DEAR SUCCESSOR...

AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HANDBOOK OF GAMES FOR NEW ALT'S

ALEX MINER
MICHAEL SAMMLER
Foreword

Dear successor,

If you’re an experienced elementary school teacher, speak fluent Japanese, have a clear idea of what your job is, and plan on striding into your first elementary class ready to take the bull by the horns, you don’t need this book. If you fall short in all these categories, maybe we can help.

The only people I know who seem to know what they’re doing their first year as ALTs never told me their secrets, but I suspect they got lucky with one of the following things:

1. Their predecessors actually stuck around and (competently) tutored them for awhile.
2. They only teach at one elementary school, once a month, and it has four students.
3. They’re one of those perpetually happy people you see in brochures who seem capable of enjoying activities, like sports, even when failing at them.
4. They read their ALT contracts and found them highly applicable to their own experiences; almost as if they were prophetic biographies of their work lives.
5. They’re physically attractive, and I mean hot.

This book isn’t for them. This book is for ALTs who are depressed and ugly -- or, at least, not as lucky as the people I just mentioned. In fact, this next list suits us better as new ALTs, and if any of it suits you too, you’re reading the right book:

1. We’ve never taught at an elementary school before now.
2. We don’t speak very much Japanese.
3. We seem to have more elementary classes than the “average” -- eight classes a week for me, sixteen classes for Michael -- and therefore need access to a large supply of activities or lessons and don’t have tons of time to make elaborate things from scratch.
4. We want to do a good job; that is, we don’t want to do the same game every class period, teach the same material to every grade, or force the Japanese teacher to have to improvise or baby-sit us while we shrug and say, “I got nothing.”
5. We didn’t get much help from our predecessors; Michael didn’t even have one.
6. Our Japanese co-workers are a mixed bag; some are very helpful, others treat us like gorillas that wandered in from the wild and don’t know what to do with us, and very few of our co-workers speak any helpful amount of English.
7. We spend a lot of our time wondering and asking about what we’re supposed to be doing while not getting any feedback.
8. We’re unsatisfied with the elementary school materials for ALTs that are already out there; we feel like they weren’t written for ALTs in our situation.
9. We’re okay-looking; cute in a Disney sort of way.

And so, rather than just whine about these issues, we hope to equip you with a detailed list of topics and activities organized neatly, written brilliantly, and illustrated adequately, with an occasional lapse into tongue-in-cheek humor and uncalled-for advice. Enjoy!

Your Predecessors,
Alex Miner
Michael Sammler
Contents
Foreword
Sample Topics
What the Categories Mean
Activities by Category
Activities:
- Adjective Hint Game
- “Board” Game
- Card-winning Game
- Carnival Throwing Game
- Christmas Gesture Game
- Clap Game
- Creative Group Guessing
- Drawing Game
- Face Game
- Famous Family Tree
- Fill in the Bubbles
- Find the Ship
- Flash Game
- Fruit Basket
- Grid Game
- I Spy
- Karuta
- Limbo
- Marking Practice
- Memory Game
- Navigation Game
- News Story
- Ninjas and Soldiers
- Number Tic-Tac-Toe
- Q&A (tate/yoko, “Crisscross”)
- Rat Maze
- Rotating Pictures
Appendix A: Disclaimers
Appendix B: Teaching Help:
  Coping with Low-energy Classes
  Explaining Things without Japanese
Appendix C: Introductions
Appendix D: Mini-games
Appendix E: Curricula
About the Authors
Index
Sample Topics
And some topic-specific games...

**Adjectives (big, fast):**
- Adjective Hint Game
- I Spy
- Rotating Pictures

**Alphabet:**
- Find the Ship
- Number Tic-Tac-Toe
- Spelling/Number Bee

**Animals**

**Bugs**

**Buildings:**
- Rat Maze
- Whose is This?

**Body Parts:** Face Game

**Can you...? (see “Verbs”)**

**Cardinal Directions (north, southwest):**
- Creative Group Guessing
- Fill in the Bubbles
- Grid Game

**Chores**

**Christmas:** Christmas Gesture Game

**Classroom:**
- I Spy
- Marking Practice
- Navigation Game
- Whose is This?

**Clothes**

**Colors:**
- I Spy
- Rotating Pictures

**Consonants (L vs. R):**
- Find the Ship
- Number Tic-Tac-Toe
- Spelling/Number Bee

**Days of the Week:**
- Clap Game
- Weekly Schedule

**Directions:**
- Face Game
- Fill in the Bubbles
- Grid Game
- Navigation Game
- Rat Maze

**Drinks**

**Expressions (“Wow!” “Ouch!”)**

**Face:** Face Game

**Family:** Famous Family Tree

**Food**

**Furniture:**
- Creative Group Guessing
- I Spy

**Greetings (“Hello!”):**
- Limbo
- Self Introduction Circle
- Snake
- Tennis Ball Game

**Gestures**

**Halloween**

**Hobbies:**
- Famous Family Tree
- Whose is This?

**Holidays**

**Introductions (“My name is...”):**
- Limbo
- Self Introduction Circle

**Jobs:**
- Adjective Hint Game
- Famous Family Tree
- Whose is This?

**Months:** Clap Game

**Music**

**Nature:** Adjective Hint Game
Numbers:
- Clap Game
- Find the Ship
- Number Tic-Tac-Toe
- Scramble
- Spelling/Number Bee

Opposites (big/small)

Places (city, country):
- Creative Group Guessing

Plural (dogs, boxes):
- Scramble

Polite English (“Thanks”):
- Limbo
- Self Introduction Circle
- Snake
- Tennis Ball Game
- Whose is This?

Prepositions (on, in):
- Creative Group Guessing

Questions (“How are you?”):
- Limbo
- Self Introduction Circle
- Snake
- Tennis Ball Game

Rooms (kitchen, garage):
- Adjective Hint Game
- Creative Group Guessing
- Navigation Game
- Whose is This?

Seasons:
- Adjective Hint Game
- Clap Game

Shapes:
- Fill in the Bubbles
- I Spy

Shopping:
- Shopping “And” Game

Sports:
- Adjective Hint Game
- Whose is This?

Time:
- Clap Game
- Find the Ship
- Number Tic-Tac-Toe
- Spelling/Number Bee

Valentine’s Day

Vehicles (car, airplane): Whose is This?

Verbs:
- Famous Family Tree
- Weekly Schedule

Vowels:
- Find the Ship
- Number Tic-Tac-Toe
- Spelling/Number Bee

Weather

Games of Broad Content:*
- “Board” Game
- Card-winning Game
- Carnival Throwing Game
- Drawing Game
- Flash Game
- Fruit Basket
- Karuta
- Memory Game
- News Story
- Ninjas and Soldiers
- Q&A (tate/yoko)
- Solitaire
- The “J” Game
- Whisper Game
- Zoo Keeper

*These games will work with almost any topic. You can probably include at least one of these games per unit, no matter what the content. Feel free to adapt the games as you see fit.
What the Categories Mean

As new ALTs, there was a mantra we kept hearing during workshops: “every situation is different.” I didn’t know if this was a nice way of saying we can’t really prepare for our lives as foreign teachers, or if it was a way to stop ALTs from nagging the company for a rigid manual that tells us exactly what to do, step-by-step, in every possible scenario.

Either way, it’s a good argument. Even within the same elementary school, we’ve run into classes of children that seem to have come from a different universe than the last class. Sometimes we even have to make two different lesson plans for classrooms of the same grade, one for the good class and one for its wicked doppelganger.

Needless to say, we aren’t fond of iron-fisted standardization. Instead, we’ve included several categories by which you can sort through the activities in this book and find something that might meet your particular needs. Most classes fall somewhere in between the two extremes of each category, so just think of these as guidelines.

Low-Energy vs. High-Energy:
This category is all about the students’ willingness to participate in things. High-energy students will shout out answers to your questions before you even ask them. Low-energy students will sleep through your questions. Even when low-energy students are apparently awake, they seem either overly serious or drugged. And so, low-energy activities are those that don’t require students to participate in a very active or public way. They can instead do worksheets, play relatively quiet games, and fill out your tax forms.

Sometimes low-energy games can calm down a class that’s nuts so they work well in the middle of a period. You can try a high-energy activity on a low-energy class to psyche them up, but I wouldn’t have labeled a class “low-energy” if it was that easy to inspire. A more fruitful path to motivating these kids might be to find out who keeps passing out tranquilizers. There’s a short section about low-energy classes in Appendix B.

Long vs. Short Preparation:
Both categories mean “minimum” preparation time. You can spend hours working on a “short preparation” activity if you want to, say, laminate your flash cards, sprinkle them with glitter, and write them in blood. But you don’t have to and that’s the point. “Long preparation” games are the ones that absolutely require you to spend a lot of time outside of class assembling materials or making them classroom-worthy, regardless of how pretty they are.
1st-6th Grade:
This is fairly self-explanatory. It refers mainly to our own experiences of which activities seemed appropriate at which level. But we don’t know about your schools. If you feel like your first graders are ready for Shakespeare, go for it.

Solo vs. Team-teaching:
Solo activities are those that can be done by yourself without too much trouble, but I like to get my teacher involved no matter what, even if it’s just calling on students or drawing random numbers out of a hat (things you could do yourself, but why?). But sometimes teachers just aren’t helpful. Sometimes they just want to take a break or go handle some other business. Sometimes they’re jerks. If you find yourself having to go lone wolf, solo activities are for you. “Team-teaching” games are those that are much better when the teacher is fully involved.

Low vs. High Complexity:
ALTs who speak decent to fluent Japanese can take for granted their ability (habit?) to lapse into Japanese whenever they need to explain a game with complicated rules. In the few examples of elementary school teaching I’ve seen, this was done so casually that I don’t think the ALTs involved were aware they were doing it. For those of us with awful Japanese, sophisticated games just aren’t plausible unless the Japanese teacher in the classroom speaks okay English. And so, if you suck at Japanese, low-complexity games are those with simple rules that you can explain with gestures and dramatic performances instead of the mother tongue. See Appendix B for some general help.
Activities by Category

**Low-complexity:**
Card-winning Game
Carnival Throwing Game
Christmas Gesture Game
Clap Game
Drawing Game
Face Game
Fill in the Bubbles
Find the Ship
Flash Game
Fruit Basket
I Spy
Karuta
Limbo
Memory Game
News Story
Q&A (tate/yoko, “Crisscross”)
Rat Maze
Scramble
Snake
Solitaire (shinkeisuijyaku)
Tennis Ball Game
Whose is This?

**High-complexity:**
Adjective Hint Game
“Board” Game
Creative Group Guessing
Famous Family Tree
Grid Game
Marking Practice
Navigation Game
Ninjas and Soldiers
Number Tic-Tac-Toe
Rotating Pictures
Shopping “And” Game
Self Introduction Circle
Spelling/Number Bee
The “J” Game
Weekly Schedule
Whisper Game
Zoo Keeper

**Younger Students* (1-4):**
Card-winning Game
Christmas Gesture Game
Face Game
Fruit Basket
Rotating Pictures
Scramble
Solitaire (shinkeisuijyaku)
Whisper Game
Zoo Keeper

**Older Students* (5-6):**
Creative Group Guessing
Marking Practice
Weekly Schedule

**Low Energy:**
Carnival Throwing Game
Fill in the Bubbles
Find the Ship
Flash Game
Grid Game
Karuta
Marking Practice
Navigation Game
News Story
Number Tic-Tac-Toe
Rotating Pictures
Scramble
Spelling/Number Bee
Weekly Schedule

**High Energy:**
Adjective Hint Game
“Board” Game
Card-winning Game
Christmas Gesture Game
Clap Game
Creative Group Guessing
Drawing Game
Face Game
Famous Family Tree
Fill in the Bubbles
Fruit Basket
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<tr>
<th>Short Preparation:</th>
<th>Long Preparation:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carnival Throwing Game</td>
<td>Adjective Hint Game</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christmas Gesture Game</td>
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<td>Clap Game</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>The “J” Game</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<th></th>
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</thead>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative Group Guessing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face Game</td>
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* The majority of games aren’t on these two lists because they work with a wider range of ages.

