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Primary Times

KIDS' CLUB 2

English Adventure 4

NEW COME ALONG! Starter

ENGLISH ROUNDABOUT PUPIL'S

Footprints Pupil's Book 1

SUPER SUNNY DAYS

ENGLISH ON THE ROAD

Inside - new ELMEDI EXPRESS For teachers of L1

From testing to resting!

As is our custom, the March issue of **Primary Times** focuses on two areas of interest; the Easter season and the closing of the school year in May/June. The latter involves two interesting topics; assessment of how much English language each individual child has retained from the many lessons attended during the previous year/term and how this assessment can be transformed into a mark/number for each child, which will be added to the individual end-of-school year report cards.

Most of the articles in this issue discuss aspects of assessment and testing, interesting at any time but of special interest this year as the ground rules for teachers have been modified in the latest reform of the Primary school.

There are several inserts in this issue of **Primary Times** including a brochure with details of the project and content of the new LANG-Longman course for Primary school – *ENGLISH ON THE ROAD* and a second issue of ELMEDI EXPRESS.

A Happy Easter to one and all!

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The Lexical Approach

Maria Rita Petrillo

The lexical approach to second language teaching has received great interest in recent years: it is based on the idea that lexical competence is fundamental, because vocabulary represents the vehicle needed to express ideas and communicate meaning in the target language. According to Michael Lewis (1993), who has coined the term *lexical approach*, language production is not a syntactic rule-governed process (as in the grammar based approaches) but is instead the retrieval of larger phrasal units from memory. He claims that language consists of unanalyzed wholes or "chunks" that we store and reuse – even without understanding their constituent parts – in order to produce fluent, accurate and meaningful language.

Lewis's taxonomy of lexical items comprehends words, polywords (e.g. *by the way*), collocations (e.g. *traffic jam*), institutionalized utterances (e.g. *I'll be in touch*) and finally sentence heads and frames (e.g. *First of all, I see what you mean but I wonder if…*). As Lewis maintains, "the central metaphor of language is holistic", because instead of breaking sentences into smaller units, we tend to think in terms of collocations (e.g. a pair of lexical content words commonly found together). Collocation is important because it makes speech sound natural and provides chunks of English that are ready to use. In fact, native speakers retain many prefabricated lexical items in their memory. Therefore, if we have a great amount of ready-made chunks at our disposal it will aid fluency, allowing more time to focus on the message and improving stress and intonation. Furthermore, the quick retrieval of ready expressions helps to reduce anxiety – especially when we are involved in a spoken interaction, and increases self-esteem and confidence in one's own abilities.

One of the great advantages of the lexical approach is that it is consciousness raising. It encourages the process of noticing of the lexical item, which is a preliminary and fundamental step when dealing with new vocabulary. I found out that going through **pre-text activities** leads the students to a better understanding of meaning in context, to point out collocations, to predict likely meanings and guess meanings from clues in the context. This is the reason why I plan the warm up and the engage phase very carefully. When students experience a personal involvement and activate their personal schemata and references, they are more likely to notice and store the lexical items which are the focus of my teaching unit. I consider **guessing from context** a basic skill to be taught, since if we suggest the meaning straight away, acting as a 'walking dictionary', the new words are stored in the short-term memory, and are forgotten immediately after the input is over.
Indeed, the receptive language skills of reading and listening are very much underpinned by being able to cope with new expressions, not with understanding every word.

In order to understand the importance of lexical inferencing in the vocabulary learning process, it is necessary to examine how words are acquired. This involves a long complex process of which an important aspect is **retention**, i.e. how to make sure that words are stored in long-term memory. The most influential factors on vocabulary retention are:
- **frequency**: words need to be encountered a number of times before they are learnt;
- **personal involvement**: words are most likely to be remembered if they have some personal association for the learner;
- **motivation**: a funny, involving activity or an interesting topic is more likely to be retained;
- **words association**: working with mental networks of associations, e.g. lexical sets or categorising, helps memorization;

The memorability of a word or collocation depends on the setting in which it is encountered, the channels through which it is processed, and the type of intelligence (in Gardner's sense) into which it must be integrated. This is why we should plan activities which allow the students to process and practise language in ways appropriate to their perceptual and cognitive preferences. Tasks which concern personal involvement seem to offer the best answer to vocabulary learning, as they rely on students' experiences and reality to facilitate learning. Their meaningfulness require learners to analyse and process language more deeply, and help them to retain information in long-term memory.

Once students have understood and memorized the words, I help them to **practise**, **recall**, **revise and recycle** vocabulary in the classroom or at home, so as to counteract the effects of forgetting. One way of doing it involves grouping words together so that a lexical set is formed. This is much more effective than studying unrelated words, and can be presented using a picture to help visualization. A similar idea is to build a word spiderweb (or mind map) where connections in meaning are visually indicated in the structure of the diagram. Likewise, it is particularly useful to encourage autonomous learning by asking learners to organize their own materials (word books, posters, games…) and promoting cooperative learning.

To sum up, the lexical approach is highly beneficial, as it encourages learners to notice the language units, identify the meaning according to the context and store ready-made chunks to help fluency. It promotes students' autonomous learning and facilitates language production by implementing vocabulary acquisition in a considerable way.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Create a class **word book**. For each lexical item there might be the phonemic script for pronunciation and stress, a picture, synonyms and/or antonyms, frequent collocations, and an example sentence. Divide the class in four teams that are going to 'play' with words the whole year. The teacher can announce the lexical set which will be tested the following week. The students are very much concerned about 'words' competitions and check their pronunciation seriously in order to gain points for the team. This is a great advantage in terms of cooperative learning, since the best students encourage the weak ones for the sake of the team.

Creative tasks provide a springboard for language work and leave space for meaningful and engaged contribution from the students. Poetry, for example, is effective for a number of reasons: it involves learners actively; it encourages the use of learners' knowledge and feelings as a source; it is authentic material and it becomes a vehicle for the acquisition of content (e.g. vocabulary) and skills (e.g. dictionary skills). In addition to that, it is written and read in chunks or 'sense groups' and it encourages oral fluency and self-esteem. Chants, limericks, riddles, rhymes and songs can all be included in the category of poetry. When choosing a suitable poem I look for a relevant subject matter, appealing and useful vocabulary, different patterns of sound and rhythm.

Matching exercises are an excellent way to work on collocation. Prepare two lists of words and ask your students to match them according to the way they are usually found together.

Storytelling helps guessing from context, rather than using word translation. Students can repeat and roleplay the story, practise fixed expressions (e.g. *What a wonderful place!*), recycle lexical units.

Action songs employ actions to create mental linkages between words and meanings. Chunks of language become particularly meaningful when there's a personal involvement.

Maria Rita Petrillo is a Primary school teacher and has been teaching children and adults both in the public and private sector since 1992. She has also worked as a language assistant in Norway and as a teacher of Italian to foreign children.
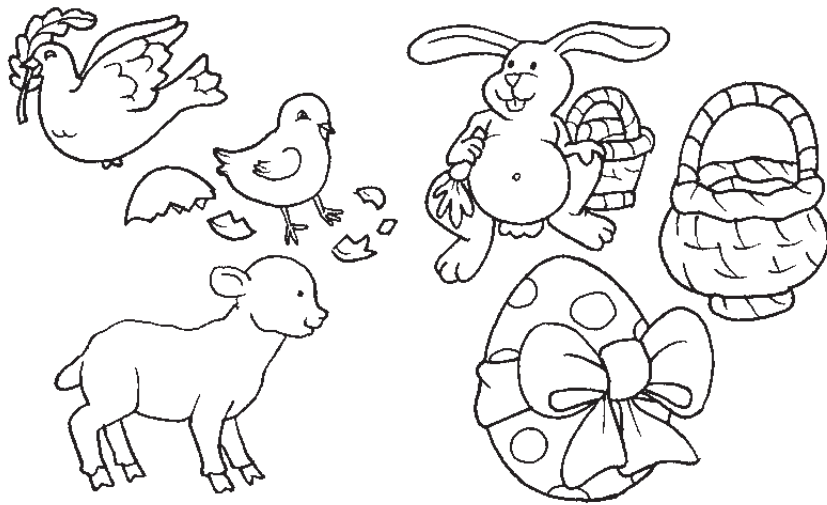
Primary Times

