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ENGLISH

SKIPPERS PASS

*Contains
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material*

Dramatic video for English-language learning

Intermediate Resource Book

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Maria Tarau and Michael Rabbidge

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INTRODUCTION TO THE TEACHING APPROACH

Approach to Discussion Lessons

The discussion sections draw inspiration from three sources, each linked, respectively, to *practical task purpose*, *theory-based task development*, and *task theme/content*. The first source of inspiration was experiences and observations of dry, non-interactive, non-communicative contexts, which can severely hinder the learner's ability to use English in every-day circumstances. Consequently, our practical purpose was to design engaging activities that connect the students to the contents and theme of each episode, while also appealing to their own experience and existing knowledge. This leads to a second source of inspiration, namely principles of the *communicative language teaching* (CLT) approach, with the design of activities drawing on the following three of Nunan's (1991) five principles of CLT:

- focusing on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language
- providing opportunities for learners to focus both on the language and on managing their learning process (particularly in the group work activities where learners coordinate and organise their own learning, as well as that of their group)
- viewing the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning

One or more of these principles heavily shapes each task, and this part of the book ends with a board game that links back to all discussion topics across the four lessons. The main point of departure from CLT theory is that by the time learners delve into discussion, they will have had ample opportunity to explore other facets of language in the previous sections.

Lastly, inspiration for the *content* of these tasks draws on the overarching *theme* of *Skippers Pass*: the supernatural, which in *Skippers Pass* receives a “tropical makeover” – an interesting twist on the European tradition of the “otherworldly”.

Suggestions for teaching:

1. Maximise the information students can draw on to communicate their own ideas:
 - a. Allow and even encourage the use mobile phones to prepare for more extensive information-sharing activities, such as talking about stories they are familiar with or movies they like;
 - b. Encourage this phone use to be **in English** – the point is for them to gain access to information for sharing; accessing it in English can speed this up.
2. When non-verbal communicative elements are incorporated into tasks (“make it scary!”), briefly demonstrate these to the students, so that they have a model of HOW we can “make a story scary” in English.
3. After demonstrating these elements, actively encourage free, dynamic and “dramatic” communication and expression, particularly during story circles and activities which incorporate voting on a group's performance. While this aspect may seem strange to students, particularly in some EFL contexts, this is common when native speakers communicate; inform students of this, and allow space for “fun” to be had during these dynamic learning tasks.

INTRODUCTION TO PRAGMATICS

Simply put, pragmatics is a field of study that considers the relationship between message, speakers and contexts. Speakers differentiate what they say and how they say it depending on the context. For instance, casual forms of speech will do for borrowing a pen from a classmate, but much more complex forms will probably be required to borrow a hundred dollars from a neighbor. Searle (1969, 1976), following the work of Austin (1962), coined the term 'speech act' and categorised speech act into five major types: representatives (e.g. assertions), directives (e.g. request), commissives (e.g. promises), expressives (e.g. apology) and declaratives (e.g. declarations).

Another approach to pragmatics can be found in politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987). Using Goffman's (1967) notion of 'face', Brown and Levinson attempted to explain 'politeness'. To them, politeness is a pragmatic scheme to build and maintain harmonious relationships amongst participants in conversation. Speaker and hearer constantly judge social distance between themselves, hearer's power against the speaker and how greatly the imposition weighs in the given culture (Brown and Levinson, 1987, pp. 76-77).

Using appropriate language facilitates interpersonal communication but is an especially challenging task for second language (L2) speakers. Various researchers have tackled language use in L2 conversation, including politeness analysis done on speech act studies (e.g. Kasper, 2008), and conversation analysis approaches (see Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) to topics such as turn-taking, sequencing and so forth (e.g. Markee, 2009; Wong and Waring, 2010). Collaboration can be realised as feedback between participants in the form of completions, clarifying questions or other types of acknowledgement that the participants have understood what their fellow communicators were saying (Tanskanen, 2006, p. 24). This view of Tanskanen's coincides with the interaction hypothesis that states that L2 learning is promoted by negotiation of meaning or corrective feedback such as clarification request, confirmation checks and recasts. Discourse markers (DMs) can be considered as one of these 'other types of acknowledging' discussed in Tanskanen (2006), as they are used in conversations to signal speakers' or hearers' intentions (Nakahama, 2018). For instance, *well* can have several functions. As is shown in Episode 2 of *Skippers Pass*, *well* can serve as a marker to 1) save time to delay the response, 2) show irritation, and 3) for pre-closing the conversation. Furthermore, L2 learners need to learn about how to *pre-open* conversation – that is, techniques to use before they even start a 'real' conversation. In this form of 'small talk', Brits are known for talking about 'weather' and Japanese people about 'weather' if not 'food'! Small talk facilitates the transition to 'real talk'.

