

Animal, vegetable, or mineral?

The game 'Animal, Vegetable, or Mineral' is a favorite among students. Sometimes it occurs under the name 'Twenty Questions'.

From their viewpoint, it is a lot of fun to play so they enjoy the game. It is sad but true that students often do not view learning as fun and thus they frequently assume that because this activity is enjoyable, it must be a waste of time. For this reason, it is important to point out to them that you are playing this so-called game to give them practice with *Yes/No* questions.

From the teaching viewpoint, it provides valuable practice not only with Yes/No questions (and probably a few new vocabulary words) but also with critical thinking.

In playing 'Twenty Questions', it is not possible to get the answer by just guessing. When the students first play this game that is often their strategy. They simply guess. However, it does not take them long to realise that this strategy will not work.

Then, they come to the realization that it is necessary to narrow down the range of possible answers by well-thought-out questions. At this point, two types of learning are going on: language learning and critical thinking.

How the game is played

The game itself is quite simple. Think of some concrete object, for example, a pelandok. Tell the students that you are thinking of something. Take a piece of paper and make a show of writing the name of the thing down on it.

Instruct the students to ask questions that can be answered with a *Yes* or a *No*

In response to their questions, do your best to only answer with a *Yes* or a *No*, although for some questions it is sometimes necessary to give answers such as "Sometimes", "It is hard to say," and so on.

The students start asking *Yes/No* questions until they figure out what the object is or until they use up all twenty of their questions.

As the teacher, you might consider not responding to questions until they are formed properly. Perhaps you might write a misformed question on the board and jointly correct it as a class — and then answer it. As you like.

Also a more advanced student might be the one to think up the object and to answer the questions from the rest of the class. In which case, it is useful for you to know what the object is so that you can help with the answers.

For advanced and even for intermediate classes, very little preparatory language work is needed. For beginning classes, however, you might prepare for the game by working with some *Yes/No* questions and some vocabulary on the board.

Certainly questions like the following may be valuable, and these along with others could be put on the board to help them.

Is it living?

Is it made of _____? (metal, wood, and so on)

Is it normally found in a _____? (city, classroom, house)

Is it bigger than a _____?

Is it smaller than a _____?

After a little practice, the students develop skill not just at asking *Yes/No* questions but they also develop strategies for narrowing the range of possibilities to figure out what the object in question is.