

Activities and Games for Storytelling

With all these activities remember that the aim is for students to practice using the narrative tenses, or at least the past simple, depending on their level.

Pictures and objects are excellent means of inspiring stories, but, as with the first “mind travel” activity, it’s also possible to visualise things, places or actions. This ability to connect language to images in our minds can be very helpful both for refreshing our memories and for helping to memorise new language.

“Mind Travel” Storytelling Activity

For classes/groups

For this activity, don’t explain anything in advance, just go through step by step.

Give each student two shopping list sized pieces of paper.

Ask the group/class to close their eyes and, without saying anything out loud, imagine they are leaving the room and going somewhere else. Maybe to a different room nearby or even go out of the building and take a bus or a helicopter... Give them a bit of time as you talk them through, so they can relax and let their minds travel. Then when you feel they’ve had enough time, say “Stop!”. This means they have arrived at their destination. Now ask them to look around this place. What is the first object that they see?

Throughout this part they mustn’t say anything out loud, just write on a piece of paper the place and the first object they saw. For example: *my kitchen – a kettle*

Then, using a timer, give them one minute to write down on another piece of paper as many verbs as they can think of that they could do or that could be done with that object.

For example, with “kettle” you might come up with:

boil, switch on, turn off, pick up, put away, pour, cool, break, repair, throw away...

Collect the pieces of paper, keeping the objects/places and the verbs separate, mix them up into two separate piles. Divide the class into groups (or divide the group into pairs). Give each group the same number of objects/places pieces of paper and verb pieces of paper.

In groups they have to make up a story using the objects, places, but most importantly they have to use the verbs in past simple, past continuous and/or past perfect forms!

They read out the story to the rest of the class. If you want to make it competitive you could award points for each correct past form they use.

For one to one

Go through the same process but repeat the “mind travel” exercise and write the places, objects and 3 verbs on separate pieces of paper. Then mix all the pieces of paper and select approximately half of them. The student uses these words to make up a story.

Pictures

Pictures are a fantastic means of inspiring stories. Either you can find some thought-provoking, or perhaps ambiguous, images to share with students, or you can invite them to find their own from books, postcards or photos.

Picture stories (See Picture Story Cards document)

If you are familiar with Rory’s Story Cubes, then these cards can work in the same way. Encourage students to think creatively of what the image represents, and explain how the images can be associated with other meanings, not just the object itself. For example, a light bulb could represent an idea, or a mountain could be a challenge of some sort. This gives the story teller more flexibility and even if the link is tenuous it doesn’t matter, the main focus is on creating a good story.

The picture cards can be used in different ways, for example, you could:

- ☞ Place them face down and one by one students pick up a card one at a time and make a sentence or two
- ☞ Hand out several cards to a group of students and ask them to come up with a story
- ☞ Randomly select 9 cards and place them in front of the students who, one by one, select a card and add a sentence or two to the story.

Sharing photos

For homework ask the students to choose one photo on their phone/computer or even in a photo album (they'll need to take a picture of it to be able to share it!). It can be a photo of a place, a person or people, an event or an object. They should prepare to tell a story that goes with the photo to share with the group.

Call my bluff with photos: To make it a bit more interactive you could use the same idea but say that the students can EITHER make up a fictional story OR a true story, the rest of the group has to guess if it's true or false.

Emoji stories

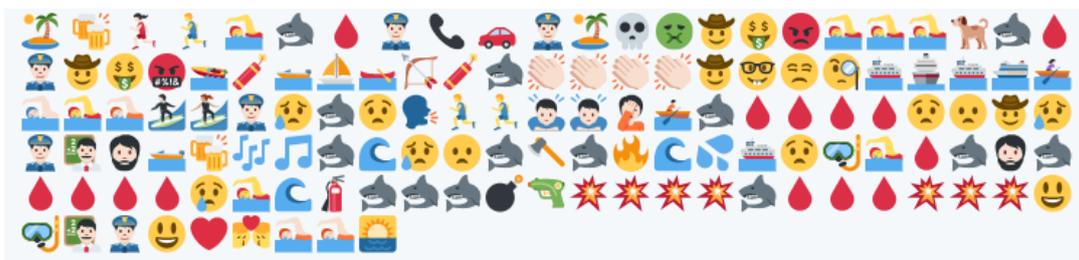
This works well as an online lesson activity where a screen can be shared.

Students work as a group to remake their favourite film using emojis. It could be a good idea to limit the number of pictures to avoid it taking too long, but encourage them to describe each picture in English using the most appropriate past tense forms as they go along.

Once they've finished, they can tell the complete story using the narrative tenses.

For one to one lessons you could ask them to prepare the emoji story in advance for you to guess in the next lesson and they can describe what happens.

This example shared on Twitter is for a real classic, shouldn't be too hard to work it out with all those shark pictures...



Emoji stories 2

Students work individually or in small groups to create a short story of their own. It would probably be better to give them this as a homework exercise rather than during class time, as it's likely to take too much time, or you could limit the number of emojis. To help the students come up with ideas you could give them a genre e.g. a ghost story/fairy tale/murder mystery etc.

Objects

Show and Tell

The "sharing photos" activity could work equally well with objects; souvenirs, gifts, clothes or anything they can either bring to a class or show on their screen if it's an online class.

Group storytelling

This works very well in groups or classes as a collaborative activity. Before you start it's a good idea to agree on a genre or at least a theme and perhaps the main characters. Then one by one, each student says a phrase or sentence – the rule is that it must contain at least one past tense verb using one or more of the narrative tense forms.

For a quick and fun exercise, you could even try the same idea, but the students only say one word at a time. The aim here is to keep the flow, so it can be a bit more spontaneous, and usually a bit sillier!