Having knowledge of and gaining practice in pragmatics helps L2 learners to dive into real conversation in the target language without as much hesitation. However, advanced grammatical and lexical knowledge alone may not allow them to extend conversations, apologise, politely refuse, express deference, disagree, or recognise humour or sarcasm, to list a few interactional skills. Researchers have shown that these skills are acquired developmentally (Kasper & Rose, 2002) and that learners benefit from instruction (See Taguchi, 2015 for review of studies).

The approach taken in *Skippers Pass* combines both these principles: direct instruction and practice. An important approach taken here is the use of role plays. Insist on natural rather than 'dramatic' use. Teachers could come up with different content for each exercise by differentiating the weight of imposition, varying power and distance between the speaker and the hearer. Students can video record their short role plays and submit them for class discussion, providing one another with feedback. These short videos could even be combined to create an ongoing narrative.

APPROACH TO DRAMA TECHNIQUES

At least since the 1970s, the use of drama techniques has aroused considerable enthusiasm among the ELT community, even if its adoption has been sporadic and often fleeting. Maley and Duff's highly influential teacher resource book *Drama techniques: A resource book of communication activities for language teachers* first appeared in the 1970s and is now in its third edition. Later books, such as Wessels' (1987) teacher resource book and Kao and O'Neill's (1998) volume on process drama, have recently been joined by well-received publications by Alice Savage (e.g. 2018; 2019), among others. The appeal is obvious: learners put into practice what they have learned, develop fluency, and gain valuable learning experiences from the challenge of making themselves understood and interpreting others.

Nevertheless, it is probably fair to say that in many classes, there has been little progress since Kao and O'Neill noted that "a disappointingly large number [of teachers] seem to restrict their efforts to the simplest and least motivating and enriching approaches" (1998, p. 3). With the *Skippers Pass* series, like *Adrift* (Ryan et. al, 2018a, 2018b) before it, one of the goals has been to expand the options available for teachers wanting to utilize drama. Each lesson has at least one warm-up drama exercise aimed at loosening up and in some cases practicing a language skill. This is followed by the main task, which is either a process drama, story drama or hot seat activity.

The concept of process drama is perhaps the one that is most often misunderstood, and worth discussing here in a little more detail. Process drama is always unscripted, and participants take one role within the agreed setting, acting within character to explore a particular theme or situation. The focus is not on *product*, that is, it is not about the outcome in the sense of theatre or other creations for an audience; rather, it is on the *process* of being and behaving 'in character', and about what can be learned and experienced through it.

For this reason, there are then two key ground rules to establish. Firstly, participants need to consistently act in keeping with their character and the situation. They should never over-act, but rather, they should convincingly become the character.

Secondly, it is useful to have a 'time out' signal, where participants can initiate a freeze in the drama to attend to any problems. This may, for instance prove useful if a situation becomes messy, for instance if clarification is needed or if one participant feels that another is slipping out of character.

Another ground rule is one for the teacher: the teacher is not an observer but an active, even central, participant in the drama. In other words, they should be involved, and not as a director yelling 'take one' and 'cut', but by leading the way as one of the actors. The teacher brings language and other skills that can drive the drama, ensuring broad participation, and at times steering events.

In setting up a process drama, we have found two steps to be particularly valuable. The first is ensuring that sufficient time is spent establishing the scenario, the people involved and their basic motivations. This time is never wasted! A second tip is to plan ahead and encourage students to bring with them a piece of costume – a hat, a scarf, jewelry or jacket for instance. Prior to commencing the drama, we symbolically put on the piece of costume and at that moment we go into character.

APPROACH TO WRITING LESSONS

The approach taken with the different writing activities in the Skipper's Pass series is best described as eclectic. No one single approach dominates how the writing activities have been constructed. What they do have in common though is a belief that writing is not an activity that must be done alone. All activities encourage students to share ideas as well as feedback on each other's writing. Encouraging peer feedback and moving beyond traditional teacher dominated feedback is seen as a way of strengthening students' ability to improve as writers as they learn to reflect not just on their own competencies but on those of others with whom they share the learning environment. Peer feedback is therefore vital in creating collaborative learning environments as opposed to more competitive learning situations.

Process writing, where the focus is more on the writing process itself, is the approach taken in Episodes 2 and 3. Process writing encourages creativity and doesn't necessarily rely on writing models as guides. Instead, it requires brainstorming and collaboration during various stages of the writing process. Product writing, on the other hand, provides students with the opportunity to write more structured genres which are common in everyday writing. The activities here for writing web pages and series reviews present students with the occasion to attempt more modern genres of writing that students themselves are exposed to in everyday life. The mix afforded by these different types of activities provide teachers with opportunities to expose students to different kinds of writing, and the balance also allows for a focus on both accuracy as well as fluency in student writing.

WRITING: STUDENTS

Step one

Who are these people?

What were they doing in the episode?

