

PS: Communicative Grammar

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Teaching Communicative Grammar

Past Events

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1. Introduction

Why cognitive and communicative grammar teaching?

The aim of this essay is to persuade as many people as possible that the implementation of Communicative and Cognitive Grammar in second language teaching is the key to successful language teaching and learning. For this reason we will summarize the major aspects, mention the most important advantages it holds for language teaching and argue why we consider it as essential.

The overall aim of learning grammar is to be able to express your own ideas in real situations in language that is as correct, meaningful and appropriate as possible.
(Newby 2014: 14)

This quote by David Newby serves as the basis for all further arguments. In order to fully understand the multiple benefits C+C grammar brings to language teaching, a short overview of what it means needs to be elaborated: It consists of three main parts, namely semantic competence, formal competence and performance. The first one deals with concepts, words and expressions that are stored in our minds. Formal competence concentrates on the realization of these concepts on the morphological and syntactical level. The last one addresses the actual use of language by encoding real-life experiences via grammatical correct utterances. (cf. Newby 2014: 20)

In addition, four cognitive abilities are significant to learning grammar. It can be imagined as a circle which is enlarged by 3 additional circles. In the middle language learning processes can be found which aim to “perceive, categorize, conceptualize and remember new information”. (Newby 2014: 30) It is surrounded by the variation in styles of “perceiving, conceptualizing and memorizing new information”. (Newby 2014: 30) These two circles are encircled by learning strategies which are used to improve the speed in learning and the commitment filter dealing with the affective and cognitive part of the learner’s mindset. (cf. Newby 2014: 30)

Grammatical Knowledge in more detail consists of two sections which are relevant for C+C Grammar. One section deals with implicit and explicit knowledge. The acquisition processes of L1 and L2 have similarities as L1 is acquired naturally without any explicit rules taught

right from the beginning. Therefore, one has to wonder why this is not applied in L2. (cf. Newby 2006: 98)

In order to define how knowledge can be acquired it is necessary to distinguish between deductive and inductive processing. The latter begins with input on a certain topic leading to awareness raising and subsequently a final conceptualization of how it is generally used. In contrast, traditional grammar teaching applies the deductive method. (cf. Newby 2006: 100)

One of the most positive aspects of C+C grammar is that it combines cognitive approaches to grammar and language learning with the theories of communicative grammar. This combination regards grammatical competence being part of communicative competence, which is, in turn, a part of the all-embracing cognitive competence. The latter states that grammar can be seen as a “means of expressing certain types of meanings - notions and functions - through grammatical forms.” (Newby 2000) The speaker categorizes his or her perceptions of the world into semantic or grammatical concepts defined as notions. These notions are then attributed to a specific grammatical form that will convey its meanings. (cf. Newby 2012: 107f.) The advantages of using notions to teach grammar are manifold. First of all, it uses people’s innate capacity of encoding and decoding and draws on their existing concepts about language. The learners only need to apply them while using the correct linguistic form. Another indispensable facet is that every notion is linked to a different form, which provides learners with reliable and exceptionless rules. (cf. Newby 2012: 112) While one form can be used to express different notions, one notion can only be expressed with one form. In class it is necessary to address the systematic labelling of forms and notions so that it is as comprehensible and transparent as possible for learners. In addition, the rules of grammar must be supported by true example sentences, which need to confirm the rule. Another important criterion for rules is that they should be dense and composed of simple language. Finally, the notions allow teachers to set their goals in language teaching according to these concepts and the learners will be able to keep track of their progress by formulating their proficiency in ‘I can’ descriptors. (cf. Newby 2014: 20f.)

