











Young Learners + Cuisenaire rods + English

*The rods (numbers in colour, coloured numbers) are named after their inventor
- Georges Cuisenaire (1891-1976), a Belgian primary teacher.*

Izabela Jaros

In 1952 he published a booklet on the use of rods called 'Les nombres en couleurs'.

He initially used them to teach arithmetic. In the system, there are 10 rods measuring 1 cm to 10 cm (one square centimetre in cross section). Rods of equal length are assigned the same colour. Most Cuisenaire rods follow this system:

	white = 1 cm
	red = 2 cm
	light green = 3 cm
	purple = 4 cm
	yellow = 5 cm
	dark green = 6 cm
	black = 7 cm
	brown = 8 cm
	blue = 9 cm
	orange = 10 cm

Dr Caleb Gattegno, who invented the Silent Way, one of the teaching methods, noticed that the rods can also be used to teach foreign languages and helped to make them popular in many countries.

In 2005 I realized that Cuisenaire rods are a valuable but under-used teaching aid in the process of teaching English to children. At that time I was doing a project with the students from Akademia Świętokrzyska



Georges Cuisenaire

in Kielce and we designed a handful of activities, which were classroom tested by a group of pupils from Primary School No. 25 in Kielce. The project was awarded a prestigious certificate "European Language Label dla nowatorskich inicjatyw w nauczaniu języków obcych" in 2005.

In the project CRs were used to cover selected lexical areas, such as:

- colours
- numbers

- the alphabet
- time specification
- body parts
- family relations
- buildings & furniture
- animals
- food
- abilities.

The following aspects of grammar were 'smuggled' at the same time:

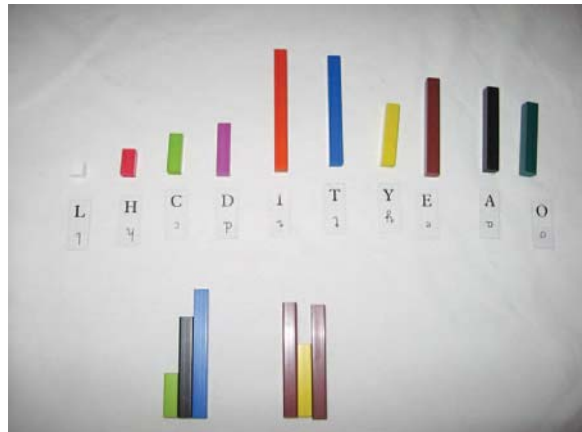
- personal pronouns
- articles
- nouns
- adjectives
- verbs
- prepositions
- word stress
- sequence of words in an English sentence

Below, I would like to present sample activities with Cuisenaire rods. The tasks are designed for children aged 5 – 10. The activities are appropriate for elementary level, although certain modifications can be introduced for more proficient learners.

The following suggestions deal with such lexical areas as: food, colour, animals, parts of the body or sport.



Fot. Izabela Jaroń (9)



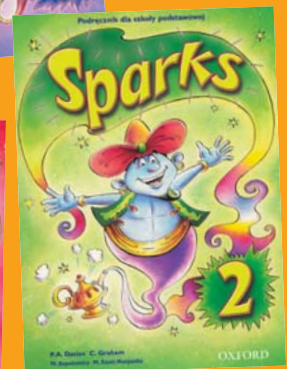
- **'Special words'** – children choose their favourite food/colour/toy/animal/sport & make the word, which begins with the same letter as their own name, e.g. Anna-apple, Kuba-karate)
- **Encode your rods!**
Each rod stands for one letter, e.g.: t – blue, c – light green, a – black, e – brown,

y – yellow, etc.- a key must be displayed so that children can refer to it and the letters should be selected appropriately to enable children to build the words. Lexical area should be established. This task can be performed as a team game if groups make as many words as possible for their opponents!

- **Monster game**
One rod stands for one part of the body, e.g. white (1) – an eye, red (2) – a mouth, etc.

