

In the Classroom

Building Fluency through Repeated Listening of Movie Scenes

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Quick Guide

Keywords: listening, fluency, dialogue, movies

Learner English level: High beginner and above

Learner maturity: Junior high school and above

Preparation time: 15-30 minutes

Activity time: 30-50 minutes per presentation pair

Materials: Projector and screen or individual smartphones, Wi-Fi/DVD player/USB

A quick look at an English learner's study notebook will often reveal page after page of words copied multiple times. Many students use this technique to help them commit the spelling and meaning of new words to memory. Listening ability can be improved in a similar manner by repeated listening of the same material. Listening is usually included as part of a general English curriculum but students lack ideas on how to improve their listening ability.

Listening materials that accompany textbooks are often less expressive and unnatural compared with dialogues in movies. Using movie scenes allows students to hear more natural

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English with a greater range of expression. In addition, the visual aspect allows students to see gestures and expressions that accompany the spoken language. When students know they will be asked to do a dramatic activity with the movie scene, they listen more carefully to timing, volume, intonation and expression. This activity guides students from relying on subtitles to committing the dialogue to memory thus building listening and comprehension skills and improving dramatic expression.

Preparation

Step 1: Choose a short (1-4 minutes) scene from a popular movie with Japanese subtitles that most students are familiar with. You may want to ask students in an earlier lesson which movies they have seen. Popular children's movies and classic animation are a good choice.

Step 2: Decide whether students will watch on their own devices if the scene is web accessible or prepare the scene to be shown on a projector with a DVD or USB. A DVD is recommended because you will need to be able to show the scene in 3 formats; with Japanese subtitles, with English subtitles and without subtitles.

Procedure

Step 1: Show the scene with Japanese subtitles. It may be necessary to provide background information such as the backstory, character names and relationships. Students should focus on understanding the scene in Japanese. Repeat if necessary.

Step 2: Show the scene with English subtitles. This step can be repeated 2 or 3 times or more if necessary. Move on to the next step when you feel the students are no longer relying on and reading the subtitles.

Step 3: Show the scene again without any subtitles; repeat 1 or 2 times.

Step 4: Turn off the video and play only the audio. Ask students to visualize the scene as they listen. Ask some questions such as: Who is speaking now? Where is he going? What is he doing? Who is he talking to? What will happen next? Repeat 1 or 2 more times.

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Additional Activities

Students should watch/listen for a combined total of 8-10 times from steps 1-4. At this point you can choose to do one of the following activities depending on the complexity of the scene you have chosen and the ability of your students. Each activity focuses on a different aspect of performance.

Activity A: Play the video with no audio and ask students to try to write down the dialogue from the visual clues. Pause the video as necessary to allow students time to write. This activity allows the teacher to see how much the students are able to accurately hear and recall dialogue, a skill that they will need to be able to do before performing.

Activity B: Play the video with no audio and have the class say the lines of the dialogue. Allowing all members to speak simultaneously alleviates performance anxiety. Students should be encouraged to experiment with dramatic vocal expression, volume and timbre.

Activity C: Play the video with no audio and assign character roles to individuals or small groups and have them say the lines. Assigning roles requires the speaker to listen carefully to each other to improve their dramatic timing.

Activity D: Play only the audio and have the students lip-synch the lines while acting out the scene in front of the class. Speaking a foreign language expressively and physical performance are two separate skill sets. Lip-synching allows students to focus on the physical aspects of performance with no need to worry about recalling dialogue and vocal expression.

Conclusion

This activity shows students how to use subtitles in movies for improving their listening ability. They first understand the scene with Japanese subtitles, then with English subtitles, progressing to listening only in English. Finally, they are able to visualize the scene, recall dialogue and perform a dramatic activity based on the movie scene.

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Deanna Clause has been teaching in Gunma for over half her life. She currently teaches engineering and medical students at Gunma University. She uses her background in theatre in the university classroom to help students build presentation skills and gain confidence in public speaking.



Written Debate: Arguing on Paper

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Quick Guide

Keywords: Writing, debate, competition, grammar

Learner English level: Low intermediate and above

Learner maturity: High school and above

Preparation time: 5 minutes

Activity time: 15-45 minutes

Materials: Paper, writing utensils, a timer (a timer that all can see is ideal, but if students can't view the timer that's not a problem)

Nothing like a bit of competition to motivate students. This activity injects the competitive spirit of debate into writing. Teams of students write arguments about a topic and then swap them with opposing teams. Teams get point if they find grammar or syntax mistakes in the other team's writing. They then attempt to write a refutation. Papers get swapped and the process is repeated. Each stage is timed and points given. There is minimal preparation and set-up, so this activity can