EASTER RIDDLES

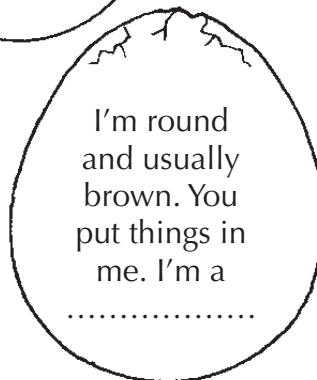Skills: reading and writing   Level 3/4
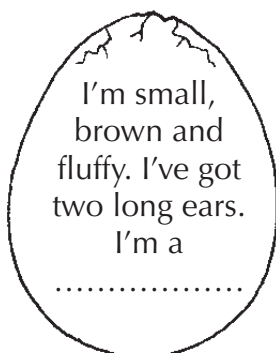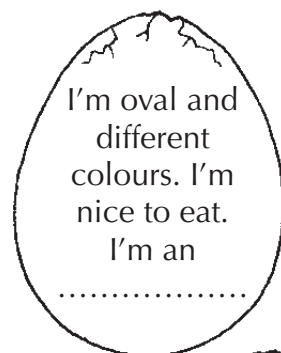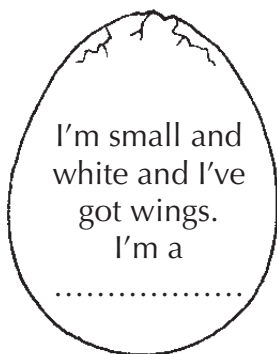
- Unscramble the words and match to the pictures.

- ALBM

- SKBTEA

- VOED

- HCKCI

- ARETES GGE

- UYNNB

- Read and complete the riddles with the words above.

I'm small and white and I've got wings. I'm a
....

I'm big, white and fluffy. I've got four legs. I'm a
....

I'm oval and different colours. I'm nice to eat. I'm an
....

I'm small, brown and fluffy. I've got two long ears. I'm a
....

I'm round and usually brown. You put things in me. I'm a
....

....
....
....
....
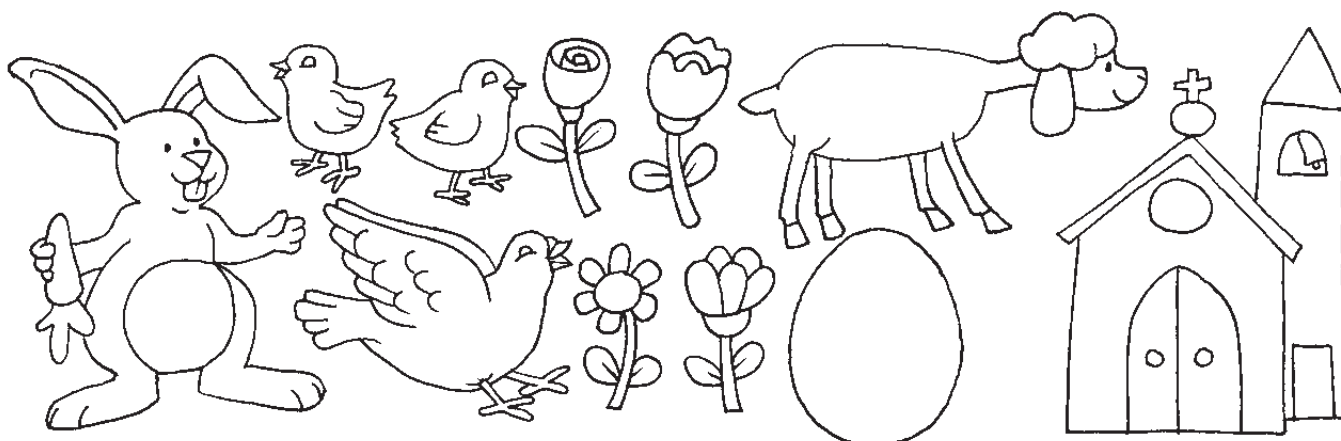I'm a chick.
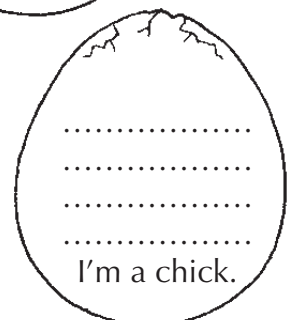
Write the riddle!

WORKSHEET

EASTER COLOUR DICTATION

Skills: listening and speaking   Level 3/4
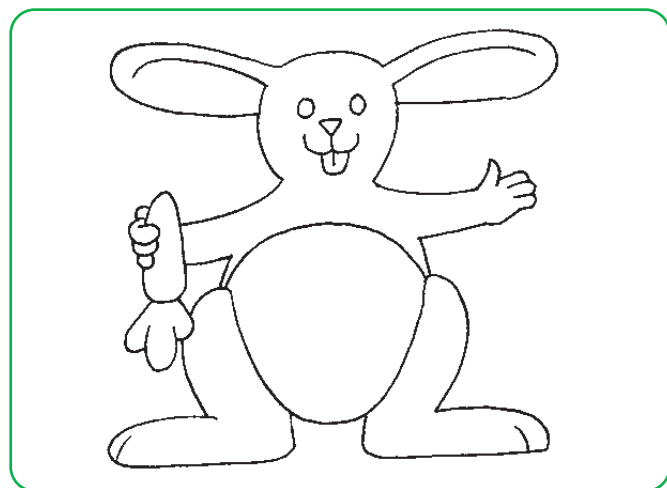
- Listen to your teacher and colour.

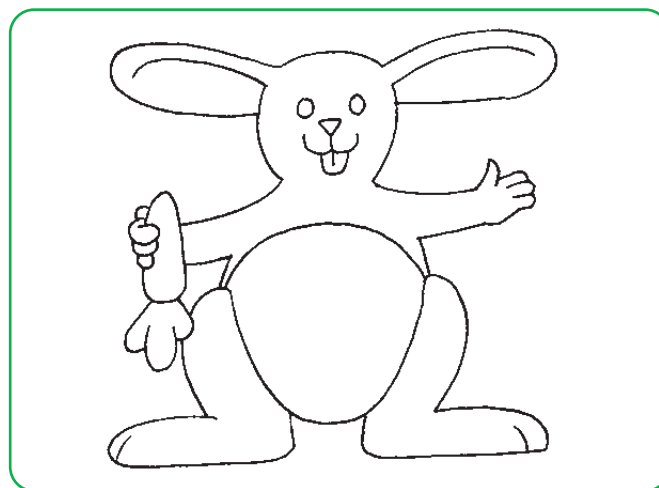- Colour Bunny A and complete the sentences. Tell a partner about your bunny.

Bunny A

The ears are ....
The nose is ....
The feet are ....

- Now listen to your partner and colour Bunny B.

Bunny B

The eyes are ....
The tongue is ....
The carrot is ....

To the teacher:
1. Read these instructions to the class: Colour the bunny blue. Colour the chicks red. Colour the lamb green. Colour the dove orange. Colour the chocolate egg purple. Colour the church pink. Colour the flowers yellow.
2. Ask the children to orally correct the colour mistakes. E.g. a bunny is not blue, it is brown. Chicks are not red, they are yellow.

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Picture Sentences

Look at the picture and circle the sentence that describes it. Write negative sentences.
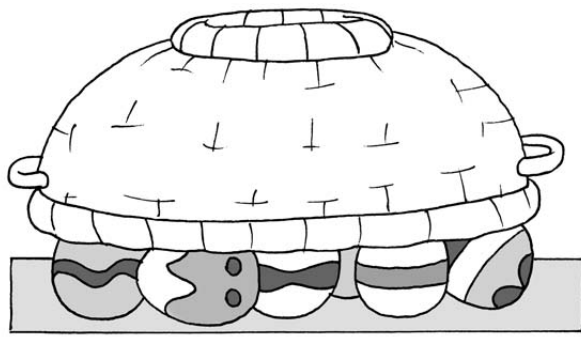
The eggs are in the basket.

The eggs aren't in the basket.

The eggs are behind the basket.

The eggs aren't behind the basket.

The eggs are under the basket.

....

There are eight flowers in the vase.

....

