

Early Childhood Literacy Strategies: Unit Activities

Activities

I. Interactive Reading Unit Introduction

(Speaking/Listening)

In order to introduce this unit and the overall goal, the instructor might demonstrate an interactive read-aloud with a children's book to the class.

The class can also discuss reading aloud, as a large group or in small groups. Students might be asked to list some benefits of reading aloud with children (e.g. *word recognition, vocabulary building, improving memory, improving cognitive skills*). It might also be useful to present this introduction as a survey, and have students ask each other questions like: "Do you read aloud to your children?" "How often?" "For how long?" A lesson on frequency and time lengths could be easily incorporated, if necessary for the learners.

Interactive reading can be an intimidating concept when presented as crucial for a child's development, but it is important to also present it as fun, easy, and flexible! Parents should be assured that even if they lack the skills to perfectly pronounce English or if they cannot read all the words, their children still benefit from being read to. The class may want to brainstorm ways to "read" even if the parent or child cannot actually read or pronounce all of the words. For very low-level or low-literacy students with young, encourage them to point out letters with their children in a book and to talk about the pictures in any language. For such students with older children, encourage them to ask their children to read aloud.

II. Fill out a Library Card Application

(Speaking/Reading/Writing)

Students can fill out library card applications. These can actually be used to apply for library cards or can simply act as language practice.

To make this a four-skills-focused task, it can be done as an information gap activity. That is, students can be paired and should fill out the form for each other by asking questions (i.e. "What's your last name?" "How do you spell that?"). Lower level students can be asked to just fill in the "Patron Information" section, while higher students can be asked to complete that and additionally read and reword the "Acceptance of Responsibility" section.

The forms are available [online](#) or can be picked up at a local library branch.

**This activity is also found in the Home Reading Plan Unit.*

III. Read: Past Practice – A Day in Class (Appendices A and B)

(Reading/Grammar)

The past tense is often used for storytelling and is therefore important for students who plan to read storybooks in English with their children.

Teach first the regular past simple with *-ed*.

Pronunciation of regular *-ed* past tense verbs should be taught as well, since parents will be encouraged to read aloud to children. A simple rule to teach is that for verbs that end with (or sound like

they end with) “d” or “t,” pronounce the –ed ending. All other regular –ed verbs will have only a “t” or “d” pronunciation (like *walked* and *washed*, respectively).

The pronunciation and common irregulars should be taught through various other activities, especially for low- and mid-level students.

One book to use when talking about the past is *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle—this is especially good for students to begin to study irregular past simple verbs. As you read together, note the past verbs: *lay, came, started, ate, was, had, felt, built, called, stayed, nibbled, pushed*.

IV. Grammar: Past Tense (Appendices C and D)

(Grammar/Speaking/Writing)

This grammar is in preparation for interactive reading practice. Directions are not included on the worksheet to allow for flexibility and variations.

Students should look at the pictures in pairs or groups and make questions in the past tense about the pictures. They can then ask those questions of other students, either as a class or by pairing groups together. Encourage students to get creative and specific with their questions and go beyond “What happened?”

For low-level students, Appendix D provides sample questions. Some students may be encouraged to model their own questions on them, while very low level students may be asked to simply match each question to a picture (some are relevant for more than one).

V. Grammar: Present Continuous (Appendix E)

(Grammar/Speaking/Writing)

This grammar is in preparation for interactive reading practice. Directions are not included on the worksheet to allow for flexibility and variations.

The present continuous is often used to talk about pictures or events in a storybook (e.g. “What is happening there?”). The grammatical structure is included on the worksheet but should be taught before the sheet is handed out.

Students should look at the pictures in pairs or groups and make questions in the present continuous about them. They can then ask those questions of other students, either as a class or by pairing groups together. Encourage students to get creative and specific with their questions and go beyond “What is happening?” Encourage them also to come up with more than one question and more than one answer. There is space to write the questions and answers if it benefits the students to make this more of a writing activity than a speaking activity.

