

Listening Journals for Extensive and Intensive Listening Practice

As a language learner, I have found that one of the most difficult skills to contend with is listening. I was never taught how to listen. It was simply assumed that listening skills would be naturally acquired. For my first few years as an English as a foreign language teacher, I assumed the same. However, as I reflected on my own language-learning experiences and those of my students, I rethought this assumption. I did more research on listening instruction, and, not surprisingly, I learned that listening in a second language is not something that is just picked up.

Instead, the research points to it as a demanding cognitive task that requires a breadth and depth of exposure that neither I nor my students had been given. Through the research, I also realized that my language teachers and I were not the only ones who had made some poor assumptions.

It seems that throughout the history of English language teaching (ELT), most students have never been taught how to listen. According to Thorn (2009), most listening is done for non-listening purposes, such as introducing grammar or vocabulary, for discussion, for testing comprehension (but not actually to learn how to comprehend), and for familiarity with different accents. Rarely will someone claim to use listening in class “to train students to listen more effectively” (Thorn 2009, 9). According to Brown (2011, 36), “playing audio and asking comprehension questions, or even playing audio and asking students to complete tasks, is merely testing.” Therefore, a great deal of listening practice focuses on testing listening, not

teaching it. Testing a skill without first teaching it would not be acceptable for reading, writing, or speaking, and therefore it should not be acceptable for listening.

When listening instruction does occur, it is mostly a top-down approach. Thorn (2009) again points out that the focus is on schema building, gist, and guessing, not the words and sounds that actually make listening challenging. Furthermore, the listening texts themselves often pose a problem—Thorn (2009) believes that most texts are uninteresting from the students’ perspective, lack natural language features (e.g., linking or elision), and utilize one standard accent. None of this prepares students very well for the real-world listening challenges they will encounter.

While these methods of listening instruction still remain the dominant paradigm in ELT, they are slowly changing. Based on my experience as a language learner, on second-language listening research, and on some

newer trends in listening instruction, I have designed a method that uses listening journals to deal with the challenges of learning to listen in a second language. This article introduces the concept of listening journals and explains how teachers can use them to focus on both the extensive and intensive aspects of listening in order to help students improve their overall listening skills.

BRIEF RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Clearly, students need a more focused approach to listening instruction. Recent research from an array of areas indicates that top-down approaches (activating prior knowledge), bottom-up approaches (decoding sounds), and metacognitive approaches (predicting, monitoring, and planning) are all essential for students to become good listeners (see Brown 2011 for an overview). While current listening instruction generally focuses on top-down approaches, bottom-up processing skills are increasingly recognized as important. The lack of phonological awareness and the inability to decode sounds or draw word boundaries are seen as major hindrances to listening (Kiany and Shiramiry 2002; Field 2003, 2008; Wilson 2003), and a shift from top-down to bottom-up listening instruction is supported by a number of research studies (Wilson 2003; Thorn 2009; Renandya and Farrell 2011).

Decoding skills are one piece of the puzzle. Just as learning to read well requires one to do a great deal of reading, learning to listen well requires one to do a great deal of listening. Inspired by extensive reading, an extensive approach to listening has been gaining support in ELT. Proponents suggest that students should listen to a great amount and variety of enjoyable texts at appropriate levels to build listening-comprehension skills (Renandya and Farrell 2011; Chang and

Millett 2014). While the listening sources do not need to be authentic to be effective, some research indicates the positive effect of using authentic materials in terms of their motivating qualities and success at improving listening (Mousavi and Irvani 2012; Thorn 2009). Authentic sources such as videos can be made more accessible to learners through the use of subtitles and captioning, which also have a positive effect on listening (Woodall 2010; Chang and Millett 2014).

LISTENING JOURNALS

The research suggests a clear and desired need for a stronger intensive and extensive approach to listening instruction. Not only do students need to do more listening, but they need to do this listening in conjunction with an approach that helps them focus on sounds, words, and building meaning from the bottom up as well as the top down. Listening journals are one tool I have used to serve these needs.

A listening journal is a book in which students record their extensive and intensive listening practices, as well as reflections on their listening experiences. The extensive listening aspect of listening journals requires students to choose and listen to texts that appeal to them from a source provided by the teacher. Students typically listen to a text several times while focusing on meaning. It is recommended that the selected texts have subtitles or transcripts for follow-up intensive activities. These texts are often authentic media from websites like ted.com, although for lower levels there are many options for media made specifically for language learners, such as NewsInLevels.com and FluentU.com (see www.anthonyteacher.com/listening-resources for a full list of sources). For students without access to computer technology, sources may include the teacher or guest speakers from the community.

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Moving from extensive listening to intensive practice, students take these texts and focus on decoding or other related skills in order to train their listening abilities. Popular and effective activities in this area include completing gap fills and transcriptions; however, prosody marking and pronunciation activities are also useful. Finally, students reflect on their successes, strengths, and weaknesses in order to identify skills they need to improve. Strengthening these weaker skills becomes a goal for students to focus on during further listening practice in the classroom, outside the classroom, or in subsequent listening journals.

All these activities are recorded in the listening journal and submitted once a week. For example, a website and series of activities are introduced and demonstrated on Monday; students choose a video from that website and complete the template, and then the students' work is collected the following Monday. Each week, the source and activity can remain the same or be changed. Listening journals can be handwritten in a notebook or follow a premade template. Templates can be tailored for specific activities, or they can be general templates suitable for any activity (see the Appendixes for examples). Another way to use listening journals is to provide a small book, or packet, of journal templates at the beginning of the course, along with a number of websites appropriate for the students' level, and providing a quick demonstration of each site and activity. Students visit any of the sites each week and select and listen to a video of their choice. For any video, they should follow the same activities, which include meaning-based listening followed by intensive listening activities. Students complete these journals on their own time and submit their book or packet several times throughout the course (an example of

this can be found at www.anthonyteacher.com/blog/listening-journals-redux). Depending on the number of students, the goals of the course, and the assessed weight of listening journals, the journals also can be collected daily, semi-weekly, or monthly. They can be assessed on any number of criteria, including completeness, correctness, effort, and quality.

WEB-BASED LISTENING JOURNAL ACTIVITIES

Following are examples of activities that can be conducted in conjunction with keeping a listening journal. The goals of the first two listening journal activities for upper-intermediate to advanced students are to focus on main ideas and on details, practice note-taking skills, and build decoding skills. The listening source is a TED Talk from www.ted.com, and students are instructed to find a video that can provide subtitles and transcripts both in English and their native language. First, I outline these two listening journal activities for upper-intermediate to advanced students, as well as the rationale for the activities. Following the TED Talk activities, I outline a listening journal activity and rationale for intermediate students from www.esl-lab.com.

Web-based activities for upper-intermediate to advanced students

Overview: Watch a short lecture, take notes, complete a gap fill, and use subtitles to find gaps in your listening and listening-comprehension skills.

Requirements: Write video title, video summary, and reflections in the listening journal (see Appendix 1 for template example), take notes in the listening journal, and print the gap fill.

Goal 1: (your personal listening goal)

Goal 2: listening for the main ideas and specific details

Goal 3: understanding specific words

Listening journals can be handwritten in a notebook or follow a premade template.

ACCESSING THE TED TALK LISTENING SOURCE

Go to www.ted.com and find an interesting video by clicking the “Watch” or “Discover” tabs or by using the “Search” function. After pressing the play button, you will see a small “Subtitles” icon below the video on the right. Make sure the selected video has subtitles in English *and* your first language by clicking the icon. *Note:* I recommend the video by Carol Dweck, *The Power of Believing That You Can Improve*, which discusses “the idea that we can grow our brain’s capacity to learn and to solve problems.” Subtitles are available in Chinese, Korean, Spanish, and many other languages. However, your students may choose any video!

TED TALK ACTIVITY 1

1. You will need three pens, each of a different color (e.g., black, blue, and red).
2. First, watch the TED Talk video *without* subtitles. Do not pause the video. Take notes in the Notes section.
3. Second, watch the video with English subtitles. Do not pause the video. Add more information to your notes using a pen with a different color ink.
4. Finally, watch the video using subtitles in your first language. Add more information to your notes using a pen with a different color.
5. Look over your notes and add questions and key words to the Notes section.
6. Answer the Activity 1 Reflection Questions and then go to Activity 2.

TED TALK ACTIVITY 2

1. After pressing the play button, you will see a small “Transcript” icon below the video on the right. Click on the icon and make sure the transcript is in English.
2. Read through the transcript for new and

interesting vocabulary. Record these words and phrases in the Vocabulary section of your journal.

3. Choose a section of the transcript that is one to two minutes long and copy the text.
4. Go to the cloze test creator at <http://1.georges.online.fr/tools/cloze.html>.
5. Paste your text in the yellow box and select “Interactive” and “No clues” below the yellow box.
6. On the right side of the website, choose how many words should be removed. Replace “n” with a number. For example, if you choose “5,” the website will delete every fifth word. If you choose a small number, you will have many missing words. If you choose a large number, you will have only a few missing words. If you leave “n,” the number and pattern of missing words will be random. I recommend choosing a small number or just leaving “n.”
7. Click on “Submit.”
8. You now have an interactive gap fill.
9. Listen to the TED Talk video again in English and complete the gap fill. Do not look at the clues!
10. Do Step 9 at least twice. Write down your score each time.
11. Print your gap fill and submit it with your journal.
12. Answer the Activity 2 Reflection Questions.

Table 1 presents the rationale for the main steps of the upper-intermediate to advanced TED Talk activities.

Web-based activity for intermediate students

Following is a web-based activity for intermediate students to complete outside class. The goals of this listening journal activity

are to focus on overall meaning, build decoding skills, and practice error analysis. The listening source of this activity is www.esl-lab.com, and students are instructed to find a video with a corresponding gap-fill activity called “Text Completion Quiz.” Table 2 outlines the activity and gives the rationale for each step. (See Appendix 2 for a listening journal template that can be used for this activity.)

ADAPTING LISTENING JOURNAL TASKS FOR NON-WEB-BASED ACTIVITIES

There are many ways to adapt listening journal tasks for almost any context, and having access to the Internet is not required. Students can keep listening journals with any source of live or prerecorded listening. They could listen to the teacher read a book aloud, listen to the teacher tell a story, or even listen to guest speakers from the community. As illustrated in Table 3, in these types of activities students can focus on note-taking, dictation and dictogloss activities,

transcription, or even creating their own gap fills for other students to fill in.

Listening journals can also be used as a vocabulary development tool. For example, students can find new words in their listening texts and bring this vocabulary back to the classroom to be pooled, discussed, and exploited by the teacher. After students gain a deeper understanding of the vocabulary, they re-listen to their texts with a greater capacity for understanding. Doing this also increases the number of exposures students have to vocabulary, which is essential for vocabulary learning.

Pronunciation can also be practiced when students add activities that focus on mimicry or comparison. For instance, students can choose short (10 to 20 seconds) clips from their text. They then listen and repeat these clips carefully, aiming to copy the sounds and tone of the original speaker. This is great fun for both the students and the teacher. If the

Activity	Rationale
1. Students choose an interesting video from ted.com.	The effectiveness of extensive listening comes from students’ ability to listen to interesting topics for pleasure at levels they deem appropriate.
2. Students watch the video without subtitles and take notes.	This mimics the experiences of a university classroom and gives students practice on taking notes and focusing on main ideas.
3. Students watch the video with English subtitles and add to their notes using a different-colored pen.	This gives students more linguistic support while allowing them to monitor their comprehension and focus on details.
4. Students watch the video with subtitles in their native language and take notes using a different-colored pen.	This gives students the ability to evaluate their understanding and compare their L1 and L2 abilities.
5. Students choose a one- to two-minute section of the transcript and create a gap fill using the cloze test creator. Students complete the gap fill twice or until they get a satisfactory score.	This activity focuses attention on decoding and trains students to listen carefully. Using the cloze test creator website, students can randomly remove words or remove specific words such as verbs or prepositions.
6. Students answer the reflection questions in their journal (see Appendix 1 for template example).	This helps students notice and think about their strengths and weaknesses in both comprehension and specific listening.

Table 1. TED Talk activity for upper-intermediate to advanced students

technology is available, students can record themselves and then listen to both the original and the recording to compare and contrast their pronunciation. Furthermore, they can explore different English-language accents using the listening journals (Galloway and Rose 2014). Students then complete their reflections in their L1, making it perhaps more useful and more diary-like, especially at lower proficiency levels. Teachers ask students to share and discuss their listening texts in class, which is an interesting activity and gets students involved. These are only a few of the ways to adapt listening journals and maintain important elements of extensive and intensive listening.

