

## **Educational Game - “Let’s Go on Vacation:**

**Joel Michael Pope**

### **Overview**

Name: Let’s Go on Vacation.

This game is for kindergarten students, aged 5 - 6, in China. Students will work in groups of six (number adjustable). They are on a vacation and visiting many interesting places. These will include a zoo, beach and theme park. As a group, for each place, they will need to make a picture of it through miming and body language. All but one person will be in the picture. Props will be available also to help make the picture. As an example, for a zoo, one person might choose to be one particular animal, or a visitor, or an enclosure. It is up to the students. The student who is not involved in the picture will then have to describe it using English. When they have completed this, they can tick off this game and progress forward. For each place, the person describing will change.

### **Instructional Objective**

Team finishes their vacation, by visiting every place, with each student describing one scene created by their classmates, with an appropriate number of English sentences, and miming, or being involved in a group mime, of a relevant feature at each other place. As a group, they make a picture containing at least five different features at each destination.

#### SMART

**Specific** - Each group will complete the game as described above, ticking off all locations on an itinerary.

**Measurable** - Each students uses a specified number of English sentences to describe their location. (Differentiation can be applied here as they can be assigned a different number of English sentences based on their level). As a group, they will create five different features in each location.

**Achievable** - For the English element, students will be stretched (again, differentiation applied to give a particular level of challenge) as they are still developing confidence in expressing themselves and giving presentations in English. However, they have developing knowledge of descriptive sentence structures and vocabulary. They will need to reflect on their experiences, but will have knowledge of the places they are acting out.

**Relevant** - We are currently supporting students in developing their confidence to do presentations in English, also preparing for an English drama. In the drama, we are building up their ability to use action and expression as well as just saying their lines. We are also beginning to plan for possible field

trips as part of our kindergarten graduation, after which we will have summer vacation.

**Time-bound** - Students will be given 10 minutes at each location. 8 minutes to discuss and prepare, followed by 2 minutes for presentation. (Time can be adjusted.) Depending on final number of locations, scope for game to be done over two sittings.

In our kindergarten, we don't follow any core or state standards specifically as we have a student emergent curriculum. However, in our communication with our elementary school - we are a K12 school - we have discussed that basic ability to express themselves and communicate freely, by making descriptions or outlining their wants and needs should be a key priority to support them for when they enter Grade 1. The game provides an opportunity to practice communication and expression.

In terms of our emergent curriculum, we are currently preparing for a class performance. As part of this, we are guiding students to enhance their acting skills, by thinking about and showing the relevant action, body language and expression as well as simply saying their lines.

## **Learners**

The learners are 5-6 years old and in their final year of kindergarten. They are all Chinese nationals and have English as their second language. However, our school is in its first year. This meant they all came from different kindergartens previously. (Kindergarten in China is for three year - age 3, to age 6.) Due to this and different levels of exposure outside of school, there is a big variety in levels of English, with both students with high fluency, and students who are still able to communicate with a small number of basic sentences.

Having been at different kindergartens previously, they also had different educational experiences, which goes along with their different learning styles. However, they do all enjoy creativity and movement and expression, relevant to the game.

We are a high fee paying school and hence all students come from high socioeconomic backgrounds. However, they do all have very different family lives. Some have siblings and some don't. Some spend much time with their parents and regularly go on outings and engage in many extracurricular activities. Others, who for example have parents working in other cities, spend lots of time with grandparents or housekeepers and have fewer such experiences. Hence, many of them may bring different levels of relevant background experience to the game.

## **Motivation**

From a motivational standpoint, the students are very active and really enjoy expressing themselves in creative ways. As a simple example, as refocusing activities, I will often say things such as "Everyone show me 3." or "Everyone show me a circle." and they will do so in a number of different ways - some arranging different parts of their body to be different shapes; some drawing the shape with their finger, hand, leg, head or even tongue; some independently deciding to work with a friend to make the

shape with their bodies. They enjoy taking ideas off each other, and as a class group, enjoy the opportunity to mime in free and creative ways. The acting aspect of the game will appeal to this motivation.

As their English level is developing, as a class in general, students are enjoying expressing themselves and communicating in English more and more and continuing to do so naturally. They are most motivated to do so when they are able to describe themselves and their friends, or their work or their friends work. The game will appeal to this. Something to be conscious of on this note is that the describing student may still want to be part of the picture. There can be flexibility to allow them to be if they do really wish.

