

Creativity and Teenagers

Judy Garton-Sprenger & Philip Prowse

You don't have to sign up to any particular view of learning styles to be aware that different learners learn differently, and that the same learners learn in different ways in different situations. There is a place in the language class for rote learning (yes!), and for spelling rules (oh, yes!), for mechanical practice (yes!!) and, of course, for texts and dialogues, exercises and questions.

But a vital part of the classroom mix is creativity. The dictionary tells us that the verb 'create' means 'form out of nothing' or 'bring into being by force of the imagination'. This gives us a clue to the importance of creative activities where learners think and do things in English for the first time (perhaps ever!). Teenagers wishing to assert their individuality are likely to be motivated by activities which encourage them to make personal responses and generate imaginative output according to their particular talents. Such activities provide the opportunity for creative use of English in enjoyable, stimulating and, above all, original ways, whether it is to solve a problem, interpret a text in a new way or make a new meaning.

We offer the following activities as examples which can be adapted to your own teaching situation. They were created for 13–16-year-olds at elementary and pre-intermediate levels.

Brainteasers

These provoke thought, discussion and laughter, with students concentrating on finding solutions to the problem rather than worrying about how to express themselves. And they can find more brainteasers on the Web or make up their own.

- 1 Picture of woman looking at photo of young man.
Woman: I have no brothers or sisters, but this man's mother is my father's daughter.
Who is the man in the photo?
- 2 A man and a woman are standing on the same piece of newspaper. But they can't touch each other. *Why not?*
- 3 Mary's mother, Mrs Jones, has four children. The oldest, a boy, is called North. The next oldest, a girl, is called South. The third child, a boy, is called East. The youngest child is another girl. *What's her name?*
- 4 A doctor and a boy are fishing. The boy is the doctor's son, but the doctor isn't the boy's father. *Who is the doctor?*
- 5 Jenny likes pizzas but she doesn't like pasta. She likes eggs but she doesn't like ham. She likes butter but she doesn't like bread. She likes peppers but she doesn't like olives. She loves coffee!
What kind of things does Jenny like?

- 6 It's faster than the speed of light.
It's darker than the darkest night.
When something is free, you pay it.
When you have a shower, you wear it.
When you lose, you win it.
When you're silent, you say it.
Poor people have it.
Rich people need it.
If you eat it, you'll die.
What is it?

Answers 1 The woman's son. 2 There's a door between them. 3 Mary. 4 The boy's mother. 5 She likes things with double letters. 6 Nothing.

Poems

These frames enable students to write their own poetry!

Good/Bad poem

I'm good at dancing.
I'm good at rap.
I'm good at sleeping,
But I'm bad at writing letters!

I'm good at _____.
I'm good at _____.
I'm good at _____.
But I'm bad at _____!

Things I've done ...

I've ...
Answered lots of questions
Been to Brazil
Climbed a lot of hills
Done my homework and
Eaten a lot of meals
Found a friend
Given her a present
Had a haircut and
Ironed my jacket
Just sung a song
Kept a notebook
Lost some money
Made some mistakes
Often been happy
Played lots of games
Quickly and slowly
Read a hundred books and
Seen fifty films
Tried to play tennis and
Usually lost
Visited London
What a lot to see!
X is too difficult
You know and so is
Z

Now write your own A–Z poem beginning
Things I've done ...
I've
A...

Students also enjoy limericks, and can write their own if given the framework: a limerick is a five-line poem in which the first two lines rhyme with the fifth line and the shorter third and fourth lines rhyme with each other.

A young kangaroo in Australia
Said 'I'm a terrible failure!
I can't jump at all
'Cause my legs are too small –
I'm the worst kangaroo in Australia!

There was a young woman called Mabel
Who wanted to dance on the table
'Don't know if I should
I would if I could
But I'm not sure if I'm able'

Stories

All teenagers can write stories, as long as they are provided with a clearly defined framework on which they can build and develop their own ideas. Here is a highly structured model:

Write a news story about two people in an amazing rescue. Use these questions to help you.

- Who are the people and how old are they? Where are they from?
- Where were they and what were they doing when they got into trouble?
- What happened to them? Did they get lost or have an accident? Was someone injured?
- Who did they contact to ask for help? How did they make contact?
- What happened when help arrived? How were the people rescued?
- What did they say after the rescue?

Choose a headline for your story, and read or show it to other students in the class. Which rescue story is the most amazing?

For some lovely suggestions of ways to motivate students to explore creative writing, go to

www.bbc.co.uk/blast/writing/story_starter.shtml

Sketches

Watching, acting out, recording and perhaps rewriting drama is always challenging and rewarding. Students can also create their own sketches, photograph them with a digital camera, and then display the prints with speech bubbles by the characters.

