

This section presents three stand-alone language learning activities related to the theme of winter. Each activity is designed for students at the proficiency level indicated.

The Magic Icebox

Level: Upper Beginner to Intermediate

Time required: 20–40 minutes

Goals: To practice vocabulary related to winter; to create a personal connection with words or phrases

Materials: chalk and a chalkboard; something for students to write with and on

Background: Using games and drama in the English language classroom creates a context for vocabulary that is motivating and enjoyable for learners. Vocabulary and grammar are repeated and recycled naturally, and students have a chance to develop fluency.

Preparation:

As the lead actor in this activity, you will need to practice pulling out the magic icebox and miming the actions. Remember that you set the tone for the activity. Believe in your actions as if they were real, and have fun!

Procedures:

1. Introduce the activity by writing winter-related categories on the board: Things Made of Snow, Winter Foods, Winter Sports, Winter Clothing, Winter Weather, etc.
2. Put students into pairs or small groups and ask them to think about examples that would fit each category. Give each pair or group about five minutes to brainstorm ideas. You can have students focus on cold-climate winter examples or on winter examples that might be related to your geographic area.

Note: If your students are not familiar at all

with winter or cold-weather items, you can still carry out the activity with a topic unrelated to winter. For example, for the topic of food, possible categories include Fruits, Vegetables, Main Dishes, Desserts, and Things We Use When We Eat (e.g., spoon, chopsticks, plate). Feel free to choose a topic and categories that match your students' interests, needs, and background knowledge.

3. Elicit responses from the students. As you do so, organize vocabulary on the blackboard or another visible space. Ask for a contribution from each group before rotating back to the first group. Stop when you have one or two examples for each category.

Possible categories and elicited examples might include the following:

Things Made of Snow: *snowball, snowman*

Winter Foods: *hot chocolate, soup*

Winter Sports: *sledding, skiing*

Winter Clothing: *snowsuit, hat*

Winter Weather: *wind, frost*

4. Explain that you will be playing a game related to the words and categories. Give students a few minutes to look at the incomplete lists you've written on the board and ask them to silently think of additional examples. It is important that you stress silence and urge students not to share their ideas with their partners or neighbors.

5. Invite students to stand up and form a circle with an empty space in the center. (If you do not have adequate space, you can keep students seated and leave an empty space at the front of

Classroom Activities

the classroom.) If you have a large class, you might consider breaking the class into smaller circles of 8–12 students.

6. Explain to students that you have brought a special icebox to class today and that the icebox is magic. Go to a corner of the room and mime the outline of the large box before picking it up. Exaggerate the size and weight of the invisible icebox, and “carry” it to the center of the circle (or to the front of the classroom). Explain that the icebox will provide gifts of winter items if the group uses a magic word.

With the class, negotiate a magic word to use. It can be a word, or a phrase, that the class has recently studied, or you and the class can make up your own word. For example, if your students are familiar with the sound “brrr” (which people sometimes say to indicate that they are cold) and the word *abracadabra* (which magicians say when performing tricks), you can combine them and use “a-brrr-cadabra” (with the accompanying action of rubbing your hands together as if you are cold while saying “brrr”). But the choice of magic word is up to you and the class—it should be something that adds interest and fun to the activity!

7. As a model for students, you should test the magic icebox. While you are chanting the magic word—or, if you prefer, you can have the whole class chant the magic word together—move to the center of the circle and tap the icebox. (Make sure the location of the icebox doesn’t change throughout the activity.) Mime the action of pulling an imaginary snowball out of the icebox. Tell the class that you will “throw” the snowball to a student, and that student must “catch” it. Toss the snowball to one student while saying that student’s name. Make sure the student “catches” the snowball. Toss snowballs to one or two more students. (If your students are not familiar with snowballs, you can take a moment before this step to explain what a snowball is—snow that has been packed into the shape of a small ball.)

8. Now start the snowball toss. Throw a snowball to another student, and tell that student to go to the icebox—while saying the magic word and rubbing his or her hands together, and perhaps even

shivering—and pull out a new “snowball.” Explain the instructions: That student must choose a category, such as Winter Sports, and say it out loud. Then the student tosses the invisible snowball to another student, who mimes the action of catching it. The student who has caught the snowball must say a word or term related to that category, such as *ice hockey*.

9. After a student has “caught” the snowball and successfully given a term associated with the selected category, that student tosses the snowball to another player in the circle. The new player says another word or phrase related to the selected category and throws the snowball to another classmate, and so on until the category has been exhausted.

