

GAMES IN VOCABULARY TEACHING

Limba engleză; toate clasele
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Games in Vocabulary Teaching

Throughout my educational career, I have experienced that language learning can sometimes be frustrating. Constant persistence is required to understand and produce the target language. Games have proven to have advantages and effectiveness in learning vocabulary in various ways, and they can play a range of roles in the language curriculum. Traditionally, games have been used in the language class as warm-ups at the beginning of class, fill-ins when there is extra time near the end of class, or just occasionally to add variety. All these are fine, but games can also constitute a more substantial part of language courses, and like any other activity, when planning them the teacher needs to consider what the objectives are. Some examples of aims and objectives when using games in teaching vocabulary are:

- as a warmer at the beginning of the lesson;
- to present new vocabulary;
- to revise previously taught vocabulary;
- to check what students know before teaching new words;
- to practice new vocabulary items that have just been presented, and
- as a filler at the end the lesson.

Thus we can see that games are at the heart of teaching vocabulary. They are not just an activity to fill the odd moments when the teacher and the students have nothing better to do, but they have got a substantial role in the Presentation-Practice-Production framework, too. Learning vocabulary through games is one effective and interesting way that can be applied in any classroom. In this paper I suggest that games are used not only for mere fun, but more importantly, for the useful presenting, practice and review of vocabulary to develop the learners' language skills.

With the help of Jill Hadfield's book *Elementary Vocabulary Games*, I can vary the content of my language classes. Taking some examples from this book and from the internet, I will present just a few of the games that I did with my students in order to diversify and teach more efficiently the English vocabulary. The games found in this section have all been played by my students and they find them to be fun, without realizing the educational value that they have. Regardless of the level of the students, the

following games challenge them as language learners and producers in situations that they may not be used to.

The games make use of a variety of techniques like: information gap, guessing, search, matching, exchanging, collecting, combining, arranging, card games, board games, puzzles and role-play. I grouped the next games according to Hadfield's classification (1998:5).

1. Information Gap Games

In these types of activities usually two students will be asking each other questions to which they don't know the answer; one student has access to some information while the other student cannot see that information. The goal of the activity is for the students to discover the hidden information, whether about the other person or related to a specific activity. The game can be played in pairs or in groups.

• Giving Directions

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials: worksheet, pencil

Procedure: This game can be played either in pairs or small groups.

Each student gets one worksheet. They get different papers (A or B), which they should not show to the others. In turns, they offer and ask information about where they can do the things mentioned in the exercise. When they hear new information, they should fill it in on their worksheet. When everybody has finished, they compare their city maps and see if they arrived at the right result. The student or group to finish first is the winner.

Objective of the Game: to share information so that everyone can complete the map and practice new vocabulary.

Variations: Changing the themes. Using different pictures that are more suitable for younger learners with less information.

Possible Themes: animals, shopping, clothing articles, colors, numbers, days of the week, months of the year, food (fruits, vegetables, beverages, breakfast, dinner/lunch, etc), hobbies and pastimes, items in a particular room, means of transportation, jobs, rooms in the house, prepositions of places, school subjects or school supplies, sports or sports equipment, places in a town, shops.

A Sheet

Language Points

Giving Street Names

It's on Pine Street

It's on 2nd Avenue.

It's on the corner of 2nd and Pine.