Some students are still building up confidence in expressing English freely. Working with friends, in a fun, exciting and perhaps comical situation will provide a relaxed environment for practicing.

Finally, students in general in the group are very sociable and enjoy doing activities with their friends, an opportunity this game provides.

## **Context of Use**

With regard to the preparation for our English drama class performance, this game sits naturally at the point where students have first practiced and now become familiar with their lines.

The next step is considering how the role will be brought to life through action, mime and expression. They will need to get into their characters' shows and think about how they will be acting, or feeling.

This game too requires them as they mime to think carefully about the features of what they are miming, and if it is a person or animal, what they would be doing or how they would be acting.

Along with the game, similar activities to practice expression and miming will be done in class.

Therefore overall, the game will have the role of supporting the development of mastery in terms of acting.

To enhance the value that will come from it, as the game is introduced, students will discuss the things they might need to think about when deciding how to mime. After the game also, there could be a circle time, where students reflect on it and how they were miming or acting, and then how this could be related back to the class performance.

With regards to the English language, the game will also support the development of confidence in expression and fluency in giving descriptions, which are skills being built ready for entering elementary school and beyond.

On the note of English, due to the different levels, this is where differentiation will need to be brought in. Students with developing English can only be required to give a smaller number of sentences, naming features, saying what they like at the place, and using some adjectives if possible. Students with higher levels of English can give a greater number of sentences, including in addition, how the different features might relate to each other, and more detail for what they might like to do at the place, or how they would feel.

Note here that students may not know the names of all vocabulary words for the features being mimed. In this case, they don't have to name everything. They have flexibility to say different things, for example, describing what some of the features are like. Students will be given the freedom to make a description and express themselves as they wish, as the goal is fluent and authentic use of English.

Relevant language and vocabulary can be reviewed for all at this stage in preparation for the game.

For further differentiation, basic sentence scaffolds, modeling and other visual prompts can be used as support. Stronger students in the group can also support students with lower levels of English to prepare descriptions if necessary. In terms of setting up the picture they will be acting out, students within the group can also support each other. Where necessary, students or groups can be shown pictures of the places they are acting out, or given models as examples.

## **Scope**

In its most basic form, the game can be played in less than two hours. However, there will be preparation also. Finally, a thirty minute circle time after to reflect on key points that can be taken away for our performance.

The game will include English vocabulary related to places. Also a range of sentence structures, including naming objects, giving adjectives to describe objects, stating preferences, and stating how objects relate to each other. (Note that although sentence scaffolds can be provided for differentiation and support, the goal is natural, authentic, independent and fluent English use, which many students are now capable of, so there will not be "target sentence structures" so to speak.)

Secondly, dramatic expression will be practiced.

Working in a team, social skills of team collaboration and support will also be covered.

Finally, reflection skills, as students reflect on the game and relate it back to the drama afterwards.

However, there will be scope to make it bigger. Formative assessment can be done throughout the game and student language expression taken further by the teacher asking the group further probing questions throughout on the reasons behind their choice for acting in a particular way (formative assessment for dramatic expression) and about the scene they have created (language expression).

It is always great for students to finish the game with a product. They will have their itinerary. However, more evidence can be kept. Photos and videos will be taken throughout the game, and students can support this. Students will then be able to present as a collage or poster. They will also have the opportunity to express their thoughts on what they have done through creative work of their choice, for example, drawing a picture of it. Together, these will practice use of technology and creativity.

There is also scope for students to further redesign or modify the game themselves. Ideas can be discussed with them. Maybe they can change the holiday locations? Maybe they would want to change it to places in town? Maybe they would want to change it to countries they know (maybe a little challenging)? Maybe they would want to use their first language - Chinese - so that more detailed expressions can be given.

## **Object of the Game**

Students are on vacation. However, this is a vacation that can culminate in a final special event. Students are to visit all locations available as part of the holiday program.

They will have half a day to visit each location, which will equate to 10 minutes in real game play time (time adjustable).

At each place they both tick off a place on an itinerary. However, for added sense of achievement, at each place, they will also get a piece of coloured string that acts as a wristband. As they walk out of the room to indicate leaving the place, exit music will play.

