

Games for Language Learning

Wright, A., Betteridge, D., and Buckby, M. (2006).

Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers
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Games for Language Learning is a part of the series “Cambridge Handbook of Language Teachers”. The book comprises a wide range of language games and is mainly for learners from beginner to intermediate levels. However, with some modifications, these games can also be used for learners of higher classes and teachers, and teacher educators in various language trainings.

The book is divided into 8 sections and has more than 200 games including variations. Each section includes games from the following categories: 1) Do: Move, Mime, Draw, Obey 2) Identify: Discriminate, Guess, Speculate 3) Describe 4) Connect: Compare, Match, Group 5) Order 6) Remember, and 7) Create. These categories have been made keeping in mind the fact that each learner has her own way of learning. Some learners may like games which involve working with visual information such as pictures, diagrams, etc., and some may respond better when they get the opportunity to go out and can do things on their own. Similarly, some learners may like to work in pairs and some may like to work in a group or individually. The games included in the book cater to all such concerns of learners and teachers.

Each section begins with a short introduction followed by details of the games such as its name, category, what it aims to do, the

preparation required and finally the procedure. Wherever required, examples and illustrations have been provided for better understanding so that the game can be executed well.

The titles of the sections give an idea about the games included in these sections. For example, Chapter 1 entitled “Icebreakers and Warmers” has games that can be played with a new group; be it a new class or the introductory session of a training. These games create opportunities for the participants to interact with each other and to get to know each other. It also includes games that can be played at the beginning of a lesson. Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 in particular deal with four language skills—speaking, listening, writing and reading respectively. The games included in each of these chapters reveal the fact that the four language skills are closely linked with each other, and therefore should not be treated separately when we work in class helping children develop these skills. Similarly, there are games which primarily focus on one of the language skills but also help in developing understanding of the elements of grammar or of a story. For example, in the game “Stories with ten pictures” the learner is expected to compose stories using past tense verb forms (p. 37), while in the game “Question Stories” learner is asked to narrate the story in the past tense and make questions based on it (p. 39).

Chapter 6 is entitled “Vocabulary and Spelling”. This chapter “is to help the learners experience the meaning of the words in context by using them for purposes which matter to them” (p. 94). It includes games such as “Word Web”, “Word Association”, “Naming Games”, “Odd one out”. The reader may have come across some of these games before, but there are many variations under each category that can be tried out in the class. The next section deals with grammar and presents games that expect the learner to exploit and analyse language and its elements. This section has 25 games in all with

variations, and these games cover topics such as tenses, parts of speech, “wh” questions, etc. Chapter 8 suggests games that the learner can play independently to practice, revise and remember what has been learnt earlier. They include making folding vocabulary books, making cards, etc. There are other games to help remember and revise what has been learnt earlier. These include “Making a Mind Map”, “Making a Word Sun”, “Adding words” in the existing lists of words on a topic.

All in all, *Games for Language Learning* is a small handy book of 193 pages. As mentioned earlier, this book can be used both with students and with groups of teachers in various language trainings. The games are meaningful and interesting, and with modification can be used at different levels and for teaching different languages. However, this requires comprehensive understanding of the language on the part of the teacher to enable him /her to use games the way they should be used in class and also go beyond them.

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