

The Lie-Ography

This activity puts a fun spin on traditional getting-to-know-you games, allowing students who are already familiar with one another to stay entertained as they introduce themselves to a new group of volunteers.

Step 1: Ask students if they've ever heard of a biography; call on a student who can provide a definition.

Step 2: Remind students that biographies (usually) tell the truth. Let students know that today, they'll be writing a special type of biography in which *everything they say will be a lie*.

Step 3: Write prompts for the lie-ography on the board. Examples:

- What is your name?
- Where do you live?
- Who lives with you?
- What do you like to eat?
- What do you do for fun?
- What's your favorite thing to wear?
- What's your least favorite thing to do?
- What will you become famous for?

Encourage students to get as silly as possible! Volunteers can set an example by writing lie-ographies of their own.

Step 4: Invite students to share their crazy lie-ographies!

Step 5: Finally, ask students to answer the same set of questions truthfully. At the end of the period, everyone (including volunteers) will share their honest biographies.

Nonsense Haikus!

This activity allows students to try their hand at formal poetry with an added goofy twist.

Step 1: Lead volunteer asks someone in the group to define a noun—specifically, a concrete noun (a person, place, or thing). While s/he is doing this, other volunteers will distribute slips of paper (3 per child).

Step 2: When they're all distributed, lead volunteer will ask both students and volunteers to write an example of a person on one slip, a place on another, and a thing on the last. Silliness is encouraged. We all fold slips in half and put them in the Container of Holding (a hat, a basket, or a pencil box—whatever is on hand).

Step 3: *After* collecting all the slips, lead volunteer will ask if anyone can define a Haiku. For the purposes of this activity, we're going to misappropriate the form by calling it "a poem that is seventeen words long that is focused on an image"—which is to say, sensory detail.

Step 4: Lead volunteer will ask students to list all five senses (sight, touch, smell, sound, and taste).

Step 5: Lead volunteer will choose one slip out of the Container of Holding at random, and will write the person, place, or thing written on it on the "white board"/easel.

Step 6: Children (and volunteers) will be directed to first choose a sense, then write a short poem about the person/place/thing that is no longer than seventeen words. They will have seven minutes per poem, and will have an opportunity to share after everyone is finished.

Step 7: Round two. Choose a new noun, and a new sense. Share after seven minutes. Continue until time is up.

Describe It Slant

This activity encourages students to expand their typical descriptive vocabulary by considering a series of common objects through a verbally unconventional lens.

Step 1: Give each student three pieces of paper. On the first piece, ask them to describe, in as much detail as possible, their favorite food/meal. They should/can be as descriptive and creative as possible, but they *aren't* allowed to use the name of the food or any of its component parts. For example, if they choose 'pizza,' they can't use the words, 'cheese,' 'tomatoes,' 'crust,' etc. They'll have to think of other ways to describe it.

Step 2: On the second sheet of paper, ask students to describe a color. In a similar way, they will be prohibited from naming the color or listing things that are commonly that color. If they choose 'blue,' they can't mention 'the sky' or 'water.'

Step 3: Finally, ask students to pick any object and write it down on the third sheet.

They'll trade with someone else, and each student will have to describe in detail (again without naming the object or its components) the object they received.

Between each of these activities, volunteers will go around the table and have students read what they wrote aloud to see if their peers can guess the food, color, or object they're describing.

Telephone With a Twist

This activity combines the traditional game of 'telephone' with Exquisite Corpse to add some literary finesse.

Step 1: Start by playing a round of traditional 'telephone' (i.e. whispering a word from ear to ear around a circle to see how it transforms). Students and volunteers should play!

Step 2: Next, a variation. Every participant in the game will receive a piece of unlined paper. Each player should fold his/her paper into thirds, as one folds a letter. On the top third of the paper, participants will draw the top of a monster, then fold that portion of the paper down, so no one can see. Each player will pass his/her paper to the right. Then, everyone will draw a monster torso in the middle third of the paper, fold it over, and pass it. Finally, everyone will draw the monster's feet on the bottom third, then unfold to reveal their hybrid creature.

Step 3: Now, the writing part. Players will get fresh sheets of paper and play the exquisite corpse game again, this time using sentences instead of monster parts. (Instead of predividing the paper into thirds, players will simply fold it over after each new sentence.)

At the end of the round, unfold and see what crazy stories ensue!

Step 4: If there's time, repeat Step 3!

Boggle Your Mind!

This exercise integrates motion with creative wordplay.

Step 1: To begin the exercise, students will stand in a circle.

Step 2: Ask everyone in the group to come up with their favorite word, *based strictly on sound*. Each student should come up with a fun way of saying the word and a goofy motion to go along with it. (Volunteers are encouraged to model examples for the students.)

Step 3: Go around the circle, with each student sharing a word and an action. After each student says his/her/their word, the rest of the group will repeat it.

Step 4: Return to the table. Ask one student for a "boring" word (I always give the example of "fork") and have the group repeat it until it doesn't make sense any more. Use this as a bridge into a discussion about the connection between words and sound. What does it mean when a word is stripped of context and just reduced to a sound? Why do we like the sounds of certain words more than others?

Step 5: Here's where Boggle comes in. Divide the students into two groups and ask them to generate a list of as many words--*real and made up*--as they can, using the Boggle pieces. They should write down all the words in their list.

Step 6: Students will choose their favorite Boggle-generated word and write it on an unlined sheet of paper. They should DECORATE IT like crazy.

