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Characters in the Classroom

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CHARACTERS IN THE CLASSROOM

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the Masters of Arts in Teaching degree at the School for
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This project by Tamara Carlin is accepted in its present form.

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Project Advisor Michael Gerald.

Project Reader Paul James CSS.

I would like to thank my internship supervisors, Carol Wilson and Eleanor C. Boone, for their time and patience.

Abstract

This paper is a collection of exercises for teaching languages, specifically focusing on American English as a second or foreign language. It is an explanation and instruction for the language teacher to be able to use Characters as creative presentation in the classroom. This process involves the creation of fictional Characters by the teacher and the students. The Characters are given visual representation and then placed in certain situations where a given element of the English language is needed to verbally express the circumstances or function within them. The students are given the opportunity to practice the grammar point and, through the Characters, see its practical applications. This is a personal paper which describes the activities, why I came to use them, and why other teachers might want to also. The style of presentation in consideration of different approaches to teaching is discussed. Examples and ideas for follow-up or expansion exercises are given. The aim of this paper is to give sufficient background and examples of these exercises so that they may be implemented and manipulated creatively by the individual teacher.

Author's Notes

Language must be able to accomodate societal changes. English has the capacity to do this, as was evidenced by the incorporation of the title Ms. into our everyday vocabulary. Unlike some other languages, the English language has no pronoun forms which are not sex specific. As of yet, using s/he, his/her are the only options available. Many people find this awkward and distracting, in reading and in speaking. A choice must be made. For many years the choice was exclusively the male form. This paper will exclusively use the female form in reference to the teacher and the student.

In this paper, the word Character specifically refers to the types of Characters used in these activities, and shall always be capitalized.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. WHY USE IT	4
III. HOW IT WORKS	10
IV. EXAMPLES	17
V. CONCLUSION	31

I. Introduction.

Characters in the Classroom is a series of exercises of creative presentation and review for the language classroom. The use of Characters draws support from several approaches to teaching languages. It also has connections in other disciplines such as psychology, drama and storytelling.

The purposes of these activities are to have the students meet, experiment with and practice a given item of the English language in the class, and to have this process be engaging and interesting for the student. The exercises allow the student to use her imagination, and in so doing free her to be creative with English on her own, in situations she may encounter out of the classroom.

Let's look at an example. The teacher begins the class by introducing the students to Late Larry. Larry can be a magazine picture, a drawing, or even a doll. The teacher tells the story of Larry finding himself in a sticky predicament. Due to his tardiness, many unfavorable consequences have befallen him. As he sits and ruminates over the events, he thinks to himself, "If I had left work on time, I would not have gotten in this traffic jam." (This lesson is about the past unreal conditional.) The student is then encouraged to imagine Larry's further reflections. This may lead to a role play of the scene. It could lead to a related role play of Larry's wife saying, "If you had come home on time, I would not have burned the dinner." There could be a class discussion of the uses of the target grammar of the lesson. Each student

might recall personally, in written or oral form a similar situation. At the end, Late Larry is posted in a visible spot in the classroom and saved for future reference.

Language lives not in textbooks or in dictionaries, but in people. Seeing the language work for a Character is a good stepping stone before jumping into the water. The student can see the language live through the Character and the Character live with the language before applying it to herself. This is especially beneficial to the student of English as a foreign language, as opposed to English as a second language, where the opportunity to hear and see native speakers and their environment is infrequent.

Characters need not be one dimensional. They can be whatever the teacher chooses to make them. They can be given a full personality and existence. In this manner, their use can extend far beyond grammatical English. Characters can become a wonderful source of cultural and interactional lessons and insights. A grammar lesson or review using Late Larry as the Character may be followed by the class making a chart of punctuality for different social events in their country/countries, its appropriateness and significance, and how it compares to promptness in the United States. Subjects touched upon can range from style of dress to male/female relationships. Again, this is especially good for students with little exposure to United States citizens and culture, save Michael Jackson, Pepsi-Cola, and other mass media monsters.