VI. Grammar: Future (Appendices F and G)

(Grammar/Reading/Writing)

This worksheet does not heavily focus on the grammatical differences between the future forms “will” and “going to.” Those differences (summarized briefly below) can be taught before this worksheet, depending on student capabilities.

While many times “will” and “going to” can be used interchangeably, there are subtle differences in their usages that should be taught to students who are ready. A quick summary: “will” is used: 1) a prediction based on opinion; 2) if decision is made spontaneously; 3) for a future fact. “Going

to” is used: 1) if a decision has been made before talking; 2) if a prediction is based on current evidence (something you see/hear now).

Both of these forms are used when asking about the events in a storybook.

With the worksheet, students look at the pictures and captions, which imitate storybook styles, and write or ask questions in the future. They may answer the questions themselves or ask a partner or group and record the other students’ answers.

Appendix ___ is for lower students and Appendix ___ is for higher students. Lower students can use either form (*will* or *going to*) or can be encouraged only to focus on one of them. Higher-level students should be encouraged to try to choose the correct form based on their question and the situation: is it a planned activity (*going to* – for the school bus picture, for example: *Where’s he going to go?*) or a spontaneous activity (*will* – for the birthday picture, for example: *What will she say to her brother?*).

VII. Grammar: Question Tags (Appendix H)

(Grammar/Reading/Speaking)

This is recommended for higher level students—for instance, for students who no longer have much trouble forming normal questions. It is probably more useful for lower level students to focus on mastering questions rather than moving on to question tags.

Teach the question tag structure (match the auxiliary verb and negate the tag), using the handout of Appendix ___ to explain. One way to practice is to use a die or a pair of dice and assign specific tag questions to numbers (i.e. 1 = don’t you; 2 = aren’t they; etc.), and then as students roll they should say or create a sentence using the appropriate tag.

When students are able to put grammatically correct tags on sentences, they may be ready to form sentences with question tags about pictures or books. Show pictures or read short pages from a picture book and have students make comments using question tags, like “He’s hungry, isn’t he?” and “They don’t like the rain, do they?”

VIII. Grammar: What If? Game

(Grammar/Reading/Speaking)

This game can be introduced if the second conditional (“If I *had* enough money, I *would* go to Hawaii”) seems to be an appropriate grammatical goal for the students. If the group of students is at a high level and are ready to learn the second conditional, this game can be used as a twofold learning experience: students will learn the second conditional, and they will learn how to play this “What if?” game with their children as they read.

Cards can be made with open-ended questions, like “What if the teacher colored his hair purple?” or “What if our class was seven hours long?” that students can draw, ask each other, and answer with the appropriate grammar (i.e. *If class was seven hours long, I would fall asleep!*). When or if students get confident enough with the grammar, they can write their own “What if” questions to ask either or to mix in with the teacher’s cards.

Another activity to use this grammar, which is directly relevant to reading, is to show pictures or read short pages from a picture book and ask second conditional questions like “What if that was you?” and “What would you do if that happened to you?”

IX. Discuss: Before/During/After Reading

(Speaking/Listening)

Introduce or reiterate to students the idea that reading is interactive and should be a stimulating activity for children. Introduce the educational notion that an activity like reading should involve aspects before, during, and after the actual reading. Use the class or a recent class activity as an example.

Next, group or pair students according to the class dynamics (decide if groups will be leveled or mixed level with the strongest students spread throughout). They should brainstorm answers to the question: What can you do with your child *before/during/after* reading a book? Encourage even the obvious answers to start in order to get everyone thinking. Have groups or pairs share their ideas either in a jigsaw or with the whole class.

Some ideas include: *Before* – talk about the title; look at the cover; ask if the book seems recent or old; guess what the story is about; ask why the child wants to read this book. *During* – let the child hold the book; ask questions about the pictures and the story; explain new words; ask how they think the story will end. *After* – ask the child if he/she liked it; ask for the child's reactions; ask what they would like to read next; re-read the book.

X. Reading Aloud in Your Second Language (Appendix I)

(Reading)

These are some research-based tips for reading aloud in a second language. This short reading list can be used in various ways. Before looking at it, students can be asked to brainstorm a list of tips for reading aloud in English (if other activities have been done prior to this, it should not be too hard even for lower or mid-level students).

