**Reading Circles**

Students form cooperative groups (of 5 students) to read a text.

They carry out a specific role in the group.

They share their information with the rest of the group (or even the whole class).

Roles:

* Discussion leader – writes questions to guide thoughtful group discussion; keeps group on task
* Connector – makes connections between the text and himself/herself; other similar texts/stories; the real world
* Summarizer – makes notes about the characters/events/ideas/key points; retells the text in a short summary (orally or in writing)
* Word master – looks for new/difficult/important words in the text; explains words to group; explains why the words are important
* Passage person – chooses important/interesting/difficult passage(s); focuses group’s attention on passage(s) by asking questions about or explaining or analysing passage(s)

The Teacher can give students role sheets to complete.

These will help students to prepare for their Reading Circle discussions in the classroom.

Students can prepare inside the class or for homework – or perhaps start in class and finish for homework.

Students should take turns to carry out all the roles during the term.

**A Vocabulary Box**

**What is a vocabulary box?**

This is an ordinary box (any kind will do) which contains important words, phrases or concepts that students have learned in their lessons. It’s important that the box is particular to a class and grade and contains words that they should already know from your lessons.

**Who puts the words in the box?**

It works well if the *students* put the words in the box. At the end of a lesson, you can give each student a small piece of paper and ask them to write down a new word they have learned today. Collect them in, discard duplicates, and put them in the box to be used in future lessons.

You can even ask one of your students to take responsibility for this part of the lesson. This student can be in charge of cutting up the paper, collecting in the words, discarding duplicates etc.

Of course, you can also add words that *you* think they should have learned (especially if the students tend to avoid them!)

**Can we use only single words?**

No, you might want your students to remember certain phrases or proverbs. Collocations are good. Why not have a mix of single words, collocations, idioms, phrases etc? As you like!!

**How long do the activities take?**

Between 5 and 15 minutes. You, as the teacher, can stop the activity whenever you like.

**ACTIVITIES**

There are many things you can do with a Vocabulary Box. Here are just a few:

1. **Definitions**

Put the students in groups of 3 or 4. One student takes a card from the box, keeps it a secret, and explains the word to the others in the group – ***without*** using any of the words on the card. The first student to correctly guess the word, keeps the card. The students take it in turns within their group to explain a word. At the end of the activity, the student with the most cards is the winner.

1. **Spelling**

i) Put the students into pairs. In turns, they each take a card from the box, say the word and ask the other to spell it. Obviously, they should not show each other the cards. You can decide if they should spell the word by writing or by saying the letters. Probably, writing the letters would be more helpful for their exams. If it is correct, the student can keep the card. The winner is the student with the most cards at the end of the activity.

ii) Put students into groups of 3 or 4. Give them some scrap paper or laminated cards (mini-whiteboards) to write on and a thick marker pen. You, the teacher, take a word from the box and tell the class what it is. Each group has 15 seconds to write the word down. After 15 seconds, ask the groups to hold up their word. Give one point for each correct spelling. The group with the most points at the end of the activity is the winner.

iii) Do you want to make it more difficult? Then don’t say the word, and instead give students the definition. The groups then have to guess the answer as well as spell it correctly. Give one point for a correct answer and an extra point for correct spelling.

Caution: don’t allow groups to hold up their word until you ask for it (to avoid copying.)

**3) Make a sentence**

Put the students into groups of 3 or 4. Take a card from the box and read it out. The groups then have 30 seconds (or 60 seconds if you prefer) to write it in a coherent sentence. At the end of the 30 seconds, ask each group to stop writing and listen. Then ask one student from each group to read out their group’s sentence. Give a point to the group with the best sentence.

What is the best sentence? That depends. Perhaps you would choose the sentence with the best English, or the most poetic, or the funniest, or the longest.

It can be a nice idea to allow the *students* to choose the best sentence sometimes. Why not pick 2 or 3 students in the class and tell them that they are the judges? Together they must choose the best sentence and give their reasons. This is a very nice way to motivate your students and challenge them at the same time.

The group with the most points at the end of the activity is the winner.

**4) Pronunciation**

i) Put the students into pairs. In turns, each student takes a card, shows their partner, and then the partner must say the word. If the pronunciation is correct, that student can keep the card. If there is uncertainty about the correct pronunciation, they can ask you, the teacher, to be the judge.

ii) Put the students into groups of 3 or 4 and call them Team A, B, C etc. Take a word from the box and write it on the board. Ask Team A how to pronounce the word. The students in the group should confer and then give you their answer. Accept only the first answer. If it’s correct, the team gets 2 points. If it’s not correct, ask another team to pronounce the word for a bonus point. Then take another card and write the word on the board. Ask Team B to pronounce it….and so on.

The team with the most points at the end of the activity is the winner.

**5) Pictionary**

Put students in 3 or 4 groups. In turns, one student from each group comes to the board, takes a card and draws a picture of the word on the board. The other students in the group have 30 seconds to guess the word. If they guess it correctly within the time allowed, they can have 2 points. If they can’t, ask another team to offer an answer. If the other team is correct, they can have a bonus point. Then it’s the turn of Team B …and so on…

Remember: a team can only make guesses when it is their turn and one of their members is drawing.

**How to use these activities**

* If you have some very quick students who finish their work before the others, you can give them the box and ask them to do the *spelling* or *definition* activities while they wait.
* If your lesson has focused on one type of activity the whole time, you can spend 5 or 10 minutes at the end with one of the team activities, to change the pace of the lesson.
* If you find your students cannot remember the important words from recent lessons, or have trouble with spelling or pronunciation, you can spend 5 minutes every lesson using the shorter activities to help them.
* You can use some of these activities before an exam or test to help your students revise in the classroom. This means they can also ask for your help if they don’t remember something.
* If students are late to class and you only have a few at the beginning, you can give the box to the students who are present and ask them to do the *spelling* or *definition* activities.
* If you have to cover a class for an absent teacher, you can ensure continuity of lessons by using his/her vocabulary box for one or two activities.

Acknowledgement:

With thanks to Helen Gasking, ESL Trainer UK for concept