

EFL Magazine

THE MAGAZINE FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

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This activity can be modified to suit your learners' age and level of English, and if you have more time you can extend it to become a unit.

Reflections are, as always, optional for the lessons and can be written in workbooks or on computers, or communicated as discussions.

There's something for different learner-styles, and it lends itself as well for making creative hand-outs with vocab lists that suit your learners' level of English.

In a future activity sheet, breathing techniques as used by actors and singers will be included, so this activity can act as a warming up!

TOPIC – BREATHING

You can choose whether this is a topic for one lesson, or for a series of lessons, or unit.

The aim is to use inquiry, so be prepared to let these lessons go wherever your students take them!

1. Introduce the topic of 'Breathing'; ask your students what they know about breathing.

Depending on the age, you can ask them simple questions: how do we breathe, what happens if we don't breathe for a few seconds or a minute, how does a fish breathe, etc. For older and more advanced students you can ask them about how babies 'breathe' in the womb, what they know about oxygen, air pollution, and breathing problems like asthma.

2. Divide your students up in smaller groups, like 2 or 4, depending on the size of your class. Ask them to draw, describe, and communicate with each other what they know about breathing while sleeping, while playing sports, while walking in the cold or heat.

3. Ask each group to come up with a story that illustrates different breathing patterns. For example, a story of Santa's elves being left out in the cold because Father Christmas accidentally locked them out, or Jack (from Jack and the Beanstalk) breathing differently once he is very close to the sleeping, and snoring, big giant.

Or for older students: travellers that are lost in the desert and onto their last drop of water, astronauts on the moon communicating with each other while breathing slowly, a party where a number of Darth Vaders try to explain that they are the real Darth Vader...

Often students have better ideas than us teachers do, so as long as you explain that their story needs to include people or creatures who need to concentrate on their breathing, they can come up with anything.

4. Ask them to write down the ideas of every member of their group, then choose one story (if this takes too long, you can always say that this week it is John's turn, next week Julia's), and ask them to start improvising their story.

5. If there's enough time, let them write dialogue for their improvisation.

6. Present the scene to the class.

7. Let the audience give the actors positive feedback: what did they like? What was clear about this story? Which character was funny, or interesting and why?

8. Reflection: students can write down new vocabulary that either the teacher introduced or that they discovered during this lesson. Also, let them reflect on what they liked about this exercise, what skills they learned (e.g. focus, listening, creative thinking etc.), what they think they were good at, or what they would like to do again in order to improve. Depending on the level of their English, let them illustrate these reflections, or ask them to write longer reflections in a certain grammatical tense.

9. If this is an on-going project, ask them to research an aspect of the topic on Breathing. They can also prepare workshops that they can give based on breathing exercises for meditation, for singing lessons, for swimming, etc. This will make them the teacher for part of the next lesson(s).

Other items to use in an on-going project are proverbs about breathing, watching (short) science programmes on how the lungs work, finding poems with short words that need different breathing compared to poems with longer words.

When you go further with your inquiry-based learning, extend the topic to air pollution or other subjects that are related to breathing and ask your students to create scenes to convince an audience about a certain point of view: 'Pollution is part of life if we want to have cars' – 'We need to stop pollution if we want polar bears to survive', etc.

If your students are interested in political theatre (Brecht, Boal), this would be a great time to introduce this!

EXTENSION

To extend the inquiry process, you can ask students to research the topic as a homework task:

1. Come up with text or songs that need to be done really quickly so breathing becomes difficult
2. Create a movement pattern that reflects air going into the body and leaving the body after changing its consistency
3. Create a soundscape with a group (4-8 people) that consist of breathing sounds. They can use the sound of blowing out a candle, inhaling and exhaling at different speeds, sighs, fearful and sharp inhale, exhales that start to sound like whistling, etc.

Let the students perform these little performances and ask the other groups to give feedback, using only positive remarks, like what it reminded them of, how funny it was, when they listened to it with their eyes closed it brought up certain pictures, etc.

Breathing is not something most people have to think about, let alone learn about. However, for performers breathing is a technique that is learned in order to support the voice and expression of the material that is being performed.

The topic of Breathing is used as a basis for one or more lessons, and can also be extended into a unit of inquiry.

It also serves as a preparation for a next worksheet that introduces students to breathing techniques that can also be used for dealing with nerves, or simply to focus and relax.

But first things first: what can we learn from a topic on 'breathing'?

You will be able to introduce science and biology through students' research into your lesson, dramatic writing exercises are included, group work, individual creativity, performing arts and communication. As you are a creative teacher, you can extend in many other ways, or you can give your students the opportunity to suggest where they would like to take this inquiry.

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