

Class Journals

Topic

Setting up class journals

Aims

- To set up a class journal with a group
- To build the writing habit, by doing several journal writing activities during the class
- To read what other students have written in response to the tasks set
- To reflect on learning and to discuss this in class
- To discuss class attitudes to error and correction, and establish the correction guidelines for the teacher

Age group

Secondary, adult

Level

A2 and above

Time

1.5 hours approx.

Materials

1. Lesson plan
2. Class set of blank journals

Introduction

The following lesson plan suggests how a 'first lesson' with class journals might be set up, in order to introduce students to the idea, and to get them working with journals from the beginning of a course or period of study.

The kind of class journal in this lesson plan is designed to get the students writing freely in a range of different ways. The emphasis is on fluency, as opposed to any kind of genre writing, and could be compared to the kind of oral fluency activities that we do with students. Rather than focusing on accuracy, or a particular style, we want students to use their language resource to express their ideas in any way that seems best to them; in this way, we will help them to build a writing habit, and to write more confidently. For more background about using class journals, please see the Teaching English article that links to this lesson plan.

Procedure

<p>1. Creating a front cover</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the journals that students have brought with them, or give the students journals that you have brought, which could be made by stapling a number of A4 sheets together, preferably with a colourful card cover. • On the front cover, students draw a 'shield' and, in each quadrant of the shield, they draw images of things that they identify with in some way. The first quadrant might represent their neighbourhood/home. The second one could be their hobbies. The third one a place that they have visited / like very much and the fourth one could represent a favourite person/ pet / belonging. • Once they have finished, they swap journals, and describe their shields to their partners.
<p>2. First page of the journal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set students a personalised writing task. If you often start a course by writing a personal letter to the students, they could read your letter at this point, and write a reply to it in their journal. You can ask them to include similar information to you. • If you are introducing the journals later in the course, you could set up a personalised task like this: Write the list below on the board. 3 things that you enjoy doing 3 people that are important to you 3 places that you've been to / would like to go to 3 things you did last weekend 3 things you own which are important to you 3 items of clothing that you like – what is their 'history'? 3 films / books / TV programmes that you like, and why you like them. • Ask students to choose 1, 2 or 3 categories to include on the first page of their journals. They should write as much information as they can in about 10 minutes. Play some background music while students are writing. • After 10 minutes, students swap their journals and read someone else's. They should try to find at least one thing in common with their partner.

<p>3. Learning questionnaire: second page of the journal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students turn to page 2 of the journal. Dictate the following sentence stems to the students. They have to write the sentences and complete them, so that they are true for themselves. <p>I think that learning English is...</p> <p>The most difficult to me about English is...</p> <p>The easiest thing is...</p> <p>The best way to remember vocabulary is...</p> <p>I will get better at speaking if I...</p> <p>One way for me to improve my English at home is to...</p> <p>I want to speak English in order to...</p> Once they have finished, set up a pyramid discussion as below: Firstly, students compare their ideas in pairs, and add new ones to the list if they want. Secondly, the pairs join up to make groups of four. Finally, conduct feedback as a whole class.
<p>4. Character writing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show the students the following YouTube clip. Students watch the clip and discuss the following: What is being advertised? Is it being done effectively? <p>The Power of Words: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hzgzim5m7oU&feature=youtu.be</p> Divide the class into 2 groups. One group is the blind man and the other is the woman who helps. Each student writes about 100 words about the event from their own perspective - What happened? How did they feel? What did they think of the other character? After 10 minutes, students swap their journals, and read what the other person has written. They then write a comment to their partner at the end of the paragraph, e.g. <i>I like your description / what do you mean by...? / You explain your ideas very well etc.</i> Another good 'character writing' activity could be based on fairy stories. For example, tell students the story of <i>Little Red Riding Hood</i> (if they don't already know it). Students adopt different characters (the wolf, Little Red Riding Hood, the grandmother) and write the story from their perspective. When they finish, students swap journals to read each other's stories.

<p>5. Follow-up discussion and error correction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw the students' attention to the way that they rounded off the previous activity. Did they enjoy reading their partners' text? Did they enjoy reading the comments in response? Why / why not? • Explain that the teacher can respond to their journals by writing an evaluative comment, and/or by correcting the language errors. • Ask students to work in groups of 3 for 5 minutes, to discuss the advantages & disadvantages of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Writing evaluative comments (no error correction) b) Correcting errors (no other comments) • Then carry out open class feedback, to find out their views. • Explain that you may not be able to correct every single error in their journal, but that you can adapt your correction to their preferences. Ask each student to write a brief comment about how they would like their journal writing to be corrected, in the back cover of the journal. • If you decide to use a correction code with your class, this would be a good moment to introduce the code, and to get students to write the symbols at the back of their journal, for future reference. <p><i>* A good idea is to show them some examples of previous journals that you've marked.</i></p>
<p>6. Final feedback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to discuss the following in groups, with regard to their attitudes towards writing in English and carry out open class feedback at the end. Hopefully students will recognise that, although they may feel initially reluctant about writing activities, these activities can be very powerful tools in helping them to improve their level of English. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you enjoy writing in your own language? Why / why not? - Do you enjoy writing in English? Why / why not? - Do writing activities in English help you to learn the language? Why / why not? - Do you like to discuss <i>learning habits</i> in English? - Do you think you can become a better learner if you think about the way that you learn?

**Follow-up
activities**

Once journals have been introduced into the class, they can form a regular part of the lesson. They can be used at different moments in the class, with or without background music. Students can also be encouraged to write in them at home, describing the events of their week.

Some suggested follow up activities:

1. Media diary

Students write about the different 'media' that they have been watching or reading. This could include TV programmes, films at the cinema or on DVD, websites that they have been looking at, magazines, books, etc.

2. Learning styles

Students can do a learning styles questionnaire, and write up their findings in their journal. They can swap journals to find out about other students' learning styles.

3. Track your happiness!

Students can draw a chart with the days of the past week, and a face that represents their attitude on those days, e.g. a happy face if it was a good day/ cross face if they got annoyed/worried face if they had a test, etc. Then students write a short description of their week & their feelings about it.

4. Vocabulary stories

For this activity, students choose a number of different words that have come up in the class. These could come from a class 'word bag'. They talk to a partner about how they can link as many of the words as possible into a story, and both partners write the story in their journals. Students can then read out the story, or swap journals. In the next class, students can then reflect on the activity itself: did writing the words into a story help them to remember them better?

Contributed by

Jo Dossettor