Get Them and KEEP Them Engaged: 25+ Student and Teacher-Friendly Activities for the World Language Classroom

Presented to:

The Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
Kansas City, MO
March 9, 2007

by

Dr. Pattie Davis-Wiley
Professor, TPTE
World Languages/ESL Education
The University of Tennessee
CCA 106
Knoxville, TN 37996-3442
pdwiley@utk.edu
https://web.utk.edu/~wiley/
Get Them and KEEP Them Engaged: 25+ Student and Teacher-Friendly Activities for the World Language Classroom

Pattie Davis-Wiley

In this handout, are some of my personal favorite activities that I have successfully used with WL students. Some of them are original, and others have been borrowed from other WL educators and modified by me. ALL can easily be adapted to accommodate students’ different levels of language proficiency or developmental levels.

Warm-Ups

*Action Initiatives:* The teacher drills a question and answer sequence to be used by the students (e.g., Q: *What time did you get up this morning?* A: *I got up at X o’clock*). Then, the students are given 2 minutes to arrange themselves in order in a line, according to the sequence. *PDW Variation:* have the students get in groups of favorite foods, TV shows, music groups. *Originator: Bob DiDonato*

*Más or Menos/Crazy Auction:* The teacher is the auctioneer. If an object is being ‘auctioned-off,’ the teacher places an already-written price on the item (out of sight of the students). An auction then begins with the teacher giving the range of the potential auction price of the item. Students then call out, one at a time, a price (e.g., in dollars). The teacher repeats the price called out, and then says, “más/plus” or “menos/moins.” And the auction proceeds from there until the item is won. This is an excellent auditory exercise and practices math extrapolation skills. *Originator: Bob DiDonato*

*Typewriter:* As the students walk in the room, they are given letters written on file folders. (Make sure that there are enough vowels!) Then, the teacher can call out a word and the students can hold up their letters in the order that the word is spelled; each student, essentially, is a typewriter/keyboard key. *PDW Variation:* ESP typewriter---Tell the students that you are thinking of an article of clothing (for example)...one that is worn on a hand. Then, ask the students to mentally communicate with each other (NO talking is allowed) as they get up out of their seats to stand up in the order to spell the word. *Originator: Bob DiDonato*

*Dame Tres! ...Give Me Three!:* Select a category of commonly-used vocabulary (i.e., weather, clothing, body parts). Ask the students to write down three items from this category in a vertical line. YOU, the teacher, have already written down three items on an overhead transparency. You then ask individual students to slowly read out loud their three items. IF any of their three items match any that you have, the student receives one point for each item. IF any of the items perfectly match the *order* of YOUR three items, then, the student receives two points for each item that is in the same order on the student’s paper as it is on
YOUR overhead. Continue this activity until the students have guessed both the identical items AND exact order that you have on your overhead.

Originator: Judy Raman

Manipulatives:

The Smoosh Book: I borrowed this wonderful manipulative template (see below) 20+ years ago from an elementary teacher in another part of the U.S. It makes a personal book with seven pages out of an 8 ½” X 11” piece of paper—perfect for individual passports (i.e., My name: My address: My phone number: My city: My state/county: ), groups of seven words, same topics/categories (i.e., sports, clothing, weather). N.B. Always introduce and teach words in similar categories, and, if possible, in alpha order. The pages can be illustrated AND the book is reversible!

Flip-Flop Book: Another public domain item source. Using another 8 ½” X 11” piece of paper (see below) turn it horizontally, fold it in half, length-wise, and then cut 3-5 individual cuts to the crease line. Use this book to create sentences (e.g., first flip sheet is an article, second is a verb, third, is an adjective, fourth is a direct object), pictograph stories, or even practice basic math problems! This is an extremely versatile manipulative and, like the smoosh book it is made of consumable materials.

Personal Clocks: Using a clock stamp template, paste the clock face on an Ellison letter-maker construction paper clock, apple, or geometric object and then laminate it. Using an ice pick, or the sharp end of a compass, pierce the center of the clock face. Then, insert through this hole, two black bobby pins, one of which has had its short side clipped with a wire cutter. The long part of the bobby pin showing is the minute hand; the short part is the second hand. Practice asking and telling time with these little clocks. Begin with receptive skills (e.g., “show me
10 o’clock” or, “show me what time you get up in the morning” ) and then work into the students asking and showing each other different times. Remember to use a 12-hour clock!  

*Paper Cell Phones*: Have the students create their own personal paper cell phones, and then laminate them. Use these to simulate conversations following canned phrases (i.e., “Simone est là?” “Oui. Un instant, SVP.”) and/or phrases or vocabulary words to practice. This is also a wonderful activity to re-cap yesterday’s lesson in a warm-up activity OR to use as a closure in a lesson.  

