

The hodgepodge. Our favourite vocabulary games. Juniors Up. A2 Up
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The hodgepodge

Our favourite vocabulary games
for the older learners

Juniors and up

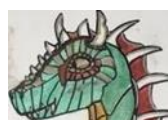
A2 and up

Tried, tested and collected here

by

Funky Socks and Dragons

December 2020



Introduction

Are you looking for more (and new?) ideas for practising vocabulary with juniors and teens (or adults)? Well, here are some of my favourite ones. Some of them I have come up with myself, some of them I have found in places. If I remember where, I will reference them.

The main idea is that we have a set of vocabulary, words, phrases etc, not necessarily connected by the topic, a situation that is quite common with higher levels when we just go beyond learning about clothes, food, money and sport or for the vocabulary that we work on in relation to the text we are reading or listening to. In Russian, we say сборная солянка or a hodgepodge, of sorts, that is difficult to come up with a context and a meaningful activity. And that is precisely why these activities here were created or adapted to the needs of the EFL classroom.

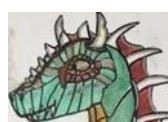
All ideas are mine but you will see that the inspiration came from a variety of sources. All of them have been tried and tested with my students, although, to be honest, writing about them has led to even more ideas for adaptation and use. Yay to that.

They all start in the same place: on the board, with a list of words. Sometimes we also use the same list on the A4 paper or on separate cards. Sometimes, some additional scrap paper is necessary, too.

Whenever we try a new game, we play with the whole group, for everyone to learn the rules and to feel comfortable. Only later (perhaps only in the following lesson or the next time we play the game) do we move onto the pair work, just to get the students used to the format of the game and the way of thinking of the words and what we can do with them.

Happy teaching!

Anka aka Funky Socks and Dragons



A is for Associations (A)

All the items are displayed on the board. Students take turns and put the items in pairs, according to their own criteria, for example two words that are synonyms, two words that have a similar pronunciation, number of letters, two words that are antonyms etc.

This game can also be turned into a guessing game when students describe the criteria for their partner(s) to guess the pair of words.

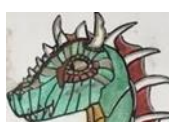
A is for Associations (B)

All the items are displayed on the board. Students work in pairs and describe **one** of the items using their own personal associations with it, using only adjectives or only nouns or only verbs or a combination of these.

A is for Associations (C: Photo associations)

All the items are displayed on the board. The teacher also needs some photographs. These can be some especially prepared photographs (photocopied or displayed on the whiteboard or the walls of the classroom) or, potentially, some photographs from the coursebooks.

The teacher asks the students to work in pairs and choose seven items from the board which are associated with each of the photographs. Later on, students work with another pair and explain their choices.



B is for Bad at Associations

All the items are displayed on the board. This game developed naturally as the follow-up of the Associations B, when we decided to raise the level of challenge. In this game, students describe **one** of the items using the contrary associations, talking about what their chosen item is definitely not.

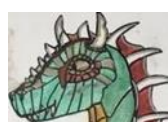
C is for Commercials

All the items on separate cards and displayed on the board. Teacher writes on the board the key questions that the students will have to consider during the preparations:

- What is the product?
- Who is it for?
- Why is it the best product in its class?
- Why should we buy it?
- How much is it?

Teacher demonstrates the activity: picks out one of the cards with one of the items. Teacher tells the students that this word/phrase on the card is the name of a new product, a great product that they are going to advertise. Teacher points out at the questions on the board and demonstrates his/her commercial. Teacher describes the new product, creating a mini-discourse, about 1 minute long and presents it to the class.

Students pick their cards, take some time to think about their imaginary product and they present it to their partner. Afterwards, they change partners a few times, mingling and presenting their products to a few students. In the end, during the FB, they go back to their original partners and tell them what their favourite product was. The class choose the most popular product / effective commercial. If the game is played again, it can also be played as riddles with the presenter **not** using the name of the product / the key word which their partner has to guess.



