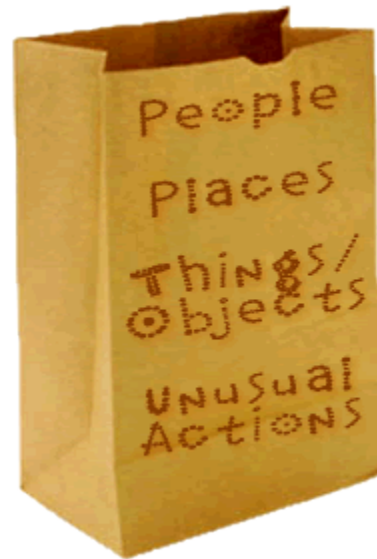


## Suggestions for Lessons and Activities

### 4x4 Grab Bag Stories

**Provide** four paper lunch bags for each group of students. Put four slips of paper with words or pictures on them into each bag. Your choices should represent places, people, things or common objects, and unusual actions.

**For example**, you might include a photo of the moon, a drawing of an oak tree, a magazine picture of a hospital, and a slip of paper with the words “shopping mall” in the “places” bag. For the “people” bag you could include a photo of an elderly man, a stick figure of two children, a picture of a cowboy, and the words “bank president.” In the “things” bag you could include a photo of an old shoe, a drawing of a beach ball, a picture of a snake, or the words “a comic book.” Finally, the “action” bag might include phrases such as “sang a scary song,” “flew to the sun,” “leaped high in the air,” or “drank orange juice.”



**To create a story**, students should reach into each bag and pull out a slip of paper from each of the four bags. Once they have selected a person, place, thing, and action, they are ready to begin writing (or telling) their stories. You can easily extend this activity by having groups switch strips of paper and retell the story differently than the previous group. An excellent way to involve and motivate the students when using this activity is to solicit their ideas for the contents of the bags and allow them to write slips that you, the teacher, must use in a story to end the lesson.

**This idea** was loosely adapted from “Basket Stories” by Leslie Opp-Beckman at the University of Oregon. Visit her website for other wonderfully creative activities: [www.uoregon.edu/~leslieob/pizzaz.html](http://www.uoregon.edu/~leslieob/pizzaz.html).

*Lisa*

# CHAIN STORIES



Beginning → Middle → End

**In this activity**, students co-author a three-part story – beginning, middle, and end – in one class period. Divide students into groups or teams of three. First, ask everyone to write part A, the beginning, and then pass it to the student to his or her right. This student will write part B, the middle, then pass it to the right again. The third student will write part C, the ending, before returning it to the original (part A) author. The circle or chain is now complete and the original author can see how his or her story “turned out.”

**An easy variation** is to have students speed-write by passing the story to another student each time a buzzer sounds. This interruption could occur in the middle of a paragraph, or even mid-sentence, yet the next student must immediately continue the story without hesitation until the buzzer sounds again. Eventually, the story should be returned to the original author so that it may be shared with the class.

*Lisa*



**This is a great activity** for the beginning of the year as a way to get to know your students or to allow the students to get to know one another. Students often share these poems by publishing them on a piece of construction paper framed by collage-style pictures from magazines, etc.

**To begin the lesson**, the class could study a sample poem like “Kate” (below). The teacher can begin a discussion of the structure of each line by asking what parts of speech are used. Later, students can use the same template to create their own autobiographical poems.

**KATE...**

tall, energetic, happy, intelligent

daughter of Julie and Sam

who loves music, books, and fresh air

who is afraid of the dark, spiders, and heights

who wants to see Paris, the end of hunger, and her grandmother

resident of this moment in time

**THOMPSON**

**Line 1:** Kate = first name of the author

**Line 2:** tall, energetic, happy, intelligent = 4 adjectives that describe the person in line 1

**Line 3:** mother of Julie and Sam = \_\_ of \_\_, describing an important relationship

**Line 4:** who loves music, books, and fresh air = 3 things the person in line 1 loves

**Line 5:** who is afraid of the dark, spiders, and heights = 3 fears the person in line 1 has

**Line 6:** who wants to see Paris, the end of hunger, and her grandmother = 3 things or people she wishes to see in the future

**Line 7:** resident of this moment in time = resident of... (time, place, concept)

**Line 8:** Thompson = last name of author

**I have found this to be really successful** if paired with a Sandra Cisneros vignette in *The House on Mango Street* like "My Name" or "Beautiful and Cruel." It also works well after a poem from *Cool Salsa* such as "Where Are You From?" by Gina Valdés or "Why Am I So Brown?" by Trinidad Sánchez, Jr. One of my former students wrote this biopoem:

**FANNY**

short, quick, smart, kind

daughter of México

who loves cooking, dancing, and talking on the phone

who is afraid of tests, policemen, and snakes

who wants to see her diploma, the beach, and her hometown again

resident of Jalisco and Dallas, but neither one

**FERNANDEZ**

**NOTE:** Thanks to Leslie Opp-Beckman at the University of Oregon for the template and sample "Kate" poem.

*Lisa*



**After reading short vignettes** from *The House on Mango Street*, students are asked to write a similar story describing their homes, backyards, relatives, or celebrations. I've found that my students often (unconsciously?) imitate Cisneros' style and produce powerful stories that incorporate their own life experiences. This is also a good way to introduce poetry by using titles such as "There's an Orange Tree Out There" / "Hay un Naranjo Ahí" and "Mango Juice" / "Jugo de Mango" from *Cool Salsa*.