Today C+C grammar is widely accepted as a successful methodology. However, in most of Austria’s language classrooms a variety of different approaches is found. Unfortunately, the most prominent approach remains the traditional one which follows a very narrow-minded structure. It starts with a presentation activity, in which the teacher explains the new grammar. The next step would be a practice phase where they have to do systematic exercises including

gapped sentences, drills and transformation activities. (cf. Newby 2000) The last stage is production, which receives very little attention in comparison to the other two. Nevertheless, they expect learners to produce spontaneous and accurate language and to have internalized the structures as implicit knowledge although they are only exposed to explicit teaching. Newby argues that when expecting implicit knowledge it would be more advantageous to teach implicit knowledge from the beginning. (cf. Newby 2012: 84f.) This may sound like too much effort for too little time, however, if this strategy is applied from the beginning, learners adapt it and although you might “lose” a certain amount of time, you will be able to proceed not only faster but even more successfully having less troubles with weak students stumbling over incomprehensible input.

Learning Stages and criteria for a good grammar exercise

Another benefit of using C+C grammar in class is that language learning can be divided into different learning stages. Although such stages are similar to the PPP structure of traditional grammar teaching, cognitivists see learning processes from the learners’ point of view. This learner-centeredness remains a key factor in the design and application of all grammatical activities. The naturalistic Input-Intake-Output procedure is widened with a few learning stages that correspond to naturalistic acquisition. To be able to understand the benefits of considering these learning stages before designing grammar activities, each one must be explained shortly. Firstly, input is not only composed of the language product containing new grammar that the teacher presents, but also as the cognitive and linguistic knowledge that learners already bring to the table. In the following awareness stage the teacher will also incorporate the learners’ input. During the awareness stage the learners consciously focus on the new language. In the conceptualization stage the students try to understand the language and build hypotheses on how it is applied. They will again be able to draw on their pre-existing knowledge and contextual information in order to form new concepts in their minds about this new linguistic input. Here the teacher’s task is to support this processes by providing goal-oriented exercises. The learnt grammatical concepts must then be internalized and transferred to the learners’ long term memory. To achieve this during the proceduralization stage the pupils need to use the language in controlled exercises that still foster individual oral or written production, preparing them for the performance stage, where they are finally able to use the language in real contexts. (cf. Newby 2014: 33ff.) Having understood the different stages, the direct implications they have on teaching and the creation of activities must be considered. When designing or using an activity in the language

classroom we need to decide on what stage we want an activity to focus on. Additionally, it is important to secure coherence in the learning process. When confronting learners with new language input they should run through all learning stages in order to successfully add these language bits to their individual grammicon. (cf. Newby 2014: 35f.)

Not only must we, as teachers, reflect on the appropriate learning stage when deciding for or against a grammar activity, but we also have to evaluate if they fulfil a number of other criteria that support learning processes. First of all, we need to make sure that the pupils activate their brains and actively engage in an activity. Without the release of mental energy and cognitive involvement they will not reach levels of deep processing, internalizing or even remember what they learn. Secondly, exercises that seem authentic to learners, also with regard to the type of action that is asked of them, are more efficient than artificial ones. In real life, for example, one would never transform active sentences into passive ones. You would talk about the invention of certain objects in passive voice, though. This degree of authenticity is crucial to the understanding and automatizing of language. Additionally, personalization and commitment filter are important key words when analyzing a grammar activity. Exercises should give learners the freedom to express their own ideas and the task should be highly relevant to their real lives. In order to really commit the pupils to engage in learning processes, they should be challenged, made curious or confronted with a problem they want to solve. Finally, the social aspect of learning is crucial. Making the pupils interact will help their understanding and they are given opportunities to learn from each other. (cf. Newby 2014: 39ff.)

2. Classroom Conditions and Target Group

The following three lessons were designed to introduce the Past Simple in an Austrian English classroom. The notion of Past Events will be taught. The target group for the lessons will be between 10 and 12 years old. The materials can be used for a whole class and should be applied at the end of the year one or at the beginning of year 2.

As far as equipment is concerned, the teacher will only need the materials presented in section 4. No textbook will be needed. The materials presented were partly invented by us or adapted from the sources given in section 5.

We assumed that the lesson will be held in one week and that the second and third lesson are set in a double period. However, the materials can be used for any timetable.