D is for Dice

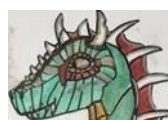
All the items are displayed on the board. Each pair or team or students get a dice. They roll the dice, find out how they will have to explain their item, choose the item they want to explain and try to do what is necessary for their partner(s) to guess. Some of the possible ways of explaining the words include:

- Draw it
- Mime it
- Mouth it
- Define it
- Associate it
- Ask a question (with this word)
- L1 it
- Say it backwards
- Synonym it
- Anonym it

E is for Eighty Seconds

All the items are displayed on the cards kept in a box/ a bag or in a pile on the table.

Students work in two or three teams. Teams take turns, nominate one of their members to compete. This student comes to the front of the class, picks out words from the bag/box/pile and tries to explain them in any way they want to their team. They can use definitions, synonyms, gestures, examples etc. Each round lasts 80 seconds, the team gets as many points as many words they manage to guess during each round. We usually play only one round per lesson but we keep score throughout the month and at the end of each month we announce the winner. The only thing to do is to keep track of the team members for each month. This game is to some extent based on the TV show Jeopardy but there is a greater variety of methods available, not only questions, that the students can use to cater for the variety of word categories that might be in the set.



Naturally, 80 is just a random number here and, to be perfectly honest, chosen only because I needed something for the letter E 😊. Depending on the level and age of the students, we play the game with more time (three minutes, in the beginning not to stress people too much) or less time (sixty seconds with the FCE+ students, or even thirty seconds, on the days when I am especially mean 😊)

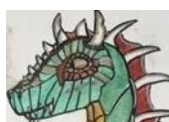
H is for Have you got

All the items are on separate cards and on the board if the students are younger, to make the task a bit less challenging. We play this game very early on, even with primary beginners, in one of the first lesson but then, usually, we use 'Can I have one, please?' or even 'One, please'.

The game roughly follows the idea of the Go Fish game but I adapted it in a few ways. Students play in pairs or groups (if the class is big, it is better to play in maximum four teams, otherwise it takes too long and students lose focus and interest). Each pair /team get a number of cards (for example 4 or 5, depending on how many items in total there. It is important that there are still some cards / items left out). They keep them secret. Students ask questions and try to guess the words that the other pairs have. If they have it, they put it in the middle of the table or give it back to the teacher.

Since there is only one copy of each item, students have to listen to all exchanges to figure out which cards have been used and which can be in their peers' possession. Pairs ask the question in a circle, team A to team B, team B to team C, team C to team D and team D to team A. The game can go on until one of the teams loses all their cards or as long as necessary. The winners are the team who have kept most of their cards.

As mentioned above, with the primary beginners, we use the simplest question possible (One, please) with the higher levels or older learners, there are two options possible. It can be 'Have you got?' as it is quite general and will match any type of a word. However, with the higher levels, with some sets of vocabulary, it is possible to adapt the question to match the particular topic. For example, with a group of juniors and the topic of



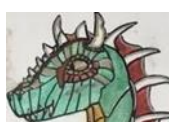
'places in the city' we were using 'Where is the nearest supermarket?' since we were also practising giving directions. If the students who did not have the supermarket card, they had to answer 'I don't know'. If they had the card, they had to describe the way to the nearest supermarket etc.

I is for Improviso games

Based on a variety of games used in the improvisation shows such as Barbixas (Brasil) or Whose Line Is It Anyway? (US/UK). All the items are on separate cards. It has worked best with the higher-level students, B2 upwards.

Phrases: Students work in pairs. Each student picks out two or three cards from the set and keeps them secret. Teacher (or later the students, once they figure out how to play it) sets the scene by telling the students who they are and what they are talking about, for example: two teachers, talking about the holidays. They have to carry out their conversation and at random points, whenever they decide, turn over one of their cards and use their item in the conversation.

