



Homophones and First Grade ELL Students

by Melanie Ann Kirschner, 2015 CTI Fellow
Albemarle Road Elementary

This curriculum unit is recommended for:
First Grade

Keywords: Language, ESL, ELL, Homonyms, Comprehension, Gesticulations, Sounds

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis:

What would happen if you moved to another country and enrolled in school there? Most likely, you would not be able to understand what was being taught as you would struggle to comprehend what was being asked of you. This curriculum unit is designed for those students whose native language is not English. Students will study homonyms, words that sound the same but have different meanings (i.e.: duck the bird and duck under a table). English Language Learners can be tripped up by words with different meanings so this unit is designed to expose the students to these words and give them a chance to begin using clues in the sentence to pick out which word is being used. The students will read books that contain homonyms, play homonym bingo and charades, and then create and publish their own homonym stories. Throughout the unit, the students will be recording homonyms in their interactive journals and illustrating them to aid comprehension.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 40 students in First Grade.

I give permission for the Institute to publish my curriculum unit and synopsis in print and online. I understand that I will be credited as the author of my work.

Homophones and First Grade ELL Students

Melanie Ann Kirschner

Introduction

When I was going into the seventh grade, I was given an opportunity to take a second language for the first time. My grandmother had come to America from Germany after she married my grandfather, but she had never tried to teach me any German. So I was excited to get a chance to learn (and I hoped to become fluent) in another language. In my school district, we had a choice of three: Spanish, French, or Latin. I can't remember now which language I had wanted to take (I think it was French), but I was placed in the Latin class. I was disappointed, but quickly began to realize how close Latin was to the English language. I also had noticed that some of the other languages had words that looked familiar in each language and I began to wonder just how connected these languages really were.

I teach first grade ESL at Albemarle Road Elementary School in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School system (CMS). CMS is one of the largest school districts in the country and has received recognition as being one of America's best.¹ We are a Title-1, Kindergarten through 5th grade school with approximately 1100 students. Of those 1100 students, 96% qualify for free and reduced meals. Our population is very diverse, with approximately 44% Hispanic, 42% African American, 5% White and 8% Asian. Also, approximately half of the 1100 students are limited English proficient, which means that they speak another language in the home. Spanish is the language that is predominantly spoken, but there are many other languages that can be found in my school. We also have a growing refugee population since we have been getting students from strife-affected areas such as the Sudan, Congo, Liberia, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma and El Salvador.

I have been at my school for 10 years now. I began as a Kindergarten teacher and only recently made the switch to ESL teacher and was placed in first grade. I work with 5 of the 10 first grade teachers (I have a partner in first grade that works with the other 5 teachers in our grade). I have 66 students that I serve with varying levels of English ability. My students also come to me with different first languages, such as Spanish, Nepali, Burmese, Chin, Chuukese, and Bemba. I serve my kids with a mixture of pullout groups, where I take a small group of students back to my classroom to work with them, and co-teaching, where the classroom teacher and I share responsibility teaching their class. My school has many staff members on hand that speak Spanish; it makes it easier

¹ "Media Room." *Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools*. N.p., n.d. Web

to communicate with those families since we send home translated handouts and notices every time we send something home and make phone calls as necessary. This year, we have some access to a translator line that can help us contact parents who speak languages other than Spanish. We are able to call a number and contact a translator who then calls the parent to have a conference call. This way, I am able to inform parents, in their own language, of their student's progress or of any concerns I may have.

Rationale:

“Of all mankind’s manifold creations, language must take pride of place. Other inventions - the wheel, agriculture, sliced bread - may have transformed our material existence, but the advent of language is what made us human.”² Humans are unique in that over time, we have created a language that allows us to communicate with each other. We have ways in which to convey our wants, needs, and emotions that do not rely on grunts and gestures.

