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10 great classroom activities language teachers can do with games (in addition to helping students speak while playing!)

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Key points

- **What is this?** This is a list of 10 activities that teachers can use before, during and after games in class. There are teaching scripts and free materials for each.
- **Why did you make it?** I think a lot of teachers use games for speaking practice, which is great, but there are many more things that can be done with games. I'd like to help. I'd like teachers to share their activities and materials, too!
- **Why is it **radical**?** These activities work with **any** game (video game, board game, traditional game .. anything!). Lots of websites list "great games" but not many share **research-tested teaching materials**. These materials tap into the **power** teachers have to help learners **before, during and after** games.
- **Who is it for?** Any teacher, any student, any classroom context.

Tweet synopsis

Hi, language teachers! :)

You're using games to help students speak, right?
Great!







I've shared #10greatactivities and #freematerials you can use in your class today!
What do you think?

#gamebasedlearning
#top10list
#helpingteachers
#realgamification

View at the LLP Playground: <https://www.llpjournal.org/2020/05/08/dehaan-10-great-activities.html>




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 What do you do with games? Maybe you... 	 Present some vocabulary or grammar?  Practice it with some drills?  Students produce language while playing a game?	Wonderful! Keep it up! 
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In **addition** to the “present, practice, produce” teaching approach ...
 Here are 10 activities you can do in the classroom with **any type of game!**






BEFORE THE GAME		
The activity 	Say to students 	Use these free materials 
Help students choose games. There are so many different games that can be educational or useful to different people. Students can learn to take control of their learning by choosing what games to play and discuss and work with. Students may invest more in games and language learning if they are given more responsibilities from the beginning.	“Who do you want to be in the future?” “What do you need to know to do that?” “Which of these games could help?” “Why do you prefer this game? What makes you like it?” ¹	I use this worksheet to help students connect games and goals. Here are games (with keywords) I use. The “ Learning, Education and Games ” books describe 300 games by keywords, and are free to download. Real English for Gamers describes the gameplay and language in many popular online video games.
Watch YouTube videos of other people playing the game. ² Games are hard to teach and learn and play, and watching how the game is played can help new players get a sense of the game. Language learners can also note useful language to use when they try the game.	“Let’s watch this video together.” “When you don’t understand something, raise your hand, and I’ll help you.”	James York’s “ Kotoba Rollers ” curriculum has a note sheet to help students notice new vocabulary in gameplay videos. Real English for Gamers’s YouTube channel has hundreds of gameplay videos.
Ask students to plan how to play. Games have choices and consequences. Even though students haven’t played yet, they can predict ³ (in their L1 or L2) what might happen, what actions they will take in the game, and what language they want to try to use.	“How will you play the game?” “What will you do first?” “What do you think will be most important?”	Aiko Sato, my student, taught some board games in her thesis project and asked simple questions (pages 15-16) to get her students thinking about strategies before and after each game.

¹ Suggestion by Mona Zawdeh (April 21, 2020, 15:42).

² Comment from Esther Park: “Excellent idea for modeling.” (April 21, 2020, 23:23).

³ Comment from Marc Jones: “Depending on proficiency/game literacy, students could find out from the game rules/component list how many different ‘moves’ there are, and pre-evaluate these moves (simple comparison/ranking), then re-evaluate post play.” (April 20, 2020, 10:22).

DURING THE GAME

The activity 	Say to students 	Use these free materials 
Direct students' attention to aspects of the game and language. It's hard for students to notice things while playing a game. If you can highlight things <i>without breaking up gameplay</i> , it can lead to better understanding. It can also help in a discussion and other work after the game. ⁴	"What just happened?" "Wow! Do you see what I see?" "What did you just say?"	You can use the black board, white board, a piece of paper, or a digital document to take public notes (things you notice, things students tell you).
Have students collect game data. If it <i>won't break up gameplay</i> , have students ⁵ collect information and language during the game. They might write down scores, game moves, things their team (or the other team) says, or even take photos, audio or video with smartphones.	"The more game information we have, the more we can do later." "What data do you think we should collect?"	I use this sheet to help my students to think about what data to collect (e.g., notes, photos, video) and also to organize it after we play. Real English for Gamers shows learners how to hunt for useful language in gameplay videos.
Have students play in pairs. Many games can be paused or played in turns. Have students play these in pairs. They should either discuss each move before making it, or one can tell the other what to do. They'll use complex language to explain their ideas and rationales. ⁶	"Work as a team." "Before you make a move, decide together." "A, you decide and tell B what to do."	This webpage and James York's sheet has useful classroom language for playing games. This forum post has commonly used language in board game sessions. Real English for Gamers provides useful language for chatting to other players in online games.

Discussion ("debriefing") Worksheet for Diplomacy (game name)

Names: _____ Pen Colors: _____

1. What happened? Add significant events or details to the game "timeline" in chronological order. Add lines and times/dates if necessary.

Read rules

Selecting Learning Understanding the game

The beginning of the game The middle of the game The end of the game After the game

2. What thoughts or feelings did you / do you have?

3. What did you observe during the game?

4. What questions do you have?

5. How satisfied are you with the game? Why?

6. What do you think you learned?

7. What data did you / your group collect? (circle types, write details)

Photos: Nothing Video: Nothing Notes: I have some ideas but I don't do. Game data (scores, etc): England 1 Germany 0 Turkey 1 Italy 0 France 0 Russia 0 Other: Russia order sheet

My students completed a [discussion worksheet](#) after their game.

