

CAN YOU MAKE UP A GOOD EXCUSE?

Sylvie Gauthier

The activity described below is appropriate for beginner and intermediate level students of any age. It is especially useful for motivating ESL students to use English creatively.

This activity should not be used on a daily basis. If used on occasion, however, it can be fun for both the teacher and the students. It will be especially rewarding for the students who are able to come up with a good excuse for not doing their homework.

Procedure

At the end of a given ESL class, the students are told that they will be exempt from homework if they are able to make up an excuse for not doing their homework that evening or during an upcoming weekend.

This activity should only take up 5 to 10 minutes at the end of the class, and can either be done orally, with each student giving an excuse aloud to the teacher, or in writing, with each student handing in a written excuse to the teacher. It must be established from the start that no excuse may be used twice, i.e., students must come up with original reasons explaining why they will be unable to do the homework. They can't repeat someone else's excuse.

The first time you try doing this activity, you will probably find that only some of your students come up with a good excuse; however, it will not take long for the others to catch on to what is expected of them when they realize that the students who came up with good excuses have no homework to do.

Here are some sample excuses produced by a group of Grade 8 students in Rouyn-Noranda, Québec:

- I have to work with my father at home.
- There is only two days without school.
- I have to work on the farm and go to Rouyn.
- I have to go to a cadet meeting.
- I have to work in the weekends.
- My boyfriend is coming to town and I have to go to his place too.
- We have only two days off on seven.
- Guy Lafleur's sick and I have to replace him Saturday night with Canadiens.
- My boyfriend is coming to see me and there is no time for homeworks.
- Friday there is a rally, Saturday there is a party and Sunday I want to

- sleep.
- I have to go play "pitoune" at the Rouyn Forum.
 - I have to babysit tonight and tomorrow and help my mother in the house.
 - I'm in a "mode" show for charity.
 - My sister comes home and I don't see her often.
 - I have to work at a truck with my brother.
 - I have to babysit in a private home.
 - I have to work in the house with my mother.
 - I have to play hockey in Ontario.

THE AUTHOR

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