3. Theoretical Analysis of Teaching Activities

3.1. 1st Lesson:

Activity 1: The learners will read a story about the Loch Ness monster. The story contains a high density of past simple forms. They should try to see if something attracts their attention. Therefore, they are asked in the heading to think about whether they can identify anything peculiar or unfamiliar. The text can either be read individually or in the plenary. The students will be given the opportunity to ask the teacher for unknown words or parts they have not understood.

~ 15 min

Learning Stages	Awareness Raising: The new form is presented to the students for the first time.
Depth of Processing	Relatively shallow. The students are in this first step only asked to read and understand the story. Depth of processing primarily on the content level.
Dual Processing/ Authenticity of the process	The learners need to activate their pre-existing knowledge about story-reading and monsters in order to fully understand the story and text type. They might identify the story as being set in the past.
Personalization	In this first step there is no personalization.
Commitment Filter	The story should raise their curiosity to the new form.

Peer/ social learning and interaction	This first activity focuses more on the individual.
Teaching vs. Testing	The activity is only suitable for teaching as they the learners do not have to demonstrate their skills.

Activity 2: In a next step the learners are asked to engage with the content of the story more closely. They have to re-read parts of the story and draw the monster as it is described in the story. They will be allowed to add some imaginary extra features.

~ 15 min

Learning Stages	Awareness Raisng/ Conceptualization
Depth of Processing	The learners really have to engage with the story again and look for the description of the monster. They have to understand it and transform it into a drawing.
Dual Processing/ Authenticity of the process	The learners engage in multi-sensory practicing as they have to turn the written description of the monster into a drawing that is as creative as possible.
Personalization	The activity is personalized as the students have to use their imagination and can add their own features to the monster.
Commitment Filter	The activity will be a fun way to express the written description in a creative way and they will be enthusiastic about drawing their own colorful monster.
Peer/ social learning and interaction	After doing the drawing, some students will present them and the learners will be given a short period of time to look at the drawings of their colleagues.
Teaching vs. Testing	This activity is primarily to be used for teaching as it is open for a lot of creativity. However, it could also be used to test receptive skills.

Activity 3 & 4: In the following two activities they are asked to go over the text again and underline the unfamiliar forms. They should try to find a rule how the forms are built and when they are used. They will do this activity in pairs to make it easier for them to find a rule. The rule will then be compared in the plenary and the teacher will add additional information if necessary.

~ 10 min

Learning Stages	Conceptualization & Hypothesis building
Depth of Processing	The learners need to activate their brains and think consciously about the new forms. They will have to link their pre-existing knowledge of verbs and forms with the new information provided.
Dual Processing/ Authenticity of the process	The students will also have to activate their pre-existing knowledge of the world and/ or maybe think about story-telling frames and the usage of past tenses, in general.
Personalization	No personalization.
Commitment Filter	The students are made curious by being asked to find a rule. They will engage in problem-solving practices.
Peer/ social learning and interaction	The pair work guarantees the social aspect of learning as they have to work together in order to find a solution to the question.
Teaching vs. Testing	The activity is only suitable for teaching as they build hypotheses and do not show their ability to produce language.

Activity 5: During the last activity of the lesson, the students should fill in the form they have found in the text into a grid. They are asked to divide them into irregular and regular forms. The teacher will then add some more important irregular forms that have not been given in the text.

~ 5 min

Learning Stages	Conceptualization & Hypothesis Building
Depth of Processing	Relatively shallow as they only have to find the right category for the previously used words.
Dual Processing/ Authenticity of the process	They will have to use the rule they have built in the previous activity and apply it in this one in order to fill the words in the right section.
Personalization	No personalization
Commitment Filter	They are again asked to do a problem-solving kind of task, which makes them engage with the language.
Peer/ social learning and	They can also do the activity in pairs in order to make the task easier

interaction	
Teaching vs. Testing	The activity should be used for teaching as the students do not have to actively produce meaningful language

3.2. 2nd Lesson:

Activity 6: In order to recapitulate what has been learned in the previous lesson the learners are asked to fill in the forms (1st or 2nd) of verbs into a grid.