CONCLUSION

The listening journal projects outlined above have been developed and refined since 2012, and I have used them with hundreds of students from various language backgrounds and proficiencies. Almost every student has found the listening journal to be not only interesting

and useful for listening practice, but a source of improvement for their real-world listening skills. While this claim needs to be empirically tested, it is easy to see the effectiveness of a listening project that focuses on the gaps and needs highlighted by previous research.

The idea for listening journals derived from the need for a different approach to listening that considers the realities that make listening so difficult. As the research shows, without exposure to a great deal of listening input and lacking specific attention to the sounds, words, and phrases that comprise this input, a student's listening skills cannot grow efficiently and effectively. If the dominant paradigm of listening instruction in ELT is one based on testing listening rather than learning how to listen, we are doing our students a major disservice. Once we shift our focus away from this type of listening instruction, not only will the assumption that students automatically pick up listening skills no longer guide ELT, but the claim that listening is the most difficult skill may be a thing of the past.

Activity	Rationale
<p>1. Students choose an interesting, level-appropriate listening text from www.esl-lab.com/quizzes.htm.</p>	<p>This activity can be completed outside class for homework or in the student's free time. This website offers numerous interesting graded texts from which students can choose.</p>
<p>2. Students listen to their chosen text and either take notes or write a summary after listening. Students check their comprehension by completing the provided comprehension quiz and noting their scores.</p>	<p>The focus is on overall meaning. Students should listen as many times as necessary to get the overall meaning.</p>
<p>3. Students choose and complete the "Text Completion Quiz" activity. If no gap-fill activity is provided, students or the teacher can easily make one. Students include their score in their journals.</p>	<p>This gives students an opportunity to practice intensive listening skills.</p>
<p>4. As a final or alternative activity, students choose a difficult section of the listening text and transcribe it in their journals. They then check their transcription against the original and make any corrections necessary.</p>	<p>This gives students further practice in intensive listening and decoding. Following advice from Wilson (2003), students look at their transcription corrections and attempt to analyze what caused gaps or mishearings, then attempt to resolve issues by focusing on these areas in future work.</p>

Table 2. Web-based activity for intermediate students

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Activity	Rationale
<p>1. Students select a story for the teacher to read. Students prepare their journals with the story’s title.</p>	<p>While class-based activities do not usually lend themselves to the extensive aspect of listening, for areas that lack resources they can still be a great source of listening. Having students choose the text boosts motivation.</p>
<p>2. The teacher reads the story while students listen. In their journals, students may draw a picture of the character(s) or events.</p>	<p>This activity allows students to focus on the overall meaning of the story without worrying about specific words or details.</p>
<p>3. After reading and discussing the meaning of the story with the class, the teacher distributes a copy of one page of the story with words missing. The teacher reads the story again while the students fill in the blanks.</p> <p>Alternative activities could include doing a dictogloss of the story while the teacher is reading, or working in groups to transcribe the story as another classmate reads it.</p>	<p>The teacher can remove words that are unstressed, blend, or are otherwise difficult for students to hear. In this way, students practice their decoding skills, an essential element of intensive listening.</p>
<p>4. Students check answers and highlight any incorrect choices or difficult words.</p>	<p>This gives the teacher an opportunity to pinpoint specific listening issues and discuss interesting pronunciation points.</p>

Table 3. Non-web-based activity for intermediate and below students

APPENDIX 1

Listening Journal Template for TED Talk Activities

Date:	Information
Video title: Write the title of the video and the name of the speaker.	
Video summary: Write a one-sentence summary of the video.	
Reflection on achievement of goals: 1. Personal listening goal 2. Listening for the main ideas and specific details 3. Understanding specific words	1. 2. 3.
Vocabulary: Write new and interesting words and phrases.	
Notes:	

QUESTIONS

Activity 1 questions:

1. Compare your no-subtitle notes to your English subtitle notes.
 - a. What percentage did you understand without subtitles?
 - b. What information did you get when you listened without subtitles? What kind of information did you miss?
 - c. Why do you think you missed this information?
2. Compare your English subtitle notes to your native-language subtitle notes.
 - a. Did you miss or misunderstand any major or important ideas? Did you miss any minor details or specific examples?
 - b. Why do you think you missed or misunderstood this information?

Activity 2 questions:

- Gap-Fill Score 1:
 - Gap-Fill Score 2:
1. How well did you do?
 2. What was easy to hear and understand?
 3. What was difficult to hear and understand?

Overall Reflection:

1. After completing Activities 1 and 2, what skills have already improved or are already strong?
2. What listening skills do you need to improve further? (*Make this the goal of your next listening journal.*)

APPENDIX 2

General Listening Journal Template

Website	Audio Name	Level/Other Information

Summary: What was the listening selection about?

Vocabulary: What words did you learn?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Activities: What did you do? What scores did you get?

Self-Assessment

Question	Yes	No	Maybe
The speed was OK.			
The vocabulary was OK.			
The pronunciation was OK.			
This helped my listening skills.			
I think my listening skills are improving.			
I need to improve (please circle all that apply): listening to main ideas / listening to details / listening to numbers / listening to fast speech / listening to connected speech / listening for a long time / listening to other accents / my vocabulary / my pronunciation			

Using Freewriting to Make Sense of Literature

For a 2015 workshop with pre- and in-service secondary school English teachers in New Delhi, we asked our colleagues to bring a short text from their curriculum to anchor the day's activities. They arrived with a copy of Stephen Spender's poem "An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum"; the fourth and final stanza reads as follows:

Unless, governor, teacher, inspector, visitor,
This map becomes their window and these windows
That shut upon their lives like catacombs,
Break O break open 'till they break the town
And show the children green fields and make their world
Run azure on gold sands, and let their tongues
Run naked into books, the white and green leaves open
History is theirs whose language is the sun. (Stephen Spender Trust 2015)

The text, the teachers explained, was required reading for twelfth-graders (senior secondary) and, for their students and for themselves, a struggle. Part of the challenge for teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) working with a literature-based curriculum is striking a balance between teaching the text or series of texts and creating opportunities for communicative interaction. To begin with, a poem such as Spender's is hard to read. The syntax is unconventional—e.g., "History is theirs whose language is the sun"; so too is the imagery Spender employs—e.g., "... and let their tongues/Run naked into books, the white and green leaves open." Often, students simply want to know what the poem means—or is supposed to mean. Obliging, teachers explain line by line, stanza by stanza, with a culminating series of comprehension questions, frequently in a multiple-choice format. If students still do not "get it," they turn to the Internet in search of an explanation; and, in the case of the

Spender poem, a recent Google search for "An elementary school classroom in a slum analysis" rendered 13,400 results. We argue, however, that in a communicative teaching paradigm, it is not enough to teach what the teacher believes the poem to mean—or what someone told us it means. Rather, reading complex texts is an opportunity for students to engage in deeply personal meaning-making processes.

Here, we return to our previous discussions about engaging young adult readers in the literature curriculum (Murray and Salas 2014a, 2014b, 2014c) to argue that freewriting—and the sense of inquiry it generates—can be used with secondary-level English language learners as a way of introducing them to the exploratory, open-ended thinking that reading literature requires. To clarify, we do not propose freewriting in and of itself as a substitute for local, regional, and national traditions that

the literature curriculum carries with it. Rather, here we propose freewriting about an unfamiliar text as a powerful starting point for readers to make connections: text to self, text to text, and text to the world. Moreover, when such freewriting is operationalized in collaborative, interactive formats, it can create new attitudes towards reading literature by supporting that activity as one of individual and collaborative inquiry.

We begin this discussion about freewriting and the literature curriculum with a brief overview of its origins in English Education as well as contemporary discussions about its potential benefits for the literacy classroom. Drawing from a robust body of *writing-to-learn* literature, we outline how freewriting and the literature curriculum works, its formats and variations followed by a set of strategies for sharing and responding to freewriting in ways that elevate it as participatory analysis. We anchor this discussion of freewriting about the literature curriculum with the Spender poem. However, we encourage teachers and students to try freewriting with the various texts they encounter—poetry, prose, fiction, and even non-fiction.

WHY FREWRITE WITH LITERATURE?

In the EFL secondary classrooms where we teach—in Charlotte, Kamloops, and New Delhi—there is a long-standing chicken-or-egg argument as to what comes first in academic writing. For some, the gold standard is a sequence starting with parts of speech, moving to types of sentences, then to clauses, to the paragraph, followed by open and closed thesis statements, and then to the essay in its multiple forms: the expository, the persuasive, the descriptive, the argumentative, and so forth. In such classroom and curricular contexts, academic writing as a communicative performance is delayed or doled out in small portions until students have demonstrated a mastery of the bits and pieces of academic writing. For others rejecting a *back-to-basics* approach, academic writing is a process of meaning making, a *whole-language* transaction between

our existential selves as writers and the world(s) we construct and re-construct on paper. It is about putting ideas on paper and working them out as we go—a process.

For this latter group, freewriting is a brief, exploratory exercise, with pen, pencil, or keyboard, emphasizing the creation of unbroken language in constant motion—without stopping, without thinking too much, and without editing (Elbow 1998a, 1998b, 2000). Theoretically, freewriting owes a great deal both directly and indirectly to the understandings of Vygotsky (1978, 1986), a Soviet psychologist whose English translations roughly coincided with the materialization of the writing-to-learn movement in U.S. English Education. The tools of language, Vygotsky (1986) argued, are not mere representations of thinking but also a mediational means to achieve that end:

Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them. Every thought tends to connect something with something else, to establish a relation between things. Every thought moves, grows, and develops, fulfills a function, solves a problem. (218)

While writing to learn means different things to different people, what these perspectives share is the notion of the writing process as a means for solving problems, for making connections, and for establishing relationships. In other words, writing is thinking aloud on paper. Or as Emig (1977), a seminal figure in college composition and communication, explained almost 40 years ago, “writing represents a unique mode of learning—not merely valuable, not merely special, but unique” (122). Words on paper afford the review, manipulation, and modification of knowledge as it is written and learned; writing “through its inherent reinforcing cycle involving hand, eye, and brain marks a uniquely powerful multi-representational mode for learning” (Emig 1977, 125). Similarly, Murray (1984) framed words on paper as symbols of and for learning—allowing us “to play with information, to make

Freewriting in classrooms and its relationship to academic writing has been controversial since its beginnings.

connections and patterns, to put together and take apart and put together again, to see what experience means” (3).

Although the writing-to-learn movement advocates writing in all of its forms (National Writing Project 2005), it is, nevertheless, popularly associated with freewriting. Championed in the work of Belanoff et al. (2002), Elbow (1998a, 1998b, 2000), Fulwiler (1987a, 1987b), Goldberg (1986), Heard (1995), Macrorie (1980, 1984), and others—freewriting surfaced as a practice forefronting the right of women and men to record and/or generate their own ideas on paper (and today, across screens). That said, freewriting in classrooms and its relationship to academic writing has been controversial since its beginnings. One of its earliest critics, Hillocks (1986), dismissed freewriting as “doodling with language” (176). Others have associated it with an exercise full of false promises (Ackerman 1993), dubious groundings in pseudo-research (Smagorinsky 1987), and privileged, middle-class assumptions about the ways children learn (Delpit 1995).

Despite these criticisms, in our contexts we have used freewriting successfully as a way of helping young adult readers explore and make sense of complex texts. With Goldberg (1986), we have used freewriting for students’ “‘writing down the bones’—the essential, awake speech in their minds” (4). Belanoff, Elbow, and Fontaine (1991) call freewriting “what you get when you remove almost all of the normal constraints involved in writing” (xii). Macrorie (1991) compared the process to digging: “We find surprise, and a voice. Then we can revise it: sort the dross from the gold” (188). Recognizing that freewriting is sometimes generative and sometimes not much at all, Elbow (2000) recommended that freewriters “just write and keep writing” (61). Although freewriting suggests a suspension of

“rules,” below we outline three principles that teachers might consider when incorporating freewriting into the secondary literature curriculum.