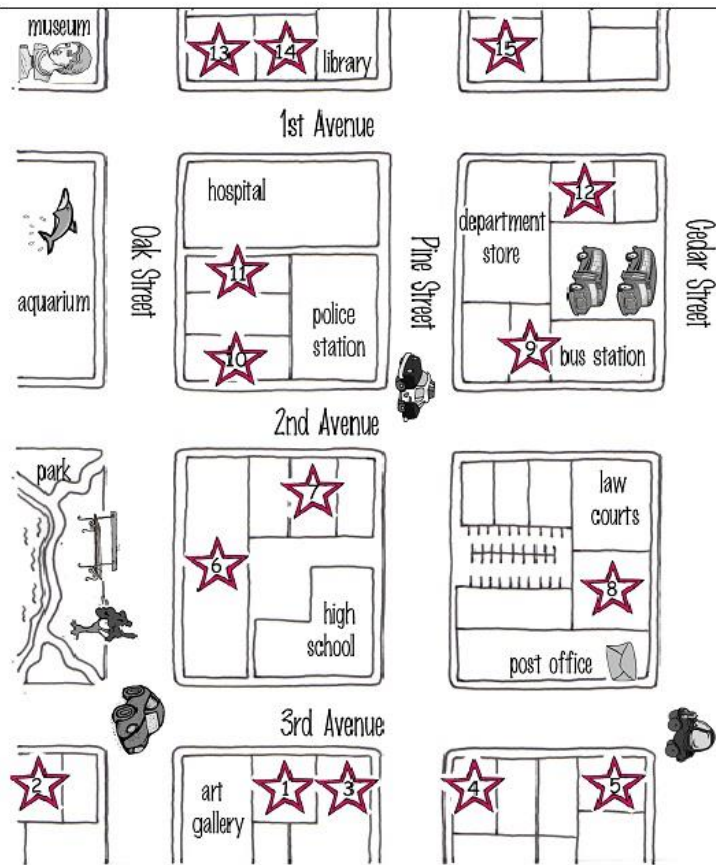
Giving Nearby Landmarks

It's across from the bank.

It's next to the park.

It's opposite the library.

Giving Directions



Use this map to give your partner suggestions and directions.

Ask your partner where you can do the following:

buy some steaks.

see a movie

order some sushi

rent a bike

pick up a bathing suit

get some aspirin

purchase some software

Fill in the name of the buildings that belong in the blanks:

- (1) Ming's Dynasty
- (2) Hungry Burger
- (3) _____
- (4) Elegant Shoes
- (5) _____
- (6) Starlight Videos
- (7) _____
- (8) Mike's Bowling Alley
- (9) _____
- (10) Monet Cafe
- (11) _____
- (12) Ace Music CDs
- (13) _____
- (14) Mark's Supermarket
- (15) _____