I See Characters in the Classroom as friendly and open exercises. They may be used solely to present grammar. They may be used only as a grammar review. Characters can be a springboard to reach issues of culture, extra- and sociolinguistics, and communicative competence. They can be adapted to focus on skills in reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

Characters can be employed by many different types of people who are teachers. One does not have to be a flaming, flamboyant extrovert to create Characters and relate them to the students. Every person has her own "style," and Characters can be effective within many. Similarly, using Characters can fit into many different approaches to teaching English as a second or foreign language.

This is not a particularly revolutionary idea. I am sure that teachers have used Characters in one form or another without thinking about them as an actual technique. The purpose of this paper is to consider the validity and versatility of Characters as a teaching tool. I have found this method to be effective and fun. It is challenging to the students' and the teacher's creativity, which seems to be enjoyable all around. One of my internship supervisors once told me that students just love it when you make them think in class. I know that I feel that way as a student, and as a teacher, I love to see the students think! I hope that you will try these exercises and be pleased.

II. Why Use It?

This year matriculating in the Masters of Arts in Teaching Program at the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont, was at times a struggle for me, especially when it came to writing papers. It took me a while to understand the full implication of the program's credo of taking responsibility for your own learning. My papers, it seemed, were either too casual or too formal. What they should have been all along was personal. In this sense, personal is not equivalent to free form individualism. There were certain parameters and protocol. Neither does personal mean personal research. Lots of footnotes and quotes were not the key to success. Personal, I discovered, means taking in new ideas and stimuli, considering them emotionally and intellectually, and assessing them in terms of present ideas and experiences. Personal means realizing that everything my life has been up to this moment has made me who I am. It means accepting that person as she is, and expecting that continued living will bring constant change.

This process and philosophy far surpasses the writing of academic papers. It remains significant to all aspects of my life. Reflecting upon this personal significance, I can see how my history strongly influences my present personal and professional preferences. While writing this paper on the use of Characters in creative classroom exercises, I realized that I must explain why it is personally appealing to me in order to validate it. But to get to why these activities are important I must first explain why I am pursuing a career as an ESL

teacher.

I entered the School for International Training, and thus took on the teaching profession, as a compromise. My primary interest and career direction for many years was theater. What attracted me most to drama was its energy, action, emotion and magic. What I did not like about theater, and this ultimately dissuaded me from being a professional thespian, was the lack of personal power. There is always the strong possibility that the actor may never get the chance to share her craft with others. When I decided that I did not want to pursue theater as a way of life, I focused on my second interests and received my undergraduate degree in counseling, social work, and psychology. What appealed to me in these fields was the abundance of opportunities to work and the potential to affect changes that human contact provides. To execute this profession well, I needed to be reliably settled in one location, which I would not feel content with. I saw ESL as a perfect blend of the best of drama and counseling. It is alive with language, warm with human contact, and it is also accessible. Work in the field is available in many sectors, in and out of the country. This gives me the chance to practice my trade and improve my skills.

Similarly, the concept of using Characters in the classroom arises from both of these focuses of interest, for as I mentioned earlier, the path traveled molds the traveler.

The focus of American dramatic training is characterization and character development. The aim of portraying a role is to "get into" the character. Some ways to achieve this are to create the character's history, imagine its environment, hypothesize the character's reactions to varied situations, and to focus on behavioral details. Another useful tool is personalization - making connections between the given character and real people already known. One need not be a trained performer to do this. If a movie has brought you to tears, or a novel has left you elated, then you were invested in the character. In fact, you let a little bit of yourself become the character, so that you too were effected by the events happening around the character. This is really something which we do quite often and enjoy. Simply stated, it is putting yourself in someone else's shoes.

Addressing situations from another person's perspective is a technique used also in counseling, but with a different motive. Its application is based on the reasoning that it is often difficult to see yourself objectively and to recognize your own needs. It is easier to see and cope with problems in others. So, a common counseling exercise is to have the client play the counselor for some hypothetical situation, which actually parallels or simulates the client's own. An effective way to approach this is through role playing. The insight achieved and course of action suggested are then shifted to the client's own life.

An activity which is common to both theater and child counseling is storytelling. In fact, throughout our society and many others, storytelling and characterization are widely used. As children, we are told tales and fables. Through the foibles, failures and successes of the characters, we are taught some of life's lessons, the values of our society, and the morals of our family. Likewise, religions often use parables to convey their beliefs and doctrine in a simple yet clear way. As we grow up into social beings, storytelling is an oft used means of communication. In my family, which is of Irish descent, spinning an entertaining yarn is a highly valued and appreciated skill. A particularly good story will endure for years. Even though I have never met my brother's mischievous cohorts nor seen my father's farm, they are vivid in my creative memory through stories.