Once they have visited every location, they will have a completed itinerary and a full set of wrist bands. With this, they can get their ticket to the special event. The tickets themselves can be designed by students in advance.

The special event will be held in the large activity area on the top floor of the ELC. It will be a sequence of the student's favorite games, followed by a balloon race, with balloons containing contact details for getting back in touch with where the balloon has got to. Balloons will be released from the roof of the kindergarten.

Note that a balloon race is an event in which every participant releases a balloon. The balloons all have details of the event and information stating that anyone finding the balloon should contact to say their location. The owner of whichever balloon officially (we are contacted) goes the furthest, is the winner.

New details based on feedback and suggestions given in green. Many thanks to my instructor, Margaret, for the suggestion to make a bigger and clearer winning condition and to further emphasize stages of progression through the game.

## **Design Details**

As I now give a fuller outline of the stages of the game, enhancements based on feedback and suggestions from my cohort members are again given in green.

Note that some details will be flexible and adaptable so as to enable as much ownership by students as possible. Preparation pace will be adjusted based on student needs and how they are coping. Similarly, based on the number of props students will need to set up, there will be flexibility for the time at each location to vary. However, the emphasis is not on craft or design of props, so set-up should be quick. This will be emphasized.

In the days leading up to the playing of the game, students will regularly play miming games as transition activities in class, miming creatures and objects. After a little practice, this activity can become student lead, allowing more autonomy.

To set the scene for the main game, it will be noted to students that we will be going on holiday within our school. Students can have the opportunity to discuss holidays in small groups. An activity can be done in which students will describe a dream holiday. They can have the freedom to write or draw - their choice. This practices the 21st century skills of creativity and communication. English will be practiced, preparing for the English part of the learning objectives of the game. This will take one long circle time session.

Next, it will be emphasized that we will go on holiday and we must visit a number of locations in order to qualify for the special event. We must visit all parts of each location in order to get a wrist band and get the ticket to the main event. In order to ensure we have been there, we must be able to make a picture with our bodies and describe it in English. We will practice drawing large scenes as a class by each of us miming. Thank you Margaret for the suggestion of rehearsing different aspects of the game before playing. Here, students will be practicing for the miming part of the learning objectives. Another circle time will be used for this.

Here are some examples of what the student mime might look like from similar activities done previously. Between them here, the students are miming features of a zoo and a beach. Here they are only using their bodies, no props.





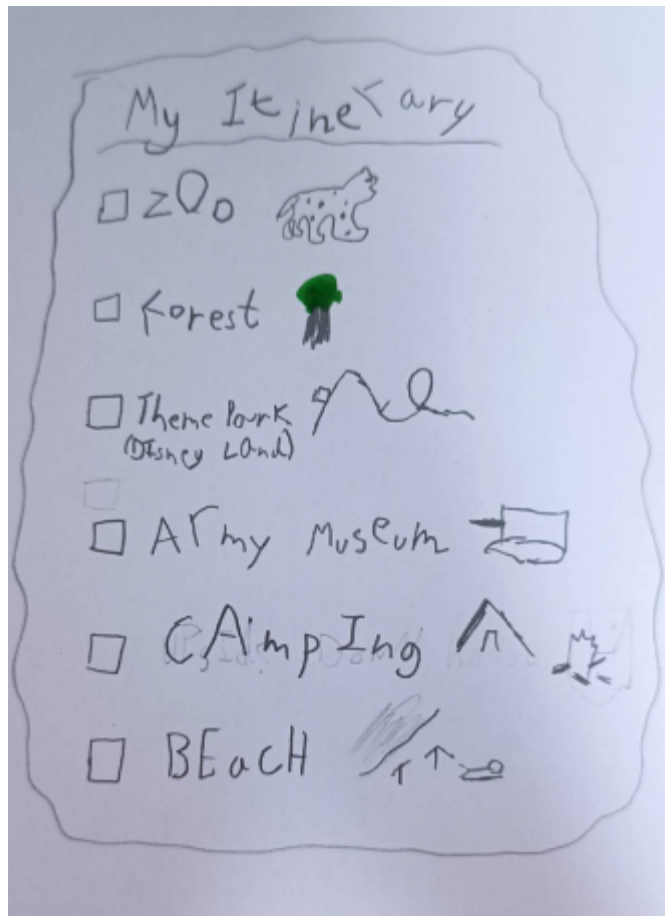




Next, it will be time to discuss the locations we will go to in the game. Players will be put in groups. They will discuss and each person should suggest at least one possible location. Thank you Patricia for the suggestion of allowing students to discuss and decide locations, even in the original playing of the game. It will help drive further student ownership. Teacher will give guidance as necessary. Students will be practicing the 21st century skills of collaboration and communication here. Again, in terms of time, at least one circle time can be used here.