B Sheet

Language Points

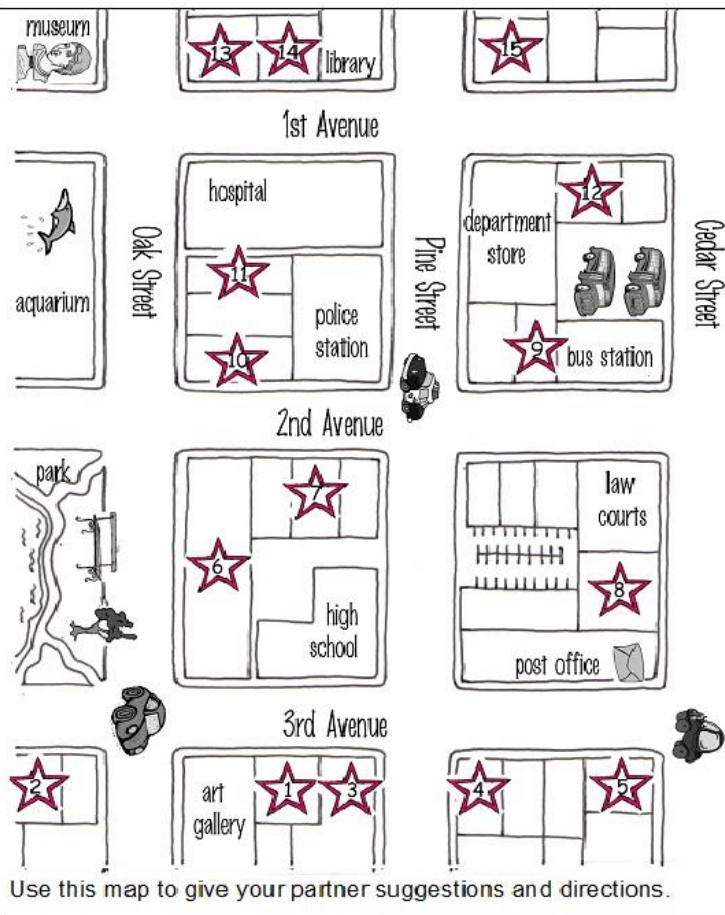
Giving Street Names

It's on Pine Street
It's on 2nd Avenue.
It's on the corner of 2nd and Pine.

Giving Nearby Landmarks

It's across from the bank.
It's next to the park.
It's opposite the library.

Giving Directions



Use this map to give your partner suggestions and directions.

Ask your partner where you can do the following:

- rent a DVD
 - go bowling
 - grab a burger
 - buy some shoes
 - pick up some milk
 - find a music CD
 - go for a cup of coffee
- Fill in the name of the buildings that belong in the blanks:
- (1) Ming's Dynasty
 - (2) _____
 - (3) Bedwell Theater
 - (4) _____
 - (5) Beaches Swimwear
 - (6) _____
 - (7) Niko Bikes
 - (8) _____
 - (9) Albert's Pharmacy
 - (10) _____
 - (11) Future Computers
 - (12) _____
 - (13) A and A meats
 - (14) _____
 - (15) Edo Sushi

<https://en.islcollective.com/>

• Around the House

Level: Beginner

Materials: Worksheet, pencil

Procedure: This game can be played either in pairs or small groups.

Students in pairs get different worksheets. One of them is A and the other one is B. They are not allowed to show the pictures to the other. They look at the picture and ask their

partner about the things in the house. They need to find 5 differences and write them in the table below the picture. With the primary school students I usually give examples to make the task more understandable. When everybody has finished, they compare their answers.

Objective of the game: to share information so that everyone can complete the task and practice new vocabulary.

Student A

Look at the picture. Ask your partner about the things in the house. Follow the example. Find 5 more differences. Write them in the table below the picture.

Example:

Student A: Is there a newspaper on the table in the living room?

Student B: No, there isn't. Are there three bookshelves in the living room?

Student A: Yes, there are. Is/Are there ?



Write the differences here:

Picture A

Picture B

- | | | |
|----|------------------|---------------------|
| 0. | <u>newspaper</u> | <u>no newspaper</u> |
| 1. | _____ | _____ |
| 2. | _____ | _____ |
| 3. | _____ | _____ |
| 4. | _____ | _____ |
| 5. | _____ | _____ |

Student B

Look at the picture. Ask your partner about the things in the house. Follow the example. Find 5 more differences. Write them in the table below the picture.

Example:

Student A: Is there a newspaper on the table in the living room?

Student B: No, there isn't. Are there three bookshelves in the living room?

Student A: Yes, there are. Is/Are there ?



Write the differences here:

Picture A

Picture B

0.	<u>newspaper</u>	<u>no newspaper</u>
1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____

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• Around the House + Prepositions of place

Level: Beginner

Materials: Worksheet, pencil

Procedure: This game can be played either in pairs or small groups.

One of the students is A and the other one is B. They get different worksheets. They are not allowed to show the pictures to the other. They look at the picture and ask their partner about the things in the house by using *Where is the...?* They need to answer and write them in their notebooks. In their answers pupils need to use the prepositions of places: *on, in, under* and the right word. With the primary school students I usually give examples to make the task more understandable. When everybody has finished, they compare their answers.

Objective of the game: to share information so that everyone can complete the task and practice new vocabulary.

To practice the prepositions of place.

A.



Question: *Where is the ...?*

Answer: *The ... is ... the ...*



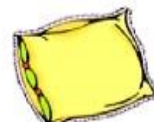
Teddy bear



Ball



Clock



Pillow



Book shelf

B.



