

Top Ten Games to Play with Bilingual Children's Books

Using flash cards and rote learning to teach an additional language is like looking at pictures of a turkey dinner instead of sitting down to eat the wonderful meal. There are so many more interesting ways to experience learning and using a new language! And bilingual books are a great place to start.

In April of this year, ScienceDaily.com ran an article supporting what we already know: "playing simple games using words and pictures can help people to learn a new language with greater ease". This type of informal learning is "effortless" and supports the retention of the new language "even days afterwards", according to the quoted study from the University of Nottingham. It makes practical sense too — we all know that we learn better when we're having fun and not putting too much pressure on ourselves to retain information.

Looking for some inspiration to get involved in informal learning using bilingual books you already have in your library or some you've got your eye on for Christmas? Look no further! We've even grouped our Top Ten Activities according to levels of proficiency in the additional language needed to complete them (the level needed is higher as the numbers go up).

1) Charades

This classic game works really well to help cement children's understanding of the bilingual books they've recently read. Little ones can choose a favorite character from the story to act out with gestures and no words. However, to really improve their vocabulary, choosing *objects* from the book for their peers to identify in the additional language will certainly push them one step further without them realizing they're doing any language-learning work at all!

2) You Be the Star

For the next activity, let the children choose a favorite scene from the bilingual book they're reading and act it out for each other. They should use as many words in the new language as they can to get across the main idea, even if they're not using dialogue and narrative lifted straight from the page.

3) Key Word Shuffle

This one is a real vocabulary-builder! Using spare index cards you have lying around your classroom or home, or even squares of construction paper, list a number of key words in the new language from the bilingual book you've chosen. For example, the story of Cinderella might produce key words like "prince", "pumpkin", "glass slipper", and "sweep". Shuffle the cards and let the children choose them at random, then find the page in the book that contains that word.

4) Scavenger Hunt

Have a little bit more time on your hands and a few more resources at your disposal? Build on the Key Word Shuffle by allowing little ones to search for bilingual treasure! They can use index cards with words in the language they're learning as clues to find objects from a story in the home or classroom. Maybe you're reading a bilingual version of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* — tots can hunt for chairs, bowls, or even a box of instant porridge!

5) Memory Game

Kids love puzzles at any age, and this quick game will challenge their memories *and* the language they've learned so far. It's simple: copy the pages of the bilingual story you're reading, shuffle them, and ask the children to put them back in order without looking at the book. For children who need a little more support, you could always copy only a few of the most important pages from the plot, and if your little ones are a bit more advanced, let them try the whole thing.

6) Pictionary

It's fun; it's fast-paced; it focuses children's minds on new-language vocabulary they're learning! Just like in the game show you remember from the '90s, in our version you use key words and phrases from bilingual stories your children are familiar with. The twist is that they *must* guess in their additional language! The competitive element will add a frisson and keep kids involved in their own learning long after they've shut their books for the day.

7) Puppet Show

Looking for a way to combine arts and crafts and bilingual learning? Our puppet show activity really ticks both boxes. Children can spend time making creative puppets (like the ones found on the website: http://www.dltk-kids.com/type/paper_bag.htm, perhaps) to represent characters from the book they're reading before using them to act out a scene with lines of memorized dialogue in their additional language. If they're working on this project in school, it would be a great one to take home and show their loved ones what they've learned too!

8) The Post-it Note Game

If you've got some sticky notes, a pen, and a bilingual children's book, then you've got the ingredients for this game. Our version requires a little bit more knowledge of the new language but it's great fun once your little ones have advanced to this level! All you need to do is write the names of characters (or objects- to make it even more challenging!) from the story onto post-its and stick them to the foreheads of your players so they can only read the stickies of the people at whom they're looking and not their own. They then ask yes-or-no questions to try to figure out "who" they are, such as, "Am I a girl or a boy? Do I have dark hair? Do I climb a beanstalk? Am I bigger than everyone else in the story?" Of course, the higher their level of proficiency, the better questions they can ask, adding to the fun of the game.

9) Hot Seating

A complex role-playing game, this will really test your little learners' vocabulary. To play, children take turns performing as a character from the bilingual book they've most recently read, while the others ask them questions about how they felt at different points in the story. As in the Post-It Note Game, the better their skills in their new language, the better the questions they can ask, and the deeper they can go exploring the emotions and characters in the text. For instance, if students are reading *Marek and Alice's Christmas*, they can use the additional language to ask questions like "How did you feel about visiting Poland for Christmas?" "What were you expecting Christmas to be like?" "Why do you like spending time with your babcia?" "What was your favorite part of Christmas?" Let the kids be creative with this one — a little poetic license is a good thing — but the closer they can stay to the text the more they'll be reinforcing what they've already learned.

10) What Happens Next?

The end of a really good story is always a bit disappointing — you wish the author had carried on! In our final game, your children can help her do just that by adding an epilogue or sequel to the bilingual book you've read. Learners will obviously need to be able to use their new language to a high level to get involved in this activity, but even a very simple continuation of the story can be fun, satisfying, and an effortless way to reinforce bilingual skills.

Of course this is just a small selection of the great games many teachers and parents use every day to support their kids' bilingualism, even when they don't realize they're doing it! Maybe you've got some ideas up your sleeve. Why not post them in our comments section and share the joy of informal language learning?

This article was originally published on the Language Lizard Blog (blog.LanguageLizard.com). The blog supports educators and parents of language learners and helps bring multiculturalism to the classroom. Please visit our blog for more informative articles to help you teach children about diverse languages and cultures.