Fast play and concentration are necessary for this game to be fun and successful. Students must pass the snowball quickly so that it doesn’t melt in their warm hands!

10. After a category is exhausted and no one in the circle can name another winter item, the last student holding the snowball approaches the magic icebox while chanting the magic word, pulls out a new snowball, chooses another one of the categories, and the game continues.

Variation (for additional vocabulary review)

1. At a future lesson, pull out the magic icebox for another activity. Tell students that you have brought the magic icebox to class again and that it is full of objects related to winter. (Again, if you teach in a place that does not have cold weather, you can substitute another topic, such as objects in the classroom, objects in the kitchen, and so on.) Mime bringing out the heavy icebox, setting it down, and opening it. Tell students that you will take an object out of the icebox, and that after you return to the circle, they will guess what the object is.

2. Approach the icebox, chanting the magic word (or having the class chant it), and pantomime a winter item by taking the imaginary item out of the icebox, then putting it on or using it. Then

move back to your place in the circle. You are completely silent.

3. Students guess what the item is. When the guess is correct, say, “That’s right! It’s a/an _____.” Then put the imaginary object aside from the circle. Tell students to take a minute or two to think of a winter item they would like to have. Then invite a student to take a turn with the magic icebox (remind students to use the magic word!), taking out an item and then miming the action of using it. Have other students guess what the object is. Continue until the entire class has an object. Suggestions include objects that were given as examples in the categories in Step 3 above; other possibilities include gloves, a scarf, ear muffs, a heavy coat, a sweater, boots, skates, skis, a snow shovel, and a sled.

When students guess what each object is, they can practice grammatical structures such as the following:

- Use of the present tense:
“You have a/an _____.”
- Question formation:
“Do you have a/an _____?”
“Is it a/an _____?”
- Conjecture and guessing:
“I think it’s a/an _____.”
“It might be a/an _____.”
“Could it be a/an _____?”

Extensions

Now that you have your students thinking about winter, why not continue with some themed projects to reinforce winter in your classroom? Here are some suggestions that make winter a little more fun!

Winter Trivia Challenge

1. Put students in pairs or small groups. Students choose two or three ideas from the vocabulary they used in the icebox activity. Using library resources, books, the Internet, or personal knowledge, students create trivia questions. For example, for the category Winter Sports, students might prepare

trivia such as “Q: Where were the 1972 Winter Olympics held? A: Sapporo, Japan.”

2. Divide students into two teams. In turn, each team challenges the other to answer a trivia question. For each question answered correctly, the team gets a point. The team with the most points wins the winter trivia challenge.

Winter Picture Dictionary

Each student chooses a vocabulary item related to winter and creates an illustration together with the written word. Display the picture words in your classroom. Later, bind the pictures together as a winter picture dictionary that students can read and use for practice.

Winter Poetry Slam

Level: Upper Beginner and above

Time required: 45–60 minutes

Goals: To review winter-related vocabulary; to write short poems; to build confidence in speaking by presenting original poetry

Materials: small pieces of paper for voting

Background: In general, poetry is a great way to teach content-based lessons. Writing poetry provides meaningful practice for vocabulary, and the use of patterns and repetition helps with language acquisition. If the poems are short, and, if the format is not based on syllables or rhymes, even inexperienced writers have a chance to find their own voice and to experience success.

A poetry slam is a popular competition in which poets read their own poems aloud as a performance. The poetry competition is usually managed by an emcee, and the winners are selected by a panel of judges or the audience.

Procedures:

1. Brainstorm winter-related vocabulary with students. You can choose to focus on cold-weather vocabulary or on winter vocabulary relevant to your geographic area.

As students provide vocabulary, ask them to help you sort it into grammatical categories, as in this example:

Winter Verbs	Winter Adjectives	Winter Nouns
sliding slipping skating sledding etc.	chilly cold icy cozy fun etc.	snowball icicle avalanche snowdrift etc.

2. Introduce a form of a category poem to your students. Here is one example:

verb + adjective + noun

verb + adjective + noun

verb + adjective + noun

Winter is + adjective

Give your students a sample poem. Because they will be writing about winter, you might share a poem about another season. Here is a sample poem about spring:

Falling gentle raindrops

Shining bright sun

Buzzing busy bees

Spring is surprisingly sweet!