There are fifteen flowers in the vase.

....

There are ten flowers in the vase.

....

The children are having a picnic.

....

The children are playing golf.

....

The children are eating Easter eggs.

....

The girl is sitting on a bench in the garden.

....

The girl is sitting on a bench at home.

....

The girl is sitting on a bench at school.

....
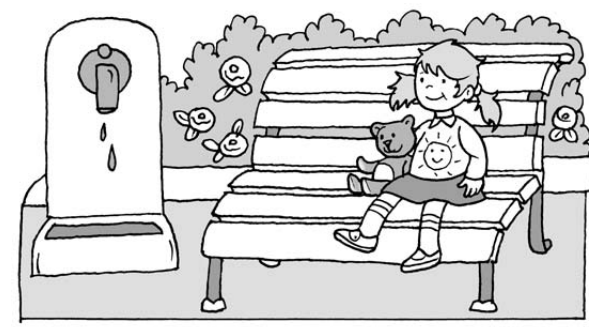
The children are in Rome.

....

The children are in Madrid.

....

The children are in London.

....

Formal vs informal evaluation: how to get to the final mark in pagella

Debora Servidio

Debora Servidio, on behalf of Primary Times, talked to Francesco Manenti, a Primary school teacher of English, about how he approaches establishing a final mark for his children.

D.S. Where do you teach?
F.M. I teach in Istituto Comprensivo of Verbicaro in the district of Cosenza. There is a main school and other detached schools in Verbicaro and Orsomarso.

D.S. What about your classes?
F.M. I have 8 classes with about 12 pupils per class. In Verbicaro I teach pupils in the second, the third and the fifth classes, while in Orsomarso I have pupils from the first to the fifth class. They are very nice and smart.

D.S. How do you organize preparation of both oral and written tests to evaluate their level?
F.M. I do not like formal assessment, because I think it is better to monitor their progress every day. As far as the pupils of the first class are concerned, I consider their attitude towards the foreign language, the final mark is based on their motivation and participation throughout the school year. With the older pupils I have more items to show them and I can check their progress with two formal written tests at the end of the first and second school term. I do not use oral test to assess their level, because I have the opportunity to listen to them in every lesson.

D.S. Do you prepare the written tests using your textbooks or on your own?
F.M. I often use the tests in the Teacher's Guide of my text book, but I also combine other elements using other sources. The important thing is to monitor the four language skills with simple instructions, such as *Listen and circle Yes or No; Say the answers* (or *Look and speak*); *Read and match; Look and write.*

D.S. Are they afraid of these tests?
F.M. No, they aren't. I always explain to them what the test is about. They know they must follow the instructions and concentrate.

D.S. Your written tests are objective, because each exercise has score points. What about the oral assessment during the lessons?
F.M. Apart from using the school register, I always take notes in a diary to focus on my pupils' work. I also use these notes to remember if they are lazy or inattentive. I always consider their motivation, participation and care.

D.S. I think that your notes on non-cognitive descriptors give you more details to get to a final mark which involves the pupils in all their aspects, but what descriptors do you use for the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing?
F.M. I can sum up as follows:
Listening: for gist – for details; speaking: pronunciation (80%) – intonation (20%); reading: skimming – scanning; writing: spelling.
However, I do not make a strict division of the four skills, because I try to consider all of them in each pupil. It is also true that each pupil is different and this is the reason why I never forget the different learning styles: visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. I try to give my pupils the opportunity to do pair and group work to encourage them to take part in the learning process in an active way. We often do lexical chains and role plays so that they become aware that English is another tool of communication.

D.S. Do you think you will have difficulties with the new grading system?
F.M. I think we will need time to get used to numbers to evaluate pupils. We should be careful to explain the different shades of meaning, such as: 7 – good and 8 – good, too. Besides numbers, assessment and so on, the final mark on the pagella has to sum up the language skills and the positive attitude towards a foreign language. It is not worth using strict descriptors in formal and close tests (oral and written), but it is good to evaluate *in itinere* pupils and help them to improve their competences.

Debora Servidio is a teacher in the Scuola Secondaria di Primo Grado in Calabria.

Kids' Corner

Giulia Abbiati

> Kids' Corner is a special section of **Primary Times** dedicated to very young learners.

Activity 1: Paper plate flower

What you need:
- one paper plate for each child
- thin cardboard
- pencil
- coloured pencils
- scissors
- glue

What you do
1. Ask the children to trace their hands (both if they can, otherwise they can just trace the same hand over and over) at least 10 times on the cardboard.
2. Get the children to cut out the handprints.
3. Glue a first circle of handprints around the outside of the paper plate (the fingers will be the petals of the flower).
4. Glue other circles of handprints inside the first one and then inside one another until you reach the centre of the paper plate.
5. Cut out and glue a small cardboard circle in the centre of the paper plate.
- Language practice: ask the children to write a number on each petal. Say a number and dictate a colour so that the children can colour the petals.
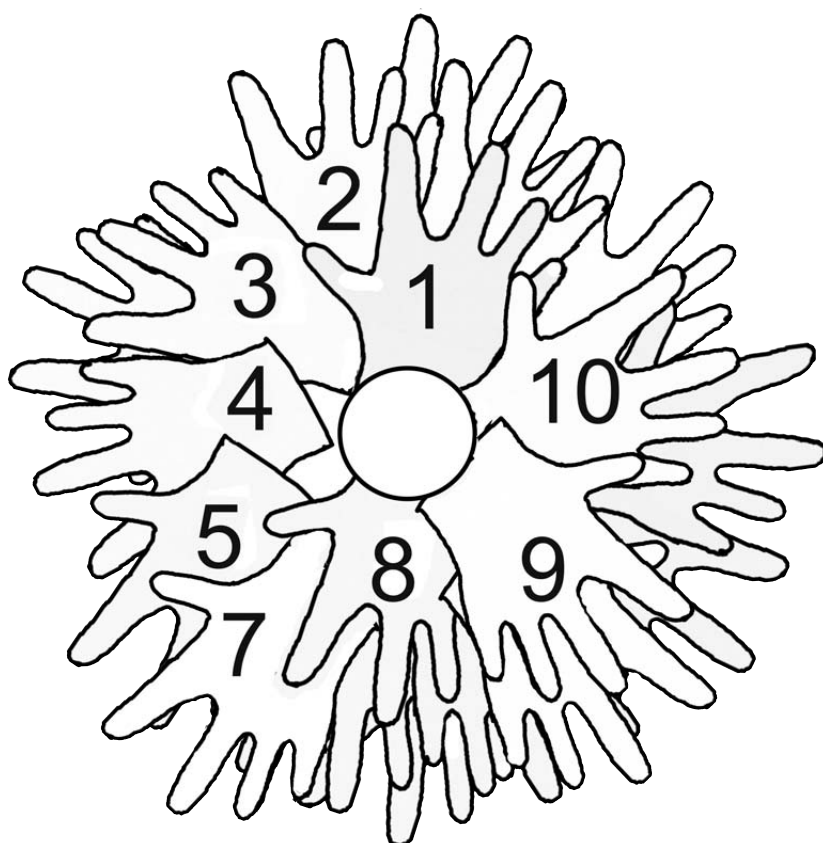
Activity 2: Mother's Day card

What you do

1. Using the cardboard, ask the children to draw and cut out as many flowers as they want (use the green cardboard for the leaves and the stem).
2. Get the children to fold the white cardboard in half and glue the flowers on the front of the card.
3. Each child must write their mother's name (using a coloured felt-tip pen) around the flowers or in the middle of them (depending on how they have glued them on the card).
4. Write either a short poem on the blackboard for the children to copy or just 'Happy Mother's Day'.

What you need:
- coloured cardboard (green, pink, purple, yellow)
- pencil
- scissors
- white cardboard
- glue
- coloured felt-tip pens

Activity 3: Flower garden diorama

What you do

1. Get the children to draw many flowers of different shapes, sizes and colours using the cardboard.
2. Ask the children to cut them out leaving a small piece of cardboard at the bottom of the flowers which can be folded and glued inside the shoebox (see drawing).
3. Invite the pupils to take the white paper and draw and colour a sunny background for the diorama.
4. Using the box as a theatre (see drawing) cover the inside of the shoebox with the background drawing. On the bottom side, draw and colour a green meadow.
5. Get the children to fold the bottom side of the flowers and glue them onto the meadow.
- Language practice: ask the children to say sentences about the flowers using prepositions of place, for example: The red flower is next to the blue flower.

