

## Past tense practice with hilarity by Chris Clayton

### Teachers' notes

**Aims:** To provide an enjoyable way to learn and practise new verbs using the past tense. It can be used in an EFL or ESL situation. This lesson should be used after students have been taught or have reviewed the general rules for forming the simple past tense of verbs.

**Level:** Pre-intermediate +

**Key skills:** Grammar and speaking

**Time:** 45 minutes +

**Materials:** Paper for making verb cards

### Procedure:

1. Divide the students into groups of four.
2. Give each group 12 card-sized pieces of paper, preferably using recycled copy paper.
3. Tell the groups to work together to find 12 interesting verbs in their dictionaries and write one of them in present tense form on each of the cards. During this time, the teacher should circulate and check that none of the verbs are inappropriate – I had to veto several of the ones my 16 year-old girls came up with! Also, if the verb is irregular, you could assist them and suggest they write the past tense form on the card as well.
4. When the groups have finished making their stacks of 12 cards, tell them to exchange them with another group, making sure no group is left with their own cards.
5. Tell the groups to use their dictionaries to check the meanings of any verbs they don't know.
6. Tell the groups to shuffle the cards and put the stacks face down on their tables. Demonstrate how to start a past tense chain story: A student picks up a card and starts by saying "Yesterday..." and makes a past tense sentence using the verb on that card. The next student picks up a new card, **repeats the previous student's sentence** and adds a new one of his/her own, using the verb on her card. They continue this, each time **repeating the entire chain of sentences** and trying to make some semblance of a continuing story. In my experience, with the unexpected and "interesting" verbs, this has resulted in great hilarity.
7. Finally, when the groups have all finished, make new groups, each member coming from a different original group, so each has a different story. Each student tells their story to the other members of their new group.