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Dear successor,

A “noun” is a woman that lives in a monastery, right? That’s what I’ve been telling your 5th graders for the past three years.
**Step by Step:**

The ALT:
1. Posts several pictures of target words on the board.
2. Tapes a copy of one of the target words on the board to a student’s back.
3. Turns the student around, showing the class the picture.
4. Asks hint questions, “Red? Yes or no?”
5. Listens for clues from the students: yes’s or no’s.
6. Keeps asking one-word questions until he can guess the object: “Apple?” The students cheer “yes!” or “no!”
7. Drags a student from the crowd and tapes a new image on her back then spins her around once, letting students see the image.
8. Helps the “volunteer” through the same process, dissuading her from guessing at the picture until she has gathered enough clues.

**Notes:**
High-complexity
Grades 1-5
High-energy
Long Preparation
Solo
Description:
This game is aimed at adjectives (fat, red, funny, etc.). However, other kinds of clues can be used, including nouns that denote types. If the picture is Mickey, students may guess “mouse?” Either way, the game follows the “20-questions” rule-set insofar as “yes” and “no” are the only valid answers.

Variants:
To level up the game, every student can have a picture taped on his back then circulate around finding partners. When each student finds a partner, she can janken (paper, rock, scissors) with the partner to determine who asks a question and who answers. After she has collected enough clues, she can approach the ALT to confirm the picture and get a new picture. Some students need more supervision than others, but it’s not the bar exam so don’t stress it.

In first grade classes, “yes” and “no” may be all you want to practice. In that case, the student volunteer can ask questions in Japanese. Also, the picture can be of something that’s the same in English and Japanese: basketball, chocolate, gorilla, etc.
“Board” Game

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Draws a “path” on the board from “Start” to “Finish” divided into roughly 16 squares.
2. Divides the students into 2-4 teams.
3. Gives each team a choice of game-piece, which is a picture of a famous person or character (Mickey Mouse, for example).
4. The ALT posts the game-pieces on the “Start” square.
5. Posts one blank card, with a hidden picture on the reverse side, in each square and keeps several cards in a “reserve” stack.
6. Invites one student in one team to randomly select a number from 1-4 from a hat.
7. Moves the team’s game-piece 1-4 squares and turns over the blank card posted there, showing it to the volunteer student.
8. Gives the student five seconds to identify the picture in English.
9. If the student is correct, allows her game piece to remain in the square, and replaces the blank card with a new one from the reserve stack.
10. If the student is wrong, turns the card back around and moves the game-piece back one square. Now, anyone in her team can try to identify the new card. Continues to move the game-piece back one space for every wrong answer, or allows the game piece to stay if the answer is correct.
11. Moves on to the next team after a right answer.
12. Rotates through the teams until one reaches the “Finish” line.

Notes:
High-complexity
Grades 3-6
High-energy
Long Preparation
Solo
Description:
It’s important to let anybody in a team guess at the next card after the first student gets one wrong. Otherwise the same student could, after failing over and over, send his game-piece all the way back to the “Start” line. It’s also important to replace correctly answered cards from the reserve stack to avoid redundancy.

This game works best as a review activity because it needs a large supply of “reserve” cards to be challenging. See the “Memory Game” for a way to make quick, reusable flash cards. In fact, you can use the exact same cards if you played the “Memory Game,” or something like it, earlier in the year.

You may want to prepare the game board on a small, portable chalkboard before your lesson begins to save on in-class preparation time. To spice things up, you can have “special” squares that give automatic penalties or rewards too.
Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Gives each student three cards with pictures of target words.
2. Jankens (paper, rock, scissors) with a student and “wins.”
3. Says a phrase that uses one of the words from the student’s three cards: “I like baseball,” for example.
4. Encourages the student to say, “Here you are!” and offer up the card in his deck that displays a baseball image.
5. Moves on to a new student, loses at janken, and leads her in practicing the English phrase: “I like hockey” then offers her the hockey card with a polite, “Here you are.”
6. Guides the students in circulating around, finding partners, and playing the same game in order to win as many cards as possible from their peers.
7. Stops the class after five minutes.
8. Polls the class to see who has won the most cards.

Notes:
Low-complexity
Grades 1-3
High-energy
Long Preparation
Solo
Description:
When a student runs out of cards, she can come to the ALT or teacher for one more. This (sometimes) prevents crying. During the game itself, the ALT and teacher can wander around making sure students are using English after each round of “janken.” They can also play the game with very shy students.
**Carnival Throwing Game**

**Step by Step:**

The ALT:
1. Splits the class into groups of four or five.
2. Using chalk, divides the blackboard into sections of varying size, assigning a point value to each section (low points for big sections, high points for small).
3. Posts a picture of a target word (i.e. countries) in each section.
4. Stands in the back of the room and throws a ball at the board.
5. Observes which section the ball hits then says the section’s target word out loud: “New Zealand!”
6. Assigns his “group” the number of points shown in the section.
7. Entreats each group to janken (paper, rock, scissors) to decide a thrower and a speaker for round 1 then chooses a group to start.
8. Plays for about 3 rounds; the group with the most points wins.

**Notes:**
Low-complexity
Grades 1-6
Low-energy
Short Preparation
Solo
**Description:**
Ideally, the ball should be spongy and harmless. If you’re male, rowdy students *will* throw it at your nether regions. This game seems to work okay in low-energy classes after the rules are explained though the explanation itself can be grueling. In any case, throwing a ball may energize bored kids.
Christmas Gesture Game

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Displays several Christmas images (Santa, reindeer, etc.).
2. Teaches the students silly gestures that represents one of the images (‘carrying a bag of toys’ can represent Santa, etc).
3. With the teacher, leads the class in clapping twice then making one of the gestures at random. Each student chooses which gesture he wants to use.
4. Observes who’s making the same gesture as the teacher.
5. Instructs these students to sit down, assuring them that they can still play while seated.
6. Plays another round of the game then observes the gestures of the students who are already sitting down.
7. Instructs the seated students who are making a different gesture from the teacher to stand back up.
8. Repeats this process until someone breaks a hip.

Notes:
Low-complexity
Grades 1-4
High-energy
Short Preparation
Team

Variant:
Instead of having students alternate between sitting and standing, the game can be played until all standing students are eliminated except one. This student is then the winner.
Description:
The plus side to this game is that it’s fun, anyone can play it, and it’s easy to get the teacher involved. The downside is no actual learning of English takes place. But then, Christmas isn’t about learning.
Clap Game

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Posts pictures representing target words on the board in rows.
2. Leads the class in chanting each one in order: “May, June, etc.”
3. Picks a student who then chooses a random picture.
4. Writes an X under the chosen picture; for example, “August.”
5. Leads the class in chanting the pictures in order, but this time claps when they get to August instead of saying it.
6. Repeats this game until all the pictures have Xs under them.
Description:
By the time everything gets an X written under it, the students will have said the words so many times that they’ll be repeating them in their sleep. Some kind of musical aid, like a tambourine, makes this even more fun.

The game works well with any kind of sequential words: days of the week, the alphabet, numbers, etc. For months and days of the week you’ll either have to use the written words (hard for younger kids) or display some kind of calendar. The kanji for days and months are pretty simple and may also help. Technically you could play the game using any words, even if they aren’t sequential. To avoid imposing a rigid order on words that aren’t naturally in any order (unless you think peanut butter must come before jelly), you can occasionally shuffle them.

Notes:
Low-complexity
Grades 1-6
High-energy
Short Preparation
Solo
Creative Group Guessing

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Splits the class into groups of 4 to 6 students.
2. Gives each group a small sheet of scrap paper.
3. Designates certain areas “here” (the students’ desks), “there” the surrounding walls, and “over there” (things out the window).
4. Says one of the three words: “There!” and writes down something in the “there” area on a few groups’ papers, such as こくばん (kokuban; black board).
5. Shows how the groups who have the same answer, black board, get no point and how the groups with an original answer, table, get one point.
6. Plays for real this time, giving the groups 30 seconds to write down an object in the specified area that other groups hopefully won’t also think of.

Notes:
High-complexity
Grades 5-6
High-energy
Short Preparation
Team
**Description:**
Unless your Japanese is good, or unless the students write their answers in English, you’ll need the teacher’s help in checking to make sure the objects they write down in Japanese are in the specified area, or exist at all! Or the students can draw the object.

You might want to have the students in each group janken (paper, rock, scissors) to decide on a group speaker who, at the end of the 30 seconds, stands up and holds the scrap paper until her group’s turn arrives. This will prevent students from covertly changing their answers at the last minute.

Besides “here” and “there,” this game can be played with cardinal directions (north, etc.) or prepositions (*in* the parking lot, etc.).
Drawing Game

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Shuffles a stack of cards, each showing a picture of a target word.
2. Splits the class into two teams.
3. Directs each team to line up on either side of the board.
4. Pretends to be the first student in a line, draws a card from the top of the deck, looks at the picture, then draws it on the board.
5. Gives his “team” 20 seconds to guess the picture in English.
6. Gives the other team a free guess if his team can’t guess in time.
7. Offers the next team a card from the top of the deck. The student in front, like the ALT had done, draws what she sees.
8. Awards points for correct guesses until one of the teams wins.

Notes:
Low-complexity
Grades 1-6
High-energy
Short Preparation
Solo
**Description:**

If the 20 seconds is up and the opposing team gets a free guess, it’s good to let them huddle, discuss it, and then decide on *one* student to speak for the group. Otherwise, they’re all likely to start shouting answers en masse.

It’s also a good idea to keep the students seated (really, they don’t even have to line up as long as the division between teams is clear). Otherwise, students may rush the board for a better view and block it for everyone else.

Finally, if one of the teams is way ahead of the other, you can make a card in the deck suddenly worth more points. This gives the losing team a chance... or provides a landslide victory for the already-winning team. Creativity points can be awarded to especially well-drawn pictures too.

**Variant:**

An especially energetic class can act out the vocabulary word instead of drawing it, sort of like in Charades (as long as it isn’t too abstract; i.e. “gray” or “entropy”). In that case, you don’t need a time limit. The team that guesses first wins.
**Face Game**

**Step by Step:**

The ALT:
1. Makes pairs by pointing at two students simultaneously and saying, “pair.”
2. Makes the teacher her partner and gives him parts of a face (eyes, mouth, etc.) made from construction paper with magnets stuck on the back.
3. Jankens (paper, rock, scissors) with the teacher.
4. “Wins” at janken and ties a blindfold around the teacher’s eyes.
5. Gives the teacher a face piece, says it out loud in English, then guides him to the black board (in Japanese or otherwise) where he posts it.
6. Repeats this routine until a face, or something face-like, is made.
7. Invites a pair of students to do the same and laughs at their abominations.

**Variants:**
Although this game is intended for young kids (with a good sense of humor), it could be made more challenging by giving the blindfolded student English directions (straight, left etc.).

You can also have several pairs go at the same time, but you’ll need the teacher to help you keep track of the resulting chaos.

**Notes:**
Low-complexity
Grade 1-2
High-energy
Long Preparation
Team
Description:
Besides human faces, animal faces also work. Animals with peculiar faces, like elephants, are fun. We always enjoyed making fun of hideous faces because it gives students who are seated something to do. Because this is a popular Japanese party game, kids are likely already familiar with it.