~ 7 min

Learning Stages	Proceduralization
Depth of Processing	Some depth of processing as the students have try to remember what was learnt in the previous lesson and have to apply the learnt rule.
Dual Processing/ Authenticity of the process	Hardly any dual processing
Personalization	No personalization
Commitment Filter	They are again asked to do a problem-solving kind of task, which makes them engage with the language.
Peer/ social learning and interaction	No peer/ social learning
Teaching vs. Testing	The activity is primarily a testing activity, but it fits in this step as the activity serves only to remind the learners of what they already know form the previous lesson.

Activity 7: The following activity works like a Domino. The students will be given the shuffled cards and have to find a domino line. They will work in small groups of three or four. They have to find fitting pairs and bring the Domino in the right order. When they are finished they should read the Domino line again. It is a summary of the story using past simple again. The cards will be distributed equally and the person with the beginning starts to lay down the card, the next person in line will try to find the fitting card. If he or she does not have it the next one can try to find it. If they have the right card they can go on and find the

fitting card until they do not have a suitable one anymore. The person who gets rid of all his/her cards first wins.

~ 15 min

Learning Stages	Proceduralization
Depth of Processing	They will engage in mental activity when they try to find the correct domino line.
Dual Processing/ Authenticity of the process	They have to draw from their existing knowledge about the story read in the previous lesson again.
Personalization	No personalization
Commitment Filter	The students engage in a playful problem-solving activity and will be motivated by the fact that they may want to win the game.
Peer/ social learning and interaction	They will work in groups of three or four which guarantees that they engage in peer learning. They can also interact and discuss if this or that card is the right one.
Teaching vs. Testing	This activity is better suited to teaching as no language production is involved.

Activity 8: The students will stay in their small groups and play the board game. They will have to build sentences from the words in the fields in the past simple.

~ 15-20 min

Learning Stages	Proceduralization. It is a still very controlled and conscious exercise.
Depth of Processing	Relatively shallow. The exercise has the purpose to automatize the forms of past tense through intense repetition.
Dual Processing/ Authenticity of the process	They are confronted with typical situations where you would use the past tense. Past tense time expressions are included.
Personalization	No personalization
Commitment Filter	The students engage in a playful problem-solving activity and will be motivated by the fact that they may want to win the game.
Peer/ social	They will work in groups of three or four which guarantees that they

learning and interaction	engage in peer learning. They can also interact and discuss if a sentence was correct or not.
Teaching vs. Testing	The activity is better suited for teaching, as there is no direct control by the teacher if the utterances were correct.

3.3. 3rd Lesson

Activity 9: In a first step the students will have to answer a few questions about the scariest moment in their lives. They should take notes and prepare themselves to tell their story to a colleague. In a second step they will tell each other their stories and the other person will have to take notes of the scariest moment of their colleague. Some of the students will be asked to tell their partner's scarest moment in the plenary.

~ 15 min

Learning Stages	Proceduralization/ Performance in real-time context
Depth of Processing	They will have to form meaningful utterances and will be really mentally active when they have to tell their story in correct language.
Dual Processing/ Authenticity of the process	They will have to connect their real life experience to the language bits they have learnt and the process of telling a friend a story from your personal past is very authentic as well.
Personalization	They will talk about their personal experience and their scariest moment.
Commitment Filter	The students will be enthusiastic about their stories and probably want to share their scariest moments with their friends.
Peer/ social learning and interaction	They will work in pairs, which means that the criterion of peer learning is fulfilled.
Teaching vs. Testing	The activity is better suited for teaching, as there is no direct control by the teacher if the utterances were correct.

Activity 10: The students will get together in small groups of three or four and pick cards. They have to pick one location, one weather condition and one card for the people involved. With these cards they should invent their own scary monster story. Before they start writing the story they need to answer the guided questions which will help them organize their story.