Alphabet: Students work in pairs. All the items are displayed on the board. Teacher (or the students) set the scene (who they are and what are they talking about). Students start a conversation but each of their entries / lines has to include one of the items in the alphabetical order, Student A: letter A, student B: letter B, student A: letter C etc until they get through the whole alphabet and get back to A, or any other letter if the exchange starts from letter R, for example. In the original game, the word beginning with the particular letter has to be the first word of the sentence each student is producing but that might be too challenging of a task.



L is for Label It

All the items are on the A4 piece of paper, each student gets a copy. It is more fun if you have some coloured pencils or markers.

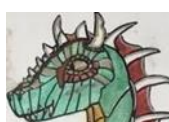
Students work individually and they categorise and colour-code the words, depending on the categories that the teacher provides. They can vary from lesson to lesson and some examples include:

- Words you like
- Words you don't like
- Words that you knew already
- Words that are easy to remember
- Words that are difficult to remember
- Words that are similar to their L1 counterparts
- Words that are really confusing

Later on, the students work in pairs and explain why they have decided to label their words in such a way. If there is time, they can change partners a few times. The same lists can be used in the following lesson, too. The students put their names, the teacher collects them and in the following lesson, gives them out. Students work in pairs and try to guess the rationale behind their partner's choices.

M is for Memory Game

All the items are displayed on the board. Teacher asks the students to look at the words and try to remember them. Teacher asks one of the students to close their eyes and then one of the words is erased. When the student opens the eyes, they try to remember which item was erased. This student nominates the next one. This student, when they open their eyes, have to recall both items, the third student – all three words and so on. To make it easy for them, teacher can leave a different symbol in place of each word (a star, a sun, a flower, a cross, two crosses etc) until all the words disappear. The class can be encouraged to help with all the missing words.



N is for Noughts and Crosses

All the items are displayed on the board. Students get an empty grid each and they have to prepare it by writing in the vocabulary items (one, two or even three per box). The teacher collects these and gives out, randomly, one per pair.

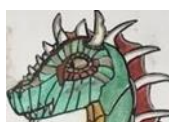
Students play the game of noughts and crosses in one of these ways:

- a) Before you put your mark, you have to make a sentence with the vocabulary item or ask your partner a question
- b) Before you put your mark, you have to use all the words in one sentence
- c) Before you put your mark, you have to talk about the topic assigned by the teacher for this round. The topic can be related to the topic of the lesson, the text or the listening task but it is a lot more fun if it isn't (although this option is for the more advanced players). Explaining why 'occasionally', 'break up' and 'headphones' may or may not have anything to do with the topic of 'animals' can be fun. As well as challenging, achievable and memorable.
- d) Instead of playing alongside each other, the students are requested to tell the story together, using the words from the grid. It is fun to see how they solve the dilemma of the choice between 'a box that will help them win' and 'a box that will help them tell a better story'. It works better, at least for the beginner storytellers, if the teacher suggests one or two opening lines.

Points system: Noughts and crosses is a game that may often end up in a draw and that the draw is quite easy to be predicted after a few moves. That might lead to students losing motivation to continue playing.

In order to solve that problem with the older learners we play with points. The students get the grids and are instructed to play until the very end, until all the boxes have been claimed. When they are done, the teacher reveals the scoring system for this particular game. It can look like that

10	10	5
5	5	5
10	10	5



Student compare it with their grids, check how much point they have earned by claiming a particular box and add them. This way there is always a winner.

The scoring is completely random and can involve 0 and 1, any number 1 – 10 or 5s and 10s. We usually play more than one round and sometimes we also collect points over a series of lessons.

O is for Odd One Out

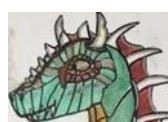
All the items are displayed on the board. Teacher demonstrates on the board and writes four (or three, depending on the items) on the side and asks students to guess which one is the odd one out. It can be based on the meaning, the first letter, pronunciation or associations. Students guess which word is the odd one out. Teacher can decide how many attempts they have, two or three or perhaps just one. Later on, student work in pairs and prepare their own set (or sets) of the odd one out words. They mingle with other pairs or partners and try to guess their odd one outs.

