minute Activities for Young Learners

In a mainstream ESL context, we are assuming that, as much as possible, the ESL teacher will try to relate the activities to the content of mainstream classes. For example, you may choose a five-minute activity to correspond with a science topic from a mainstream class. This activity will not only meet specific language objectives, but may also provide a link between the language classroom and the mainstream class. Similarly, if the children are learning about narratives in their mainstream classes, you, the language teacher, could choose a number of five-minute activities which focus on the language features of narratives. In this way, language teachers can help to build an integrated curriculum, while at the same time catering for different levels of ability, skills and content knowledge.

The structure of this book

We have organised the book into six themes, and each theme contains activities which have been divided into three levels of difficulty: one star (*) represents the lowest level of difficulty, while three stars (***) represent the most challenging activities. The box at the top of each activity also contains the Language focus and Skills focus for each activity, along with a Thinking focus and suggestions for the teacher about accepting or correcting errors. The nature of the interaction, i.e. group work, pairwork, etc. is noted at the top of each activity, and the teacher's preparation for each activity is also clearly stated.

The six themes in this book have been chosen to appeal to both boys and girls from a wide age range. The topics, which relate to common learning topics in EFL and ESL classrooms, are usually covered in young learner EFL tests (for example, the Cambridge Young Learners English Test) and in many course books. The topics also underpin learning in the curriculum in most primary mainstream classrooms. They are as follows:

- Animals
- Journeys
- Fantasy and adventure
- The world around us
- Healthy bodies
- About me

The design of the activities allows teachers to adapt and apply the ideas to other themes. Teachers may decide to use the activities for five to ten

Introduction

minutes, or it is possible for experienced teachers to extend a number of activities and adapt these for more able students.

The philosophy underpinning the activities

We have structured the book so that it encourages meaningful language use and real communication appropriate to primary age learners and their learning contexts. Even when children are practising vocabulary, pronunciation or language structures, they do so in a meaningful way, in an activity where their own meanings are created, supported and exchanged with others. The arrangement in themes is important because it enables children to build up a store of topic-related language items that they can recycle as they move on to more advanced activities on the same topic. We have used a range of genres, such as recount, information report, procedure, narrative, explanation and argument, to provide a range of contexts and purposes for language use.

From our knowledge of child development (including an appreciation of multiple intelligences) and from a desire to focus on individual learners, we have created activities that are hands-on and appeal to a child's sense of fun. Such activities are enjoyable and achievable and motivate learners because they enable them to be successful according to their individual abilities. We have involved movement, active participation and games. A spiral model which recycles language, together with an awareness of higher-order thinking skills, has enabled us to cater for children's cognitive development. (The spiralling of learning depends, of course, to a large extent, on the order in which teachers choose activities.)

Through the activities, we aim to enable children to think and to communicate in English, so that as they acquire new language, they develop strategies to communicate, and are then able to apply this new knowledge to new situations. Through this process, then, children are able to learn how language is organised, used and learned. We have also aimed to give children an opportunity to reflect on and learn new things as they participate in the activities.

The content of the activities

The activities focus on the four macro skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing, and the 'building blocks' of language, vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. They also focus on developing learning strategies, for

Five-Minute Activities for Young Learners

example, certain decoding strategies to enhance reading skills, pronunciation strategies to aid clear oral language, and higher-order thinking skills (such as categorising, classifying, defining, explaining, drawing conclusions, hypothesising, making connections between ideas, and considering multiple viewpoints or conflicting views) to improve children's thinking abilities.

Materials needed

We assume that teachers have a blackboard and chalk, or whiteboard and marker, for every activity. Other materials that teachers need are listed.

We encourage teachers to display children's work around the classroom. Lists of words, and pictures, and other material that is used in the activities can also be used for display. Displays give children a chance to revisit what they have learned, and when they look around the classroom they can feel good about what they have done. Teachers can also organise children to keep their 'activity work' in a book or portfolio in which they stick or keep their work, and to which they return from time to time.

Class sizes

In designing the activities, we have been mindful that children learn English in many different settings, ranging from small groups to large classes. The activities are flexible enough to cater for English teaching and learning in a variety of contexts.