Question: *Where is the ...?*

Answer: *The ... is ... the ...*



Lamp



Chair



Toys



Picture



TV

2. Guessing Games

Guessing games are a variant of the previous type of game, where one player or the teacher hides the information and the others guess what it might be.

• Pictionary

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials: whiteboard, marker, pictionary cards or any other pictures;

Procedure: Most English learners are familiar with this game. This game can be played in groups. To play in a classroom with many students, instead of the game board we use the whiteboard at the front of the classroom.

I divide the class into two teams and create a small column for each team on one side of the board. I will record their points here. I chose one person from Team A to come up to the front. The student draws a card or a slip of paper with a word written on it. The student must convey the word to his or her team using only drawings. Students cannot use words,

symbols or hand gestures. I limit the time to two minutes maximum. Each correct word is a point and the first team to get 10 points is the winning team.

Objective of the Game: vocabulary recollection

Variations: Changing the themes.

Possible Themes: animals, body parts, family members, sports, clothes, colors, numbers, seasons, food (fruits, vegetables, beverages, breakfast, dinner/lunch, etc), hobbies and pastimes, items in a particular room, means of transportation, jobs, rooms in the house, school subjects or school supplies, sports or sports equipment, places in a town, shops.

• **Hot Seat**

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials: whiteboard, marker, pictorial cards or any other pictures;

Procedure: This game is similar to the previous one and it is one of my favorites. First, I split the class into different teams, two or maybe more. The students are facing the board. We take an empty chair - one for each team - and put it at the front of the class, facing the team members. These chairs are the *hot seats*. Then one member from each team comes up and sits in that chair, so they are facing their team-mates and have their back to the board. I prepare a list of vocabulary items that I want to use in this game. I choose a word from that list and write it clearly on the board. The aim of the game is for the students in the teams to describe that word, using synonyms, antonyms, definitions etc. to their team-mate who is in the hot seat - that person cannot see the word! The student in the hot seat listens to their team-mates and tries to guess the word. The first hot seat student to say the word wins a point for their team. The students in the hot seat are changed.

Objective of the Game: revising vocabulary;

Possible Themes: animals, body parts, family members, sports, clothes, colors, numbers, seasons, food (fruits, vegetables, beverages, breakfast, dinner/lunch, etc), hobbies and pastimes, items in a particular room, means of transportation, jobs, rooms in the house, school subjects or school supplies, sports or sports equipment, places in a town, shops.

• **Memorising**

Level: Elementary

Materials: whiteboard, marker, pictorial cards or any other pictures;

Procedure: This game can be played in two teams or in small groups of three or four.

