

The Power of BINGO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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I have been an ALT for a year and seven months and in that time I have recognized that personally, I prefer to teach conversational English and review important grammar points through games. My students also seem more receptive to this method of teaching and thus, I have investigated and attempted to use a variety of educational English conversational games. My research has lead me to discern that Japanese students in elementary and junior high schools respond well too, and most importantly, learn from, the game of Bingo. When I announce that we'll be playing Bingo it's almost as though a voodoo spell has been cast on the class of students that I and my JTE are instructing; the kids become excited and a good atmosphere of competition is created. There are several variations of the Bingo game which I have tried and in this piece I would like to share my game ideas and their results on the children with you.

"ABC Bingo." This game is great for elementary school students and those in the first year of junior high school. To play this game I first taught the ABC Song, then I had the children write the ABCs in capitol letters in random boxes on the Bingo sheet. After that I called out letters and then used the letter in a word. Following is an example: E, as in Elephant, E. The students listened to the letters and words and most were able to differentiate between the letters and the sounds those letters make in words. Most students know the alphabet so it is a excellent review in recitation, writing and listening.

"Sho/ Chu Gakusei Bingo." This game idea came from the ALT activity book MINEFIELDS. For this game I cut out cards with the numbers 1- 40 written on them. Each student was given a number card at random, I told the students that for the game they would be standing and then I explained the game to the class as a whole. I wrote a question on the board and told each student that they had to answer the question in a complete sentence when, and if, their number was called. The first row and the first column of students to answer the question correctly would be the winners. The catch to the game is that no student can give the same answer as another student! My JTE's and I worked together to carry off the game in a successful and timely manner. I called out the numbers and addressed the question to the student while my JTE wrote the student's answer on the board. In several elementary schools I used this game to determine whether the students had understood how to introduce themselves in English. For the elementary lesson the following format was used:

- 1) My name is -.*
- 2) I like-.*
- 3) Nice to meet you!*

The elementary school teacher wrote the students' answers, for "I like -", in katakana and in hiragana on the blackboard. For first and second year junior high school students I used the question, "What do

you like?” while for some second and third year students I asked, “How are you today?”. This type of game was great for a warm up. Every student was capable of answering the questions; additionally, the fact that the question was always the same but the answers could not be, challenged the students to delve into their vocabulary and choose a word which fit into the respective sentences properly.

“Tick - Tock Bingo.” This game was also taken from the MINEFIELDS activity book and I think it is a fantastic way to teach first year students about time and to review the concept with those in their second year of junior high school. I set up this Bingo activity as an interview game. First, I passed out a sheet to students asking them what time they did everyday activities: What time do you get up?, What time do you take a bath?, What time do you eat dinner?. Once the surveys were completed I collected them and passed out the same variety of time questions for students to ask each other in an interview format. The students then marked the answers of other students on the Tick - Tock Bingo sheets. After all the interviews had been carried out, I called out random times and those with the times I mentioned marked their Bingo sheets. This game reviewed numbers, specifically time. There was also an element of conversation in that students were responsible for interviewing each other to gain information concerning everyday activities.

“-ed” or “-ing” Bingo. I have only used this game with first year junior high school students but I believe that it would also serve as a good review for second year students. I created a worksheet for this game with a list of words on one side and a bingo graph on the other. Next to the words, I left a space for students to write the meaning of the words in hiragana or katakana. Some of the words I included for “-ing” Bingo were: playing, watching, kicking, shopping, and laughing while some of the words for “-ed” Bingo were played, watched, kicked, shopped and laughed. After we had orally recited the list of words and the students had translated the meanings of the words into Japanese, I had them write some of the words in the Bingo boxes. Then the game began! For this Bingo game I read sentences and left the “-ing” or “-ed” word out, students had to choose which word, from the list of words, completed the sentence best. For example: I enjoy (playing) soccer or Michiko loves (watching) American movies. Random students called out the correct words and all students began slashing boxes. Although this Bingo game is more complex, there were many phases of preparation and play. Most students had a fantastic time translating the words, writing them in the Bingo boxes, listening to my sentences and, of course, crossing out the boxes in which they had written the “-ed” or “-ing” verbs which worked best.

My students seem to love the Bingo games that I play with them and I enjoy working in a classroom that is awake and excited about what they are learning. I firmly believe that games are an excellent means of introducing and reiterating material. While I do acknowledge that textbooks serve a function, I also recognize that using the texts day after day is tedious to the students, JTEs and ALTs. Games break up textbook usage and can often supplement exercise activities supplied by the text. Games, especially Bingo, have the magical ability of being able to provide a retreat from the ordinary and an excursion into the extraordinary world of conversational English.