What you need:
- one shoebox per child
- thin cardboard in different colours
- white paper
- pencil
- scissors
- glue

# Primary Times

Kids' Corner
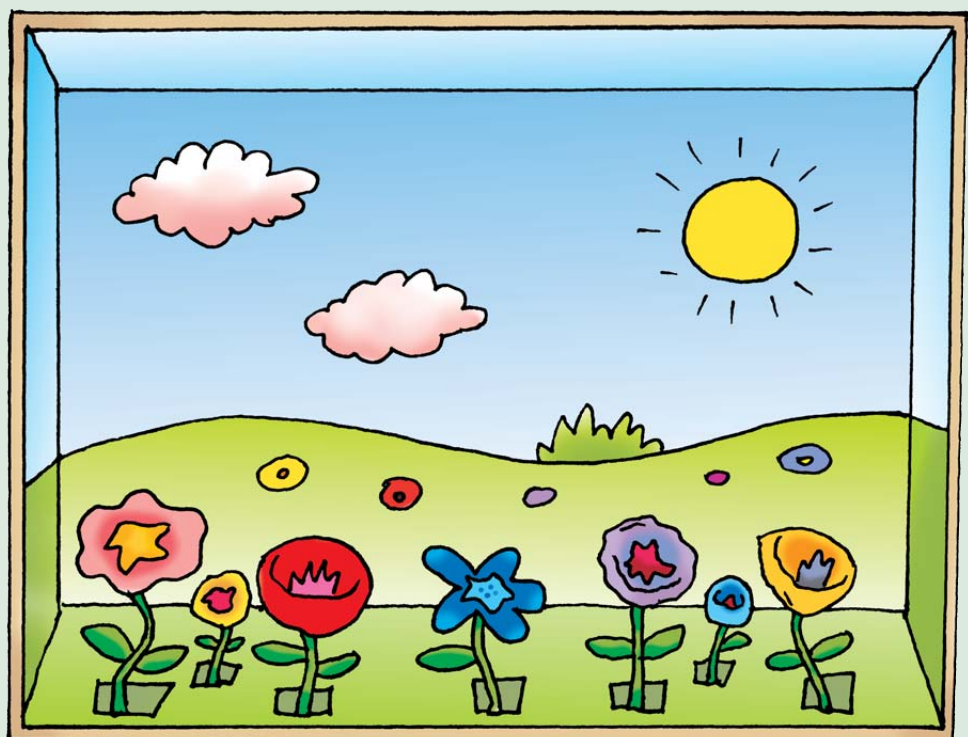
Activity 4: Eggshell pots

What you need:
- one empty eggshell for each child
- one pipe cleaner for each child
- cotton wool
- two fresh beans or a few fresh lentils for each child
- some water

What you do

Before asking the children to construct the object, demonstrate using the drawing below. Then get the children to:

1. Twist the pipe cleaner into a circle in order to make a base for the eggshell to stand on.
2. Glue the pipe cleaner onto the bottom of the eggshell.
3. Put some cotton wool inside the eggshell, then gently lay the fresh beans or lentils onto the cotton wool.
4. Pour a few drops of water inside the eggshell, then put it on the desk or in a place in the classroom where it can get a lot of sunlight.
5. Remind the children to water the beans every two days and soon the eggshell will become a vegetable pot!
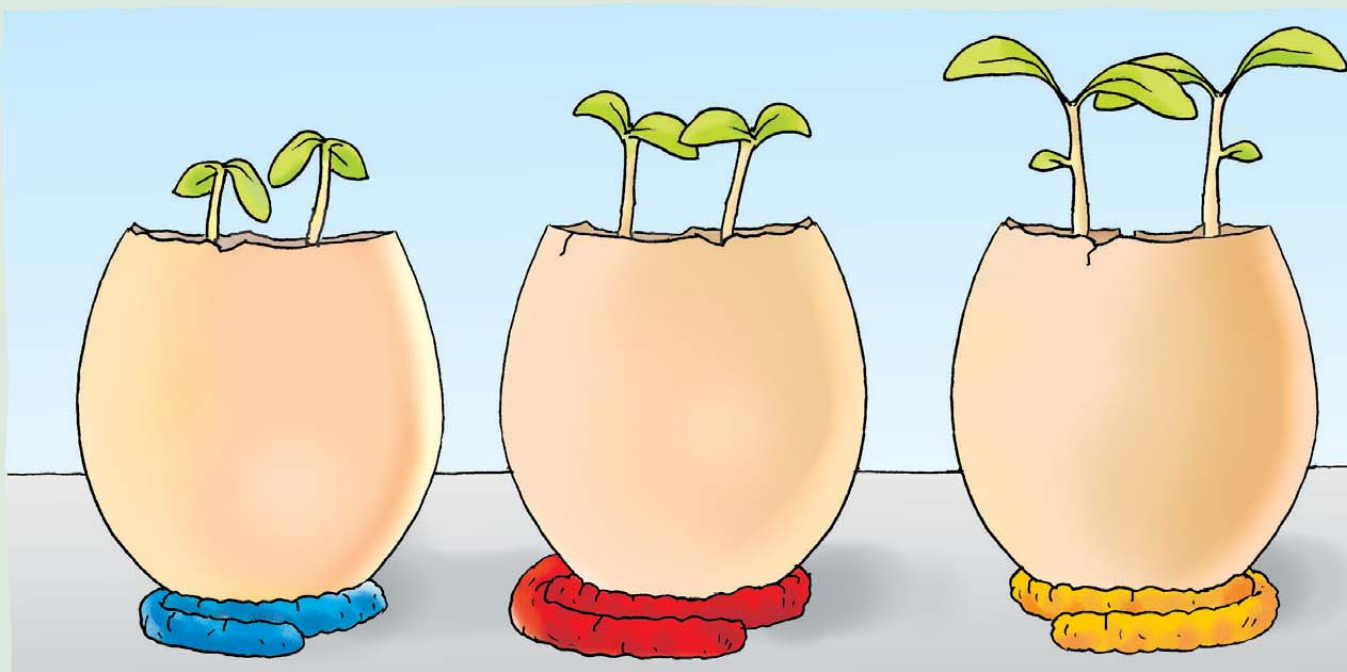
Activity 5: Easter egg bunnies... with a surprise!

What you need:
- one small plastic egg for each child (such as those found inside chocolate eggs)
- coloured cardboard (pink and white)
- cotton wool
- black felt-tip pen
- glue
- scissors

What you do

Dictate these instructions to the children. Watch carefully to check that they are following the instructions exactly.

1. Take a sheet of white cardboard.
2. Draw and cut out two big bunny ears with a small extra piece at the bottom of the ears that can be folded and glued.

3. Using the pink cardboard, draw and cut out two smaller bunny ears.
4. Glue the pink ears inside the white ears, then glue the two ears on the top of the plastic egg.
5. To make the cheeks use two small pompons from the cotton wool.
6. To make the nose use a very small ball of cotton wool.
7. Glue the cheeks and nose onto the egg. Be careful not to glue them where the egg opens.
8. With the black felt-tip pen, draw and glue the eyes above the cheeks and the nose.
9. Put a small surprise inside the plastic egg (a sweet, a chocolate, a very small Easter card, a flower...) and give it to someone (mum, dad, a special friend etc.)

## Activity 6: Homegrown garden

Note for the teacher
This activity is actually an experiment which children will really enjoy if they have the chance to check it day by day. Don't start the experiment if holidays or trips are planned in the following two/three weeks. If you have a closet in the classroom, it would be great to try both experiments: this will allow children to learn a lot about the sun and its effects on nature. The activity is related to the Eggshell pots Activity 4, but you don't need to do them both if there isn't time.
Our suggestion is to have a tub or two for each child, so that they will all have the possibility to water their seeds and to see them grow, but should this be a problem two big tubs can be used (one for the sunny and one for the dark part of the experiment).