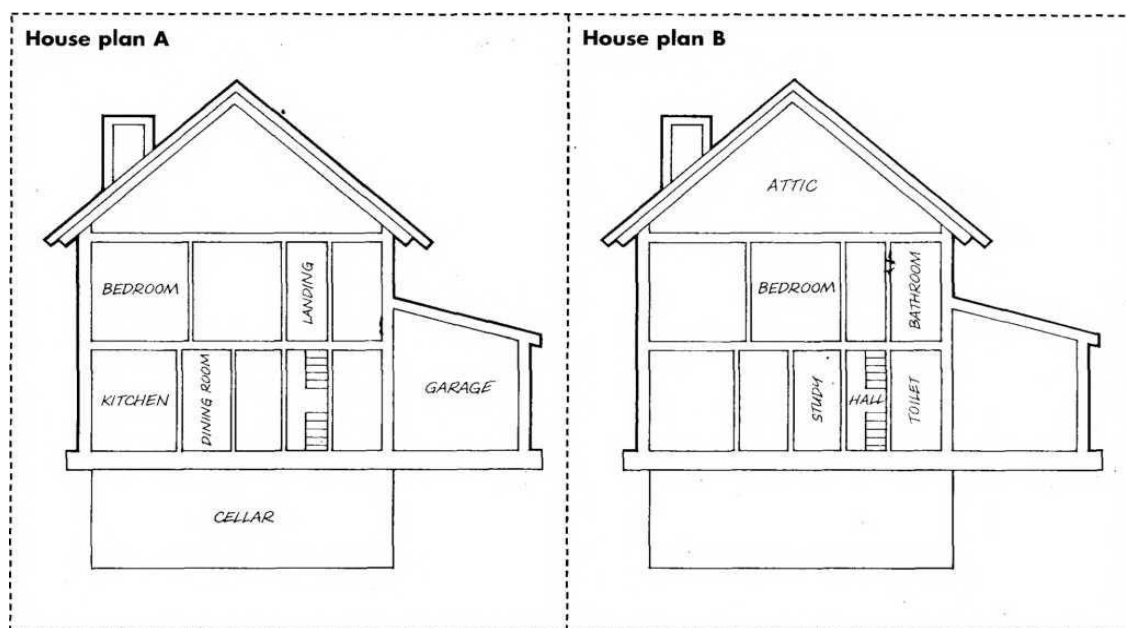
If we play in teams, we should divide the class into two teams. One pile of room cards is placed face down at one side of the room and the other on the other side of the room. We get two volunteers to come to the front.

Take the top card off each pile and give it to them. They should go back to their teams and mime an action that takes place in that room (e.g. cooking for kitchen, sleeping for bedroom etc.). When the team guesses correctly, another person should come up and take the next card off the pile, go back and mime that room and so on.

Objective of the Game: for the team to guess all the rooms correctly.

- The first team to do so is the winner.

Possible words: attic, bathroom, bedroom, dining room, garage, garden, hall, kitchen, landing, living room, stairs, study, toilet, basement, cellar, first floor, ground floor, second floor



Parts of the Body- Body Outline and Clothes pictures
(Elementary Vocabulary Games – Jill Hadfield; 1998: 56)

3. Search Games

This type of game is similar to the first two games. It can be played individually, in pairs or small groups. Payers must obtain information to fill in a questionnaire or to solve a problem.

• Scattergories

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials: paper, pencil, timer;

Procedure: This game can be played either in pairs or groups.

I give a theme. The students write down words that relate to the theme. When time is up, each student or group reads their list. If another team has the same word, the word is crossed off all the lists. Words remaining score one point.

Objective of the Game: spelling, thematic vocabulary recall

Possible Themes: adjectives to describe people, animals, in the city, clothing articles, colors, numbers, days of the week, months of the year, food, hobbies and pastimes, items in a particular room, means of transportation, jobs, rooms in the house, school subjects or school supplies, sports or sports equipment, shops, weather related words.

Variations: Played with teams or individuals. I give the starting letter that all of the words must begin with. Have the students write words or use the words in a sentence to receive the point.

	Letter 1:	Letter 2:	Letter 3:
Animals			
Foods			
Countries			
Cities			
Movie Stars			
Sports			
Colors			
Jobs			
Fruits			
Vegetables			
Emotions			
Tools			
Singers			
Movies			
Weather			
Books			
TV Shows			
Clothes			
Songs			
Drinks			
Toys			
Furniture			
Desserts			
Girl Names			
Boy Names			
Total			

<http://www.funenglishgames.com/>

• **Stop the Bus**

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials: Paper, pencil, timer

Procedure: This game can be played either in pairs or groups but we usually play it in groups. So, I put the students into teams of three or four. I draw on the board or print out a table like the one below and get each team to copy it onto a piece of paper or in their notebook. Students simply have to think of one item to go in each category beginning with the set letter. The first team to finish shouts *Stop the Bus!* I check their answers and write them up on the board and if they are all okay that team wins a point. If there are any mistakes in their words, I let the game continue for another few minutes. If it gets too difficult with certain letters participants are allowed to Stop the Bus with 4 columns.