Language is a pattern of sounds (phonemes) that are then put together into morphemes. These morphemes then follow a grammatical structure that allows us to communicate and be able to understand each other. Burling says, “Comprehension, rather than production, was the driving force for the evolution of the human ability to use language.”³ If there was no comprehension, then we would have no language. Without comprehension, why should we speak to each other? As Burling said, “If no one else was around with the skills to understand, what could the first speaker have hoped to accomplish with her first words?”⁴ It would have been a waste of time if we had all of this language with no means of understanding what someone was trying to say.

To aid comprehension, however, we as humans use facial expressions and hand movements. These movements are called gesticulations and we use them without thought many times. How many times have you seen someone from afar and you could understand what that person was trying to say, even though you could not hear a word that was saying? While gestures alone do not constitute a language, they help the listener to comprehend how someone feels. Burling says, “We communicate with several other kinds of gestures and vocalizations, including the intonations of the voice, the

² Deutscher, Guy. *The Unfolding of Language An Evolutionary Tour of Mankind's Greatest Invention*. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005), 1

³ Burling, Robbins. *The Talking Ape*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4

⁴ Burling, *The Talking Ape*, 20

gesticulations of the hands, and even with instrumental gestures that are not intended to communicate at all.”⁵

My students have already learned a language, whether it be Spanish, French, Burmese, or Russian first. Now they are taking what they have previously learned and trying to put the ‘rules’ they have learned to English and many times it does not sound right as each language’s structure can be different. As we learn a language, meaning is learned through what we have been exposed to. According to Gee, “the meanings of words, phrases, and sentences are always situated, that is, customized to our actual contexts.”⁶ For example, the word coffee has a different meaning in ‘I spilled the coffee, get the broom’ than ‘I spilled the coffee, get a broom.’

In that manner of thinking, then my job as an ESL teacher is to guide my students through new situations in which they will learn how to use context with their experiences to build their vocabulary in order to increase comprehension. The most widely practiced way of teaching English as a Second Language students is with content-based instruction. Content-based instruction is when “the focus is on making the language meaningful and on getting the student to communicate in the target language.”⁷ It gives the student a chance to speak in the target language (English) and express their thoughts and opinions on what we have learned.

Objectives/Standards

My goal for this unit is to introduce my English as Second Language students to homophones. While learning a new language is tough, the fact that we have so many words that sound the same but mean different things makes it even harder for them to grasp and gain understanding of the language.

The students have to be aware that words such as “duck” can have different meanings in different situations. Most children understand the word duck to mean the bird that quacks and that it can also mean to move your head or top part of your body quickly down to avoid being hit.⁸ They may not know that it is spelled exactly the same way. Without knowing that, someone may find it confusing when they see it in writing, but they don’t understand the context of how it is used.

⁵ Burling, *The Talking Ape*, 44

⁶ Gee, James Paul. "Reading as Situated Language: A Sociocognitive Perspective." *Journal Of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 2001: 714-725

⁷ Fromkin, Victoria, Robert Rodman, and Nina Hyams. *An Introduction to Language*. (Boston: Wadsworth, 2014), 313

⁸ n.d. *Cambridge Dictionaries*. Accessed November 2, 2015

Along with teaching them that words that sound the same can have different meanings, comes the need for comprehending what word is chosen for the situation. Students need to learn strategies to use in order to figure out which meaning is being used. They need to be taught to pick out clues as to which word is being used in that situation. This way, they will be able to be more successful in learning the language without being confused by the meanings of words.

My students will not only be reading and speaking homophones, but they will be given a chance to write stories using what they have learned about homophones. WIDA, a non-profit cooperative group whose “purpose is to develop standards and assessments that promote educational equity for English language learners”⁹, has standards that focus on listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Throughout our reading and discussions, they will meet all four of the standards. The writing component will also help me to see if they understand what has been taught and where there may be a need for some re-teaching.

