

Cats: notes and tips for teachers

1 Pre-reading tasks

- a Ask all the students what one thing makes cats different from other animals. Board ideas e.g. purr / can see in the dark / very lazy...
- b Then ask students to choose / discuss the best idea.
- c If any of the students mention *nine lives* / *lucky* ask for an anecdote.

Tip: be culturally aware

Students around the world will have very different answers, and have different personal feelings too. These pre-reading tasks aim to highlight the differences and encourage different reactions.

- 2 a Board: *I think cats are.....because.....*
Ask students to complete the sentence *in writing*.
- b Students tell the others next to them their thoughts, do they have the same feelings? Why / why not?

Tip: encourage personal brainstorming

By getting the students to write rather than just think focuses them on the task and then they'll have more to say. It also makes sure they do the task too!

- 3 a There are three stories (A, B and C). Divide the class into small groups (of 3 or 4) making sure roughly a third of the class will have one of the stories.

Tip: do your maths first

It may seem obvious but if you're useless at numbers like me try to work out the groups before the class to save time (and embarrassment!). Think about who will work with who as well.

- b Explain to the students they will have one cat story each (A, B or C). They will get the heading first and have a few minutes to guess the story. Each story begins *Cat survives ...* elicit / explain meaning as necessary.
- c Distribute the task sheet so there is one per student, but make sure that
 - i they concentrate on their heading only (and know which one it is),
 - ii they try and guess any unknown words, and
 - iii they are still working together.
- d Get students not only to think about what happened but why it happened.

Tip: encourage speculation

Getting students involved in the story beforehand means that when reading they'll focus more on the content rather than understanding every word or sentence.

4 Reading tasks

- a Give each student a copy of their reading. Ask them to read it as quickly as possible to see if the story is similar to their ideas. Let them know they can read it again in more detail later.
- b Ask students to spend two minutes drawing a picture of a scene from the story. (Ignore the complaints of 'I can't draw', it doesn't have to be good). They then compare drawings (and laugh at each other's artistic attempts).

Tip: vary the tasks and make them correspond to the text

All the stories are very visual and no doubt images formed in the students' minds while they were reading. A non-linguistic activity can often be an appropriate comprehension task.

- c Students read again and underline any unknown words. Make sure they follow the steps and don't make a grab for the dictionary straightaway.

Tip: encourage learner autonomy

If students become familiar with this process they are less likely to keep asking what words mean and keener to guess or ask another student. Make sure students share their knowledge -- stronger students who have not underlined anything should be helping the others.

5 Post-reading tasks

- a This activity gets the students looking at the lexical content. Make sure they're not peeking at the stories. Nothing needs to be written, it can be a speaking activity within the group. Monitor, but let students try to remember as much as possible on their own.

Tip: raise students' awareness of lexical chunks

And avoid post reading comprehension questions which can dull an otherwise interesting text.

- b Once students can remember most of the story rearrange the groups so that a new group of three has someone who has read each of the texts.

Tip: link the reading to a speaking activity

Reading should not be separated from other skills. And make sure students are listening too!

- c Finally, get students in their new groups to work together and write another *Cat survives...* story

Tip: link the reading to a writing activity

And make sure there is a reason for the task, in this case to see who can make the most interesting story in the class. Pin them up around the class for everyone to read and enjoy.