Dear successor,

To adopt Japanese pronunciation, you should add “o” and “u” at the end of every word. For example, rather than telling students to “sit down” and “stand up,” you should tell them to “sit-o” and “stand up-u.” In restaurants, it’s customary to get the server’s attention by yelling, “sumimasen-u.”
Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Organizes the students into groups of four.
2. Gives each group a picture of a famous family, or a group of people who could somewhat pass as a family (the Simpsons, Star Trek characters, the Jackson 5, etc.).
3. Picks a character and becomes that character by writing his name next to a person in the picture, then helps the students choose their own alter-egos.
4. Helps the students give the leftover characters names and relationships to themselves (“Mamama: my mom,” etc.).
5. After five to ten minutes, calls each group to the front of the class one-by-one to present their “families.”
6. Laughs as a student points to Yoda, saying, “Dai-san is my dad.”
Description:
Although these examples use pretty advanced grammar for elementary kids, one-word answers (“mother!” “uncle!”) are also okay. During the presentation, there’s no need for each student to have a rigidly defined role. Comedy sort of creates its own structure.

Besides being given names and roles in the family, occupations, vehicles, and other biographical facts can be added, especially if they are easy to implement in the sentence pattern being taught. For example, the presenting students may end up saying things like: “My brother’s name is Akira. My brother’s job is zookeeper. My brother’s car is Toyota” etc.

Just be warned that if you and the teacher are opposite sexes, you’re likely to become the mother and father of the family and be assigned eccentric likes and dislikes (cucumbers, rubber boots, etc.).

Notes:
High-complexity
Grades 4-6
High-energy
Short Preparation
Solo
Step by Step:

The ALT:

1. Passes out a 6x6 grid of circles. All of the circles (or bubbles) are empty except one, which is filled in. This is the start.
2. Draws a similar, but smaller, grid on the board as an example.
4. Fills in the bubbles as per the directions: the bubble to the right of the starting point, then the next right, etc. Gradually, a simple picture forms.
5. Slowly gives directions to the students, being careful not to repeat directions so students don’t overshoot.
6. Upon finishing, asks the students what they had just drawn.

Notes:
Low-complexity
Grades 3-5
Low-energy
Long Preparation
Solo
**Description:**
This game shouldn’t be abused. While it’s good listening practice, its long term fun is limited.

Some fairly simple images they can draw are:
- A. A heart
- B. A star
- C. A crescent moon
- D. A staircase
- E. Your home state, province, country, etc.

**Variants:**
Besides filling in bubbles, you can also make this “connect the dots.”

Also, cardinal directions (north, etc.) work well and if you teach the more complex cardinal directions (northeast, etc.), you can make more elaborate pictures.

Finally, you can use a grid of bubbles or dots when teaching shapes by calling out the names of shapes while students draw them. A blank sheet of paper would work too, but the confined space of the grid makes it more challenging.
Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Sets up a little chalkboard with a 6x6 grid of blank cards on the board, six of which have hidden ship-pictures on the backside.
2. Writes some small numbers to the left of each row (2, 4, 6, etc.).
3. Writes multi-digit numbers above each column (00, 05, 30, etc.).
4. Pretends to be one of the students, raises her hand until the teacher calls on her, then says: “4:30!”
5. Turns over the card at the intersection of 4 and 30, says, “Nai!” (not there!), then puts the card aside.
6. Calls on students to guess where the ships are located until all six are found.

Notes:
Low-complexity
Grades 3-6
Low-energy
Long Preparation
Solo

Variants:
Besides times, students can practice saying large numbers (3 and 000 for three thousand) and words (“a” and “t” for “at”).

“Find the Ship” can be played more like the Milton-Bradley board game it was inspired by if you divide the students into pairs and give each pair a couple of worksheets that resemble the grid depicted. More students get to participate this way.
**Description:**
Although you could put a vocabulary word on the front of each card and the students could select a card by saying it, you would need 36 different words in your unit (which is a bit evil) and you can only use the cards for one grade and one lesson, which isn’t worth the effort of making all the cards.

The game lasts maybe 10 to 15 minutes with a 6x6 grid. It’s great for giving students a lot of practice on things that aren’t especially memorable, like combinations of numerals (2500, 5:31, etc.)

See the “Memory Game” for a note on saving materials during preparation. The worksheet shown here should be folded in half allowing the student to hide the grid from her partner.
Flash Game

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Gives half a stack of large flash cards to the teacher.
2. Flashes the top card in the stack at the students far too quickly for any of them to see.
3. Waits patiently as the students express their bewilderment.
4. Takes turns with the teacher showing, then suddenly hiding, the pictures at the students (now that they’re paying attention).
5. Selects an eager student to guess the word represented on the flash card.

Notes:
Low Complexity
Grades 1-6
Low Energy
Short Preparation
Team
Description:
For grades 1-4, pieces of cardboard with large pictures pasted on, or laminated computer paper, can work as flash cards. For grades 5 and 6 pictures and words might be best.

One run-through of all the vocabulary is about right, but if you find new and dramatic ways to flash the cards, it may never get old. I enjoy the following:

A. Hiding the flash card behind my necktie. 
B. Showing the flash card to the blackboard, then abruptly jumping 180 degrees to face the students. 
C. Walking to distant and awkward places in the classroom. 
D. Babbling in English then flashing the card in mid-sentence. 
E. Showing the back of the flash card to half the students while “accidently” revealing the picture to the other half. 
F. Slowly revealing the picture from behind an opaque object.

The unexpected nature of the game builds anticipation and helps kids pay close attention to you. That’s the theory anyway.

The students themselves can also flash the pictures after a few demonstrations.

Variant:
Besides making cards with only one image, you can also make some with five or six images. After flashing the card once, call on several students to identify what they saw, one after the other. This variant kind of works as a visual take on the News Story game.
Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Posts big pictures of target words on the board.
2. Gives each student three small cards depicting target words.
   Each card has at least one match in some other student’s hand.
3. Guides the students in forming a circle with their chairs.
4. Stands in the middle of the circle and says a word: “Cherry!”
5. Directs the students with cherry cards to stand up and run to a chair left vacant by another student with a cherry card.
6. Similarly tries to steal a vacant chair.
7. Calls upon the student in the center to say one of the target words on the board; i.e. “Apple!” Students with apple cards now look for new chairs.
8. Occasionally encourages the student to say, “Fruit basket!” at which point all of the students stand up and seize new chairs.

Notes:
Low-complexity
Grades 1-4
High-energy
Long Preparation
Solo
Description:
This is a common enough game that you may not need to explain it at all, which is the reason it’s classified as “Low-complexity.” Be warned that any student that’s “it” can yell, “Fruit basket!” every time, thus never actually practicing the vocabulary from the lesson.

You can use fewer cards for younger grades. Also, the “fruit basket!” chaos round is an especially good idea for younger grades because it gives kids whose cards never get called (such as the poor kid with the “antidisestablishmentarianism” card) a chance to run around.

Finally, you can cut down on preparation if your lesson involves something all the students already have, such as clothing and colors.

Variant:
As the class advances they can start to use more than one word at a time: for example, “I like salad and pizza!” This gives you the opportunity to fake the kids out with variations on the grammar: “I don’t like pizza, but I like lasagna” etc.
Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Organizes the students into pairs.
2. Gives each pair a worksheet with a grid on it, each square showing a picture except for the square which is labeled, “Start.”
3. Gives each pair a short stack of little slips of paper, each corresponding to one of the pictures on the grid.
4. Demonstrates by drawing a similar grid on the board and offers a random slip of paper out of her own deck to the teacher.
5. Gives directions from the “Start” to the target picture on the grid that matches the slip in the teacher’s hand: “Go left, go up,” etc.
6. Helps the teacher guide his slip of paper from the start to the target picture via the ALT’s directions.
7. Draws her own slip and then takes directions from the teacher.
8. Entreats the pairs of students to do as she had demonstrated.

Notes:
- High-complexity
- Grades 3-5
- Low-energy
- Long Preparation
- Solo
**Description:**

Although this game is difficult to explain to teachers and, as the case may be, to other ALTs, it’s actually quite simple and students seem to pick up on it. The only goal is to get all the slips of paper distributed across the grid to their appropriate squares using directions.

The images themselves aren’t important to the core game, although you could ask the students to name the pictures as they draw them from the deck. This might be difficult as this game is aimed at low-energy, bored students, but it would expand the potential content of the activity.
Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Divides the class into groups of four or five students.
2. Takes mental note of something in the classroom and says, “I spy something green.”
3. Waits, then identifies the green thing in the classroom: a plant.
5. Gives the groups 30 seconds to identify all the blue things they can see.
6. Starts at group 1 and picks a volunteer to suggest one thing. If it’s the correct blue thing, the group wins. If not, the ALT moves on to group 2 and lets them guess.
7. Picks a new group to start when each round begins.
8. Allows a (trustworthy) student to say “I spy” after a few rounds.

Notes:
Low-complexity
Grades 1-6
High-energy
Short Preparation
Team
Description:
Naturally, any English adjectives, not just colors, will work with this tried and true game. Unless you speak good Japanese, the participation of the teacher will be crucial because students will probably give their answers in Japanese.

DEAR SUCCESSOR,

I'M NOT SURE HOW BILINGUAL JAPAN REALLY IS.

HELLO! I'M FINE, AND YOU?
Karuta

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Organizes the students into groups of four or five with their desks facing each other.
2. Passes out 6-12 cards per group, each with a picture of a target word (i.e. animals), crowding them into the center of the combined desks.
3. Indicates to the students to place their hands on their heads.
4. Shouts out, “Dog!” then quickly slaps the dog card on somebody’s desk and “keeps” it because he slapped it the fastest.
5. Puts his hands on his head again then shouts the names of animals until students similarly begin slapping the appropriate cards and hoarding them.
6. Praises the student in each group who wins the most cards.

Notes:
Low-complexity.
Grades 1-6
Low-energy.
Short Preparation
Solo
**Description:**

This game counts as low-complexity only because most students already know it. Shouting out the name of the activity will probably be enough for students to prepare without your help. Already knowing the rules is also the reason this game usually works with low-energy classes most of the time.

If two students slap a card at the same time, they can janken (paper, rock, scissors) to decide who wins or engage in gladiatorial combat.

**Variants:**

Students can make their own cards, especially in younger classes, because drawing is fun. This takes a lot more time though. See the Rotating Pictures game for a good preliminary activity.

Also, you can use clippings from newspapers and magazines if you’re teaching clothes or sports, both of which tend to be depicted regularly. The office assistant can probably give you a reliable supply of old periodicals.

Finally, you can post pictures on the board. Students then run up and touch the correct picture or whack it with a flyswatter. In this variant, two students can wait at the board while the students themselves pronounce the word. You can prompt them by showing them a separate picture of the target word and having them finish your sentence like so:

Teacher: “Let’s go to the…”
Students: “Park!”
Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Gives a meter stick, mop, or other long object to the teacher.
2. Finds a student volunteer to help the teacher hold the stick horizontally.
3. Lines up all the students in front of the stick.
4. Asks the first student in line a question in English, such as “What’s this?” (while showing a picture).
5. Quickly demonstrates to the students how to limbo.
6. Encourages the student, if she answered correctly, to do likewise.
7. Sends students that can’t successfully limbo under the stick back to their desks.
8. Lowers the height of the stick when all the students have tried.