1. FREEWITING ABOUT THE LITERATURE CURRICULUM IS STRATEGIC.

Freewriting with classroom texts is something that instructors can turn to strategically. Instructors can begin a class with freewriting; as students enter and settle, the process can create a space for reflection and focus on the learning to come. It can also be used to introduce a new reading, as a means for students to explore and articulate what they already know. For example, with the Spender poem, an initial freewriting task might simply start with three minutes of writing about the prompts “elementary school classroom” or “slum.” What comes to mind when we begin writing in response to such prompts? What associations do we make? What memories or lived experiences do the categories generate on paper?

We have found that the traditional emphasis on writing as a performance measure used mainly for assessment can lead learners away from writing practice. Sometimes their experiences with writing have habitually been fueled by anxiety and doubt. To have students begin freewriting, simply write a prompt on the board and set a timer for two or three minutes.

In freewriting about the Spender poem, we followed an initial reading of “An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum” with a series of vocabulary-building exercises, followed by freewriting using the prompt, “let their tongues/Run naked into books, the white and green leaves open.” As facilitators, we chose this particular prompt because of the vivid imagery and, frankly, because we ourselves were unsure of what it meant or what it could mean. Thus, freewriting in this case was a way

of picking up a dense piece of the text and examining it closely.

Freewriting can also be used as closure to reading—short reflections on what the poem came to mean after multiple readings and re-readings. Later that afternoon, for example, we returned to freewriting with the same prompt to tease out what we as readers had come to understand about the poem three hours later.

2. FREEWRITING ABOUT THE LITERATURE CURRICULUM IS SHORT AND EXPLORATORY.

Setting a time limit to freewriting is important—sort of like setting a goal of 50 meters for a sprinter. The idea is that the writers will give it their all for that brief 180 seconds—writing without stopping or “thinking about spelling, grammar, and mechanics; not worrying about how good the writing is—even whether it makes sense or is understandable (even to oneself)” (Elbow 2000, 85). When freewriting is too long (in terms of time), writers begin editing their work. This may lead students to overthink what they might want to say and potentially freeze up. Thus, whether freewriting is focused (with a prompt) or unfocused (without a prompt), it generally works better when the time allotted for the writing is under five minutes.

Although traditional writing strategies often emphasize students’ staying on topic, freewriting invites and celebrates digression. We have found that by letting go of the rules for a few minutes, even the most reticent writers can surprise themselves with a word or phrase in their freewriting that generates new meaning. In reflecting on freewriting as a practice, students have told us that it is liberating to write whatever comes to their minds and to realize that with the censors off, they can write. Brief and exploratory, freewriting has one elemental rule—not stopping, even if that means writing and rewriting a word or making nothing but circular motions. Or as Macrorie (1991) famously advised, if writers have nothing to

say, that “nothing” begins with “n.” That same letter is a starting point for words to follow. In other words, write “nothing, nothing, nothing” and see where “nothing” leads.

3. FREEWRITING ABOUT THE LITERATURE CURRICULUM INVOLVES TEACHERS AND STUDENTS.

It is important for teachers to engage in freewriting with their students as a way of modeling the process of meaning making we are advocating. That means that when the timer starts for a three-minute freewriting session, teachers should start writing too. It is even better if the teacher’s first attempt is clumsy or awkward. It is a way of modeling the difficulty of putting thoughts on paper—a challenge that even a teacher who knows a lot about writing still embraces. Having a teacher write with students sends a strong message that reading and writing are life-long processes. Moreover, engaging in writing with the whole class intently freeing their thoughts on paper makes the writing process exciting for students who see the results of short, exploratory, concentrated practice.

SHARING, RESPONDING, AND REWRITING ABOUT CLASSROOM TEXTS IN COMMUNITY

Writing to learn insists that writers not only produce texts for teachers and then receive a few scribbled comments in the margins and a grade. Rather, as Elbow and Belanoff (1989) have claimed, writing is better realized as an act of communication with others. Once students (and teachers) become comfortable with freewriting without the pressure of needing to produce a perfect text, the products of freewriting are useful to initiate discussion, generate ideas, and exchange perspectives. This can be done in small groups—or anonymously, by piling pages of freewriting in the center of the room and having each student pick one and read something from it that he or she finds relevant or interesting. This can also have the unintended effect of building confidence for the writer, as someone is selecting something interesting from his or her writing.

Sharing writing can also reinforce listening as an important component of learning and discussion.

Optimally, writing processes are realized with peers collaboratively engaged in writers' workshops or other participatory formats. Rather than grading students' freewriting individually, we suggest approaching writing for meaning as a communicative event that begins with an individual putting words on paper and follows in a helping/sharing circle format wherein writers (teachers included) share their words on paper aloud to a live audience. The read-aloud is both an oral publication and a starting point for more writing.

Elbow and Belanoff (1989) suggest a series of strategies for sharing and responding to writing. Three of these strategies that we have found particularly generative are (1) listening to and enjoying the freewriting of others, (2) pointing to energy spots, and (3) asking questions about what was almost said. We summarize these three strategies below with examples generated from the Spender poem.

Listening to and enjoying the freewriting of others

Listening to and enjoying the freewriting of others is simply having the writers read aloud what they have written in the preceding three minutes, to either a partner, a small group, or an entire class. For example, "let their tongues/Run naked into books, the white and green leaves open" generated for one participant a series of questions:

Writer #1: Does he mean that we should read books all the time? What kind of books? And when? How long? I am really confused [a line of scribbles]. Let the writer say whatever he feels; children cannot read books all the time. And by using the word "tongue" does he mean from page one to the end? It's all very confusing [another line of scribbles]. What about those kids who don't want to read books? Can we force them to read books so thoroughly? It's all absurd. The poet should be clearer.

For another participant, the same prompt brought questions but also childhood memories:

Writer #2: Let their tongues run naked into books. This is a strange image—a naked tongue—it makes me think of someone licking a book. When I was little we had scratch and sniff books. For example, there was one story about chocolate and you could scratch the image and it would smell like chocolate. I remember reading one of these. I must have been 8 years old. Children are hungry for books.

For another, the prompt took her in a different direction:

Writer #3: Let their tongues run naked into books. Let them be free in their thinking and let them explore the world themselves. Let them be independent. Let them be a free bird to fly wherever they like. Don't thrust anything on their simple minds. Don't overburden them with thought. Don't create doubts in their minds. Don't push them with anything. Let them go through the white and green pages.

Listening to these three very different responses, the audience is not required or even encouraged to respond to the writing. Rather, they simply listen and perhaps applaud at the conclusion of the reading.

Writers will sometimes begin their reading with a preamble—trying to explain their intent or apologizing for what is to come, and perhaps not reading what they have written but explaining what they were thinking. Insist that writers simply read—without explanations or apologies; the audience listens attentively. Reading our work aloud to someone in front of us—no matter how long we have worked on the piece or how many times we have read it silently to ourselves—brings out things that we had not noticed before: a misplaced word or an awkward sentence or another idea altogether. Likewise, the nonverbal responses that the

piece generates help us to gauge the effect of the freewriting on others and point to possible direction for revision. Even more, simply sharing is a way of affirming that writing is a communicative act, something that often gets lost in the classroom.

We recommend that teachers first ask participants to share their writing in small groups. Afterwards, the teacher might solicit a couple of volunteers to share with the larger class. Do not force anyone to share with the larger group. If students are reluctant to share, teachers can begin by sharing their own freewriting.

Pointing to energy spots

Pointing to energy spots is another adaptation of an Elbow and Belanoff (1989) strategy that we have found particularly generative early on in the freewriting process. At the end of two or three minutes of freewriting, read your work aloud and ask listeners to point out an especially strong word or phrase or image. Elbow and Belanoff (1989) clarify that what listeners identify as an “energy spot” within a freewriting passage might not be a main idea—or the gist of the writer’s intent. Rather, the word, phrase, or image is a moment in the reading that has the potential to generate more writing. Listeners can identify multiple energy spots, which could become new prompts for additional freewriting. The initial freewriting examples on “let their tongues/Run naked into books, the white and green leaves open” generated points of energy that prompted two more minutes of freewriting.

For Writer #1, the energy spot “Can we force them to read books so thoroughly?” generated:

Why should students be asked to read? Students should read because that is how they are going to become human in the real sense. A well-read human being can have many advantages in life. He/She will be able to negotiate his/her way through the difficulties of life. Of course, there are the basic advantages of reading. You become literate, you get a good job and earn a lot of money. But beyond these,

it is also the elevation of a person to a level where he/she can relate to the complexities of life.

For Writer #2, the energy spot “Children are hungry for books” generated:

Devour. I’m not sure if I can remember devouring a book but I do remember devouring the internet back in 1995. It was completely new for me and I would travel to visit my sister on the weekends and spend hours surfing the internet—it’s a hunger I have for news, for images, for mail. Let their tongues run naked into books.

For Writer #3, the energy spot “Let them be independent” generated:

Learning is generally initiated by the teacher in the classroom. The books are said to be the tools for learning. For once, let the child have it as a tool in his hand so that he can carve his own worldview [line of scribbling].

Asking questions about what was almost said

Here, participants listen to a peer read from a short freewriting passage to describe what is “almost said” or what they want to hear more about. Again, this generative sharing/responding strategy is intended to help a writer who has just begun putting words on paper to identify another starting point for writing by hearing what an audience wants to know more about.

Peer feedback about what the audience wants more of can help the writer to clarify his or her thinking and writing. In the case of previous prompts, responses included requests for clarification and examples, along with questions: “What does it mean to be a real human?”; “Why do you think you devour the Internet and not books?”; “What do you mean by ‘tool for learning’?” Writers are not compelled to answer the questions immediately. Rather, the questions are starting points for more writing.

In each of the three adapted Elbow and Belanoff (1989) strategies we have presented

here, writing is followed by reading, which is followed by more writing and talking about the writing and the text at hand. That is to say, after a round of sharing and response, students and teachers take up the writing once more for another three to five minutes. We have found the combination of freewriting and sharing/responding to be a powerful way of building adolescents' engagement in reading complex texts and their confidence in making meaning of and connections to literature. Reading combined with freewriting emphasizes teasing out an idea on paper—seeing it from different points of view and engaging through our lived experiences with an issue or text or an idea. Such writing, we argue, is exponentially more meaningful when it is shared with peers in an open and collegial forum.

FREEWITING AND ASSESSMENT

As with most writing activities, freewriting about texts and sharing and responding to such freewriting takes practice. At first, students might fall into the trap of framing sharing and responding as an “assessment”—trying, like many teachers, to identify the mistakes or correct the errors within a composition. However, the idea of sharing and responding and rewriting is to recast writing as an exploratory, shared process. In the same way that the construct of “rules” pushes against the spirit of freewriting, so too does the notion of assessment. For this reason, as opposed to grading freewriting, we encourage teachers to frame freewriting activities as spaces where learners are encouraged to read, write, and think deeply about the thoughts, images, and emotions contained therein. At the same time, secondary readers and writers can also benefit from focused, individual feedback from teachers. In large classes, however, the sheer number of writers and the potential number of pages of freewriting each writer might generate during an academic quarter or semester make it impossible for teachers to commit to providing feedback each time to everyone.

What we suggest is to have students submit periodically a single piece of freewriting that has been shared aloud to the class, elaborated

on, and expanded based on peer feedback. This might happen once a quarter or semester—with each student selecting a particularly generative freewriting passage for a teacher's focused feedback that combines a narrative response to the student's writing (e.g., “What I like most about this freewriting is *x*” or “The image of *y* and the description of *z* make me think about 1, 2, and 3”) and a simple grade of complete/incomplete. In assessing freewriting, we want to consider the process rather than the product of writing, so assigning a letter grade or a percentage may be counterproductive. Alternative strategies for assessment might include the compilation of a freewriting journal where students collect significant freewriting passages across an academic year, prefaced by a reflective introduction. Again, in terms of feedback, we recommend that teachers respond in narrative format, talking about the ideas and the writing—its strengths, its imagery, and its limitations—without the burden of a grading scale. In other words, we recommend that teachers, instead of simply assessing freewriting, respond to the thinking aloud on paper.

CONCLUSION: THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS OF THREE MINUTES

We began this article with a brief overview of freewriting—its origins in English Education as well as contemporary discussions about the potential benefits of “writing down the bones” as a springboard for textual analysis. Drawing from the tradition of writing-to-learn literature, we outlined broad principles for operationalizing freewriting with a literature curriculum followed by a set of strategies for sharing and responding to freewriting in ways that elevate it as a generative communicative activity for building context and making connections with the literature curriculum.

