

TITLE: "Using English Magazines in Class"

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USING ENGLISH MAGAZINES IN CLASS

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The use of magazines in the 4th grade is an effective, motivating and enjoyable way to enrich your English lessons

When trying to find (and incorporate) motivating, diverse, enjoyable and lively ways of presenting new topics to students that would make learning foreign languages fun and at the same time effective (i. e. produce knowledge) – well, let's face it: that might be a bit of a problem. Never-ending lists of hints as to what to do in class to achieve better productivity and how to incorporate different activities to keep a high level of motivation usually give us lots of creative ideas but the question is whether we'll be able to put them into practice and – most importantly – whether they'll actually work in our class. I've tried many teaching methods and/or teaching techniques, tested various teaching aids and found out that what works really well with my 4th-graders is English magazines. I love them, kids love them, and – most importantly – they proved a powerful teaching tool that enables students to learn while having a wonderful time.

The secret of magazines' success as a teaching aid lies in a combination of factors and a variety of reasons that all contribute significantly to a more successful and rewarding teaching (and learning) experience:

1/ The magazines come from abroad in a large parcel addressed to our primary school. No matter how frivolous the reason sounds, the fact is that students love material from a foreign land. To most of them the UK or the USA seems like the most far-away and mysterious place they've ever heard about. It is not surprising that whenever we check the cover of the magazine and see "London" printed on top of the page, this simple word brings about a number of topics to be explored. It definitely opens up new horizons and gives us a great starting point that enables us to discuss London and/or capital cities in general, to compare countries (the UK vs. Slovenia) and the like. No matter how unimportant and useless a certain cue may seem at first, there's always something that might be done with it so you as a teacher can evolve it into something fulfilling – both, for you and your students.

2/ Primary-school magazines are oriented at students of a certain age and thus operate on a range of topics that are of interest to these children. The variety of topics and the length of the (reading) passages varies but mostly the magazines are about music, films and sports.

Not only do children get to know famous stars, they also get an insight into their peers' lives from around the world, get to know different cultures, nations, traditions, and the like. The topics work internationally and by offering different subject matter expand students' knowledge of a certain language, of other cultures and countries, which is an important step forward because this is what we all long for: getting information and knowledge that both lead us and our students to a fuller understanding of the world beyond our borders. This is where learning a language reaches a whole new level and becomes meaningful and lively.

3/ At first all-English magazines represent a challenge for the majority of students. But after reading or just browsing through such an authentically English magazine students usually get the feeling that their command of the foreign language is wide, they see that they can actually understand a lot without having to search for immediate translation into their mother tongue. Thus many students raise their self-esteem and even those suffering from shyness often manage to overcome it and (instead of hiding behind their schoolmates) start participating actively in the learning process, which is priceless. The love of language at an early stage can do wonders in higher grades (and later on in life) so it is of vital importance what the children's first contact with English (or for that matter any other foreign language) is like.

4/ The variety of activities offered in a magazine is impressive. Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills can be practiced in the context of lively and meaningful exercises, group work, as well as pair work and individual work are all encouraged. Comics, texts on various subjects, picture cues, games, puzzles, songs and rhymes enable kids to enjoy themselves, stretch their imagination, develop creativity, and at the same time practice using English in a wide range of contexts. When learning the pronunciation and patterns of a new language, listening input via the authentic (native-speaker-produced) CD offers students the opportunity to hear and experience English live, which is of great importance. They learn that there is not only one variety of English "out there" and get into contact with yet another of its varieties.

5/ Magazines keep pace with the onward march of technological progress, suggested on-line activities and useful links are listed regularly and needless to say we resort to such modern techniques when learning as well. Being in touch with the editor of the magazine enables us to pass comments on the magazine and give suggestions as to its contents. The feedback we get is always met with true joy and this two-way communication works positively on the students because through it they help create the magazine (and thus make a difference), and are at the same time noticed and recognized by the editor. There's so much more to be learnt here than just "pure" language – grammatical structures and vocabulary items go hand in hand with co-operation skills, social skills, communicative skills and organization skills, all of which play a significant part in a learning environment.

6/ Last but certainly not least, there are also international projects and competitions to be entered via magazines. Competition rules are usually quite simple and aim at stimulating students' creativity and imagination while showing their knowledge of English. There are always lots of entries from our primary school and I am glad to say that we've won a few competitions already. Imagine students' happiness when the prizes get to Slovenia and their names appear in an international magazine on the winners' page. Prizes usually include useful items such as stationery, mugs, brooches and the similar. Winning a competition also has a strong long-term motivating effect which helps us work harder and strive for more.

I hope the above-mentioned advantages of using English magazines in class might be a source of inspiration to you and the pointers given will be of practical use so you give it a try. I am sure using magazines can make your teaching practice an even greater, more versatile and more fulfilling experience. Good luck!

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