

ESL Developmental Continuum P–10

Teaching strategy – Picture stories

Focuses on

Speaking Listening Reading Writing

Most useful for students at stages

A1 A2 BL B1 B2 B3 SL S1 S2 S3 S4

Purpose of this activity

For students in upper primary and lower secondary, this can be a good task to use for revision of concepts in history or science. The activity is also helpful in getting students to think logically, and to think about the idea of sequence and the need for time markers.

How this helps ESL students in particular

Stories without words are a very useful resource for teaching ESL children. For many years there just weren't enough of these stories to go round, but with the accessibility of digital cameras, teachers can now make their own, tailored to the content their students have been studying.

It helps students to revise key vocabulary and concepts orally and in writing. Usually, the task of transforming the oral narrative into written form triggers the use of the past tense. (When students talk about a picture narrative, even native English speakers will tend to use to present tense.)

As the activity is done in a small group, it provides an opportunity for speaking in a safe environment, rather than in front of the class.

A problem with the first variation below is that a quieter child may tend to sit back and let others talk and justify the sequencing of the cards. Teachers will need to monitor this situation and intervene if necessary.

Procedure

The picture stories can be used in a number of ways.

One way is to cut the story up and give the pictures to a group of students to sort into a coherent order.

- During this process, students will need to talk to each other about why they are putting particular pictures in a certain place in the story. The order may be dictated by the pictures being from a familiar story, like 'The three little pigs', or because of a sequence of time shown in a clock face, or by the stages in a familiar recipe or some other reason.
- After the students have sequenced their pictures in an order they are comfortable with, they can then write the story of their pictures. It will usually be necessary for students to perform an oral retell of their story before they attempt to write it. Students can be helped by having some stem sentences on the board for them to use, or some written reminders about sequencing words like 'next', 'later' and so on.

An alternative idea is for each student in the group to have only one or two of the pictures in the sequence. Students are to describe their picture orally, without showing it to the other students, in order for the sequence to be worked out.

Acknowledgments/reference

A good example of a hand drawn picture story can be found on page 47 of:

McKay, Penny and Scarino, Angela (1991). *The ESL Framework of Stages: An Approach to ESL Learning in Schools K-12*. Carlton, Vic : Curriculum Corporation.