A nice story
by Jane Richards

Age: Suitable for all ages
Level: Writing Entry Level 3 and above (but can be adapted for other levels)
Objective: To encourage students to use a wide range of adjectives rather than depending on high-frequency lexical items such as good, nice and bad
Time: 30 minutes
Materials: OHT of A nice story. Photocopies of A bad day worksheet (one per group or one for each student, as you prefer)
Organization: Whole-group activity, then students in pairs or small groups

Procedure:

1. Show the students A nice story on the board. This can be done by using a projector, an OHT or simply by writing the story on a whiteboard.

2. Read the story to the class and have the students discuss the strengths and limitations of the story.

3. As a whole-group activity, students should be encouraged to replace the word nice with other appropriate adjectives. As students suggest adjectives, introduce them to (or remind them of) the idea of collocation. For example, a bright idea is an acceptable collocation but not a bright walk, and we say a strong coffee not a powerful coffee.

4. Read the new and improved story aloud to the group and have the learners compare and contrast it to the original. Hopefully students will be able to appreciate how easily a simple story can be transformed into something more sophisticated just by their using a range of vocabulary rather than relying on the words nice or good.

5. Following this activity, students should be issued with the A bad day worksheet.

6. In pairs or small groups, the students replace the word bad with other synonyms. Monitor to check they’re using suitable collocations.

7. Students read their stories aloud and compare their choice of adjectives.

Follow-up:
The teacher could use this activity as a springboard to a fuller discussion of collocations and fixed phrases and appropriate vocabulary choices.

Homework:
Students could be encouraged to write their own ‘good’ or ‘bad’ story for homework or continue the story for homework.
A nice story

It was a nice day so Mary decided to go for a nice walk in the nice park near her house. She thought it was a nice idea to phone her friend Jenny so that after their nice walk they could go for a nice coffee in one of the nice cafés which were near the edge of the town.
A bad day

John had a bad day at work. He had woken up with a bad headache and because he was in a bad mood he had a bad argument with his wife. The weather was so bad that he decided not to walk to work. He took his car but a bad accident made him late for work …