Objectives of the Activity: get students focused and working on tasks as a team. Revise and practice vocabulary.

Possible Themes: countries, cities, objects, adjectives to describe people, animals, clothing articles, colors, numbers, days of the week, months of the year, food (fruits, vegetables, beverages, breakfast, dinner/lunch, etc), hobbies and sports, means of transportation, jobs, rooms in the house and furniture, school subjects or school supplies, places in a town, shops, weather related words.

STOP THE BUS!!!



LETTER	Category1	Category2	Category3	Category4	Category5	Category6	SCORE

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• Find someone who...

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials: a piece of paper listing vocabulary items or questions, pencil















Procedure: This is a whole class activity. I prepare 10 to 20 characteristics using vocabulary that my students are familiar with, in this case: food. Students use the checklist as they walk around the room trying to find a person who likes a certain food. They have to ask questions like: *Do you like ice cream?* When students find someone who *likes ice cream*, they write that person's name on their checklist of paper and move on to the next person with the hope that that person meets one of the other characteristics on the list. The goal is to meet and talk to as many people as possible within the time limit in order to put one name by each of the characteristics.

Objectives of the Activity: Since this is a fluency activity, the purpose can be to review vocabulary and perhaps even learn one or two new words, but the main objective of this activity is to get students talking for a purpose.

With secondary school students I try to vary the questions so that it will be easy to find a person for some characteristics but not so easy for others.

Possible Themes: family members, countries and nationalities, faces, adjectives to describe people, animals, clothing articles, colors, numbers, seasons, days of the week, months of the year, food and drink, hobbies and sports, everyday actions, means of transportation, jobs, rooms in the house and furniture, school subjects or school supplies, places in a town, shops, weather related words, materials.

PICNIC (Find someone who...)

likes ice cream		
likes hamburgers		
likes cucumbers		
likes corn		
likes tomatoes		
likes bread		
likes pancakes		
likes tea		
likes cheese		
likes orange juice		
likes eggs		
likes sandwiches		
likes popcorn		
likes watermelon		

<https://en.islcollective.com>

Back from winter break activity



Find someone who....

- 1) Had a real Christmas tree.
- 2) Helped his/her parents during the holiday.
- 3) Went to church on Christmas Day.
- 4) Went skiing, skating or hiking.
- 5) Played computer games.....
- 6) Likes watching Christmas films.
- 7) Went to another country or city.
- 8) Visited relatives.
- 9) Read a book.
- 10) Decorated a Christmas tree.



<https://en.islcollective.com>

4. Matching Games

These games are also about transferring information where students have to match corresponding pairs of cards or pictures. It may be played as a whole class activity, or a pair work or small group activity.

• **Matching Cards**



















Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials: Copy of the body outline, pencil, clothes cards;



















Procedure: I divide the students into pairs and give each pair a body outline and a set of clothes cards. I ask them to turn the clothes cards word-side up and spread them out on their desk. They should take it in turns to place them on the body outline in the appropriate place (e.g. *gloves* on the hand etc.). When participants have finished, they can turn the cards over to see the pictures and check if they were right. When all the cards are picture-side up, they can see if they can remember the names of the clothes items.

Object of the Game: to place all the cards in the correct place on the body outline. It is a vocabulary review or practice activity.