Notes:
Low-complexity
Grades 1-6
High-energy
Short Preparation
Team
Description:
Besides “What’s this?” any simple exchange will do: “What’s your name?” “How old are you?” etc. If a student gets the question wrong, other students can help him. There’s really no need for penalties.
Marking Practice

Step by Step:

The ALT:

1. Passes out about ten different versions of a fake, completed test to each student, each of which has 10 answered questions on it.
2. Helps students “mark” the test by marking his own sample test, circling correctly answered questions and X-ing out wrong ones.
3. Writes a score on the sample test like so, 9/10, after finishing his marking.
4. Circulates around the class helping students do the same.
5. Assigns a word of praise or criticism to each possible score on the board: 0/10 = Terrible, 5/10 = Okay, 10/10 = Perfect, etc.
6. Practices the question/answer, “How is it?” and “It’s perfect!” etc. a few times with the whole class.
7. Jankens (paper, rock, scissors) with a student and “loses.”
8. Asks, “How is it?” and helps the student answer: “It’s great!” etc. then switches tests with the student.
9. Jankens with a student and “wins” so that the student must ask.
10. Beckons to the students to do likewise with random peers until they practice the question/answer, and switch tests, five times.

Notes:
High-complexity
Grades 5-6
Low-energy
Long Preparation
Solo
Description:
It isn’t necessary that the students mark the tests themselves, but it does provide a little more immersion into the fantasy. Also marking wrong answers to ridiculously easy questions ($2 + 2 = 900$) can be quite amusing.

To take this mock-classroom to the next level, each test can have the name and picture of a famous person or character on it as the “test-taker,” just in case the students were curious about the Cookie Monster’s exam aptitude.

Dear successor,

So, the car you drive here in Japan wouldn’t happen to have fifteen wheels, would it? That’s how many used tires I left on the back porch for you. No need to pay me. They’re free.
Memory Game

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Displays a 5x5 grid of cards on the board. The blank side of the cards faces the students while the other side displays target word images.
2. Writes a number above each column in the grid and a letter to the left of each row.
3. Demonstrates by calling out a letter and a number: “B3!”
4. Turns over the card at the intersection of B and 3 and identifies the image: “purple!”
5. Calls out another card at random, “A5!” and turns it over.
6. “Wins” a point if the images match, or returns the cards to their original places on the grid if the images don’t match.
7. Divides the class into two teams: the ALT’s team and the teacher’s team.
8. Flips a coin to see which team goes first and chooses one student from each team to pick two cards, hoping for a match.

Notes:
Low Complexity
Grades 1-6
High Energy
Long Preparation
Solo
Description:
This game is a lot like “Find the Ship,” except that students are practicing saying the images on the cards. The emphasis is not on selecting the cards, as in “Find the Ship,” so the selection method should be as easy as possible. In fact, students can even use hiragana or katakana to select cards: “ke 1,” etc.

The whole team can participate, not just the brave student who raises her hand. Chances are, some students in the team remember where a card’s match is on the grid and can give advice to the student who’s guessing.

This game works well with pairing up opposites too: hot with cold, fast with slow, etc.

If your cards are made of construction paper, you can staple little pockets on the back. You can then slip pictures of target words into the pockets every time you want to play this game or “Find the Ship” and not have to make a new set of cards for every lesson. It saves on paper, glue, magnets, time, and sanity.
Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Travels throughout the school before class posting pictures of recognizable things on the doors to important rooms (gym, etc.).
2. Forms pairs by designating each student as either Mario or Luigi.
3. Gives each Mario a sheet of pictures that correspond to the pictures posted on doors throughout the building, but not in any particular order.
4. Gives each Luigi a list of directions using pictures of arrows. Each list also has its own ID number.
5. Impersonates a Luigi by giving a Mario directions in English from the list: “Go right. Go downstairs. Go straight. Take the second right.”
6. Does nothing while each Luigi leads each Mario to a specific door with a picture on it. When the Mario comes to the picture, she finds it on her sheet and writes the ID number of Luigi’s list next to it.
7. Declares each finished Mario a Luigi and each Luigi a Mario, gives the new Luigi a new list of directions, then sends them on a new search.
8. After everyone returns, rewards the first pair who finishes.
9. With the teacher’s help, checks everyone’s answers by yelling the name of a room (i.e. “Nurse’s Office!”) and asking the students for the corresponding number from the direction sheet: “Two!”
Description:
It’s best if the teacher in the classroom is the one who actually makes the lists of directions given that the teacher probably knows the school better.

Notes:
High-complexity
Grades 4-6
Low-energy
Long Preparation
Team
Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Before class, writes 4-6 “news stories” that uses most of the target words from the lesson, keeping track of which words are not used in each story.
2. Passes out a numbered worksheet to each student, each displaying a row of little pictures representing target words (or the words themselves).
3. Warns the students to listen, then recites the first news story as practice, emphasizing the target words with a loud accent.
4. Helps the students check off the target words they hear on the worksheet.
5. Asks the students which words were not used in the practice story and calls on volunteers to answer.
6. Moves on, reading each successive story faster than the last.

Notes:
Low-complexity
Grades 1-6
Low-energy
Short Preparation
Solo
**Description:**
The stories do not have to be Shakespearean, nor do they have to be in simplified English as the students are not expected to understand them. The exercise is meant to help students get used to listening to English, even when they can’t get most of it. In some ways, it emulates an immersion class.

It’s not a good idea to overdo this activity as it can wear students out quickly. It’s also not a good idea to over-think the stories. They really don’t need to be “news” at all, although they should probably follow the conventions of normal, spoken or written English.

1. Mrs. Greenstone got out her pencil and proceeded to put her thoughts down on paper. Later, she would turn these thoughts into a new book because, after all, the pen is mightier than the eraser. Scissors.

2. There’s book at the library that details the process of making paper. I circled the passage with a pencil and pen then cut it out with scissors. Now it’s mine! Eraser.

3. Although my book has a fancy cover, I try to keep my pen, pencil, and eraser rather plain. But then, my scissors do depict the Last Supper. Paper.
Ninjas and Soldiers

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Places a “throne” in front of the board and draws a crown on the board where a student’s head would be were she sitting there.
2. Picks six students to stand in a wide V that spreads outward from the throne, proclaiming these students his “soldiers.”
3. Gives each soldier two or three pictures of target words.
4. Makes sure the soldiers know the words.
5. Assigns everyone else the role of “ninja” and splits them into two equal groups who then line up at either end of the V.
6. Pretends to be a ninja and jankens (paper, rock, scissors) with the first soldier on his end of the V; if he loses, he then goes to the end of the opposite line.
7. If he wins, gets the soldier to ask, “What’s this?” and show the picture.
8. Identifies the picture in English, then moves onto the next soldier and repeats the process, trying to eventually reach the ruler (the person sitting on the throne).
9. Indicates to the soldiers to shuffle the pictures after each challenge.
10. Becomes the ruler and jankens with a student who finally makes it through one of the gauntlets of soldiers. If he loses, the student becomes the new ruler.
11. Stops the students every five minutes or so to trade out the six soldiers with new ones, giving each ninja chance to be a soldier.

Notes:
High-complexity
Grades 4-6
High-energy
Short Preparation
Solo
Description:
This complex game teaches a valuable lesson about subterfuge. More importantly, kids seem to love it and it tests both listening and speaking. It’s a good idea for the teacher and ALT to play one of the three roles too to stay involved and keep the momentum going. The game can take up the whole class period if you want.
Number Tic-Tac-Toe

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Gives every two students one tic-tac-toe sheet, thus forming pairs. Besides the grid, the sheet also shows two identical lists of numbers on each side of the tic-tac-toe grid so that if the two students are facing each other with the sheet between them, each student will be looking at the same list of numbers.
2. Says “janken” (paper, rock, scissors) and the pairs then janken.
3. Designates each winner an “O” and each loser an “X.”
4. Draws a tic-tac-toe grid on the board and a list of numbers.
5. Calls out a random number from the list on the board.
6. Competes with the teacher to “find” the number first, circle it, then draw an X somewhere in the tic-tac-toe grid.
7. Repeats this charade but lets the teacher find the number before her. He then circles the number that was called on his list and draws an “O” on the grid.
8. Repeats the demonstration until either she or the teacher can draw her/his mark in three adjacent squares, thus winning the game of tic-tac-toe.
9. Entreats the pairs to do likewise, while the ALT calls out the numbers.
10. Writes each called number on the board after a few seconds, revealing the answer.

Notes:
High-complexity
Grades 3-6
Low-energy
Long Preparation
Solo
Description:
Some students will win very early on in the game, but you can keep playing up to nine rounds (the number of squares in the tic-tac-toe grid) so that every student gets a chance. Some students may win more than once. If students tie, they can janken to resolve the tie. To make it clearer who the winner is, the winner can quickly place her pencil down after making her mark.

Although the sheet can be quite stark, a few adornments, such as a different animal in each section, can make it more obvious which part of the game the class is on (i.e. “Let’s start with the monkey section!”)

The last step, writing the number on the board after a few seconds, is important. Otherwise, 14 will get confused with 40 and so on. Doing this slowly throughout the round creates drama.

Finally, besides random numbers, this game can be played with letters, easy words, and time.
**Q & A (tate/yoko)**

**Step by Step:**

The ALT:
1. Writes this on the board: 9-14 = たて (tate [column]), 15-20 = よこ (yoko [row]), 1-8 = ひとりで (hitori de [by yourself]).
2. Tells the students, “Stand up!” (or “たてくうたい”)?
3. Asks a question (i.e. “What’s your name?”) loudly to the entire class then raises his hand indicating that they should do likewise.
4. Calls on a student who hopefully answers correctly.
5. Offers the student a cup full of random numbers from 1-20.
6. Gestures for the student to sit down, or for her row or column to sit down, depending on what number she draws, as indicated on the board.
7. Takes turns with the teacher asking questions and picking students to answer until everyone is seated.

**Notes:**
Low Complexity
Grades 1-6
High Energy
Short Preparation
Solo

**Variants:**
Dice, coins, or other things more exciting than numbers written on chits of cardboard make the game more fun. Also, students themselves can choose between “tate” or “yoko” if you don’t want the process to be random.

To make this game last longer, some of the random numbers or quarters can make students stand back up.
Description:
Q&A, also known as “Crisscross,” is a variation of a warm-up activity common in junior high schools and probably elsewhere. If you’re not comfortable writing the “key” in hiragana, romaji or little diagrams of desks in rows and columns work fine.

Dear successor,

I came to Japan for the food. I don’t really like sushi, sashimi, yakiniku, soba, ramen, onigiri, shrimp, eel, seaweed, squid, octopus, fish, or rice, but the McDonalds is awesome.
Rat Maze

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Assembles a maze on the board by drawing it or using construction paper (the point isn’t to get the rat lost, so the ALT keeps it simple).
2. Places a picture of a rat (a toy rat if you can find a magnetic one) and a prize (cheese?) on opposite ends of the maze.
3. Shouts directions at the rat while moving it: “Turn right!” etc.
4. Calls on a student to do the same.
5. Moves the rat according to the student’s directions, even if into a wall. Reorienting the rat after a screw-up is good for learning.
6. Chooses a new student each time the rat hits a barrier.
7. Repeats this process until the prize has been reached.

Notes:
Low Complexity
Grades 3-5
High Energy
Long Preparation
Solo
Description:
This activity is an interactive way of using English, but is not really a game, so it’s best not to overdo it. The novelty can keep kids engaged long enough to grasp the concepts.

Also, if the picture of the rat is from an overhead view, it’ll be easier to tell which direction it’s pointing, which is crucial for driving-style directions.

Variants:
For two-dimensional directions (right, left, up, down), an old-fashioned printout of a 2D Mario and Donkey Kong and a series of platforms and ladders is pretty funny.