*Flip Sticks*: Select two items that are opposites (e.g., night, day; sun, moon; dog, cat). Then, make an Ellison Letter object of these items. Glue one on each side of a small square of construction paper. Insert a craft stick in the middle and laminate the entire thing. Make a class set. Students can flip one side up for YES the other side for NO; one side for SINGULAR the other side for PLURAL; one side for UNDERSTAND the other side for DON’T understand. In this way, the students are actively engaged throughout an activity.  

*Character Book*: It is imperative that teachers try to tap the right hemisphere of their students’ brains in a variety of ways. Rather than assigning a simple report in the target language, why not ask them to create a Character Book of an actual person, event, or a famous monument, with a brief narrative written on the inside of the book? The only materials needed are construction paper, scissors, glue sticks, and white paper. Once the books are completed, they can be shared with the class, used as small group conversation starters, and displayed on the bulletin board for student work, on a wall, or even as mobiles. What a delightful decoration for the classroom and a wonderful conversation starter for parent-teacher open house nights at school! Students will want their creations returned, of course, but do try to entice some of the students to leave their books for future students’ admiration. Below is an example.  

![](image)

*Grammar*:  

*Car-Wash Dice*: Go to a car wash convenience store or to a dollar store, and purchase super-sized dice. Then, on the white/chalk board or overhead, number two sets of 1-6 in a vertical order. After each number on the first list, write a subject pronoun, noun, or a name. On the second list, write a verb. Then roll the first die, and then the second. The students must match up the first number with the subject pronouns, noun, or name listed for that number with the proper form of the verb that appears next to the number on the second die. Different verb
tenses can be used. The number of dice can be increased. A third die, for example, can represent a direct object. Public domain source.

Human Orchestra: Phase One: Write a sentence on the overhead, chalk/white board. Keep it simple but include a subject, very, adjective, and direct object. (e.g., I love this class and the teacher. I hope to make a good grade because I am a good student.) Also, write on the board, subject: raise left hand; verb: raise right hand; adjective: raise both hands; direct object: stomp feet. Now, you will read out loud the sentence, very slowly. As you read each word, the students must raise their hands or stomp their feet, depending on what part of speech is being read. For beginners, you will need to color-code and/or other-wise designate what part of speech is what (e.g., circle the subject; put a square around the verb). Phase Two: Create an original and fun paragraph. Then, assign as many different parts of speech to a musical or percussion instrument. As the students read the sentences out loud, slowly, volunteers with a wood block, a tambourine, a pair of finger cymbals, play their respective instrument as their designated part of speech is being read out loud. The teacher can lead the orchestra with a baton. PDW original

Fridge Art: This is another neat way to practice spelling (in addition to the typewriter game already mentioned). Have the students create a picture of an object by printing the name of the object in the shape of that object, using as small of a printed word as possible. Therefore, a picture of an ojo can consist of 50 small printed ojos which, when written together, actually resemble an oyo. Other nouns can also be used (soleil). E.E. Cummins was my inspiration for this activity. PDW original

Text-Messaging: The teacher creates a cryptic telegram-type message (e.g., send $$$$ quick flight Saturday need $700 go home). The students then make this message into complete sentences. Once you do one for the students, have them do their own text messages. Adapted by PDW from Bob DiDonato.

Dear John/Jane/Nicole: Find a short article from a newspaper, grocery store Hollywood periodical. Copy the picture with it and turn it into an overhead transparency or a PPT slide. Then, create a Dear X letter, leaving out strategic words. You may wish to incorporate a modified –cloze activity with this, with or without a choice of words from which the students can choose; you may also use a word bank at the bottom of the page. Make this activity fun. It can be whole
group, a small group, a dyad, or an individual activity. DO make it fun! *PDW original*

**Whole Group Composition:** Select a picture from a magazine. Post it on a wall or a chalk/white board. Put pieces of paper around the picture with single word titles on each piece: nouns, verbs, adjectives, objects, adverbs. Then, the students take a marker and take turns going to each list, and each student adds a word to each of the lists which is appropriate to the picture. Then, on a large piece of butcher paper, individual students write a short composition ONLY using the words generated by the entire group. Variation: teacher can supply the words on each list. *PDW original*