Possible Themes: family members, countries and nationalities, faces, adjectives to describe people, animals, clothing articles, colors, numbers, seasons, days of the week, months of the year, food and drink, hobbies and sports, everyday actions, means of transportation, jobs, rooms in the house and furniture, school subjects or school supplies, places in a town, shops, weather related words, materials.

	lion		frog
	pig		dog
	elephant		sheep
	duck		cow
	mouse		dinosaur
	octopus		goat
	kangaroo		bird
	snail		deer
	spider		bee

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	I am very big and strong. I am grey. I live in Africa. I have four legs. I eat leaves.		I am a big cat with a mane. My legs are short but powerful. I am a carnivore and a hunter.
	I am very small and usually grey. I have got a long tail. I like cheese.		I am a furry, clean and carnivorous mammal. I like to hunt mice, birds and fish. I purr.
	I look like a horse but I have got black and white stripes. I live in Africa. I eat grass.		I have four legs. I am the perfect companion for humans. I bark.
	I am pink and I have a large head with a long snout. I am an omnivore.		I am a ruminant mammal living on the farm. I am raised for meat, milk but also wool.
	I am a ruminant and feed on grasses and grains. I am raised for meat and milk.		I am a reptile. I look like a big lizard. I can walk or swim. I have scales and sharp teeth.
	I am very long and have not got any legs. I eat small animals. I can be dangerous.		I am an Australian marsupial. I have powerful legs to leap. My babies grow into my pouch.
	I am a mollusc. My soft body is protected by a hard shell. French people like to eat me!		I am an insect that produces and stores honey. I can sting and this can be very painful!
	I have grasping hands and feet. I can climb trees. I live on nuts and fruit. I love bananas.		I am a reptile. People say I am slow. I am a herbivore. I have a shell that is called a carapace.
	I can swim in the sea and walk on the land. I cannot fly. I eat fish. I live in very cold countries.		I am a carnivorous mammal with a long snout. I live in a cave and hibernate during winter.



Parts of the Body- Body Outline and Clothes pictures
(Elementary Vocabulary Games – Jill Hadfield; 1998: 46, 55)

• **The Memory Game**

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials: written cards

Procedure: During my English classes I note down the word combinations that come up. Then I put each part of the collocation on two separate pieces of paper. Here is an example I had when we were talking about the weather: *freezing cold, strong wind, heavy rain*. The first part of each phrase is written on one coloured sheet of paper. Then on a different coloured paper I write the second part of the phrase. I put all of the first parts of each phrase together, face down on the floor. During the game I mix up the second group of words face down in a separate group to the first. In groups students work together to pick up one piece of paper from each group so as to make a phrase from the previous class. As the students match them up incorrectly students start to recall the correct collocation or phrase. After they find the right pairs they have to use it in a sentence.

Aim of the Game: the efficient memorising and use of the target language.

Possible Themes: family members, countries and nationalities, faces, adjectives to describe people, animals, clothing articles, colors, numbers, seasons, days of the week, months of the year, food and drink, hobbies and sports, everyday actions, means of transportation, jobs, rooms in the house and furniture, school subjects or school supplies, places in a town, shops, weather related words, materials.

closed	open	dangerous	safe	difficult
easy	different	same	empty	full
everything	nothing	fast	slow	finish
start	To give	To take	heavy	light
here	there	innocent	guilty	inside
outside	large	small	left	right
silent	noisy	together	apart	wrong
correct	young	old	whisper	scream

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5. Exchanging Activities/ Exchanging and Collecting Activities

The participants of the activity have certain pictures, cards or ideas which they want to exchange for others. Children circulate freely in the classroom, in this case it is a whole class activity, but it can also be done as a group activity.

