

Instructional Session 6

The Word Chunk Team Game and Dictée

The Word Chunk Team Game

This activity from, Ben's Big CI Book, is a team game that builds a ton of community and kids LOVE it. We play it every other Friday and they would play it every day all week but we don't let them. This game gets a lot of love. Classes develop their own inside jokes, teams develop a positive group identity, and the game leaders make heroes out of socially-marginalized kids. This game is pure gold and has contributed greatly to positive mental health for me as well as my students. We have yet to meet a student (or a teacher) who does not love WCTG Fridays! It puts the students in the driver's seat and gives them power over their own learning environment.

The student jobs in this game are key. They bring marginalized and hurting kids into the classroom in a powerful way that gives them a positive identity with their peers. We have seen this game improve troubled teens' attendance problems, give confidence to the shy, and help the misfit make friends. As one student referee recently exclaimed in Tina's class during the WCTG, "The Word Chunk Team Game is my LIFE!" This student was sullen and withdrawn in class at the beginning of the year, but through this game she has bloomed, made friends, and gotten comfortable in class.

To set up the game: The students get into teams of three and stay in those teams all year. What about the kids who have a hard time making it into a group when you say to find two people for the group? They just wander around the room looking nervous, right? *Tap them to be your helpers!* THIS IS KEY, as you are actually looking for them to help you run the game as judges, so when you see them (you already know who they are) ask them to join you in the front of the room as the other groups are forming. The game is an illusion to get the helpers up and helping you as judges. The purpose of this game is to include the three or four outcasts in the room and so is more about classroom management and building community than reviewing language. That's just a front for the real work of including those few kids who,

otherwise, suck energy out of the room each and every day all year.

The helpers have their jobs all year. One helper is the “hands-up” referee. One helper is the “gestures referee”. One is the “talking referee”, but the “gestures referee” and the “talking referee” jobs can be done by the same student. The last judge keeps score. So you will have either two or three student judges and one scorekeeper, for a total of three or four misfits standing side by side with your running the game. (All this is explained below.)

Don't force students to be helpers, just let the misfit kids who need social standing "choose" the role by asking them, in an off-handed way, “Hey, will you help me. I need help to run the game?” Most shy or misfit kids will happily do this. It really turns around their standing in the class over the course of the year. It is almost magic.

You might also choose a kid to be the timer/”Jeopardy theme song” singer (this can be a kid who is on a team or a kid who is a helper).

You then need to set up game play. You only need to do this on the first day as the teams, team names, and team gestures are permanent and the points are cumulative and once a class is locked into this process, they are *locked in*.

Have the teams sit in their groups. They make up a team name and team gesture (with or without without a team sound). They keep their name/gesture all year as well. The scorekeeper makes a list in a class notebook of the teams' names. Teams practice their gestures. Have a helper draw a large Skee-Ball target on the board (like a dartboard target). The points are totally arbitrary and we just let the helpers decide how many points to put in the different circles of the target. The more power the helpers get, the better.

You then explain the rules:

Note: L1 refers to Language One, in the case or the authors English.

L2 refers to Language Two, in our case French or Spanish.

To start game play the teacher will count 5-4-3-2-1 and if your team is still talking (verified by the talking referee) then you are disqualified for that round.

Teacher will say a chunk of *any* words in L2 twice, the weirder the better. We also often use sentences from a recent story. For example, if a recent story featured a big blue bird, the teacher would say the following word chunk, "...a big blue bird...." Other possible word chunks might be, "...a big yellow bird...." or "...a small yellow bird flies...." It is therefore helpful to have recent stories, or any comprehensible input from recent classes, available to help us think of word chunks. Teachers who still use word walls can make very creative word chunk combinations from them.

The length of the chunk depends on the age/maturity/proficiency of the kids, obviously.

Teams MAY NOT raise their hands until the second time you say the chunk, or they are disqualified for that round. (Hands referee makes this call.)

Arguing with the misfit judges is totally off-limits - if you argue with them, then your team is disqualified.

This is the time for the misfits to shine, to run the show. Your only job is to make up the word chunks and be deferential to the misfits.

You can choose to disqualify teams for two, or three or four rounds- or even the rest of the period with work to do in the back of the room - depending on how strict you want to be, or how entitled some of the teams are, to teach them lessons about sharing and respect for others.

The first team to have their hands in the air together while sitting in their chairs is the first one to get a shot at play. It is often hard to make this call, and you need to let the hands referee judge know that if it is too close to call just go with their gut. The more power the helpers have, the better for them as this game

is miraculous at giving them confidence. We have seen shy and socially-marginalized kids suddenly bloom and laugh and smile and joke with their peers!

When the hands referee calls on the first team, the teacher will count 5-4-3-2-1 again (important because the process of selecting the team often leads to widespread talking). If any team is not silent at 0, then they are disqualified for the rest of the round. We do this counting in L2.

The teacher repeats the word chunk again in L2.

The team performs their gesture (and sound if they have one) and the gestures referee decides if they did their gesture in *perfectly synchronized fashion*. (If they did not then you give the question to the second runner up team.)

