

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

... is a staple of the back to school calendar. Our first lessons can be based around this concept without too much risk. In my almost 30 year teaching career, only once has this type of activity been tricky to put in place and that was the year when I was lucky enough to follow a class through from one year to the next. Generally speaking though, it is a fairly safe bet to start off the year by organising some kind of « Getting to know you » activity. Some argue that students can dislike the pressure created by being forced to « get to know » a number of strangers and, especially with shy, ill-at-ease teenagers, this can be such a difficult trial. I actually disagree. Whilst I completely take on board the shyness and lack of self-confidence that can dog teenagers, I believe it is up to the teacher to create an atmosphere that is low-risk and that will make the students feel comfortable whilst they participate in an activity that is, after all, designed to make them feel more at ease with their classmates.

The main objectives of « Getting to know you » activities are two-fold in my eyes : pupils can get to know pupils within the class AND teacher and pupils can get to know each other. This is very much two way traffic. It is a question of pupils getting to know the teacher as well as vice versa and we can tend to neglect this aspect. No one is suggesting that the teacher should reveal the intimate details of their private life, but some carefully chosen elements can start the process of relationship-building within a group. To give some concrete examples ; to know that my dog is an old adopted dog called Bobby who has a halitosis issue and that I keep chickens in my back garden called Barbara, Blanche and Beryl, never struck me as intrusive BUT the students hooked on to these details and we could use them during the year as talking points. They were getting to know me just as I was getting to know them.

So, what form do these « Getting to know you » activities take ?

There are many examples of ideas on-line and my favourite source is always Pinterest. Obviously all will depend on the teacher's preferences, the age of the pupils and their ability to communicate, because let it be made perfectly clear, my Getting to know you work is all done in English, in the target language, to get the students communicating with each other from the get-go.

You will find below a list of ideas and examples of activities. Generally speaking, students will be required to prepare something for the activity, which means it may not take place during

lesson 1 but during lesson 2 once we have introduced things in lesson 1. If we want pupils to communicate effectively, we need to make sure a) that they have something to say and b) that they know how to say it. More often than not, this needs preparation time and reflection time.

Activity 1 : Mystery words (minimal preparation)

Students write on a piece of paper 5 mystery words about themselves / their life. With a partner, they then have to ask each other questions to discover the significance of the mystery word but the answer can only be Yes or No.

Eg my mystery words could be : Bobby - three - tap dancing - sweet peas - Norway

A partner working with me would need to ask me questions to discover what the meaning behind these words is. So as Bobby is the name of my dog, I would be waiting for questions such as Is Bobby the name of your husband ? No. Does Bobby live in your house ? Yes. Is Bobby a boy ? No. Is Bobby an animal ? Yes. Is Bobby the name of your cat ? No. Do you have a dog ? Yes. Is Bobby the name of your dog ? Yes.

For the other mystery words, here is what they correspond to, with a view to showing the level of personal details I would give ;

Three : the number of children I have

Tap dancing : my favourite activity and what I do on a Tuesday evening

Sweet peas : my favourite flower and the flowers I grow in my garden

Norway : a country I have visited and where I would like to return.

Activity 2 : Find someone who games

You will find numerous examples of Find Someone Who games on-line. Students are given a card with criteria to meet and they have to circulate within the class to find people who correspond to their criteria. A follow-on for this activity is to then ask the students to introduce someone else in the class that they have spoken to and learned something about. This can be done orally and/or in the written form.

Some examples of questions :

<http://inkablinka.com/2014/05/mother-daughter-personal-progress-night.html>

Activity 3 : Variations on the « Me Poster »

You will find a blogpost on Me Posters on my blog, written a few years ago and destined for language assistants. <https://jennyleger.com/cecrl-language-skills/speaking-skills/me-posters/>

I always have had great success with asking students to create a Me Poster. We need to allow them some time to do it and so it cannot be done in Lessons 1 or 2 usually but I have always found it to be worth the wait. The students use their posters as a support for giving an oral presentation about themselves and their lives. The presentations can be done in pairs or as a whole class activity, depending on the level of risk you wish to create. When doing this in pairs, to give the students as much chance to share information as possible, I divide the class in two. The first half of the class pin their posters up around the room and the 2nd half circulate, discovering the posters of the 1st half - then we swap over so the 2nd half can pin up their posters and the 1st half can circulate.

