

A Lesson Plan From the TESOL Teacher of the Year

By Anne Marie Foerster Luu

Helping Students See That We Can Help Each Other:

A lesson about descriptive language

Students in Elementary ESOL are challenged to understand themselves and their relationships with others as they navigate the murky waters of transitioning to a new culture. There are often challenges of miscommunication that leave a youthful heart defensive and toughened by the “unresponsiveness” of peers, the stern glance of a teacher, and the helpless sighs of parents who are challenged by their own transitions. Elementary ESOL students and their teachers have to find ways to communicate without words: with body language and facial gestures, with predictable patterns of behavior, and with wordless stories. This lesson plan was developed based on the curricular expectations of Grade 2 as well as the specific social and emotional needs of a learner who was struggling to transition to being a student in the United States. (Read about how I addressed the issues faced by that struggling student in my [TESOL blog](#).)

Teaching Materials:

Mystery box with several objects available to put inside and a picture of each object

Chart paper and markers

[Picture of an elephant](#) (enough copies for each student), each picture cut into 4–6 pieces

[Seven Blind Mice](#), by Ed Young (multiple copies if available)

Sticky notes and a marker

Calendar

Number cards that can be moved as you count down from 7 to 1

Storyboard graphic organizer

Audience: Grade 2 beginner/low intermediate

Objective: Students will be able to discuss, sequence, and retell *The Seven Blind Mice*.

Outcome: Students will be able to use specific sentence constructions. Students will be able to negotiate meaning and develop descriptive language.

Students will understand:

- How do small pieces come together to make a larger whole?
- Can we each have a different understanding of the same thing?

Duration: Three 35-minute sessions Sticky notes and a marker

Preparation

Prior to the lesson sequence:

- Introduce yourself to [Ed Young](#) and his story [Seven Blind Mice](#), which is the story of how seven blind mice, each feeling a different part of a “strange something” near their pond

(an elephant), describe that part to the rest of the group. It is only through combining their disparate perceptions that they are able to see the whole.

- Prepare a mystery box and collect objects to put inside. Take a picture of each object and print it with space left at the bottom for students to add descriptive vocabulary during the activity.
- Prepare one envelope for each student. In each envelope, place the cut-out pieces of an [elephant picture](#), attaching one piece to the outside with a paperclip.
- Prepare a piece of chart paper with selected vocabulary and structures. Keep the marker available to add student contributions. This list will serve as a lesson-specific word wall.
- Prepare a storyboard graphic organizer with eight boxes on a PowerPoint, ActivInspire, or on chart paper; copy it for each student. The first box should be completed with “The red mouse thought he touched a pillar.” The second box should be a cloze that reads “The _____ mouse _____ he touched a _____.” The next five boxes should be left blank. The last box should be another cloze with “When the mice touched the whole thing, they learned _____.”

Getting Started (Session 1; 35 minutes)

Have students settle at a table or in a circle on the floor. Use the mystery box to pre-assess students’ descriptive vocabulary and negotiate new vocabulary. Keep the chart paper (with pictures of objects to pin onto it when appropriate) handy in order to add new vocabulary as students discuss the objects in the mystery box.

Begin with one object in the box. Invite a student to reach into the box and describe the object while others guess what it is. If the student is not able to express enough descriptive language, ask him/her to invite a friend to put a hand in the mystery box. You can use the pictures to scaffold the discussion as necessary. “Does it feel like this (picture A) or like this (picture B)?” Pin pictures of the object on the chart paper and record descriptive language specific to the object. Some descriptive language they might use would be:

smooth, rough
soft, hard
squishy, firm
fuzzy, hairy, hairless
bright, dull
colorful, colorless
strong, weak
large, small
long, short
heavy, light

After each student has gotten a turn with the mystery box, briefly discuss the challenge of describing an object or correctly guessing what it is when only using the sense of touch.

Presenting the Challenge (Session 2; 35 minutes)

Explain to the students that they are going to read a book together and tell them that they will first complete a puzzle. Give each student one of the prepared envelopes, and have them describe

what they see on the single piece of the puzzle attached to the outside of the envelope. Use an anecdotal record sheet to note the vocabulary used by each student as you circulate.

