

Out-of-The-Box Teaching Activities to Develop Creativity and Critical Thinking in a Second Language

Gallery Reading and Discussions

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Duration: 7 minutes per text, plus 18 minutes set-up and discussion, totaling 60 minutes

Target student proficiency level: Intermediate to advanced

Target student age: Young Adults or Adults

Objectives:

This activity fosters a variety of customized, timely topics that encourage learners to read and discuss in pairs or small groups to develop fluency, proficiency, and, most importantly, criticality, using written input to encourage negotiation.

- Language skills: Reading and speaking
- Content knowledge: Social issues, self-analysis, self-reflection, self-improvement
- Cognitive abilities: Visual and textual processing through reading and pictures, problem-solving in discussing the questions
- Social abilities: By working in pairs or small groups, learners receive input (text plus questions) that requires interaction and negotiation for meaning

Materials:

Wall posters (papers, pictures, adhesive tapes) on which are displayed short readings with discussion questions on customized, timely topics such as self-improvement during challenging times, printed in large font size, fitting on one single page (text may be adapted from original texts). See examples below.



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Preparation:

Before the activity, the teacher hangs all posters on the walls, clearing the way and rearranging desks so that learners have access to the posters. It is important to keep the posters displayed at a distance from each other, given that learners will read and discuss and then walk around to the following text.

Procedure:

This activity uses the topic of self-improvement in challenging times, but topics can vary.

1. Have the texts taped on the walls around the classroom
2. Tell students to work in pairs or small groups
3. Ask students to walk around the classroom, read each text and discuss the questions that follow each text with their partners
4. Encourage students to take some notes while reading
5. Make sure all pairs read all texts and answer the questions for each text
6. Monitor the activity closely, taking notes of possible mistakes or expressions during the discussions
7. Go over pronunciation or explanation of language issues noticed during the activity and provide feedback
8. Bring the class together to discuss
 - what they learned from the texts
 - what they learned about themselves
 - what self-improvement actions they will take in the next week or month
9. Create a Class Pledge to record what each student said they would change to improve themselves

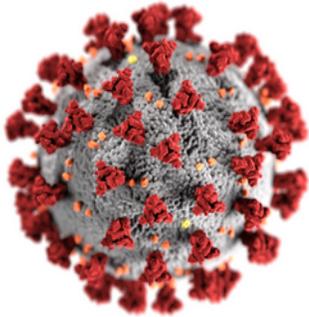
Variations & Extensions: Apart from the numerous topics (texts and pictures/drawings) that can be used in this activity, other possible variations are:

1. Learners formulate three questions about the topic instead of reading and answering the given questions.
2. Learners write their short answers and hang them under the main text so that the other groups can read each other's thoughts. (That would add a writing skill component to the activity)
3. Poll survey. Learners can answer a survey while or after discussing the questions.

Examples of Reading Materials:

Ready-to-print posters are on the following pages. All photos are by Unknown Author, licensed under CC-BY-SA.

Exhibit 1: COVID-19



COVID-19 caught the entire world by surprise in 2020. Spreading rapidly, it reached all countries, killing more than 5 million people worldwide. Given how little was known about this virus and how deadly it was, some countries took severe measures to control the contaminations implementing lockdowns and other restrictions. In contrast, others did not take many precautions. Many laboratories developed vaccines against COVID-19, and while some people trust the vaccine's effectiveness, others are still questioning the unknown and long-term effects of the vaccine.

Now, answer the following questions and share your thoughts with your partner or group:

1. Was there a lockdown in your city? For how long?
2. How different was your life during the lockdown? What did you do?
3. In your opinion, did the governments make the right decisions? Why? Why not?
4. Did you or would you get vaccinated? Why? Why not?

Source: Izabela Meira Grein Muller

Exhibit 2: Smizing



We used to convey our emotions through our facial expressions, whether happy, sympathetic, sad, or angry. Now, half of our faces are covered with masks. Our way of communicating is certainly affected. It isn't easy to guess what someone is

saying or read people's emotions when wearing masks.