How to choose activities

You are free to use any activity and in any order, but, according to good teaching practice, you should always consider whether children are ready for this activity or whether it would be better to do a less advanced activity, or to do an earlier activity in the sequence of activities. If you choose a number of activities in one level in one theme, then there is more opportunity for recycling and consolidation of learning.

There are many ways to fit these five-minute activities into schemes of work; ideas will easily arise as teachers read the many activities, and keep in mind their objectives and their children's needs. The five-minute activities can act as a planned activity for one of the teaching phases, they can be slotted in as the teacher realises the need for more focus or reinforcement

Introduction

during the scheme of work, or they can be picked up and used because the children enjoyed them and they help them to review past learning once the scheme of work is finished.

How to fit a five-minute activity into an overall scheme of work

Scheme of work in an EFL context: writing to a friend in another classroom about the things in their classroom

In this example, this five-minute activity is a mainstay activity embedded in a scheme of work in which EFL children are writing a letter to a friend describing their classroom. Remember that there is not always a clear distinction between EFL and ESL activities; these types of activities might also be used in intensive ESL contexts where the ESL teacher is planning and teaching the activities directly, focussing more on language and preparing children for mainstream learning.

- 1 Preparation phase of scheme of work: activating lexis about things in the classroom (see box below).
- 2 Core phase of scheme of work: producing sentences – orally and then in writing – about things around them.
- 3 Follow-up phase: writing a letter to a friend describing their classroom.

The five-minute activity can also be used later during the scheme of work as a reinforcement activity, say at the beginning of a new lesson during the scheme of work, or during a spare five minutes in classroom activities.

6.2 My classroom (five-minute activity used as a Preparation phase)

Level	*
Language focus	Vocabulary: classroom objects
Skills focus	Listening for details
Thinking focus	Following directions
Teaching approach	Promote accuracy – correct errors
Interaction	Whole class work, suitable for large classes
Preparation	On small slips of paper, write the names of a number of familiar classroom items. Choose objects from the basic game. See Box 112. Jumble these and put them into a container.

Five-Minute Activities for Young Learners

Procedure

- 1 Ask each child to choose one object from the classroom and place it on his/her desk.
- 2 Then ask the children to stand and listen to the names of the objects as you draw them out of the container.
- 3 As you select a slip of paper, read out the name of the object. Anyone with this object has to sit down.
- 4 Continue to draw out all the slips of paper one by one, and read out the name of the object. The last children left standing are the winners.
- 5 It is possible that some children have chosen objects which you did not include in your list. If they know the English word for these items, then they win bonus points.

Box 112 Classroom objects

Classroom objects: basic game	Classroom objects: advanced game
Book	<i>Add one adjective:</i>
Pen	Red pencil
Picture	Old toy
Eraser	Tennis ball
Pencil	
Ruler	<i>Add two adjectives:</i>
Ball	New English book
Game	Big picture book
Toy	Old test book
Bag	
Box	

Scheme of work in an ESL mainstream context: beginning a scheme of work on space travel

In this example, in an ESL mainstream context, the teacher is using this five-minute activity to give her/his advanced ESL learners an opportunity to become familiar with the language of space travel, the new theme being studied by the mainstream class. The ESL learners need to know more than vocabulary – they need to know how to discern and express strengths and weaknesses in an argument, which in turn involves the language of creative

Introduction

thinking (analysing, contrasting, evaluating). A well-prepared teacher will also be aware that these ESL learners need support to establish their understanding about space travel. So the five-minute activity can help the children to prepare their thoughts for the scheme of work, while at the same time helping them check their ideas through oral language (as in this activity) with their teacher and their classmates. Through this kind of activity, the ESL learners are therefore being given a chance to learn and apply some of the English vocabulary they need to talk about travel in space. They are also learning ways to talk about strengths and weaknesses. They are doing this in a sharing and fun classroom situation with their mainstream classmates, or at least with their more advanced ESL classmates before they join the main class. This will help them to join in with other whole class activities as the mainstream scheme of work on space travel progresses.

