

# **“Generic” Learner-Centered Reading Activities**

Here are the two most common but *least motivating and least effective* classroom reading activities:

- One person reads aloud a few sentences or a paragraph or more and everyone else listens, hopefully while following along into the text.
- In a “teacher-centered” lesson, the group goes over, discusses, interprets, and/or translates each reading selection line by line or even word by word.

There are more efficient, more productive, and *inclusive* methods of learning, teaching, or practicing and improving reading abilities. In some form or another, all of them involve *silent* reading to oneself, communicating and later discussing the most important information and main ideas, and—eventually—learning what needs to be learned and remembered. Here are some of the tried-and-true, (almost) always successful methods, presented in “generic” form so they can be reduced, expanded, or otherwise adapted to a group.

## **R** **Reading Card “Kit.”**

The simplest, quietest, most individualistic way to “teach” reading or provide effective practice in *silent reading for meaning* is to provide each group of learners—or a whole class—with a Reading Card “Kit.” To prepare such a set of reading cards, paste up reading selections on the chosen topic on index cards or card stock, perhaps brightly-colored card stock. The selections should be of approximately equal length and difficulty. Another way to produce this kind of material is to create it on the computer and print it out on card stock—or photocopy the master on card stock. Each group should be provided with at least twice as many reading cards as there are group members.

For example, if you decide to use the *High Beginning Level Biographies 1-10* from this booklet for a Reading Card Kit, paste up the ten readings on ten separate index cards of the appropriate size. Or you can glue copies of four readings on each piece of card stock and then cut *pages* apart. In either case, there should be significantly more reading selections than students, so if the class is large, make more than one Reading Card “Kit.”

If you want students to increase their speed and comprehension by “reading for a specific purpose,” hand out the “answer sheet” or “quiz sheet” first. For *Biographies 1-10*, you might want to use the ten items on page 30 or something similar.

To start the reading activity, hand out a set of ten reading cards to each group of four or five students. They distribute the cards, probably two to each member. At a signal, they read their cards silently and quickly for meaning, marking the answers on their answer sheets or quiz papers. As they finish each card, they pass it to the student on their right.

When time is called, perhaps those students that have completed their answer sheets should receive a small prize—as an incentive to find information even more quickly next time. When the class reconvenes, participants can go over their answers together.

To test for reading comprehension, the instructor or group leader can read the answer sheet or test items aloud, without the answers of course. Listeners try to recall and tell the answers (in this case, the names of ten famous people).

An alternative, more challenging way to make use of a Reading Card “Kit” is to hand out the cards *before* distributing the answer sheets or quiz pages. Again, learners read silently for meaning, but this time they might want to make notes on the important information of each selection. For biographical readings like those in this booklet, it may help to take notes in chart form, something like this:

Famous Person's Name	Why this person is famous or remembered	Other Important Information
Kareem Abdul Jabbar	Most points in basketball player's career, tallest player	Played for U.C.L.A., Bucks, Lakers. Doesn't play anymore.
Yasser Arafat	Leader of PLO. Against Israel, now for peace.	Supported Saddam Hussein in Gulf crisis. Won Nobel Prize.
The Beatles	1960s-world-famous pop music group, "Beatlemania"	John, Paul, George, Ringo. "I Wanna Hold Your Hand," etc.
The Buddha	Founder of Buddhism. Four Noble Truths. Nirvana.	Nepal, royalty. Received enlightenment under a tree.

After time is called, the reading cards are collected. Learners can take the “reading comprehension quiz” in one or more forms:

- *A group reader or instructor reads aloud the questions or test items. The leader can call on participants individually or let the group answer collectively. Perhaps the “oral quiz” can even be conducted as a kind of competition.*
- *Each small group can receive a test paper, competing with other groups to complete it cooperatively, completely, and correctly. Perhaps the winning group can win a prize.*
- *Each individual can “take the test” on his or her own. If the activity is conducted in a credit course, the papers can be graded.*

# The “Expert Game”

A more communicative, somewhat “noisier” activity that makes use of a set of reading selections is the “Expert Game.” Again, prepare a set of reading cards with selections of approximately equal length and difficulty. The principle behind the “Expert Game” is that each learner or pair or small group becomes responsible for teaching a piece of information to others—by summarizing, paraphrasing, explaining, answering questions, and making sure that listeners “get it.” At the same time, listeners become responsible for understanding the main points and information, for asking for repetition or clarification if they need to, for jotting down or remembering what they need to learn. Here are some ways to conduct the “Expert Game.”

