

VOCAB DICE GAMES



Looking for a quick filler when your students are finished their work? Looking for a way to introduce new words but perhaps as well to assess them "in action"? Then why not try a dice game! The example below provides you with a basic process for selecting words and suggestions for what to do with them, and is easily adaptable to any age, language, or level of learners.

Laura Loder Buechel



Laura Loder Buechel is a teacher trainer at Zurich University of Teacher Education. This dice game does not exclude working with a text in other ways (skimming, scanning, re-writing, writing questions) but it can well accompany work with any listening transcript or reading passage.

1. Have the text you'll be working with ideally in digital form so you can copy / paste the text into step 2. For this example, to start a unit on poetry, I have chosen the article "National youth poet laureate finalists found confidence and friendship through words" on Newsela with a Lexile Level of 420 (the simplest) though for upper-level classes, a higher Lexile Level could well be chosen.

2. Copy-paste the text into WordSift and hit "sift". There are many options with this tool, but generally, I mark the words in the New General Service List (see Figure 1). There are many other options with WordSift (such as sorting the words from common to rare) but to create my list, this general word cloud is fine. 3. I eyeball the word cloud and select a list of words. My general criteria are that the words the learners play with should not be too specific (thus transferrable to other contexts) nor should they be cognates (parallel words) of the local language (here German), they should offer a mix of parts of speech, of abstract or concrete, or simply be fun to spell or say. Whilst I might also do a quick introduction to words such as 'laureate' or 'inauguration', these words are not ones I care so much about having the learners actively learn. In the list in step 4, I might also include different forms of the verbs, but for simplicity's sake, here I do not.

- poetry
- rule
- audiencewrote
- might
- share
- many
- a lot
- also
- poem

5. I generally do a speed introduction to the words by acting out a word, giving an example, saying what it is not, providing a description or an attempt at a synonym and having the learners guess which word it is. A quick choral drill is not to be excluded. However, I do not take too much time here (max 3 minutes for a list of 6-10 words) because the learners will be working in groups afterwards and it is better if the lesson moves.

6. The easiest way to work with this list is to have pairs or small groups copy the words onto small cards, one word per card. Like this, the learners think about the words. In their pairs or groups, they then put the words face-down between them.

7. The first person chooses a word (and doesn't show the others!) and then rolls a dice. They do what is said and the other guess! You can always have the learners keep points, but I have found that this is not necessary.

8. You find here two variations of this game, a simple one and a harder one, but you can create any combination or ones not mentioned here. You can have this game set up and ready on laminated cards for learners to play with any set of words, or even just from the words on a certain page of a coursebook. They can do this when they are finished their other work.

9. For assessment, I find this game more useful than vocab tests because I can declare it "test time" and observe learners playing and take notes. Just keep in mind that different activities measure different constructs – spelling a word gives no indication of comprehension, and describing a word requires accuracy and fluency and appropriacy of speech on the part of the speaker and then comprehension from the listener. Thus, it may be helpful to only take notes on certain observations and not all.

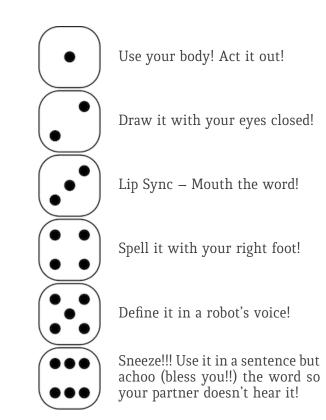




Figure 1 Word cloud generated from frequency of words in text, sifted in WordSift.

Other options

- Sculpt it out of playdough
- Describe the word via numbers of syllables, consonants, vowels, letters....
- Give single word clues
- Spell it backwards, on your partner's back, with the tip of your nose, in ASL, etc...
- Say everything the word is NOT
- Describe how you or others might feel
 about the word
- Draw it (blindfolded, in the air)
- Provide synonyms or free associations