2.17 Holidays in space

Level	***
Language focus	Debate, modal expressions
Skills focus	Speaking
Thinking focus	Analysing, contrasting and evaluating
Teaching approach	Promote creativity – accept errors
Interaction	Whole class, suitable for large classes Group discussion
Preparation	Draw a large grid on the board. See Box 42.

Procedure

- 1 Write the topic on the board: *Holidays in space*.
- 2 Refer to the large grid on the board.
- 3 Tell the children that you want them to think of the advantages and disadvantages of having a holiday in space. Give them an example of the sort of ideas that can appear in each section of the grid. See Box 43 for suggestions.
- 4 Divide the class into teams, and each team has a turn to add one idea to the strengths and weaknesses grid. Team members discuss their answers first and then choose one idea to add to the grid. Encourage the children to use the modal expressions *could/couldn't, might, would* and *may*. They continue until they run out of ideas.
- 5 The team to contribute the last idea is the winner.

Five-Minute Activities for Young Learners

Box 42 Space travel: strengths and weaknesses grid

Topic: Holidays in space	
Strengths	Weaknesses

Box 43 Questions about space travel

Strengths

Teacher: What are the good things about going on a holiday into space? What would we enjoy? How would we benefit?

Children: It's a new experience. We could see things we've never seen before, e.g. Saturn's rings, Mars' volcano. We could see the Earth from space. We might meet other friendly life forms. We might learn about how the solar system was formed.

Weaknesses

Teacher: What are some of the problems we could face? What would stop us from going on a holiday in space?

Children: It's too expensive. We would be away for a long time. We couldn't eat our normal food. It's too hot / too cold. There could be angry aliens in space. The space ship may break down.

The scheme of work will continue with a range of other science and creative writing and group work activities around the space travel theme, and will continue to draw on children to express their oral and written ideas about strengths and weaknesses (analysing, contrasting, evaluating) in the space travel theme.

1 Animals

1.1 What animals do you know?

Level	*
Language focus	Vocabulary: animal names
Skills focus	Writing
Thinking focus	Classifying
Teaching approach	Promote creativity – accept errors
Interaction	Group work or pairs, suitable for large classes

Procedure

- 1 Form the class into groups. Each group has a large sheet of paper. In large classes, students could work in pairs, each with a sheet of paper.
- 2 Children write as many animals as they can think of in one minute.
- 3 They then pass the large sheet of paper to the group on their right or to the pair on their right.
- 4 The children read their peers' suggestions and add more animals to the list.
- 5 Continue rotating the sheet of paper until it returns to the original group. In large classes, pass the paper round five pairs.
- 6 Create a summary grid on the board, using the headings from Box 1.
- 7 Ask the students to call out the name of an animal that falls into the following categories: Farm animals, Pets, and Wild animals, and record these into the grid.

Box 1 Animal names

Farm animals	Pets	Wild animals
chicken, cow, duck, goat, horse, sheep	bird, cat, dog, fish, horse, mouse	bird, crocodile, duck, elephant, fish, frog, giraffe, hippo, lizard, monkey, mouse, snake, spider, tiger

Five-Minute Activities for Young Learners

Follow-up

The children copy the name of each animal onto a playing card. They can then play card games such as Snap and Concentration. See Box 2 for instructions on how to play these card games.

Box 2 Card games

These games are best played in groups of two to four players.

Snap

- Divide the cards between the players.
- Each player takes a turn to place a card on the table, thus revealing the content of the card.
- When two cards match, e.g. if there are two pets (e.g. a cat and a dog) or two farm animals (e.g. a cow and a horse), the first person to place a hand over the pack and say *Snap* wins all these cards.
- The game continues until one player has won all the cards.

Concentration

- All the cards are placed face down spread out on the table.
- Each player takes a turn to choose two cards.
- If the cards make a pair, e.g. if there are two farm animals, the player keeps the cards and has another turn.
- If there is no pair, the cards are replaced, face down, in the same position.
- The game continues until all pairs have been claimed.

1.2 Describing well-known animals

Level	*
Language focus	Vocabulary: adjectives
Skills focus	Listening and writing
Thinking focus	Selecting and defining
Teaching approach	Promote accuracy – correct errors
Interaction	Pairwork, suitable for large classes
Preparation	Draw a grid on the board. Write the headings, but no details. See Box 3.