If students wish, they will now have the opportunity to go away and make itineraries themselves. This can be done during project time. Each individual within the group can make one.

Here is what a student-made itinerary might look like.



Now that students have their itineraries all ready to go, the next stage is the preparation for the final playing of the game. For necessary locations, we can use a circle time to first discuss and then go on a virtual tour. (Many thanks Patricia for this suggestion.) At this time, key vocabulary relating to the places can be practiced in English, preparing for the meeting of the English language part of the objectives. In preparation for the presentation in the game, students can also practice making descriptions of these places. Sentence scaffolds will be provided for the students who need it. This can take a small number of circle times.

Now it is time to do a first-round practice for the real game. Students will visit the school store room to collect cardboard boxes and any other possibly useful props. Now, in their groups, they will make a picture of their most popular location, using themselves and props. Extra time than in the game and guidance will be given as necessary. A photo of them miming will be taken. Coming back, they can practice describing it in English. This will help with preparing for meeting the English language part of the main learning objective. These two activities together can be two sessions on the same day, close together so the scene is fresh in the students memory.

As a final preparation, students can brainstorm together any extra props or costumes they may need. Perhaps they can bring some from home. Perhaps the teacher can arrange to have some ordered and bought. Thanks Diana for the great suggestions here. It will bring the game to life even more and give students increased ownership.

Following this preparation, it will be time for the playing of the game. Students will have all of the props they want now.

The game will take place on the second and third floors of the kindergarten, which contain many empty classrooms. Each classroom will be used for one vacation location. The props will have been put in the room beforehand.





A large space will be marked out in each location for students to use. Using the bodies of all but one of the group and their props, they will make the picture of the location. They will have eight minutes for this. In the following two minutes, the final student will describe the scene in English.

In advance, each students will be given the specified number of points they have to make (based on their English level) and possible things to include, based on their English level. However, again these are a guide if necessary. The focus and push is for authentic, independent and creative use of English. An example is here.

