The Liberation of the Garden Gnomes
By Peter Vahle

Level: Upper intermediate to advanced
Age: Teenage to Adult
Length: 50 minutes to 1:15
Aims:

Linguistic – for students to read and understand a story about the controversial Garden Gnome Liberation Front
Communicative – for students to debate the public’s right to own garden gnomes.
Personal – to lighten up the classroom a bit with a somewhat ridiculous topic.

Material Preparation:

Photocopies:
1. Text - one per student.
2. Extensive Practice - One for every three students.
3. Intensive Practice - One per student.
4. Role Cards - At least one set of roles (3) per 9 students. You could use one role per student.
   - Cut out roles and group names to be given to each student or small group.
   - Print out visuals of Gnomes and any others you wish to use.
   - Copy lesson plan for yourself.

Procedure:

pre-teach Vocabulary

a garden gnome
   - elicit: show visual, realia if possible. Ask ‘what is this?’
   - Drill.
   - Concept Check: real or imaginary? Where do they live? What are they made of?

to hang
   - elicit: visual of noose on board. ‘What’s this?’ (noose) ‘What’s the action?’
   - Drill.
   - Concept Check: Who’s it for? What happens? What countries do this?
to swipe
- Elicit: Mime. Walk by a students desk and quickly take something and walk off. ‘What did I do?’
  (steal) ‘Good, another word for ‘steal’?’
- Drill.
- concept check: Who swipes? Is it good or bad? Where do people swipe things?

a prank
- elicit: verbal. ‘What is another word for a joke or trick?’
- drill.
- Concept check: is it nice or mean? Is there a special day of the year for them? Why do people do them?

mock (as in fake)
- elicit: realia. Use a fake moustache. ‘What is this? (moustache) Is it real? (no) What do we call it?
- Drill.
- Concept check: what is the opposite of mock? (genuine, real) What other mock things are there? Do you have a mock thing?

Pre-reading tasks

Discuss topic.
Choose any of the following to get Students thinking about Gnomes.
‘do these exist in your country? Do people talk to them? Why do people put them in the garden? Are they controversial?’

Task:
‘Look at this picture (point to gnomes) and the words on the board. In pairs, discuss what you think this story (hold up text) is about. Take two minutes.’
Ask one or two groups for their ideas.

Students read text

Focus Question:
‘Please read the text and answer this question: What does Thierry Verdier say about Garden Gnomes?’.
Put question on board. Hand out text to students. When eyes pop up, re-ask question and answer it.
Practice exercises

1) For Gist.
Instructions: In groups of three, (block groups) please read the text again and decide which topics are mentioned.
For example, ‘an exhibition in Paris, yes’. Mime putting an ‘X’ next to #2.
Take 3 minutes.’
Monitor and correct.
Feedback: ‘compare your answers with the group next to you’
Answers to practice 1: ‘X’s by #s: 1, 2, 4, 7, 8,

2) For specific information.
Instructions: ‘Individually, please read the text and choose the correct answer. A, B, C or D. For example, ‘Who stole the Gnomes from the exhibition? Umm… C! The GGLF.’ Circle ‘C’ on handout.
Give students the handout. ‘take 4 minutes’
Go over answers with group. Answers are: 1) d. 2) c. 3) a. 4) b. 5) c. 6) d.

Debate

Teacher to students: ‘Well, to solve the problem of the garden gnome thefts, the French Government recently passed a law prohibiting people from putting them in their gardens. This made the GGLF very happy. However, the owners of the gnomes were very angry and they formed a group of their own, the French Respecters of Garden Gnomes Society or ‘FROGGS’. This group has demanded the government change the new law.’

Instructions:
‘Please count 1, 2, 3. Find your group. 1s, you are the GGLF. 2s, you are the FROGGS and 3s, you are French government representatives. Please read your slips and write reasons for your position. Take 5 minutes.’ Hand out slips to each group.

‘Now, the government will explain their reasons for the law. FROGGS you get to respond first and then the GGLF will have a chance. At the end the Government needs to decide what action to take, if any. Please begin, you have 10 minutes.’

Note: this activity can be varied. You could do it in plenary mode with the whole class. This works well with under 10 students. With more, you may consider groups of 6 (2 in each role). To maximize student participation, you can create groups of 3 students doing the debate, one in each role.

