



Red herring questions

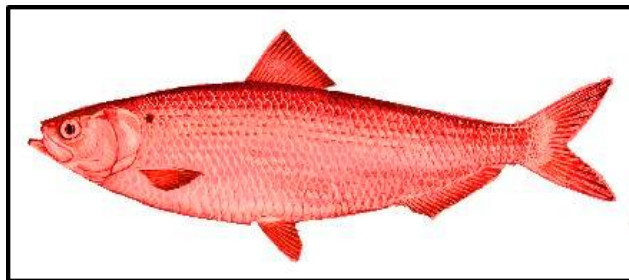
Language: Question forms (but different forms can be used e.g. adverbs)

Activity: Tinkering with question forms

Level: A1 to B1/ All Levels

Time: 10-20 minutes (can be extended)

Materials: Materials-free (Card/ Pens)



Introduction

In this activity learners rearrange mixed up questions and 'tinker' with words. This raises their awareness of question forms in English and can also be used as a revision activity.

Preparation

1. Take several pieces of card (approximately A5) and write down one word from the question on each card. ALSO, you should write a 'Red Herring' word on one piece of card.*
2. Make three sets - one set for each question. You can also use different coloured card here so you can tell the different questions apart.

Here is one of my questions. What's the question here and what is the 'Red Herring' word?



That's right. 'What did you do today?' is the question, 'fruit' is the Red Herring (try and make a question with 'fruit' in it - it doesn't work - though there are some interesting variations!)

Lesson Plan

1. Write 'Red Herring' on the board and ask the learners - 'What is a Red Herring?' Elicit responses.
2. Explain that a 'Red Herring' is a piece of information which you think is correct, but which gives you the wrong answer.
3. Give an example. Say: 'Can you tell me what the correct question is here - and which word is the 'Red Herring?'' Write on WB:

you Do smoke does

The correct answer is 'Do you smoke?' and the 'Red Herring' is the word 'does'.

***Note:** to make it more difficult I omitted the question mark at the end of the question - students have to work this out themselves. However, I did capitalise the first word.

4. Give out the first question to your learners - one word per pair of students (or three).
5. Learners then hold up their cards and look at each other's words. Teacher asks: 'Is this question correct?'
6. Learners then have to identify the correct question form AND the 'Red Herring' word. They can do this by a) moving around the room to make the question correct or b) passing the cards around until the question is correct.
7. Repeat until you have gone through all three sets of questions.
8. Teacher takes back the cards and asks the learners: what were the questions again? Elicit responses and write on WB.
9. Learners work in pairs asking and answering the questions.
10. (Optional) Teacher gives feedback on their question formation and goes over any problems e.g. word order in questions, auxiliaries, pronunciation (schwa).

Variation/ Extension

After you have finished with the three sets give out BLANK pieces of card to each pair (or three) and ask them to come up with their own 'Red Herring Questions'. Tell them that they must be sure that the 'Red Herring' word cannot be used in the question in any way. This means that they are really concentrating on the task (which is actually forming questions!)

Follow up

Once students know the activity routine, repeat this game regularly with variations.

Note: This game can be played with short sentences; lines of poetry; adverbs of frequency, there are lots of possible variations. The trick is in providing a good 'Red Herring' to engage learners and promote 'tinkering' with the words.

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