
THE MANY USES OF THE MINI WHITEBOARD

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Abstract

In this teaching tip, the author highlights several different uses for the mini whiteboard in the English writing classroom, particularly to move students away from screens.

Keywords: active learning, writing activities, group work, similes, misplaced modifiers, description

Teachers have long complained about students who are distracted by their phones and tablets. I am one of those teachers, and recently, I have been experimenting with ways to get students off their phones and engaged with small, concrete writing activities. In this teaching tip, I share three brief activities that students can do with whiteboards. At my school, we are lucky to have mini whiteboards for each student, and our classrooms are surrounded by large whiteboards. Most of these activities could be done using either style.

1. **Describe the most specific _____.** In this exercise, students work in small groups to write the most specific description for a general noun the teacher assigns. The teacher sets a timer for two minutes. At the end of that time, the teacher asks the groups to share what they wrote on their whiteboards. For example, if the teacher asked students to describe the most specific automobile, they might write “a 2014 silver GMC Terrain that has a small rust spot on the driver’s side passenger door. Inside it has grey cloth seats, a Sponge Bob air freshener on the rearview mirror, and an old Casey’s cup in the driver’s side cupholder.”

The team with the most specific description at the end of each round gets a point. This gives the teacher a chance to point out which descriptions work well and offer reasons why they work. Other general nouns that might work for this game include *person, meal, room, animal,* and *job*. Later when students revise their writing, teachers can remind them of the way they made nouns more specific through description when they did this activity.

2. **Illustrate Misplaced Modifiers.** After students have corrected a series of misplaced modifiers, the teacher asks them to draw a cartoon of the incorrect version of the sentence alongside a corrected version. This can be done by individuals or as a group activity.

Here are two examples of sentences that contain misplaced modifiers: “Leaking in several places, the scouts abandoned their tents.” “The bank will make loans to responsible people of any size.” After drawing leaking scouts and people of any size, students start to notice misplaced modifiers in their own writing.

3. **Simile Starters.** The teacher places 8-10 whiteboards around the room. On each, the teacher should write part of a simile (e.g., *sweet as*, *loud like*, *rude as*, *grouchy as*, *silly like*, and *cold as* are simile starters). Then the teacher should put students in small groups. Pairs work best for this activity, but groups of three will also work. The teacher sets a timer, and then students need to generate the second part of the simile. For example, after “tall as” students might write “an old giraffe.” After “happy like,” students might write “a dog with peanut butter on his nose.”

Every two minutes, students rotate to the next white board. At the end of the activity, the students read all the similes on their board. The teacher might supply the person or thing that is “tall as” or “happy like” at this time as well. For example, “Our embedded tutor Ehren is happy like: a goldfish, a dog with peanut butter on his nose, Selly when her door dasher delivers her food, or you when you just clocked out at work.”

I hope you find even more use for the mini whiteboard. If you do, please tell me about it in your own teaching tip next year.

Author Biography

Beth Gulley is a professor of English at Johnson County Community College. She has a Ph.D. in curriculum theory from the University of Kansas. Her research interests include active learning techniques, global engagement, and the scholarship of teaching and learning. In addition to her interest in curriculum, she has published ten collections of poetry and volunteers for The Writers Place, the Riverfront Reading Committee, and the Kansas Author’s Club.