- *In the small group version of the “Expert Game,” each person in each group receives a different reading selection—or two selections if there are twice as many readings as there are group members. Time is allotted for them to read and understand their selections, perhaps making notes to talk from. Then, group members in turn “present” the main points of their material—by summarizing it briefly in their own words and making sure that their listeners understand. As each person has his or her turn at “teaching,” group members may jot down notes and ask questions. Finally, the reading cards are collected.*
- *In a whole-class version of the “Expert Game,” each person, each pair, or each small group receives a different reading card, perhaps several copies of the same reading if feasible. As in the small-group version described above, time is allotted for them to read and understand their selections, perhaps making notes to talk from. If more than one person has the same selection, they may want to practice their “presentations” together, correcting one another’s grammar, phrasing, and pronunciation if necessary. Finally, the reading cards are collected. In turn, individuals, pairs, or groups “present” the main points of their material in front of the class—by summarizing it briefly in their own words and making sure that their listeners understand. (Pairs or groups might decide to divide up the information. Or they may prefer to present the same material two or three times in different paraphrases.) As each person or group “presents,” listeners in the audience are responsible for taking coherent notes and asking questions if they need to.*
- *In the most active version of the “Expert Game,” each learner gets a different reading selection. (In a large class, there will be duplicates, but the game will still work.) The titles of the selections—in this case the names of the people in the biographies—are listed on the chalkboard. (Or each participant can make himself or herself a name tag with the name of the famous person biographed in his or her reading.) At a signal, all students circulate around the room, trying as fast as they can to get the answers to the first or both of these questions about all of the famous people listed. (1) Why is this person famous? OR Why is this person remembered? (2) What else should we remember about this person’s life? They take notes on the answers.*

# Oral Informational Activities

No matter which version of the “Expert Game” is used, chosen, the follow-up to group or whole-class activities should be a comprehension check of some kind. Any of the suggestions for a “reading comprehension quiz” on page 37 are appropriate as checks for the “Expert Game.” Here are more ideas:


- **Placing People in History.** Keeping their reading cards as “name tags,” learners in groups of 4 to 8 arrange themselves in “chronological order,” according to the era in which their famous person lived and worked. In turn, the groups “present” their important information to the class. Standing in a line in time order, they each tell something about their person’s significance in history. Listeners can be made responsible for listing the names of famous people in a “master list,” arranged in order of their places in history.
- **Biographical Categories.** Each with a different biographical reading card, all participants arrange themselves in small groups, according to the “category” to which the subjects of their biographies belong. For instance, all those that are “experts” in sports figures form one group; those with political figures, another; those with media personalities, a third; and those with scientists, a fourth. They prepare their “presentations.” Then in turn, each group tells about the famous people in their category, perhaps explaining what they had in common and/or how they are different. Listeners can take notes, be asked to summarize what they learned, etc.
- **Chain of Facts.** In each group of five to ten participants, every person should have a different biographical reading. The first student reads aloud or—better yet—paraphrases a statement about the subject of his or her biography, such as “The Beatles were a world-famous pop music group.” The second participant repeats the first statement and gives one of the same kind about his or her famous person. For example, “Kareem Abdul Jabbar” was one of the best basketball players of the 1960s and 1970s.” The third person repeats the second statement and adds a third about another famous personality, such as “The Buddha was the founder of the Buddhist religion.” The chain continues until each student has given one statement of the same kind. Together, the group reviews what they have just learned.

Another participant begins the second round by giving a statement of another kind or sentence pattern, such as “One good thing that Yasser Arafat did was work for peace in the Middle East.” The next person repeats the first statement and adds a second, such as “One good thing that Lucille Ball did was make millions of TV viewers laugh.” The process continues in this way until everyone has said one fact of the same kind. If the life or personality of someone’s famous person does not fit the pattern, he or she may ask the group for help or “pass.”

The game may continue with as many rounds as seem useful, each based on a different “fact format” or sentence patterns. Here are a few suggestions for additional statement forms: (1) “One bad thing about ... was that s/he....” (2) ... lived in the time of .... (3) The most unusual thing about ... was that .... (4) Some of the .... that .... created (or produced or caused) were ..... (5) The event that determined the course of ...’s life was .... (6) Most people remember ... because .....

# Biography Quiz Games

From their biographical reading cards, each individual or small group—and/or the instructor—can prepare “quiz questions” for competitive question-and-answer biographical fact games. The questions can be of a “Jeopardy format,” in which “contestants” tell answers in question form, or—more simply, in forms typical for language-learning games. Here are some examples for one of the reading cards from this booklet.

