

Baseball Stories, Cards, and Interviews

Baseball is popular in the United States and in Caribbean, Latin American, and East Asian regions. However, people in many other parts of the world are unfamiliar with this sport. Students who are already baseball fans can use the activities in this lesson plan to broaden their interests while developing their language skills. For students who are less knowledgeable about baseball, these activities offer an opportunity to take a greater interest in the sport and at the same time improve their language ability.

Three separate, independent activities (with options) are presented here. Each activity will take one or two full class periods (depending upon the length of your classes). The activities are developed for different audiences and target different levels of language proficiency, but the goal of each activity is to give learners exposure to baseball and to encourage them to take a greater interest in the language spoken by the players and fans of this sport.

Me Cards

Level: Upper Beginner and above

Goals: To encourage students to reflect on important accomplishments and to write (and talk) about themselves in the past tense

Materials: thick, stiff paper (or pieces of thinner paper that can be glued together to make cards); pens or pencils

Many people in the United States collect baseball cards. The cards have a photograph of a baseball player on one side and interesting facts and statistics about the player on the reverse side. Baseball fans have collected these cards for many years, mostly for fun, although cards that are rare or feature famous players can be worth a lot of money.

In this activity, students will make cards about themselves that are in some ways similar to baseball cards. They can draw self-portraits (or use photographs) on one side of the card and include interesting information about themselves on the other. (The students are not professional baseball players, so they do not have to include baseball-related information on the card.) Below are questions you can ask to help students generate information to write on their Me Cards:

- Where were you born?
- When were you born?
- Where do you live now?
- How tall are you?
- What are your hobbies?
- What are some things you do well?

- How many brothers and sisters (cousins / aunts and uncles / ...) do you have?
- Where have you traveled?
- What is something about you that none of your classmates knows and that you would like to share?

You and your students should feel free to think of other questions to ask and additional information to include on the Me Cards.

Suggestions for Me Cards

Below is a sample of one side of a student's Me Card (the student's picture would be on the other side).

<p>John Jones Student</p> <p>Birthplace: New York City Date of Birth: February 5, 1999 Height: 5 feet, 2 inches Lives in Springfield, New York Hobbies: playing baseball, reading science-fiction books, swimming</p>	
<p>John won 10 games as the pitcher for his Little League baseball team.</p>	
<p>John's Life</p>	
1999	John was born. He was the second child born to his parents, Susan and Peter. Their first child was another boy. His name is Robert.
2001	John's family moved from New York City to Springfield.
2004	John started the first grade. He got all A's on his report card.
2006	John played in his first Little League game. He pitched 5 innings and got 3 hits.
2008	John's Little League team, the Mustangs, won the league championship.
2009	John played the part of a king in the class play.
2010	John's family took a vacation at the seashore. John swam and snorkeled.
<p>Question: What did John say to the reporter from his school website after his Little League team won the championship?</p> <p>Answer: "I love baseball!"</p>	

Here is a template students can use to create their own Me Cards. Draw a similar template on the board, and have students copy it to create their Me Cards on thick paper.

Name	
Birthplace:	Date of Birth:
Height:	Lives in
Hobbies:	
Key Fact:	
_____’s Life	
Question:	
Answer:	

The categories and type of information will vary depending on the age, level, and interests of your students. Younger or less-advanced students will probably include less information, and they could write about themselves in the first-person singular. They could use the present tense, too, if they have not yet studied past-tense verb forms. Students who want to draw a picture or include a personal motto can be creative, of course! And remember—students do not need to be accomplished in baseball or other sports to complete this activity.

In the upper section, where the student’s name appears, have students include the name of the town or city where they live. If they don’t object, they can also include their birthday and birthplace. Other information such as parents’ or grandparents’ names, birthplaces, and talents can also be added.

In the space just below that, the student can insert an interesting fact; it should be about an accomplishment or experience the student is especially proud of. Students can then list additional accomplishments or experiences. This autobiographical information, in whatever form it appears, should be presented in chronological order.