There’s a similar game, “Tank,” where students give directions to a blindfolded person around the classroom. “Tank” is fun but extremely chaotic. “Rat Maze” can be played without riot police and the overhead perspective conveys the concepts of “right, north, etc.” very clearly.
Rotating Pictures

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Divides the students into groups of four or five.
2. Passes out one blank sheet of paper to each student.
3. Draws a rectangle on the board and divides it into thirds, writing a number in the corner of each third: 1, 2, and 3.
4. Helps students do the same with their papers.
5. Assigns each group a color: yellow group, green group, etc.
6. “Joins” the yellow group and draws a yellow thing: a banana.
7. Pretends to be another student in the group and draws a sun.
8. Guides students until each has drawn a different yellow object.
9. Leads the students, with the teacher’s help, in drawing objects that correspond with their group’s color.
10. Ensures that each student in a group draws a different object and resolves conflicts with janken (paper, rock scissors).
11. After about 2-4 minutes, assigns each group a new color in English. The students draw each new picture in a different third of the paper.

Notes:
High Complexity
Grades 1-4
Low Energy
Long Preparation
Solo
Description:
This is a listening activity, although the only time they actually listen to English is when they’re assigned a color. It’s a lot of fun and a good way to get every student to produce something unique (rather than copying). If you want to turn it into a real listening drill though, it’s a good lead-up to Karuta.

Variants:
Besides colors, “Rotating Pictures” works with any English adjectives. Groups can draw cold things, hot things, big things, fast things, etc.

The reason why this is a group activity is so every student draws a different picture, which is the challenge of the game. If that isn’t important to you, you could always assign a color to each student individually.

For a greater challenge, you can limit older kids to drawing things that they can say in English. Students need not try drawing something unique from other kids in this case.
Scramble

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Distributes a worksheet randomly covered with little pictures that represent target words.
3. Circulates around the classroom helping the students count all the carrots, marking them with a pencil or pen if necessary.
4. Writes the true carrot tally on the board when students start shouting out numbers.
5. Leads the class in saying the number of carrots: “Four carrots!”
6. Repeats this “game” until everything has been counted.

Dear successor,

The second-in-command at your school is the kyoto-sensei. Above him is the tokyo-sensei. He’s a stern man with no sense of humor. Make sure you always refer to him as “tokyo-sensei” just to be on the safe side.

Notes:
Low-complexity
Grades 1-4
Low-energy
Long Preparation
Solo
**Description:**
The more decorative the worksheet, the better. For example, if the topic is “animals” consider a jungle theme. It’s a great game for low-energy classes given that the students’ only required interaction is to hunch over a sheet of paper and find stuff.
**Step by Step:**

The ALT:
1. Divides the class into pairs by giving each pair a random amount of fake paper money (in this case, from 100 to 1000 “yen”).
2. Decides what kind of “store” the class is (in this case, a pet store) and posts pictures of “products” on the board with prices.
3. Pretends to be a student with 500 yen, spending all of her money by saying animals and using “and”: “gorilla and dog and ostrich.”
4. “Pays” for the animals, which together must total 500 yen (the gorilla is 200, the ostrich is 200, and the dog is 100).
5. Invites one student in each pair to say a combination of animals that will require they spend all their money.

**Notes:**
- High-complexity
- Grades 3-5
- High-energy
- Long Preparation
- Solo
Description:
The “products” in this game will always be target words from your lesson, preferably tangible things (buying days of the week may be a bit abstract).

The challenging part of the game is finding a combination of products that uses all the money allotted. Giving each pair a varying amount ensures that students get a chance to hear, and practice, many combinations of words.

DEAR SUCCESSOR,

DON’T BE ALARMED BY THE 6:30 AM WAKE UP SIREN. I THINK IT’S A JAPANESE TRADITION.
Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Gives each student an ID card with the name, age, and place of origin of a recognizable person or character (Ichiro, Nobita, etc.).
2. Divides the students into two circles, one inside the other, with the students in the inner circle and outer circle facing each other.
3. Joins the inner circle and persuades the teacher to join the outer circle so that the ALT and teacher are facing each other.
4. Introduces herself to the teacher with her ID card: “I’m Donkey Kong. I’m 33. I’m from Japan.” The teacher does likewise.
5. Yells “rotate!” and nudges the student to her right. The circle rotates clockwise so that everyone is facing a new student in the outer circle.
6. Entreats all the students to do as the ALT and teacher had done.
7. Yells “rotate!” after about a minute to begin the madness again.

Notes:
High-complexity
Grades 1-6
High-energy
Long Preparation
Solo
**Description:**
There are a lot of changes that can be made to this game for younger kids. For one, students can simply wander around the classroom randomly and find other students to introduce themselves to, playing janken (paper, rock, scissors) to determine who goes first.

With younger kids (roughly grades 1-4), it’s a good idea to use a picture instead of a written name on the ID card unless it’s in Japanese, and maybe even a little map or flag for the place of origin, one of maybe two or three recognizable places: Japan, China, etc. Also, the students can make their own IDs and it’s fun to draw crazy pictures and come up with silly names and ages.

Forming the circles for the first time is difficult. It entails yelling, bizarre gesturing, and drawing elaborate charts on the board that resemble something from a university-level engineering class. Give it some time.
Snake

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Gives a slip of paper with a target word to each student.
2. Announces the word on his own paper: “Thursday!”
3. Raises his hand, then implores, “Friday?”
4. Picks a student with a Friday slip and stands next to him.
5. Calls out the next word in the sequence, “Saturday?”
6. Invites a Saturday student to stand near the Friday student and so on, forming a snake of students from Sunday to Saturday.
7. Sets the students free to form their own snakes.
8. Points at whichever students are left over who couldn’t complete a full snake, laughs at them, and calls them losers.
9. Reshuffles the papers and starts again.

Variants:
Besides using sequential words like months, the alphabet, and days of the week, the leaders of two snakes can meet, janken (paper, rock, scissors) and say English greetings to each other. The snake that loses janken must join the winner’s snake. This is a way of playing the game without reading.

For younger kids you can also randomly distribute some picture cards of something like colors. Then the students need only find other students with the same color and form a group.

Notes:
Low-complexity
Grades 3-6
High-energy
Short Preparation
Solo
Description:
Step 8 can be waived. It’s a good idea for both you and the teacher to play the game with the students. It keeps the energy up and the confusion down.

Dear successor,

When you get here, you’ll be a superstar. Everyone will worship you. Kids will idolize you. The mayor will give you the key to the city. The local university will give you an honorary doctorate. A platinum statue of you will be erected in the town square and birds won’t even use the bathroom on it. But don’t let it go to your head.
Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Organizes the class into groups of four with their desks facing each other.
2. Gives each group two identical decks of cards with pictures on the bottom side of each that represent target words.
3. Joins the teacher in helping the students mix the two decks together and spread them out on their desks, face down.
4. Draws two cards at random from one of the groups to demonstrate. If the cards don’t match, the ALT puts them back. If they do match, the ALT holds them up and calls to the teacher excitedly, “Sensei!”
5. Says the target word on the cards to the teacher and keeps them.
6. Petitions the class to janken (paper, rock, scissors) to determine what order students should go in.
7. Polls the class after finishing to see which students found and pronounced the most matches.

Notes:
Low-complexity
Grades 1-3
High-energy
Long Preparation
Team
**Description:**
This is similar to the Memory Game, but uses groups. It takes more preparation, but more students participate and nobody has to talk in front of the class.

If the cards are laminated or made of cardboard the students won’t be able to see through them and they’ll last longer. Students who win a pair of cards should keep them visible, not in their desks or pockets.

It’s a lot of work to reorganize the cards after the game, and impossible if you only have a few minutes between classes. Leave a little time for the students to organize them for you.

Finally, if a student finds a match, but can’t say the vocabulary word that describes the two, other students in the group can help; unless you’re just plain mean.
Spelling/Number Bee

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Posts 10 numeral-cards (0 to 9) on both the right side and the left side of the board.
2. Draws a circle in the middle of the board.
3. Divides the class into two teams: the ALT’s team and the teacher’s team.
4. Demonstrates by shouting a random number: “15!”
5. Races against the teacher to create the number by finding the “1” and “5” cards and putting them in the circle.
6.Cheers upon winning and gives his team a point.
7. Calls upon a student from each team to do the same.
8. Plays until everybody in class gets a chance.

Notes:
High Complexity
Grades 1-6
Low Energy
Long Preparation
Solo
Description:
Naturally, you can play this game with larger numbers or with times (4:30, 12:00, etc.) in upper grades.

This is a cross between the popular flyswatter game (see “Karuta”) and “Find the Ship.” It’s easier than the latter game, but results in more crying for some reason.

Variants:
In 6th grade, you can try spelling some two or three-letter words with letter-cards instead of numeral-cards. I don’t recommend using all 26 letters on each side of the board; just a few consonants and vowels with easy pronunciation (A, K, T, E, etc.).

If you ever teach a unit that has many compound words (baseball, basketball, eggplant, etc.), you can post the root words on word-cards and have the students combine them. For example, if you shout, “eggplant!” the students will try to make the word with the “egg” card and the “plant” card.

Finally, you can play this game without numeral cards by dividing the class into groups and giving each group space on the board to write the target number with chalk. In this variant, the students can wait in their groups then run to the board when the number is called. You can penalize students who forget to erase their numbers when they’re done too and then cackle like so: “Mwa ha ha ha.”
Tennis Ball Game

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Makes a circle of chairs -- with students in them.
2. Stands in the middle of the circle with two tennis balls.
3. Gives one ball to a random (energetic) student and the other to a student directly across from the first student.
4. Plays (or sings) a random tune and guides the students in passing the balls clockwise around the circle.
5. Stops the music and yells, “Stop!” hoping the students comply.
6. Invites the two students now holding the balls into the center.
7. Tells the students, “janken” (paper, rock, scissors).
8. Coaxes the winner to prompt the loser with an English greeting or question, “How are you?” by gesturing at the loser.
9. Stares blankly at the other student until she answers the question.
10. Directs the students back to their seats and starts the music and tennis ball-passing again.

Notes:
Low-complexity
Grades 1-6
High-energy
Short Preparation
Solo
Description:
Results vary by grade. Often younger kids are anxious to get a chance in the circle. They may even cry if you don’t give them a chance, so it’s a good idea to eliminate students who have already had a turn. On the other hand, some older kids will most assuredly not want to participate so giving everybody a turn may not be necessary. Either way, through anticipation or dread, the game is very suspenseful.

There are different ways the student can answer. For example, sample answers can be posted on the board or you can give hints by holding up a flash card, shuffling the flash cards after each round.
The “J” Game

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Divides the students into groups of four or five.
2. Posts a 4x5 grid of cards on the board, the top row marked 200 yen, the next row marked 300, then 400, and the bottom row is marked 500 yen.
3. Writes a category in kana above each column or draws it.
4. Writes 1-8 on the board, each number representing a group.
5. Sits down at a desk, taking note of which group he is in.
6. Raises his hand and picks a category and price loudly: “Nihongo 300.”
7. Gets up and removes the corresponding card from the board and asks a question: “inu?” (dog?).
8. Becomes a new student by sitting down with a new group, raises his hand, and answers: “dog!”
9. Places the 300-yen card next to the number on the board that represents the ALT’s group. This shows that his group has won the yen.
10. Chooses a student in the winning group to select a new category and price.
11. Chooses a student at random from another group to answer.
12. Repeats this until class ends or until all the yen is distributed.

Notes:
High Complexity
Grades 3-6
High Energy
Long Preparation
Team
Description:
This might remind you of a certain TV game show that starts with a “J.” Like in the game show, the amounts of yen designate the difficulty of the question. 500 is really hard, 200 is laughably easy. The “J” Game works best as a review exercise because it relies on students’ knowledge of the content.