<p><b>BIOGRAPHY 19: Donald Trump (1946- )</b></p> <p><b>D</b>onald Trump often appears in the news media and gossip columns because of his high-profile business deals, his enthusiastic self-promotion, his glamorous marriages, and his costly divorces. Occasionally, he even shows up on TV—in minor roles in situation comedies or on talk shows.</p> <p>Born in New York City, Donald was the son of a successful residential real-estate developer. When he took over the Trump organization, he greatly expanded its holdings. He was responsible for the construction of more and more grandiose buildings, such as the Trump Tower in New York and the casinos in Atlantic City, New Jersey. A “celebrity” in the 1980s, Donald Trump almost faced bankruptcy from the stock market “crash” of 1990.</p> 		<p><b>Jeopardy-Format “Answers and Questions”</b></p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>This New York real-estate developer is often in the news because of his marriages and</td> <td>Who is Donald Trump?</td> </tr> <tr> <td>He built a tower in New York City with his name and casinos in</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>		This New York real-estate developer is often in the news because of his marriages and	Who is Donald Trump?	He built a tower in New York City with his name and casinos in			
This New York real-estate developer is often in the news because of his marriages and	Who is Donald Trump?								
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<p><b>“Traditional” Language-Learning Question-and-Answer Formats</b></p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>True or False: Donald Trump was famous as a modern artist, struggling financially.</td> <td>False. He is a still a well-known, very rich real-estate developer.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Who is Donald Trump?</td> <td>A real-estate developer often in the media.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>When did Donald Trump live and work?</td> <td>He’s still living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.</td> </tr> </table>				True or False: Donald Trump was famous as a modern artist, struggling financially.	False. He is a still a well-known, very rich real-estate developer.	Who is Donald Trump?	A real-estate developer often in the media.	When did Donald Trump live and work?	He’s still living in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century.
True or False: Donald Trump was famous as a modern artist, struggling financially.	False. He is a still a well-known, very rich real-estate developer.								
Who is Donald Trump?	A real-estate developer often in the media.								
When did Donald Trump live and work?	He’s still living in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century.								

Quiz games can range from the very simple, in which individuals or teams compete in answering questions, to exciting, complex game formats that mirror TV game shows. Here are some ideas for the simplest versions:

- *Students divide into groups that serve as “teams.” In turn, each team gets a chance to answer a different question, selected randomly from a list or—better yet—from question cards drawn out of a container. After the question is asked, the team gets time to confer—perhaps 15 to 30 seconds. If the members answer the question correctly, they receive a point. If they answer incorrectly, the next group gets a chance to answer, and so on. The game can be played for as many “rounds” as time allows. The winner is the team with the most points.*
- *Alternatively, the class can divide into two or more teams to create their lists of biographical questions, or decks of question cards. In turn, each team asks a question of the other (or the next) team. Because this game will probably follow one or more cooperative-learning activities, a “positive” scoring method is to give both the questioning and the answering team a point if the question is answered correctly—and to subtract a point from both scores for an incorrect answer. That way, everyone will work hard to make their questions and answers comprehensible and important.*

# Research Picture Cues

For any kind of content, but especially with biographies, pictures (photos, sketches, and cartoons) provide a motivating and effective language-learning change of pace. Pictures of famous people can be collected from magazines, from illustrated biographical readings, from “clip art” like that cited in this booklet, and/or from Internet (worldwide web) addresses like the ones listed on page 4. The pictures can be pasted up on card stock of any size. Here are the simplest ways to make use of the picture cards:

1. In groups or as a class, learners identify the people in the pictures—cooperatively or competitively. They get one point for each correct answer and an extra “bonus point” if they can tell why the person is famous or remembered.
2. Learners use the picture cards for a kind of “information scavenger hunt.” From a pile of cards laid out on a table, each individual or team receives one card. As fast as they can, using supplied “research materials,” they find out three important facts about that person and/or three significant events from the person’s life. They write the information in a list. They then exchange the card for another person’s picture and repeat the process until time is called. The winner is the person or team with the most correct facts. The cards and the collected information can be reviewed with the whole class.

Here are more Corel MegaGallery ClipArt caricatures of famous people—to be used in the activities suggested above or in other biographical lessons or games.



The people caricatured above are supposed to be: Benjamin Franklin, Clark Gable, Dan Rather, Bette Davis, Salvador Dali, Dolly Parton, Eddy Murphy, Clint Eastwood, Ronald Reagan, Genghis Khan, Sammy Davis Jr.