## Place Descriptions

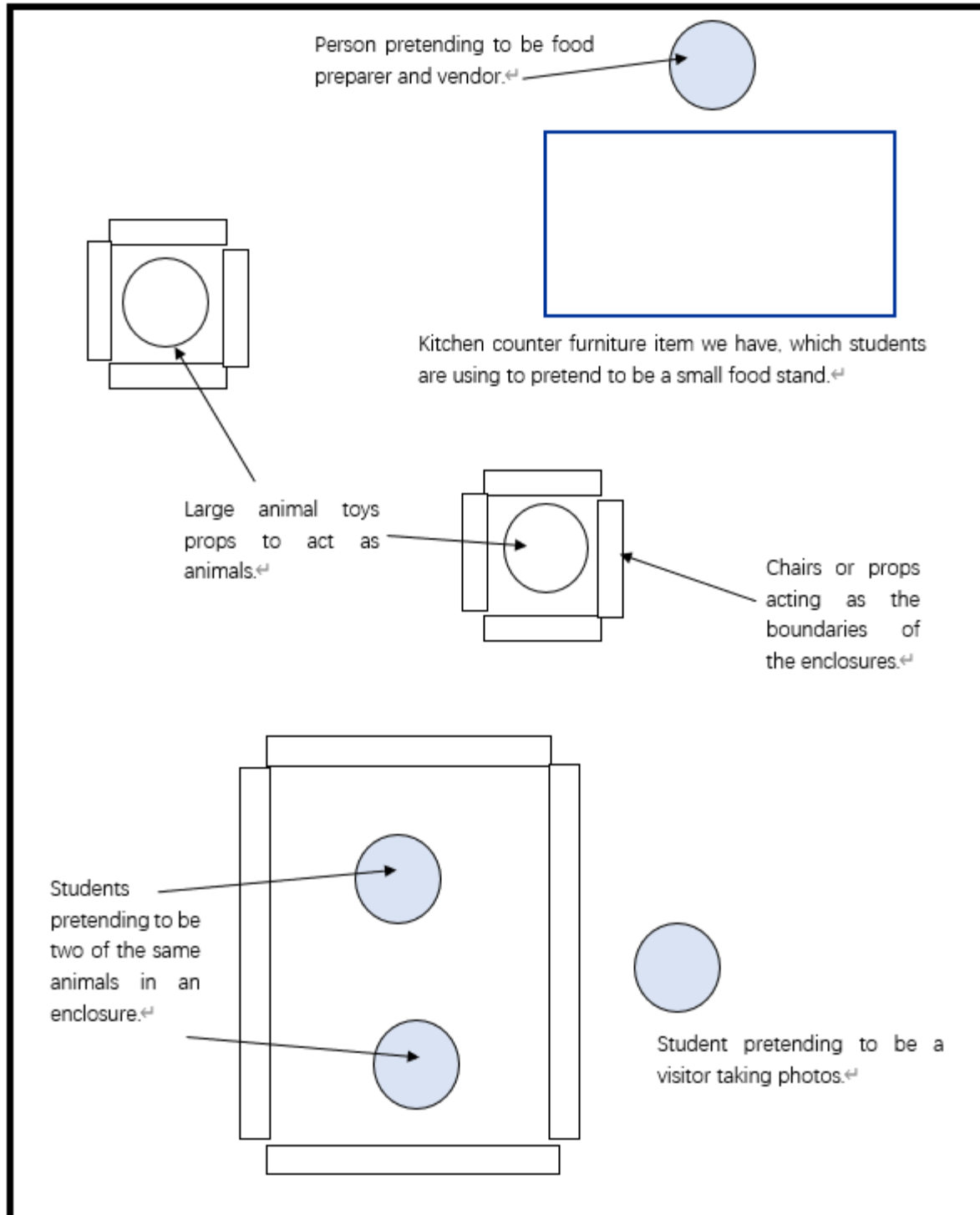
(What to Include)

Please say 8 things.

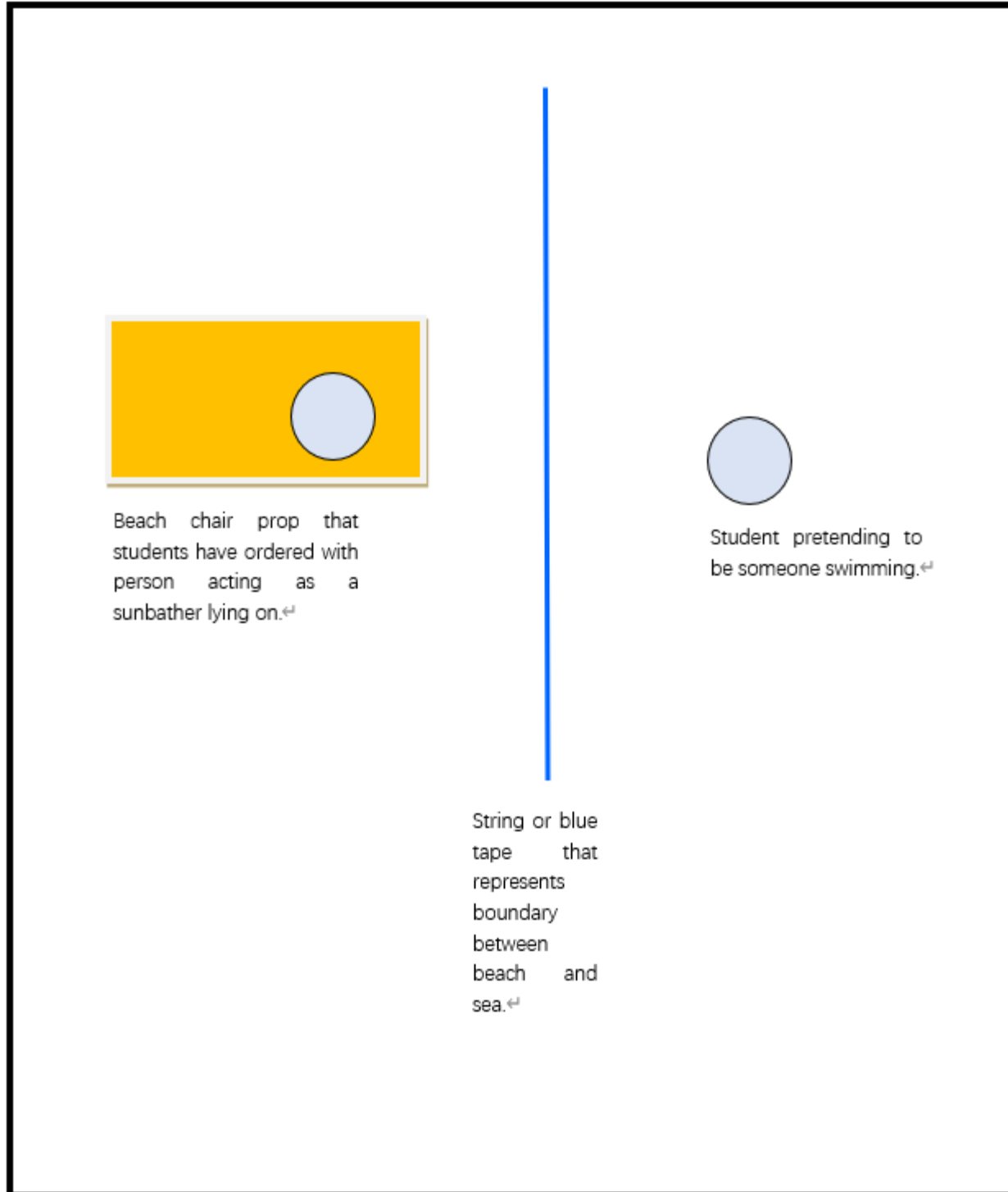
You can include.