Here are some example categories:
1. Nihongo: students translate a word into English.
2. Charades: students guess a word that you physically act out.
3. Multi-choice: students pick the correct card out of a stack.
4. Picture: students guess a vocabulary word based on an image.
5. ABC: students guess a word based on a partial spelling.
6. 123: for things that go in a natural order (numbers, days, the alphabet, etc.) students can say the order starting and ending wherever you choose.
7. 321: the same thing as above, only backwards.

The teacher can be in charge of picking students who want to answer. Technically, the first student who raises her hand should go, but this can be confusing in a large class. Janken (paper, rock, scissors) resolves it.

This game was tested in classes of about 30 to 40 students divided into eight or nine groups. In groups, shy kids can still help without having to speak in front of the class. In extremely small classes, groups may not be necessary.

The students can also name their groups or choose mascots (Doraemon, Minnie Mouse, Donkey Kong, Barack Obama, etc.).
Weekly Schedule

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Gives a sheet to each student with days of the week across the top and a blank column under each day of the week.
2. Draws a similar schedule on the board to demonstrate.
3. Draws pictures of what he did on each day of the prior week, then explains them in English: “I ate sushi on Thursday.”
4. Guides the students in drawing what they did on each day.
5. After 5 minutes, picks two students by their student numbers.
6. Helps the first student in asking a question: “How was your Thursday?”
7. Looks at the second student’s picture under “Thursday,” a Nintendo DS, then helps her answer: “I played games.”
8. Calls out one more student number.
9. Helps the DS student ask the question of the new student.
10. After the demonstration, releases students to find peers with which to practice the dialogue several times.
Description:
To help remember days of the week, you can draw or paste a picture that sort of sounds like the target word; for example, a monkey for “Monday,” a big 2 for “Tuesday,” etc. Students can then stash their schedules in their desks to use another day without you having to review.

You can also make the schedules yourself with several variations. For example, to combine days of the week and sports, you can pass out schedules depicting a variety of sports on each day. For example, “How was your Tuesday?” “I played baseball.”

As far as we know, almost all elementary classrooms assign their students numbers. Knowing this, you can draw numbers and pick students at random to answer questions.

If you don’t like using student numbers to select students, you can play the “Tennis Ball Game” instead, which is found in this book. Finally, to avoid traumatizing the first student that gets called upon randomly, you can call upon the teacher first.

Variant:
You can challenge the students to practice the exchange a certain number of times within a time limit. For example, students can try to ask ten students about their schedules in five minutes.

Notes:
High-complexity
Grade 5-6
Low-energy
Short Preparation
Solo
Whisper Game

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Posts large pictures of target words on the board.
2. Splits the class into two teams.
3. Lines up each team in front of the board.
4. Stands behind the two lines in the back of the classroom.
5. Huddles with the students in the back of each line and whispers a word, “fish,” making sure both students understand.
6. With much drama, says, “Readyyyyy… go!”
7. Helps the two students whisper the word into the ear of the student in front of them in line until the message travels from student-to-student to the front of the line.
8. Guides the students at the front in running to touch the appropriate picture as soon as she hears the whispered word.
9. Gives the first team to touch the picture a point (or the promise thereof, given that this is only a practice round).
10. Escorts the student at the front of the line to the back to rotate in a new runner.
11. Repeats the process without assisting the students; whichever line transmits the whispered word the fastest and most accurately wins a point.

Notes:
High-complexity
Grades 1-4
High-energy
Short Preparation
Solo
**Description:**

There are many ways to cheat at the “Whisper Game,” so you might want to lay down a few hard rules:

A. No Japanese; English only.  
B. No yelling or talking out loud; whispering only.  
C. No shotgun-approach to touching pictures; only touch one.  
D. No beating the pictures into submission.

Younger kids can form smaller teams, resulting in four or five lines. This will seem chaotic, but it’s not really necessary to keep track of their score in first and second grade.

This game has many names and each may be a homebrew version of the “Whisper Game” specific to an elementary school. If two teachers at two different schools come up with the same game, but show great pride in their innovations, feign ignorance!
Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Walks up and down each row with an open box.
2. Confiscates various small objects from the students -- pencils, name tags, erasers, etc. -- and puts them in the box.
3. Shakes the box (gently) to randomize (but not break) the objects.
4. Offers the box to each student. Each student instinctively reaches in and procures a random object.
5. Asks, “Whose is this?” indicating the student should repeat after him (after a few rounds students should say it on their own without the ALT’s help).
6. Invites the whole class to yell out the answer: “It’s Yuki’s!” etc.
7. Finds the owner of the object and indicates for her to repeat, “It’s mine!” (after a few rounds, students should say, “It’s mine!” on their own).
8. Returns the object to its owner.

Notes:
Low-complexity
Grades 3-6
High-energy
Short Preparation
Solo
Description:
Needless to say, it helps if the objects are easily recognizable by the students who own them, especially if everybody has the same matching pen case with the same inexplicable marijuana leaf on the front or the same mundane white “MONO”-brand eraser.

Variants:
Besides using objects that belong to students, you can bring objects to class, or pictures of objects, that are associated with a person or creature that the students have studied. For example, if you ask “Who’s is this?” with a banana, “It’s gorilla’s!” (or, ideally, “It’s the gorilla’s”) is one answer.

Similarly, this works well with jobs (i.e. handcuffs belong to cops), vehicles (tires belong to cars), countries (sumo belongs to Japan), sports (bats belong to baseball) and so on.
Zoo Keeper

Step by Step:

The ALT:
1. Forms the students into pairs.
2. Organizes the pairs to sit in a circle on the floor, one partner behind the other. This creates two circles, one inside the other.
3. Places a B4-sized picture of a target word in front of each student in the inner circle.
4. Moves to the center of the ring, but remains standing.
5. Picks a student in the inner circle to say a random animal, but not the animal depicted on her own picture. For example, “Sheep!”
6. Finds the sheep picture then runs to it in slow motion.
7. Helps the student with the sheep picture call out a new animal before the ALT reaches her picture: “Dog!”
8. Changes course and starts running to the dog picture instead.
9. Tries to reach the dog picture before the student there calls out a new animal and trades places with the dog student if successful.
10. Having won, calls out a new animal for the student in the center to run toward.
11. Watches as whichever student can’t call out a new animal in time becomes “it” and has to stand in the circle.

Notes:
High-complexity
Grades 1-4
High-energy
Short Preparation
Solo
Description:
If the class is small, the kids don’t need to partner up. It’s also possible to split a large class up into two circles, the ALT in charge of one and the teacher in charge of the other.

After a while, students are likely to start yelling the same couple of animals over and over again. That’s when it’s a good time to change the rules so that the same two animals can’t be called twice in a row. Unless you speak good Japanese, introducing this rule at the very beginning makes the game seem complicated, especially for younger kids.
Appendix A: Disclaimers

Disclaimer 1: We can’t help you adjust to Japanese culture.
You may’ve noticed there’s nothing in here that will help you understand cultural differences between you and Japanese students or teachers. We’ve found that treating people as individuals is as useful in Japan as it is anywhere else; more useful, anyhow, than over-generalizing the motivations of real people as something merely “cultural.”

Disclaimer 2: We aren’t guided by any particular pedagogy.
Very few ALTs are professional elementary school teachers. We aren’t experts either. However, we do agree on a few things:

1. That students build their education; that they create things, put things together, and make connections between things with only as much help from us as is required.
2. That students be treated as fairly as possible; that everyone should get a chance and the majority of the class should be catered to, not the few overachievers.
3. That students learn things that are useful and practical.
4. That every opportunity should be taken to have constructive fun; that games should be emphasized over drills, even though the latter may be necessary sometimes.
5. That ALTs support whatever the teacher is doing and vice versa; that ALTs pay attention, nod, volunteer to help, and in general act like ideal students when the teacher is talking, and that teachers do the same for ALTs.
6. That ALTs do their best even in classes they dread; that every student should get a high quality lesson, even if an ineffective teacher or the group at large seems determined to make every activity bomb.

In theory, we think these things are bad (but that’s not to say they never happen):

1. That students sit and listen to us talk or wait while we set up activities for long periods of time without any other interaction.
2. That students are dry sponges that should soak up knowledge emanating from us and don’t have their own experiences and opinions that are interesting (this can be as simple as finding out what they “like” and “don’t like”).
3. That students be treated with contempt because they don’t know things that we know; that our status as wise adults alone is what qualifies us as good instructors.
4. That the same few overachievers should answer all the questions, or the same few loud students should be rewarded with all the attention (negative or otherwise).
5. That students be treated like “buddies” to the extent that ALTs find themselves unwittingly in the same cliques as students, leading to favoritism and exclusion.
6. That ALTs disrespect the teacher or the school, even in ways that may have been acceptable when they themselves were students; yawning, chatting with students or not paying attention when the teacher is talking, etc.; that ALTs _act_ like students.

Of course, even if you have very different ideas about how a classroom should be run, we think these activities will be useful to you. These are simply some basic principles that the editors of this book had in common when designing (or stealing) lessons.

**Disclaimer 3: We didn't include JHS games, or games that suck.**

When you’re thrust into a job without any real training, like ALTs are, there’s a lot of trial and error. Our errors -- games and activities that failed spectacularly -- won’t be found in these pages. Instead, we portray ourselves in this book as outstanding ALTs who always got everything right. We hope you’re fooled.

Some of these activities may be useful in junior high and high school, but we don’t know. Our control over lessons at this level is very limited. Therefore, each game is designed very specifically with elementary school classes in mind, especially schools in which we are allowed, or expected, to do a lot of the work ourselves.

**Disclaimer 4: We respect the individuality of teachers.**

To us, teachers create their authority in many ways. Some gain respect by being funny while others are stone-faced disciplinarians. Just as our most effective teachers from the past had all manner of personalities and outlooks, we don’t recommend any specific style of teaching. Instead, we expect the ALTs who use this book to experiment with their own variants of each game -- not just those provided -- to discover what suits them best.

If you’re new to teaching, you may not know yet what you’re comfortable doing in front of 40 kids and a teacher (singing, wearing costumes, etc.), but after some personal exploration, you ought to be able to adapt these games to your particular style as you settle into your persona as a teacher. Feel free to forsake the rules established for these games as you gain experience. If you have the opposite problem, you don’t even know where to start, see Appendix B for some ideas.

**Disclaimer 5: We're thieves.**

Only about 50% of these games are products of our imagination. We stole the rest. It’s not like Karuta, Fruit Basket, Zoo Keeper, and Ninjas and Soldiers had any owners per se. They were just drifting around in the maelstrom of ALT lore, ripe for the plucking. Finders keepers. You’re similarly free to claim our games as your own, but that means you also take responsibility if they don’t work.
Appendix B: Teaching Help

This flimsy appendix will not turn you into a teacher. Technically, the ALT isn’t supposed to be a teacher. The ALT has other responsibilities. But we never figured out what those were because we were busy teaching. Consider this a scrap bin of things we learned the hard way. We too weren’t expecting to be teachers.

Step 1: Prepare
If you want, you can do everything with a loud voice and a blackboard, but that takes confidence. Starting out, you may want to invest your confidence in material things: lesson plans, goofy pictures, fat target words pasted on orange construction paper, and big, labyrinthine diagrams you can gesture at when your mind goes blank. I may never glance at some of these materials during the course of the lesson, but they make feel good. The airbag in my car has never deployed but I feel secure knowing it’s there.

Lesson plans can be scrawled notes or multi-page outlines. Showing these to a teacher before class helps you look professional. It gives you something to point at while explaining your intentions in broken Japanese or loud, gesture-ridden English. My lesson plans typically have four or five activities including a warm-up (such as Q&A or the Flash Game). I rarely make it to the fifth activity. Again, knowing it’s there is the important thing.