Teaching Strategies

Socratic Seminar

Socratic Seminar, as defined by the Northwest Association for Biomedical Research, is “a group conversation in which the participants work together to achieve a deeper understanding about the ideas and values in a text.”¹⁰ The teacher, since my students are in first grade, will act as a facilitator to their discussion, guiding their learning by asking open-ended questions. If the students ask a question, she will answer them back by asking a question of her own. The teacher should have a list of open-ended questions prepared ahead of time so that she can help her students start their conversation (with first graders, this is very important as sometimes they do not know how to begin a conversation connected to a topic) (see Appendix 2 for examples).

In order to have these deep conversations, it is necessary to have some procedures in place so that everyone gets a chance to share their information. The first procedure she has is to have all her students come to the carpet and sit in their ‘sharing circle’. The sharing circle occurs when the students are sitting on the carpet on a letter (the letters run around the outside edge of the carpet) where they are facing the middle. There are three sides that the students are allowed to sit on because the last side is where the teacher sits so that she can guide the conversation.

⁹ n.d. *WIDA Consortium*. Accessed November 2, 2015

¹⁰ n.d. *Northwest Association for Biomedical Research*. Accessed October 15, 2015

Conversation is the most important part of the Socratic Seminar, so there must be steps put into place to ensure that there is a conversation, not just people shouting out. In class, the teacher will utilize the ‘Share Bear’. When a student has the ‘Share Bear’, they are the only one who may share their thoughts, feelings, ideas. In order to get a turn with ‘Share Bear’, the students must listen to each other and raise their hands only when the first child has finished speaking. That child will then pass the ‘Share Bear’ on to the next student. Once the students get the hang of waiting for their turn to talk, the ‘Share Bear’ can be either kept or phased out. Also she needs to remind her students to respect each other; there are no bad ideas or thoughts.

Socratic seminar will be used to help students gain understanding of homophones by allowing them to speak in English and talk about what they have seen and read. They will be given a chance to talk about what homophone interested them or ones that they didn’t quite understand. It gives them a chance to use their context clues to figure out word meaning and also be able to share with their friends how they figured it out.

Journals

Journals give students a chance to process their thoughts about what they have read or what they have discussed. After a Socratic Seminar where a lot of material is covered, it gives the student a chance to process that information and pick the piece that sticks out to them and that they may want to focus on or remember. If students are given an opportunity to write down what has been discussed, they would, “Through writing – and drawing as well – express and expand their thinking and improve their ability to reflect”.¹¹ The teacher then can assess how well the student understood the topic and guide their lesson for the following day to help them understand the topic.

The students will use the journals to create lists of homonyms that they have learned. They will be able to record them in a way that will help them remember them as well as illustrate pictures to go along with the word pairs that will help them to remember them. Also, by writing everything down in their journal, they are able to go back and reference their work anytime they feel the need to. They can also go back and add more if they feel they need to record more.

Technology

Technology abounds in nearly every aspect of life nowadays from personal computers, to cell phones to iPads or other tablets. With all of this technology around, it is necessary to

¹¹ Pinnell, Gay Su, and Irene C.Fountas."Writing about Reading."In *The Continuum of Literacy Learning Grades PreK - 8*. 2008. (Reprint, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2011), 74

incorporate it into the classroom to help students learn. If teachers have a Smartboard in their classrooms they can use it to help students gain a better understanding homophones. They can create Smart Notebook lessons that give the students a chance to come up to the board and interact by moving objects into categories or as a fill in the blank that the students can check to see if they are right by themselves.

The teacher can also utilize the app Story Creator during this unit. Story Creator will allow students a chance to use pictures from the internet or pictures they have taken to illustrate their homophone stories. I have noticed that a lot of my students don't like to write because they don't know how to draw the things that they want to write about. By using Story Creator, the students can then focus on what they want to say instead of worrying how to draw a car or a person or an animal. Story Creator also lets them record themselves while reading it so that they can listen to each other as well as themselves.

Turn and Talk

Turn and talk is an excellent reading strategy that allows all students a chance to digest reading material as well as to give them a chance to make predictions as to what will happen next. Turn and talk is being used a lot during interactive read alouds as a way to teach students traits of good readers.