- Names of things and what they look like.
- Do you like going to this place? Why or why not?
- Talk about a time when you went?

Here is a diagram showing a possibility for how the students might make a zoo.



Here is a diagram showing a possibility for part of how the students might make a beach.





There will however be some flexibility to the timings to increase suspense if the time is proving more than necessary for students, or to give more time if the group as a whole or students doing the describing need it. This will be another way of bringing in differentiation.

Sentence starters will be provided as scaffolds for students who need it. The strongest students from the group can go first, so that they can model for others.

Here are possible sentence starters. Vocabulary and adjective cards can be provided also.

Place Descriptions (Sentence Starters)

This is a \_\_\_\_\_.

This is a \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_

I like \_\_\_\_\_.



I don't like \_\_\_\_\_.



The \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_.

If any students need support, the other students in the group can help the describer prepare. So that the students don't have to stay in position during this time, a photo can be taken, immediately sent electronically and put up on the big screen in the classroom. Other students can then have a chance to help the student prepare before the description is given. This will also be a possibility for allowing flexibility if the describing student wants to be in the picture too.

Once the describing student has finished, the teacher may ask further probing questions on the students choices for the picture they painted, or about what is happening in the scene - to all students - as a method of formative assessment about their awareness of their acting and also broader aspects of their English development.

The key rule will be that only the student allocated to give the description is able to give it. If other students have supported in preparation, once the describing student begins, the others will have to remain quiet. By the final two minutes of the preparation time (6 minutes in to the 8 minutes), each student must have chosen the object they themselves are going to be and they can't change. (They don't need to plan completely in advance, with what they will be so as to allow more flexibility and spontaneity during the playing of the game.)

In each of the rooms, students will not be allowed to touch another student, even as part of the mime. Similarly, they will only be able to move by walking, not running. These rules are for safety.

Note that students with a range of special needs who may find the more abstract nature of the game challenging could still be involved in the miming, but could be shown concrete pictures of exactly what the object they want to mime looks like. This will help make it more concrete. When they are doing the description part, there could be the possibility of them using a visual scaffold of a real-life picture of the place to help make it more concrete. If students with any physical impairments were to play, support could be given to the group as necessary to allow the individual to participate in the miming safely and appropriately.

Once the describing student has completed their specified number of sentences of the description, the group will have visited that location. They will tick off that location on the itinerary, get the wristband, and leave to varying dramatic music.