What you need:
- two polystyrene tubs (such as those used for food, meat...)
- cotton wool
- some fresh beans and fresh lentils
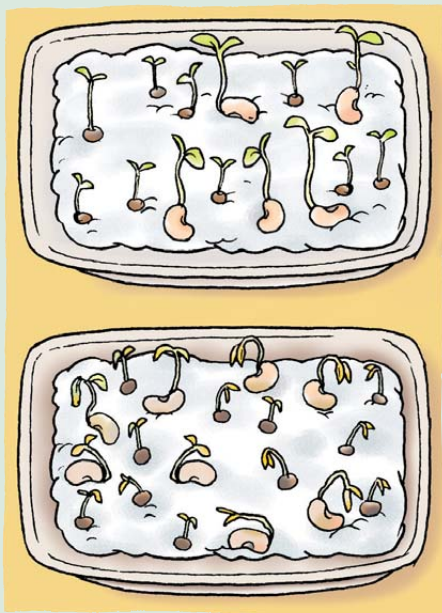
What you do
1. Put a layer of cotton wool, not too thin and not too thick, into each tub.
2. Scatter the fresh beans and the fresh lentils on the tub. Be careful not to put the beans and lentils too close to each other.
3. Water the seeds. Keep the tub in a sunny, well lighted spot.
4. Follow the same procedure with the second tub. Close the second tub inside a closet or cupboard.
5. Ask the children to water the tubs every two days (this will not take too long, but it will involve the children in the experiment and you can always speak English when giving them instructions).
6. In two or three weeks, the tubs in the sunlight will be full of green buds, while the tubs in the dark will have small, colourless buds. This will fascinate the children and is a great way to explain the power of light. If the Science teacher wants to join in the experiment, it can be extended and will be an interesting CLIL lesson!
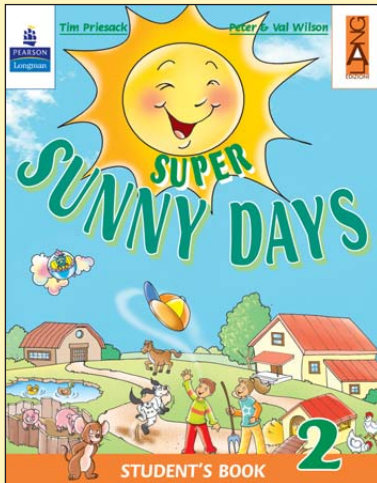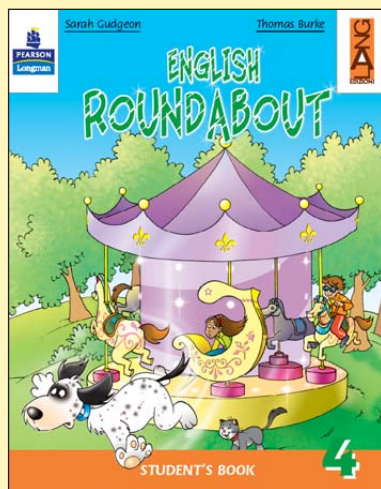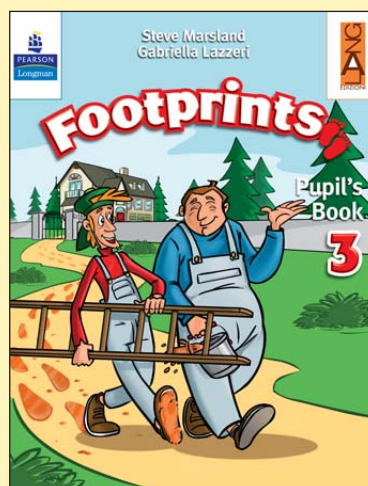
- Balanced skills work
- Songs and music
- Comprehension and practice
- Life in Britain
- Play Time

- Hands-on activities
- CLIL
- Pair and group activities
- Constant revision
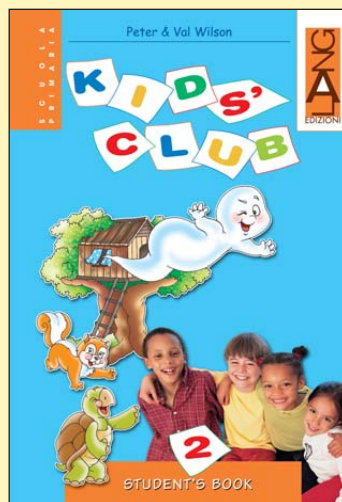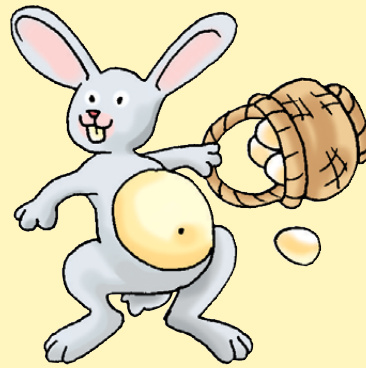- Festivities
- Life and traditions

- Narrative approach
- Multi-level lessons
- Culture
- Games, fun and humor
- Visual learning
- Extensive listening

dological emphasis

Brunel Brown
Frances Foster

NEW COME ALONG!
Starter
PUPIL'S BOOK 1

- Word album
- Culture stop
- My English diary
- Worksheets
- Songs and rhymes

Peter & Val Wilson

KIDS' CLUB
STUDENT'S BOOK 2

- Story Time Fun
- Practice Time
- Portfolio check
- Spelling check
- Practice tests
- Face to face

English Adventure 4
Pupil's Book
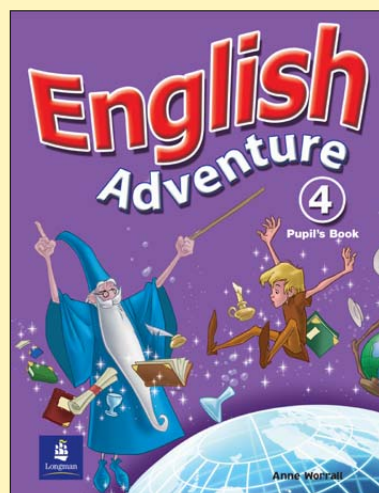
- Disney characters
- Time together (CLIL)
- Labs
- Revision
- Culture time
- Story time
- Brain Gym®

Anne Worrall

© Disney

CLICK AND CLIL

Putting fears aside and exploiting the 'digital intelligence' to achieve effective language learning with children

Laura Papetti

'One reason why very young children seem so good at picking up languages is often to do with the *naturalness* of the environment around them. A language classroom, where learners go through the often difficult process of sorting out sounds, structures, grammar or vocabulary is rarely natural.' (David Marsh, *Using languages to learn and learning to use languages*).

Think about your history as a learner, or that of friends of yours. Don't you think too many people have left school being able to use very little of the languages which they spent so many hours learning?
The Italian language has – not by chance unfortunately – an emblematic expression that is widely used in writing CVs to state one's very basic knowledge of a foreign language: *Conoscenza scolastica.* This tells a lot about the culturally spread implicit idea that a foreign language that has been learnt only at school is a foreign language that you can't manage, and might even not be able to use in a real communicative situation.

Although people are born with the capacity to learn languages, as is evident from the way a native language is successfully learnt, a key success factor is the *opportunities* they have to use this capacity and *learn by doing* in natural contexts.

If you, as teachers of English as L2, want to bring some *real-life opportunities* into your classes, maybe you should first ask yourselves what it is that children do more often today in their 'natural environment', once out of the classroom.
What are their routines? What are their favourite activities? What are the things their families do more often during the week?
Try to think about it for one minute.

I was invited to do this easy brainstorming at a training session with some colleagues a few months ago, and we ended up agreeing on what children between 6 and 11 from 'average Italian families' are likely to experience throughout their 'typical' week:
– using a mobile phone (their mother's if not their own);
– looking at photos on a computer or digital camera;
– putting on a DVD;
– switching on/off a stereo;
– seeing their parents surfing the net (if not doing it themselves);
– playing video games.

Let's make another step forward and consider the following data.
The dramatic turn to the digital era has happened quite recently:

– Fully automatic cellular networks were first introduced in the early to mid 1980s (the 1G generation);
– Digital cameras arrived on the global market in the mid-nineties;
– Google was born in 1996;
– First generation iPods were issued in 2001.

Where do these considerations lead us and what do they imply for teachers?