Turn and talk works well when the teacher gets to a part in a book that they really want their students to notice and she points it out to them, but asks them a question about before the teacher has them turn and talk. For example, if the teacher notices while reading a book of homonyms that there is a picture of a moose sitting at a dining table, the teacher might say, "Look at this picture. Does that seem right to you? Turn and talk to your partner." While listening to students talk, the teacher can also ask them, "What do you think would make it look right?" Then she can give them a few minutes to discuss and then bring them back together and let them share what they discussed.

Charades

Charades will be utilized as a way to teach the words to the students by having them get up and moving. It is well known that we, as students, do not all learn the same way. Some students are visual learners, some are auditory learners and some students are kinesthetic learners. Movement helps them to remember what is being taught as well as makes it fun for all students. The use of charades in teaching homophones will be described in more detail later in the unit.

Classroom Activities

These lessons are designed to give first grade ESL students exposure to homophones that they will encounter while learning English. The lessons are designed to give students a

chance to learn and use words that they may know in one context i.e.: duck as a bird, but not in another i.e.: duck as to bend over. As these students are beginning English learners, there will be a lot of materials used to help illustrate the different word meanings. A complete list of materials and when to use them is included in the Resource section. My unit consists of five lessons that run 45 minutes apiece.

Lesson 1 – Introduction

We will begin our unit by reading a story, *The King Who Rained* by Fred Gwynne and introduce the goal of our unit, which is to learn about words that sound the same and look the same, but mean different things. I would then introduce the word “homophone” to my students so they know what it is called that we are learning. Before reading, we will look at the cover and discuss what they see. I want them to notice that the king in the story is floating in the sky and rain is coming from him. I want to start a discussion about why that doesn’t make sense, but that it sounds right. While reading, I will give my students chances to turn and talk with their partners to discuss what they see. Afterwards, I will return to the book, asking my students to listen carefully to see if they can find any other words that sounded right, but didn’t look right in the book.

After reading the book, I will then turn to my students and ask them to name some of the words that they found while listening to the story. While they are sharing, I will be writing down everything they say on chart paper. As I am writing it down, we are discussing what they think the author meant. I will attempt to draw a picture of what the word means so that the students can look back and remember what had been discussed. Next to the word from the story, we will write the word that should have been in the story with an attempt to illustrate the meaning of that word as well. After we have finished recording all our words, I will lead a discussion on how we can tell when we need to use one word or the other. I want my students to use clues located within the sentence to be able to determine which word should be used.

Then I will pass out the students’ interactive notebooks and have them record the words with their homophone and illustrations as well. This way the students will always have a record of the words that they have learned and they can record it in a way that they can always look back and remember what they learned. Also, we will include a short sentence so that they can remember what clues they used to decipher which word was used. The lesson will conclude with each student picking a word off the chart and creating a sentence using that word (since they are ELL’s, they may just repeat the sentence we came up with together or they may try to create their own). This will also give me a chance to informally assess my students to see if they understood homophones.

Lesson 2 – Common Homophones

We will begin our lesson with another read aloud. This time we will read, *Dear Deer* by Gene Barretta. It is an excellent book that goes over many of the common homophones that the students would encounter on their day-to-day lives. We will read the book together and discuss what we have heard and seen from the book. I will have them turn and talk to their partner while reading. We will add our new words to our list that we started the day before. As we are creating our list with illustrations, the students will be adding them to their interactive journals as well so that they can have a record of what they have learned.

Next, I will pull out some flash cards that I have created that have both the word and a picture on them so that the students can see both the picture that shows the definition of the word as well as the different spellings of the word in cases in which there are two spellings. I will go through all of the cards and show the students each word and picture, and then create a movement that goes along with it (i.e.: duck: quack, or duck: bend over and cover your head). As they are looking at the cards, I will also give them a sentence to go along with it so that they can start listening for its context.

