

The Mystery of the Sand

Topic

A lateral thinking problem

Aims

- To develop students critical thinking skills, specifically lateral thinking.
- To encourage students to work co-operatively as a group
- To raise awareness of linkers, especially time reference.

Age / level

Teenagers and adults, B2 +

Time

50-60 minutes

Materials

Worksheet 1 is to be cut into 10 sections, 1 for each student. So 20 students would be split into two groups of 10 etc. If you have, say, 12 or 14 students, it's fine for some students to have the same section as another, and if you have 7 or 8 students, it's fine for some students to have more than one section, **but all ten sections must be given out.**

Worksheet 2, one copy for each student, or 1 between 2

Introduction

This lesson is based around a 'teacherless task', a lateral thinking puzzle where students have to work together, without the help of the teacher (though the teacher is of course listening) to first sequence a story and then solve a puzzle.

The lesson should help to develop lateral thinking skills (a creative way of thinking which is often considered to be part of critical thinking), improve co-operation between students and provide plenty of speaking practice as well as focusing on sequencers.

Procedure

1. Lead-in

5 – 10 minutes

- Write the word 'mystery' on the board and elicit what it means.
- Tell students they are going to work together to solve a mystery
- Write the following words on the board and ask students to work together to a) check their meaning b) see what they can predict about the mystery.

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| | <p>customs border sack suspicious detain analyse smuggle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Let them make guesses, but do not confirm or deny anything or you may spoil the activity. |
| <p>2. Group work activity</p> <p>15 – 20 minutes</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put the students into groups of around 10 (see instructions above under materials). Tell them that they are going to be given one (or maybe two) pieces of information each about this mystery. They should read their information and be ready to tell the rest of the group about it. They should not <i>show</i> each other the piece of paper, just read it aloud or report what it says. Give out the pieces of paper and give students a couple of minutes to read and make sure they understand any vocabulary not pre-taught. Then tell students they have to work together to put the story in the correct order. When they have the correct order they should try and solve the mystery at the end. If any of them already know the story, tell them not to tell the others. Monitor the students while they work together, but try not to intervene or help. One of the aims of the activity is for students to improve their co-operation skills. Stop the activity when the group(s) have got the correct order for the story (or close), and ideally have solved the puzzle. |
| <p>3. Focus on lateral thinking</p> <p>5 minutes (or more if you actually get students to do the second puzzle or others the class may suggest).</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elicit or give the answer to the puzzle. (The man was smuggling motorbikes). Ask students to discuss the first question on worksheet 2 in pairs or small groups, then feedback as a class. <p>Possible answers:</p> <p>Lateral thinking is about looking at problems in different ways, so it's particularly useful if you need to be creative. Inventors often think laterally, as do people working in advertising and marketing.</p> <p>Another classic lateral thinking problem: A man goes into a bar and asks for a glass of water. The barman pulls out a gun and aims it at the man. The man says thank you and leaves the bar. (The man had hiccups and the barman heard him and gave him a shock to stop the hiccups).</p> |
| <p>4. Sequencing a narrative</p> <p>10 – 15 minutes</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Let students check the order of the story by looking at worksheet 2, then ask them to underline the linking words that helped them to follow the sequence of events. <p>Possible answers:</p> <p>A man comes up to the border of a country on his motorbike. He has three large sacks on his bike. The customs officer at the border crossing stops him and asks, "<i>What is in the sacks?</i>"</p> <p>"<i>Sand,</i>" answers the man.</p> <p>The customs officer is suspicious and tells the man to get off the bike. He rips open</p> |

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| | <p>the sacks and empties them out. He finds nothing but sand, so he puts the sand back into new bags and lets the man go.</p> <p><u>A week later</u> the man arrives at the border <u>again</u>. <u>Once more</u> he is carrying three sacks of sand. <u>This time</u> the customs officer detains the man overnight and has the sand analysed, but it really is just sand. <u>So once again</u> the customs officer puts the sand into new bags and lets the man go.</p> <p><u>This</u> happens every week for three years. <u>Eventually</u> the customs officer can't stand it any longer. 'Please, he says, I know you're smuggling something and it's driving me crazy. I haven't slept for months. What is it?!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check as a class (there may be some variation in the words students choose) and establish that most of the linkers are sequencers. • Elicit any other sequencers they know (e.g. then, after that, next,) • Ask students to re-tell the story in pairs, without looking at the worksheet, and try to use the sequencers they underlined, or any others. |
| <p>5. Focus on group dynamics</p> <p>10 minutes</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put students back into the groups they were working in to solve the mystery and ask them to discuss the questions together. Again, try to step back and let them work together as a group. • Briefly discuss the process as a whole class and share any good ideas for working together more effectively. E.g. one person could be the 'chair' and make sure that everyone takes part in a group discussion, or people could be given tokens that they have to 'spend' by making a contribution, and so on. |

Contributed by

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