

Something out of nothing by Martyna Kamińska

Age:	Any
Level:	Any
Time:	5–15 minutes
Description:	This lesson provides inspiration for fillers when you unexpectedly have ten minutes or so left at the end of a lesson. The activities can also be used as warmers.
Key skills:	Speaking, writing
Materials:	Idea 4 – a dictionary

Idea 1 – Word search

Write the phrase 'AFTER BREAKFAST' on the board and explain to your students that it is possible to make over 200 English words from the letters available (because it really is!). As an example, you may want to show them the words *break*, *fast* and *bear*. Set a time limit and off they go. Of course, they can write any words – nouns, verbs, prepositions.

A variation is to narrow the topic down. For example, if you have just discussed food, ask them to find words that are related to food. But this version is suitable only for higher levels.

Idea 2 – Chain story

This works best with past tenses or conditionals. Ask students to pick one word from a topic they are familiar with. They will then have to make a story incorporating their words. They also need to include a part of the previous person's story. For example, imagine you have been working on conditionals and the topic of survival – one person chooses the word 'tent', another 'sleeping bag'. And the story goes: *If I went camping, I would sleep in a tent.* (Next person) *If I slept in a tent, I would have to find a sleeping bag.* (Next person) *If I found a sleeping bag, ...* The more ridiculous the story, the better. I can guarantee there will be lots of laughs!

Idea 3 – Alphabet

Ask your students to work in pairs (or in threes). They should write the alphabet vertically on a piece of paper. Their task is to find a word (or phrase) that starts with

every letter of the alphabet and the word should be related to a particular topic you have just discussed. This can be food, transport, cities and towns etc. You set a time limit and they get started. If their choices are not obvious, they should be prepared to explain them. This activity stimulates students' creativity and practises the skill of explaining your choices.

Idea 4 – Dictionary

This activity is appropriate for higher levels. You will need a dictionary. Open a dictionary on any page. Read out the first and the last words from this page. For example, they may be *employee* and *encourage*. Students' task (preferably in pairs or groups) is to write as many words as they can that appear between the given words (*employer, empty, enable, enclose, etc.*). Later, you check if their words are in the dictionary. The group with the most words wins.

Idea 5 – Word tennis

Divide your class into groups or in half. Then, set the category (animals, food, etc). Student take turns to provide a word or phrase connected to the topic. The game ends when one of the groups has run out of ideas. If your group is strong, you can make it a bit more difficult and tell them to use only nouns or verbs.

Idea 6 – Things that are ...

Ask you students to write on a piece of paper five things that are (for example) blue. They cannot show their answers to each other. Then, in pairs they ask each other ten closed questions and have to guess what their partner has on their paper.

Idea 7 – Surprising facts

Students should write on a paper three to five facts from their lives that are unknown to the rest of the group. They mustn't write their names on the paper. Then, you collect in those pieces of paper and redistribute them to the students. Their task is to guess who wrote the facts in their possession. You should be careful with this activity because some

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students may not want to share details from their personal lives with the rest of the group. Tell your students not to write really intimate details or the things they want to keep secret.

Idea 8 – Preferences

The group should stand up. You ask them questions about their preferences and as you ask the questions, you indicate where they should go. The students then move to the relevant side of the room, before listening for the next question and moving again. For example: *Do you prefer tea* (point to the left side of the room) *or coffee* (point to the right side of the room)? *Do you prefer mountains or seaside?* *Do you prefer rock music or classical music?* When you've finished, you can check what they remember. So you can ask, 'Chris, does Anne prefer tea or coffee?' Don't warn them to observe each other at the start of the activity – let it be a nice surprise for them.

Idea 9 – My alphabet

Every student chooses one letter of the alphabet. Then, they have some time to write five words starting with their letter that are somehow associated with them. Later, they present those words to the class. For example: 'My letter is 'M'. My first word is 'music' because I play the piano. My second word is 'Mediterranean' because I love Mediterranean food. My third word is ...'

Idea 10 – Positive thinking

Students exchange their experiences about the current week. They need to relay three positive things that happened to them. Then, as an extension, they can add three sentences about positive things they are looking forward to. With this activity, you can practise the structure *be going to*. For example: *I met my friend who I haven't seen for ages. I saw a film I'd always wanted to see. Next week, I'm going to visit my cousin. I'm going to paint my room, etc.*

Idea 11 – Numbers

Students need to talk about the things they did yesterday but they need to use at least five numbers. For example: *Yesterday, I went shopping and bought 3 kilos of potatoes. Then, I had to wait 20 minutes for my bus ride home, etc.*

Idea 12 – Similar or different

Students work in pairs. They have 60 seconds to find as many similarities between them as possible. These can be related to food, their favourite colour, their appearance, etc. Then, students are given another 60 seconds to find differences but they cannot just be the opposites of the similarities. They need to find something totally different. Later, they share their 'discoveries' with the class. For example: *We both like apples and dogs but it's only me who has my ears pierced.*

Idea 13 – My preference

Establish three areas in the classroom – the left side of the room means 'I love it'; the middle means 'I'm neutral' and the right side means 'I hate it'. If this is hard for students to remember, write the areas on the board. Now, give students a topic (*chocolate, politics, summer, etc*) and they have to stand in the appropriate place, according to their preferences. Then, give them 20 seconds or so to talk to the person next to them about why they (dis)like the thing, what is good or bad about it, etc.