

# Two ESL Listening & Speaking Games

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Committed to a learner-centered pedagogical style, I have come up with a number of teaching methods and games over the 16 years that I have taught, that focus on getting the students to listen more deeply. Currently, I teach at a university in Japan, but I have taught high school students and younger. These are two games I use when I want to get the students outside.

## Name That Thought!

Thoughts are important, we all know that. We know it so well that often we do not really realize that we are thinking; it just comes automatically. This English exercise is based on that awareness.

Go outside to a stream or creek. Sit down on the bank and watch the leaves or sticks floating by. Ask them: Did you just notice what you were thinking? The students will probably be surprised because they are not used to being asked to recall their thoughts. The teacher can say again: Just now, what were you thinking? I don't know, is the usual response. The teacher can say: Have you ever just sat a little while and noticed your thoughts? I have. Let's just sit a little while and relax first. Look at the leaves and stuff that's moving down the stream, on the water. Our thoughts are like this, aren't they. I mean: our thoughts come and go, then they pass. We are always thinking. Let's stop one of those thoughts and look at it. At this point, I usually say "O-o-ops!" I just had a thought. Do you wanna know what I was just thinking? I just thought "Did I lock the car door?" Then I share another thought. At this time, the teacher can ask them to share a thought. Or can explain further, giving more examples appropriate to the student's age and English level.

Then I have the students use their imagination.

Imagine that, as you see each leaf or stick floating by, it is your thought. And give it a name. For example, if I'm thinking "I have to study for my math test", just as I see a small stick float past me, going down the stream, I can name that thought, "The math test". Then I will have another thought, probably in a few seconds, for example, about my puppy at home. "Is he in his bed or in my room, on my bed?" I can name that thought, "The puppy's bed."

I ask the students to watch the leaves and sticks pass by them, floating down stream, and name them, with the thoughts they are having at the moment. Then I ask them to write their thoughts down on paper. I ask them to name about 4 or 5 thought names. Then they share them with the class, saying... "I had a thought. It was about my.... I named it ... "Students of all ages like this game because it helps them to 1.) recognize their thoughts 2.) use English in a sharing way. And they can get out-of-doors too!

With children, you can have them watch leaves flowing down a stream, and have them play a similar game. But draw a line in the dirt beside the stream and as the leaf passes the line, have them name it, "I see a leaf." Then the next child can say, "I see a leaf and I see a ...." (Whatever he or she sees, perhaps a tree.. ) Use your own intuition as to how to apply this to your class.

## What Is That Sound?

This game will help them to listen more closely, and describe what they heard, using verbs. In this game, the students sit outside in a circle on the grass. They should have a pencil and paper with them. I ask them to close their eyes and just listen. I do not speak for awhile. Then I ask them: Did you hear anything? Listen again. What did you hear? Then I ask them to write down what they heard. Then after writing, they can use English by saying "I hear a car engine."; "I hear a woman talking" etc. The more advanced ones can say what their neighbor heard, the student sitting next to them, then say whether they did or did not hear the same thing. Then they can introduce what they heard. For example, "Susan heard a man talking but I didn't. I heard children playing" Or They can say, "I

heard a man talking first. Then I heard a dog barking; and then I heard a bird. Just before I opened my eyes, I heard the teacher's voice." "Finally, I heard another student talking." This allows them to practice using first, second and finally or lastly.

With children you can play "What do you hear?"

Have them sit in a circle, and cover their eyes. The teacher goes first by covering her eyes. She says: "I cannot see but I can hear." Then the teacher addresses the children. When you cover your eyes you cannot see. (Please put your hands over your eyes.) When all the children have covered their eyes, break a stick. Then say "open your eyes" Ask them, "Did you hear something when your eyes were covered? " (Please cover your eyes again. And this time, please listen.) Did you hear anything? What did you hear?" Then show them what they heard, a breaking stick.

Then say: "I hear a stick, breaking." Then do something else when their eyes are covered. And ask them if they heard anything. Then show them. Then ask them to name it: "I heard a finger snapping." or "I hear two hands clapping." etc. If they need help, I use big cards, written in crayon; and prop them against a tree or lay them in the grass, with the simple sentence structure, "I hear a ----, ----." Of course this game can be adapted to playing inside too. But I find that children like to go outdoors, if they can, in the nice weather. Me too!