Cracking contraption, Gromit!

Daniel Mills and Sean Toland present a highly inventive activity.

In nearly every corner of the world, the forces of globalisation are altering the field of English language education. Nowadays, English learners must be equipped not only with language skills, but also with the ability to process and present information effectively in professional settings. English language instructors need to be conscious of this reality and need to create meaningful activities that will give their students the opportunity to think creatively and communicate their ideas successfully. The activity described in this article is suitable for high-school or university students, and it would also work well with new immigrants and those with work experience. The students should be lower-intermediate level and above. The aims are:

- to practise presentation skills;
- to enhance the learners’ awareness of authentic language;
- to improve the learners’ reading, writing and communication skills;
- to generate excitement and promote cooperation in class.

It will take between 60 and 90 minutes to complete the activity, and it requires approximately 15 minutes of preparation time. You will need a projector, a computer or mobile device with access to the internet, a board, and copies of the handouts on pages 14 to 17 for each pair of students.

Procedure

1. Divide the class into pairs and give each pair the warm-up activity handout (page 14).
2. Tell the students that they are going to watch a short animation video clip about an interesting invention. The title is Wallace and Gromit’s Cracking Contraptions – The Snoozatron.
3. Lead the class in brainstorming the meaning of words such as invention, contraption and snooze. Write the responses on the board.
4. Play the video clip (www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGxRUglFFME) and ask the students to work in their pairs to discuss and answer the questions on the handout, describing the invention in the video and identifying the problems that it causes for Gromit. Encourage them to share their information with other pairs.
5. Tell the class that they are now going to think up their own invention. Hand out copies of the original invention example (page 15) and explain that this is an example of the sort of thing they could produce. Ask for volunteers to read this aloud to the class, and deal with any difficult vocabulary.
6. Distribute a copy of the planning sheet (page 16) to each pair. Tell them that they have ten minutes to brainstorm ideas for their own original invention. Go round the pairs checking, assisting and providing feedback.
7. Ask the students to work in pairs to complete the planning sheet, and quickly check their work when they have finished.
8. Tell the students that they are going to create an original poster based on their planning sheet. Hand out copies of the Dream Pillow poster on page 17, to give them an example of how their poster might look.
9. Provide each pair of students with a large sheet of paper and coloured pencils, and set them to work creating their posters.
10. When the posters are finished, tell the pairs that they are going to give short presentations of their inventions to the class. Model an example presentation with a student volunteer.
11. Give each pair time to organise and practise their mini-presentation.
12. Get the pairs to rotate around the classroom, giving their presentation to several other pairs.

Options

This activity can be modified to suit different proficiency levels. For example, lower-level students may need more time to create their invention and practise their presentations. They might also benefit from seeing additional student examples.

The activity can also be extended to cover two lessons by having the students organise and practise their presentations for homework and present their posters to the rest of the class in the following lesson.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 What do you think ‘cracking contraption’ means?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 What is the name of the invention in the video?</td>
<td>_____________________________________________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 What is it used for?</td>
<td>_____________________________________________________________________</td>
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<td>4 How does it work?</td>
<td>First, __________________________________________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 What problems does this invention cause for Gromit?</td>
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Cracking contraption, Gromit!
Cracking contraption, Gromit!

Our original invention – Example

There are three parts to this activity:

A  Create an original invention.
B  Make a poster to explain your invention.
C  Give a mini-presentation to other pairs.

Your invention must be original. Here is an example:

Name of invention

Noodle Cooler

What is it used for?

It’s used to cool down hot noodles.

How do you use it? (instructions)

You put the Noodle Cooler on top of your chopsticks. Then you point the fan towards your noodle bowl, turn on the switch and start to eat!

What are four special features of this product?

1. It cools noodles instantly.
2. There is no need to slurp your noodles any more.
3. It’s portable – it can be carried in your bag or briefcase.
4. The battery is solar-powered – you never need to spend money on batteries.

What kind of person might buy this product?

A person who is embarrassed to slurp their noodles, or a person who is in a hurry and can’t wait for their noodles to cool down.

How much is it?

It’s only ¥3,000.

Where can you buy it?

You can buy it online at www.noodles.com, or at any appliance store.

Write a description of your product for a magazine advertisement.

Are you a busy person? Are you tired of burning your mouth every time you eat hot noodles? If you answered yes to these questions, the Noodle Cooler is the perfect solution to your problem. It is easy to use, portable, and a perfect gift for someone who loves to eat noodle soup. This revolutionary device will cool your hot noodles instantly. It is an environmentally-friendly product that operates on a solar-powered battery. Therefore, you don’t need to waste your money on disposable batteries. Get your Noodle Cooler today for only ¥3,000! Order this amazing product online at www.noodles.com, or visit your local appliance store.

There are three parts to this activity:

A  Create an original invention.
B  Make a poster to explain your invention.
C  Give a mini-presentation to other pairs.

Your invention must be original. Here is an example:
Our original invention – Planning sheet

Draw a rough sketch of your original invention here:

A Name of invention
________________________________________________________

B What is it used for?
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

C How do you use it? (instructions)
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

D What are four special features of this product?
   1 _____________________________________________________
   2 _____________________________________________________
   3 _____________________________________________________
   4 _____________________________________________________

E What kind of person might buy this product?
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

F How much is it?

G Where can you buy it?

H Write a description of your product for a magazine advertisement. (Your description should be about six to ten sentences.) Use the back of this page if you need more space.
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Our original invention – Poster example

Make a poster of your invention on a large piece of paper. Here is an example, produced by some students:

Cracking contraption, Gromit!

Dream Pillow!

Name
Dream Pillow

What is it used for?
It’s used to have a dream which you want and sleep well.

How do you use it?
First, you turn on the dream switch. Next, you write your dream which you want to have on paper. Finally, you put this paper into the entrance which is beside the pillow.

4 features
1. It is very comfortable.
2. It has an alarm.
3. It also has a music player.
4. It can be connected to the PC.

How much?
￥15,000

Where can you buy it?
- Online at www.pillows.com
- Your local appliance store

Are you tired of reality? Are you a tired person?
If you answered yes to these questions, the Dream Pillow is the perfect solution to your problem. When you use it, you can have a dream which you want to. Also, an alarm and a music player are built into it, so you can sleep well and wake up well. It gives you a happy sleep!
Get your Dream Pillow today for only 15,000! Order this amazing product online at www.pillows.com or visit your local appliance store.