

Engage and Motivate with a Challenge or Competition

Set a challenge: Think of those 'superlative' ('----est') adjectives. Challenge children to be or do the

- most
- fastest
- biggest
- smallest
- funniest
- most colourful
- longest
- cleverest
- quietest
- loudest
- most interesting
- with the least mistakes
- neatest ...

For example you could say: "Let's see who (which individual, pair, or group) can ..."

This can be applied to any activity, even drilling, and even a boring worksheet, but not necessarily in the same way ever time. Give them a little surprise by what you ask for! So now you say:

"This time I want to see

- who finishes first, or
- who has the neatest writing, or
- who draws a funny picture at the bottom, or
- who can come and say to me 'Teacher I have done my very best work!' when they bring me their exercise book ..."

(Of course in the Malaysian English language classroom you need to build up to these concepts, and understanding the words.)

For example: You could start by asking (all, or some of) the children to stand in a line displaying their work. Choose three that are neat/colourful/interesting and the others sit, and then from those choose the neatest/most colourful/most interesting.

- Get 3 children at the board drawing a big ... balloon (or something). Choose the biggest.
- Get three children at the board, ask them to quickly draw a car. Choose the fastest draw-er.
- Ask three children to line up at the back and sing a song. Choose the loudest/highest/lowest/sweetest/fastest/most dramatic ...

Through these little activities they quickly catch on to how the competition works – not difficult really! The important thing is to use lots of variety so that every child/pair/group can win sometime.

Spice up the lesson with some competition.

- Play games – such as “Typhoon”! This gives the students a focus and helps them to remain engaged while learning and practising.
- Playing in teams allows less able children to feel safe, less likely to lose/fail and/or be blamed for losing.
- The randomness of games like Typhoon means that it is possible for any team to win in the end.
- Play BINGO! (*See instructions elsewhere on this site.*)
- Play Tic Tac Toe on the boards, blackboard Soccer, or make up your own blackboard game – anything where they can work in teams and progress or win points by getting an answer correct.

Challenge the children to a Back-to-Front day

For example:

- Write words and sentences on the board back-to-front and ask them to read them.
- Challenge children to write things back-to-front. (See who can do it the fastest / neatest / biggest ...)
- Hold up flashcards for them to read upside-down (or write some especially back-to-front, or hold them up in front of a mirror.)
- Spell everything back-to-front.
- Say a sentence / question back-to-front and get them to answer in the same way.

While this may seem a bit ‘silly’, it is making their brains work harder, and making them use higher-order thinking skills and problem solving.

Challenge the children to guess things

The first step in reading a story is generally to look at the picture or cover, and try to guess what the story is about – this is a very valid educational practice. When we guess something, we base our answer on the information we have already received – and some people (detectives, for example) are especially good at noticing things others may miss. Again, this encourages higher-order thinking skills, conversation (especially if done in pairs/groups/teams) – which should be encouraged in English – and it can be a lot of fun.

So, for example:

Bring a box (or bag) into the class – big/small, heavy/light, gift-wrapped/plain etc. Ask the children to guess what is in the box. Ask them why they think so. If you do this more than once, it could become a regular (listening and speaking?) activity, and they will get better at looking for clues. You could trick them by pretending it is really heavy, when it isn’t. They could try to guess why you have the item(s) etc. There could be something in the box or bag for them – which could increase excitement. They could make up a story – and write or tell it – about what it is, or what they think it is.

Show them a photo. Ask questions about the person/place/things in the picture. It could be real (a friend or relative or a famous person) or complete fiction. Write or tell stories (real or imaginary) about the picture.

Set a Spelling Challenge

Spelling is commonly a drilling aloud activity in Malaysian schools, and rarely a written activity (which it is in Western Schools). Some children seem to learn to spell easily, and for others it is more difficult.

- Dictate words for the children to write down.
- Ask the children to check their words against a paper or list on the board – or they can check each other's, but remember we don't want to embarrass them.
- Children get a score, and the next time they try to beat their score.
- You could have a chart on the wall that shows how much *better* their score is each time.