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Teaching English Through Riddles

Статья посвящена загадкам как одному из инструментов в обучении английскому языку. Загадки требуют от учащихся не только отработки различных языковых навыков (фонетика, лексика, грамматика), но и развития навыков критического мышления. Рассмотрены основные преимущества использования загадок в обучении.

Ключевые слова: загадка, обучение, английский язык, языковые навыки, критическое мышление, развлечение

The article is devoted to riddles as one of the tools in teaching English. Riddles require students not only to practise various language skills (phonetics, vocabulary, grammar), but also to develop critical thinking skills. The main advantages of using riddles in education are considered.

Keywords: riddle, teaching, the English language, language skills, critical thinking, entertainment

Teachers are always looking for new ways to keep students interested and engaged during lessons and tuition sessions. Researchers assure us that riddles are an effective tool for this. Why not use them in classes?

Riddles seem to be a topic which has been already studied in full detail. They have been studied from the structural point of view [2]; as a minor form of a play text with textual categories of a specific character [3]; classifications and functions of riddles [8]; cognitive semantics of riddles [11]; pragmatics of riddles [1] and a lot of others. But there are still scientific articles being written on the benefits of using riddles in teaching foreign languages [4], [7], [9], [10], [14].

Educators are sure that riddles are a wonderful way “to involve any student in a topic: not only does this force a student to be an ‘active’ rather than ‘passive’ listener, but also working with riddles can improve the effectiveness of the overall learning environment, because these sorts of problems require a variety of skills and bring new meaning to abstract concepts” [6].

What is a riddle?

There are several definitions of a riddle. A *riddle* is generally a trick question or statement devised to require clever or unexpected thinking for its answer.

M. Zipke believes a riddle to be “a question that turns into a joke because riddles have puzzling question and the answer is surprising and unpredictable” [17, p. 131]. Sadie Nachtigal considers a riddle to be “an excellent ESL/EFL tool because it requires students to practice a variety of language skills in order to find a solution” [13].

Riddles are sometimes called brain teasers, but this term refers to a broader category of thought-based games such as crosswords and Sudoku puzzles.

In addition to being fun, riddles can also be quite useful! That’s because solving them involves thinking hard about the words used, which strengthens the parts of the brain that deal with language. “When presented with a riddle, the brain searches through all the words and their various meanings, and solving the riddle depends on locating the combination of meanings that will unlock the puzzle – sort of like a combination lock. The more riddles you work on, the faster your brain gets at this process, which means it is getting better at processing words and ideas” [16]. As riddles are usually worded in a way that relates to real-life situations, they can help students understand complex conceits. Besides, to solve puzzles, students are required to develop their critical-thinking skills.

What are the key benefits of using riddles in teaching English?

In class children usually respond well to brain teasers as they seem to be familiar with the concept of puzzles and riddles. Familiarity breeds *comfort in learning*. Besides, being short riddles are accessible for young learners.

Riddles often make us laugh out loud. Scientists say that laughter is health-giving, relaxing the brain and body, helping us release stress, encouraging positive mental health.

Riddles improve *metalinguistic awareness*. The ability to manipulate language using metaphors, incorporating multiple meanings, ambiguities makes students reflect on the nature of language. Looking for hidden meanings and interpreting a text,

getting familiar with linguistic devices such as puns, homophones, spoonerisms, comparisons will help students ‘read between the lines’, think about context. To develop this ability, we can offer a range of either sophisticated or simple puzzles and riddles to our learners. Word play, for example, is a key element of many riddles:

Why should a man never tell his secrets in a corn field? (Answer: Because it has so many ears).

In this case the pun is based on playing on two meanings of the word *ear*: 1) one of the two organs on your head that you hear with; 2) the top part of some crop plants, which produces grain.

Riddles **expand vocabulary**. Introducing riddles (comprising new and unusual words) in education can enlarge a student’s vocabulary in an effortless way as they are, as a rule, enjoyable and highly memorable. Young learners are likely to learn new words and new ways to use them, subliminally learning rhythm and rhyming.

Riddles **create a great bond between student and teacher**. “Sharing and solving riddles together is a fantastic bonding experience: it’s both interactive and fun, and the act of ‘thinking outside the box’ can also encourage children to break out of their comfort zone. Incorporating riddles into a lesson is an excellent icebreaker and can help create a solid foundation for a future learning relationship” [6].

What are the benefits teachers can get from using riddles in the classroom?

1. Use them as warmers and icebreakers.

And it’s especially difficult early in the semester or year before your students are comfortable with you and with one another. You can offer your students the following riddle:

How do you know that an elephant has been in the refrigerator? (Answer: There are footprints in the butter dish) [15].

