

Let's review: Student-created, content-based

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Summary: Having students create games themselves to be used for content review in English language classrooms can be a fun and beneficial activity that promotes student ownership and engagement in creating and playing the games. This article introduces an activity for students to review materials they learned with a student-created, content-based activity.

Keywords: games, student-created, content-based, review

Introduction

Over the course of a semester or quarter, English Language Learners (ELL) are exposed to a lot of new information in each of their classes, and it can be difficult to remember everything learned throughout the semester. As teachers, we want students to be able to look back at our class, remember the information and knowledge from the semester or unit and say, “look at all the things I’ve learned.” One way to accomplish this is by having students create their own games to review materials.

Many teachers use games for learning or practicing new materials throughout a semester whether it’s for vocabulary, grammar, content, or other English skills. Games can bring a sense of fun and competition to a class. As Mubaslat (2012) says, “Games also lend themselves well to revision exercises helping learners recall material in a pleasant, entertaining way.” Games can motivate students to want to win or do well and can be fun for students even if they are at different levels with their English skills. Usually, these games are chosen by the teacher; however, having students create the games and materials can also be beneficial. Moiseenko (2015) mentions, “One benefit of student-designed materials is that they contribute to peer teaching and learning.” By creating all aspects of the games, such as game questions and rules, students are invested in the activity and using their language skills by navigating the game process with each other both when producing the game and playing their peers’ games later.

This student-created, content-based activity was used as a final semester review for Japanese university students studying English skills and American culture courses in the United States. The students were beginner to intermediate in their language skills. In the American culture course, the students learned about a variety of topics related to American culture such as education, family, and U.S. history. During

the course, they learned new vocabulary, concepts, and ideas in each unit. When teaching this content heavy class, I often wonder if students remember what we talked about earlier in the semester, so this activity was created as a way to help students review the content from the semester in two ways: by creating a game and then playing games created by their classmates. The procedure for this was over about 2 class periods of 90 minutes each. In the first class period, we discussed games, vocabulary, and began creating the games. In the second class period, the students played the games that their classmates created.

Before creating the games

In order for students to start thinking about games and what makes a game successful, students first brainstormed and discussed the following questions in groups:

- Do you like playing games? Why or why not?
- What are your favorite games?
- How often do you play games?
- How many games can you think of?
- What makes a game successful or fun to play?
- What are some vocabulary words people use when playing games?

Students shared their answers with the whole class. We discussed that games can be a lot of fun but they also can learn a lot from games as well. Next, students were given a vocabulary handout with some simple game vocabulary such as “dice” “roll” “turn” “space.” We went through the game vocabulary so they knew what all the vocabulary words meant and could use them when they made their own game instructions later. We also did a simple cloze activity to practice using the vocabulary in game instructions. For example,

“When it is your _____, roll the _____ and move that number of _____ on the board.” A variation of this would be to bring in real games and have students read and analyze the instructions for vocabulary and instruction language.

Creating the games

Students were put into groups of 3 or 4 and then given the game assignment and shown a few game examples from past students. For my class, there were 28 students, so we had 7 groups of 4. They were given a 90-minute class period to work on this together. Anything not completed would be homework. The main assignment instructions were:

- Talk about and decide how you want the game to look, how it will be played, and what kind of questions/activities you want to have in the game.
- Review the content that we have done this semester and draw your questions from the class content.
- Make the materials for the game- the board, the questions, the pieces, anything you need (see Figures 1 and 2). Be sure to have a variety of questions from the semester. This is a review of all we have learned. You must also provide the answers to your questions.
- The game should take about 8-10 minutes to play.
- Write clear instructions for the game using your vocabulary and instruction language (see Figure 3). Your classmates will play your game, so your instructions must be very clear and easy to understand. You will not be there to explain the game.
- Be creative and have fun. Think about the different things we have learned and talked about in class and use as much knowledge as you can.
- Bring your game, instructions, and all your materials to class on _____.
- Be prepared to play games and review all we’ve learned this semester.

Playing the games

Students brought the games and instructions to the next class. They were assigned to start at one game that was not their own, read the instructions, and play the game. After about 8-10 minutes, students rotated to the next game- reviewing the information from the semester with each new game. Since we had 7 groups in total, each group was able to play the 6 games created by their classmates. These 6 rotations took about 60 minutes. This was another learning opportunity for the students because each time they got to a different game, they had to read and understand the instructions in order to play it properly. They were not allowed to ask the creators for clarification, because part of the game creation was to write clear, understandable rules.

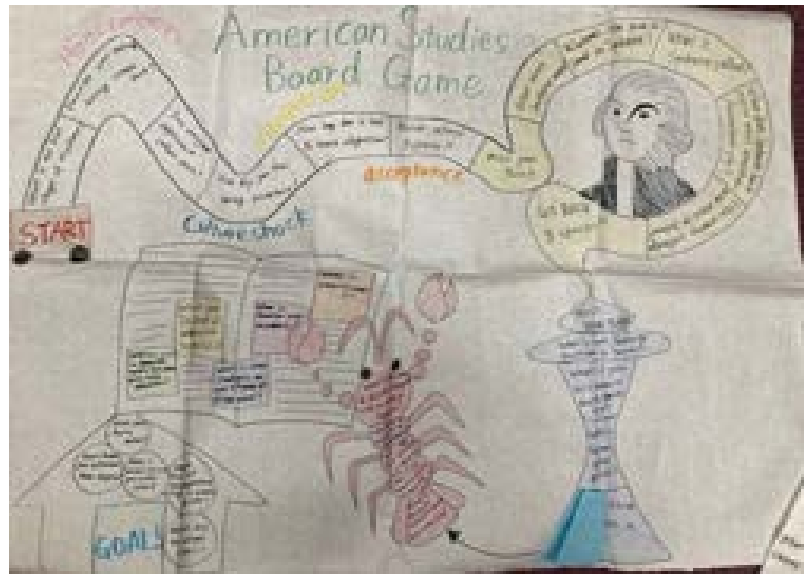


Figure 1: Student-created board game



Figure 2: Student-created game pieces

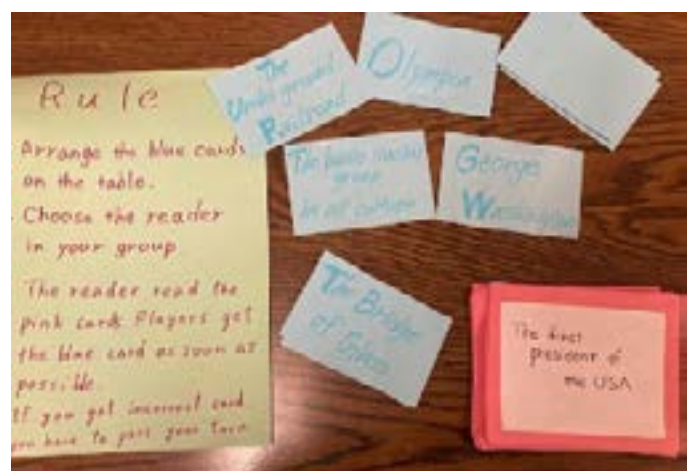


Figure 3: Student-created rules and game materials game

Conclusion

I have always found this activity to be highly successful for my class and believe it could be adapted for other subjects and proficiency levels as well. Students are really engaged in taking ownership and being creative when creating the games and choosing what content to review. In the past students have created board games, card games, and a variety of other

creative games for this activity. The students review the materials from the semester when they decide what to include in their games and then must review it all again when they play. It's a fun, energetic class period and hopefully helps students answer the question "What did we learn this semester?" in an enjoyable way.

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