Teaching philosophy by Shelley Vernon an English teacher

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A dismayed ESL teacher found that his students did not understand the concepts of subject, verb, object. When he tried to explain English grammar, he found that he needed to explain grammar. My games and teaching philosophy work for this too! Here's how to teach the concepts of subject, verb, object.

- Explain what they are with examples.
  - subject - who or which does the action - I
  - verb - what is the action - DRINK
  - object - what is affected by the action - MILKSHAKE

- Ask pupils for other examples of subjects, verbs and objects. Then show a list of ten sentences and ask kids to read out all the verbs. If you have these on the board have a kid underline all the verbs in green as the class calls them out. Then have the class identify all the subjects - underline in pink. And then do the objects - underline in blue.

- Have the class choose and write down EITHER a subject, an object or a verb, (preferably using the colour code on the board).
Now kids go around the class looking for two other people with whom to make a sentence. If a child has written down an object he or she has to find a subject and a verb.

When kids have joined up in groups of three they stand in their groups and wait a few minutes for others to finish. Don't wait till everyone has finished. Ask everyone who hasn't made a group to sit down and be prepared to switch places with a student in a group. Then listen to the sentences that have been created. Have each student sitting down swap places with someone in a group. This is important as they are included, even though they did not manage to find partners to make a sentence.

Follow-up idea
Using pictures ask children to make up 3 sentences each using a subject, verb and object. With the blog picture here examples are. The dog drinks milkshake. The dog is lying on the bed. The dog is wearing sunglasses. I can see a dog. Try finding the subject, verb and object in questions...can you see the dog?

In a future lesson you can play this again, but making groups of four and including adverbs.
Get the book in download or in paperback.
SIMPLE PAST EXAMPLE

Here is an example for lower intermediate students:
Target structure: simple past.
Words: bought, ran, ate, pen, smiled, walked.
Example sentences:
Bought: He taught English.
Ran: She made a flan.
Ate: She was called Kate.
Pen: He was called Ken.
Car: They walked far.
Walked: They talked and talked.

PRESENT PERFECT EXAMPLE

Here is a difficult example to practice the present perfect: Write up 6 words such as pen, chair, dog, dictionary, travel agent and bus. Students make up sentences using the present perfect tense that contains a rhyming word.

Hat: She has become fat.
Chair: I've been to the fair.
Dog: He has burnt a log.
Dictionary: I've played Pictionary.
Category: Step 5 Speaking fluency
Level: Intermediate to Advanced
Group size: Any
Materials: Optional fact sheets
Preparation: Have students prepare for the game for homework using your chosen topic

Students try to persuade other students to buy their product, vote for them, or take their point of view in pairs on a given topic. Sounds simple, however you may find students do not have much to say and the conversation is forced or fizzles out. For example if you tell students to discuss their dream home you may find that many students do not have much to say and are not too motivated. The activity is likely to come to an end very soon.

The problem is that the students do not have a real reason to communicate and the setting is artificial. However if you give a compelling reason for the students to speak and to listen you will find the conversation flows more readily. Use this persuasion technique to generate a reason to communicate and stimulate the students. You can discuss any topic with this activity. It is ideal for special subjects as it is for general language.
Here is a detailed example using the topic talking about your dream home. First brainstorm with the class about ideal features for a dream home. With lower intermediates jot new vocabulary the class come up with as they call out their ideas. Specify the type of information that is needed such as location, proximity to services, environment, size, grounds, extra features such as pool or gym, parking, architectural style, whether modern or character and so on.

Now either give out real estate information on several fancy homes to half of the students who are estate agents, or let students prepare descriptions of their ideal home for homework.

Sotherby (http://www.sothebysrealty.com/eng) has luxury homes. By all means use regular homes or flats for a realistic house search if you don't like the dream home idea.

Once you have your dream home specifications, either because you have prepared them or the students have done so for homework, split the class into estate agents and home buyers. Home buyers have a few minutes to interview three or four estate agents and choose a property from those on offer. Estate agents only have one or two houses in their portfolio which they are very keen to sell. House buyers may visit several estate agents with a time limit of a few minutes at each one before making their choice. See which estate agents make the most sales.
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Repeat the exercise since students will be better at it the second time around and add in budget limitations.
This is adaptable to many topics. Here are a few examples:

- Favorite holiday destination: Travel agents and customers
- Best product: Salesmen and customers
- Favorite day out: Tour guides and customers
- Food for the school canteen: Nutritionists and parents
- Which school for your child? Headmasters and parents
- Which job? Employers and Employees
- Which bank? Bank managers and customers (ideal for business English) Give the bank managers the task of choosing a bank and reading up on the terms for homework.
- Which party? Hosts describe what their party will be like and guests decide which party they want to go to.
- Which political party? Party leaders describe their policies and voters decide who to vote for. Allow for some outrageous parties such as the Monster Raving Loony Party from the UK. Be sure students know they can take on a role rather than express personal views. Have students each prepare a party manifesto for homework that can be used in the pairwork in class.
- Which pet? A pet lover tries to sell his idea of the best pet to a potential pet buyer.
- Which country? Ambassadors try to attract immigrants to their country. If you have refugees or feel that this is too sensitive a topic for your class play with imaginary countries that have fantasy ideas such as free food for children and so on.

I hope you are successful with this in your classes – the thing is to try it out right away. Once you have done it once it will be an extra string to your bow and something you can use over and over again to make your lessons more passionate and meaningful.

Kind regards
Shelley