

Minimal pairs musical chairs by Linda Alley

Age:	Children (6+) / Teenagers
Level:	Elementary–Intermediate
Time:	30 minutes
Objectives:	To focus on the pronunciation of the /r/ and /l/ sounds and to help students distinguish between these sounds when speaking and listening (although the lesson can be adapted and used with other minimal pairs)
Key skills:	Pronunciation; listening
Materials:	N/A

Procedure

1. Introduce the /l/ sound (7 minutes)

Write the following on the whiteboard:

/l/ lice, led, late, lies, lip, lay

Drill the /l/ sound. Tell students to put their tongue just behind their upper teeth until its tip is touching the gum ridge. Demonstrate with your own mouth and draw a rough sketch on the board to show the position of the tongue. Drill each of the words above, asking students to repeat after you. Point to particular words and select individual students to repeat the word. Assist with pronunciation as necessary.

2. Introduce the /r/ sound (7 minutes)

Write the following on the whiteboard, below the /l/ words:

/r/ rice, red, rate, rise, rip, ray

Drill the /r/ sound. Tell students to pull their tongue back in their mouth without its tip touching the roof of the mouth. Demonstrate with your own mouth and draw a rough sketch on the board to show the position of the tongue. Drill each of the words above, asking students to repeat after you. Point to particular words and select individual students to repeat the word. Again, assist with pronunciation as necessary.

3. Demonstrate the game (4 minutes)

Tell the students to move their chairs so that they are all sitting in a circle. While they are doing this, write on the board:

Lice
Rice
Lice in the rice!

Stand in the middle of the circle. Tell the students that you are going to give each person one word. Point to a student and say 'lice'. Point to the next student and say 'rice'. The next student is 'lice', the next 'rice' and so on until everyone has a word.

Ask the 'lice' students to repeat their word. Then, ask the 'rice' students to repeat their word. Drill the phrase 'Lice in the rice!' and ask the class to repeat this. Tell the students that if they hear you say their word, they must stand up and change seats. If they hear the phrase 'Lice in the rice!', then everyone must change seats but they cannot move to the seat directly on their left or their right. Say the word 'lice'. While the 'lice' students are changing seats, quickly sit down on one of the empty chairs. The student who is left standing in the middle has to choose which word or phrase to say next.

4. Practice and feedback (12 minutes)

At this stage, you can move out of the circle, taking out a chair, to monitor from the side. Assist the student in the middle with pronunciation if the others are having problems understanding what is being said.

The student in the middle should try to sit on a chair when the other students get up, as you did. The new student in the middle then says a word or the phrase, students swap chairs and so the game continues.

Extension: For stronger classes, you could give each student the sound /l/ or /r/, rather than the words 'lice' or 'rice'. Ask the student in the middle to say any word containing either of these sounds. If students hear a word with their sound in it, they have to change seats. As they play the game, you could write their words on the whiteboard as a visual record of how many different words contain these sounds.