

Grammarman presents

Wordless Comics

(ideas for using them in the ESL classroom)



by Brian Boyd

Wordless Comics

Wordless comics are perfect for the ESL classroom. They have no dialogue, no captions, no thought balloons and no sound effects. This lack of text means that students of all levels can access and enjoy the stories.

Presented here are a selection of activity ideas for using wordless comics with ESL students. Each activity is described in brief outline, allowing the teacher to adapt it for her students' needs.

Of course, there are endless possibilities for using wordless comics in teaching. These activities are just a handful, and hopefully they will serve as a springboard to many ideas of your own.

I hope your students enjoy studying English with wordless comics. Thank you for visiting the Grammarman website.

Cheers

Brian Boyd



1. Adding Balloons

Organize the students to work in pairs or small groups. Assign one section or page of the comic to each group.

Now give each group a page filled with comic text – speech balloons, thought balloons, captions, sound effects etc. Challenge the students to cut out each piece and glue it onto their part of the comic. This will take some preparation on the teacher's part.



Alternatively, you can give the students more creative freedom by inviting them to make *their own* text for the section of comic they're working on. You could add dialogue to the first page of the comic as an example.

Perhaps lower level students might be happier with pre-made balloons initially, but higher level students will probably enjoy dreaming up their own dialogue.



2. Quiz Time

For practice of question forms, split the class into groups and give a section of the comic to each. Students work together to make comprehension questions for their section. Groups can then pass their section of the comic and the accompanying questions to another group for a fun quiz.

You can make this activity more of a challenge for higher level students. When the comprehension questions are ready, groups pass their comic sections but not the questions. After everyone has had time to read the new section, collect all of the comics and *then* pass the questions. Groups now have to try and answer the questions from memory.



3. What next?

Students can practice using future forms by predicting what will happen next in the story. You can allow them to read the whole story and then try to write what happens next. Alternatively, give them the story with the last few pages missing. After predicting possible endings, they can read the actual ending and compare it with their own ideas.

To get ideas flowing, you can use a brainstorming activity with a time limit. Give groups of students scrap paper and see which team can jot down the most possible ending ideas in five minutes. Explain that they can make all kinds of endings – happy, sad, surprising, mysterious, funny etc. They can then choose their favourite idea to develop further.

4. Story tellers

Split the class into two groups. Group A read the comic silently and become familiar with the story. You might like to pre-teach any vocabulary you think they'll need later.

Meanwhile, group B receive only a few key pictures from the story, selected by the teacher. They write questions, asking what they'd like to know about the story based on the selection of panels they have.

Now pair the students up so that each pair has an A and a B. Student A tells the story and student B notes how many of their questions are successfully answered by the story teller.



5. Out of order

Cut the comic into pieces and give it to the students as a pile of panels. Groups then discuss the best way to arrange the pictures to recreate the complete story.

They can then compare with other groups to discover (and discuss) any differences in their chosen order.



6. Narrators

Practice using the narrative tenses (past simple, past continuous, past perfect) with your students by having them narrate the story. Have the students work on a page each, writing a sentence to accompany each panel. The different pages could then be pinned up on the classroom wall in order, and students can present their own page by reading their sentences aloud.

7. Taking turns

Students work in pairs reading the story to each other. Give each student alternate page numbers, so that student A has pages 1, 3, 5, 7 etc and student B has the even numbered pages. Student A begins by describing the story on her first page, then student B describes page two and so on. You can encourage careful listening by insisting that the students don't show each other the pages they're describing until they've read the whole story. At that point they can look through all of the pages together.

8. Grammar focus

Use the comic to review or practice a particular grammar area you've been covering in class. For example, you might ask the students to read the comic and then find eight different panels where they can describe the story using the structure you want to focus on: the passive form, modals of obligation, conditionals, a particular tense, reported speech etc.



9. Audio

If you have access to recording equipment, have small groups of students each narrate a section of the comic. You can make a fun challenge by asking each group to make one detail of their recording inaccurate.

Come together and listen to the whole story as a class. While they listen, students try to note the minor changes made by the other groups.

A recording activity like this is also a great opportunity to focus on pronunciation. You can encourage the student to bring the story alive using intonation and stress.



Finally, if you have more ideas for exploiting wordless comics in the classroom, send an email to brian@grammarmancomic.com