**Micro-Log:** Create a no-more-than 10-sentence paragraph on a place, person, or an event. (The paragraph, when read slowly, cannot last longer than 60 seconds.) Use short sentences and no more than 10 new words. Make a graphic illustrating the paragraph; keep it very simple. Then, read the paragraph to the students, pointing to the different part of the graphic for emphasis. Repeat this several times. Then, when you’re ready, repeat the paragraph, pausing for the students to help you fill in the missing words. Then, show the paragraph on an overhead (be careful that you are using no smaller than 24-pt. font) with selected words left out (cloze activity). You can have a choice of the words, in parentheses following each blank. Then have the students help you recreate the paragraph. Show the same slide, but this time, have a word bank on the bottom of the page. Practice the paragraph. Then, show the same slide without the word bank on the bottom of the page. Finally, show the graphic and challenge the students to recreate the micro-log paragraph. *Originator: John Rassias*

**Press Conference:** Have a student be a celebrity (deceased or living, male or female). ALL of the other students are newspaper reporters. Each reporter stands, and asks the celebrity a question that can only be answered in 10 words or fewer by the celebrity. (All others are taking notes.) Then, after the press conference, the teacher asks the students what happened. They recreate the story in 3rd person. Then, the students write a summary of the press conference for their newspaper columns with their bylines. *Originator: John Rassias*

**Emotional Dialoging:** Divide the class in half. Each half must say their line of the dialogue with an emotion (sad, happy, afraid, anxious). Then, each side says their line of the dialogue with the other half’s emotion. Do this four times! In just a few minutes, the students will have practiced the dialogue 8 times, within a couple of minutes! Variation: students can stage whisper their lines, use a falsetto or bass voice. *Originator: Bob DiDonato*

**Patti-Cake Verbs:** Practice verb conjugations with this children’s game, with a couple of variations. At the third person singular and plural stage, students clap their own hands together three times and then twirl around! There can even be class competitions for the fastest Patti-Cake players. Fun! *Originator: Doug Bright*

**Caracoles…Caracoles-Frijoles….Caracoles-Frijoles-Tomales:** This is an excellent way to practice numbers in sequence, keep the students engaged, and have a little friendly competition in the process. The first variation of this game,
Caracoles, begins with a student counting staring with uno, followed by the next student saying dos, the third saying tres, and the rest continue counting in order until the number siete or a multiple of seven occurs. When it does, that student will say, caracoles. The students continue counting in this way. If a student who has a multiple of seven doesn’t say caracoles, the next student has to start over with the number one. Originator of this game and the four which follow: Doug Bright.

Caracoles---Frijoles is the same game as above, with the number seven and its multiples begin replaced with the word caracoles. However, when a student comes to the number three, or a multiple of three, that student must say frijoles instead of the number three or its multiple. Thus, uno, dos, frijoles, quarto, cinco, frijoles, caracoles!

Caracoles---Frijoles---Tomales: This is an extension of the game above but adds the word tomales for the number five and its variations. Thus, the students would count: Uno, dos, frijoles, cuatro, tomales, frijoles, caracoles, ocho, frijoles, tomales for numbers 1-10.

Verbos Revuletos: The teacher writes the subject pronouns on the board (each is circled) in random order. Then infinitives are called out loud to the class by the teacher, the teacher then touches a subject pronoun at random, after which the students give the correct form of the verb out loud. This game can also be played in groups of two using a piece of paper with the scrambled subject pronouns written on them. Then, one student calls out the infinitive, touches the pronoun, and the other student gives the correct verb form out loud.

¡Avalancha! The teacher draws a ∆ on the board. The students form two teams. Then, the first person in each team goes to the board, one on each side of the ∆, the mountain. The teacher then calls out the verb and the verb tense to be used in this game. Then, the game begins with a toot of a train whistle or the ding of a bell. The first person on each team starts by writing the first person singular of the verb in the designated verb tense. Then, the second person in each team runs to the board to write the second person singular of the verb. Each person in each team, quickly attempts to correctly write the correct form of the verb, in order, starting with first person singular, going through third person plural. The teacher must monitor this game very carefully. If a team member makes a mistake, then, the teacher goes to the board, with an eraser, and erases one side of the ∆ and cries out, ¡Avalancha!
Painless Conversion From C° to F°

Creation of: Judy Ruman, Former Spanish teacher
Oak Ridge H.S. Oak Ridge, TN

Add 1° for each interval
Subtract 1° for each interval

Basic Formula: C° doubled + 30° = F°

Ex.: 0° C doubled + 30° = 30° 30° is two intervals to the left of the 50° line. Add 2° Thus, 0° C = 32° F

Ex.: 10° C doubled +30 = 50°. Do nothing! But, 20° C doubled +30° = 70° 70° is two intervals to the right of the 50° line. Subtract 2° Thus, 20° C = 68° F