Sparks

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- ★ Kurs powiązany z kształceniem zintegrowanym
- ★ Polskie autorki – znane specjalistki w dziedzinie nauczania dzieci
- ★ Jasny podział materiału na lekcje
- ★ Bohaterowie, z którymi dzieci mogą się utożsamiać
- ★ Wartości bliskie dzieciom, rodzicom i nauczycielom
- ★ Magia, która oczaruje wszystkich

Children work in teams and each person from the group throws the dice and makes appropriate parts of the body. Then children describe their monsters in the following way: *Our monster has got 2 mouths, 4 eyes, 5 arms, etc.*

■ Hunt the thimble



3 pupils are given a slip of paper each with an instruction on it to find certain number of rods, e.g.:

Kuba

Find 2 red rods, 3 light green rods and 6 white ones.

Wiktor

Find 4 white rods, 1 orange rod and 2 black ones.

Elwira

Find 4 brown rods, 3 blue rods and 2 yellow ones.

Weronika

Find 2 white rods, 3 orange rods

and 5 red ones.

Then the learners with the slips of paper are asked to leave the classroom for a while. In the meantime the rods are hidden in different places in the classroom, e.g.

behind the flowerpot, under the rug, on the chair, etc. Then the children come back and try to find their rods. The rest of the group help them find the rods by saying 'cold' or 'hot' if they are near the hidden rods or not. The time limit may be set to encourage competition.

The same procedure is repeated for the next 3 children to avoid chaos and noise in the classroom.

The possibilities of different activities are endless. Even at Christmas time they may be used in a lesson as excellent teaching aids. Selected Christmas – related activities are presented below.

Christmas + Cuisenaire rods

■ Christmas Cuisenaire chain.

Certain rods stand for selected vowels or consonants, e.g.:

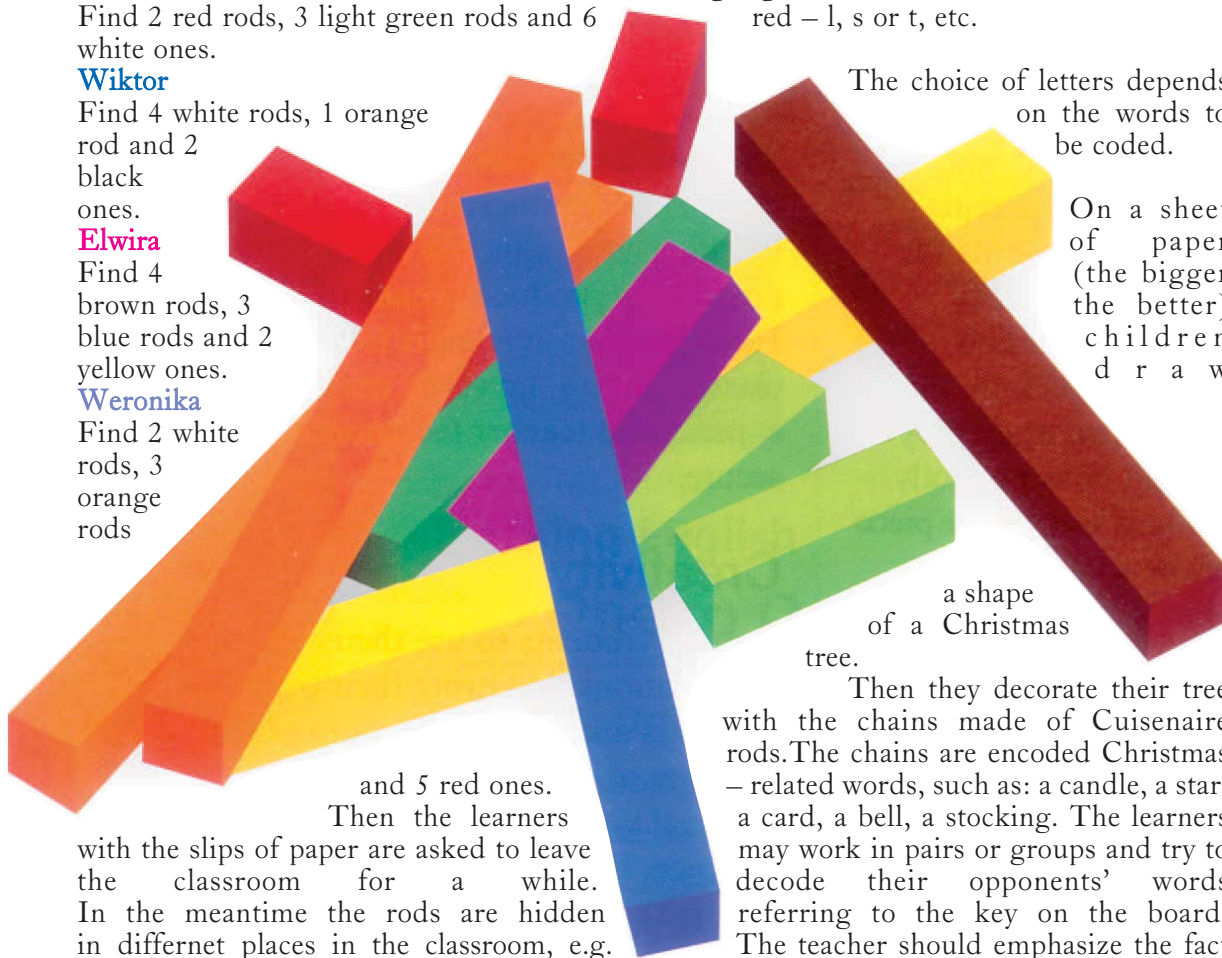
white – a, e, or i

light green – c, n or d

red – l, s or t, etc.

The choice of letters depends on the words to be coded.