These are ways in which I came to use Characters in the classroom through my experiences with drama, counseling and storytelling. But how does this benefit the student? Using Characters provides the student with the opportunity to work, learn, and become involved on many levels.

1. Using Characters requires imagination of the student. One of the foundations of the Silent Way, Gatengno's approach to language teaching, is that the individual is a limitless source of imagination waiting to be explored and exploited. Exercising your creativity is exciting and enjoyable, especially in the classroom where well defined rights and wrongs usually prevail.

2. Helping to create Characters and formulate solutions to their situation is a form of student generated material. The class becomes their class when the students contribute to what comprises their learning. Student generated material enhances and advances learning.

3. The accumulation of accompanying visual aides of Character presentation serves as a very convenient reference point. If a student makes an error with a previously addressed grammatical item, the teacher may merely point to the character used for that specific presentation, triggering the lesson in the student's mind and giving her a chance to correct herself.

Decorating the classroom like this creates a rich and stimulating learning environment. Even if the student is daydreaming, her eyes wander to language related items. This type of classroom surrounding is highly encouraged in Lazonov's language teaching approach, Suggestopedia.

4. Curran asserts in his language teaching approach, Community Language Learning, that learning another language is very threatening to one's ego and self-esteem. Characters provide the student with a less threatening way to assess her own language needs and examples to how to incorporate the new language information. For example, intermediate language students often reach plateaus in their language acquisition where they are comfortable and would like to linger. They feel that they are getting along fine without, say, the past progressive

tense, and hence see no need to master it. Through a Character presentation where the Character needs appropriate use of the past progressive to effectively and gracefully negotiate the situation, the student may see where her own communicative competence is deficient.

III. How It Works.

The basic structure for using Characters in the Classroom is: the teacher presents a Character to the class. The Character is then placed in a certain set of circumstances. The Character needs a given point of the English language to appropriately handle the situation. The students provide the English.

Sometimes, the presentation is in the form of storytelling. In this case, the teacher may provide details and information about the Character. Sometimes, only a few facts may be offered, and the students will create the rest.

How much flexibility there is in the Character and the story depends upon the goal and the structure of the lesson. If certain details (She didn't listen to the radio this morning. She was caught in the rain without her umbrella.) are necessary to place the Character in the situation which would best demonstrate the grammar point, (If she had listened to the radio, she would have brought her umbrella.) then the teacher needs to provide them. Other stories may be more general and less dependent upon specific details. Then the student may do more creative invention of the Character and the Character's circumstances.

The use of the Characters make for open and flexible exercises. It is adaptable and can be used in many different ways in the classroom. The important and fundamental factors

to consider are: 1. the teacher's personal approach to teaching, 2. the teacher's classroom style and personality, 3. the students' personality, and, 4. the particular Character. These elements must be measured and blended together in a recipe of an appropriate and effective lesson. Let's look at some of the possible considerations of these factors.

Teacher's Personal Approach to Teaching. Although these exercises can be incorporated in many individualized teaching approaches, there is one basic premise which I feel is key to its essence. This concept fascinates me in my teaching and my life. It is a personal philosophy on the art of sales. We are all skilled salespersons. It goes beyond jokes about the traveling salesman and the farmer's daughter, or the stereotype of the sleazy used car dealer. Selling need not be dishonest or impersonal. When applying to a new job, we sell our talents and accomplishments. When trying to strike up a romance, we sell ourselves as desirable and better than the competition. When we want our own way, we can be particularly manipulative and smooth salespersons. I can still hear myself expounding for my mother all the sound reasons why she should let me go to the drive-in movies!

We are also skilled consumers. Politicians, religious leaders, and advertisements constantly woo us with their wares. We decide whether or not we will by, i.e., accept, believe, participate. Even in our everyday personal lives, we engage

in sales. We present, talk up, defend our ideas at work and at parties. We display our personalities in the most advantageous light, depending upon what we hope to accomplish. In order to buy, the individual must feel a need and believe that the change brought on by the purchase will improve her state. Most of us would like to think that the decision to buy is independent, but we have to admit that we are influenced by innumerable outside factors.