After these are read or explained, follow-up activities will help emphasize their importance. For lower level students, the instructor or a lead student can demonstrate the tips as they are read. Students can also learn the meaning of each tip and then demonstrate to each other and guess which they are demonstrating (as a sort of charades game). Mid or higher level students can be asked to either reword the tips (changing as many words as possible without changing the meaning) or to explain why they think each is important.

Appendix List: Worksheets

A. "Grammar: Past Practice – A Day in Class" (lower level)

B. "Grammar: Past Practice – A Day in Class" (higher level)

C. "Grammar: Past Tense"

D. "Past Questions"

E. "Grammar: Present Continuous"

F. "Grammar: Future – 'Will' and 'Going to'" (lower level)

G. ""Grammar: Future – 'Will' and 'Going to'" (higher level)

H. "Grammar: Question Tags"

I. "Reading Aloud in your Second Language"

Grammar: Past Practice A Day in Class

Read the story in the present. Then, fill in the blanks in the story below with the ***past***.

Present

Today, I attend English class. I learn about the past tense.

The teacher shows some examples, and then we practice. I work in a group with three other students and we talk about the worksheet.

I return home at 7:30pm. At home, I cook dinner and later I watch TV.

Past

Yesterday, I _____ English class. I _____ about the past tense.

The teacher _____ some examples, and then we _____ . I _____ in a group with three other students and we _____ about the worksheet.

I _____ home at 7:30pm. At home, I _____ dinner and later I _____ TV.

Grammar: Past Practice A Day in Class

Read the story in the present. Then, fill in the blanks below with the ***past***.

Past

Today, I go to English class. I learn about the past tense.

The teacher shows some examples, and then gives us a worksheet. We practice in groups. I work with three other students and we talk about our answers. We do not understand one question, so we ask the teacher.

I return home at 7:30pm. I cook dinner. I have pasta for dinner. After I eat, I watch TV.

Present

Yesterday, I _____ to English class. I _____ about the past tense.

The teacher _____ some examples, and then _____ us a worksheet. We _____ in groups. I _____ with three other students and we _____ about our answers. We _____ one question, so we _____ the teacher.

I _____ home at 7:30pm. I _____ dinner. I _____ pasta for dinner. After I _____ I _____ TV

Grammar: Past Tense

Use the past tense to ask and answer questions about the pictures.

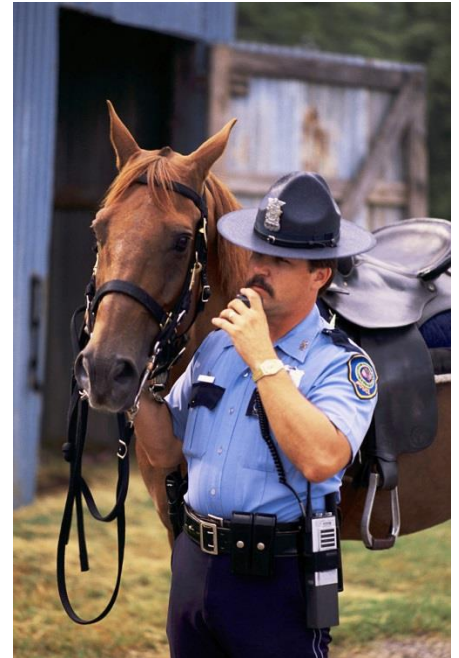
What do you think happened?

What do you think he/she/they did?

1.



2.



1.



4.



Past Questions

Where is he?

Where are they?

Where is she?

Is he angry?

Did he ride the horse?

Is she happy?

Did they run fast?

Did she get bad news?

Did he swim?

Did she make a mistake?

Where is he?

Where are they?

Where is she?

Is he angry?

Did he ride the horse?

Is she happy?

Did they run fast?

Did she get bad news?

Did he swim?

Did she make a mistake?

Where is he?

Where are they?

Where is she?

Is he angry?

Did he ride the horse?