Children who are attending Primary School in 2009 can be identified as *Digital Natives*, i.e. born and are being bred in a digital era. We weren't.

That said, there are children who don't like using technologies, who still lack sufficient experience-building opportunities, who feel uncomfortable with trying new digital tools, but the majority of them will approach digital devices as they do with a pen or a pencil. Not only: most of them are utterly *in love* with digital technologies!

As to the teaching/learning process, which teachers spend so much time and effort planning and shaping in order to achieve the most effective learning, we can't ignore that a new variable has come into play recently in our children's lives.

If we consider that in the early eighties the well-known American psychologist Howard Gardner identified seven core intelligences – *linguistic*, *logical-mathematical*, *spatial*, *bodily-kinesthetic*, *musical*, *interpersonal* and *intrapersonal* – and that, later on, in 1997, he added an eighth, the *naturalist* intelligence, it may be too much to state that it's time to add a ninth, the *digital* intelligence, but – at least – we have to take into account the existence of techno-lovers who prefer learning by using technology as much as others like learning by moving or using visual aids.

I certainly don't think that I.T. competences are vital. For the time being, they are just very useful. However, the point I am making is that teachers of English as a foreign language might benefit enormously from the engagement that digital devices, and especially communication tools, produce on children.

English is THE language of communication technology. Why not exploit this wonderful 'natural environment' as an opportunity for children to learn the language while engaged in other interesting activities? Their focus will be on the tasks, but the language will be the key tool to achieve their goals. Follow a thematic approach to defining your content objectives first, but plan ahead on the language that will be required too. Once the theme is chosen, identify the key concepts and skills to be developed. Guide your learners to use the most basic computer resources (Word), giving them instructions in Italian first, then in English, guide them to download digital photos on a computer (maybe from a USB key?) and insert them into a document, let them have fun with English websites for kids, watch a DVD in English with a short extract from a famous cartoon film they all know, let them write an email or an e-card, teach them how to search for their favourite football player website, ask them to search the Internet for information about their town…

Finally, make sure your learners feel that, while assessing their performances, you are taking into account both content learning and language learning, otherwise they might feel a lack of purpose.

Consider that the above-mentioned tasks involve:
– a lot of seeing, watching, observing (documents, photographs, objects, films, teacher and others)
– a lot of experiencing, handling, doing (i.e. performing real tasks with objects, realia)
– a lot of listening (teacher and others, audio files, videos)
– a rich visual environment, including written language (including both new and known language)
– the possibility of producing language for a purpose (both short oral responses or simple writing)

In other words, all language skills are being developed with a *learning by doing* approach, they represent an invaluable opportunity of *learning contents and language in an integrated way* (CLIL) within a real communication situation, with real purposes and most of all with FUN!

I think this is a unique opportunity, a high quality context that it is worth offering whenever possible to go beyond the mere language focus that an English class usually provides at this level.

Isn't it worth a try? Teachers might have fun too!
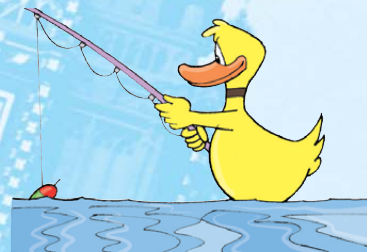
Who's afraid of Oral Assessment?

Matilde Gagliano

Speaking and listening skills are essential components of the overall linguistic proficiency, but when it comes to measuring them, teachers often feel less secure than when dealing with written competences.

Some could even argue that as the main function of the language is communication, and since oral communication is more important than written communication, especially at primary level, we should dedicate more time and effort to the acquisition and evaluation of these skills. However, as we are expected to give a single mark for the report card, which includes both written and oral skills, sometimes we tend to neglect the use of systematic assessment procedures aimed at ascertaining the children's speaking abilities, basing our decision on the grade we assign to each child mainly on the many written records at our disposal - such as their exercise books, their practice books, work samples, projects and the photocopiable unit tests from the teacher's book.

How can teachers establish a mark on each child's oral production with large classes and no written records?

Things get particularly difficult when we have to give a mark for the first trimester or quadrimester, for first year students. We don't know them well yet, also because we only see them one hour per week, they don't write or read yet, and some of them won't even talk as they are too shy or afraid of speaking, and sometimes, during the first lessons, even of repeating a word in English. What criteria can be used?

The term **assessment** derives from the Latin word 'assidere' which means 'to sit beside', conveying thus an idea of partnership between the student and the teacher, of mutual help and understanding. This possibly gives us a hint on what approach we could choose, shifting the emphasis on the assessment of the process of learning rather than of the product. Assessment should be **for** learning not only **of** learning, as it is concerned not only with children's achievement but also with the process of gathering, recording, interpreting and communicating information about a child's progress.
Assessment, therefore, involves much more than testing. It is an ongoing process that includes formal and informal activities. We should also engage children in their own learning by providing feedback, using peer and self-assessment.
The tools of assessment we can use range from less structured, informal methods such as teacher observation, which we do everyday, to more formal, structured methods.

Observing a child's performance in the various tasks and his/her engagement with the day-to-day learning activities in the classroom, the teacher will gather extensive, continuous information about his/her progress. In evaluating the child's response to the teachers' questions, the quality of his/her involvement in class and group activities, and the questions he/she poses in the learning situation, the teacher can obtain much of the information needed to assess the child's competence.

We are too often stressed out by making sure that our children's exercise books are full of well

structured exercises, charts, tables, colourful pictures and worksheets which are obviously important but are not all that matters. We are afraid that our work is judged on the amount of written work our students have produced, and that parents will think that we don't work enough if the children haven't filled an adequate number of pages. Maybe we should worry less about the perfection and tidiness of our students' exercise books and spend more time actually using the language in class. And also if we're thinking of preparing our students for international examinations (Trinity, Cambridge etc.) then they have to be used to answering questions, introducing themselves, describing pictures and so on.

Another question is whether the assessment of oral skills should mirror the full range of the child's learning, embracing the cognitive, creative, affective, physical and social dimensions of his/her development or just the specific language skills. How should we evaluate, for example, kids who are not particularly good at using the language structures, or understanding and answering questions and possibly have a poor knowledge of vocabulary but who are very good at acting in English because they have a good memory, correct pronunciation and the necessary expressive skills?

If we consider that every child is different, with his/her own cognitive characteristics, then assessment should probably take into account all aspects of the child's learning and development.

There are some ideas on how to make oral assessment a bit more systematic and structured on pages 18 and 19. A standardised test is only one of the many assessment tools we can use to gather information about a child's progress. Formal tests do not provide an absolute measure of the children's achievement, but can enhance their motivation to perform better if the students are told that they are being tested.
Visual prompts, such as flashcards, objects, photos, storycards can be used to elicit words and phrases.

Primary Times

keeping the teacher informed

Matilde Gagliano is a primary school teacher and has been teaching young learners in Messina since 2001. She is currently involved in the organisation of teacher training courses with the local Tesol group.

Listening/Speaking tests

First/second year

**1.** Do what the teacher says. (/4) The teacher chooses four different instructions for each child.

a. Stand up.
b. Say your name.
c. Come to the teacher's desk.
d. Say hello.
e. Count to ten.
f. Open the door.

g. Close the door.
h. Say goodbye.
i. Go back to your desk.
j. Sit down.
k. Open your book.
l. Close your book.