Interacting with the literature curriculum at the secondary level is a complex process that requires an understanding of the basics. However, an underemphasized “basic” is that engaging with the literature curriculum is an act of connecting. What we also know for sure is that freewriting in the English language classroom reframes interaction with the

literature curriculum as an exploratory, open-ended, communicative act of thinking aloud on paper and then sharing and responding to that thinking with others.

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Using Concept Mapping to Teach Young EFL Learners Reading Skills

Many English as a foreign language (EFL) students fail to be effective readers because they lack knowledge of vocabulary and appropriate reading strategies. We believe that teaching proper reading strategies can help second-language learners overcome their reading problems, especially when the instruction begins in elementary school. Effective reading strategies “provide the means to tackle complex problems in more efficient ways” and allow students to build a “path to comprehension” (McNamara 2009, 34).

One effective strategy is *concept mapping*, which is the use of visual tools to help readers understand material by transferring “the written content into concrete images” (Liu, Chen, and Chang 2010, 442). Through concept-mapping activities, learners connect previously learned and newly learned ideas onto a visual representation, or “map.” Research shows that concept maps have positive effects on children’s language skills; for example, Liu et al. (2011) describe how concept mapping “prompts learners to reflect to construct meaning based on their observations and knowledge,” thereby helping “students develop and apply the knowledge about storytelling” (873). In this article, we describe two reading lessons that use concept mapping to produce beneficial effects for elementary school students.

BACKGROUND

Concept mapping is related to the pedagogical theory of *constructivism*, which asserts that productive learning occurs when students

create meaning on their own by connecting previous knowledge and experience with newly formed knowledge and experience. According to Kalhor and Shakibaei (2012), concept mapping (1) helps students understand the framework of the subject being taught; (2) clarifies the relationships and connections among all instructional content; (3) reinforces knowledge retention; and (4) enhances an instructor’s teaching objectives. Anderson (1991) stresses the importance of describing reading strategies for students (e.g., visualization and applying background knowledge and experience) and of showing learners how to use them. Therefore, when it comes to teaching EFL reading, it is crucial for a teacher to act as facilitator to help learners construct their own meaning as they apply their current knowledge to new ideas.

TWO CONCEPT-MAPPING LESSONS

The following two lessons are geared toward EFL elementary school children with basic

English language proficiency—at least two years of experience in learning English. We paired up students in advance, and each student remained with the same partner throughout both lessons. Teachers who would like to adapt our lesson plans can make adjustments to suit the level and makeup of their classes.

Concept-mapping Lesson One

The objective of this lesson is to teach students to organize their ideas by drawing their own concept maps based on a story they are already familiar with. To this end, we chose a picture book called *Frozen* (Scollon 2013) because the story is popular and the plot is easy for elementary school students to understand. For this lesson, teachers will need the picture book and a copy of the movie. For teachers and students who do not have access to the picture book and movie, a video book is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=WIB2IRxAuLO. Teachers will also need copies of the pre-made concept map chart (see the Appendix), a pencil and an eraser for each student, and two pieces of paper and a set of colored pencils for each student pair.

Procedure

1. Show the movie *Frozen*, which is dubbed in the students' first language and contains English subtitles. (An option is to show the original movie in English, with subtitles in the students' first language.) We strongly suggest that teachers allow students to watch the movie a few times and follow with a discussion until students are familiar with the story. Continue the lesson by showing the picture book of *Frozen* to the students and then ask individual students to narrate the story following the actual sequential order of the events.
2. Introduce the idea of the concept map by showing the students the pre-made concept map in the Appendix. Include the four major story-element categories: (1) characters, (2) settings, (3) events, and (4) time order. Explain the meaning of each category so that the students understand what to fill in. Facilitate as the students fill in the significant elements that relate to the story.
3. Have students work in pairs to draw their own concept maps; encourage them to be creative. For example, instead of drawing a traditional concept map as in the example, students can draw a character of their own choice from the story to be used as the topic frame. Many students in our class chose Olaf, the talking snowman in the story, as he is most students' favorite character. For example, one student drew four Olafs with four different poses, and the students recorded their ideas on the Olaf heads and bodies. The heads consisted of four major categories, and the bodies were filled in with the related details. This activity promotes creativity and learner autonomy because students design concept maps according to their own preferences.
4. Have the students rewrite their own versions of the story on their concept maps, adding any characters or events they create themselves. Students employ creativity when they produce a version of a story written by others; they are excited about writing their own versions, as it gives them a sense of ownership. Next, the students color the concept maps and the characters they drew. While the students create their own stories, emphasize that all the events must be recorded in proper time order; ensure that the chronological order of the events arranged by the students reflects logical progression rather than random ordering.
5. This step serves as an assessment stage. Collect and record the ideas from Step 4 and invite students to share their opinions with the class about how they organized the events in the stories. If the students' events do not represent proper time sequence, show them how to connect their ideas by recording the events step-by-step on the concept maps they created on their own in Step 4.

6. Give students time to work in pairs again to discuss the differences between others' work and their own. Point out how each event developed and note whether the events were arranged in proper time order.
7. Ask each pair the following questions and give pairs opportunities to answer:
 - Did you find any differences between others' concept maps and your own?
 - Why did you make your concept map like this [*Event A* first, then *Event B*] instead of like this [*Event B* first, then *Event A*]?
 - Please explain why you wanted to present your story in this way.

In this step, students explain orally to the class, or to other pairs, why certain events happen before or after other events in the stories they created. The purpose is to allow them to explain or justify the time-order arrangement in their stories; this step also allows the teacher to assess students' ability to arrange story events in logical order. For example, students might explain, "In our story, at the beginning we put Johnny in the house instead of at school. The reason is that we wanted him to meet the stray dog on his way to school."

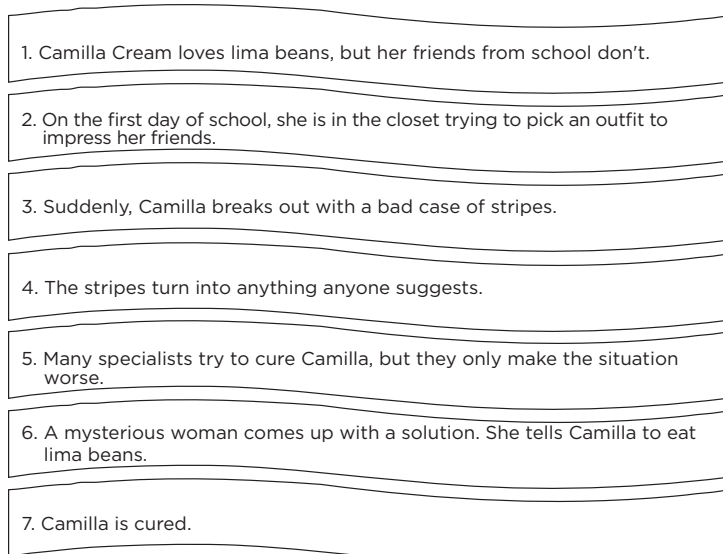


Figure 1. Key events in *A Bad Case of Stripes*

Concept-mapping Lesson Two

The objectives of this lesson are to promote students' ability to use their vocabulary in various contexts and to make predictions and inferences using concept maps.

For our class, we used a picture book titled *A Bad Case of Stripes* (Shannon, Casserly, and Ingemi 2006). This book has been published in many countries. For teachers and students who do not have access to the picture book, the video book is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=6MeRu0uK2Ms. The story describes Camilla Cream, a girl who agonizes about other people's opinion of her and anxiously tries to please everyone. She goes to great lengths to impress her friends, even to the point of giving up eating lima beans, her favorite food. We chose this book because there are many elements in the story that support making predictions and inferences.

In addition to the storybook, the materials needed for the lesson are a pencil and eraser and several pieces of paper for each student; a pre-made chart showing key events in the story (Figure 1); copies of a concept map for making predictions (Figure 2); and copies of a concept map for making inferences (Figure 3).

Procedure

1. Explain to the students that in this lesson they will learn new vocabulary and reading skills for making predictions and inferences. Key vocabulary terms include *stripes*, *afraid*, *disaster*, *embarrassed*, *worst*, and *lima beans*. Teach the vocabulary by using concept maps. For example, place the word *afraid* in large print in a circle in the center of the concept map, with lines extending to four squares on the page. Ask students to think of four scenarios they associate with being afraid and to draw a picture of each scenario in one of the squares. Then ask them to write other words that are related to the word *afraid* next to the pictures they drew on the concept map. The purpose is to help students learn to use *afraid*

appropriately in different contexts. Teachers can use a similar concept map to teach other vocabulary, or they can create their own concept maps if necessary.

2. To encourage the students to make predictions, do not pass out copies of the storybook at this stage. Instead, read the first two pages of the story and then ask the class to predict how the story will continue. Next, read the third and fourth pages and discuss the differences between their predictions and what actually took place in the story. Do the same for several pages—the students make predictions, read more of the story, and discuss—until the students are comfortable with making predictions.
3. Stop reading at a pre-selected page of the story and have students work with their partners and jot down their predictions for what remains. Students record their

Instructions:

Record your predictions of the story in the blank boxes. You may draw pictures or write a few words to record your predictions. You may also ask for more copies of this sheet if you need to add events to your prediction.

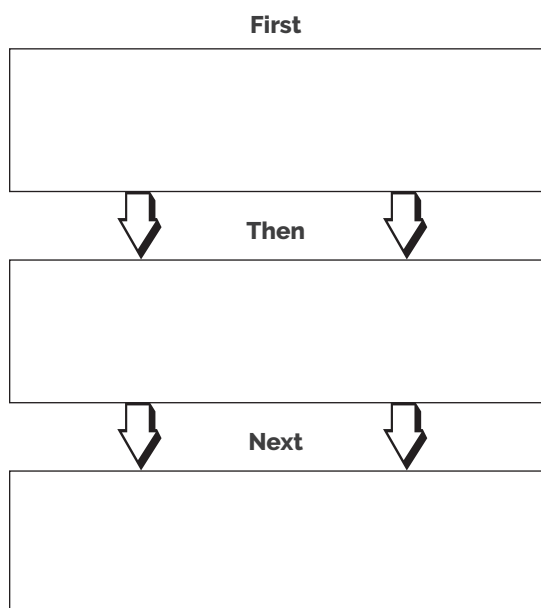


Figure 2. Concept map for making predictions

predictions on a concept map they create themselves or on one provided for them. (See Figure 2.)

4. Give students copies of the story and ask them to read it silently on their own and at their own pace. Give students enough time to process and comprehend the story individually before they join their partners for further discussion.
5. Show the student pairs a chart created in advance (Figure 1) to illustrate the chronological order of the events that take place in the book. Explain that there is no finite number of events in the story because some readers may add events that were not included on the list, while other readers may exclude events on the list. Tell students that what is important is not the total number of the events but whether their predictions are presented in proper time sequence. Students then discuss the differences between their own predictions and what actually happens in the book.
6. Invite the students to share their predictions and justify their answers with the class. In the meantime, the teacher assesses whether the students were able to make predictions effectively.
7. Teach skills in making inferences. Explain that sometimes messages in a story are not told directly or explicitly to the readers. However, we can discover indirect messages if we pay close attention to the hints in the story. Ask students to fill out a generic concept map for making inferences (Figure 3). This concept map consists of two sections: “What I Read” and “What I Found Out.”
8. Demonstrate how to record information in the “What I Read” section by pointing out a few main ideas in the book. For example, to model this task to the young learners in our class, we recorded a main idea from the text on the book’s

What I Read

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



What I Found Out

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Figure 3. Concept map for making inferences

first page by writing “Loved lima beans ... didn’t eat them.” Then we asked our students questions such as, “Why didn’t Camilla eat lima beans even though she loved them?” We invited the students to give reasons that were not stated explicitly in the story. If a student’s reason is “All of her friends hated lima beans,” we would respond, “You are right. That reason is stated in the book. Can you guess why it matters to her whether her friends like or hate lima beans?” If the student’s response is “Because she wants her friends to like her,” “She likes to please her friends,” or “She wants to make more friends,” we would respond, “Yes. Although the sentences on Page 1 do not tell us directly what you just said, your reason is probably right. It seems that Camilla didn’t want to do things her friends hated.” We then recorded the students’ inferences in the “What I Found Out” section on the concept map.

9. Ask the students to practice this activity in pairs. Each student takes notes and writes inferences on the concept map

for making inferences and then, with partners, students explain what they wrote in each section.