The last section of the card has a trivia question about the student. This question should be about an interesting or unusual fact that the student’s classmates do not know but that the student wants to tell them.

Extension Activities

1. Collecting and trading baseball cards is a popular hobby in the United States, and your students could take part in a similar activity. (That might require them to make several copies of their own Me Cards.) Your students might enjoy trading the cards with their classmates, and could focus on vocabulary through theme-based assignments, such as collecting cards from students born in the same month, cards about students who play sports, and so forth. Other language functions to practice through this activity could be making requests and negotiating (agreeing, refusing, bargaining).
2. Me Cards can be used for making presentations. Have students exchange cards in small groups and make short presentations (1–2 minutes) about each other based on

the information they read on the other student's Me Card. Such an activity can help students develop their confidence in speaking to a group, possibly improve their skill at making introductions, and provide practice in using third-person pronouns.

If students are not ready to switch between first-person and third-person pronouns, they could keep their own Me Cards and make short reports about themselves.

This activity also gives students practice in using the appropriate tense. Based on the sample Me Card, for example, students might say, "John *was* born in New York City. Now he *lives* in Springfield." And they would have to choose between saying, "He *was* born on February 5, 1999" and saying, "His birthday *is* February 5." This activity, then, could help students remember to use the third-person singular *-s* ending in the present tense.

3. Randomly distribute cards to pairs or small groups of students, who do not show their group the cards they are given; instead, they describe the pictures on the Me Cards to each other. The listeners try to guess which classmate's picture is on the card. Conversely, students can read some information from the card, and their partners guess the person on the Me Card. (Students can use a piece of paper to cover the reverse side of the card so that their partner or other group members cannot see it.)



Flash Cards

Level: Beginner and above

Goals: To develop vocabulary with a focus on sports-related words; to develop creative thinking; (optional) to practice phonics and review the alphabet

Materials: thick, stiff paper for making flash cards; colored markers; pens or pencils; glue

Flash cards serve a variety of instructional purposes. In the activities described here, learners create and use flash cards to learn words for sports—or to practice using sports words that have already been taught.

Flash cards are fairly easy to make. Again, if thick paper is not available, you can write the target vocabulary on one piece of paper, then draw the corresponding image (or, if you prefer, the meaning, the translation, or a synonym) on another piece of paper, and glue the two pieces of paper together. You can show the class an example of a flash card before starting this activity; if ready-made flash cards are not available, you can make one or two as examples.

Suggestions for Flash Cards

1. Lead the students in brainstorming names of sports they already know something about. They might suggest words like *soccer*, *tennis*, and *basketball*. Write these words on the board as a vocabulary web—also referred to as a “mind map.” To make a web, write the word *sports* inside an oval in the center of the board; then draw lines extending to other ovals in which you write the names of the sports.

Add the word *baseball* if it hasn't been suggested. (If you are not familiar with baseball, the feature article in this issue explains some basic elements of the sport.)

2. Continue brainstorming with the students by encouraging them to suggest words that are related to each of those sports. Ask leading questions like “What kind of equipment

is used to play the game?” or “What are the names of the players’ positions on the field?” Draw lines extending from each sport to the words that are related to that sport. For *baseball*, you can draw lines that extend to words such as the following:

Equipment: *baseball, bat, glove, cap, helmet*

Positions: *pitcher, catcher, batter, infielder, outfielder*

Field of play: *diamond, infield, outfield, base, home plate*

If baseball pictures are available, display them on the board near the words.

3. Divide the class into groups. If possible, assign one sport to each group; the group’s task will be to make flash cards for the vocabulary items related to its sport. Each student should have a sports term to make a flash card for. Show an example of a flash card and explain what students will be drawing. If students want to make more than one flash card each, that’s fine!

For beginning students: On one side of the flash card, they should draw a picture of their word and write the word below it. On the reverse side, they should print the first letter of the word. The letters must be large, so that all of the students in the classroom can see them.