Sign Language

OFFICER Excuse me, sir. What are you doing?
MAN I'm taking photographs.
OFFICER Yes, I know. But you can't do that.
MAN Yes, I can. I'm very good at taking photos
OFFICER No, sir, I mean you aren't allowed to do that.
MAN It's not against the law to take pictures.

OFFICER Not usually, sir, but you can't take pictures here.
MAN Why not?
OFFICER Look at the sign – it says: Police No Entry.
MAN Oh, that's OK. I'm not a police officer.
OFFICER Exactly. That's why you shouldn't be here.
MAN No, that's why you shouldn't be here.
OFFICER I beg your pardon?
MAN You're a police officer, so you shouldn't be here.
OFFICER Are you trying to be funny?
MAN Certainly not! The sign says that police mustn't come in here.
OFFICER No, it doesn't!
MAN You don't have to shout.
OFFICER Sir, that is a police sign. It says no one can come in here.
MAN No one?
OFFICER That's right.
MAN Then you're breaking the law. You'd better leave before I take a photo of you!

Games and puzzles

Played in pairs or groups, games like these generate creative thought as well as laughter and fun.

Word Race

Work in pairs and name:

- 1 One kind of food that is yellow.
- 2 Two words for meals.
- 3 Two things you can do at the gym.
- 4 Three sports ending in *-ball*.
- 5 Three days of the week with six letters.
- 6 Three words ending with the sound /ʔ/.
- 7 Four prepositions of time.
- 8 Four months of the year ending with the letter *y*.
- 9 Four leisure activities.
- 10 Four kinds of food beginning with the letter *c*.
- 11 Five colours.
- 12 Five school subjects.
- 13 Five numbers beginning with the letter *f*.
- 14 Five letters which rhyme with *B*.
- 15 Five names of clothes.

What Is It?

Work in small groups. Take turns to choose an imaginary object. Don't say what it is! Pick up your object and use it. You can mime and make noises, but don't say anything. The rest of the group try to guess what your object is.

- A It looks like a box.
- B It can't be a computer.
- C It must be a TV!

Where Am I?

Imagine you're somewhere outside the classroom. You could be in a town, in the country, by water...

Think about these questions and make notes.

What time of day is it?

What's the weather like? Do you feel hot, warm, cold, wet?

What can you see around you?
 Are there any people or animals? What are they doing?
 What sounds can you hear?
 What can you smell?
 How do you feel – happy, relaxed ...?

Now describe your experience to other students. Can they guess where you are?

'It's the afternoon, it's a beautiful day, and I feel quite warm. I can see hundreds of people all around me, and we're all watching animals running. I can hear people cheering and clapping and I can smell the grass. I feel excited!'

Celebrity memories

Work in small groups. Imagine that you met a famous person who is dead! Imagine what happened, what you did and what you said. Ask and answer questions about the celebrities.

Who did you meet and where?

What was he/she wearing?

What did he/she say?

Crossword puzzles can be also be creative communication activities, where students make up clues to define their words:

STUDENT A

Student B has the missing words from this crossword. You have Student B's missing words. Don't say the words! Take turns to ask each other for clues and try to complete the crossword.

- A What's 1 down?
- B It's the opposite of cheap.
- B What's 1 across?
- A It's a big grey animal.

1 E	L	E	2 P	H	A	3 N	T		4 M
									O
5 P	I	A	N	O		6 R			N
									K
		7 L		8 P		9 H	A	T	E
10		A		L					Y
		R		A		12		13	
11 V	E	G	E	T	A	R	I	A	N
		E		E					

STUDENT B

Student A has the missing words from this crossword. You have Student A's missing words. Don't say the words! Take turns to ask each other for clues and try to complete the crossword.

- A What's 1 down?
- B It's the opposite of *cheap*.

- B What's 1 across?
- A It's a big grey animal.

1 E			2 P			3 N			4
X			I			O			
5 P			N			6 R	A	I	N
E			K			T			
N		7		8		9 H			
10 S	M	A	L	L					
I						12 D		13 C	
11 V						R		A	
E						Y		T	

These crosswords are easy to devise and students can make them up too. A very useful website source for both teachers and students to make their own puzzles, including crosswords and word searches, is: <http://puzzlemaker.school.discovery.com/>

We hope that you will want to use activities like these to balance the classroom offering and satisfy the widest range of students. You will find many more in our own books and in those recommended in the bibliography.

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Judy Garton-Sprenger and Philip Prowse are the authors of *Inspiration and Shine*, both courses for teenagers (Macmillan), and many other coursebooks, readers and articles. *Inspiration 2* was Highly Commended in the 2005 Duke of Edinburgh English-Speaking Union English Language Book Awards.

Email judygs@btopenworld.com
philip.prowse@ntlworld.com