Next, give them a chance to put their puzzles together. Discuss how the large object is made up of smaller pieces. Depending on the size of your group, you could also give each student only a single piece of the puzzle and challenge them to work together to solve it. I recommend using only the elephant with a beginner/low intermediate-level group. A higher-level group could use a variety of pictures and focus on guessing the objects as you read the book.

Jumping In

Review the parts of a book (cover, title, author, illustrator, spine, back cover) and preview only a few of the pages with the students to give them an idea of the pattern of the book. Don't go beyond the green mouse because it is apparent that they are talking about an elephant with the next page. They should understand that the blind mice are wondering what has come to their pond. There is no picture of a pond in the book, so consider providing a picture of one and using the term *setting* when you discuss how it fits with the story.

Ask how many mice are in the story and point out that each mouse explores the object on a different day. Point out that this is related to the calendar and use the number cards to count the mice. Use patterned language such as "The first mouse explored the object, how many mice are left?" This will help you integrate math-related vocabulary and patterns without specifically doing a math lesson. Ask questions such as "Do they agree or disagree?" This will help you pattern questions that they might encounter in social studies or reading/language arts.

Read Together

If you have multiple copies of the book, provide one to each student. If this is not possible, use an Elmo to project the pages on a Promethean Board or use an [internet resource](#) to project the pages on the board. Have students find specific words or constructions within the text. I focus on "It is a pillar," and "It is a snake," directly from the text. For each mouse, stop and ask the students questions like "Why does he think it is a pillar?" to practice descriptive language using these constructions "The leg of the elephant is like a pillar because _____.
"_____" feels like (looks like)." "_____ is as _____ as _____."
Explore the other structures in the objective as your students build on their success with these. You will know which students will thrive with this challenge and which will need more support.

Count down as the mice are introduced in the story. Move the number cards and say things like "On day 1, mouse number one thought he touched a pillar." Use this patterned language for each mouse to review the story as you proceed. Ask the students to guess what came to the pond.

Retelling the Story (Session 3; 35 minutes)

Depending on whether you used chart paper, a Promethean flip chart, or a PowerPoint, how you support having students retell the story will vary. In this lesson I have students use the flip chart and drag a sentence into the first box of the story map. Then we use the pen to write a cloze in the second box. A student fills it in.

Once the students complete the organizer, meet with each individually. Ask him or her to tell you what happened in the story. They may tell you the order of the mice and what the mice thought their parts of the elephant to be; however, challenge them to move off the graphic organizer. Open the book to a random page and ask the student what happened. Ask him or her what happened in the beginning of the story or the end of the story. Keep a checklist to record if the student independently used any of the target language. Note what language was used. Note if the language was in sentences with or without prompting. Before you finish with the individual student, ask him or her “Does everyone always have the same idea?” Try to prompt a quick conversation that will lead to a class meeting discussion.

Making It Matter: Discussion

Each of the three sessions in this lesson sequence will have a closing that helps you determine what the students learned and what they can say about what they learned. In addition, it is important to build relationships and make the learning matter to the students. For the final closing activity, gather the students for a class meeting. Prompt a discussion about how no one sees things exactly the same way. Depending on the level of your students, this conversation will be supported best with body language and facial gestures.

Opportunity

As this lesson sequence opened doors to new opportunities, students will learn about the structure of a problem/solution story. Students in my class used the same graphic organizer from this lesson to map an original. Using the fish in our classroom as a prompt, they wrote a book about two fish friends who don’t always see eye to eye; in fact, one is a bit of a bully. Read about how I used the writing of this original story to help a new English language learner transition from one culture to another in my [TESOL blog](#).

Read about Anne Marie, her award, and her classroom:
“[Profiling Excellence:
The 2013 TESOL Teacher of the Year](#)”

[Anne Marie Foerster Luu](#) is currently a National Board Certified ESOL teacher working in a public K–5 setting and serving as an adjunct in a MA-TESOL program. She is the 2013 TESOL Teacher of the Year.