Out-of-The-Box Teaching Activities to Develop Creativity and Critical Thinking in a Second Language

From Reading Comprehension to Magazine Cover Creation

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Duration: 60⁺ minutes

Target student proficiency level: Intermediate to Advanced

Target student age: Any

Objectives: To develop
- Language skills: Reading, writing, speaking, listening
- Content knowledge: Varies (e.g., food, sports, nature, social issues)
- Cognitive abilities: Planning, design thinking, problem-solving
- Social abilities: Explaining and expressing voice in writing and speaking to peers and instructor.

Materials:
Reading: Article or story containing imagery in the text.
Online Creative Tool: Pixlr https://pixlr.com/
(other options: Adobe Photoshop https://www.adobe.com/, Canva - https://www.canva.com/)

Preparation: Instructor must have basic background knowledge of Pixlr (or similar creative tool), pre-selected readings that contain imagery in the text.

Procedure:

1. Show students popular magazine covers that illustrate an article inside. Ask students to guess what the article might be about. (Search "magazine covers" on Google Image and select sub-categories such as "food")

2. Have the class read the article and discuss the connection between the article and its cover image, focusing on content (what the article is about), perspective (whose viewpoints are represented?), and mood (what feelings does the author create in the audience?).

3. In groups of 3, students discuss how design patterns, trends, and layouts are done in the example and go over key design elements as a class.

4. Tell students that they will now read an article and create a magazine cover to illustrate it.

5. Students read a pre-selected reading as a class, in groups, or individually. Explain any new vocabulary from the reading and discuss any questions about the content as needed.

6. Demonstrate how students can use the online tool (e.g., Pixlr) to create a magazine cover (using necessary tools such as *mask*, *adjustment, lasso select*) and how to save image files (as PNG or JPEG).

7. Have students work in pairs to create their own magazine cover. They need to decide on:
   ○ target audiences
   ○ what key points in the content to illustrate.
   ○ what perspective to take based on the reading (e.g., eater, buyer, chef, manufacturer, or cleaner of food).
   ○ what mood to convey based on the reading (e.g., warm, excited, sad, or calm)

   Refer to the template on the next page as an illustration of requirements if necessary.

8. Students write an artist statement to go with their cover. The statement should explain the reasons behind the creative output. In their statements, students should:
    - use formal or academic language
    - give information about their creations such as:
        - color choice
        - design choice
        - vocabulary usage
        - image manipulation

9. Student pairs share their magazine covers and explain their designs. Audience members rate the designs based on the accuracy of illustration and artistic quality. See examples of student work below.

Variations & Extensions:
- Instead of a magazine cover, learners could create album art, posters, billboards, etc.
- If online tools are not available, learners can create physical objects using pens, colored pencils, collages, etc.
- Students can choose different topics to read about rather than reading the same article as a whole class.
- In addition to sharing in class, students can share their designs on a website with a larger audience.

For more advanced students:
- Learners must use specific tools within the online application during their creative process to demonstrate their knowledge of the tool itself.
- Learners write an artist statement (50-100 words) about the creative choices made and how these choices connect back to the reading.

(see example of student work on the next page)

About the author
Kinohi Abafo holds a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from the University of Cincinnati and is currently a MA TESOL candidate at Hawaii Pacific University. She has tutored English in America for 4 years. Her research and teaching interests include integrating photography, philosophy, and culture into the language classroom.

Example of student's work

Artist Statement: I chose the filters in this photo because they give justice to the Hawaiian vibe that I wanted my photo to project. I used the ocean as the background of this magazine cover as it reminds me of a picnic that I often do with my friends at the beach by our university here in Laie. I used the words "perfectly grilled" to describe the bacon in the sandwich that I used in my magazine, as that is what describes excellent bacon when on a sandwich — not too soft, but not too crunchy.