If they are eligible to guess, you have the Jeopardy Theme Song Singer sing that Jeopardy music that goes, "Doo doo doo doo doo doo doo..." You know the one. By the end of the song, the team has to say the chunk EXACTLY correctly in L1. All team members have to all say the same thing in exact unison.

If they get it right, and speak in perfect unison, *as decided by the referee*, they get a point. If not, the hands referee picks the next team to answer it. If there are more than three teams who get a crack at it, we just move on. We just have the whole class answer in L1 and start over. (We do it this way because going through team after team on the same question makes the class get restless.)

When a team gets three correct answers/points, they get to spend exactly one minute in Skee-Ball and the scorekeeper kid tallies the points they get. Usually teams throw a "trashketball" at the target and we let them work out who throws and who retrieves, etc. (Anyone who doesn't know what a trashketball is shouldn't be reading this book.) The kids throw (UNDERHAND!!) and the teammates retrieve the ball and feed it to the thrower...smart teams choose this option as it is far more efficient!

The points get tallied by a kid in the class notebook and there is a prize at the end of the year on the last day of school, after school. Most likely no one will show up because they forget, but it does give the class motivation to win over the entire course of the year, as each game builds to the end-of-year prize awards. Never announce the prize in advance because then we actually have to produce one. (Not once in 15 years of doing the game has Ben ever had to give a prize because of the way everyone is out of the building so fast at the end of the year.)

One fun thing to do with this game is to devote a permanent section of the board to the WCTG and have the scorekeeper update the total points for each team in their particular class period. Other classes will take an interest in which teams are in first place in their respective classes. This cross-class competition is also mirrored in the class galleries as discussed elsewhere in this book.

Dictée

Dictée is a writing activity in which students write what they hear, while spelling and punctuating however they think is best. After the writing portion, the teacher reveals the correctly-written version of the sentences that the students heard, and the students compare their version to that of the teacher.

This is a powerful metacognitive tool that helps students attempt to match up the sounds of the language with what they can write. Dictée has three huge benefits that Ben noticed ever since he introduced it into his classroom instruction fifteen years ago: (1) it gets the students into another part of their brain, (2) it quiets down a classroom almost instantly, and (3) the students enjoy it.

Students write in absolute silence. We end the activity if even one child speaks one word. This sounds extreme. It's not. Dictée doesn't work unless it is done in absolute silence from beginning to end. We tell the students before we begin that they will make an A on the activity if they write what they hear, doing simply the best they can, and then copy the correct sentence later when we show it to them, and then circle the things that were different in their writing.

Basically they get an A for trying their best and then copying from the board! We tell the students that we will say each sentence three times, and the second time will be really slow, so there is no need to ask us to repeat or slow down. They just need to *silently* write what they hear.

The first time you do this, you will want to do an example sentence that does not count, just to put the kids at their ease.

Students use lined paper. They will hear each sentence three times but write it only once. We will have prepared three to five sentences using information that the students have learned in class, from Small Talk or Card Talk, or any other source of comprehensible input done up to that point in class.

The first time through we read the sentence at a slow but fluid pace. We say the punctuation aloud. The students already know the punctuation words because we use them in Write and Discuss. For instance, if the sentence were: "Today it is sunny and not very hot." - we would say "Today it is sunny and not very hot period."

The second time we read the sentence, we read it at an extremely slow pace, an unimaginably-slow pace. Between every single word, we literally count to six in our heads silently. This gives the students time to transcribe what they hear.

The third and final time, we read at a slow yet fluid pace, a little slower than we did the first time. Generally, the students are looking over what they have written at this point.

Next, we reveal to the students the correct version of the sentences. This is the first time they have seen them written out. Up until now it has been a completely auditory experience.

We require that they copy the entire correct text on the first line below the line they just wrote on. They are graded on how accurate their copying is. Then they go into their writing and circle everything that is different from the correct sentence just displayed by the teacher. They do not have to correct their writing (though some will want to), but they do have to circle everything that was different.

We tell the class to skip two lines and then move on to sentence #2.

This is an important metacognitive learning activity. It is inherently differentiated because the students are each learning what misconceptions and errors *they* revealed in their writing. Each student is making connections and having small epiphanies about the language. We don't need to interfere with that process, since it is different in each child. In proficiency-based Novice classrooms, all we do is provide comprehensible input in as wide a variety of forms as possible.

After the dictée is done, it is often quite fruitful to have students teach a partner what they noticed and learned about the language from the activity. Then it is often very educational to conduct a quick class discussion in L1, asking students to point out what they noticed or learned about the language as they worked with their sentences and the teacher sentences.

Dictée is a great way to hit an instant reset button in any class, get everyone focused, get everyone *silent*, and give ourselves a little break. We use it often, up to two times per week, whenever the class needs a little focused writing work. We tend to do dictées more frequently in the springtime when students need support to be more focused. A dictée should last from about ten to absolutely no more than fifteen minutes each time.