

Athletes, Actions, and Adjectives

The feature article in this issue provides information about American football and can help you answer questions your students might ask when doing the following activities. However, you do not need to know a lot about football to use this lesson plan. It introduces basic ideas about U.S. football team names but assumes that most teachers and students will not know much about this sport.

The basic lesson is designed for beginner-level students. It introduces simple language forms and vocabulary in a controlled manner, with a group project of designing a football team poster. That is followed by a Lesson Extension, also for beginner-level students, which focuses on writing a simple description of a person.

Materials: paper for posters, tape, colored markers/crayons

Lesson: Your Own Football Field

Level: Beginner

Assumed Prior Knowledge of Students: Students should be familiar with the simple present tense forms of *to be* and the following lexical sets: colors, animals, and basic adjectives (*big, small, tall, short*).

Goals: To learn and use new adjectives to describe animals; to make simple suggestions, give reasons, and agree and disagree with suggestions

Background Information: Fourteen U.S. professional football teams use names of animals, fish, or birds. These are the Miami **Dolphins**, the Baltimore **Ravens** (a type of bird), the Cincinnati **Bengals** (from Bengal Tigers), the Indianapolis **Colts** (a colt is a young horse), the Jacksonville **Jaguars**, the Philadelphia **Eagles**, the Chicago **Bears**, the Detroit **Lions**, the Atlanta **Falcons** (a type of bird), the Carolina **Panthers**, the Arizona **Cardinals** (a type of bird), the St. Louis **Rams** (a male sheep), the Seattle **Seahawks** (a type of bird), and the Denver **Broncos** (a bronco is an untrained horse).

Each team has a logo on its helmets. This logo is often the animal or something representing the animal. The Philadelphia **Eagles** have wings on the sides of their helmets; the Miami **Dolphins** have a dolphin. American football teams also have specific colors. For example, the Atlanta **Falcons'** colors are red, white, and black. The team uniforms use these colors.

Activity 1: Ready, Set, Go! (15–20 minutes)

Goals: To review vocabulary relating to animals, colors, and adjectives; to become interested in the project in a lively way

1. Divide the class into groups of three or four. Tell students that each group has one secretary. The secretary should have paper and a pen/pencil. Only the secretary writes, while the other students speak.

2. Tell students you are going to shout out one topic, and they need to make a list of all the words they know on that topic. Tell them they will have only two minutes, so they need to work fast. They will receive one point for each correct word on their list.
3. When the students are ready, shout “Names of animals!” The secretary in each group should be writing a list of animals, while the other group members give suggestions.
4. After two minutes, shout “Stop!” and make sure all groups stop writing. Ask each group to exchange papers with another group. On the lists they receive, groups will count the correct words (spelling counts!), write the score, and return the papers to the original groups. Ask the groups for their scores and write them on the board. If you like, you can ask one or two groups to read out their lists, but do not spend too much time on this.
5. Tell the groups they are going to have a second round. In each group, a different student becomes the secretary. This time, shout “Colors!” Go through the same steps as above: shout “Stop,” have groups exchange and check the lists, add the new group scores to their previous scores, and share some of the answers.
6. Tell students there is one final round. Have groups change secretaries again. This time, shout “Adjectives!” Again, go through the same steps. At the end you can declare the group with the most points the winner and have the class give that group a round of applause.
7. Divide the board into three sections: *animals*, *colors*, and *adjectives*. Assign each group one section (several groups may have the same section). Ask one student from each group to go to the board and write three words from his or her group’s list. You may wish to review the pronunciation and meaning of words that the whole class may not know. Leave the words on the board for the next activity.