For upper-beginner and intermediate students: On one side of the flash card, they should draw a picture, definition, or synonym. On the reverse side, they should write the word that identifies the picture, definition, or synonym.

Tell students that later, they will present their words to their classmates. Have them practice the pronunciation of the word (and, for beginning students, the sound of the letter it begins with).

4. After students have made their flash cards, let each student present his or her flash card to the class, showing the picture and saying the word clearly. (Beginning students can repeat the vowel or consonant sound that it begins with.) The rest of the class should repeat the word in unison. If your focus is the alphabet, try to use words that are in an alphabetic sequence.

Extension Activities

1. In this basic memory game, the flash cards are used for vocabulary review. Divide the class into groups of seven or eight students, and give each group as many cards as there are students in the group. If possible, the words could have a common theme—for example, all the cards could be for words related to soccer (e.g., *net, ball, player*). Give students a minute or two to memorize the cards. In each group, one student acts as a referee. The referee distributes one card to each student so that the student is holding the card at his or her forehead and cannot see what is on the card. Students must then guess which card they are holding. (As each student looks at the cards that others in the group are holding, he or she tries to remember which word is missing.) This activity can be made into a game; the first student to guess the word on his or her own card is the winner. The referee makes sure no one peeks. After a few games, you can rotate cards to new groups, with a different student taking over as referee.
2. For more advanced learners, put students in groups and give one student in each group a flash card to hold facing out so that the other students in the group can see the card

but the selected student cannot. Students holding cards ask other members of their group *Wh-* or *Yes/No* questions to help them guess what is shown on their card. Some questions students might ask are:

- What sport does it go with?
- Is it a kind of equipment?
- Is it a position?
- Can I wear it on my head/hands/feet?
- What is it made of?
- What color is it?

If students cannot guess the word on their card, they can get help by asking such things as:

- What is the first letter of the word?
- What is the last letter of the word?
- How many syllables does the word have?

3. Put students in small groups and have each group choose flash cards at random from the class collection so there is one card for each student in a group. Tell students they will have five minutes to arrange the cards in their group in a way agreed upon by members of the group. It will take some discussion, and possibly some false starts, for students to decide their criteria for grouping the cards. They might arrange the cards in alphabetical order, or sort the cards according to the sport each card relates to—some cards might go with baseball, some with soccer, and one with basketball. Or students might arrange the cards in some other way, putting equipment from different sports together, names of positions together, and so on. (Depending on the students' ability, you can give them freedom to think of their own ideas for arranging the cards and see what they come up with.)

After five minutes, ask for one member of each group to tell the class how that group arranged their cards (e.g., “We put *ball* and *bat* together, and we put *pitcher*, *catcher*, and *batter* together.”); then ask the rest of the class to guess the group's criteria for sorting the cards. When all of the groups have reported, have the class compare and contrast the criteria used by the groups.



Interview Role Play

Level: Upper Intermediate/Advanced

Goals: To allow students to practice interview skills such as preparing and asking questions, anticipating questions, and giving spontaneous responses

Many students will be interviewed when they apply for academic programs or for employment. This activity gives students an introduction to interviews, with each student playing the role of either an interviewer or an interviewee. As interviewers, students brainstorm questions to ask their “guests”—professional baseball players who will visit their school. As interviewees, students play the role of baseball players. For some students, this escape from reality will lower inhibitions and concerns about accuracy with language and will raise their level of fluency.

By participating in this activity, students will get a sense of what being interviewed is like. In addition, by preparing questions for an interview, they will gain an understanding of the purpose of an interview and why certain kinds of questions are asked, while others are not.