10. In Step 8, examples were given to demonstrate how to record on the “What I Read” and “What I Found Out” sections. Step 10 provides more opportunities for practice by sharing the student-generated examples with the class. For example, when one of our students wrote in the “What I Read” section, “Camilla loves lima beans, but she never ate them because her friends hate lima beans,” we encouraged the student to explain what kind of person Camilla is. We said that the author never tells us directly what type of person Camilla is. She might be shy, for example, or she might be unfriendly, or students might have other ideas. We encourage them to find out about Camilla’s personality by paying close attention to the details the author gives us in the book. The most common response we receive is “lonely.” We then record the students’ responses in the “What I Found Out” section. Practice this step by using several examples created by the students in the “What I Read” section to help them fill out the “What I Found Out” section until they are comfortable working in pairs independently.

11. Assess the students’ reading comprehension and skills in making inferences by asking two open-ended inferential questions based on the story:

- Why is Camilla so eager to fit in with her classmates?
- Do you think Camilla’s classmates are her true friends? Why or why not?

ADAPTING CONCEPT-MAPPING LESSONS

Throughout the process, it is important for the teacher to make necessary adjustments to the activities based on each student’s unique

learning needs, language proficiency level, and progress. For example, if students cannot spell certain words or express their thoughts in sentences while filling out the concept maps, they may be allowed to draw pictures to express their thoughts. If a student is not able to write a full sentence due to a lack of language proficiency, a few key words or short phrases should be acceptable.

Concept maps are an effective teaching tool, and the ones included in this article can be adapted for many types of reading lessons. Stories offer a multitude of additional concept-map possibilities for lessons, such as the reading questions and tasks below:

- What are some of the main ideas in the story? Please create concept maps to express your ideas.
- What are the details that support each main idea in the story? Please create concept maps to express your ideas.

Finally, when selecting stories for young EFL learners, teachers should ensure that the stories (1) have a clear chronological order to help young learners follow the storylines without getting confused; (2) have easy-to-understand plots so that the students can find the important characters, settings, and events from the stories and record them on the concept maps; and (3) allow young learners to relate the stories to their daily-life experiences. This is especially important when one objective of a lesson is to teach the students how to make inferences. When young learners can more easily activate resources from their own background knowledge, they will be more confident and capable of analyzing texts and making inferences based on what they read.

CONCLUSION

When we taught the two lessons described in this article, we observed our young readers learn to visualize their thoughts and organize their ideas by using concept maps we created for them and those they developed

on their own. Throughout the activities, they reinforced knowledge they had learned previously and discovered links between ideas. In the process, they also showed their confidence and competence in making predictions and inferences. We hope that other teachers who incorporate concept-mapping activities into their lessons will experience similar success.

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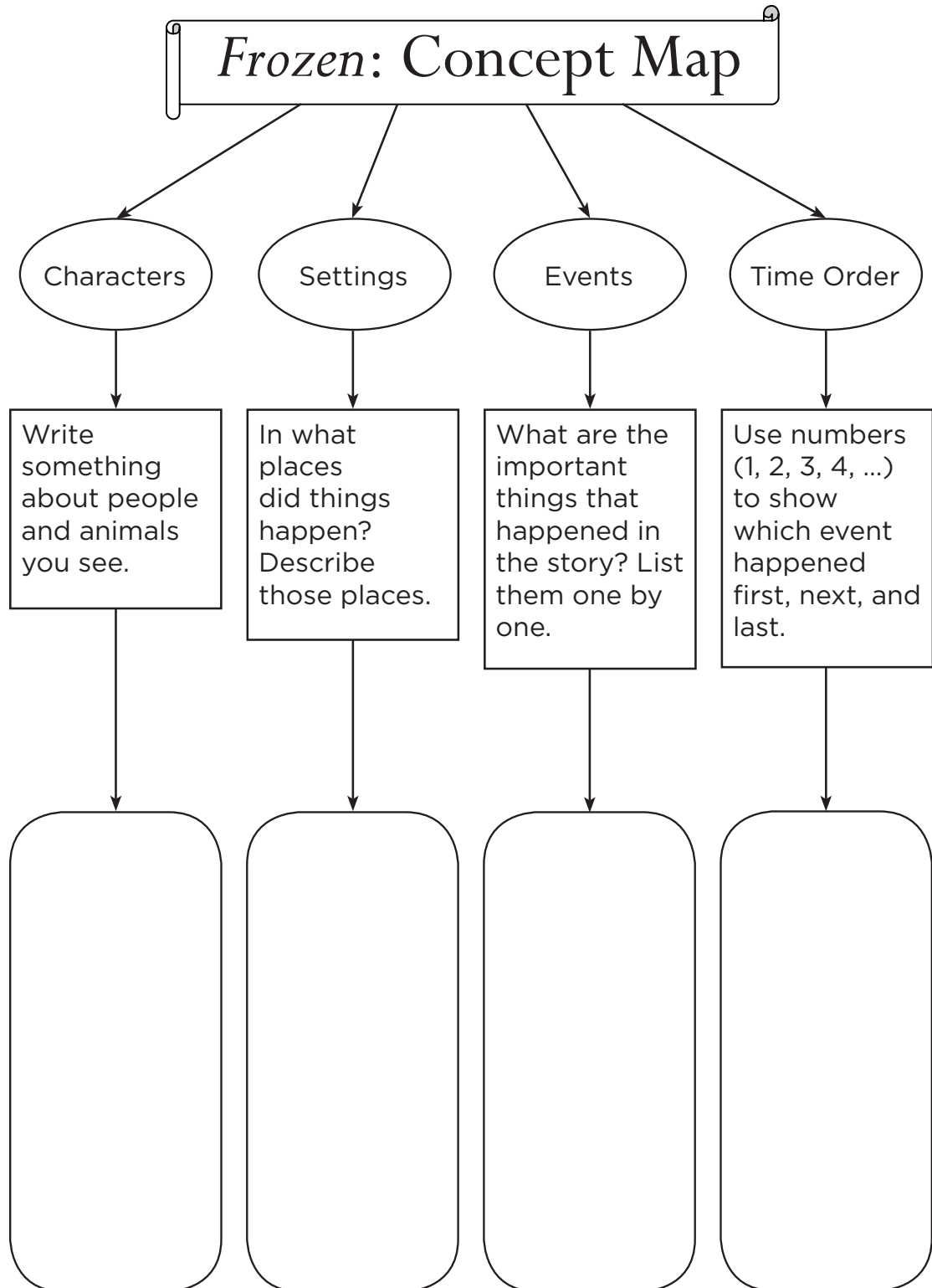
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APPENDIX

Pre-Made Chart for *Frozen*



This guide is designed to enrich your reading of the articles in this issue. You may choose to read them on your own, taking notes or jotting down answers to the discussion questions below. Or you may use the guide to explore the articles with colleagues.

For example, many teachers discuss *Forum* at regularly scheduled meetings with department colleagues and members of teachers' groups, or in teacher-training courses and workshops. Often, teachers choose an article for their group to read before the meeting or class, then discuss that article when they meet. Teachers have found it helpful to take notes on articles or write a response to an article and bring that response to share in a discussion group. Another idea is for teachers to try a selected activity or technique described in one of the articles, then report back to the group on their experiences and discuss positives, negatives, and possible adaptations for their teaching context.

Listening Journals for Extensive and Intensive Listening Practice (Pages 2–11)

Pre-Reading

- 1.** How did you learn to listen in English or in another language you learned? How successful were you in building your listening skills?
- 2.** How do you teach students to listen in your classes now? Would you like to improve the way you teach listening? Why or why not? What improvements would you like to make?

Post-Reading

- 1.** What is the difference between intensive and extensive listening?
- 2.** What is the difference between teaching listening and testing listening? Which one are you doing right now in your classes?
- 3.** What are some good sources of listening selections for your students? Make a list.
- 4.** Suppose you want to make a Listening Journal activity for your whole class. Find a listening selection that would work for your students. Then create the activities students will complete. Make a chart like the one in Table 1 or Table 2, depending on the level and learning needs of your students.

Using Freewriting to Make Sense of Literature (Pages 12–19)

Pre-Reading

1. What do you know about freewriting? What is your opinion of freewriting as a technique in the classroom?
2. Have you used freewriting exercises with your students? If so, what was the purpose? Were you satisfied with the results? If you haven't used freewriting, what has kept you from doing so?
3. What techniques do you use to help your students engage with and make sense of the texts they read in your classes?

Post-Reading

1. Choose a text that you use in one of your classes. What freewriting prompts could you give to your students to help them explore the text?
2. The authors point out that “we do not propose freewriting in and of itself as a

substitute for local, regional, and national traditions that the literature curriculum carries with it” (pages 12–13). What traditions are associated with the literature curriculum in your context? How could you productively integrate freewriting into your teaching within those traditions?

3. How do you feel about freewriting along with your students? Would you be willing to share part of your freewriting passage with them? What advantages (and possibly disadvantages) do you see to sharing your writing and thinking in this way?
4. What do you feel are the strengths of the freewriting approach described in the article? If you feel there are challenges to this approach or elements that you would feel uncomfortable incorporating in your context, what adaptations or alternatives can you think of?

Using Concept Mapping to Teach Young EFL Learners Reading Skills (Pages 20–26)

Pre-Reading

1. Have you used concept maps with your students? For what purposes did you use them? What were the results?
2. What techniques do you use to help your students learn vocabulary terms? What techniques do you use to help students place story events in chronological order? What techniques do you use to help students make inferences?
3. Do you ask your students to make predictions before they read a story or book for the first time? Why or why not? Do *you* make predictions when you read novels or stories?

Post-Reading

1. Which stories or books that your students read would work best with these concept maps? Why? Which stories or books would not work as well with these concept maps? Why?

2. The concept maps described in this article were created for use with young learners. If you teach older or more advanced learners, how could you adapt these concept maps to use them in your classes?
3. Choose a story that you use with your students. Fill in a set of concept maps for the story. If a colleague also teaches the same story, have the colleague complete concept maps for the story. Compare your concept maps and discuss similarities and differences. When you have students complete concept maps for the story, compare your concept maps to theirs. How are they similar and different? What are some reasons for the differences? And—how does filling in the concept maps yourself affect the way you present the concept maps to your students and the way you react to and evaluate theirs?

Audiovisual Feedback in EFL/ESL Writing Classes

by WILLIAM J. WOODARD



As an English teacher preparing students for university-level work in academic English, I have spent many hours poring over essays, red pen in hand. The process of reading and correcting was always time-intensive and grueling, and the results were usually as disheartening for me as they were discouraging for the emerging writers who composed the essays. Not only that, but the

same problems would reappear later, the whole demoralizing process repeated through the draft, feedback, and revision process, assignment after assignment.

In my search for a better way, I have tried most of the standard techniques to give effective feedback to my students while decreasing the amount of time spent writing

such feedback. Whether handwritten or submitted electronically, the waves of essays kept coming, multiplied by regular increases in class size, and I sought any technique or innovation that would allow me to fit my family life into the troughs between the peaks. I used rubrics and handouts of abbreviations and proofreading symbols, some standard, some of my own invention. I created an array of Microsoft Word macros that I could access with the press of a key to insert such feedback as “This is a comma splice. A comma splice is when you connect two independent clauses using a comma, and it can be corrected in several ways. See page XX in your textbook for further information.” Finally, I went minimalist and only circled or highlighted areas that needed attention, requiring students to visit me during office hours or consult with me during class time when they couldn’t figure out their errors. Usually though, if students couldn’t correct their mistakes on their own or by asking me in class, they would take a random stab at correcting their mistakes, not having the time or desire to make a special trip to visit me during office hours for an explanation. However, during the moments I spent with the few who did come to visit me for face-to-face feedback, I felt like I made the biggest impact, and both the quantity of the feedback and the quality of the experience were incomparably superior to those of any written feedback I had ever given. Not only that, but I was able to deliver better feedback in much less time than it would have taken to write it. I wished that there were a way to deliver that experience to all my students. That’s when I discovered Jing.

Jing is a free application for PCs and Macs by TechSmith, a company that specializes in screen capture. Jing sits quietly on the edge of your laptop screen or desktop monitor—a small yellow half-sun—until you need it. At that point, you click on it and, using your cursor, select the portion of the screen you wish to record (it can include the entire screen). You then choose to take a screenshot or record a video. Choosing the video option prompts a three-second countdown and notification

that your microphone is on; after those three seconds, Jing records everything you do in the area you selected on screen, as well as your voice. Once you are done, you click the stop button, and Jing offers you the choice of saving your screen-capture video to your computer or uploading it to Screencast.com, TechSmith’s free storage site, from which it can be shared with others.