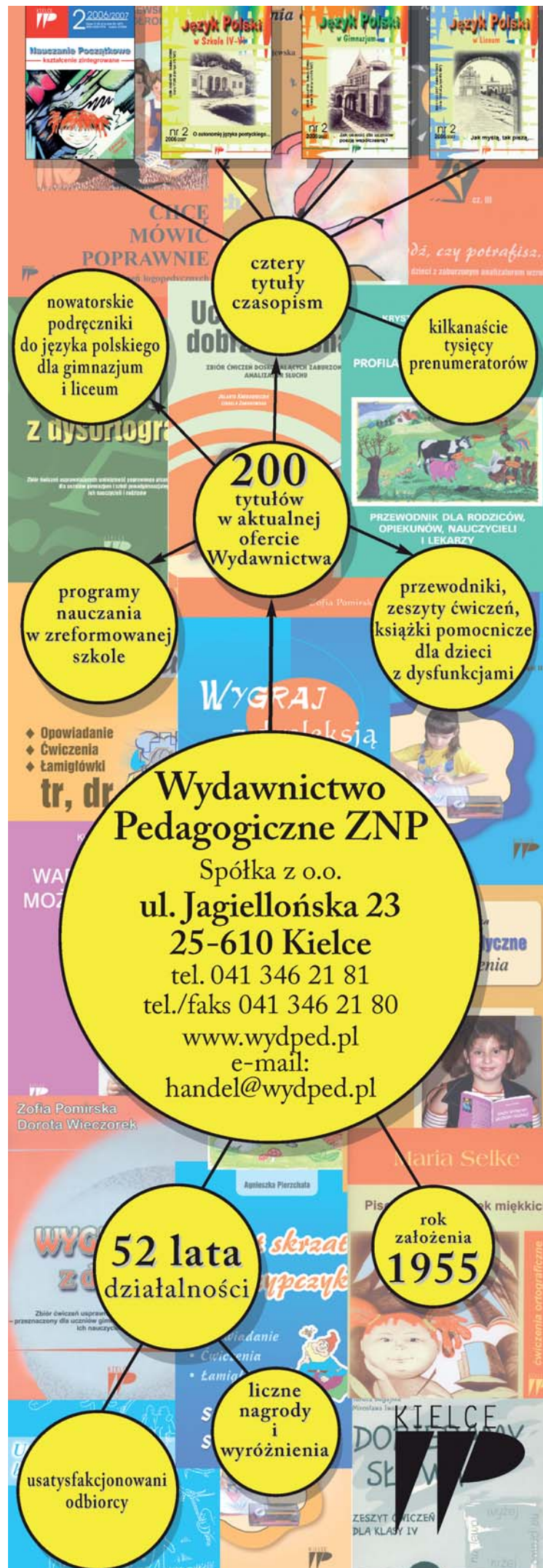
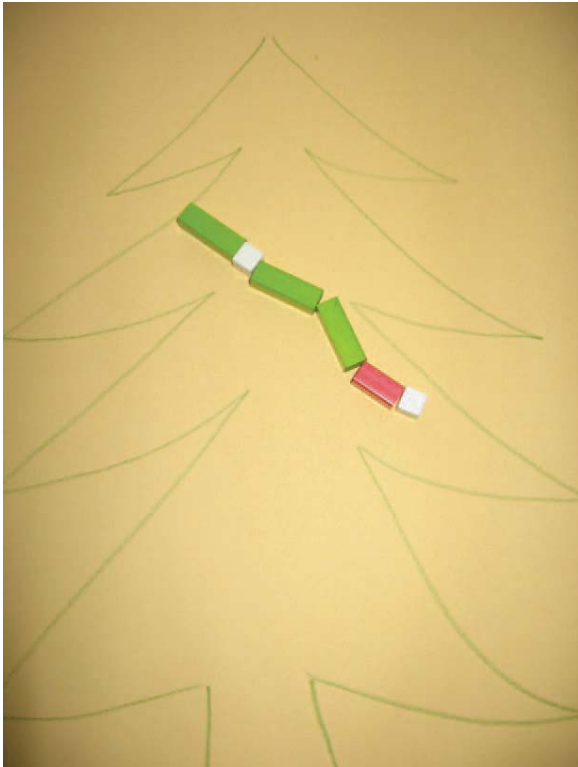
On a sheet of paper (the bigger the better) children draw



a shape of a Christmas tree.

Then they decorate their tree with the chains made of Cuisenaire rods. The chains are encoded Christmas – related words, such as: a candle, a star, a card, a bell, a stocking. The learners may work in pairs or groups and try to decode their opponents' words referring to the key on the board. The teacher should emphasize the fact

that the rod of the same colour may stand for different letters even in one word.
For weaker students one rod stands for one letter only (to make the task easier the first and/or the last letter of the word can be added).



■ **Christmas Cuisenaire board game.**

Children participate in the game creation: they use the rods to build the track, ideally in the shape of a Christmas tree or a star ('never-ending' track) and they establish the rules, such as:

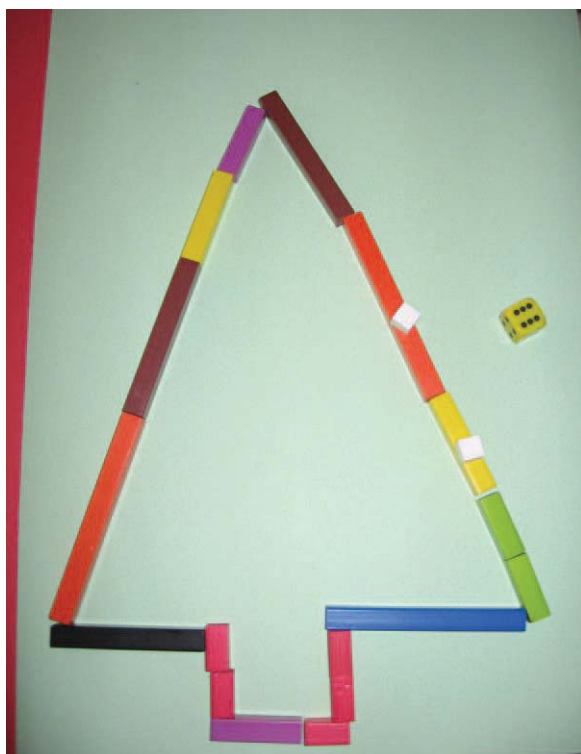
When you land on a brown rod, name 3 Christmas decorations.