~ 35 min

Learning Stages	Performance in real-time context
Depth of Processing	They will be mentally active as they have to produce a whole story on their own.
Dual Processing/ Authenticity of the process	They will have to connect their knowledge of storytelling, in general, to the new language they have learnt.
Personalization	They can invent their own story and include their personal creative ideas.
Commitment Filter	They will work together in order to produce as scary a story as possible. They are asked to share all their creative ideas.
Peer/ social learning and interaction	They will work in groups of three or four which guarantees that they engage in peer learning. They can also correct each other along the writing process
Teaching vs. Testing	The activity can be done as a teaching or testing task. However, to get clear results it should be done individually for testing.

3.4. Homework

They are asked either to record their story on vocaroo or to make a short video clip out of the story where they act it out and let somebody read the parts of the narrator. Whether they choose one or the other does not matter. However, they must make sure that every group member takes on some role in the recording/video. They should upload it on moodle and the groups will be asked to listen to/watch the recording/ video afterwards.

Learning Stages	Performance in real-time context
Depth of Processing	They will engage in mental activity as they have to work on and revise and finally act their story out in a creative way.
Dual Processing/ Authenticity of the process	They will have to connect the things they know about acting out a story to the language they have produced and learnt.
Personalization	They can act their story out including their own ideas.
Commitment Filter	They will try to put on a good performance as all the others will be able to watch/ listen to their product.

Peer/ social learning and interaction	They will work in groups of three or four which guarantees that they engage in peer learning. They can also correct each other along the writing process
Teaching vs. Testing	The activity can be done as a teaching or testing task. However, it is more advisable to use it for teaching as they won't feel inhibited to be creative.

3.5. Testing Activity

As a testing activity they are asked to finish a scary monster story. They will have to produce a story in past tense about 75 words.

Learning Stages	Performance in real-time context
Depth of Processing	They will engage in mental activity as they have to produce a meaningful scary monster story.
Dual Processing/ Authenticity of the process	They will have to use and meaningfully connect the things they know about storytelling, the new vocabulary they have learnt and the new tense they have learnt.
Personalization	They can use their own creativity for their story. It is an open task that leaves space for personal ideas.
Commitment Filter	They will try to achieve a good grade and try to demonstrate that they know how to write a scary monster story in the past.
Peer/ social learning and interaction	No peer learning involved.
Teaching vs. Testing	The activity should be applied for testing as they have to produce correct language and can show whether they know how to use the past tense in stories.

4. Practical Part: Teaching Materials

4.1. 1st Lesson:

- 1.) Read the text about the Loch Ness Monster. Do you notice anything special? Are there new forms that you do not know?

THE LOCH NESS MONSTER

A long, long time ago there was a legend about a monster that lived in a lake called Ness, by the side of a little village in Scotland. No one had ever seen the Loch Ness Monster, but the whole world talked about her. People said that the monster in the lake was as big as a football pitch, that she had four eyes and ate all the little children who went near the lake. They said it was green and had very long grey hair. It had sharp claws and a huge and hairy tail.

Jake, an adventurous little boy from the area, decided to investigate and set off to explore the area around Loch Ness. Jake knew that if the rumors of the monster were true, he wouldn't come out of his adventure alive. But there was something inside him that made him think that what people said was false.

Jake believed that if there really was a monster in Loch Ness, it couldn't be as bad as the villagers said, for he believed that all living beings had their good and bad points, and that we should try to get the best out of each other.

So Jake went off with his backpack full of food. When he reached the lake, he began throwing the food to attract the Loch Ness Monster.

Suddenly, he heard a thunderous noise coming from the lake – the monster!! Jake, who was very brave, stopped at the edge of the lake and began shouting at the same time as the monster roared. This made the monster fall silent, and after a few seconds her four-eyed head popped out of the water right in front of Jake's.

Of course Jake was very scared, but he stood quietly. Surprised that Jake wasn't moving, the monster asked: "Aren't you frightened, little boy?" Jake didn't say a word, so the monster kept on talking: "I like you. You're the first person not to run away when they see me."

Little by little, Jake grew calmer and eventually answered: "I'm sure you can't be all bad. You don't eat children, do you?"