Using Characters as a means of presentation utilizes the art of sales well. Take, for example, a lesson on modals. The Character is introduced and then placed in a predicament. The teacher gives the student a sales pitch: modals are the solution to the problem. Through the course of the lesson the student learns, through experimentation will all possibilities available, how to apply this new information to the situation at hand. In the end, she aids the Character in coming to a resolution, a better understanding, or clearer communication. The student's own awareness and understanding is then heightened. What has happened is:

1. A situation with a need was presented.
2. The student recognized the need
3. The teacher gave the sales pitch for modals as the solution to the problem.
4. The student bought the idea and tried it out
5. The situation improved. It was a good purchase.

Positive results are positive reinforcements. The student may then begin to think, "If it worked for this Character, it could work for me." Providing time in the class for the student to enact or recall similar situations would let her see the personal benefits of her purchase.

Whenever you buy an idea or a function in a language classroom, you put yourself on the line more so than in other situations. Struggling with simple self expression is a throw-back to infancy. One's personal and intellectual self image is challenged. Each time a new area is approached, one thinks, "Does this really work? Do I really need it? Can I do it?" The more practical applications and positive support provided for the student, the better. The student will trust the teacher, and the language, and herself more. She will be more likely to continue buying the language in the future.

Teacher's Classroom Style and Personality. The ways in which one uses Characters, or sells portions of the English language, are as widely varied as the different teachers which exist.

Originally, in thinking about this method, the only style of presentation I envisioned was the one which I would use. My personality is very high energy and creative. This is my demeanor in and out of the classroom. As a teacher and as a student I find an energetic classroom very comfortable and stimulating and productive. It is most natural for me, and I believe that ease is conveyed to the students. It is also natural to the study of language. Unlike more erudite disci-

plines, the language classroom has the potential to be personal and emotional. There is also more interaction between the students, which is a proven source of surprise and energy.

The style I use in class, and specifically with these exercises, is theatric and energetic. It is not purely a show, though. It is not distant or distancing. More appropriately, it can be likened to guerrilla theater, for the whole purpose is to involve the students. This might be called the hard sell. I make ample use of body and hand gestures, facial expressions, voice, props, and visual aids. Sometimes, I will add an element of mystery or humor by making the target grammar point seem like a big secret or some sort of linguistic panacea!

The soft sell is also an effective way of engaging the student's attention and participation. Elementary school teachers try to create a lap experience for each student when reading a story to or with the entire class. Similarly, presenting language to the class through Characters and stories can be a more intimate affair. Also through using her body, voice and visuals expressively, the teacher can create classroom moods ranging from conversational to intriguing.

With these activities, as in any teaching situation, I believe in considering at length one's teaching persona, or professional personality. Is it revealing or protective?

How different is it from the out of class self image? These questions are important when thinking about how to approach such broad teaching activities. Indeed, I feel that such reflection and self knowledge are necessary to develop and justify my own personal approach to teaching.

Students' Personality. Any approach to teaching, no matter how right it feels to the teacher, is not worth very much if it does not work! The purpose of studying a language is to learn it. A fast paced, high energy activity might just shock and overwhelm the students. A sensitive, non-threatening demeanor could possibly put them to sleep. The teacher needs to be able to assess the students' level and the class dynamics. Will they jump right in to role plays or will it take some slow persuading. My experience is that the best way to foster and encourage creativity is to be creative and willing myself. I do not expect the students to get up in front of the room and squawk like a chicken if I would not do it myself. And never give up on an activity or an idea after only one try!

The Character. The final factor to consider is the style of implementing Characters as a classroom exercise is the Character itself. I can create a realistic Character in a practical or serious situation. I can create a comic Character, like Late Larry, who repeatedly gets in compromising situations for the same reason. The locale of where one is teaching and/

or the nationalities of the students may influence creative decisions about the Characters, such as their sex, occupation, habits, or culture specific behavior.

IV. Examples.

The following are some sample Character exercises. Where the page is divided down the middle, the left column is a rough script for the teacher. In the right column are the teacher's instructions. The page reads across, left to right, and the columns correspond. Further activities are added as ideas to recycle the Characters or use them as resources in other lessons.