Wrap up: ‘Thank you all for your participation in the debate. We have made the world a safer place for Garden Gnomes today.’
French 'Gnome Liberators' Strike Again

Someone in France is stealing garden gnomes again. In a late night raid on a Paris park where 2,000 of the small statues had been assembled for an exhibition, members of a group calling itself the Garden Gnome Liberation Front swiped a score of the sculptures last weekend. The unknown thieves demanded the 'immediate closing of this exhibit, as well as the unconditional liberation of the garden gnomes still detained.' Act now, they warned, or we will strike again.

Is this for real? Thierry Verdier, professor of anthropology at the university of Rouen, has studied people who collect gnomes and the people who steal them. He believes that gnome stealing, which first happened here in the mid-1990s, started out as a simple student prank but now has become an obsession. The garden gnome, the anthropologist says, is a product of the times we live in, filled with economic, cultural, and emotional symbolism.

'For my study, I went out and talked to people who have gnomes in their garden or yards,' Verdier said. "I often found surprisingly strong affections. Some owners wash their gnome every day. Others take their gnome in for the night and put him to bed. Many people talk to their gnome like it was their favorite child. These objects allow a regression into childhood without a visit to the psychiatrist. I call them the 'Sigmund Freud' of the poor."

These days, an estimated 30 million of the small figures stand guard in the gardens of Western Europeans. For many people, the sculptures -which resemble Walt Disney's Seven Dwarfs, are the epitome of poor taste. This might be another reason for their owner's fondness.

In 1999, masked bands in Alencon made nightly raids to 'liberate' gnomes by taking the ceramic sculptures from people's yards and setting them free in the forest, their supposed natural environment. Some homeowners, who had paid up to $100 for their gnomes, failed to see any humor in the thefts and notified the police. Others took their gnomes into the house for the night. In one bizarre ritual, the gnomes were used to symbolize the discontent of modern civilization. Eleven gnomes were hanged by the neck off a bridge in eastern France, and a mock suicide note was left that said, "When you read these words, we will no longer be part of your selfish world, where we serve merely as pretty decoration."

Stealing the figures from the Paris exhibition was the first action claimed by the GGLF in the past 3 years. City officials were not afraid and said the exhibition will continue as scheduled until July 23 despite the group's demands.
### Extensive Practice

What is mentioned in the text? Put an X by each.

1) ___ People putting stolen garden gnomes in the forest to free them.

2) ___ An exhibition of garden gnomes in Paris.

3) ___ An interview with a collector of garden gnomes.

4) ___ The psychological benefit of garden gnomes.

5) ___ English garden gnome thieves.

6) ___ Thieves returning the gnomes to the Paris exhibition.

7) ___ An anthropology professor.

8) ___ A fake suicide note from eleven gnomes.

9) ___ The relationship between gnomes and dwarves.

10) ___ Thieves reselling the stolen gnomes for hundreds of dollars.
Intensive Practice. Multiple choice.
Please choose the correct answer.

For example: Who stole the gnomes from the Paris exhibition?
a. Thierry Verdier  b. Alencon  c. The GGLF  d. Rumplestiltskin

1. How many gnomes are in W. European gardens?
   a. 30
   b. 300,000
   c. 2 million
   d. 30,000,000

2. In paragraph 5, where were the gnomes 'set free'?
   a. in garbage bins.
   b. in psychotherapist's offices.
   c. in the forest.
   d. in the city.

3. What did the thieves demand?
   a. the unconditional release of the gnomes.
   b. that the gnomes be sent back to Narnia.
   c. that people be nice to gnomes.
   d. that all gnomes be destroyed.

4. What did the Anthropologist, Thierry Verdier find out about gnome owners?
   a. that they don't care about them.
   b. that they have large degree of affection for them.
   c. that they live only in France.
   d. that they only give them as gifts.

5. Eleven gnomes were:
   a. seen dancing in the forest.
   b. arrested.
   c. hanged.
   d. found by the police.

6. Thierry Verdier says the gnomes are the ___________ of the poor.
   a. Karl Marx
   b. Luis Figo
   c. Bette Davis
   d. Sigmund Freud
Government Representatives:
In your group, determine 5 reasons why you passed this law. Explain them to the other two groups. After you hear the two groups opinions, decide if the law should be changed or kept the same.

Respecters, of Garden Gnomes:
You love Garden Gnomes in the Garden and think it is crazy that the government would make a law like this. In your group, find 5 reasons why this law is unfair. Try to convince the Government and the GGLF to change the law.

GGLF:
In your group, find 5 reasons why this law is a good idea. Convince the other two groups to keep the new law.

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Name cards. Cut and fold and place on students desks

The Garden Gnome Liberation Front ‘GGLF’

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French Respecters of Garden Gnomes Society ‘FROGGS’
The French Government