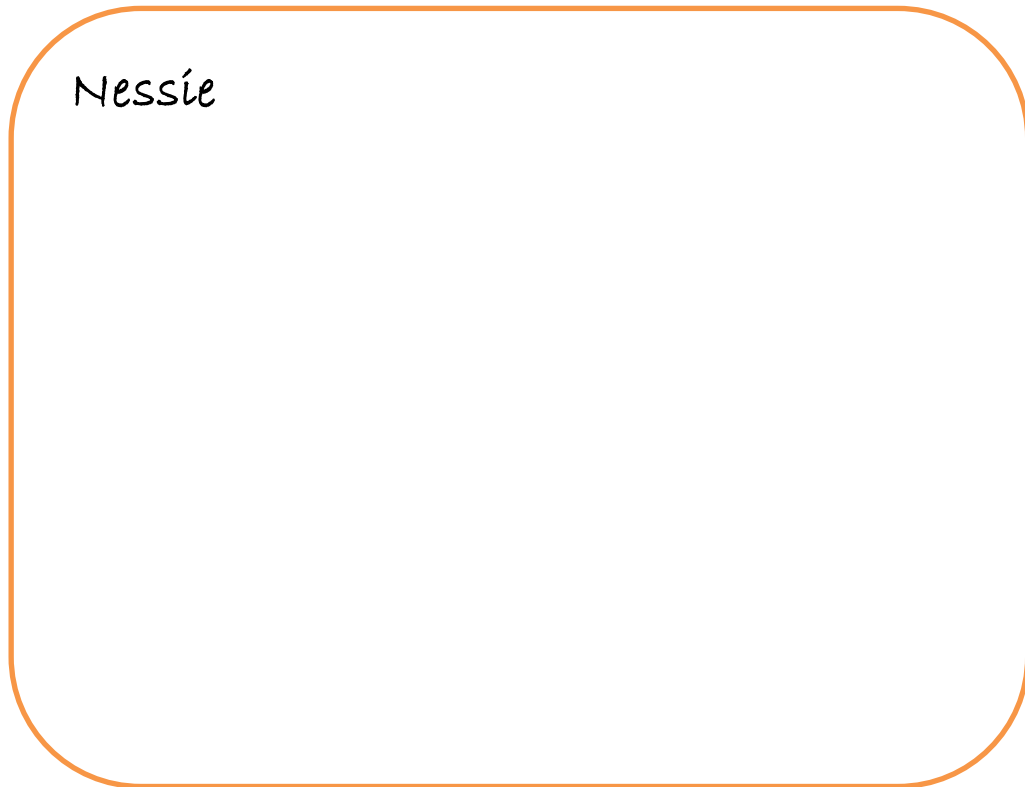
And that was how Jake and the Loch Ness monster ended up being friends, and Jake told the story all over the village and made them see that the Loch Ness monster wasn't as bad as everyone thought. And everyone realized that we should get to know someone first before saying negative things about them.

Adapted from <http://www.shortstories.net/story-the-loch-ness-monster/>



- 2.) **Draw the monster the way it is described in the story. You can add your own features to the monster. Be creative and make it colorful!**

Nessie



- 3.) **Underline the verbs in the text which are not familiar to you. What is different about them?**



- 4.) **Why are these verbs used? Find a rule for these verbs and its forms. When do we use it?**



5.) Fill the new verbs from the text into the right box.

Regular Verbs	Irregular Verbs

4.2. 2nd Lesson:


6.) Fill in the correct form of the word. Go back to the text and look them up if you do not know them.







Present tense	Past Tense
	was/were
begin	
	believed
bellow	
	decided
do not say	
	ended up
go	
	grew
hear	
	kept
know	
	made
pop out	
	reached
realize	
	reassured
say	
	scared
stand	
	stopped
talk	
	told
think	

7.) Domino: Summary of the story.

There was a legend about...	a monster in a village in Scotland.	The monster lived....	near the lake Loch Ness.
The monster had	four eyes and looked very ugly.	Jake was a very brave boy and	went to the lake one day.
He wanted to	find out if the legend was true.	He couldn't believe that	Nessie was such a horrible monster.
He walked to the lake and	threw food into the lake so that the monster came.	Both Jake and	the monster shouted.
Jake was scared,	but he still stayed.	The monster was very surprised and	started to talk to Jake.
Jake found out that	Nessie was not all that bad.	In the end Jake and	Nessie became friends.