Step two: Backstory

Although not major characters in *Skippers Pass*, Andrew and Lucky do have a backstory. Brainstorm who you think these people are, their relationship to each other, what they do, what they like, and why they are at *Skippers Pass* that day.



Step three: Backstory

Read each character's backstory and compare it to your own.

Hiker 1 (Andrew Much)

Age: 54 years

Renowned jazz musician Andrew Much is Canadian-born but emigrated to New Zealand in the early 1980s.

His nocturnal lifestyle took a toll on his health but with the encouragement of his family,

in particular his eldest son, Lucky Much,

Andrew has thrown himself into a fitness regime including hiking. The Skippers Pass route is known to Andrew through his wider circle of friends, many of whom he met as a member of the HiKings and Queens, a social group now numbering in the hundreds throughout New Zealand. The legend of Sophie Stevens, while slowly fading into the annals of time, is remembered by Andrew as a favourite story told around the area by local historians and in surrounding jazz clubs as far north as Pukekohe.



Hiker 2 (Lucky Much)

Age: 21 years

Lucky has had the blessing (and curse) of growing up the eldest son of a respected musician. It was Lucky and his mother (Andrew's second wife) that convinced Andrew to become more physically active and he joins his father on a regular basis on hiking expeditions. Lucky is a student of political science and a registered (junior) member of the New Zealand Socialist Party.

This is his first hike on the Skippers Pass loop.



PRAGMATICS: TEACHER

Close analysis of a scene: Part 1

In the scene examined here, Emma is anxious and so her responses come across as direct, blunt and uncooperative. For instance, her question below would normally be taken as a refusal to answer and as rebuffing Hiker 2's show of concern:

- 2 Hiker 2: Are you alright?
 3 Emma: Who are you?

As the scene continues, the hikers realize Emma is upset and possibly disorientated so they try to calm her down. However, Emma disregards the suggestion and provides a vague reason. The hikers try to help Emma by trying to take her arm. This part of the dialogue may be analyzed as:

Hiker 1:	Why not sit down for a minute and have a drink of water.	<i>Suggestion</i>
Emma:	I have to get home. You need to get out of here too.	<i>Disregard suggestion; reason provided Counter suggestion</i>
Hiker 1:	Slow down. Seems like you've had a bit of a fright.	<i>Direct command Provide a reason</i>
Emma:	Don't. Sorry.	<i>Direct command (urgency and fear) Apology for rudeness</i>

Students draft their own 'normal' response to such a situation. For instance:

- 1 Emma: No
 2 Hiker 2: Are you alright?
 3 Emma: Yeah I guess I'm a bit dehydrated and tired.
 4 Hiker 1: That's no good. Why not sit down for a minute and have a drink of water.
 5
 6 Emma: That actually sounds like a good idea.

Close analysis of a scene: Part 2

An approach to using these scenes with the students is outlined in the Teacher Notes for the corresponding section in Episode 2; see that section for more detail.

Get students to work silently, analyzing the scene for about 10 minutes. Then, either as a full class or in groups, get students to share what they notice. Again, emphasize that while answers are useful (and you and they can try to provide some), so is coming up with new questions; **once they have noticed something that occurs in spoken English, they are in a better position to keep noticing it and eventually learn from experience.**

In addition to the details outlined above about this scene, some further ideas that might be raised in the discussion are discussed below. A general, rather striking, feature of this scene is the lack of expected responses and complete adjacency pairs (i.e. pairs such as 'greeting + greeting', 'advice + acceptance/rejection').

PRAGMATICS: STUDENTS

Close analysis of a scene: Part 1

Look at the following dialogue from Scene 5 as Emma meets the hikers (again):

- 1 Emma: No.
- 2 Hiker 2: Are you alright?
- 3 Emma: Who are you?
- 4 Hiker 1: Why not sit down for a minute
- 5 and have a drink of water.
- 6 Emma: I have to get home.



In this scene, Emma was anxious because she is experiencing déjà vu. How would Emma react on an ordinary day? Re-write the scene, keeping only lines 2 and 4 as they are, with Emma reacting normally.

- 1 Emma: _____
- 2 Hiker 2: Are you alright?
- 3 Emma: _____
- 4 Hiker 1: Why not sit down for a minute
- 5 and have a drink of water.
- 6 Emma: _____
- 7 _____: _____
- 8 _____: _____
- 9 _____: _____
- 10 _____: _____

Part 2

- 1 Emma: No.
- 2 Hiker 2: Are you alright?
- 3 Emma: Who are you?
- 4 Hiker 1: Why not sit down for a minute
- 5 and have a drink of water.
- 6 Emma: I have to get home.
- 7 You need to get out of here too.
- 8 Hiker 1: Slow down.
- 9 Seems like you've had a bit of a fright.
- 10 Emma: Don't.
Sorry.

Role play

Develop and role play an unusual situation like the one above. A offers to help B with a problem, but B has more urgent things to do.



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Skippers Pass: Credit List

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