⁴ Suggestion from Mona Zawdeh: "You can also videotape the students and watch the video again with them while asking questions and facilitating discussions." (April 21, 2020, 15:43).

⁵ Suggestion from Mona Zawdeh: "Assign one task for each student in the group (you can call it mission). Later they can collaborate to analyze their data and conclude." (April 21, 2020, 15:47).

⁶ Suggestion from Marc Jones: "It would be a good idea to link this back explicitly to collecting data, e.g. audio/video recording." (April 20, 2020, 10:06).

AFTER THE GAME

 The activity	 Say to students	 Use these free materials
Transcribe and improve. It's natural for students to make mistakes the first time they play a game. It's natural for students to use their first language when playing with speakers of the same language. If students record (e.g., audio or video using a smartphone), you can assign transcribing (mistakes and first language and all) their language, working with them to correct their mistakes and to translate their L1 into the L2, and then playing again using the corrected scripts. ⁷	"Your recording is very useful." "It's ok if you made mistakes, or spoke your first language. I'll help you fix those mistakes, and help you learn what you wanted to say." "Let's do a mini project." ⁸	James York's " Kotoba Rollers " curriculum has the perfect sequence of materials that guides learners through transcribing and evaluating , correcting mistakes and extra language study , and play analysis .
Talk about the game. Discussing a game requires that students use specialized terms and more precise language than the language often used during a game. Discussing a game can also help students remember and understand the game better, can help them play better in a subsequent attempt, and also prepare them for later activities or projects.	"How was the game? ...Why?" "Why did you win (or lose)?" "Did your plans work? Why (not)?" "What would you do next time to try to win?" ⁹	I have students work together to write their answers on this discussion worksheet . (If I have a small group of students, I just ask them those questions.) Great discussion ("debriefing") questions can be found here and here and here .
Play it again. This is one of the best, and easiest, things you can do. Students are still learning the game the first time they play. By playing again, they can be deliberate about game and language choices.	"Ok, now that you know how to play, let's play again." "Try to play better. Try to use language more carefully." ¹⁰	This is one of the simplest activities in terms of materials, too. Just ask students to answer the following, for themselves, on a scrap piece of paper (after the first and second play): Your gameplay? ★★★★★ Your language use? ★★★★★
Study the language in games deeply. Games are full of language. After students have an amazing experience with a game, they can be helped to understand the new vocabulary, grammar, or texts (game rules, online reviews) more deeply.	"You used (read) a lot of language, didn't you?" "This worksheet will help you understand and remember it."	This worksheet (pages 12-13) helps students understand vocabulary and grammar deeply. This worksheet asks students questions to help them think about the vocabulary, organization, author, audience and style of any piece of text. The questions are simple, but require thinking and careful answers.

⁷ Comment and suggestion from Dustin Staats: "Love this! When James and I chatted about this on the podcast, I loved how he had set this up. I ran Pandemic games as a part of our English Corner at a uni in Taiwan and looking back I had wished I would have asked them to look more directly at the language they used in the game. I think we could take it a step further and ask Ss to look at the language in the game and then look at how the grammar structures, phrases, or vocabulary are mirrored in other day to day conversations." (April 26, 2020, 14:28)

⁸ Suggestion from Mona Zawdeh: "Perhaps they can make an anchor chart (poster) with those keywords used including visuals." (April 21, 2020, 15:43).

⁹ Suggestion by Marc Jones (April 20, 2020, 10:11).

¹⁰ Suggestion from Mona Zawdeh: "We can videotape students playing the game for the first time and playing it later... While watching the video, they can analyze their attitude, language choice...." (April 21, 2020, 15:48).

Dear Teachers,

Thank you for taking a look at this collection of ideas and resources.

Do you have other lesson plans, teaching notes or materials that you can share? Please contact me, so I can add it to this document, and let's co-author this paper. Or, we can write a different paper together!

I have done other activities using games, but I haven't organized materials for them, yet. Are you interested in any of these activities?

1. *planning and noting and comparing strategies in games,*
2. *comparing game experiences to game reviews and other messages online,*
3. *writing an essay about playing a game,*
4. *making a concept map of a game,*
5. *teaching a game to other people,*
6. *posting a game review or video to a fan or consumer website,*
7. *researching the history or social connections of a game,*
8. *comparing their experience of a game to how the news reports on games,*
9. *talking to students about how they would like to transfer what they did in the game to their lives and future, and*
10. *game remixing and game design.*

If you would like to do any of these activities, let me know. I'll immediately share what I have done with you, and also work to add these activities to this document as soon as possible.

Are you looking for a whole game curriculum? I recommend taking a look at:

- James York's "Kotoba Rollers" [course](#),
- my "Game Terakoya" [course](#),
- Jonathon Reinhardt's "Explore-Examine-Extend" [sequence](#),
- Mark Rasmussen's [lessons](#) and
- DM Jones' [Appendices](#).

And, I hope you join LLP's Slack [group](#) to share what you are doing. I'd love to talk and work with you.

Jonathan