8.) Board Game



Finish		last week visit friend	last Sunday ride bicycle		
last week clean bedroom		Skip One Turn	last month go swimming	Move Back 3 Spaces	last weekend watch TV
last night listen music		this morning take shower			Super Skip! Move Ahead
three days ago cook dinner		last week read book			yesterday write e-mail
Oh No! Go back to Start		last night wash dishes			Move Ahead 3 Spaces
last Monday learn English		last summer travel abroad			last Saturday play tennis
last week draw picture		last weekend take photos			lunch-time eat sandwich
last month find money		Oh No! Go Back		this morning do homework	
Move Ahead 2 Spaces	last year buy computer	two days ago see movie			Start

How to play:

In groups of 3 or 4, take it in turns to roll the dice.

When you land on a word square, you must make a past simple sentence using the words and the time expression.

Examples:
I played football last week.
Two weeks ago, I baked a cake.

If the sentence is incorrect, you have to go back to your previous square.

The student who reaches the finish square first is the winner.

4.3. 3rd Lesson:

9.) **My scariest moment: Answer the following questions for yourself and then tell your partner about the scariest moment in your life.**

Take turns and take notes of your colleague's story, too.


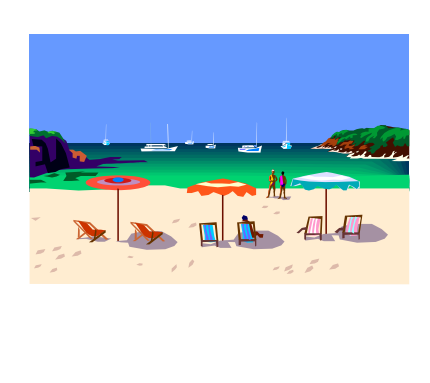

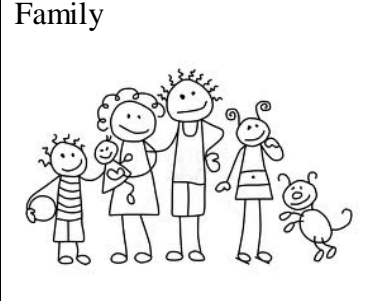
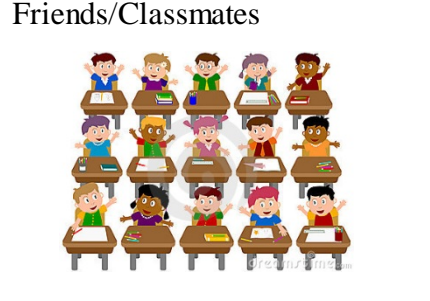






- a) What was the scariest moment in your life?
- b) What happened?
- c) Where did it happen?
- d) When did it happen?
- e) Why was it so scary?

My partner's scariest moment:



10.) Group Work: MONSTER STORY

		
Family 	Friends/Classmates 	Alone 
		

- a) Pick three cards and use them to invent a scary monster story.
- b) First answer the questions. They will help you to organize your story.
 - 1) What happened?
 - 2) What did the monster look like?
 - 3) Where did it happen?
 - 4) When did it happen?
 - 5) Who was there?
 - 6) How did it end?
- c) Include a cool heading and write your story in the past tense!

4.4. Homework:

HW: d) Meet up in your groups and record your story.

- You can either record it on vocaroo. Keep in mind that every person needs to talk (narrator, characters, monster, etc.)
- Or you can make a short video clip of your story acting it out in front of your webcam. Remember each group member must take on at least one role.



4.5. Testing Activity:

Finish the monster story. Remember to take notes first about the most important information you want to include (what, when, where, how, why). Write about 75 words.

One Saturday evening I was alone at home and I decided to go for a walk. At the end of the street, I saw the scary haunted house everybody was afraid of. I was curious and entered the haunted house. The door shut behind me and I was not alone.....



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