2. What's this? (/4) The teacher asks the question four times pointing to different pictures. The children answer: *It's a (dog)*.
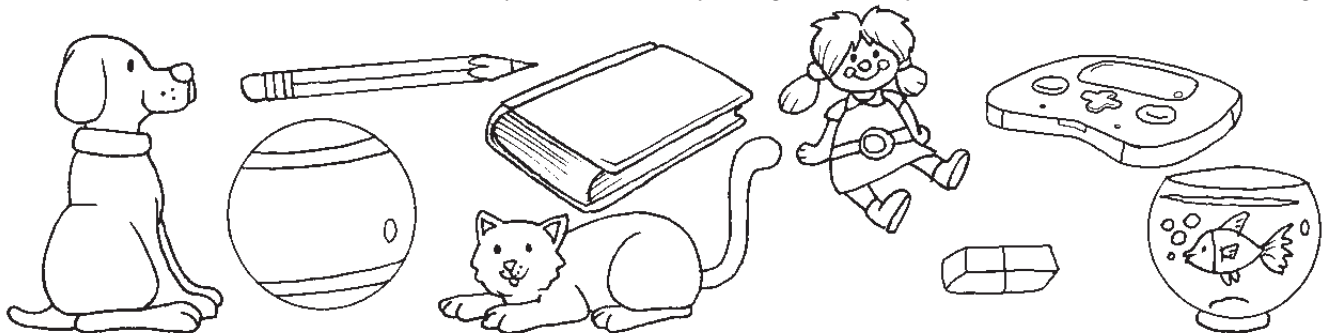
3. Listen and match. (/4) The teacher says four sentences (ex: *A pink schoolbag*) and the students draw lines to match colour and picture.
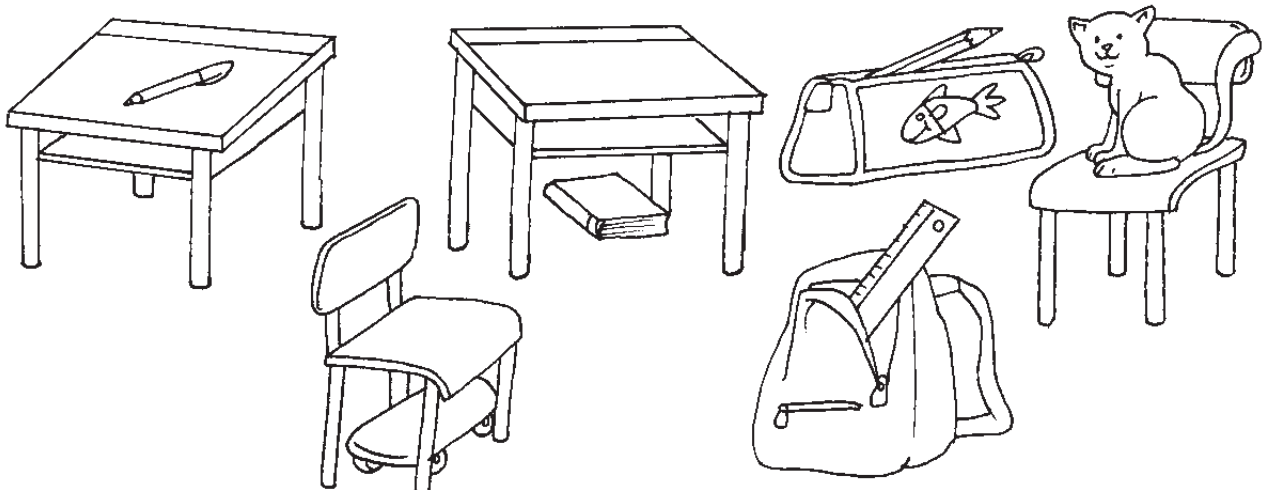
Red
Yellow
Green
Pink
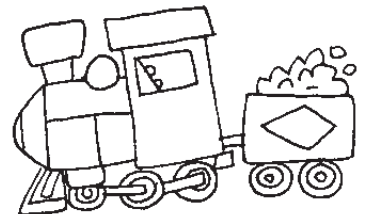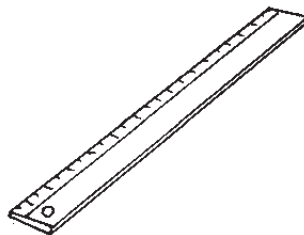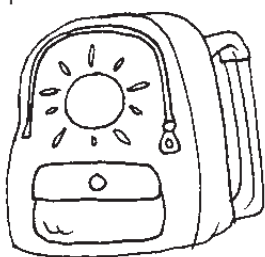
Total score (/12)

Third year

1. Say the sentence. (/4) The teacher points to four pictures eliciting sentences (ex: *The pen is on the desk*). Ask for example *Where's the (pen)?*

2. Look and say. (/4) The teacher arranges three flashcards of number + colour + object/animal in a row to form a sentence (ex: *five orange cats*). Elicit -s for plural words.

3. Answer. (/4)

a. What's your name?
b. What's your surname?
c. Can you spell it?
d. How old are you?
e. Have you got a (computer)?

f. Do you like (chocolate)?
g. What's your favourite animal?
h. Where's your English book?
i. What colour is your schoolbag?

Total score (/12)

Fourth/fifth year

1. What are they doing? (/4) The teacher shows four flashcards, storycards or photos showing a person or more people doing an action. The students say what he/she/they are doing (ex. *She's running/They're watching TV/He's going to school*).

2. Correct me. (/4) The teacher says four false sentences, the students look at the picture and correct the sentences (ex: *There isn't a sofa in the bathroom.* or *There is a sofa in the living room.*)
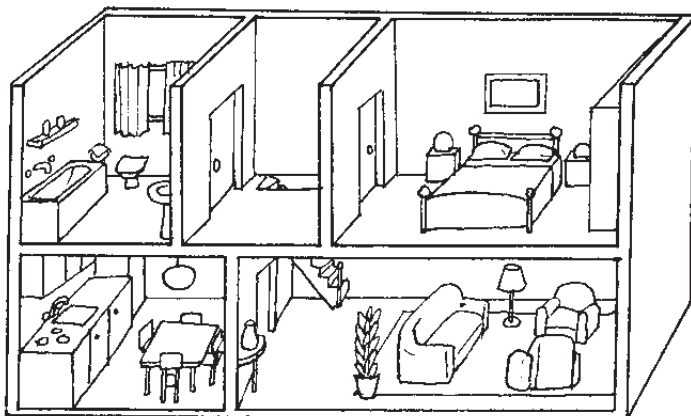
a. There is a sofa in the bathroom.
b. There isn't a bed in the bedroom.
c. There are four chairs in the living room.
d. There is a wardrobe in the kitchen.
e. There isn't a bath in the bathroom.
f. There are two tables in the kitchen.

3. Make sentences. (/4) The teacher arranges in a row: a picture of a boy/girl + smiley/sad face + flashcard of verb to elicit sentences such as: *He/She likes/doesn't like playing football.*

4. Answer. (/4)

a. Have you got (brown eyes)?
b. Are you wearing (a red jumper)?
c. What time do you (have breakfast)?
d. Can you (cook)?

e. Is there (a cinema) in your town?
f. Do you like (dancing)?
g. What's your address and telephone number?

Total score (/16)

Reaching the final mark for the report card (pagella)

Cecilia Perillo
Maria Rosaria Sagace

In July 2008 the Education Minister, Mariastella Gelmini, introduced a new bill which involves changes to school and university education, but above all to primary education. In the school year 2008/2009 Primary school teachers have to face a ten-point system for grading pupils' progress followed by an analytical assessment on the global level of maturity reached by each pupil. Teachers are therefore expected to match words and numbers to express the mark which will appear in individual report cards at the end of the school year. Testing Primary school students is rather difficult because an L2 teacher has usually a wide range of different ages, large class sizes, limited space and time.

However, assessment is necessary for both children and the teacher. Children should always be tested to find out what they know and can do and what they need help with or which areas to consolidate. Through assessment the teacher learns more about children's levels and identifies any 'gap' or 'weak areas' in order to plan and start an immediate 'catching-up' programme.

Children can be monitored through everyday activities and assessed at the end of a Unit, that's to say, four times a year. Materials can be selected according to the age and maturity of children. These include everyday objects and pictures which can be used to engage their interest, elicit the language of their grade and encourage the development of conversation. Obviously, many English tests concentrate on structures and vocabulary because they often focus on form.

Oral skills should be developed in the first two years of studying English. Speaking and listening skills can be assessed through gestures and simple actions (TPR activities), dramatization, role play and role taking, circling and true or false activities. Children can give short responses about something they can see or know, a listening activity where they choose pictures (listen and match) corresponding to what they hear etc.

In the following three years it is important to test reading and writing, too.

Monitoring written work such as homework and class work gives the teacher an idea of how the child is progressing.

Reading skills are assessed through exercises such as: fill in the blanks, multiple choice crosswords and wordsearches, etc.

Letter marks for assessment:

A – The child's contributions are very effective, clearly comprehensible, highly appropriate and obviously fulfil the task. There is comprehensive coverage of the communicative skills functions and language items of the grade and a high level of accuracy and appropriateness.