3. If you feel your students need more guidance, write a model poem together as a class. Encourage creative or unusual word combinations—silly can be poetic! Then ask students to write one or more of their own winter poems.

4. When students have finished writing, ask them to select their best poem to share. Explain the concept of a poetry slam and give students time to practice performing their poems. Remind students about effective dramatic speaking skills and give them tips, such as using a clear, loud voice and changing volume, speed, or pitch for emphasis. If you like, students can include gestures, body movement, and costumes or props.

5. Explain to the students that they will be judges for the poetry slam competition. You can choose categories for the competition. Suggestions include “best performance,” “funniest,” “most creative,” etc. Distribute small slips of paper for voting. Students may not vote for themselves.

6. Act as the emcee and allow each student a chance to present his or her poem to the class. Invite applause to celebrate each poet after the performance.

7. Collect votes from the class and recognize the competition winners as “Winter Poetry Slam Masters.”

Variations

1. Students can write and perform poems in pairs or groups. This will allow students to work together if the group is of mixed ability, and it can encourage shy students to participate. Pair or group poetry may be easier to manage with larger class sizes.
2. Students can create category poems with full sentences or phrases rather than only nouns or verbs. Students can also generate other original kinds of poetry from the brainstormed vocabulary,

including more complicated forms or structures. You can make up your own forms for students to use—or see “Pattern Poems: Creative Writing for Language Acquisition” by Margaret R. Moulton and Vicki L. Holmes (www.njcu.edu/cill/vol4/moulton-holmes.html) for more fun and simple poem ideas.

Extension

1. Students edit and illustrate their poems to create a classroom display of their work.
2. Publish a book of poems to celebrate and share.
3. Create more poems on a variety of seasons or other themes.

Freeze Frame Role Play

Level: Intermediate and above

Time required: 45–60 minutes

Goals: To form and support arguments; to practice and observe communication strategies; to take part in a role play; to critique and reflect on outcomes

Materials: role play descriptions, observation checklist (photocopied or written on the blackboard), paper and something to write with

Background: Role plays and observation tasks give students practice in using, identifying, and reflecting upon effective communication strategies in English. Discussing effective communication raises learners' awareness of strategies they currently use and offers them alternative communication strategies through interaction with classmates.

Procedures:

1. Divide students into four teams. Ideally, groups made up of four to six students are easier to manage, but this activity can work with larger groups as well. Assign each team a number from 1 to 4 (you might have a representative from each team choose a slip of paper with one of the numbers on it). Tell students that the teams will have the following responsibilities:

- a) **Team 1** will prepare together to act out a role.
- b) **Team 2** will prepare together to act out a second role.
- c) **Team 3** will observe Team 1.
- d) **Team 4** will observe Team 2.

2. Explain to Teams 1 and 2 that they will be performing a role play as a team. The role plays will contain an element of conflict, and teams will be encouraged to brainstorm arguments and strategies that they can use to support their roles.

3. Before handing out the role play descriptions, ask all teams to consider how to prepare for a role

play. What strategies will they use? Give students about five minutes to generate ideas; then, as a class, have each group share suggestions. You can write student ideas on the board and suggest additional ideas.

Possible suggestions might include the following:

- Using personal experience and knowledge (activating background knowledge)
- Setting a specific goal for the role play
- Anticipating difficulties in the conversation and what you might say or do
- Predicting what the other team might say or do and how you can respond.
- Planning ways to support and defend an argument
- Coming up with language for the conversation (vocabulary and phrases)
- Using other words or gestures when communication is difficult
- Taking a deep breath; visualizing success; using positive self-talk (ways to lower anxiety)

4. Explain the rules of the Freeze Frame Role Play:

- a) In traditional role plays, each group member typically plays a role; however, in Freeze Frame, each team will choose one representative player to begin the role play. The remaining members support the player and make suggestions.
- b) If communication breaks down or the team would like to switch players, teams may shout “Freeze!” to stop interaction for two minutes. The players must freeze on stage while their teams consult about language, tactics, and strategies to continue the role play.
- c) You as the teacher may also shout “Freeze!” at any time, at your discretion.

d) After the freeze, both teams must send in new players to replace the frozen players and continue the action.

e) Each team gets two chances to freeze the play.

f) The role play ends when both teams have used all their “freezes” and a natural conclusion to the conflict has been reached. If the conflict is not resolved by this time, you can call “Freeze!” to end the play.

