

Pyramid Debate Lesson Plan

Class Description:

This Lesson is for an advanced listening and speaking class at City College of San Francisco. Students are taking the course for credit and passing this class will determine if they matriculate into English 1A, the colleges' entry level English class. The class consists of 12 students from a variety of backgrounds including Russian, Chinese, Japanese, El Salvadorian, Chilean, and Cambodian. The students' main purpose for taking this class is to matriculate into higher level English courses and eventually graduate with a two year degree. The class meets once a week on Thursday nights and is three hours long.

Note: this lesson will not take up the entire class time!

Terminal Objectives:

- Ss will be able to negotiate with others to reach a consensus.
- Ss will be able to critically evaluate an ethical dilemma portrayed in a short story.

Enabling Objectives:

- Ss will listen for details in a short story read out loud by the teacher.
- Ss will think critically on their own to answer an ethical question.
- Ss will negotiate with a partner to reach a consensus.
- Partners will negotiate together to reach a conclusion.

Rationale:

Why these objectives?

These students are advanced English language learners. This class is the last ESL class they can take at this college before moving into year-one English. The objectives of this lesson, aside from their explicit end, also familiarize the students with some basic skills they will use in year-one English. Being able to work with fellow students, to negotiate a point, to politely disagree, to think critically about a topic, all of these are transferable skills in academics.

Why these activities?

The activities in this lesson are designed to be both highly communicative and academically pertinent. The short story is popularly used in ESL classes because of how short it is and it's fairly simple English. The ranking activity however can be adapted in many different ways. I modified it into a pyramid debate for this lesson because there really are no right or wrong answers to the ranking, it is merely a matter of opinion yet there are a number of avenues to one can take to support or refute a ranking. This gives the activity a highly communicative edge; students can debate on the ranking for an almost indefinite period of time.

Also, I like to read the story and have students take notes just for some added listening practice. These students will matriculate into other classes in academics, most of which will be teacher fronted lecture style courses and they will have to be familiar with listening and taking notes. The pyramid debate works well with this activity because it allows students to be exposed to several different opinions where they are given the opportunity for negotiation. Instead of only conferring with one other student, or with many students right away, they are allowed to establish a ranking first which leads to more earnest defenses when they are challenged by other classmates.

Materials:

- White/black board with writing utensil
- Multiple copies of handout

Procedure:

Schema-Building~ (10 min)

- T greets class and tells them he is having trouble with an ethical question.
- T writes the word Ethics on the board and asks Ss if they know what he means by this word.
- T discusses the concepts of ethics with the class until they reach a consensus, for example: ethics is the difference between right and wrong.
- T then explains that he is going to read a short story to the Ss and that they have to pay close attention to what happens so they can help him answer his ethical question. -T pre-teaches some vocabulary from the story: Baron, drawbridge, castle, slain etc.

-T provides the setting for the story and ensures the class understands the time period it is taking place in.

While listening~ (5-10 min)

-T asks Ss to take notes on the story while he is reading it, and to list as many characters in their notes as they hear.

-T reads the story (appendix) while Ss take brief notes on what they hear. -T asks Ss if they would like to hear the story again, if they do, T reads it again.

Post listening~ (10 min)

-After the T reads through the story he asks the students to name the characters they can.

-T writes the name of the characters on the board as they Ss call them out, making sure that all the characters are listed.

-T asks some basic comprehension questions about the story: where does it take place? What is the main conflict?

-T explains that this story ended tragically and that the ethical question that was bothering you was that you didn't know who was most responsible for the Baroness' death.

Oral communication task~ (25-35 min)

-T tells class that he is going to pass the story out to the class (appendix) and he wants everyone to read through it briefly on their own (allow no more than 5 minutes for this).

-T tells the students that he wants their help in answering the ethical question. T explains that each S will decide for themselves who they think is most responsible for the death of the Baroness.

-T asks each S to fill out the list on the handout which orders all the characters from most to least responsible and to come up with one or two good reasons why you chose the character who they think is most responsible.

-Once Ss have their list and reasons the T tells them that he wants them to work with one other classmate to create a new list, the T explains that each Ss list might have a few of the same characters but there could be some differences also, and there will definitely be differences in the reasons they came up with. The T says that they may not agree with their partner about how the list should go but it's important to be polite and work with them to create a new list.

-T reminds the Ss of some language they can use to agree or politely disagree with their partner such as: yes, that's a great idea! or, that's good, but I don't think it works. Etc.

-Once Ss have worked together to create a new list T tells them to form groups of four with another pair of Ss. Once Ss are in groups of four the T tells the Ss to compare their lists and to see if there are any differences. If there are differences have the Ss decide which list is best (it is not necessary to create a new list). Or, if the lists are very similar ask students to come up with 2-3 reasons for putting the characters in this order.

-Once Ss have had enough time to talk about their lists, the T calls for the class's attention. Since there are now two groups of 4 in the class, the T asks for one person from each group to come to the board and write their list.

Closing~ (10-15 min)

-Once T has class's attention and the Ss have finished writing their lists on the board the T can process the lists with the whole class. If the lists are identical ask the students why they chose to put the characters in that order (the reasons are never identical). If the lists are not identical, ask the groups why they chose to put certain characters in front of others. If time allows, create a final list with the whole class.

-Thank the Ss for helping you with your ethical dilemma.