When doing a whole class activity, to keep everyone engaged and on-task, I ask them to make notes as each student takes turns to speak and then they have to prepare questions to see who had been listening in most detail eg who has a dog called Timmy ? Who went to the Futuroscope during the summer holidays ? These questions can then be asked as a whole class or in smaller groups.

A variation on Me Posters :

<http://www.thebubblyblondeteacher.com//2014/07/christmas-in-july-day-3-4.html>

Activity 4 : Leaving a trace

The Me Posters can be posted up in the classroom but often, I have found that students want to keep them and don't want them posted in the classroom. If you want to make a display of work, it has to be made clear from the outset that this will be the outcome and students can work accordingly. Here are some ideas :

My shoes :

<https://i.pinimg.com/1200x/13/3c/82/133c824a415009bf512cbb985a9c020e.jpg>

The Jigsaw

This is a fabulous group building idea and can be used with any ages.

<https://www.supplyme.com/products/2-great-first-day-of-school-collaborative-projects-a2675>

It corresponds to ideas seen when travelling to other countries and visiting schools. And to make the puzzle complete, the teacher creates their own puzzle piece too.



I can't imagine life without

<http://creativeelementaryschoolcounselor.blogspot.com/2016/07/i-cant-imagine-life-without.html>

Peek face portraits

<http://simply2ndresources.blogspot.com/2013/08/oh-my-goodness.html>

Making a mobile - especially interesting when you have your own classroom (one day)

<https://www.pinterest.fr/pin/564005553329934285/>

All about my teacher

All About My Teacher

Today I played a game to get to know my teacher. We started in a line and when I thought what she said was true, I took a step forward. If it was false, I stood still. If I got the wrong answer, I had to go back to the starting line! Here are the True/False statements she gave us. See if you can answer them correctly! My teacher will send home the answers tomorrow!

- _____ 1. I have 2 sons named Jackson and Carson.
- _____ 2. I hate the beach.
- _____ 3. I played the drums for 8 years in school.
- _____ 4. My husband's name is Steve.
- _____ 5. I live in Lititz.
- _____ 6. Both of my boys were born on the 15th day of a month.
- _____ 7. I have blue eyes.
- _____ 8. I am a National Champion baton twirler and dancer.
- _____ 9. My favorite food is pizza.
- _____ 10. I drive a red car.
- _____ 11. Jackson is in first grade this year too!
- _____ 12. I do not like coffee.
- _____ 13. I LOVE hot chocolate-especially white hot chocolate from Starbucks!
- _____ 14. I dislike feet.
- _____ 15. Wiggly teeth gross me out.
- _____ 16. I love to read.
- _____ 17. I do not like to shop.
- _____ 18. I wish I could see a whale in the ocean.
- _____ 19. I love to listen to all kinds of music.
- _____ 20. My boys and I met Phineas and Ferb twice!
- _____ 21. I make mistakes.
- _____ 22. I was nervous this morning.
- _____ 23. I have twin nephews.
- _____ 24. I grew up outside of Philadelphia.
- _____ 25. I LOVE first grade!

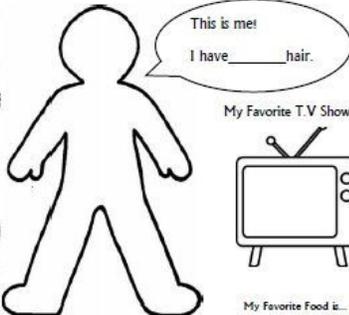
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All about me

All About Me



My Name is...



This is me!
I have _____ hair.

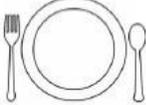
My Favorite T.V Show is...



My Favorite Book is...



My Favorite Food is...



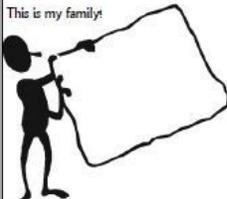
My Favorite Sport is...



When I grow up, I want to be a...



This is my family!



I am _____ years old.



I live...



My Favorite Color is...



These are just a selection of ideas you could choose to use for Getting to know me activities. You will find lots more on line and especially on Pinterest. Which are you favourites ? Do you have any images / examples to share ?

Jenny Léger
August 2018.