Then, I will pass out the homophone bingo cards so that we can further practice identifying which word is being said. This is a game that I will create that matches the flashcards I created so that the students aren't going to be tripped up by any unfamiliar words. We will play a few rounds, having the students act it out and saying it before finding the words on their card. The winners of each game will earn a sticker.

Lesson 3 – Writing

As before, we will begin today's lesson with a read aloud. I will choose any book that illustrates homonyms (there is a list in the materials section of books that would work). While reading, I will continue to use the strategy turn and talk to have my students' gain comprehension. We will talk about any homonyms that we see that we have seen before and talk about any we may have not encountered before now. The students will then get out their notebooks to add any of them that interested them or add to their pictures of one they already have to further help them remember the meaning of each word. Then, we will play a quick round of charades to get the students up and moving and practicing the homonyms.

Beginning today, I will introduce my students to the topic of writing a book. My vision is to have my students write sentences and illustrate each pair of homonyms. I will have previously written down 12 word pairs on cards so that my students can pick 2 cards each. They will then have to write 4 sentences (one sentence per word) and illustrate

each sentence. Since my students are ELL students, they can either attempt to write their own sentence, or they may just copy the sentence they have in their journals.

Lesson 4 – Writing Continued

Today's lesson will be a continuation from the previous day. We will begin the day with another read aloud with turn and talk so that the students can be accustomed to hearing homonyms. They will start to pick up on the ones that they will hear over and over and some that they may have heard for the first time. As before, we will discuss each homonym pair and illustrate them in our journals for future reference.

Also, as we have done previously, we will play a game of Homonym Bingo. This time, I will pass out cards with a different set of words on them, words that we have practiced, but may have not been included in the first round of Homonym Bingo. I will provide the word pair, but this time I will have the students come up with a sentence that goes with one of the words. If I am teaching my lower level class, I will continue to help them with the spellings and correct any misconceptions they may have. I will have cards ready with pictures so that they can pick out the correct spelling. If I am teaching my intermediate level students, I will give them an opportunity to spell the word that they used for the sentence.

When we finally turn to writing, my students should have completed their sentences the day before or be very near completion. I will then give my students a chance to “publish” their work by creating their final version on iPads with the Story Creator app. Story Creator gives the students a chance to write their own story on the iPad as well as illustrate it with pictures or find pictures on the internet to use. They will also record themselves reading their sentences to give them a chance to practice their reading fluency as well as give them a chance to hear themselves read.

Lesson 5 – Celebration Day!

As a wrap up to our unit, we will have a celebration day where we are going to celebrate all that we have learned as well as giving my students a chance to present their work to their classmates. Before we celebrate, we will read another book of homonyms. As we have done each previous day, we will use turn and talk and afterwards, we will discuss the homonyms they found and add any interesting ones to our list.

We will then get our iPads out and open the app to retrieve our stories. One by one, each student will get a chance to play their stories for each other. While one student is presenting, the other students will be listening and paying attention as they will be asked which words are the homonyms in the sentences. This way all students are being held accountable for learning the material, and I am able to determine whether they

understood what we have been discussing for the entire week. After all of the students have finished sharing and we have discussed the words, we will have a quick cheer and applause for our hard work.

Finally to wrap up our unit, I will pass out our homonyms quiz that I found online from turtlediary.com¹² (which you can find in the materials section). The quiz will be short with a lot of picture support as they are still learning English. I want them to take the quiz, not for a grade, but for me to see which words they understood, if any, and if they get the idea of using words in context to guess which word should be used. Moving on for the future, I will take the results of this quiz and use the data if it shows me they struggled to intersperse review of such words in the future so that they can continue to practice them or use the information to slowly bring in some new words that they may encounter.

Resources: Bibliography for Teachers

"Media Room." *Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Nov. 2015.
<<http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/mediaroom/aboutus/Pages/Didyouknow.aspx?word...>>.

