



Language revision activities for the start of the year

Donatella Santandrea and Philip Curtis



Beginnings are important and none more so than the beginning of a new school year. The length of the summer holiday in Italy means that pupils become de-schooled during their weeks away. The challenge for teachers is to re-school the children quickly and effectively. In the teaching of primary school English the increase in the use of the **summer holiday study book** has meant that many students have at least some contact with the language during the break but, if our experience is anything to go by, this is often concentrated into the last few days of holiday before the pupils return to school!

Our experience is that the start of a new school year is also the perfect opportunity for teachers to modify their practice in order to enlarge and emphasize the use of English in everyday practice. This might be something as simple as preparing posters with classroom English phrases, such as 'I don't understand', 'How do you say "x" in English?' or 'What does "x" mean?' that can be displayed in the classroom or English lab, or it could be an undertaking to speak more English in their everyday teaching. Organising revision activities requires planning and the preparation of appropriate materials. Recycling and revising previously learned material is essential in all teaching, especially the teaching of a language, and this is particularly true after a long break. There are many advantages of starting the new school year with a well-organised revision programme. Here we identify three of the most obvious.

1. By beginning the year with familiar material, preferably something simple, the confidence of the students is immediately reinforced. They are reminded that they are already users of English and that they have already acquired many language skills. The message from the teacher is positive and the students feel positive too with their self-esteem reinforced.
2. Student familiarity with the material presented also allows the teacher to remind students of his/her expectations as to their behaviour and method of working through practical activities. The classroom rules on such things as putting your hand up, working in groups, speaking as much of the time as possible in English etc. are much more effectively re-proposed while the pupils are involved in learning activities related to familiar language.
3. Revision allows teachers to assess the level of any new students and to identify any 'gaps' in their knowledge compared with their peers. This can be invaluable as it allows the teacher to plan and start an immediate 'catch-up' programme.

Of course there is the danger of de-motivation in recycling and revising material: the students' feeling of 'not this again!' or 'but we've already done this ten times!' This is a real danger and should not be dismissed, especially at the start of the year. The challenge for the teacher is to find and/or prepare new material on familiar topics in such a way that the students feel stimulated and yet secure at the same time. In this way a productive environment is immediately created in which the students from day one - lesson one are working in English.



Based on the concept that *individually the children remember very little but collectively they remember a lot* dividing the children into groups and getting them to brainstorm lexical sets is a popular revision activity. Here follows the description of two other revision activities. The photocopiable worksheets are on the following pages.

Back to school – Pencil case check (page 6)

- Year:** class 2 or 3
Aim: to revise pencil case vocabulary, to reinforce the importance of bringing a complete pencil case to school and to check this by themselves.
Key vocabulary: pencil, pen, scissors, glue, ruler, sharpener, coloured pencil, rubber
Key structure: Have you got... ? I've got... I haven't got...
Skills: reading, writing, speaking



1. Distribute one sheet to each child.
2. Ask them to read and circle the words.
3. Get them to colour only the objects that they have got in their pencil case.
4. Tell them to list the objects that they have and have not got in the appropriate column.

Divide the children into pairs. Write the model dialogue on the blackboard. As the activity proceeds, the teacher can gradually wipe off the words.

- *Have you got a ruler in your pencil case?*
- *Yes, I have.*
- *And you, have you got coloured pencils in your pencil case?*
- *No, I haven't.*

An alternative would be to do the colouring activity (3) as a listening with the teacher instructing the pupils to colour the articles. For example: *Colour the rubber grey. Colour the pen black.* etc.

Holiday Scrapbook (page 7)

- Class:** class 4 or 5
Aim: to revise vocabulary and structures from previous year.
Key vocabulary: action verbs, clothes, food, toys, prepositions of place, animals, weather
Key structures: It's a bike, she's eating an ice cream, the book is on the chair, it's raining, there are two dogs
Skills: writing, speaking

Divide the children into groups of three or four and give one sheet to each child. Invite each group to choose one illustration.

The task is for the groups to invent as many complete, correct sentences in English to describe their chosen illustration. The sentences under the illustrations offer structural prompts. The teacher should revise the structures at this stage eliciting example sentences from the students that can be written on the board. When the groups have written their sentences ask them to read to the class. The group with the highest number of correct sentences wins. The teacher can award extra marks for particularly good sentences.