CREATE A CHARACTER

This can be started with a beginning class using the simple present tense and built upon continuously from there. It can also be introduced at the start of higher level classes, and incorporated in the class's progression. Let's look at an example for a beginning level class.

The first time, have many magazine pictures or photos available. Each student picks one. Along with the given information from the picture, the student must invent other facts such as occupation, place or residence, name and age. The teacher may provide a list of typical American names, a map, and a selection of occupations represented by pictures or translation into the students' native language, where possible. The students then write the information they have chosen on colored strips of paper. Then they will tell the class about their Characters. Example: This is Emilio Nunez. He lives in Chicago and works in a restaurant. He has brown hair and blue eyes. He is 25 years old.

All Characters are posted in the classroom with their biographical information. These Characters can be the core Characters. They can be referred to frequently. When the students learn something new, they can apply it to their Characters. For example, they can tell their classmates about their Character's family, personality, likes and dislikes, history, etc.. They can describe their Character's house when studying prepositions. They can describe their Character's face when learning descriptive facial adjectives. Characters

can meet each other in student written dialogues.

All new information about the Characters is posted on the wall with the pictures so that as the course continues and the Characters expand, the students may see how their English has also grown.

This exercise introduces the student to the concept of using Characters from the start. It lets her know that the language classroom is a place to flex her imagination and creativity. By designing presentations utilizing the student created Characters, the teacher involves the student not only in creating English utterances, but contributing to the whole class' learning.

WILL/GOING TO - ZOLA THE GYPSY

This is Zola, the Gypsy Fortune Teller. She can look into her crystal ball and see your future!

I went to see Zola yesterday and she gave me this!

She told me that all I have to do is to wave this over you...

...and now you all have the power to see the future too!

Visual: Gypsy woman fortune teller with a crystal ball and black cat. Picture should be elaborate, detailed and comical.

If this is a strange concept for the students, take some time to explain it, but it is not necessary to decide whether or not it is true.

Produce some artifact like a wand or a scarf or a long feather.

Do this.

Zola told my fortune for me.
Here are some of the things
she saw.

Now that you have the ability
too, what do you see in my
life?

Give a couple of examples.
Write them on the board. Use
WILL and GOING TO.

Write answers on the board.
Encourage imaginative answers,
if you dare.
Next break the class into pairs
and have them write each other's
fortunes.

Review the construction - WILL +(NOT)+ TO-LESS INFINITIVE
TO BE +(NOT)+ GOING TO-LESS
INFINITIVE

Discuss the function - Future reference, promise, etc...

To show that these forms can be used for real things as well as imaginative projections, have each student write one thing she will do that day, next weekend, next month, next year. Then have the students question each other about what they have written. This is also good practice of question formation.

Further Activities.

1. Referring to the picture of Zola, ask the students if they know what a black symbolizes in United States culture. If a black cat walks in front of you, it means that you will have bad luck. This is a superstition. Tell the class what superstitions are and what some common ones are. A sample list might be:

Black Cat

Open umbrella indoors

Walking under ladders

Bad things come in threes

Lucky penny

Four leaf clover

Knock on wood

You may want to do a little research into the origins and original symbolism of superstitions for a more advanced class. Having examples or demonstrations of the superstitions is fun!

Also, consider the difference between a superstition and a belief. There can be a fine line of difference, especially when viewing beliefs and superstitions from a cross cultural perspective.

In an EFL class, assign the students to each come in the next day with a description or a demonstration of one of their culture's superstitions. In an ESL class, have the students do the same, based on an interview with a native.

An interesting class discussion should spring from asking if superstitions are real or not, or if anyone is familiar with superstitions from other countries.

2. Ask the class if they would expect to see people like Zola walking along the street in the United States. How would they feel if many people like her came knocking on their door all in one night asking for things? Indeed, this happens all over the country once a year on October 31. It is a national event called Halloween.

This should lead nicely into a cultural lesson on United States holidays. Ask the students which holidays they know about. Fill in the rest, not only the dates, but why and how they are celebrated.

Assign each student to give a presentation about a holiday in her country.

