

Fun with words

Marta K. Kotarba

*The difference between the right word
and the almost right word is the difference
between lightning and the lightning bug.*
- Mark Twain

In order to teach writing in the new language to young learners I emphasize the global approach. You can always ask: Ok, but when are young learners ready to read and write? Actually, as far as I'm concerned, children are ready to write in a variety of forms when teachers give them opportunities. Young learners tend to write in the same way they play with building blocks – just for fun! In other words, they write for the sake of the activity, rather than the final product.

It's obvious that the aim of the language teaching is to stimulate the children's mental, psychological and social growth. You have to still keep in mind the learning characteristics of your students and their implications in the development of the lessons. It's also quite easy to observe that some children have a wide range of abilities and that strength in a specific area doesn't predict strength in different one. We all know that it isn't easy to get young learners' attention, but we also know that we have to keep their attention throughout the English class. Young children's attention spans vary, so the pace in the classroom should be lively.

Children need to learn writing in other language at their own pace and they should be encouraged to apply their own learning strategies. As teachers, we can help them when we understand and respect their growing process, the skills and abilities they do have, yet avoid discouraging their creativity. Unfortunately, at the early stages of writing and reading, many children's writing is slow and takes much effort.

Children learn by the things that they see, hear or do. The teachers should plan a large variety of activities that practice vocabulary and simple expressions. The key to maintaining children's attention is planning

activities in which they will be participating actively. Playing games with words is like daily practicing a musical instrument. Word play stretches the vocabulary, so the young writers can pick out the best words and put them together!

Here are some games and ways to play with words that increase vocabulary and language skills.

RHYME TIME

Just say a word and then have students name the words that they can think of that rhyme with it. For example: **cat**: *fat, that, rap, mat, pat, bat, rat, path, rug, sad, hat etc.* You can also ask a simple question, for example: *What do you read that rhymes with cook?; What do you wear that rhymes with cat?; What fruit do you eat that rhymes with hair?; Where do you sleep that rhymes with red?*

WORD BANK

With a little index card file box and a stack of index cards, suggest that your students start building their own treasure trove of words to use in writing and speaking. When they find a new word during the reading exercises, have them write the word on a card. They should then look the word up in the dictionary and write the explanation on the back of the card.

FIVE SENSES POETRY

In five senses poetry you have to describe something by comparing it with words that stand for things that we can *see, hear, smell, touch* and *taste* (check also: The Teacher, 11 (33) 2005).

LIMERICKS

A limericks is a humorous, rhyming, five-line poem that children enjoy hearing as much as they enjoy writing. The first two lines rhyme, the third and fourth lines rhyme, and the last line rhymes with the first two lines. How do you write a limerick? Clap out the rhythmic pattern together so the writer can get the beat and be able to duplicate it.

*I know a stupid rat
Who is very, very fat!
He lives in a hole
He plays with a ball
And what do you think about that?*

Emilka, age 9.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL POEMS

Here is what the poem contains:

- Line 1:** your first name
 - Line 2:** adjectives that describe you
 - Line 3:** daughter or son of
 - Line 4:** lover of (*write two or three things of your favourite things*)
 - Line 5:** who fears
 - Line 6:** who would like to see
- (*countries, places or things you've always wanted to see*)

For example:

*Bartek
8 years old, nice, friendly, polite and funny
Son of my mummy and daddy
Lover of computer games and football
Who fears spiders, tests and girls
Who would like to see new film at the cinema*

HOW CAN YOU USE A FORK?

Just ask that simple questions and try to name all the practical or crazy ways to use the objects besides the normal use! (The Teacher, 11 (33) 2005).

ABC BOOK

Help your students build their vocabulary as a word detectives! Get out a bunch of magazines, scissors and glue and ask them to find as much words that begin with A as they can! Then have them glue on a piece of coloured paper. Each time you do this

exercise, use a different letter until you go through the whole alphabet. (The Teacher, 11 (33) 2005).

TONGUE TWISTERS

Tongue twisters are fun to say and write, and they don't have to make a lot of sense. For example: *She sells seashells by the seashore, See the ragge, rugged rabin run round and round the rugged, rugged rabbit*

STORYTELLING

When storytelling is a part of classroom fun, children tune into language. Their listening and vocabulary improve, their imagination ignite. Telling young children stories actually motivates them to read and write.

METAPHORS and SIMILES

Metaphores and similes are figures of speech in which a comparison is made. In a metaphor, the comparison is implied: *The school is a big, black owl*. With a simile, the writer makes a comparison of two unlike things using *like* or *as*: *My mum is like a lion, she is very strong and brave*.

And finally, one more tip. If possible, allow your students access to computers. A computer is an incredible tool for young writers. Your students can make banners that say "Happy Birthday!", posters, signs or labels etc.

Have a nice class!