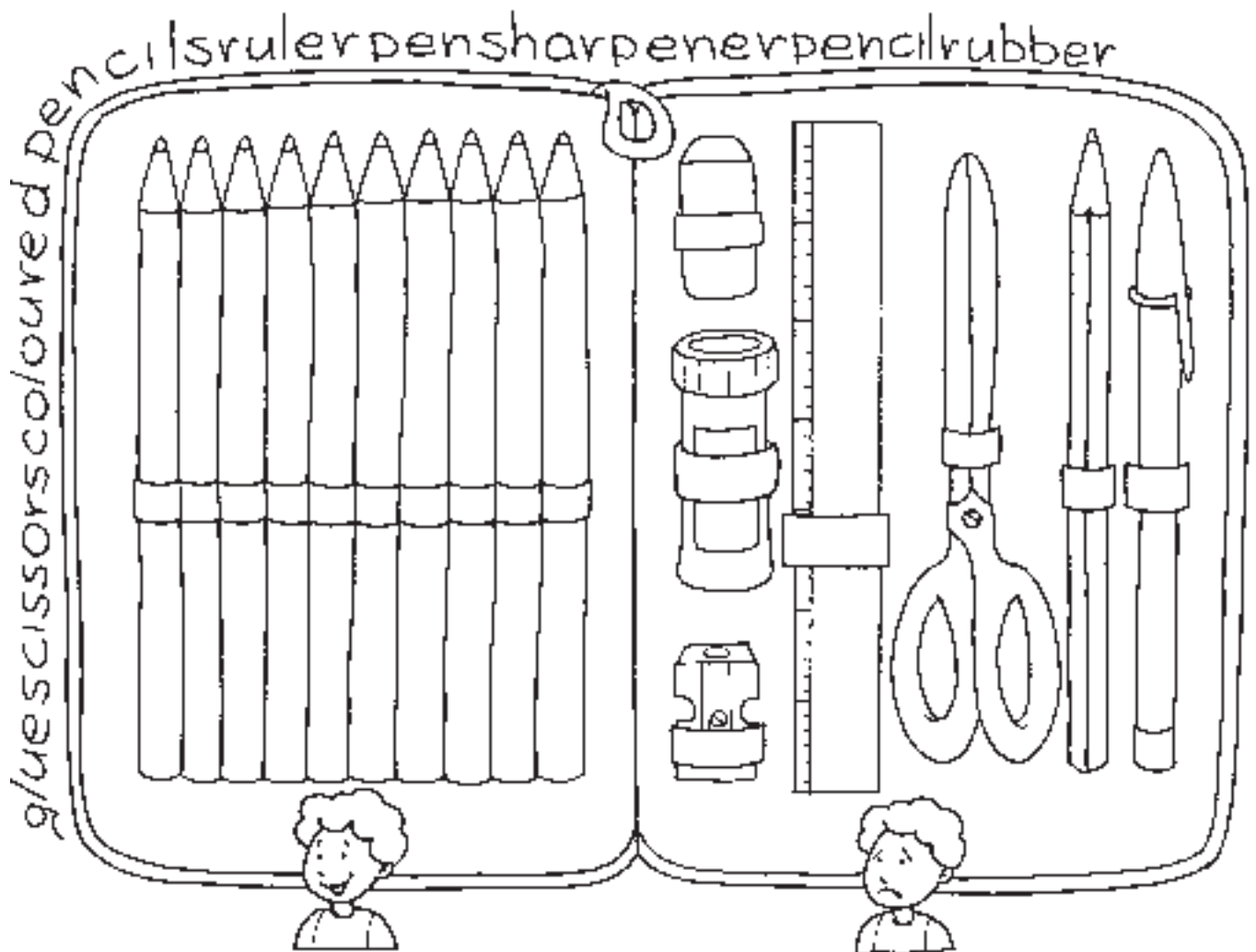
An alternative would be to do a listening activity before the group work asking the pupils to colour different objects. For example: *In illustration 1, colour the umbrella green and red. In illustration 3, colour the kite blue and yellow.* etc.



Back to school Pencil case check

WORKSHEET

(for the teacher: see page 5)



In my pencil case I've got...

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

In my pencil case I haven't got...

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



HOLIDAY SCRAPBOOK

WORKSHEET

(for the teacher: see page 5)

CAN YOU REMEMBER?



- It's a bike.
- She's eating an ice cream.
- He's cooking sausages.
- The book is on the chair.
- *It's raining.*
- *There are two dogs.*