Thanks to our creativity, we invented new ways of letting people understand our state of mind. Some people voice their feelings, speaking clearly and saying how they feel. Others use body language like waving, 'air' hugging, or clapping to express themselves. Our necks and shoulders posture can also express our feelings. Smiling under your mask or 'smizing' also sends a positive message about our mood.

Now, answer the following questions and share your thoughts with your partner or group:

1. Do you know what 'smizing' is? Do you 'smize'?
2. How do you express yourself when wearing a mask?
3. What are the impacts (social, psychological) of wearing a mask?

Source: <https://www.aarp.org/home-family/friends-family/info-2020/showing-emotions-face-mask.htm>

Exhibit 3: Social connections and loneliness



We are social creatures by nature, so maintaining our social connections is always crucial to our well-being. Social isolation is one of the biggest mental health challenges we face nowadays. Many people live alone or away from their support systems, which are essential well-being boosters in times of trouble. It is difficult to deal with being lonely.

Although communities are less connected now, it is possible to find activities like volunteering, exercising groups, and learning new skills. Joining a class or a club will give you a sense of belonging and can even stimulate your creativity. It will also allow you to meet new people who might share the same interests as you.

Now, answer the following questions and share your thoughts with your partner or group:

1. How 'isolated' were you during the pandemic? Were you living alone? Or with your family? Did you feel lonely?
2. Were you able to connect with your friends and family? How?
3. Have you ever volunteered or participated in community activities? Share your experience.

Source: <https://www.silvercloudhealth.com/us/blog/the-challenges-of-covid-19-and-how-to-deal-with-them>

Exhibit 4: Working from home



The idea of working from home was growing before 2020. Then, with the pandemic, it skyrocketed. What seemed to be a dream job for many people became a reality but also presented new challenges. Distractions, loneliness, and the inability to unplug are some of the difficulties that even a disciplined worker can experience, consequently impacting productivity. However, after almost two years since the outbreak, some companies are evaluating the benefits of having their employees working from home. In fact, most workers would like to continue their careers working remotely or in a hybrid system, which allows them to split their time working some days at the office and some days at home.

Now, answer the following questions and share your thoughts with your partner or group:

1. In your opinion, what is the biggest change between working in an office and working from home?
2. Do you think it is easy to lose motivation when working from home? Why?
3. Do you or would you like to work remotely even after the pandemic? Why or why not?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of working from home?

Source: <https://www.betterup.com/blog/challenges-of-working-from-home>

Exhibit 5: Disinformation



The media and social networks have found an exceptional opportunity in the pandemic to extend their influence. While they often contributed to knowledge reporting social and medical recommendations, a lot of disinformation about COVID-19 was also stated. For the first time in history, a pandemic was instantly and broadly

announced, creating various speculations and theories that could not be proved. According to the World Health Organization, '**infodemic**' is 'too much information, false or misleading, spread in digital and physical environments during a disease break.'

Now, answer the following questions and share your thoughts with your partner or group:

1. In your opinion, what is the best source of media to stay informed about what is happening in the world?
2. Did you and your family discuss what was presented in the news?
3. Do you trust the media? Why? Why not?

Source: <https://www.isglobal.org/en/healthisglobal/-/custom-blog-portlet/la-pandemia-en-10-lecciones-y-retos-globales/91046/0>
https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic#tab=tab_1

Exhibit 6: Climate Change



As climate change destroys the environment and resources, infectious diseases will spread rapidly through communities.

Climate change-related events have contributed to increasing the number of refugees and many other issues in the past decade. Soon, more people will be forced to move from their homes due to weather-related disasters.

Worldwide, populations likely to experience the negative effects of climate change are those in low-income and middle-income nations, including those in small-island or coastal communities, Indigenous groups, and those in precarious economic situations. Yet, these problems are often not considered or are simply ignored by politicians.

Now, answer the following questions and share your thoughts with your partner or group:

1. How is climate change affecting our lives?
2. What are the solutions for climate change?
3. What do you think will happen if we don't take action to stop climate change?
4. What can you do to help?

Source:[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(21\)00257-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(21)00257-6/fulltext)

About the author

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