Is she happy?

Did they run fast?

Did she get bad news?

Did he swim?

Did she make a mistake?

Grammar: Present Continuous

I	am	_____ing	He			They	are	_____ing
			She	is	_____ing			
You	are	_____ing	It			We	are	_____ing

1. What's the sheep doing?



2. What are they doing?



3. What's he doing?



Grammar: Future
"Will" and "Going to"

What do you think she will do?

What will they do next?

What's he going to do?

What do you think they are going to do?

1.



Jimmy was nervous. He did not know the bus driver.

2.



The firefighter ran out of the house with the dog.

3.



Randy wanted to help Alana blow out the candles.

**Grammar: Future
"Will" and "Going to"**

What do you think she will do?

What will they do next?

What's he going to do?

What do you think they are going to do now?

1.



Jimmy was nervous about his first day of school. He did not know the name of the new bus driver.

2.



Luckily, the firefighter found Spot just in time! He ran out of the house with the dog in his arms.

3.



Alana got ready to blow out the candles on her cake. Randy jumped up to help her.

Grammar: Question Tags

Use a question tag when you want to check a statement (similar to “right?”).

To make a question tag, check two things in the sentence:

1. **Verb.** Is there a helping verb (also called an auxiliary)? Helping verbs are underlined in these examples: *They have gone.* *We can sing.* *She will go.* *You should write.*
2. **Positive or Negative.** With a positive sentence, make a negative tag. With a negative sentence, make a positive tag.

*If there is no helping verb:

He/She/It - Present: No helping verb <i>He hates carrots.</i>	Use “Does/Doesn’t” <i>He hates carrots, doesn’t he?</i>
You/They/I/We - Present: No helping verb <i>You don’t go to class on Fridays.</i>	Use “Do/Don’t” <i>You don’t go to class on Fridays, do you?</i>
Past: No helping Verb <i>Jane went home at 9:00.</i>	Use “Did/Didn’t” <i>Jane went home at 9:00, didn’t she?</i>

* If there is an auxiliary/helping verb (like be, can, will, should, have), the question tag will use that verb:

Helping verb: Be <i>Frank isn’t sleeping.</i>	<i>Frank isn’t sleeping, is he?</i>
Helping verb: Can <i>They can work tomorrow.</i>	<i>They can work tomorrow, can’t they?</i>
Helping verb: Will <i>You won’t (will not) go to Sue’s house.</i>	<i>You won’t go to Sue’s house, will you?</i>
Helping verb: Should <i>We should talk to the boss.</i>	<i>We should talk to the boss, shouldn’t we?</i>
Helping verb: Have/Has <i>Susan has not applied for citizenship.</i>	<i>Susan has not applied for citizenship, has she?</i>

*If the only verb in the whole sentence is “be” (is/am/are/was/were), then use that same verb:

<i>He is late.</i>	<i>He’s late, isn’t he?</i>
<i>They aren’t good players.</i>	<i>They aren’t good players, are they?</i>
<i>You were late yesterday.</i>	<i>You were late yesterday, weren’t you?</i>

Reading Aloud in your Second Language

- ✓ Use the first language too! Translate!
- ✓ Focus on important words in the book.
- ✓ Point at the words as you or your child says them.
- ✓ Use gestures and facial expressions to help your child understand.
- ✓ Answer your child's questions about the story.
- ✓ Repeat the story. It is very useful for children to hear it again and again!
- ✓ Try new books.



Gillanders, C. & Castro, D.C. (2007). Reading aloud to English Language Learners. *Children and Families*, 21(3), 12-14.

Reading Aloud in your Second Language

- ✓ Use the first language too! Translate!
- ✓ Focus on important words in the book.
- ✓ Point at the words as you or your child says them.
- ✓ Use gestures and facial expressions to help your child understand.
- ✓ Answer your child's questions about the story.
- ✓ Repeat the story. It is very useful for children to hear it again and again!
- ✓ Try new books.



Gillanders, C. & Castro, D.C. (2007). Reading aloud to English Language Learners. *Children and Families*, 21(3), 12-14.