This is the website for Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools. It gives great information about our district and the schools that are located within.

Deutscher, Guy. *The Unfolding of Language An Evolutionary Tour of Mankind's Greatest Invention*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005.

Burling, Robbins. *The Talking Ape*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Gee, James Paul. "Reading as Situated Language: A Sociocognitive Perspective." *Journal Of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 2001: 714-725.

Fromkin, Victoria, Robert Rodman, and Nina Hyams. *An Introduction to Language*. Boston: Wadsworth, 2014.

n.d. *Cambridge Dictionaries*. Accessed November 2, 2015
<<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/duck>>

An excellent resource for looking up the definitions of words.

¹² TurtleDiary.com n.d.

n.d. *WIDA Consortium*. Accessed November 2, 2015. <wida.us>

This website is used by ESL teachers in the states that have adopted the WIDA standards.

n.d. *Northwest Association for Biomedical Research*. Accessed October 15, 2015.
<https://www.nwbar.org/teacher-center/education-strategies>

Pinnell, Gay Su, and Irene C.Fountas. "Writing about Reading." In *The Continuum of Literacy Learning Grades PreK - 8*. 2008. Reprint, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2011. 74.

n.d. *Turtle Diary*. Accessed February 11, 2016
< <http://www.turtlediary.com/worksheet/match-the-homophones-ate-and-eight.html>>

Reading List for Students

Barretta, Gene. 2010. *Dear deer: a book of homophones*. New York: Square Fish.

Coffelt, Nancy. *Aunt Ant Leaves through the Leaves*. New York, New York: Holiday House, 2012.

Ghigna, Charles. *See the Yak Yak*. New York, New York: Random House, 2000.

Gwynne, Fred. 1976. *A chocolate moose for dinner*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks.

Gwynne, Fred. *The King Who Rained*. New York: Young Readers Pr, 1970. Print.

Parish, Peggy. *Amelia Bedelia*. New York, New York: Harper & Row, 1963.

All of these books are excellent examples of homonyms and are a funny way to look at the way words can sound the same.

Materials For Classroom Use:

1. Children's books
2. Markers
3. Chart paper
4. Interactive Notebooks
5. Pictures that match the words that you want to teach
6. Bingo cards (purchased or made. A template is attached).
7. Flashcards to go with your Bingo game or for charades
8. iPads – the number depends on the number of students
9. Story Creator App
10. Paper

B	I	N	G	O
		Free		

Name: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Match the homophones. Draw a line between the words that sound the same.



Aunt



Eight



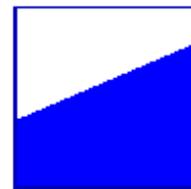
Bore



Ant



Blew



Blue



Ate



Boar

Appendix 1

Implementing Common Core Standards:

These are the standards that my unit will address and will be met in multiple ways. The reading standards will be met through reading books that contain homophones and homonyms in them. The writing standards will be met through their work in creating their own stories that use homophones/homonyms. The rest of the standards are speaking and listening standards. These standards will be addressed throughout the unit as the majority of our time will be spent on discussing the different meanings of words that sound the same.

RI.1.4: Ask and answer questions to help determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases in a text.

RF.1.2: Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds (phonemes).

RF.1.3: Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.

W.1.6: With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.

W.1.7: Participate in shared research and writing projects.

SL.1.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

SL.1.2: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

SL.1.3: Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to gather additional information or clarify something that is not understood.

SL.1.5: Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

SL.1.6: Produce complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation.

L.1.4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 1 reading and content, choosing flexibly from an array of strategies.

L.1.5: With guidance and support from adults, demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

L.1.6: Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts, including using frequently occurring conjunctions to signal simple relationships (e.g., because).

Appendix 2

Examples of Open Ended Questions that can be used:

Why did the author write that?

What could we do differently?

Can you tell me what happened?

Do you have any other ideas?

What did you see?

What did you notice?

What did you learn?