• Division of Labour

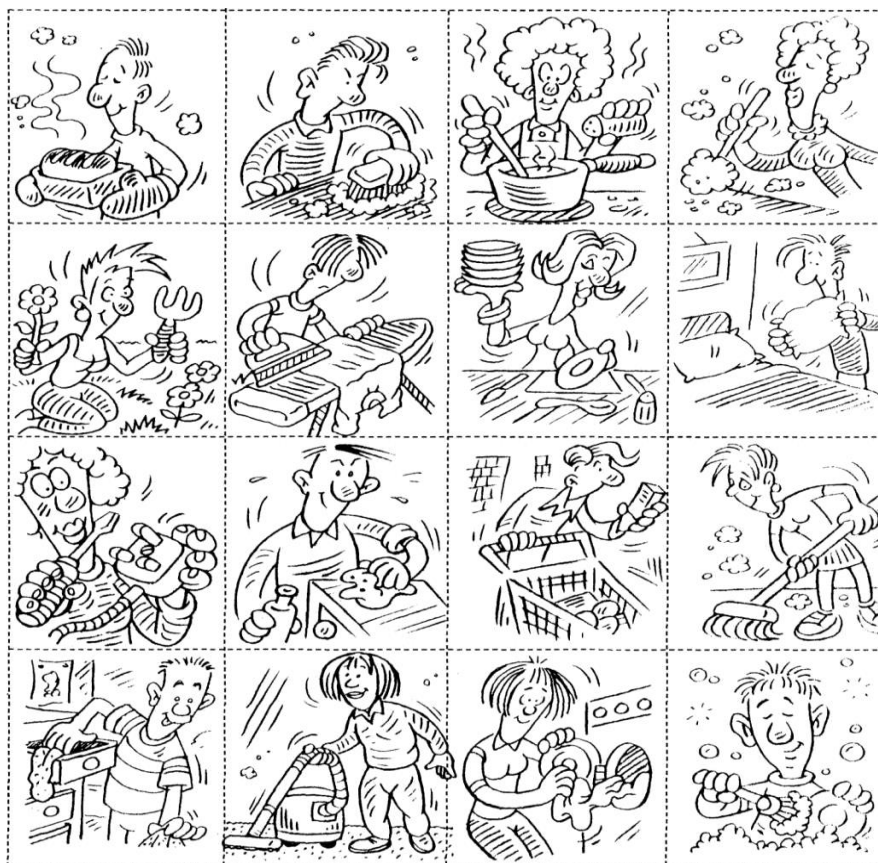
Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials: picture cards, role cards

Procedure: The game is played in small groups of 3-4. All the participants belong to the same family. I give each group a set of role cards and a set of picture cards. Each student should take a role card that shows who she or he is. They should imagine that mother has decided to do together a general cleaning. Participants have to do chores they do not mind and to avoid those they do not like.

They start walking around the classroom and ask others what chores they have, e.g. *what have you got to do?* If they like that job they try to make bargains and swap their cards. E.g. *you do the ironing. I will do the washing up.* The game finishes when they got all the jobs they like. The winner is the student who has none or fewer cards.

Object of the Game: the efficient practice of the target language.



<i>Sue</i> YOU DON'T MIND making the beds, cooking, baking, washing. YOU DON'T LIKE cleaning the windows, ironing, washing up.	<i>Tim</i> YOU DON'T MIND vacuuming, gardening, dusting, mending. YOU DON'T LIKE polishing, tidying up, laying the table, shopping.	<i>Alice</i> YOU DON'T MIND cleaning the windows, ironing, polishing, tidying up. YOU DON'T LIKE vacuuming, gardening, making the beds, cooking.	<i>Sam</i> YOU DON'T MIND laying the table, shopping, washing, up, sweeping. YOU DON'T LIKE dusting, mending, baking, washing.
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Household Tasks- Picture and Role cards
(Elementary Vocabulary Games – Jill Hadfield; 1998: 93)

• Out of Stock

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials: whiteboard, container cards

Procedure: The class is divided in two. First, I write up on the board a list of containers down one side and a list of items down the other. Then I give the students in one half a complete set of container cards each. They are asked to decide on a product for each container and to write it in on the container. The other half of the students has to write a shopping list of six items chosen from the two lists on the board. The first group of students remains seated because they are the shops. The second group stands up because they are the shoppers. The shoppers should go round the shops asking for the items on their list. If they find a shop that stocks it, the shopkeeper should give them the card. The first person to get all the items is the winner. It can happen that some items they want to buy might not be in stock or might be sold out.

Object of the Game: to obtain as many items as possible while practicing the previously taught vocabulary.