5. Hand out the Winter Weather Role Play description cards and give teams a few minutes to discuss their tasks. Team 1 gets the Team 1 card; Team 2 gets the Team 2 card; Teams 3 and 4 get both cards and copies of the Observation Checklist—or you can write the Observation Checklist on the board for students to copy.

Teams 1 & 2: Each team will plan for one of the roles and strategize. Teams should consider the following:

- how the interaction might begin
- what their goals are
- what they are going to say
- what they think the other team will say
- how they might respond

Note that all team members should be equally prepared to take part in the role play!

Winter Weather Role Play

Team 1: It is a beautiful winter Saturday! The temperature is below freezing, the air is crisp, the sun is shining, and it is your first free day after a long week of school or work. You just bought a brand-new pair of ice skates and want to convince your friend to go ice skating with you at the newly opened outdoor skating rink. You can't wait to get out and skate!

Team 2: It is a very cold winter Saturday with a temperature well below freezing. The sun is blinding, it hurts to breathe, and you are exhausted after a long week of school or work. You have been looking forward to staying indoors and watching a movie. You want to watch it with your friend. What a great, warm way to spend the day!

Teams 3 & 4: These two observing teams will read the role play descriptions, predict what will happen, and prepare to observe and document specific examples of effective communication. The teams should discuss characteristics of effective communication (for example, does it mean making a strong argument, or does it mean finding a way to convince others to agree with you?).

Observation Checklist for Teams 3 & 4

Communication strategy	Yes/No	If “yes,” what did you hear the person say, or what did you see the person do?	Was the communication effective? (If not, write a suggestion for how it could be more effective.)
Did the team support its argument with facts or reasons?			
Did the team use gestures or find other words when they didn't know specific vocabulary?			
Was the team polite?			

You can modify this checklist by including other communication strategies such as turn taking, asking for clarification, etc. However, it's best to limit the number of strategies included on the checklist so that the students who are observing can focus.

With more advanced students, instead of providing Teams 3 and 4 with the checklist, you could ask them to simply list examples of effective and ineffective communication that they observed.

6. After the role play is finished, move students back into teams for about five minutes.

Teams 1 & 2 reflect on the following questions:

- What went well?
- What went as you planned?
- What could have been better?
- What would you do next time?

Teams 3 & 4 compare their observation checklists and discuss questions similar to the ones Teams 1 and 2 are discussing:

- What went well?
- What went as you predicted?

Classroom Activities

- Were there any surprises?
- What could have been better?
- What should they do next time?

Teams 3 & 4 also prepare to report on the following:

- Two things the team they observed did well
- Two areas for possible improvement

They should give specific evidence from the checklist to support comments and make suggestions for better communication.

7. Debrief together as a class. Teams 3 and 4 report their observations. Teams 1 and 2 have a chance to agree or disagree, give rationales, and report on their reflections.

8. Repeat with a new role play, Degree of Comfort. This time, Teams 3 and 4 take part in the role play, while Teams 1 and 2 observe. Use the following scenarios:

Degree of Comfort Role Play

Team 3: It has been a very cold winter, but you feel strongly that turning the heat up too high in your apartment will contribute to climate change. In addition to wanting to save the environment, you also want to save money and feel that putting on a few more layers of clothing while turning down the temperature is a great way to do both.

Team 4: It has been a very cold winter, and when you get back to your apartment, you want to turn the heat up and be comfortable. You have heard that using more heat contributes to climate change, but you are not convinced that climate change is real; besides, your apartment is not that big. You also know that turning down the heat could save money, but you are more concerned about comfort than money.

Extensions

1. Students create their own original role plays on the topic of winter. Students record role plays for other teams to act out and for the teacher to use in the future.

2. Use other role plays that address other seasons, ideas, or themes to emphasize the types of strategies needed for successful communication.

3. Generate and practice other strategies for effective communication such as turn taking, giving opinions, keeping the conversation going, disagreeing politely, persuading, etc.

4. Ask students to keep a learning log that reflects examples of strategies they have used and includes their thoughts on the kind of strategies they use to learn and communicate in English.

5. Urge students to form groups outside of class where they can practice English and share techniques and strategies.

JENNIFER UHLER became a Regional English Language Officer in June 2011. She has enjoyed teaching English and working with teachers in Estonia, Austria, Turkey, Romania, Mexico, Slovakia, and the United States.

JERROLD FRANK also became a Regional English Language Officer in June 2011. Prior to that he lived and taught in Sapporo, Japan, for 22 years. He has also taught and trained teachers in the United States and Korea.