**For the first writing activity**, I ask them to journal about a childhood memory that includes a fruit from their country. Some choose mangoes, but other may select plums, apples, etc. A sixth grade student from eastern China wrote this entry:

My grandmother has a plum tree behind her home. It is part of the garden my grandfather began a long time before. Every year we eat the fruits from it. My grandmother says the fruits are so delicious. We can taste China when we eat the fruits and remember our homeland. I see the plum tree in my brain and taste its sweet on my tongue when I remember my family, and I miss my grandmother more and more.

**Other journal topics** that work well with *House on Mango Street* include:

1. **Describe Esperanza.** Can you find specific places in the book where she is described physically or emotionally?
2. **Describe Esperanza's family.** What do we know about her father, mother, brother, sister, relatives? Can you find places in the book where they are mentioned?
3. **Describe the house on Mango Street** and the neighborhood around it. Who lives there? Where are specific places in the book where the house or neighborhood is described?

**NOTE:** Thanks to Carole A. Poppleton from the Maryland Institute College of Art for the journal topics and original idea for the "Fruitful" Stories activity.

*Lisa*





A great way to use the newspaper as homework is to have students find either the happiest or saddest story they can to summarize. Then, they can orally tell about the story when they come to class the next day. If the reading level of the newspaper is too high for your students, you can often use the school newspaper or find an appropriate ESL paper online.

This idea came from a great little book, *Once Upon a Time: Using Stories in the Language Classroom* by John Morgan and Mario Rinvolucri (Cambridge, 1983).

Lisa



The following activities utilize magazine pictures in creative classroom activities. I have found these ideas to be terrific springboards for discussion and writing with *Cool Salsa*, *The House on Mango Street*, and a thousand other stories. Some of my favorites are included here. For the full list of speaking and writing activities, see Julie Seek Sharp's article "Fifteen Ideas for Using Pictures as Prompts for Speaking or Writing" from the TESOL IEPIS (Intensive English Programs Interest Section) Newsletter (November 2004, Volume 21, Number 4).

### 1. Reporter Stories:

Provide a group of four or five students with a series of photos that include faces, animals, locations, objects, and a clock/calendar. A good rule of thumb is to give one photo per student in the group.

**Next, ask them** to use the common newspaper reporter “wh- + h” word strategy -- who, what, when, where, why, and how -- to collectively construct a story. This can simply be given as a written or speaking exercise, but one adaptation that I have found to work well is to have the original group jot down ideas for connecting the pictures into a story, then orally tell it to the rest of the class. The audience must take notes, then write the story down. Finally, we read and compare the audience stories so that the original group members can decide which was most accurate.

**To tie this activity** into a Cisneros vignette such as “Hairs” requires only that you choose photos of some objects or people she mentions -- for example, pictures from a hair salon, a photo of a little girl, another picture of a hair brush or barrettes, an older sister or mother. Hint: I’ve found that it’s fun to let them write their stories before reading Cisneros’ then compare.

### 2. Brainstorming for Themes:

When teaching story elements in my reading class, I have found that the concept of literary theme is often vague and confusing for my students. In the past, I have used a photo of a cowboy, for instance, to brainstorm for related themes such as hard work, independence, stereotypes, etc. Students can then write or discuss how those themes relate to whichever story we are reading at the time. This usually prompts a wonderful -- and sometimes heated -- class discussion.

### 3. Around-the World Conversations:

Post pictures around the classroom. Usually, half the number of students in your class is ideal -- for a class of 20, you will need 10 photos. Divide your students into either “A” or “B” teams. Ask each “A/B” pair to go to one photo and discuss it for two minutes. Then, give a signal for the pair to split up. The “A” person moves to the photo to the right while the “B” person moves to the photo to the left. In this way, each student will rotate around the room and get a new partner to speak with at every picture. Some possible discussion questions might be posted beside the photos to keep students talking.

### 4. Part 'O Speech Stories:

With a picture on the overhead projector so that the entire class can see it, ask students to brainstorm a list of nouns they see. Next, repeat with verbs, etc... Once you have a good list of words, they can write either sentences or a short paragraph, depending on their level, about what is happening in the photo. You can further

customize the lesson if you are studying, say, the simple past tense, by specifying that the action in the photo occurred last week in order to solicit those verbs. A good picture to use with this activity is a simple one without a lot of small detail such as a woman riding a bicycle or a man waiting at a bus stop.