They will also get the coloured wrist band for that location.





Depending on the finalized number of locations to visit, the game may be played over multiple sittings, to allow for maximum student concentration. Three sittings and three days maximum however, so that excitement is not lost for the concept.

Once the vacation is complete, it is time for the ticket to the special event.

## **Design Process**

In the original preparation for the design of this game, I did a lot of research into the difference between gamification and game-based learning. This really helped me understand that the challenge in game design is thinking of and fleshing out an idea whereby the skills related to the learning objectives are being practiced through intrinsic motivation as the purpose of the game. You do not simply try to bring game-like elements into a normal learning activity, with these simply being an addition to increase motivation.

I had much experience in the latter. The former is really not easy.

I had initially started with a different idea. I really wanted a game that would focus on social skills, while possibly practicing English and acting also. I had thought of a game, where students would work in pairs. One student would need to choose an emotion and a reason for while they are feeling that emotion. The other would have to attempt to describe the feelings and reasons in English. In particular, this would have helped learn to observe and read how other people are feeling or responding to you, so that you can act appropriately, something that is challenging for many of my students, even relative to their age.

However, I felt there was a lot of subjectivity in the concept, and it could especially be a challenge to make rules slightly clearer. If all emotions and reason were chosen by the teacher, this would be less student autonomy, even if things were clearer. This could in turn mean lower levels of engagement. Nonetheless, this might also be a concept to try to take further also.

The challenge was trying to find something that was practicing English, acting and social skills, and also getting a game that students would enjoy and buy in to.

I had a big a-ha moment when reflecting on activities we had done not too long ago. We actually ran a drama workshop for the class at the beginning of this semester, where we ran a very similar activity - miming a place - as shown in the photos in the previous section. Students had really enjoyed it. I suddenly realized that the activity could be taken further by having students practice English descriptions. Working in groups, they would still be practicing social skills.

A point that had to be overcome was that in the original activity many students had been in the photo. Doing it as a whole group, could make it more difficult for all students to have a chance to do a description uniquely and authentically. After some thinking, I landed on the idea that students could

be in small groups, and props used also.

From there, the original ideas flowed very quickly. A vacation. Different locations and an itinerary. Differentiated goals based on English level.

My research showed the importance of enhancing games by allowing students to be able to have a product at the end and to use it for as much formative assessment as possible, asking probing questions of students as you go. Hence, I included opportunity for the latter throughout the game, and the former at the end of the game, as outlined in the scope.

As outlined in the previous sections, feedback from my instructor and peers gave me ideas for how I could enhance the game further. Originally, I would have allowed students to adapt the game afterwards, but I realized that allowing students to choose even in the first playing could increase engagement and buy-in. I realized that to allow the game to run smoothly, due to its different elements, there should be preparation for the different parts in its lead up. I realized that the game could be more personal by allowing students to bring their own props and costumes from home.

Finally, the concept of having a clear win-condition, with build-up towards this. This took a little thinking. However, eventually I decided on adding in the wrist bands, as well as simply the itineraries. Also, the build up towards the special event at the end.

I incorporated these suggestions as I moved to the full “Design Details”.

### **References**

All ideas and work are my own.

I quote references however for the research I did on game-based learning, the difference between game-based learning and gamification and how games could be used for assessment, which helped me in thinking of the idea for this game, and then developing it.

Edutopia (2016), Using Games for Classroom Assessment. Retrieved April 2023 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-BBsPI9GSo>

Falciani, I. (2020) Game-Based Learning: What Is It? GBL vs Gamification: Types and Benefits. <https://www.teacheracademy.eu/blog/game-based-learning/>

Template notes: The elements and outline of this template borrow significantly from templates used in Dr. Bernie Dodge's course Exploratory Learning Through Educational Simulation and Games at San

Diego State University, <http://edweb2.net/ldt670/>.

References

Dodge, B. (n.d.). EDTEC 670: Exploratory Learning Through Educational Simulation and Games. Retrieved December 28, 2014, from <http://edweb2.net/ldt670/>

Dodge, B. (2002), ET670 Design Template. Retrieved 2002, from <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/courses/edtec670/FinalProjectsF02.html>. (URL no longer valid.)