Activity 2: Animal Adjectives (20 minutes)

Goals: To practice using new vocabulary to describe animals; to practice asking questions using the verb *to be* to reinforce meaning and pronunciation

Lexical Set to Be Taught/Reviewed: *fierce, gentle, wild, tame, strong, weak, smart, huge, fast*

1. Select one animal from the list on the board. Ask students for adjectives to describe the animal. They can use adjectives on the board from the previous activity or contribute new ones.
2. When students are done using the adjectives they know, teach one adjective from the “Lexical Set” that matches that particular animal. Ask if any students have heard or seen the word before. If they have, allow them to explain the meaning to the class as well as they can; offer guidance as needed. If necessary, explain to the class what the adjective means. Write it on the board in the *adjectives* section. To help students with pronunciation, have them repeat the word after you.
3. After you have taught all the new adjectives, make sure students understand the meaning of each one. To do this, point to one adjective and ask students to name at least one animal that has that quality. The following list of animals and adjectives may help you.

Suggested Adjective/Animal List: This list contains animals that people in the United States often associate with different adjectives. These associations may not be the same in your country. Use the animal-adjective associations you think will best help your students learn and understand the words. This list is for your use; you do not need to teach the list to the students.

fierce: lions, panthers, alligators
gentle: kittens, songbirds, rabbits
wild: lions, hippos, rhinos
tame: domestic animals (e.g., cats and dogs), caged birds
strong: horses, elephants, buffalo
weak: parakeets, kittens, mice
smart: dogs, monkeys, dolphins
huge: elephants, whales, hippos
fast: cheetahs, antelope, panthers

- Teach students the following question and answer forms:

Which animals are [adjective]?

_____ are [adjective].

Many _____ are [adjective].

Some _____ are [adjective].

Examples:

Which animals are wild?

Many rabbits are wild.

Some horses are wild.

Which animals are fierce?

Lions are fierce.

- Select two students to model asking and answering several questions using the animals and new adjectives on the board.
- Put students into pairs. Ask them to practice asking and answering questions. Each person should ask at least three questions.

Activity 3: Make Your Own Team (40–50 minutes)

Goals: To practice making suggestions, giving reasons, and agreeing and disagreeing; to design a poster describing a new football team

- Write *American football* on the board. Elicit what the students already know about the sport. You can ask questions to guide them:
 - Where do people play it?
 - What is it like?
 - Is it dangerous? Why or why not?
 - What are some of the team names?
 - What is the championship game called? [the Super Bowl]
- If possible, show pictures of American football players in their uniforms. Explain that many teams use the names of animals. Give examples from the “Background Information” section. Also explain that most teams have uniforms with two or three colors.

3. Tell students that the National Football League (NFL) wants to start a new team in your hometown. The NFL has asked the class to give suggestions for a new team name and team colors. The class will vote on which name is the best.
4. Teach the following ways of making suggestions, giving reasons, and agreeing and disagreeing:

Suggesting

Let's use _____.

What do you think about _____? It is _____.

How about using _____?

How about choosing _____?

Giving Reasons

They are _____.

Agreeing

That's a great idea.

Yes, that sounds good.

Disagreeing

No, sorry, I don't want to use _____.

Hmm. No, _____ are (not) _____ (enough).

5. Model a few exchanges for students. Here is an example:

A: Let's use monkeys. They are fast.

B: No, sorry, I don't want to use monkeys. Monkeys are small and they're not strong.
How about choosing a snake?

A: Hmm. No, snakes are not strong enough. How about using whales? They're huge, strong, and smart.

B: Okay. Yes, that sounds good.

6. Divide students into groups of four. Tell them that by making suggestions, agreeing, and disagreeing, they need to decide on one animal name for the team and two or three team colors.
7. Tell students they need to design a simple poster. The poster should have the team name at the top and the following three sentences written on it:

Our team name is (Town + Animal).

The (Team Name) are (adjective) and (adjective).

Our colors are (color) and (color).

Depending on their level, students can add other information describing their team. If you wish, under these sentences, students can draw their team logo or uniform. (If you plan to do the Lesson Extension below, instruct the students to fold their poster paper in half. They should use only half of the paper for the team name and team description. They will use the other half to write a paragraph, as described in the Lesson Extension.)

Note: If you plan to do the Lesson Extension below, do not do the following two steps.