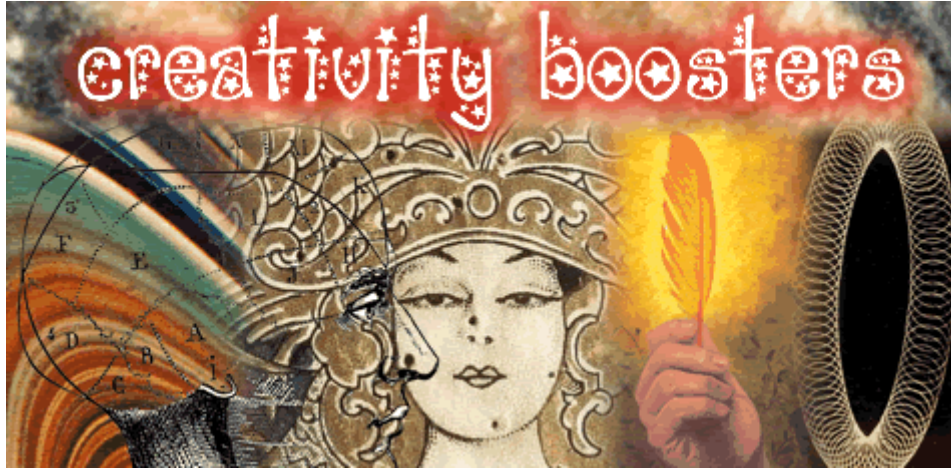
### **5. Before and After:**

Show the class two pictures that contain the same subject, or what could be the same subject. Ask them to decide which photo came first and write a story about what transpired between the “before” and “after” photos. A good example of this activity is showing two pictures of the same woman -- one as a bride and one solemnly looking out the window. One group of students might write that the bride was lonely, but finally met Mr. Right and got married. Another group might decide that the woman married too quickly and now regrets her choice.

### **6. Memory Madness:**

Give each pair of students a photo and allow them one minute to study and memorize as much as possible. One of the students now takes the photo so that the other person cannot see it and begins to question his partner’s memory by asking questions such as, “What color is the dog?” “How many children were sitting on the sofa?” Again, this can be adapted to whatever specific grammar point you are studying at the time simply by modeling the type of question (simple present? past progressive?) you would like the students to ask. It is pretty easy to find photos that could be from one of Cisneros’ stories to use for this activity and that work well to activate vocabulary that students will need for the reading. For example, you can include a photo of a party or dance before reading “Chanclas.”

*Lisa*



From *“Using Creativity as a Catalyst: Boosting Creative Skills in the ESL Classroom”* by Hall Houston.

1. **Seek out** realia, songs, or artwork that might stimulate students’ imagination.
2. **Get out** of a rut. Plan a surprise or two or change the order of learning activities.
3. **Encourage** students to give more than one answer to a question; help them look for alternative solutions and ideas.
4. **Ask** lots of questions, but don’t forget to encourage students to ask questions as well.
5. **Introduce** humor via cartoon strips or short video clips of a comedian’s performance.
6. **Try to get** students used to thinking in metaphors and similes by asking them to make connections between ideas or objects.
7. **Challenge** students to think of the opposite word(s) when doing a simple vocabulary exercise.
8. **Encourage** students think of a situation from several different points of view.
9. **Use** visual like mind mapping, Venn diagrams, and other graphic organizers to help students organize their ideas onto paper and also expand their creativity.
10. **Model** “thinking outside of the box” behavior for your students by talking aloud about your thought process as you analyze a sentence for grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, or comprehension. Talking to yourself doesn’t mean you are crazy; it’s a great way to show them how to connect ideas. ;-)

Lisa





**For an Intermediate Reading class,** I assigned students two different writing assignments based on chapters from Sandra Cisneros' *House on Mango Street*: a short composition about their names and a free-verse poem about the Cadillac.

**For the first assignment** based on the chapter "My Name," the goal was twofold: to learn about my students and give them a chance to tell about themselves, thus creating a community of learners and lowering the affective filter. Students read "My Name" from *House on Mango Street* before they began their own composition. Here is one example from the class of 2003.

My name is Nobuko, and I come from Japan. When my mother gave birth, my father was on the ship, not at home, so someone sent that news to my father by telegraph. They didn't decide on my name, but my father had a list of candidates. When he chose my name Nobuko, he checked the number of strokes and meanings that it has in Chinese. They wished that I would be a sweetheart and a helpful person. Then he chose Nobuko from the list.

My grandmother always said a name should be helpful for people. It is your mission and your destiny. I'm not always a sweetheart and a helpful person, but I know my name's meaning, and I like my name. I try to be a sweetheart and helpful all the time.

**For the second assignment,** students read "Louie, His Cousin & His Other Cousin." Their task was to imagine they were in the Cadillac and to write a free-verse poem about the imaginary experience.

**The chapter "Hairs"** inspired another creative writing task: a found poem. Students would start with the noun "hair" and underline descriptive phrases and synonyms. The final product would be the poem. An extension would be to students create a similar poem describing the hair of someone in their own family.

## **Hair**

Like a broom

Up in the air

Or

Thick and straight

Or

Slippery

Like fur.

But

## **Mama's Hair**

Like little rosettes

Like little candy circles

Like the warm smell of bread.

*Freddie*

[http://www.corndancer.com/vox/gnosis/artcls\\_037054/gno\\_now042.html](http://www.corndancer.com/vox/gnosis/artcls_037054/gno_now042.html)