My introduction to Jing was through a colleague who used it to produce helpful how-to videos for friends and family who were not as tech-savvy as she (e.g., how to upload and share files, how to mail merge in Microsoft Word, etc.). Jing is a great tool for such situations because you are able to show rather than tell others how to do something much more clearly and in much less time than you could if you were, say, writing an email description of the process under consideration. Imagine a colleague asking you by email how to share a Google Drive folder with students and create a Google Doc inside the shared folder. Although not an inherently complicated task, it would take quite a bit of writing to explain, and even if you could communicate by phone and coordinate the explanation while simultaneously viewing your individual computer screens, mistakes could still be made (no two browsers seem to work exactly alike). With a screen-capture app like Jing, such worries fall by the wayside. Jing videos have the advantages of being clear and exact, and they can be viewed as many times as necessary and at a time convenient to the viewer.

After getting to know how Jing worked, I was ready to give it a spin as a vehicle for delivering audiovisual feedback to students. I chose a student essay at random, clicked on Jing, and within five minutes I had gone over the entire five-paragraph essay (and had discussed numerous grammatical and vocabulary errors) and uploaded the resultant video to Screencast.com. The same amount of feedback in written form would have taken at least 30 minutes, maybe more. Was Jing the answer to my prayers? It was time to try it out with my students.

In my lower-intermediate academic writing and grammar class, we concentrate on developing paragraphs. We go over paragraph types, topic sentences, supporting sentences, and conclusions, in addition to concentrating on the grammatical and syntactical elements necessary to developing complex sentence structure. This class is a lead-in to the next level of writing classes, in which we expand paragraphs into essays. I chose this paragraph-level writing class to carry out my semester-long experiment in audiovisual feedback. First, I had my students create shared Google Drive folders with me and had them write their paragraphs as Google Docs. This gave students an easy way to turn in their paragraphs and made it simple for me to attach feedback to their work. For each document turned in, I went through the screen-capture-video steps outlined above. Jing does not allow videos longer than five minutes, and I was usually able to stay within the limits and give a complete review of the paragraph.

It was helpful for me to begin by giving the paragraph a quick read so that I had an idea of the types of problems I would be discussing in the feedback. In a few cases, I jotted down a word or phrase to remind myself of something particularly important that I would need to point out in the feedback, but I found that this step became less necessary with practice. On occasion, I needed to pause the recording to formulate my thoughts or rehearse my comments before speaking; I simply clicked on the pause button and later resumed the recording with another click. The pause feature was also helpful when I was interrupted because it allowed me to pick up where I had left off.

After finishing the recording, I chose to have Jing upload the audiovisual capture to Screencast.com, where I was given three options: (1) make the video public; (2) make the video available only to those with the link (which includes a complex string of random characters for extra security); or (3) protect the video with a password. I chose the second option because it is both secure

and convenient. In Screencast.com, I clicked on the video and copied the secure hyperlink. Then I went to the Google Doc that I had open in another browser tab and pasted the link into it by highlighting the word *here* in a sentence at the bottom of the page and inserting the hyperlink: “To see and hear your instructor’s comments, click *here*.” Once I became accustomed to the procedure, it took only about 30 seconds to complete.

The reaction of the students to the audiovisual feedback was universally positive. Not only did they get a clear explanation of the areas in their paragraphs that needed work, they got the added dividend of being able to practice listening to English in a meaning-rich context. Many students said that they watched and listened to the videos several times while working on their corrections. I was not surprised when I got my students’ course evaluations and many of them mentioned how much they liked the audiovisual feedback.

The next semester, I tried audiovisual feedback in my essay-writing class, and it was equally successful. In that class, we focused on developing and writing five-paragraph essays and using proper citation techniques. Again, five minutes was usually enough time to devote to audiovisual feedback, given that the students had had time in class and at home to work on their essays and ask me questions before turning them in. However, on occasion I ran up against the five-minute limit, especially when I was reading the first drafts by some of the lower-level writers and when we were working on research and citation; many students were unfamiliar with citation techniques, and errors were common. In those situations, I focused on only certain aspects of the essays, such as structure, development, grammatical and syntactical errors, or citation. TechSmith does offer other, more robust, tools (such as Snagit and Camtasia) that allow for longer videos and a variety of formats (Jing videos are in flash format); however, I found that the five-minute limit suited me well because it forced me to focus my comments concisely, another factor in reducing the time I spent giving feedback

on student work. I estimate that I reduced the amount of time I spent on correction and feedback by more than half. I even used Jing with handwritten assignments; I simply scanned the students' papers (using a portable scanner or a scanner app on my smartphone) and had them automatically converted and uploaded as PDF documents to my Google Drive before I "Jinged" them.

Having used Jing to provide audiovisual feedback to my writing students for about two years now, I am more than satisfied with the results. The advantages to audiovisual feedback are that it allows for more feedback of a higher quality, reduces the amount of time spent on grading and feedback, and provides an opportunity for students to practice listening. In addition, it can be used asynchronously, freeing students and instructors from the time constraints of office hours and appointments. The Jing application is free and secure, and it can

be used in traditional, hybrid, and online settings. The potential disadvantages are that it requires reliable Internet and computer access, things that are not available in all English as a foreign or second language settings. However, the technology necessary for using applications such as Jing is available in many places and is spreading rapidly. I recently delivered a presentation on Jing and other web-based applications to teachers in Santiago, Chile. The audience included teachers from public schools and from private schools and universities. They all said that it would be possible to use Jing with most, if not all, of their students, and they were intrigued by the benefits it offers.

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Using the Power of Language to Foster Community

by CHRISTA BIXBY



The process of learning a second language requires vulnerability, and vulnerability demands trust. To put students into a language-learning environment where they are unsure of their abilities, do not know their classmates, and are getting a grade for their performance can lead to an atmosphere of hesitation and fear. It has been said that “words are the voice of the heart” (Confucius), and to ask our students to allow others to see their inner thoughts and heart is a hefty request and one that should be approached delicately and with intentionality.

One way to create a safe environment for sharing, collaborating, and vulnerability is to foster an authentic community within the English as a second language (ESL) classroom. This does not need to be something we must add to our list of things to do but rather something that, with a bit of thoughtfulness

in our planning, can be cultivated through the practice of the English language.

I have used a lesson on adjectives to promote a sense of community while reinforcing the ability of students to use adjectives authentically. This activity can be adapted for use with adults and children alike. This particular lesson was done in Los Angeles, California, with an adult group of beginning, intermediate, and advanced ESL learners from diverse backgrounds and nationalities. I taught a standard lesson on adjectives with presentation, practice, and production phases. However, in the production phase, I tweaked the activity to give my students the chance to use language to empower one another. I spoke to my students about the power of language and how easily it can be used to either build up or tear down others. Furthermore, we discussed how we are all one community

working towards the same goal, albeit with our own individual struggles, and how as a class we need to encourage one another in the process.

I had the class get into a large circle and allowed the students to go get the food and drinks I brought in (hoping to create a more relaxed atmosphere). After we were all sitting, I started with the student sitting to my left, and I asked each student to describe him, using adjectives to say what he or she appreciated or liked about that student. Students could think of their own adjectives or use ones on an adjective list we had created earlier in the lesson. Every individual in the circle had a chance to speak. We did this with every student. Students used adjective lists they had created to search for the perfect words to describe their peers and even took the initiative to write down adjectives they heard classmates using. This activity became deeply personal and relevant; language became a medium of meaning as students were enthralled and engaged while describing their admiration for one another and listening to how others perceived them. It is rare that we stop to verbalize how much we appreciate those around us, and it is easy to allow doubts to fill our minds when we wonder how we are perceived by others. Through the use of adjectives, students were able to silence some of those doubts and use language to make an immediate difference in the lives of those around them.

THE ACTIVITY

Time: 1½ to 2 hours (including introductions of adjectives, pre-activity, and activity)

Preparation

1. Discuss with students how to use adjectives to describe people and their personalities.
2. Show how to use adjectives grammatically (either after a linking verb or before a noun).
3. Have students get into pairs.

4. Give each pair a worksheet with adjectives that can be used to describe persons; the adjectives can be scattered randomly across the top of the page. (See the Appendix for example adjective lists.) Teachers unable to photocopy worksheets can write adjectives in random order on the board.
5. Have students in pairs sort the adjectives into columns (Positive, Negative, or Both) in their notebooks. Allow students to use their phones or dictionaries if they do not recognize a particular word.
6. As a class and on the board, create lists of positive and negative adjectives. For more advanced learners, discuss connotations of each word as well as synonyms that could be used. Identify each word as formal or informal, as appropriate. With advanced learners, you can also discuss how the same adjective could be positive in one context and negative in another, depending upon the intention of the speaker.

Procedure

1. Use the separation of positive and negative personality adjectives listed on the board to begin the discussion on the power of language. Have a discussion about how important using language to empower one another is and how much of a difference it can make.
2. Have the students arrange their chairs into a large circle. (If you have brought food, invite students to go and help themselves to food before you begin the activity.)
3. Once everyone is sitting, tell students they are going to have the chance to use the adjectives they just learned to encourage their classmates. Explain the directions: They will start with the student on your left (e.g., John); every person in the circle will say one thing he or she likes about John.

4. Ask the student sitting to the left of John to begin. Allow each student in the circle to comment on John. Help the flow of who is next by using hand gestures, not your voice. (Do not correct grammatical mistakes; let students speak freely and focus on meaning.)

Make sure you participate in this encouragement circle. Tell your students authentically what you appreciate about them.

5. After the circle is completed, discuss with students how they can empower themselves through language. Explain to the class why you value them as a collective whole. Remind them that they all have the power to use language to make a positive difference.

VARIATIONS

If bringing food into the classroom is not possible, consider creating a more comfortable, inviting setting by meeting outdoors or in a different room, or simply by adding a decorative touch to the classroom. (It is always a good idea to check with the administration or management before bringing in food or changing classrooms.)

To have students practice writing instead of speaking, create a card for each student, writing the student's name at the top of the card. Instead of speaking in the circle, students pass the cards around the circle and write one positive adjective on each card for each person in the class.

To include practice of both the negative and positive adjectives learned, you can pre-teach that the use of *never* before a negative adjective can produce a positive meaning. For example, "You are never stubborn." Students can use this formation when they describe others during the circle activity.

CONSIDERATIONS

This activity can be used for a variety of levels and environments. However, before implementing the activity, consider: What is

the objective of my class? (This type of activity might not be suitable for a Business English or English for Nursing course, for example.) What time is best to incorporate this type of communicative technique? (Is there a big test coming up? Would it cause students stress to not be doing more academically focused work? Choose a time when students have a relatively low level of stress and can fully participate in the activity without being distracted.) How large is my class? (If you have a large class, consider dividing the students into groups to maximize the amount of speaking per student.)

CONCLUSION

This activity built trust, inspired depth of thought, broke down barriers, and created an environment of appreciation and encouragement in my classroom. A crucial element I wish to reiterate is that this activity was not one that was done simply to build community; it had a language focus. It was a simple lesson on adjectives, and yet it was transformational. I continued to incorporate activities like this in my classes throughout the year, but this one activity in particular was the start of a welcome change from being a *class* to becoming a *community*.

I became a teacher because I believe wholeheartedly in empowerment, and I believe empowerment comes through not only intellectual development but personal development as well. I hope incorporating activities like this one taps into the hearts of students, as they are valued for not only what they can do, but who they are.

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APPENDIX

Example Lists of Adjectives

Teacher's Copy

Teachers can choose the adjectives they would like their students to learn and use throughout this activity. Example adjective lists for intermediate and advanced levels appear below. (When conducting the activity, scatter the words across the board or across the top of a handout, and ask the students to put them into the columns for Positive, Negative, or Both.)

INTERMEDIATE ADJECTIVE LIST

Positive	Negative	Both
sincere friendly enthusiastic organized powerful intelligent gorgeous accommodating mature open	critical annoying awkward stubborn stern strict careless aggressive average	interesting unique talkative introverted

ADVANCED ADJECTIVE LIST

Positive	Negative	Both
persevering creative efficient genuine energetic innovative extroverted tolerant ingenious courteous	cunning suspicious domineering headstrong defensive fickle flakey quick-tempered	different determined quiet solemn frank

Human Mind Maps

by TOM GLASS

When students generate mind maps, the maps are usually on paper, computer screens, or a blackboard. Here is a way for your class to create a Human Mind Map.