When introducing a riddle to your class, let groups of students talk for a few minutes about what the answer might be. Then, have groups of students share their ideas with each other. These so-called *elephant jokes* can function as good conversation starters and get your students use language in the classroom with each other. Younger students who are just beginning to explore the world find such riddles funny and amusing. There are two contradictions involved: 1) how can an elephant, the owner of a gigantic size, perch on a plate of butter? 2) how can you leave marks on food if it is something that is always stored in specially designated places, away from dust and dirt? The collision of these contradictory factors creates a comic effect, which arises thanks to an unexpected answer, the purpose of which is to involve you in a guessing game [3]. A long chain can be continued:

How do you know that two elephants have been in the refrigerator?

(Answer: There are two sets of footprints in the butter dish).

The chain can be continued:

How do you know that a herd of elephants has been in the refrigerator? (Answer: There is a Volkswagen parked in front of your house and there are lots of footprints in the butter dish) [15].

2. Use riddles as part of a lesson on a specific topic.

Using riddles, you can focus on different aspects of English. Teaching Degrees of Comparison, for example, you may ask your students the following riddle:

What five-letter word becomes shorter when you add two letters to it? (Answer: Short (Short-er)) [5].

Such riddles can be used to review grammar rules, as well as exercise students' knowledge of vocabulary. Students must think about spelling to solve this riddle.

Riddles can also be useful for practising pronunciation and rhyming:

*When it's time for me to come,
all the kids will run along,
back home to rest their heads,
on their pillows, in their soft beds.*

(Answer: the night) [12].

After you have presented the riddle, you may ask your students to repeat it imitating your or the speaker's pronunciation and intonation.

Riddles can be used to teach English idioms. Idioms are a lot of fun to teach and to learn, and they will make your students sound more like native speakers and become better listeners, more in tune to colloquial English. It's almost like a code-breaking game, where students must learn that when certain words come together in a phrase, they can mean something very different.

When asking, "*Why did the man throw the clock out the window?*"

we are imagining a literal interpretation of events. We see the man taking his alarm clock and throwing it out of the window, which we all might want to do on Monday mornings. The key here, though, is the idiomatic expression that answers the riddle: *He wanted to see time fly*. The man in the riddle is acting out a literal depiction of an idiomatic expression. ESL students spend much time learning English's idioms. A fun way to review them is to use this type of riddle in your classroom.

3. Use riddles as your closing activity.

Having reviewed the words of time such as *often, seldom, usually, never, once, twice* and others, you can ask your students the following riddle:

What occurs once in a minute, twice in a moment and never in one thousand years? (Answer: The letter "M") [5].

You may want to use puzzles and riddles to review vocabulary with your students. For example, having studied the topic "My House. My favourite room", you may want to test your students' knowledge and you ask them the following riddle:

I have four legs, a back, but no head. What am I? (Answer: a chair).

In conclusion it should be noted that puzzles and riddles do have practical applications in the ESL classroom. When the students feel fun in learning, they will

have strong motivation to learn. After learning and practising new grammar or vocabulary in a non-stressful way, even the shiest student can use language and express their idea. One more pleasant thing about riddles is that there are hundreds of them to choose from. There are job riddles, animal, letters, number riddles, house, sports, food riddles and many more. There are ready riddle worksheets which one can use in their classes.

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Использование цифровых образовательных технологий при организации самостоятельной работы по дисциплине «Иностранный язык»

В статье рассматриваются преимущества использования цифровых технологий в образовательном процессе как эффективных инструментов при организации самостоятельной работы целевой аудитории применительно к дисциплине «Иностранный язык». Автором раскрывается потенциал подобных ресурсов как для преподавателя в рамках создания целостной разнообразной образовательной среды, так и для обучающихся, поскольку цифровизация позволяет разрешить вопрос вариативности, избыточности, уровневой и глубинной дифференциации заданий, выстраивания индивидуальной образовательной траектории. В статье подчеркивается, что цифровые образовательные технологии должны рассматриваться только в качестве дополнительного обучающего ресурса.

Ключевые слова: цифровизация, профессиональное образование, целевая аудитория, самообучение, образовательный стандарт, мультимедийные технологии, целеполагание, иностранный язык, субъектность, активная позиция, инициативность, мотивация, принцип «научить учиться»

В системе высшего профессионального образования овладение иностранным языком как одним из средств общения и познания окружающей действительности занимает особое место. Изучение иностранного языка помогает формировать у обучающихся творческую самостоятельность и учит их использовать языковой материал для высказывания своего мнения в диалогической или монологической речи [1]. Необходимость решения проблемы недостаточного уровня самостоятельности обучающихся составляет основную задачу современного образования. В образовательном процессе высшей школы на современном этапе к обучающимся при изучении иностранного языка предъявляются достаточно высокие требования в рамках развития коммуникативной компетенции, закрепленной в качестве основной в федеральных государственных образовательных стандартах. В образовательных стандартах нового поколения