When you land on a green rod, sing a Christmas carol/song.

When you land on a yellow rod, name 3 presents you received from Santa Claus.

When you land on a black rod, you miss a go, etc.

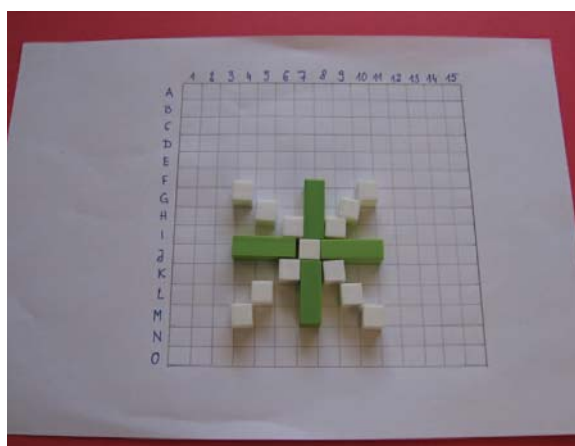
The rules should be written to help children stick to them. The dice and counters (the smallest rods which can be put on the track) are used to play the game. The game starts with a selected rod and the winner is the one who has reached the same rod first.



■ **Christmas picture dictation**

The pupils are given special grids (squared paper with letters and numbers), similar to the ones used in battleships.

They work in pairs. They build Christmas – or winter-related items on the grid (secretly), such as: a candle, a present, a star and the like. Then they describe, in turn, their object using the letter and the number that are the coordinates of the squares the rods are placed on and the colour of the rod, e.g.: H, I, J, K, L 7 – yellow; F7 – white. The rods can be placed horizontally, vertically or diagonally. The other person tries to build the same thing on his/her grid and name it.



■ Cuisenaire stocking

One rod stands for one present, e.g.:

white – a car

light green – a robot

red – a doll

yellow – a book

brown – socks

orange – board games, etc.

Then the rods are put in a Christmas stocking. The teacher asks a question: *What would you like to get for Christmas?* First each child gives the name of the present he/she would like to get and after that closes his/her eyes and takes one rod out of the stocking and says:

I've got I wanted it/ I didn't want it.

Parents should try it out as well – the presents do not cost a fortune!

The main benefits of Cuisenaire rods are enumerated below:

- they spark children's interest in English through hands-on investigation and visual confirmation of concepts
- they are fun and help to develop positive attitudes towards the foreign language learning
- they enable holistic learning (children learn through active, engaging and meaningful learning)

- concentration span is improved
- aspects of language can be developed (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation)
- conceptual development is reinforced
- communicative skills are practised (children interact with others while working in pairs or groups)
- children's creativity and imagination are exercised
- they can be used in varied contexts
- they are ideal for children with learning difficulties (dyslexic ones in particular).

To sum up, numbers in colours are:

- C – colourful
- U – universal
- I – imaginative
- S – solid
- E – effective
- N – nice
- A – appropriate
- I – indispensable
- R – ready
- E – exhilarating

More suggestions on how to use Cuisenaire rods in an English lesson can be found in the book *"Język angielski z klockami Cuisenaire'a"*, published by Wydawnictwo Pedagogiczne ZNP Sp. z o.o. w Kielcach.

Bibliografia:

Jaros I., *Język angielski z klockami Cuisenaire'a*, Kielce Wydawnictwo Pedagogiczne ZNP Sp. z o.o. 2006

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