Target words can appear as pictures, or pictures and words for grades 5 and 6. We use clipart or other images we find on the Internet (if we can’t draw them) then paste the printouts on construction paper or cardboard if we want them to last. If your school has a laminating machine, your supplies will survive a nuclear blast. On the back of target

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3rd Grade Lesson 1-20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Vowel Exercise (introduce A, E, I, O, U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. ALT introduces basic vowel sounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Students stand up for た/よ/こ; ALT/JTE says words with vowels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Students must say the correct vowel to sit down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Introduce the Face (show pictures/point)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Ears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Nose</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Mouth</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Cheeks</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. Forehead</td>
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<tr>
<td>g. Eyebrows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Chin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Drawing Exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. ALT says face words; students draw the face parts on a sheet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Students must draw in the right order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. ALT says groups of face parts, “Cheeks, nose, eyes!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Students must only draw the words in that group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Speaking Practice (Find the Ship)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Students form two or three teams; ALT shows blank cards on a grid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. One student in a team selects by letter and sound (A, E, I, O, U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. If the card is a face word, another student must say the face word for one point; if the card is a ship, the team gets two points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. If the card shows the police, the team loses a point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sing the Alphabet Song</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
word cards you can place sticky magnets if they’re available so you can slap the cards on the black board. Otherwise, most classrooms have a supply of plain old magnets somewhere. Just start rummaging for them until the teacher or students help. Comic Sans (between 100 to 200-point) is a good font for target words because it’s easy to read and looks like written English. Half an A4-size page is a good picture size for a class of about 30 or 40 students.

Maps, diagrams, and decorations provide a source of ideas if nothing else. If you find yourself saying something like, “In America, we like to stick gum on the bottom of our desks,” throwing sweeping gestures at a map of America makes the mysterious land and its delinquent students suddenly more real. Something big and colorful, like a collage or a crazy PowerPoint (not one full of text), just sets the mood of the lesson. This may not seem important, but students are not always eager to learn by default -- and the teacher may not be eager to help. You have to sell your lesson.

Worksheets, such as word searches and matching exercises, give your voice a rest and seem to engage even the surliest students. They provide for a quiet interlude in the middle of class, or a “last activity” that the students can keep and finish on their own (for fun, not homework) after class has ended. While they’re busy with them, you can wander about looking over the students’ shoulders and interact with them. Most worksheets don’t need to cover an entire A4 sheet of paper, especially word searches and BINGO sheets. Save trees by grouping several onto one page, you monster. Keep in mind that conversion of documents from a Mac to a PC still isn’t perfect. We use Microsoft Word and have noticed that the formatting is more likely to remain intact if we save our files as PDFs.

Stickers give students incentive to do stuff in your class if your arresting charisma isn’t enough. Just remember to bring lots of them, cut out from the original sheet so you can pass them out easily. If you don’t bring enough for everybody, especially for younger kids, crying will ensue. They also work as a good reward for competitive games, but it’s important that only a few students -- maybe one group or team -- can win stickers. Otherwise, students will see the stickers as a right, not a privilege, and will feel cheated if they don’t get any. Stickers can be found at 100-yen shops or in the school supply catalogue if you’re ever lucky enough to be told about it. Finally, writing your signature or drawing a little picture on approved worksheets can be just as good as stickers.

Technology, like a video, does a lot for your apparent professionalism, but it’s not a good idea to rely on it. CD players disappear from closets, laptops get dropped in the snow, and classroom TVs audaciously have Japanese buttons on them. Technology will help your voice box. On the Internet, the Podcasts of “English Learning,” “They Might be Giants,” and Sesame Street’s “Word on the Street” are all free and quite helpful. Finally, with a projector, you can save ink by printing out smaller images. You’ll probably
have to brief a teacher long before class if you need equipment. Teachers are often prohibitively busy and making students sit and watch while you plug stuff in makes you look unprepared.

**Step 2: Teach**

Good teachers are a product of trial and error and so is this list. These are things we wished we had been doing from the beginning in the classroom. They aren’t rules though. Please don’t hire a lawyer if they don’t work for you.

**Start class.** That goes without saying, but it’s actually tough to do sometimes. The temptation may be to stand around and “ease” into things. It can also be an awkward time of silent pauses, self-conscious agonizing, and fidgeting. It’s better to just clap your hands and start yelling out the daily greeting as if you have a million things to do and you want to accomplish them all.

**Draw attention to yourself** however possible at first. If you don’t know Japanese, you may have to act a little crazy. Students are likely to focus on something that may entertain them. Then you’re free to trick them into learning. Take that!

**Be bossy,** as strange as it may feel. It isn’t default behavior for most of us to tell others what to do, but most children are used to it and being timid is a lesson in itself: the students are learning they can walk all over you.

**Interact with students** when possible. By this, we mean one-on-one exchanges. It’s easy to tune out an ALT who’s blithering in English, but harder to ignore one who’s having a direct conversation with you. Other students are likely to pay more attention if the student you’re talking to is one you’ve gabbed with before. This can make it “okay” for the others.

**Call upon students** to give them something to do when not actually playing a game. Eventually, you’ll notice it’s the same few students who are volunteering for all the questions. To mix things up you can call upon students with random numbers (each student usually has an assigned number) or use Q&A (tate/yoko), which is in this book. Finally, you can pass out colored cards and specify that only students of a certain color can raise their hands. This will keep the few brainiacs from taking over. Really, any features that distinguish one group of students from the next (even eyeglasses) will do.

**Make things fun** for the same reason you should draw attention to yourself. Besides creating atmosphere with visual aids and music, try to fill as much class time with games as possible. If you’re stuck doing a daily repetition drill, try using a crazy voice
occasionally or try throwing out a random Japanese word (“Doraemon!”) in the middle of the routine. Students appreciate the unexpected.

**Let students take ownership** of their education by giving them some autonomy. This book has several games, for example, that emphasize group work and student-student conversation practice. Not everybody will follow the rules, but if every game or lesson requires your personal attention at all times, students can become passive (AKA “lazy”).

**Repeat games** that you’ve only tried once unless they bombed so badly that you have nightmares and have taken up chain-smoking as a result. Students often get excited when they know exactly what to do for a familiar game and things will go more smoothly without the dramatic, confusing explanations required of us Japanese-impaired.

**Don’t repeat games** over and over again just because they were successful. The obvious reason is that they’ll get dull after awhile. The less obvious reason is that if you’re always playing it safe, it’ll be harder to grow as a teacher.

**Step 3: Act Neurotic**

The time after class is ideal for pacing back and forth and contemplating all the different ways you destroyed your students’ lives. If teaching makes you emotional, take comfort in the knowledge that you care enough to worry. The best treatment is to pour this anxious energy into improving your next lesson and the curriculum as a whole.

**Organizing** may not seem important at first, but your contract lasts a year at minimum. If you teach elementary lessons often enough to be reading this book, a big accordion-file labeled by grade and by lesson really helps in your second year and/or helps your successor if you decide to run screaming back to your home country.

**Synthesizing** is making each lesson complement the last, and ultimately come together as something consistent. If you teach, for example, food vocabulary in one lesson, consider combining these words with dining-phrases in the next lesson: “This eggplant tastes like an old sock,” “Gimme the salt now,” etc. There’s no need to plan all this out at the beginning, however. You probably won’t have a good idea of how much your students know, and what they’re prepared to learn, until you teach them a few times. This is especially true if your predecessor left no record of his own endeavors, or of his existence.

**Interacting** with students outside of class might be a little easier now that they know you’re not some creepy intruder on the school’s premises. You may find their behavior in a more casual setting -- like the lunch room while they’re eating -- utterly different than in class. This makes it easier to interact with them in class later.
Getting angry at the students, teachers, or yourself is a sure-fire way to be miserable for the rest of your teaching career. Whatever your students do that upsets you, consider this: every generation of students will probably do the same thing every year you’re a teacher. You can either let it slowly turn you into a psychopath, or you could just see it as an issue that needs vigilant attention. Besides, the truly unruly students may be learning more than you know.

Giving up is a popular response to low-energy classes. You may notice burnt-out teachers prefer this coping mechanism, relinquishing control of the class to mob rule, lecturing to themselves in a zombie-like daze, and sometimes not showing up at all. Keep this in mind before you consider giving up: whole classes may act uninterested in, and hostile to, English, but there are always individual students who aren’t that way. It’s not their fault that a class turned out the way it is and they deserve a teacher who tries, even if she fails spectacularly.

Coping with Low-energy Classes

A low-energy class is a group of students who act stoned. It’s surprising that a whole class can have a collective personality, but emotions are contagious. Unfortunately, that means a low-energy class can suck you into its vortex of apathy too. Here are some ways to cope:

Speed up, though it may go against instinct in a class full of sleepy kids, but blazing through activities can fool students (and yourself) into thinking English class is something energetic and fast-paced. More importantly, moving along at fast-forward skips over awkward silences; students won’t have a chance to hear the crickets chirping. You must be well-prepared though. Digging around for buried flash cards or pacing back and forth trying to remember the next game is dead time. It’ll remind students of how boring you truly are.

Work with the silence, which is the default approach of this book. After all, the students may be dead for any number of reasons. If the homeroom teacher has migraines and likes to keep things as quiet as a tomb, you may be out of luck. Most of the low-energy activities in this book are quiet activities that can engage students without them having to laugh, yell, talk, smile, or blink. The same goes for the mini-games here in the appendices.

Give control to the students to really charge up a classroom that’s bored or passive. Conversation games, especially ones where students circulate around the classroom talking to each other, just give them something to do. Even if they’re not speaking English the whole time, being social and breaking the routine can wake them up a bit.
Even having a few students teach the class themselves (i.e. teaching from flash cards) can empower them.

**Take it personally** if you feel like you don’t worry enough. But remember that you are only a small part of your students’ busy day and if they’re unmotivated, they were likely that way before you got there. With that in mind, most students aren’t judging you with nearly the same rigor that you’re judging yourself. Whatever mistakes you made in class that you think are an 8 on a scale from 1 to 10, students will remember as a 2, if at all.

**Explaining Things without Japanese**

For those of us who came to Japan with very little to no Japanese language skills, communicating with students seemed like a big mystery. My role as an assistant to the main teacher mitigated some of the anxiety; I would be helping somebody else. That didn’t turn out to be the case. I found myself having to explain things to students by myself most of the time. Even if you’re fluent you might not want to use Japanese in the classroom because it can train students to ignore your English and wait for a Japanese explanation. And so, here are a few ways to get things across without Japanese:

**Become a student** to really get their attention. If there’s an empty desk in the classroom, sit down in it. Then raise your hand, call on yourself, obediently say English phrases, throw a ball, and do whatever else you want the students to do. It’s fun to get teachers in on the act, especially if you give yourself and the teacher names that end with “chan” or “kun” (instead of “san” or “sensei”). You may have to go through the motions a few times for a complex game, but it ought to keep the students amused.

**Draw pictures** or, ideally, prepare a picture before class. If arrows, stick figures, and abstract geometric shapes aren’t your thing, you could always have a picture of a popular character, or even a doll or action figure, represent the “student” during your explanation.

**Learn Japanese**, stupid. That’s easier said than done, but you can do a lot with a few nouns and they can really complement the two methods above. If you draw a diagram on the board made of circles that represent students and point at each one, screaming, “Seito! Seito! Seito! Seito!” they’ll get the point.

