

On the Board

200 Fast, Fun & Easy Warmer, Filler and
Fast-Finisher Activities

Walton Burns

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By Walton Burns

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1204 Main Street #172

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(203) 442-5222

info@alphabetpublishingbooks.com

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Introduction

In 2005, I began volunteering at an English language center in Astana, Kazakhstan. Every Monday night, between 10 and 40 people would come to practice speaking English. Most of the participants were high school or university students planning to study in an English-speaking university. But there were also adults who needed English for work, retirees who wanted to keep up their English for fun, and other English teachers or trainers. It was a fun, low-pressure group and you never knew who would show up from day to day. So I'd just pick a theme, prepare a few questions and off we'd go.

I also developed a habit of putting a proverb or saying related to the day's theme on the board. I'd then asked students: What do you think this proverb means? Do you agree with it or disagree with it? Do you know a similar proverb in Russian or Kazakh?

They loved it.

From there, I moved on to include puzzles, riddles, jokes, even funny headlines. Soon I was writing down anything I could find or anything I came up with that could work as one of these quick warm-ups or do-nows.

In short, this collection became one of my go-to teaching tools. I'm hoping it will fast become one of yours, as well.

On the Board

These activities are no prep, and easy to use. Students can do them on their own, so they can do them while you're doing something else. Once students get into the habit, you can throw something up on the board and let them have at it for 3-5 minutes while you monitor or get out the handouts for the next lesson.

The book is divided into different kinds of activities: Brainteasers & Riddles, Jokes, Headlines, Proverbs and Quotations. Before each section, I've given some suggestions on how to use that kind of activity in class and ways to extend them beyond the first 5 minutes of class. I've also added lots of space in the margin to leave comments and notes.

In general, these make great warmers or do-nows, although they may be a bit shorter than the average do-now.

You can also use them as fillers or compile a bunch of them into a "quiz" for students—it's a great thing to add to your Fast Finisher file!

If you have a great way, you implemented these in class, please let us know. If we include your idea on our blog or mailing list, we'll reward you with a coupon code good for use on our site!

Brainteasers & Riddles

Brainteasers and riddles and even silly jokes are great critical thinking activities. They give students something to think about and I've selected puzzles here that have students grappling with language.

You should alert students to the nature of the answer—is it a pun or a riddle or a serious logical puzzle. It can be quite frustrating to work with what you think is a serious puzzle only to discover that it's a joke.

How to use them in class

- Have students try to solve them.
- Once they solve it, have students write down the solution and what is tricky about it.
- Have students create a similar puzzle or joke or riddle.
- Ask students to translate the riddle. How well does it translate? Can they do it literally or do they have to adapt it?

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Riddles about Letters

What is the center of Gravity?

The letter V.

What starts with "P" and ends with "E"
and has more than 1000 letters?

A post office!

How do you make the number one
disappear?

Add the letter g and it's "gone"

What occurs once in every minute, twice
in every moment, yet never in a thousand
years?

The letter m.

We see it once in a year, twice in a week,
and never in a day. What is it?

The letter e

What's the difference between here and
there?

The letter t

What do an island and the letter T have
in common?

They are both in the middle of water.

Brainteasers & Riddles

Beth's mother has three daughters. One is named Laura and the other one is Sara. What is the name of the third daughter?

Beth. The question says Beth's mother

A plane crashes right on the border between the US and Canada. 15 people die. Where do they bury the survivors?

Nowhere. Survivor means the people who lived.

Why is it illegal in the US to marry your widow's sister?

If you have a widow, it means you are dead.

There is a red one-story house and everything in it is red. The tables are red, the chairs are red, and the piano is red. What color is the staircase?

It's a one-story house. There is no staircase.

A man builds a rectangular house in such a way that all sides face south. A bear walks by. What color is the bear?

White. He built the house at the North Pole, the only place where all directions are south.

A man was driving his truck. His lights were not on. The moon was not out. Up ahead, a woman was crossing the street. How did he see her?

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Puns and Jokes

What kind of nut has no shell?

A doughnut.

What kind of coat can be put on only when its wet?

A coat of paint.

Why is it easy to weigh fish?

They have their own scales.

What room can't be entered?

A mushroom.

What kind of tree can you carry in your hand?

A palm tree.

Why is six afraid of seven?

Because seven eight (ate) nine.

What lets you look through walls?

A window!

What two keys can't open doors?

A monkey and a donkey.

Where do fish keep their money?

A riverbank.

What is gray, and has a tail and a trunk?

A mouse on vacation!

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Headlines

Grandmother of Eight Makes Hole in One

Deaf Mute Gets New Hearing in Killing

Police Begin Campaign to Run Down
Jaywalkers

House Passes Gas Tax onto Senate

Two Convicts Avoid the Noose, Jury
Hung

Cemetery Residents Making a Comeback

Milk Drinkers Are Turning to Powder

Safety Experts Say School Bus
Passengers Should Be Belted

Quarter of a Million Chinese Live on
Water

Farmer Bill Dies in House

Iraqi Head Seeks Arms

Queen Mary Having Bottom Scraped

Prostitutes Appeal to Pope

Panda Mating Fails —Veterinarian Takes
Over

NJ Judge to Rule on Nude Beach

Child's Stool Great for Use in Garden

Proverbs

Proverbs are a fun way to have students think about language and idioms. Some students enjoy memorizing proverbs and using them in conversation, so you may find that students love these do-nows. There's also a lot of follow-up you can do with proverbs, such as introducing the theme of the class or having students write an exegesis or summary.

I've tried to curate proverbs that aren't too idiomatic or too difficult to figure out. However, you may need to simplify or rewrite some of these, or step in to explain some of the idioms.

How to Use them

Ask students to figure out what the proverb means.

Ask students to decide, or discuss in pairs, whether they agree or disagree with the proverb.

Ask students to think of a saying or proverb from their culture that has a similar meaning.

Ask students to try to translate the proverb to their own language. Does it

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make sense or do they need to change the words?

Ask them to think of an example from literature, history, or their own lives that the proverb applies to.

Proverbs

When in Rome, do as the Romans do.

Don't bite off more than you can chew.

Too many cooks spoil the broth.

If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.

A leopard cannot change its spots.

Lightning never strikes twice in the same place.

Misery loves company.

No news is good news.

Rome wasn't built in a day.

Two's company, but three's a crowd.

Where there's smoke, there's fire.

The way to a man's heart is through his stomach.

You can't have your cake and eat it too.

You reap what you sow.

Bad news travels fast.

Quotations

Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it. - Charles R. Swindoll

Is it possible to have too much of a good thing? - Shakespeare (adapted)

It is people who make a city, not walls or ships - Thucydides

Do what you can with what you have, where you are. - Theodore Roosevelt

There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about. - Oscar Wilde

What we think, we become. - Buddha

A problem is a chance for you to do your best. - Duke Ellington

Always forgive your enemies —nothing annoys them so much. - Oscar Wilde

But love is blind, and lovers cannot see. - Shakespeare

If you only read the books that everyone else is reading, you can only think what everyone else is thinking. - Haruki Murakami