Teaching some songs or reading poetry about various holidays is a fun activity. It is also fitting, since most holidays are celebrated with songs and commemorated in the arts. Norman Rockwell paintings are wonderful Americana which illustrate many holidays accurately and humorously.

SHOULD HAVE (SHOULD) - LATE LARRY

This is Late Larry. Larry was late for work this morning. His boss was very angry. Let's look at what Larry did this morning.

He woke up late.

He sang in the shower.

He read the newspaper.

He ate a big breakfast.

He had no gas in his car so he had to hitch hike to the train station.

He missed his usual train so he had to take a later one.

When Larry got to work his boss yelled at him. "Why are you so late, Larry."

What did Larry tell him?

Visual: Man with a briefcase.

Visual: Angry boss.

Have a visual with each item.

Place them in a horizontal line.

Have students review aloud what Larry did in the morning.

Have students role play Larry telling his boss why he was late.

Well, Larry's boss does not want him to be late again. So he tells him everything he did wrong and gave him some advice.

"Larry, you should have woken up on time!"

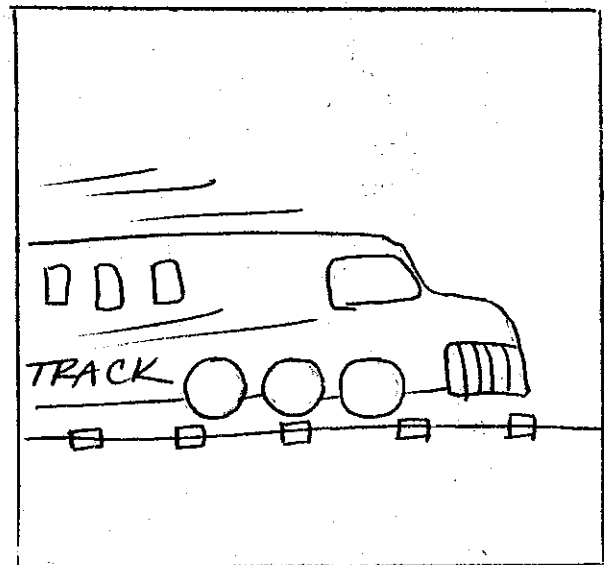
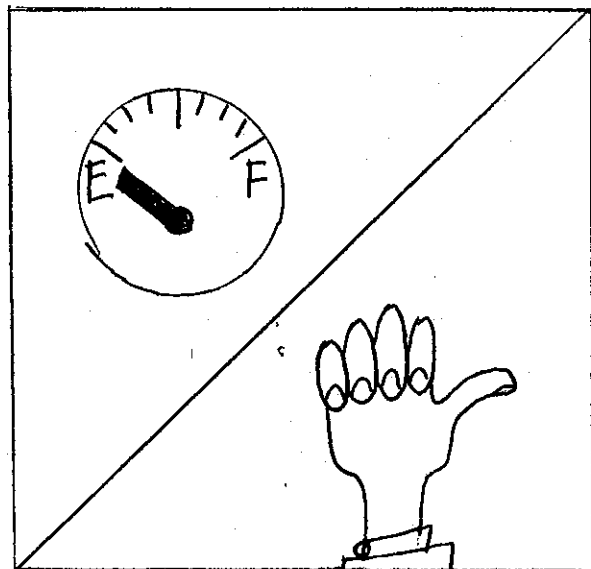
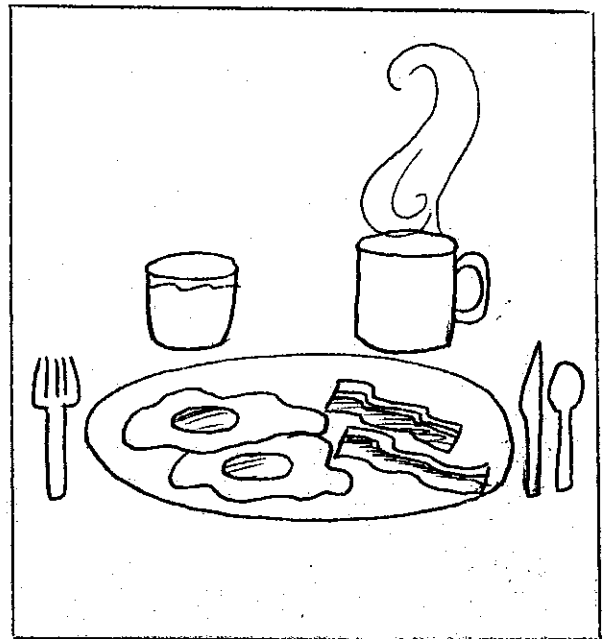
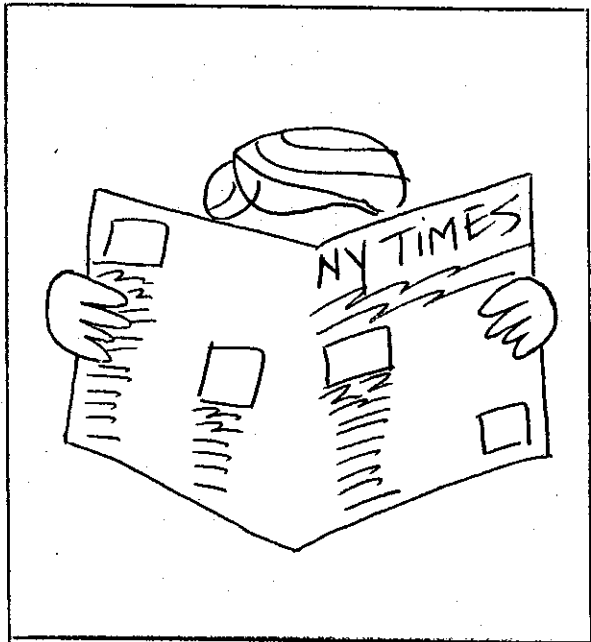
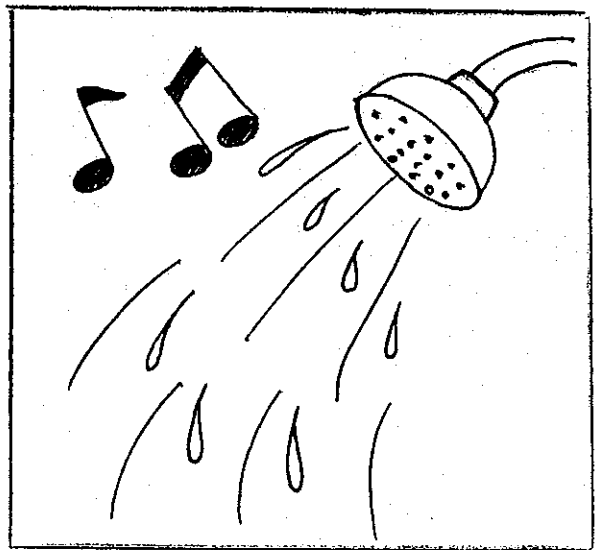
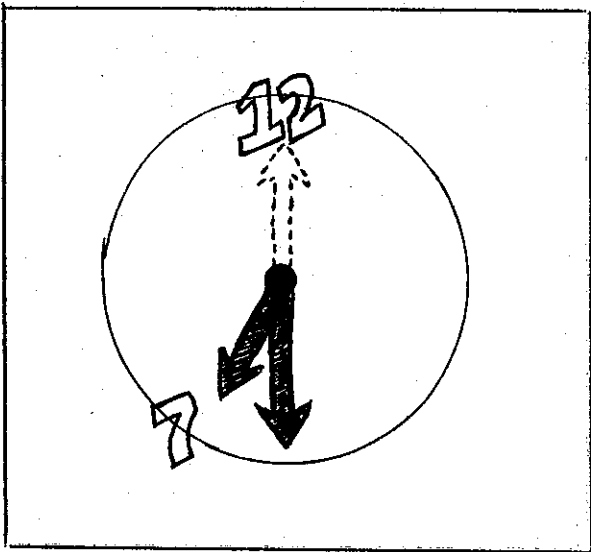
What else did Larry's boss say to him?

Point to the appropriate visual. Write the examples on the board here or save the writing until the end.

Students generate rest of sentences based on the pictures. Role play the whole scenario.

Review the construction - SHOULD +(NOT)+ HAVE + PARTICIPLE.

Discuss the function - advice about a past event, hindsight, etc..



Attached Activities.