P is for Pot

All the items are displayed on small cards.

This game is similar to Eighty Seconds but it has three rounds that are played one by one. The students are divided into teams. In each round, one student from the team comes to the front and tries to make their team guess the words. There is a total of a minute and the more they guess within this minute, the more point they get. If they don't guess the word, it goes back into the box.

The whole class has to listen because whatever they pick up during the rounds that the other teams are playing might be useful during the final round. It might be good to remind the students about it during the game.



Round one: students only describe the words on the card, they can use as many words as they want, they have a total a minute for their round. The teams take turns until they go through all the words. The teacher counts the points and puts all the words back into the box.

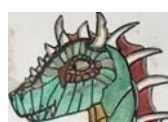
Round two: in this round, the students can only use gestures to help their team guess the words. The time limit per round is a minute and the more words they go through, the more points they guess. This round lasts until the students go through all the words. The teacher counts the points and puts all the words back into the box.

Round three: students describe the words on the card but they can only use one word at a time, only one adjective, only one synonym, only one association. Again, they have a limit of a minute per turn and again, all the teams take turns until they go through all the words. The teacher counts the points, adds the points from the previous rounds and announces the winner.

This game was inspired by my friends and the game we played at the Halloween party. We did not have a box, all the words were put into a pot, hence the name.

R is for Retell It

All the items are displayed on a piece of paper, each pair/group of students gets a copy. Students work in pairs, trying to retell what they have heard or read, using the key items. If an item is used, it is crossed out of the list. The items can be used in any order whatsoever, the retold story does not have to follow the order or the original text. Most likely, students will start with the easier and more memorable items, leaving the more complex or challenging ones for the very end. If necessary, they can look back into the book to find out how this phrase is related or how it features in the text. We usually play this game in the following lesson, to properly revise the story but it can be used as the final activity, at the end of the reading/listening task.



S is for Stories

All the items are on separate cards, in a box/bag. Students work in pairs. Each pair gets an A4 piece of paper. Teacher guides students in creating the main character. Teacher asks them to decide if it is a boy, a girl, a man or a woman, his/her profession, age, nationality. Students write that on the top of the page. Teacher dictates the first sentence and it is a good idea to make sure that it is a dramatic or a generative one, for example: 'It was a horrible day' or 'It was such a strange day' or 'It was already late when the doorbell rang' etc. Students write the sentence on their paper.

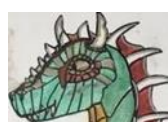
Teacher walks around the room; each pair get a card out of the box/bag. This is the item that they have to include in their story. They discuss it and write their sentence (or sentences). Teacher walks around again; students pick out a new item and return the one they have used already. The game continues for as long as necessary. If any team picks out the word they have already used, they have to use it again. Teacher picks out all the words and tells the students to think of one final sentence, of their choice.

There are a few ways of doing the content feedback after this activity. Students can exchange their stories and read them to underline all the items and to say what they like about the story.

Teacher can also circulate the stories, with all pairs reading all of them, in a chain and leaving points or stars, depending on how much they liked the story, 1 or 1 star if they liked it a little bit and 3 or 3 stars if they liked it a lot. The stories are circulating until they get back to their creators and the winning story is chosen. All that apart from the error correction, of course.

The stories can be kept for future use and reference, stored in a box or a folder or displayed on the noticeboard. They can be typed up and printed, too.

There was a similar idea in one of the Rewards Resource Pack, to practise past continuous and past simple, putting together short stories and using a set of rather random selection of small pictures.



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P.S. You will have noticed that there are some letters that are still waiting for their big breakthrough. The positions of F, G, J, K, Q, T, U, V, W, X, Y and Z are still waiting to be filled in.

Soon! I am still teaching. There will be updates 😊

