

Improv Storytelling

Level: B2 and up

Aims: *Students are engaged and made to approach some of their fears. They are shown what improv is, and how fun it can be. Then, the students are taught a significant lesson, especially those who believe themselves to be completely lacking in imagination or performing skills.*

Resources: *Just some cutouts, which you only need to print once, and then reuse every time you want to carry out this lesson again.*

This is one of my favorite lesson plans, with good reason. I tend to automatically go for this one lesson plan when I'm asked to replace a teacher, and have a class for only one session, as this is quite an unusual lesson which is not what the students are expecting, and there is next to zero chance that they've already done the same lesson with the other teacher.

Try and establish a warm and friendly atmosphere in the classroom. If they are your regular students, feel free to start off with asking them how their day/weekend/whatever has been, or to tell them about your own, and if they are new students find out all their names and get them to share a little bit about themselves, asking for more information. As much as you can, you would like the students to feel safe in this class.

Ask your students for a volunteer. However, I prefer going for a student who is a little bit shy in this case. When a student puts their hand up, and I can tell that this is one of the more confident and self-assured students in the group, then usually I will ask this student instead to help me, because I would like to work with someone who is a bit shy, so I ask that student to indicate someone appropriate. Once you have your volunteer, invite the volunteer to the center of the classroom, and once they are there, ask them to tell you a story. Give the following specific instructions: "I want you to invent and tell us a story." The reactions you get to this are always unique and I usually prefer to note them. If they ask for further clarification, explain that the story can be about anything they want, and it must be made up on the spot, not real. You will find that some students will be able to do this task, perhaps even for several minutes. Others will not be able to accomplish it. Many will feel uncomfortable. If they remain stuck for over a minute, invite them to return to their seat. Ask a second volunteer now to perform this exercise. And a third, if you wish.

Notice how everyone reacts differently, and you can even point this out to them. Sometimes students hold themselves back because they feel their story is not interesting or original. It's important to let them know that you didn't ask for a good story, just a story. Teach them that they don't need to expect perfection. If you think they're ready for it, you can share Keith Johnstone's quote, "Be more average." Let the students discuss it, and you can explain that Johnstone was encouraging his students to let go of perfectionism, and the need to be unique, as these hindered improv actors.

At this point, it's a good idea to switch it up. Invite another student to be the storyteller, it's okay if the student is a bit nervous, because you're going to help them. Let them stand in the center, and instruct all the other students that they have 15 seconds to think of a word (or a noun, or an adjective, as you prefer). Then, explain that you want your volunteer to start telling the story, but that, when you see that they are stuck, you are going to call out 'pause' and point at a student, who will immediately say out loud their word. The storyteller has to continue telling the story, but find some way to incorporate the word that was just said to them into the story. Check understanding by asking your storyteller what their role is, and the other participants what their role is.

Let the exercise go on for a good 5 or even 10 minutes, and whenever you want the story to take on a new direction, or when your storyteller seems to be struggling, say 'pause', and point at a student who will give the student a word to use in his story. When this exercise has gone on long enough, then let a new storyteller be elected, and I suggest somebody who is a close friend of the original storyteller, if possible. Instruct this storyteller that they must continue the story where their friend left off, and that they also must reincorporate into the story all the words that were said by the participants during the first part of the story. Let the story develop into a gradual ending.

Now that the students understand the tasks, ask them if anybody else would like to give the exercises a try, and invite any volunteer who feels up to the task to do it. They can choose if they want helping words or not. When the exercises are complete, get some feedback from students.

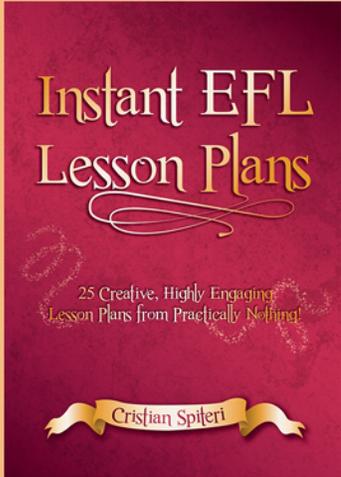
Ask questions like:

- Are you good at this kind of exercise? Why?
- Would you enjoy having to do this exercise very often?
- How do you feel when you have to tell a story like this in front of everyone?