1. This is an optional addition to the SHOULD HAVE Character exercise, contrasting it with SHOULD. You may follow with this immediately. If you do it at a later date, first review the SHOULD HAVE activity. Use the same visuals that accompanied Late Larry the first time.

Larry's boss wants to make sure that Larry is not late again, so he gives him some advice.

"Larry, you should wake up earlier."

Role play, using the whole series of visuals as a guide.

Review the construction - SHOULD +(NOT)+ TO -LESS INFINITIVE
Discuss the function - advice for the present and future, etc..
and future, etc..

Contrast the usage of SHOULD and SHOULD HAVE.

Have a sheet of paper for each student in the class. On the top of each paper, have a problem situation, depicted in words or with a picture. Divide the paper into two columns, headed SHOULD HAVE and SHOULD. Pass the sheets around so that every person sees every sheet, and writes a piece of advice using both forms. Example:

Larry is lost. He is very late for the party. He is in the middle of nowhere. It is dark. He can't find his map and he can't read his directions. He is all alone and scared.

Should have	Should
He should have kept his map in the glove compartment.	Next time, he should carry a map.
He should not have gone alone.	He should always bring a date.

Teach phrases and idioms that go along with advice giving. A sample list:

From now on, ...

From this point forward, ...

As of today, ...

In my opinion, ...

If you ask me, I think...

It seems to me...

2. Each student fills this in, based on what time she would arrive and when she would be early or late. All events are scheduled to begin at 8:00. Use the given abbreviations.

	earlier	7:30	7:40	7:30	8:00	8:10	8:20	8:30	8:40	8:50	9:00	later
family inner												
business inner												
movie												
date												
party												
funeral												
class												

TE - too early

E - early

OT - on time

LL - little late

L - late

TL - too late

When completed, post and give all a chance to read them. Then have a discussion about promptness and how it is culturally perceived. Some possible questions:

How do you feel when you are late?

How do you feel when someone else arrives late?

Do people ever explain why they are late.

Do your feelings differ depending on the event.

Are some people always late?

Does your culture have addages about lateness. Some

American ones:

Better late than never.

The early bird catches the worm.

Better safe than sorry.

Does this information we've gathered say anything about our cultures?

How would late Larry get along in your culture.

3. What is the first thing you have to do when you are late? It is not hard to do, but it is very important. It is apologizing.

Break the class in to small groups and give them some sample situations to role play and practice apologizing.

Some ideas:

You are a waitperson and you spilled some food on a customer.

You are late for an appointment.

You forget your boy/girlfriend's birthday.

You stepped on someone's foot while dancing.

You forgot to meet someone for lunch.

You borrowed a friends shirt and ripped it.

V. Conclusion.

I have heard some of my colleagues say that they wished they were creative and could think of more imaginative things to do in the classroom. I believe that every person has creativity and imagination. Feeling that you do not is no reason not to try these activities or others like them. In fact, using these exercises brings out and develops your creativity. Divine inspiration is not the only source of new ideas. Building your creativity can be done very methodically.

For me, sometimes bright ideas do come like a flash out of the blue. I think that is because I have been involved in many creative and artistic endeavors in the past. Bits of those memories spring forth when I'm raking my mind for an idea.

More often though, I approach a Character presentation in a logical way. I think of the linguistic point I want to cover in class. Then I think of situations in which I use that point, or when I frequently hear it used. I first think of common situations, and then of rare or exaggerated ones. Next, I imagine the people who would typically be in these situations. So I now have the Characters and the situation. All I need to do is prepare the dialogue and plan the lesson.

Say, for example, I wanted to present the had better construction in class. I hear this used as strong advise, which may bring serious consequences if not heeded. This reminds me of a parent telling a child to do something or be punished. "Bill, you had better clean your room or you won't get your allowance this week". There are many other examples

of things parents want their children to do, so I can construct a lesson around these Characters. Had better is used as advise so strong, it is a threat. I think of a bank robber saying, "You'd better give me all the cash or I'll shoot!" Both the little boy and the bank robber are Characters in situations which illustrate well how had better is used.

Feeling pressured to be creative is the one thing that blocks creativity. We all have imagination. Being speakers of English, we are all experienced experts on where, when, why and how the language is used. Remembering and believing that is the key which opens the door to the creative self.