Human Mind Maps require few resources and little preparation. The main requirements are space where students can move around and a little creativity and imagination.

The technique works best if students are already familiar with mind maps (sometimes called concept maps). They should also have knowledge of a set of terms or concepts related to a particular topic. Before you begin the activity, select a topic. It could be one the class has just studied—perhaps weather, the environment, or your school. Then follow these steps:

1. As a class, brainstorm terms and concepts that are related to the selected topic. For the topic of weather, for example, the class might come up with words such as those listed below.

rain	downpour
snow	drizzle
hot	sleet
cold	forecast
wind	thermometer
clouds	barometer
temperature	windchill
sun	thunderstorm
overcast	lightning
breeze	thunder
drought	partly cloudy
flood	mostly cloudy
blizzard	high temperature
hurricane	low temperature
typhoon	heat wave

Ideally, you will generate as many terms as there are students (see options for large classes under Variations

below). Including terms that are indirectly related to the main topic is fine and could lead to critical-thinking opportunities as the activity progresses. For example, students might suggest *umbrella*, *boots*, *gloves*, or *sunblock*, all of which are items we may need when we go outside, depending on the weather. (Write the words on the board as you brainstorm.)

2. Have students help write the terms from the board on pieces of paper—writing in large letters and putting only one term on each piece of paper.
3. Collect all the pieces of paper and then have each student choose one at random.
4. Tell students they will represent the term on their piece of paper. The student who has *wind* will represent the wind, the student with *hurricane* will represent a hurricane, and so on. Tell students that at your signal, they will stand up and mingle with classmates. Each time they meet someone new, they will do three things:
 - Each person will tell the other what he or she is and then ask, “What do I do?” (Or, if a student is representing an adjective, the question could be “What am I like?”)
 - Each person will explain what the other person does (or is like).
 - Together, the two students will think of two ways that they are related.

For example, suppose the student with *sun* meets the student with *rain*. The student with *sun* might say, “I am the sun. What do I do?” The student with



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rain might answer, “You shine in the sky and make everything warm.” (Many other answers are possible.) The student with *rain* can then say, “I am rain. What do I do?” The student with *sun* might answer, “You fall from the clouds and make everything wet.” (Again, many other answers are possible.)

(Note that the reason the student with *sun* does not simply say, “I am the sun. I make everything warm” is that then each student would be repeating the same information over and over again during the mingle. By answering “What do I do?” or “What am I like?” questions, students must formulate and express ideas about each of the terms they encounter.)

Next, the two students will look for ways that *sun* and *rain* go together or affect each other. They might say, “After it rains, the sun comes out and dries up the water on the ground” and “When the sun and rain are together, we make

a rainbow.” After coming up with at least two ways the terms are related, students move on to find other partners. They mingle until they have met all their classmates, or as many as time will allow.

5. After students have mingled and reactivated their knowledge of the terms, they are ready to make a Human Mind Map. They will move around and form groups with classmates who have terms that relate most closely with their own. You might tell them, “You have met the other weather terms, and you have talked about your relationship with them. Now, find the weather terms that connect most closely to yours. Who has the most in common with you? When you find someone who has a lot in common with you, try to find others who have a lot in common with both of you.”

Students move around the room, forming pairs and then groups. It is important to tell students that in this exercise there is no right answer or wrong answer. The important things are for them to find and understand relationships between and among the terms they represent, and to be able to explain them.

6. Position a symbol for the general topic of weather in the center of the room. The symbol could be a chair, or it might be you. Have the groups stand around the weather symbol just as subtopics are positioned around a central topic on a written mind map. The students, and the terms they represent, are now a three-dimensional representation of a mind map.
7. Ask a spokesperson for each group to identify the common connection among the terms in their group. Students representing *rain*, *snow*, *drizzle*, and *sleet* might be grouped as kinds of precipitation, while students representing *thunderstorm*, *blizzard*, *hurricane*, and *typhoon* might have put

themselves together as kinds of storms. Or perhaps the precipitation group and the storm group have joined into a larger group. That is fine, as long as students can explain why they made the connections they did. (If you wish, have each group write its name on a large sheet of paper.)

You might ask students if any of them feel they could be in a different group than the one they are in.

If you have string or yarn, you can show relationships more visually at this point by having each group extend a piece of string from the central idea (in this case, “weather”) to the group. You can take the connections a step further: give out more pieces of string and have students connect to other groups (the precipitation group might connect to the storm group) or to an individual member of another group (a group including students representing *hot*, *cold*, and *temperature*, for example, might connect to the student with *thermometer*, who might already be in a group with the student representing *barometer*). Have students explain these new connections—and see if they suggest even more. Depending on the amount of string you have, students might discover that they are part of a tangled web of connections—and that they are noticing relationships among terms and concepts that they never considered before. (Once students are in place, you could take a photo of the Human Mind Map.)

VARIATIONS

If you have a large class, you can make more than one set of pieces of paper and divide the class, giving each group a set. Each group will construct its own Human Mind Map, and as a class you can see whether the mind maps are the same, how they differ, and why.

You could also ask each group to generate its own list of terms and, later, compare the

terms and the mind maps that were generated from them.

Students at lower ability levels can make Human Mind Maps with other sets of vocabulary. The pieces of paper might show kinds of food, kinds of animals, or kinds of objects. Or the pieces of paper might show vocabulary related to school; the following list offers suggestions:

student	notebook
teacher	blackboard
classroom	chalk
hallway	eraser
book	cafeteria (canteen)
playground	English
paper	Math
pencil	Science
pen	friends

Of course, many other terms are possible. You and your students can brainstorm terms, write them on pieces of paper, and then be ready to make a Human Mind Map.

CONCLUSION

Mind maps can be used for a variety of purposes, and Human Mind Maps are no different. The topics you choose can be abstract; they can be controversial; they can be arguments for and against a proposal; they can be students’ own opinions about an issue you are discussing in class.

In this activity, students must think critically and creatively. They must use the vocabulary and concepts they have studied. They must move around—purposefully—and communicate in English and collaborate. And they, and you, will probably have fun doing all those things.

Tom Glass is Assistant Editor of *English Teaching Forum* and a fan of maps of all kinds.

MY CLASSROOM BURMA

If you are an English teacher in Upper Burma, particularly in Mandalay, you probably know Nyein Ei San. Ms. San has been active in the English language teaching (ELT) community in Burma for the past decade, teaching English as a foreign language and training English teachers in her local community. Ms. San works as what is commonly considered a private teacher. Being a private teacher in Burma means that she is not affiliated with a single school, but instead teaches at multiple institutions.



Nyein Ei San teaches her Access class in Sagaing.

Ms. San realized she wanted to teach English when she was a university student, through an unusual situation. “Most of my friends were my students, as they did not understand the lessons our teachers taught,” she said. “And from that time on, I tried to find teaching methods to make my friends understand more. It was then that I realized that I wanted to become an English teacher.”

Still, even though she had chosen her career, Ms. San had to overcome many obstacles on her professional journey. For example, during her time at Mandalay University, the university was frequently closed down, so often that it took her more than ten years to finish her bachelor’s and master’s degrees. Yet Ms. San persisted; during the multiple university closings, she instead visited the local American Center in Mandalay to work on her English. No challenge could have changed her goal of becoming an English teacher.

Now, having taught for over ten years, Ms. San is an English Access Microscholarship Program project director; she also co-teaches with an English Language Fellow for the Lower Mekong Initiative’s Professional Communication Skills for Leaders program. Ms. San teaches a diverse range of students. Some come from government ministries, some are in the parliament, and some—the Access program participants—are high school and university students. She also conducts teacher-training and capacity-building workshops for community leaders and local businesses.

Due to the variety of students she teaches, Ms. San focuses her planning and teaching on meeting the unique needs of each class. For instance, in her professional communication skills class, where students are middle-level civil servants in the Burmese government, she teaches skills such as how to chair a meeting and how to use diplomatic English. Her students often tell her that learning these skills greatly increases their confidence in using English in multicultural and professional settings. She said, “I am very proud of it, as they said if they have a chance to be a chairperson, there will not be any

problems if they are asked to do so in the future.”

Ms. San also commented that her teaching, while remaining fun and carefree at all times, does shift when she moves from teaching young people to teaching adults. “The younger students prefer to be very active and to play language games,” she said, “while the adults, who also like to be active, want to have a specific purpose for the activities and more structure.”

When Ms. San teaches the Access students, her classroom erupts in consistent laughter and fun. Most of these students are in their first year of university or their final year of high school. They represent the diverse range of ethnic and religious groups in Burma. She focuses on preparing the students in the program to become future leaders in their communities, so her class topics generally focus on volunteer work, community development, civil engagement, and academic skills.



Ms. San (left) talks to two Lower Mekong Initiative Education Seminar participants about their digital poster on education development.



Ms. San's Access students planting trees in Sagaing as part of an environmental awareness project

Ms. San's class sizes vary greatly, with some as small as nine students and others with 40 or more. Usually, depending on the resources available, she prefers to arrange her students in small groups, and then in a half-circle. "I try to arrange the seating so that the students can stay active and share with each other," she said, "because students in Burma have had little or no opportunities to communicate in English."

In Ms. San's classes, seating students in groups helps develop their communication skills by facilitating interaction and information sharing. Ms. San's classrooms tend to be large and spacious, with plenty of space for students to stand up and move around. "I really like to do activities where I ask the students to stand up and share with each other, such as a gallery walk," she said. "They love to move around, and it really energizes them. Also, I find that they tend to lose some of their inhibitions when they are standing up, which helps them speak more English." Ms. San is also a resourceful teacher. She is used to regular power outages and teaching with no Internet connection, so she needs only a blackboard to teach effectively.

She also focuses on developing her students' leadership skills. Each year, Ms. San and her Access students organize a Youth Forum, a

two-day gathering for young people from Burma's Sagaing Region. They learn about approaches for mitigating the issues facing their communities, including pollution, poor education, corruption, and public health, while promoting values such as civil engagement and volunteerism. For the 2015 Youth Forum, which had over 500 attendees, Ms. San organized the event around several topics related to youth, such as Youth and Democracy, Youth and Education, and Youth and Environment. For the Youth Forum, she uses her far-reaching connections to invite both foreign and local speakers from across Burma to discuss these issues and mentor the audience in how to become productive members of their communities.

As the Youth Forum demonstrates, Ms. San is passionate about helping the youth of her country develop into community leaders. "They have to become the leaders of their communities and share with each other," she said. "These students will be the ones that others will look to for advice in the future." Following up on the effects of her work, she mentioned that several participants in the 2015 Youth Forum are currently working together on volunteer projects in their local communities.

Ms. San is always looking for new ways to develop her teaching skills, and to do so she has taken advantage of online resources. She participated in the English Access Microscholarship Program Summer 2008 Teacher Workshop provided by Oregon State University. More recently, she completed the E-Teacher Scholarship Program course on English for Specific Purposes, and she is enrolled in the American English Webinar Series.

Ms. San believes that ELT in Burma faces many challenges, such as outdated methodology, lack of resources, and teachers' low-level English proficiency. When asked what advice she would give the future English teachers of Burma, Ms. San said, "I would tell them to go get as much exposure [to English] as possible. Our country is now receiving a lot of help from local and foreign organizations, and there are many opportunities for them. I would tell them that they should do their best, even to take an online course. When they tell me that they cannot because they do not have an Internet connection, I encourage them to do everything they can to do those courses, and I give them advice on how to use the resources available to complete the courses. I have done two online courses, so I know that it is possible. I also

tell teachers to seek out help and advice from everyone around them so they can get lots of new ideas to improve their teaching."

As the Burmese ELT community continues to grow and evolve, Nyein Ei San's developing legacy will be one of consistent mentorship and support for her colleagues and her students. She looks forward to the future of education in Burma, as she will surely play a role in the evolution of effective English language education in her country. Moving forward, she sees herself taking on greater roles in local educational institutions and potentially volunteering with the government to assist in educational policy development and training. Ms. San would like to use her wealth of experience to develop the educational system and to provide more opportunities for the people of Burma to develop into independent learners.

This article was written by **Marie Snider**, a returning English Language Fellow in Burma who works on the Lower Mekong Initiative's Professional Communication Skills for Leaders project. She also conducts teacher-training workshops and events for teachers.