Step 7: While the students are decorating their words, volunteers should fill un-lined sheets of paper with 'boring' transitional words like "and," "but," "the," etc. As with the students' pages, one word per sheet.

Step 8: Finally, students will combine their words and the volunteers' words on the floor to make wacky sentences!

Halloween Mad Libs!

Students love riffing on the traditional Mad Libs® word game with a personalized and/or seasonal twist. This is also a nice review of parts of speech.

Step 1: In advance of the lesson, write five (5) one-page-long Mad Lib ® -style fill-in-the-blank stories, with the part of speech of the desired word written under each blank. (We had some fun by incorporating personalized Johnson Elementary details into ours, and also making them scary stories, as this lesson took place just before Halloween.)

Step 2: On site, ask students to identify each part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, interjection, exclamation, etc.) and write definitions for each on the board.

Step 3: One volunteer will go through the Mad Lib, asking students for words of the appropriate parts of speech to fill each blank. The volunteer should NOT yet read the words surrounding the blanks.

Step 4: Pick one student (draw a name out of a hat or ask for a volunteer) to read the goofy Mad Lib out loud.

Step 5: Repeat Steps 2-4 using the remaining four Mad Libs/

Secret Noun

This variation on 'twenty questions' keeps kids guessing...

Step 1: Ask students for a definition of a noun. Write the definition they provide on the board.

Step 2: Ask each student to choose a noun. Then, write the following questions on the board:

- What do people notice first about your noun?
- What does it smell like?
- What does it taste like?
- What's something nobody knows about your noun?
- Why did you choose your noun?
- Is your noun a thing you could bring to school?
- What does your noun sound like?
- What's the coolest thing about your noun?

Step 3: Ask students to write down their answers to the above questions, based on the noun they're thinking of. Then go around the circle and have each student read his/her/their responses to the questions as clues. Other students will try to guess the noun.

Things that Go Bump in the Night

Instead of using conventional writing prompts that ask students to compose a piece from beginning to end, this activity encourages students to shake up their sense of chronology, with a story's last line as inspiration.

Step 1: In advance of the lesson, write 15 last lines on slips of paper. (Examples: "...and I told no one." "Little did they know, it was me all along." "They lived happily ever after...except for Geoffrey.")

Step 2: Place slips of paper into hat or some other sorting container and have students each pick one at random.

Step 3: Ask students each to write the story that concludes with the line they drew.

Step 4: Students should share the stories they wrote.

Step 5: If time allows, students may draw another last line and repeat.

Candy Chaos

This exercise is a sweet way to discuss the elements of a story.

Step 1. In advance of the lesson, pick up a bag of assorted original Starburst. At the beginning of Writing Club, pass one piece to each student--it's important to select the pieces randomly and not let students go for their favorite flavors, since a relatively even distribution of colors is required.

Step 2: Students will write out elements of a story based on the color they picked.

Everyone with a **red** Starburst will write about a **character**. (What does your character look like? What does your character like to do? What is important to your character? What scares your character?)

Everyone with an **orange** Starburst will write about a **setting**. (Where is your place? Urban or rural? What are the seasons like? What can you see there? Smell? Hear? Taste?)

Everyone with a **yellow** Starburst will write about a **conflict**. (Imagine a problem somebody could have. A good way of thinking about this is to consider something that someone might want and then obstacles they may have to getting it. Are they thirsty for water in a desert? Do they want a brand new toy that their stingy younger brother is keeping from them?)

Everyone with a **pink** Starburst will write a triumphant **resolution**.

Step 3: Each student will present his/her/their story element to the group. Volunteers should take notes, jotting on the board one or two lines about each character, setting, conflict, and resolution students present.

Step 4: Students should pick elements from each category on the board (1-2 characters, one setting, one conflict, one resolution) and write a story of their own, based on the ideas their classmates contributed.

Changing the World

This activity does something adults do altogether too rarely: it asks students for their opinions about what's going wrong with the world and provides them an outlet for suggesting productive change.

Step 1: Ask students to think of one thing that upsets them, something about the world they wish to change. This can be something as simple as their school's lunch menu, or as complex and broad-spanning as the military-industrial complex. Just one thing they think is not working.

Step 2: Ask students to write down the thing they'd like to change and to draw an accompanying illustration. Students may share their responses with the group.

Step 3: Then, ask students to think of one solution for the problem they've presented. Again, they should write that solution down, illustrate it, and share.

Step 4: Don't be afraid to spend a long time discussing each student's problems and solutions. Particularly if they're engaging with real-world issues, this can be an important venue for getting their voices heard.

A Mystery Object

This week's activities were brief and informal, centered around an end-of-semester party volunteers threw for the children. As such, we brought only one mystery object. To fill a period, volunteers should bring 3-5.

Step 1: *A mystery object.* One volunteer brings in an interesting knickknack or household object (the more unusual, the better) and conceals it with a blanket or scarf.

Step 2: Students are invited to touch the object through the blanket or scarf and describe their impressions of it, either verbally or written. They may take guesses as to what the object is.

Step 3: Volunteer reveals the object by removing the blanket or scarf.

Step 4: Students pass around the object, then write the story of what they think it does—where does it come from? What is it used for? Where did it live, before it lived with the volunteer? If it came alive, what kind of personality would it have? Etc.

Step 5: Students may share the stories they've written.

Step 6: Repeat, with a different object.