

How to Make a Mad Lib

Overview

This activity uses ideas from Grammar Safari¹ (where students “hunt” and “collect” examples of specific parts of speech or grammar in a text) and from Mad Libs (a popular word game in which some of the words in a story are replaced with numbered blanks). Students play the game in pairs or small groups: one student is the “Reader” and the others are “Vocabulary Experts.”

Instructions for Creating the Game

1. **Choose a short reading passage from your textbook or another source. The text should be appropriate for your students’ language level and age. The example below is a simplified version of the story of Cinderella.**

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Cinderella. She lived in a small town with her two sisters. They were very ugly and unkind. They were also very lazy, and they made Cinderella do all the work.

One day, the king and queen invited all the girls to an important party, to dance and meet the handsome prince. The sisters were very excited. They wore fancy dresses, but they didn’t allow Cinderella to come with them. Cinderella was so sad! She cried and cried.

Suddenly, a strange woman appeared. She was Cinderella’s Fairy Godmother. She gave Cinderella a beautiful dress and some small glass shoes. Cinderella went to the party and had a wonderful time. She danced with the prince and they fell in love. When she left the party, she lost one of her glass shoes. The next day, the prince brought the shoe to her house and asked her to marry him. They were both very happy and went to live together in the big castle. The end.

2. **You may want to focus on one grammar item like adjectives. Replace the adjectives in the story with numbered blanks as in Example A.**

Example A, Text for the Reader

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Cinderella. She lived in a _____ (1) _____ town with her two sisters. They were very _____ (2) _____ and _____ (3) _____. They were also very _____ (4) _____, and they made Cinderella do all the work.

One day, the king and queen invited all the girls to an _____ (5) _____ party, to dance and meet the _____ (6) _____ prince. The sisters were very _____ (7) _____. They wore _____ (8) _____ dresses, but they didn’t allow Cinderella to come with them. Cinderella was so _____ (9) _____! She cried and cried.

Suddenly, a _____ (10) _____ woman appeared. She was Cinderella’s Fairy Godmother. She gave Cinderella a _____ (11) _____ dress and some _____ (12) _____ glass shoes. Cinderella went to the party and had a _____ (13) _____ time. She danced with the prince and they fell in love. When she left the party, she lost one of her glass shoes. The next day, the prince brought the shoe to her house and asked her to marry him. They were both very _____ (14) _____ and went to live together in the big castle. The end.

You can also replace a variety of parts of speech (e.g., adjectives, nouns, verbs, etc.), as shown in Example B. This example also has an open-ended question at the end to encourage students to use their creative thinking skills.

Example B, Text for the Reader

Once upon a time, there was a _____ (1-noun) _____ named Cinderella. She lived in a small town with her two _____ (2-plural noun) _____. They were very _____ (3-adjective) _____ and unkind. They were also very lazy, and they made Cinderella do all the work.

¹ For more information about Grammar Safari, see the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign website: <http://www.iei.illinois.edu/grammarsafari/grammarsafari.html>

One day, the king and queen invited all the girls to an important party, to _____ (4-verb) _____ and meet the _____ (5-adjective) _____ prince. The sisters were very excited. They wore _____ (6-adjective) _____ (7-plural noun) _____, but they didn't allow Cinderella to come with them. Cinderella was so sad! She _____ (8-past tense verb) _____ and _____ (9-past tense verb) _____. Suddenly, a strange _____ (10-noun) _____ appeared. She was Cinderella's Fairy Godmother.

What happened next? Work with your partner and write a new ending for this story:

3. **Next, prepare a matching set of directions for the Readers to give to the Vocabulary Experts.**

Example A, Directions from the Reader to the Vocabulary Experts (this story has 14 blanks):
Number your paper from 1–14. Write down 14 different adjectives. Then, give them to me and I will put your words into the secret story and read it to you.

Example B, Directions from the Reader to the Vocabulary Experts (this story has 10 blanks):
Number your paper from 1–10. I will tell you what vocabulary to write for each number. For example:

- For number 1, write a noun.
- For number 2, write a plural noun.
- For number 3, write an adjective....

4. **Give “Instructions for Playing the Game” (below) to all of the students; give either Example A or B (above) to the Reader to give to the Vocabulary Experts, too.**

Instructions for Playing the Game

Play this game in pairs or small groups: one student is the Reader and the others are the Vocabulary Experts. The Reader can't tell Vocabulary Experts anything about the story, not even the title! The Reader will give directions to Vocabulary Experts to collect words that are needed for the story. Vocabulary Experts should be as creative as possible! Then, the Reader puts the words into the story in order and reads it aloud. Or, everyone can read it together quietly. Get ready to laugh!