Photos courtesy of Nyein Ei San



Ms. San (right) in front of the Access classroom building in Sagaing with her Access co-teacher, Zar Thiri Myint (left), and Thuzar Thwin, a Cultural Affairs Assistant at the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon

Collaborative Mind Mapping

LEVEL: Intermediate to Advanced

TIME REQUIRED: 45–60 minutes

GOALS: To practice alternative ways of brainstorming and activating learner knowledge; to collaborate with classmates on discovering the potentials of career choices; to reinforce vocabulary related to jobs and careers; to engage in self-discovery related to career interests

MATERIALS: Chalk and blackboard or markers and poster paper; pens and paper; tape

OVERVIEW: A mind map is a type of graphic organizer that allows for short ideas to be written and linked to related ideas on a “map.” Imagine the central idea in the middle of the paper with related ideas connected to the central idea as well as to other ideas. When students step back and look at a mind map, they have a clear visual representation of how their ideas are connected.

This activity can be used to brainstorm ideas, develop existing ideas for projects and activities, or review content students have learned. The example below uses the topic of jobs and careers to demonstrate how the activity works; however, you can use the activity for other topics that fit your students’ needs and interests. In this case, students will start with a job or career that interests them, work together to compile what they collectively know about each job, and finish with a brief writing activity.

PREPARATION:

1. As part of a unit on jobs and careers, or as a separate activity, ask students to choose a job or career that interests them.
2. Collect a large piece of paper (newsprint works well) and a marker or pen for each student. Markers work best if students are writing on large paper, but pens also work well. If paper and markers are not available, have enough chalk for each student to use.

PROCEDURES:

1. Write on the board an example job or career idea with a few lines extending from it. This will be a template for students to follow later as they work individually. Start with an idea that is familiar to students but not likely to be a popular choice. For example, a job such as veterinarian works well if students are familiar with that career. Tell students that together you will use mind mapping to explore the chosen career—in this case, veterinarian. Tell students, “We use mind mapping because it allows for short ideas to be written and connected to related ideas.” Tell students that they will use this template to create their own mind maps later in the activity.
2. Answering specific questions will help students work on their mind maps; you can write questions on the board. The first one is the big question that starts the thinking process, while the last three

relate specifically to what should be listed on the mind map.

- a. What do you know about this job?
- b. What do people who have this job do on a daily basis?
- c. Who else works with someone who has this job?
- d. What skills are needed for this job?

3. Model the activity by having students consider the career you suggested. If some students do not know that job, elicit ideas from the class. What is a veterinarian? What does a veterinarian do? (Possible answers: “A veterinarian is a doctor who takes care of animals.” “Veterinarians treat animals that are sick.” “Veterinarians help animals stay healthy.”) Once *veterinarian* is defined, have students brainstorm possible daily tasks associated with the job. Students might say “giving exams,” “giving shots,” “performing surgery,” etc. As students offer ideas, write them on the board—or better yet, have students come to the board and write their ideas. Once students have finished brainstorming daily tasks, move on to brainstorming with the class for the other questions, about people and skills.

Note that when brainstorming about people associated with the job, students might not know the necessary vocabulary. You can provide the vocabulary as students describe the person or allow students to work with the vocabulary that they have. One example might be a term like “veterinary technician.” Students might say “nurse.” At this point you could provide the term “veterinary technician” or simply write “nurse.”

Once you reach the subtopic of skills, students will likely be engaged with the activity, and so this subtopic

might generate the largest number of responses. Encourage students to offer both technical and non-technical skills needed. Some students might suggest that veterinarians must be good at biology; others might say veterinarians must be patient. The first suggestion emphasizes technical knowledge, while the second focuses on the importance of certain personal characteristics.

4. After students have explored all three categories, ask them to connect some of the ideas they have come up with. For example, students could draw a line connecting “biology” to “surgery” because it is important to study biology in order to perform surgery.
5. Pair students and have them share their career ideas. You might say, “Please tell your partner which job you chose, and explain why you chose that job.” This step should take just a few minutes—enough time for students to share with each other their choice and offer an explanation as to why this particular job interests them. While students talk, pass out paper, markers, and tape (or pieces of chalk).
6. Tell students they will now do the same mind-mapping activity individually that they have done as a class with “veterinarian.” Tell them to use the materials you have given to them. If possible, have students choose a spot on the wall to hang their paper and begin by copying the mind map template you shared in Step 1, with their own career choice written as the central idea. The advantage of using large paper is that when students step back from their mind maps, they are able to look at their ideas from a different perspective and easily see the bigger picture. But note that if you do not have large pieces of paper, this activity can be done with any materials you have on hand. Students can stay at their desks and use paper or their notebooks to complete the activity.

7. Give students 7 to 10 minutes to fill in the subtopics on the mind map. As they write, circulate around the room, helping them with vocabulary. You could give students a time limit, or you might want to put a limit to the number of ideas they should write related to each subtopic. Advanced students could be told to write five ideas per subtopic, while intermediate students could be asked to write two ideas per subtopic.

8. Tell students they will now rotate to the right and add to the mind maps of their classmates. (If they are working at their desks, students can pass their mind maps to the person on their right.) Sometimes it is helpful to suggest that they should add three ideas to a mind map before moving to the next one, but this suggestion can be adapted to fit each classroom's needs. If you want each student to contribute to every other student's mind map, it might be best to say, "Write one idea per subtopic and then move to the next mind map." In a class of fewer than 20 students, each student can contribute to every classmate's mind map. Choose this option if you are confident all students are capable of responding to all the job subtopics.

For larger classes, you can put a time limit on the rotation, or you can group students so that they have a limited number of mind maps to work on as they progress through the activity. Another option is to group students with similar career choices together to ensure that they will each have something to say. For example, if five students have selected careers related to medicine, these students could work together, particularly since their schema related to the topic has already been activated. In addition, grouping students of similar interests gives them time to explain their career choice to the others before starting the rotation.

It is also important to let students know how much they should write during the rotation. Because the activity is based on a mind map, suggest that students write short phrases or even single words. If one student's topic is "race car driver," another student might write "good eyesight" under the subtopic of skills. Asking students to write full sentences for a mind map, or many types of brainstorming activities, places an extra burden on their cognitive load. The goal here is for students to generate ideas, and they should not be inhibited by grammar or structure.

- 9.** Ask students to return to their own mind maps. They will then do the following steps, which can be posted on the board.
- a. Read everything that has been added to your own mind map.
 - b. Add anything new to the subtopics, now that you have looked at your classmates' mind maps.
 - c. At the bottom of the paper, write two or three questions you still have about your career choice.

If students have trouble coming up with questions, you might suggest the following:

- i. How many hours per week do people in this career typically work?
 - ii. What is the average salary for this job?
 - iii. How easy is it to find a job doing this?
- 10.** Have students pair up with their partners from the beginning of the activity. Tell students to (a) orally summarize for their partners what they first wrote on their mind maps and (b) explain to one another

what they learned from the additions their classmates made to their maps.

11. Have students, still in pairs, ask the questions from their mind map to each other. Tell them to work together to come up with possible answers. These answers don't necessarily have to be accurate (for example, they might not know the actual salary for someone in the chosen career), but students should work together to propose possibilities. Together they might guess that a professional soccer player makes a lot of money but a teacher makes much less.

12. Have students work individually once again. Tell them that now they will compile all that they have proposed and learned about their topic. This can take the form of a short writing assignment to be done in class or for homework. Students should summarize in five to seven sentences what their mind maps tell them about their career choices. They can also mention any questions they still have about the career they chose. If you keep the questioning aspect of this activity alive and constantly engage students in the question-and-answer process, their curiosity remains high, and they continue to evaluate the information before them.

Instead of completing the activity with a writing task, students could end with a presentation to the class or a large group, summarizing what they have learned and whether their opinion of the career has changed.

13. Once students have completed the summary, ask them to add two sentences explaining whether they are still interested in this career choice—and why or why not.

EXTENSION

This activity can be part of a larger unit on job or career choices. Early in a unit, after an

introduction to different types of jobs, students could complete this activity before taking on additional research for a final report or presentation on their career choice. Students could then be assigned to do further research on their choice, either by interviewing someone in their chosen field or by reading, watching, or listening to materials related to the field.

VARIATIONS

This activity is designed to work for a variety of topics and areas of study. Here are just a few of the ways it can be used:

- Brainstorming and narrowing down a topic for a research project. Students work together to develop their own ideas for research. During rotation, they offer suggestions for possible research questions and approaches.
- Getting students excited about a topic they have yet to learn about as part of a larger unit, such as vacation planning, weather, hobbies, or holidays. Instead of choosing a career, students choose—for example—a vacation site or a hobby, generate questions as in Step 2, and then continue the activity as described.
- Pre-reading for a piece of literature where perhaps students already know something about the author or story. When students know the characteristics of a genre or the style of an author, you can use this activity to promote guessing and prediction. Students brainstorm before reading by using the author, genre, or title as a central theme. You can break the reading into parts so that students return to their mind maps to clarify predictions and offer additional predictions and questions before reading further. Collaborative mind maps can also help students make connections between plot elements, characters, and themes.
- Helping students work through and understand a process or cause-effect



relationships. Students will have to structure a mind map that shows a linear process rather than multi-layered relationships. They will start with a main topic and follow it through to a natural conclusion. For example, students might develop the steps of a recipe chronologically and then return to each step to suggest possible variations. Each variation could lead to a different end that students would work toward.

- Comparing topics—for example, to further understand two topics students have been learning about throughout a course or term. Students work with two central ideas at the start instead of one and develop both ideas during the activity. In this way, students can make clear connections between subtopics or can actively separate differences.

SCAFFOLDING (OPTIONAL)

This activity can be adapted for many ages and levels. In order to make it less challenging for lower-level students, you can have them simply create a mind map showing what they know about their topic rather than relating ideas to specific subtopics. In addition, beginners could end with a short oral presentation rather than a written piece. More advanced students could be tasked with developing the subtopic categories at the beginning of the lesson with a prompt from the teacher such as, “What do we need to know about a job in order to understand it?”

This activity was written by **Melissa Mendelson**, an ESL teacher with more than ten years’ experience in the United States and abroad. She is currently an Associate Instructor in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Utah.

A Maps Mind Map

Below is a mind map about maps. Your job is to fill in the blanks to complete the mind map. (A mind map is a graphic organizer that shows how ideas can be connected and grouped together.)

Unscramble the Map Words in the column on the left to spell words that are related to maps: there are four *directions*, four *natural features* (such as mountains), and five *features made by humans* (such as streets). Then use those words to fill in the blanks in the Mind Map.

For example, “TESTERS” can be unscrambled to spell “STREETS.” And STREETS can then be written in the box marked “Features Made by Humans.”

Now see if you can unscramble the other words and place each in the proper box in the Mind Map.

MAP WORDS	MIND MAP
(Hint: When the words are unscrambled, they will be in alphabetical order.)	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 200px;"> <p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">DIRECTIONS</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 200px;"> <p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">NATURAL FEATURES</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> </div> </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin: 20px 0;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <p style="margin: 0;">MAPS</p> </div> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 200px; margin: 0 auto;"> <p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">FEATURES MADE BY HUMANS</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p style="text-align: center; margin: 5px 0;">S T R E E T S</p> </div>
REDROBS → _____	
ICITES → _____	
RECUSTION → _____	
SEAT → _____	
SLANDIS → _____	
SLEAK → _____	
THORN → _____	
CEANOS → _____	
VERRIS → _____	
DORAS → _____	
SHOUT → _____	
TESTERS → <u>STREETS</u>	
STEW → _____	

Answers to *THE LIGHTER SIDE*

A MAPS MIND MAP

MAP WORDS
REDROBS ← BORDERS
ICITES ← CITIES
RECUSTION ← COUNTRIES
SEAT ← EAST
SLANDIS ← ISLANDS
SLAK ← LAKES
THORN ← NORTH
CEANOS ← OCEANS
VERRIS ← RIVERS
DORAS ← ROADS
SHOUT ← SOUTH
TESTERS ← STREETS
STEW ← WEST
DIRECTIONS
EAST, NORTH, SOUTH, WEST
NATURAL FEATURES
ISLANDS, LAKES, OCEANS, RIVERS
FEATURES MADE BY HUMANS
BORDERS, CITIES, COUNTRIES, ROADS