8. When the groups have finished, display the posters on the walls. Tell the groups to select one group spokesperson. The spokesperson should stand next to the group's poster. Tell the rest of the students to walk around and visit each poster. The spokesperson will explain the team name and why it is the best team name. The students may ask the spokesperson questions. Halfway through the activity, change each spokesperson and have another group member take over that role.

9. After students have visited every poster, tell them to take a slip of paper and write down the team name for the poster they think is the best. They are *not* allowed to vote for their own group's poster.
10. Collect the slips of paper and tally the vote. Announce the winning team and give that group a round of applause or other small reward.

Lesson Extension: The Star Player

If you wish to teach your students how to describe a person, you can extend the lesson. In the lesson above, do the activities that are appropriate for your students. Allow them to choose their team animal and team colors.

Next, explain that the NFL, in addition to wanting a team animal and colors, also wants the students to describe their team's star player to provide information about him on the team website. By completing these activities, students will learn how to describe athletes and their abilities, and they will write a paragraph describing their star player.

Level: Beginner

Assumed Prior Knowledge of Students: Students should be familiar with simple present tense question forms and parts of the body.

Goals: To use basic verbs to refer to athletic activity, learn appropriate adjectives for describing athletes, practice asking simple present tense questions, and write a descriptive paragraph

Activity 1: Action Words for Athletes (15 minutes)

Goal: To use basic verbs to refer to athletic activity

Lexical Set to Be Taught/Reviewed: *run, throw, catch, jump, kick, tackle, block, pass, score*

Note: In American football, to *tackle* someone is to stop an opponent who has the ball. Usually when a player is tackled, the player is forced to the ground. To *block* is to stop the movement of a player who does not have the ball or to stop the movement of the ball when it is thrown or kicked. And to *pass* is to throw the ball to a teammate, who can then run with it and try to score.

1. Mime each verb in the list for your students. When they guess the correct word, write it on the board. If they don't know the word, explain it to them.
2. When every word is on the board, ask students to pronounce each word. To check comprehension, call out each word and ask the class to mime it for you. (*Warning!* Remind students to mime the word *tackle* gently and not to hurt anyone!)

Activity 2: Simon Says “Describe” (10 minutes)

Goals: To review the parts of the body; to have fun

1. Explain the rules of Simon Says: Students should do an action only when the teacher first says “Simon says”; they should not do the action if the teacher does not say “Simon says.”
2. Ask students to stand up. Quickly play Simon Says, directing students to touch different parts of their bodies. For example, “Simon says touch your ears”; “Simons says touch your shoulder”; “Touch your nose.” Any student who touches his or her nose is

out of the game because you did not say “Simon says.” Play the game for a few minutes to review parts of the body. If your students are able, let some of them take turns leading the game.

Activity 3: Adjectives! (30 minutes)

Goal: To practice using adjectives that describe people and/or parts of the body and practice asking simple present tense questions

1. Draw three columns on the board, with the headings shown in the chart. Ask students to come to the board and, in the second column, write a list of parts of the body. Ask other students to correct any spelling mistakes. Then ask students to copy the chart, which will look something like this:

Describing Parts of the Body	Parts of the Body	Describing the Person
	<i>arms</i> <i>legs</i> <i>shoulders</i> <i>back</i> <i>hands</i> <i>eyes</i> <i>feet</i> <i>ears</i>	

Use this chart as a guideline; your students may suggest other parts of the body (*fingers, toes, etc.*). Make sure the whole class understands all the words before you continue.

2. Divide students into pairs or small groups. Tell them you are going to give them a list of adjectives; they must decide which column (or columns) to write each adjective in. Demonstrate with *big*. Explain that *big* can go in the first column because people can have, for example, *big hands* and *big ears*. It can also go in the third column because a person can be physically *big* (*He is a big man*). Write the word *big* in the first column and in the third column. Explain that the word *smart*, meanwhile, would belong in the third column (*She is a smart girl*), but it would not fit in the first column because we would not normally use *smart* to describe a part of a person’s body. Write the word *smart* in the third column.
3. Write the following words on the board (but not in the chart): *strong, weak, huge, fast, tall, long, short, small*. Review the words to make sure all students know them. Tell groups to decide which column(s) each word belongs in. Give groups time to discuss where the words belong. Then, for each word, have a student come to the board and write the word in the correct column(s). When each word has been written in the chart, ask the class to suggest any changes they would like to make. If words are erased or moved, explain why.