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- Is it easier when you are being fed words that you have to use, or is it easier when you are 100% in charge of the story?



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At some point or another, some student is going to bring up imagination, or lack thereof, or if they don't, you can bring it up and discuss it.

The class now needs to be split into two groups of equal size. On one side you should have the students who claim they don't have imagination, or that they are too shy to create a story, and on the other hand you should have the students who feel somewhat comfortable with this exercise. If there is no way to split the group equally in this way, then just do a round of counting to establish each person's group. (A, B, A, B, A, B...)

Instruct every student A to buddy up with a student B, and move their chairs to somewhere in the room where they have some distance from the other pairs, and to face each other. Give each student their role card, instructing them to read it without showing it to anybody. When everyone has had time to read their instructions, let the exercise start, and set a time limit of around 15 minutes. If there's an odd number of students, the teacher can buddy up with a student, but the student should be in group B.

When the exercise is done, invite each student B, one by one, to come to the front of the classroom, and tell the story that they have extracted from student A during the exercise. After each student B completes the story, ask some questions to this student like:

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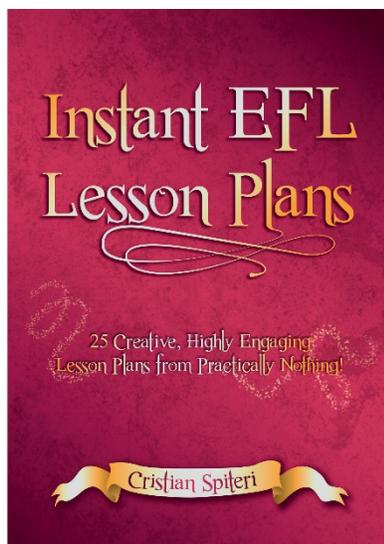
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- Do you like this story?
- Do you think your partner is good at telling stories? Does he/she have good imagination?

These questions will very likely elicit giggles from the rest of the classroom. When the exercise is over, let all the students exchange role cards so they understand the meaning of the exercise. After all gasps of surprise have died down, you can elicit feedback from the class, asking them what they can learn from this exercise. If the answer doesn't come out explicitly, you can guide your students towards the answer that everyone has imagination, sometimes we just block it, but it is always there. If the audience is mature enough, you can explain that once the responsibility of creating, inventing, and sharing a story were taken away, everyone happily imagined the questions to ask.

<p>A.</p> <p>Your partner B thinks that you are going to create a story, but they are wrong, they will be the ones creating the story without realizing.</p> <p>Partner B is going to ask you questions to understand the story e.g. Is it about a house? Which you will have to answer.</p> <p>However – The rules are that if the question ends with a consonant – the answer is going to be NO. If the question ends with a vowel, the answer will be – YES, and if the question ends in Y, the answer is MAYBE.</p> <p>Is the story about a fairy? – Maybe Is she sad? – No Does she live in a small house? – Yes.</p>	<p>B.</p> <p>Your partner has a story in their mind – but they are not going to tell you the story. Instead, you have to ask them Yes or No questions to extract the story.</p> <p>Try and understand and learn as much as you can about the story as later you will be sharing it with the class.</p> <p>Is the story about a cat? Does it live near here? Have you ever met it?</p>
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Instant EFL Lesson Plans

25 Creative, Highly Engaging Lesson Plans
from Practically Nothing

This book of innovative and original lesson plans that are quick and easy to use is your new magic weapon! Perfect for new teachers who want to break away from the textbook. But even an experienced teacher will love this low-prep guide to incorporating art, storytelling, and drama to the classroom!

Engage and challenge your students with creative activities such as:

- Book Genres Roleplay: Students create a story in a genre, exploring what makes a fantasy story.
- How Do I Make That? Discuss food and how to cook, diving into the nuances of cooking vocabulary.
- Heroes: Students discuss what a hero is and what kinds of jobs are needed in society.
- Memes: Explore what makes a meme funny

Each lesson follows TEFL methodology and has clear language goals. Most importantly each lesson is like a magic spell that makes you a better teacher! And there are ideas for adapting or varying the lesson. And once you get the hang of the framework, you'll find yourself incorporating ideas from the book in other activities as well!

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