Ice-Breakers  
By Sarah Sahr

Ah, the first day of a new group of students. There is nothing better. If all has gone well, you don’t know anything about these people and they don’t know anything about you. Perfect! What a great time to play some ice-breakers (an “ice-breaker” is a small activity to help people in getting to know one another). However, icebreakers don’t need to be used only on that first day of school. Sometimes, icebreakers are best done at the middle of the year, even after everyone has gotten to know each other. Doing these types of activities in the middle of the year might surprise you: You just might learn something about your students that you didn’t already know.

Find the person who...
This is a great question and answer activity because it allows students to talk about themselves! Students can share a trivial piece of info, like, “I have 3 cats,” or a life changing event, such as, “I underwent brain surgery when I was 7.” It’s totally up to them. However, it does takes at least one day to prepare.

Materials: Worksheet with a list of characteristics or of activities students in your class might do (see examples below).

Activity: At the end of a class period near the beginning or the middle of the year, have students write down three interesting things about themselves on scrap paper, preferably things others in the class don’t know about them but that they are willing to share. Collect the scrap pieces of paper.

During a planning period, create a two-column worksheet. In the left column, make a list of interesting items based on your students’ papers (be sure to include at least one item from each student); in the right column, leave blank space for student signatures. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Find someone who...</th>
<th>Signature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Has 8 brothers and sisters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Practices yoga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feeds 7 dogs each morning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next time you are in class, give each student a worksheet. While mingling, students have to find each other based on the questions on the worksheet. When a student finds the classmate who fulfills the interesting item, the classmate must sign the worksheet on the correct line. There should be no repeat student signatures.

Who Am I?
This ice-breaker will not only introduce students to each other, it will also introduce the teacher to pop-culture trends and/or current events of the country they are teaching in! It is okay if the participants don’t know all the people in the activity... this lack of knowing just creates more opportunity for authentic English conversation.

Materials – index cards
Variation 1 – Each student (and the teacher if necessary) chooses a famous person, a person everyone in the class would know, and writes it on an index card. The teacher collects the cards and shuffles them. (Depending on the obscurity of the names, you may want to share the cards with the class before handing them out.) The teacher redistributes the cards and everyone reads the name on the card he or she has received. For the next 10 minutes, each student must play the part of that person. It is very important that everyone keeps their new identity secret. While mingling, students ask each other yes/no questions, trying to figure out who everyone else is. On the other side of the index card, students should list classmates and, if they can figure it out, the name of the famous person those classmates are trying to portray.

Materials – index cards, safety pins

Variation 2 – Each student (and the teacher if necessary) chooses a famous person, a person everyone in the class would know, and writes it on an index card. The teacher collects the cards and shuffles them, and then pins a card to the back of each student. While mingling, students have to figure out who they are (the name pinned to the back for their shirt) by asking classmates yes/no questions about themselves (E.g., “Am I a girl?”, “Am I an actor?”, “Do I make people laugh?”). Once a student figures out who they are, a classmate can remove the card and give it to them. Keep playing until there are no note cards on the backs of students.

Materials – index cards, timer, hat

Variation 3 – Give each student three index cards. On each card, have students write a famous person, a person everyone in the class would know. The teacher collects the cards and puts them in a hat. Divide the class into two teams.

Round one: Set a timer for 2 minutes. One student must go to the front of the class and pull a card. He or she describes the person on the card to the class, and the class tries to guess the person. For example, for Mickey Mouse, a student might say, “This famous person is a rodent, has big black ears, lives at Disney...” (The student cannot say mouse because that is a part of the famous person’s name.) If a teammate calls out the name of the famous person, the team gets a point and the student chooses a new card and describes that person. This continues for 2 minutes, and then the next team gets a chance. Keep going back and forth between teams until all cards are done.

Round two: Return all the cards to the hat. Set a timer for 2 minutes. One student goes to the front of the class and pulls a card. Now, the student must act out the famous person. For example, for Mickey Mouse a student might mime a mouse or draw big round ears above his or her head. Once a teammate calls out the name of the famous person, the team gets a point and the student chooses a new card and acts out that person. This continues for 2 minutes, and then the next team gets a chance. Keep going back and forth between teams until all cards are done.

Round three: Return all the cards to the hat. Set a timer for 2 minutes. One student goes to the front of the class and pulls a card. Now (and this can get tricky), the student must sit in a chair and can say only one word to describe the person. For example, for Mickey Mouse, he or she might say “ears.” (Mouse is unacceptable because that is a part of the famous person’s name.) The student can give no other clues. Once a teammate calls out the name of the famous person, the team gets a point and the student chooses a new card and gives one word to describe the person on the card. This continues for 2 minutes, and then the next team gets a chance. Keep going back and forth between teams until all cards are done.
Tally up the points and call a winner!

**Truth & Lies:**
Do you have a class full of people who like to share stories? This ice-breaker allows participants to share three personal stories, with a twist...one of them isn’t true.

**Materials:** Index card and pencil/pen

**Activity:** Students write three events about themselves on one side of an index card. Two of these events must be true, and one of them should be false. Students walk around the room, making introductions and sharing their three events by telling each other about them as a story. As students are sharing their stories, they should be asking each other yes/no questions to try and figure out which of the three events is not true. Once a student decides which event isn’t true, he or she should make a note of it on the back of his or her card. This note should include the name of the classmate and which story is false. The teacher MUST participate!

Let students mingle for about 20 minutes. Depending on class size, students may not be able to speak with everyone.

Once everyone returns to his or her seat, have students one at a time read their sentences. As a class, vote on which of the sentence is the lie (simple as a raising one, two, or three fingers). After votes are tallied, let the student say which sentence was the lie.

**Toilet Paper Trick:**
This ice-breaker is a bit silly. It uses an everyday household item that might make people giggle. However, it will get people talking.

**Materials:** One roll of toilet paper (TP)

**Activity:** It’s best if people sit in a circle. Starting with yourself, say, “Take what you need” and model the action by taking a fair amount of toilet paper (maybe wind it around your hand). Then pass the TP to the person on your right and say, “Take only what you need.” Have that person pass the TP to the person on the right and repeat, “Take only what you need.” Keep going until everyone has some TP.

For each square of TP the person took, he or she has to say something about him or herself. It’s that simple.

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