B - The child's contributions are generally effective, comprehensible, appropriate and adequately fulfil the task. There is good coverage of the communicative skills, functions and language items of the grade and a good level of accuracy and appropriateness.

C - The child's contributions are moderately effective, comprehensible, appropriate and partially fulfil the task. There is satisfactory coverage of the communicative skills, functions and language items of the grade and a satisfactory level of accuracy and appropriateness. The child may need some help and support to communicate effectively.

D - The child's contributions are very limited, incomprehensible and, although there is some attempt to tackle the task, it is not fulfilled even with support. There is very little evidence of coverage of the communicative skills, functions and language items of the grade.

A = 9/10 - B = 8 - C = 7 - D = 6

The number/letter mark is collected in a grid (a grid for every Unit).

DATA COLLECTION GRID

CLASS: ....

DATE: ....

UNIT: ....

Name and surname	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing

I would like to gratefully acknowledge Maria Rosaria Sagace's excellent contribution.

Cecilia Perillo is a teacher at all levels in both the public and private sectors. She is a teacher trainer for LANG-Pearson Longman and co-author of Sing Along and Primary Teaching Files, LANG-Pearson Longman.
Maria Rosaria Sagace is a Primary school teacher at the Circolo Didattico G. Missere in Torre S. Susanna, Brindisi.

WORKSHEET

Traditions Around The World

• Match the Country to the tradition.

- Australia
- Bulgaria
- Greece
- Germany
- Mexico
- United States

- Americans hold an Easter Parade.
- The Greeks give out red eggs.
- Mexicans smash eggs on heads.
- In Bulgaria they have egg fights.
- In Germany they dye eggs green.
- Easter egg hunts for children in Australia.

• Colour the countries.
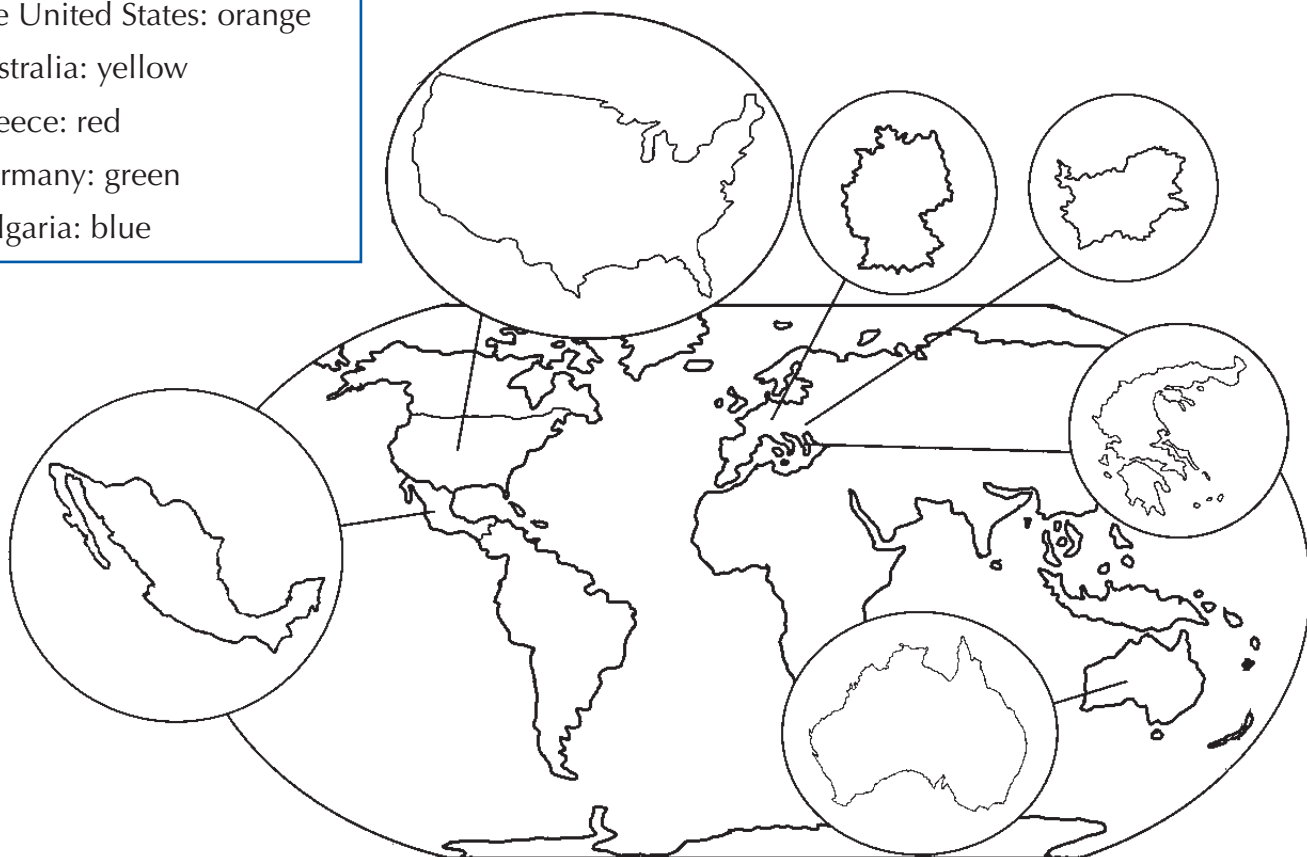
Follow the colour code.

Mexico: pink

The United States: orange

Australia: yellow

Greece: red

Germany: green

Bulgaria: blue

Class project
A letter to a pen-friend

The project for this issue is particularly appropriate for classes in Primary years 4 and 5. The project gives the teacher the opportunity to introduce and/or consolidate the expressions of size and number as well as daily and weekly routine at school. Motivation will be high as the children will NEED to understand and remember these expressions and language forms in order to complete the project.

CLASS Project – March 2009 – Issue 32

A letter to a pen-friend

On one side of an A4 paper each child must draw and colour a picture of their classroom including the teacher and students.

On the back of the picture they must write a letter to a pen-friend in England with a description of their classroom, their best friends, their teachers (including the subjects they teach). The text should also include a description of a typical school day as well as the timetable for a week.

A4 size paper is recommended. Should the reverse side of the paper be unusable, get the children to write their letters on a different sheet. All the written language must be in English and physically written by the children. Teachers are asked not to correct or re-write the sentences produced by the children.

Each child who takes part in this project will receive a small gift of appreciation.

Send the project materials together with the completed project form to:

Primary Times, Class Project – Issue 32
Pearson Paravia Bruno Mondadori S.p.A., Corso Trapani 16
10139 Torino

The materials should arrive in our offices by 15.05.2009.
We may publish extracts from some of the projects in future issues of **Primary Times**.

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This form must be completed and attached to the front page of the project materials.
32
Name of school _____
Address _____
City _____ CAP _____
E-mail _____ @ _____
Name of teacher _____
Number of children presenting their illustrations and texts _____
Signed by the teacher _____ Date _____

Teacher Support Network LANG-Longman Primary seminar 2009

Our teacher trainers will be criss-crossing the country during the next few months giving a seminar titled *Making the most out of visual materials*.
The seminar illustrates different ways of using flashcards, posters, realia, pictures in text books and all the different visual aids a teacher has at his/her disposal.
Seminar locations and dates can be found on www.lang-longman.it or direct from our agents.
To give some idea of the scale of the TSN here are some of the cities we will be visiting in just one month (March 2009) - Albenga, Avellino, Cesena, Cuneo, Genova, Macerata, Messina, Milano, Modena, Napoli, Pavia, Perugia, Salerno, Torino, Roma, Sassari, Udine, Verona.

primary@lang-longman.it

The next issue of **Primary Times** will be published at the beginning of the new school year in October 2009.

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If you wish to comment on the articles in Primary Times, please do not hesitate to write to us.

32	New subscription ❏		Change of address ❏

Name

Home address

City		CAP

E-mail	@	Telephone no.

School name and address

	City	CAP

Course book used

I would like an agent to visit me at school   Yes ❏   No ❏

Ai sensi della Legge 675/96, con la presente vi autorizzo esplicitamente al trattamento dei miei dati personali unicamente ai fini amministrativi per l'invio di materiali scolastici al mio indirizzo.

Signed	Date

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