

Bridges: Teachers' notes and tips – upper intermediate

1 Pre-reading tasks

- a Ask each student to draw a picture of a bridge, it can be a made up one or a bridge they know. Let the students show each other their drawings, have they drawn the same style?

Tip: use visual stimuli to activate schemata

By getting the students to do this they are immediately thinking about the construction and look of a bridge and so thinking about the topic before the reading.

- b Hand out the folded quiz, one for each pair, and ask students to *think about* the answers, it doesn't matter if students don't know any of them.

Tip: use quizzes to create interest in the topic

This is not a test but a way of getting students intrigued by the topic and perhaps wanting to know more.

- c As soon as students start giving up ask them to open up the sheet, the answers are there but in the wrong order. They can get the answers right through context. Open class feedback (1 is e, 6 is f).
- d Do the students have any idioms about bridges in their own language? Encourage students to say the idioms and to explain them, are they similar to the ones in English?

Tip: think about using idioms

I'm always surprised how languages have similar idioms (a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words). Comparing them can help students to recognise the meaning of those they are unfamiliar with in English.

2 First reading tasks

- a The first reading should be done as quickly as possible (give a 3 minute time limit?) Tell the students they have to:
- read and identify the type of bridges pictured (A, B & C)
 - write in the measurements represented by the arrows (don't tell them this is called a span, let them work that out) and,
 - say which are the two main bridge builders' problems.
- b Open class feedback.
- c Students then look at their drawings, which type of bridge did most of them draw? Why was that?

Tip: always have a reason for doing a task!

By returning to the first task students will understand the purpose of the exercise, they shouldn't be left wondering *Why on earth did we do that?!*

3 Second reading tasks

- a Refer back to the word *span* in the second paragraph. How did the students understand the meaning – because it was explained in the text! Explain that although other meanings are not so evident students can often work out unknown words if they look carefully at the context.
- b Ask students to look at the word *swathed* in paragraph 1. Ask them to:
- decide which part of speech it is, *past participle used as an adjective*
 - explain what fog is – *thick, low cloud near the ground which makes it difficult to see* – and where it was – *near / around the bridge*
 - and to say whether the writer could see the bridge – *yes, but perhaps not all*
- c Draw a quick picture of a tall bridge and get a student to draw it swathed in fog. Encourage help from the other students.
- d Now get students to work in pairs to look at the following words, they must decide what part of speech it is, look at the meaning of the words they do know in the same sentence or paragraph, and then use their intelligence / logic to have a go at the meaning.
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|------------------|-------------------------|
| rickety (para 1) | sway (para 6) |
| rigid (para 3) | undulate (para 6) |
| mortar (para 4) | oscillations (para 6) |
| fatal (para 6) | the upper hand (para 7) |

Tip: encourage students to infer meaning from context

Students who can infer meaning from context, rather than turning to a dictionary each time an unknown word is met, become far more efficient readers. Giving students the time and opportunity to realise they can make (fairly) accurate guesses boosts confidence and make reading in English a more enjoyable activity.

- e If students say there are still some more words they don't understand, get them to follow the same process for homework.

4 Post-reading tasks

- a Students choose a bridge from their own home town and come to the class with information about it. Dictate the following questions:
- When was it built?
 - What kind of bridge is it?
 - What building materials have been used?
 - What is it used for / by?
 - What obstacle does it cross?
 - How many spans are there, and how long are they?
 - Do they use the bridge themselves? How often?
 - Do they like the bridge? Why / why not?
- b Students can present their information to the other students next lesson (pictures or drawings would be nice too!)