

Scientific Conference: Who's Coming?

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Levels	<i>Advanced</i>
Contexts	<i>University, especially fun for science majors</i>
Aims	<i>Interact with classmates</i> <i>Use scientific and other cultural knowledge and deductive reasoning to find partners</i> <i>Develop awareness about vocabulary used to introduce reported speech</i> <i>Have fun</i>
Class Time	<i>15–20 minutes</i>
Preparation Time	<i>2 minutes</i>
Resources	<i>Strips of paper with the subject separated from the rest of the sentence (see Appendix)</i>

Getting students up and moving increases their energy level. This partner-match activity is great for getting students to mingle with other class members whom they might not yet have interacted with much. Recent brain research states that exercise not only is good for the body, but “makes the brain function at its best” (Ratey, cited in Randolph, 2013). Additionally, engaging students’ background knowledge with these examples of famous scientists and allowing them to help each other discover why these statements are funny increases their confidence in reading between the lines and expands their English vocabulary. Also, the challenge of solving a word puzzle is enjoyable. Thus, this activity uses several of the five Es that McPherron and Randolph (2014) encourage teachers to use in the classroom: emotions, examples, energy, exercise, and euphoria.

This activity also encourages students to talk with everyone since they don’t know who will have the information they need. Increasingly, students interact with each other less and less. It’s common these days to see classrooms full of students fully engrossed in their own mobile device, waiting for the teacher to arrive. This activity helps students interact with each other in a nonthreatening way and forge connections with their peers. The hope is that they will increase real-life communication and continue to engage their peers with more frequency.

PROCEDURE

1. Print the sentences in the Appendix and cut sentences so they're on individual strips. When you know how many students are in class that day, snip enough sentences in two so that each student will get a slip with half of a sentence on it.
2. To introduce the topic of the scientific conference, ask students to name some famous scientists or inventors and what theories or devices they developed or discovered.
3. Next, explain the procedure of the partner match to students: They will each draw a slip of paper that contains half of a sentence about a person, usually an inventor, and a reference to that person's creation. Students have to stand up, go around the class, say to other students what their slip of paper says, and find the person who has their match.
4. After finding their match, have students sit with their newfound partner and discuss the sentence, discover why it's funny, and prepare to explain it to the class (e.g. "Newton said . . . he'd drop in" is funny because Newton discovered the theory of gravity, purportedly when an apple fell from a tree under which he was sitting).
5. Have each pair tell the class what their sentence is and explain the humor of the statement.

CAVEATS AND OPTIONS

1. In the sentences that have reporting verbs, you may want to ask students to notice the verb tense used. You could ask why the verb tense is different in the direct quote from the reported speech examples.
2. Lower level students can be catered to by changing the content of the sentences used. For example, another humorous partner-matching activity could be created with ironic profession/name combinations. Some real examples: Sue Yoo, lawyer in New York; Storm Field, retired meteorologist; Sgt. Law Power, Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer; Gary Wood, creator of custom-made furniture; Cardinal Sin, pastor; Dr. Russell Brain, neurologist; Richard Rich, business teacher.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

McPherron, P., & Randolph, P. T. (2014). *Cat got your tongue? Recent research and classroom practices for teaching idioms to English learners around the world*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Randolph, P. T. (2013, Summer). The magic of movement: Exercise's phenomenal impact on the language learner's brain. *ITBE Link*. Retrieved from <http://www.itbe.org/newsletter.php>

APPENDIX: *Scientific Conference Activity Strips*

Newton said	he'd drop in.
Descartes said	he'd think about it.
Ohm	resisted the idea.
Boyle said	he was under too much pressure.
Darwin said	he'd wait to see what evolved.
Pierre and Marie Curie	radiated enthusiasm.
Volta was	electrified at the prospect.
Pavlov positively	drooled at the thought.
Ampere was	worried he wasn't current.
Audubon said	he'd have to wing it.
Edison thought	it would be illuminating.
Einstein said	it would be relatively easy to attend.
Archimedes was	buoyant at the thought.
Dr Jekyll declined; he said	he hadn't been feeling like himself lately.
Morse said,	"I'll be there on the dot. Can't stop now, must dash."
Gauss was asked to attend	because of his magnetism.
Hertz said	he planned to attend with greater frequency in the future.
Watt thought	it would be a good way to let off steam.
Wilbur Wright accepted,	provided he and Orville could get a flight.