The Interview Activity

1. Introduce the topic of interviewing. Elicit from students that during an interview, one person asks another person questions in order to get information or to evaluate that person's qualifications. As a class, or in groups, ask students to brainstorm situations that require interviews. (For example, students might interview for a job or for admission to a college or university; others conduct interviews to elicit information from a person with specialized knowledge or someone whom a particular audience would like to learn more about.) If students brainstorm in groups, be sure the groups share with the class the interview situations they thought of.
2. Tell students to imagine that some famous baseball players are going to visit their school. Students will interview the players for an article that will appear in the school newspaper or on the school website.
3. Divide the class into two groups. One group will be the interviewers; the other will be the interviewees (the baseball players). If your class is large, you may wish to subdivide the two groups for the following brainstorming activity.
4. If necessary, review question words such as *why*, *where*, *who*, *when*, *what*, and *how*; questions that begin with a form of the verb *to be*; modal auxiliary verbs in questions; and questions that use the word *do* as an auxiliary verb.
5. Both the interviewers and the interviewees should brainstorm. The interviewers should develop questions they will ask in their interviews. (Note: Tell students that when they interview someone, it is generally better to avoid *yes/no* questions, so the interviewee cannot answer simply "Yes" or "No.") Meanwhile, the interviewees can think of questions they expect the interviewers to ask and consider how they might answer those questions.

Depending on your students' ability level, you might want to elicit a few examples, from the whole class, of appropriate questions to get the brainstorming process going. Write the questions on the board. Here are some possibilities:

- What team do you play for?
- Why did you become a baseball player?
- When did you decide that you wanted to be a professional baseball player?
- Where did you learn to play?
- In your opinion, who is the best baseball player?
- How can I learn to play baseball?

Have students brainstorm additional questions in their groups and write them down. In countries where baseball is well-known, questions may focus more on specific players, teams, and skills. In places where baseball is less well-known, questions may focus more on general topics such as the players' feelings and attitudes about playing, how they practice or stay in shape, and other basic information.

Note that there are some questions that should not be asked, depending on what is appropriate in the culture of the country where you are teaching. For example, questions about salary are not appropriate for most sports-related interviews in the United States, whereas in some contexts, asking about a person's salary is acceptable. Use sensitivity and discretion in advising your students on topics to avoid during the interview.

6. Divide the class into pairs made up of one interviewer and one interviewee (the guest baseball player). The interviewer should introduce himself or herself, explain that he or she is writing an article for the school newspaper or website, and begin the interview. The interviewer can ask questions from the class brainstorming session and add other questions as well. The interviewee should try his or her best to answer the questions clearly. Interviewers should take notes on the interviewees' answers to the questions.
7. After students have completed their interviews, have everyone complete a brief self-assessment. Write some reflection questions on the board or on a handout and collect students' answers, if possible. You might ask these questions:
 - How did you feel when asking/answering questions? Why?
 - Which question was the hardest to answer?
 - Which question was the easiest to answer?
 - What was the most interesting answer?

Once students have written or thought about their answers, you can collect their papers or ask for volunteers to share their ideas with the class.

8. (Optional follow-up activity): Have students supply the names of their favorite athletes—baseball players or otherwise—for a second set of interviews. Have interviewers and interviewees (from #6 above) switch roles (and possibly switch partners), so that the roles of the athletes are played by students from the original interviewer group. All other procedures remain the same.

During the interviews, have each interviewer take brief notes on the interviewee's answers. After the interview, ask students to each write a short article about the interviews they conducted (either #6 or #8). When everyone has finished writing, have students compare what they have written, looking for similarities and differences in the various players' responses.

Alternative Activities

1. Students record a short video of the interview, using video equipment or the video feature of a cell phone. Students could record several "takes," then compare the original (spontaneous) take to a third or fourth take, perhaps looking for areas of improvement or increased fluency. In this option, you might decide to have each interviewer select only two or three questions; after a few takes, the partners can choose the version they like best and post it to a class website.
2. Have several students play the roles of athletes who are all competing for the same position—for example, they could be candidates for a single place on the national Olympic baseball team. The candidates could be interviewed by the entire class, or they could rotate among groups. After the interviews, the class (or the groups) can vote to decide which candidate should be selected. Each student voter should be prepared to justify his or her selection.

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