4. When the board is complete, write the word *has* over the first two columns and the word *is* over the last column. The chart should look something like this:

has		is
Describing Parts of the Body	Parts of the Body	Describing the Person
<i>big</i>	<i>arms</i>	<i>big</i>
<i>strong</i>	<i>legs</i>	<i>smart</i>
<i>weak</i>	<i>shoulders</i>	<i>strong</i>
<i>huge</i>	<i>back</i>	<i>weak</i>
<i>long</i>	<i>hands</i>	<i>huge</i>
<i>short</i>	<i>eyes</i>	<i>fast</i>
<i>small</i>	<i>feet</i>	<i>tall</i>
	<i>ears</i>	<i>short</i>
		<i>small</i>

Note: Not every adjective in the first column can be used with every part of the body. For example, it would be meaningless to say that someone has “strong hair.” You should monitor students’ usage and provide guidance as needed.

5. Elicit the correct question forms for *has* and *is*. Write the following models on the board:

Does he/she have + [adjective] noun?

Example: *Does she have strong arms?*

Is he/she (adjective)?

Example: *Is he tall?*

If your students have previously practiced question forms with verbs, write the following model on the board:

Does he/she (verb)?

Example: *Does he play football?*

6. Have students form small groups. Tell one student in each group to think of another student in the class. The other students in the group must ask Yes/No questions to guess the name of the student. They can take turns thinking of questions and asking them.

Here is an example:

A: “Does he have long legs?”

B: “No, he doesn’t.”

A: “Is he fast?”

B: “Yes, he is very fast.”

A: “Does he play soccer?”

B: “Yes, he does.”

Students continue asking questions until they guess the correct person. They may use other words besides the ones in the chart.

Activity 4: Our Star Player Is Great! (30–40 minutes)

Goals: To practice making suggestions, giving reasons, and agreeing and disagreeing; to write a descriptive paragraph about a “perfect athlete”

1. Elicit the word *star*. One kind of star shines in the sky at night; another kind of star is a famous person, usually one with a special talent, such as an actor, a singer, or an athlete. Tell the students they are going to design a “star player.” That is, they are going to design the most talented athlete they can imagine.
2. Put students back into the same groups that made posters in the basic lesson. Tell them that as a group they need to decide which characteristics and qualities their star player has. Remind them how to make suggestions, agree, and disagree (see Activity 3 in the basic lesson). Tell them to choose the following:
 - a name for the star player
 - two physical characteristics the star player has, such as strong legs or huge hands
 - three things the star player can do, such as throw a football 50 meters or run a mile in five minutes
3. Ask each group to write a paragraph describing its star player by using this information. If they wish, they may add additional information. They should write this paragraph clearly on one side of a piece of paper, so that they can tape or glue the paper onto their poster. (Students could also write the paragraph directly onto the poster.)
4. Ask the students to open up their folded poster paper and tape the paragraph onto the blank half of the team poster. If you wish, students can draw a picture of their star player under their paragraphs.
5. Ask students to put the posters on the walls. Give every student a slip of paper. Tell students to go around the room, look at all the posters, and read all the paragraphs. They need to choose the poster with the best team name and best star player and write the name of that team on the slip of paper. They are *not* allowed to vote for their own poster.
6. Collect the slips of paper and tally the vote. Announce the winner and give that group a round of applause or other small reward.

DIANE MILLAR is a Regional English Language Officer. Before joining the Department of State, she taught English and worked as a teacher trainer in Turkey, Oman, Malaysia, Canada, Nicaragua, Lebanon, Georgia, and Qatar.