**Teach them English**, dummy. With a few basic classroom commands and nouns under their belts, they’ll have a practical way of understanding your pointing at the aforementioned circles, screaming, “Student! Student! Student!” I guess that’s what they’re there to learn, technically.
Appendix C: Introductions

After making a few humiliating speeches, your first real encounter with students will be a self-introduction. This doesn’t necessarily have to be about you the whole time. You can use it as an opportunity to learn about your students, your school, and its precious equipment. The following steps were written with these ulterior goals in mind. They should also help if you’re just plain stumped for ideas:

1. Prepare excessively by asking the teacher how long you’ll have, how many students there are, what equipment you can use, and what he thinks would be fun. That way if anything goes wrong, you can blame him. If the teacher doesn’t speak English, or if you don’t speak Japanese, gesturing and drawing cryptic diagrams on a napkin will give you both clues about what kinds of communication barriers will divide you two in the classroom later. In any case, if he gives you thirty minutes, plan for an hour. You can use this as an opportunity to push random kanji-labeled buttons on the laminator, the copy machine, and the coffee maker in an attempt to learn their secrets for when you really need them. Cut things. Glue things. Staple things. Stick magnets on things. If there’s a projector, a TV, or a CD player in the classroom, pretend you’re going to use them all. If you can reserve the lunch room or gym for a noisy, rambunctious game, try it out. You won’t end up doing half this stuff during your actual introduction, but you’ll learn a lot and build a lasting relationship with the office assistants.

2. Smile nervously because you won’t have a choice. Japanese classes start with a routine greeting you’ll have to wait on. Just bow when everybody else bows and look on the bright side: you’ll know exactly when class has started.

3. Present crazily or, if not crazily, at least vibrantly. Show pictures of your family, house, and car. Spill out the contents of your pockets to reveal bizarre artifacts from your home country (no need to display the crown jewels; even my lip balm has gotten an “ohh” of fascination). Draw a grotesque map of your home country on the board, then draw pictures of your likes and dislikes -- ice cream, traffic, rap music, children -- in huge, mysteriously labeled circles. Or just use a Powerpoint. But since this dichotomy of “like” and “don’t like” should be pretty obvious after a few dramatic examples, start asking the students about their likes and dislikes, using the same examples. Point at an outgoing student’s name tag with an inquisitive expression, wait for the student to pronounce her name, then write it down as if you’re an investigative reporter, saying your notes aloud as you write: “Miiiiiiihooooo liiiiiikeessssss meeeeloooon sooooodaaaaaa.” Coaxing biographical facts out of students will make them more eager to communicate with you
later. Also, pelting students with questions is an especially good idea if they’re supposed to be asking you questions and seem to have lost the power of speech.

4. Review light-heartedly because you’re not that interesting. Who cares if they remember your boa constrictor’s name? You’ll have to beat your chest in front of students at different age levels, so the age-specific activities from this book can be adapted to self-introductions if you like. Otherwise, you can always give them a true/false or multiple-choice worksheet. At the elementary school level, try to stay away from text. Instead, you can show little images of, for example, your likes juxtaposed to your dislikes, your home country’s flag juxtaposed to the flag of Turkmenistan, and your age juxtaposed to the age of the pyramids. Then they can circle the ones that apply to you and you can stop talking for awhile.

Finally, if your Japanese sucks and you think this is going to be a handicap, you’re right. That’s not such a bad thing though. Refer to Appendix B for some suggestions.
Appendix D: Mini-games

Between the activities described in this book and military-style vocab drills, we often pad out our lessons with mini-games. These are games that are too simple to require a detailed explanation. Some of the more common ones, like the Word Search, aren’t explained at all. They’re meant to be squeezed into slots of five to ten minutes, or given to students at the end of class. Also, there are several sites on the Internet that can make these games for you.

Connect the Dots - There are various pre-made “connect-the-dots” worksheets online, but you may need to change the content a bit. If, for example, you’re only teaching the numbers 1 - 12, you can erase all the numbers after 12 in Photoshop or Paint (which comes with Windows) and simply have the cycle start over again with 1. You can also label the dots with images or, for older kids, written words, to practice vocabulary. Your role will be to say the vocabulary words out loud until the students trace the desired image.

Conversation Practice - Almost any English phrase or question can be practiced easily by having students circulate around the classroom with a card or sheet of paper with pictures on it. They can then janken (paper, rock, scissors) with other students. The winner or loser asks a question inspired by, for example, the picture of a guitar on her sheet: “Can you play the guitar?” The other student answers. At this point, the two students can switch sheets or the asker can simply mark the guitar picture with a smiley/frowny face -- depending on the answer -- and move on to the next student. The image shown here is an example of the latter. This mini-game works with any grade level. An ultra-simple version for 1st and 2nd graders is to simply give them number cards. The loser of janken must say his number out loud. Then they switch. That’s about it.
Crash - Line up all the pictures you’ve used throughout the year on the floor then have two students start at each end of the line. Their goal is to say the English word depicted in each image until they meet in the middle. Then they janken (paper, rock, scissors) and the winner either rejoices or, if you’re playing with teams, wins the team a point.

Crossword Puzzle - Clues can include partial spellings of words, opposites, pictures, adjectives, and so on. Keep it very simple. You may want to limit this to 6th grade because it involves writing.

Dice Rolling - Making dice out of cardboard that show a picture on each side isn’t too hard. Students can roll the die and say the target word shown in the picture. Given that most dice only have six sides, you can have each side depict a category of word. Students can then draw from a stack of words that belong to the rolled category and say that word.

Drawing/Listening Exercise - Younger kids enjoy drawing things that you say aloud in English, especially faces and animals. Keep in mind you’ll probably have to provide the scrap paper yourself. A fun variant is to have students randomly take a face word and a color word from a stack, forcing them to draw, say, a “green nose” on the board.

Hang Man - Only draw two or three body parts if you’re using target words from your lesson; say, a head, a torso with arms, and then legs. It’ll be too easy for students to guess the target word before the man gets hung otherwise. Works best with grades 5-6.

Number Yelling - Start by yelling a number (big surprise there). Students then form groups comprised of the number you yelled. The group left over that doesn’t have enough students in it can then be responsible for deciding the next number.

Showing Artwork - Not only does this refine students’ aesthetic sensibilities, it’s a good way to practice identifying shapes and colors in English.

Songs - We’re big fans of the Hockey Pokey and Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes. You know those songs, right?

Word Search - Start out using a 5x5 grid of letters until your students get used to it. If you use Courier font the letters will line up properly. It’s also reasonably easy to read, except the A’s look a bit weird for kids who are used to Comic Sans. Grades 5-6 are ideal for this “pre-reading” game.
Appendix E: Curricula

It doesn’t have to be detailed, but designing a curriculum for the school year not only gives you something to show your teachers, it lets you see how your lessons hang together.

Here is one of Michael’s. The arrows indicate when a lesson shares content with the next, creating synthesis. For example, he teaches “School Things” to his first graders in May, introducing words that will later be used in a “Classroom Instructions” lesson in June.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4th grade</th>
<th>3rd grade</th>
<th>2nd grade</th>
<th>1st grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conversation (2)</td>
<td>Conversation (1)</td>
<td>Introductions (2)</td>
<td>Introductions (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How was your weekend?</td>
<td>What did you have for breakfast?</td>
<td>What do you like?</td>
<td>What's your name?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I played, I ate, I went, I saw, I watched</td>
<td>Fruits</td>
<td>School Things</td>
<td>Desk, Chair, Pencil, Color Pencil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals (3): Jungle</td>
<td>Countries</td>
<td>Animals (2): Sea life</td>
<td>Adjectives or opposites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s that? Where are you from?</td>
<td>I'm from...</td>
<td>Yummy or Cute, What’s That?</td>
<td>Colors &amp; Rainbow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural</td>
<td></td>
<td>Form the plural of</td>
<td>Color and Rainbow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair of pants, shoes etc...</td>
<td></td>
<td>a word in English</td>
<td>ROY G. BIV (colors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let’s add “S” to everything</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Monkey/2 Monkeys</td>
<td></td>
<td>Review</td>
<td>Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move Chair</td>
<td>Move Chair</td>
<td>Get Pencil</td>
<td>If your happy and you know it (Dance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move Desk</td>
<td>One more time</td>
<td>One more time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One more time</td>
<td>Get Pencil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get Pencil</td>
<td>If you slow down</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you slow down</td>
<td>Review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review</td>
<td>Review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under the spreading chestnut tree</td>
<td>Summer Vacation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature: Look A +</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This can reassure a teacher that students will be prepared for a lesson by the time it arrives. Any amount of Japanese you can write will be appreciated, but even an all-English curriculum can at least show that you’re a responsible planner.

Keep in mind, creating a curriculum doesn’t mean that you have to get every lesson plan hammered out before the school year begins. It simply shows the big picture. The specifics will depend largely on what kind of students you end up with. On the lesson-plan level, it’s a good idea to leave yourself a little flexibility.
About the Authors

Alex Miner was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma. From 2007-2009, he resided in Nikaho, Akita-ken, where he was an ALT with the JET program. He received a Master of Arts in English from the University of Oklahoma. He taught first-year composition for three years before coming to Japan.

Michael Sammler grew up in Parkdale, Oregon. He was an ALT with the JET program from 2007-2009 and was stationed in Iwaki, Akita-ken. He has a Bachelor of Science from Portland State University. His focus was Art: Drawing/Painting/Printmaking.
Index

adjectives 13-4, 44, 66, 102
age (of students) See grade level.
ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers) 3-4, 9, 91-2, 105

cards 15, 17, 27, 35, 37, 39, 45, 51, 75, 77, 81, 95, 98, 102
characters (popular) 15, 31, 71, 82
competitive games 15, 19, 25, 27, 35, 43, 45, 47, 51, 57, 59, 75, 77, 81, 85, 94, 101-2; See non-competitive games
conversation (student to student) 17, 49, 71, 73, 79, 83, 97, 101
curricula 96, 103-4
drawing 27, 33, 46, 65, 98, 102
dying (classroom) 9, 42, 46, 68, 91, 97
explanations (of games to students) 20, 42, 72, 98
famous people See characters.
flash cards See cards.
full class participation (games) See whole class participation.
goals (in teaching) 3-4, 91-2
grade level 10, 14, 32, 38, 40, 72, 78, 80, 86, 102
groups (and group games) 15, 19, 25, 27, 31, 35, 43, 45, 51, 57, 65, 75, 77, 85
janken 14, 17, 19, 29, 46, 49, 57, 59, 65, 73, 75, 79, 82, 101-2
Japanese (culture) 91
Japanese (language) 10, 26, 29, 62, 72, 90, 95, 96, 98, 100
JET 9, 105
junior high school 62, 92
lesson plans 9, 93, 104
listening (games that emphasize ~) 21, 33, 39, 41, 43, 45, 47, 53, 55, 58, 59, 61, 65, 67, 77, 79, 81, 83, 85, 101-2
low-energy classes See energy.
materials See preparation.
music (as an aid) 24, 79
non-competitive games 13, 21, 23, 29, 31, 33, 37, 41, 55, 61, 63, 65, 69, 71, 73, 79, 83, 87, 101-2; See competitive games.
paper, rock, scissors See janken.
pairs (games that use ~) 29, 41, 53, 59, 69, 71, 89
pedagogy See teaching.
preparation 9, 16, 36, 38, 40, 52, 56, 76, 82, 93-5, 99-100, 102
randomization (when calling on students) 15, 61, 84, 95
review 16, 82
students (interacting with ~) 91, 94, 95, 97, 99-100, 104
subjects See topics.
synthesis 96, 103
teachers (interacting with ~) 91-2, 94, 97, 99, 104
teaching 91-2, 93-8
teams See groups.
team-teaching 10, 21-2, 26, 29, 44, 58, 74, 91-2, 99-100, 102
timed games 17, 25, 27, 43, 84
topics 7-8, 103
whole class participation (games) 21, 23, 29, 31, 37, 39, 47, 57, 61, 63, 73, 79, 87, 89
worksheets (including games that use ~) 33, 35, 41, 49, 53, 55, 59, 67, 83, 94, 101-2

Underlined pages indicate where subjects are discussed in detail.