



# Authentic appeal

**Ana Leiguarda de Orue** uses storybook tapes to empower her young learners.

**T**he image that young learners have of themselves determines to what extent they will or will not succeed at school. For this reason it is necessary to help them build self-esteem by letting them experience feelings of reward. As teachers of English, we can help children develop a positive image of themselves by designing activities at which *all* the students and not just the best ones can succeed.

Engaging emotions is also critical in the learning process because, as Marshall points out, we learn better when we feel better. When we feel good, our brains release neurotransmitters which facilitate the processing of new information. According to Jensen, we learn best when information is embedded in emotions and context.

## Authentic material

A good way of making our students feel good about themselves and engaging their emotions is by using authentic material from the very beginning. The sort of material that is produced for native-speaker children – fairy tales, stories and nursery rhymes – is usually of intrinsic interest to non-native-speaker children too, and they may already have been exposed to much of it in their mother tongue. When it is used in the classroom, they feel proud of their ability to understand ‘real’ English speakers.

## Stories with tapes

There are many good stories recorded on tape that come together with a storybook. I have been using these tapes with my nine year olds for the last four years and they seem to find them particularly appealing. Though there are many such tapes available, I would particularly recommend the ones produced by Disney, which tell the stories from well-known Disney films. These contain features that add to classroom fun. For example, there are special sound effects; there is a narrator who tells the story and there are also dialogues involving the main characters, played by famous actors such as Mel Gibson (Captain John Smith in *Pocahontas*) or Robin Williams (the Genie in *Aladdin*). The background music, together with the lively dialogues and other sounds, helps the students create a mental picture of what is going on. Moreover, since a great number of the learners may have seen the film or have an idea of who the characters are, the story becomes easier to understand. As a result, the children’s stress level is reduced because they don’t have too much difficulty in understanding.

## Overcoming the difficulty

Since these tapes are meant for young native speakers, their level of language complexity is high and most of the vocabulary will be new to true

beginners. Nevertheless, many activities can be done with them, and I have used them successfully with very low-level classes. For example, students can be asked simply to identify which character is speaking (there are different voices on the tape and each character speaks with their own particular tone of voice and pitch). They can also be asked to raise their hands when they recognise common words and expressions such as *hello*, *follow me*, *come here!* *Help!* and many other clearly pronounced words.

Believing we have the knack for something helps us do it. Getting your students to believe that they can already make sense of what native speakers say gets them on the road to doing so. Understanding real-life English gives children a great sense of achievement and boosts their self-confidence. For this reason, bringing real-life material into the classroom is enormously empowering.

## Creating activities

Since the language used in the stories is naturally far beyond the students’ level of understanding, the focus of activities based on them should not be on meaning. Instead, several short fun activities can be devised to develop the students’ listening strategies. These can be done individually, but it is often better if students are in groups, since they can then work cooperatively and relax more. Activities should take about five to seven minutes each. Indeed, Cranz argues that remaining seated for more than ten minutes reduces the students’ awareness of physical and emotional sensations.

## Pre-listening activities

Using pre-listening activities involving prediction is a good way of engaging the students’ emotions because it helps raise their interest and reduce their stress level. When the tape is played, students are not required to understand what the story is about, but merely to check their predictions. And it gives them great satisfaction when they guess at least a few words correctly.





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▶▶▶ Simple riddles can be read so as to introduce the characters in the story, eg *She is tall and thin. Her hair is black and white. She is wicked. Who is she?* (Answer: Cruella DeVil in *101 Dalmatians*).

Another possibility is to use pictures and to show only parts of them for the students to guess who the character is. The pictures can be put into an envelope and, for example, only a dog's paw can be shown. The students are then asked, *Who is it?* (Pongo or Perdita in *101 Dalmatians*).

You can play a part of the tape where the students listen to some sound effects or key words and they can be asked about the title of the story, eg *He was raised in a family of gorillas and yet he was as human as you are* – sound of drums and a storm in the background (*Tarzan*).

You could also ask students to predict who is going to say certain words in the story, that is, whether it is a man or a woman, a good or a bad character, eg *'You will always be in my heart.'* (*Tarzan's* mum, Kala); *'Clayton, if Jane sees gorillas, she stays?'* (*Tarzan*).

You can give the students part of a script with alternatives for some words and ask them to choose one of the options, eg *I live in London/Liverpool with my master, Roger.* Then they listen to the tape and check which one is correct.

## While-listening activities

You can ask the students to listen and put words or phrases in the order they hear them. You should give them about six words so that it is fairly simple.

You can get them to listen and detect or correct mistakes in the

script. You should specify the total number of mistakes so that it is easier and these should be near the end of a phrase rather than at the beginning.

You can also use a list of lines and ask the students to match each one with the character who says it, or give the students halves of lines and ask them to listen and match both parts.

Short sentences with words in jumbled order can be used to practise word order. The students listen to the phrase first and then put it in order.

You can stop the tape before a word and read three options to the students for them to choose which word is coming, eg *He is a clever man/person/fellow.*

## Post-listening activities

Roleplay activities are always fun. Since the dialogues from the story are not graded, and thus do not focus on any particular grammatical structure, you might like to make up one of your own to suit your needs. Since we remember more easily things that are funny because our brain gives great importance to our emotions (Jensen), we should try to make up humorous dialogues. One that worked well with a group of nine year olds who already knew the verbs *to be* and *to have* got and the present continuous was the following:

### 101 Dalmatians

**Cruella:** Anita, darling!

Congratulations!

**Anita:** Congratulations? Why?

**Cruella:** You have got Dalmatian puppies!

**Roger:** Yes, they are in the kitchen.

**Cruella:** Where is the kitchen, darling?

**Anita:** Shhh. They are sleeping.

**Cruella:** But they are not Dalmatians. They are white!

They haven't got spots!

**Roger:** Dalmatian puppies are white, Cruella.

**Cruella:** OK, OK, I want to buy them all!



**Roger:** Wait a minute, Cruella.

They are *our* puppies.

**Anita:** Yes, and they are not for sale.

**Cruella:** All right. But you will be sorry. Bye.


**Anita and Roger:** Goodbye, Cruella.

The following activities can be done to help students learn the dialogue.

Divide the class into groups of three and give each group the dialogue cut up into sections and jumbled. The students put the dialogue in order.

Mime each line, making appropriate gestures. Ask the students to copy you. They then say the lines aloud and repeat the gestures. To practise pronunciation, ask volunteers to come to the front and do the gestures for one line. The rest of the class recall which line it is and say it aloud.

Say a line silently, moving your lips but not making any sound. Ask the students to guess which line you said.

Write the dialogue on large pieces of paper. Volunteers can flash these or show them upside-down for the class to say the line. Once the dialogue has been practised for a while as a whole group, the students can practise it in threes. 

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Jensen, E *Teaching with the Brain in Mind* ASCD 1998

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