Activity: Story Chain

Materials needed: Small slips of paper with a base-form verb on each. Many of the verbs should be irregular.

Description: Students will create an oral story as a group, using the verb they selected at random.

If possible, arrange the desks in a circle. If that isn't possible, try standing around the room in a large circle. Finally, if there are more than 20 students in the class, you may want to do this in two groups simultaneously.

Let students choose a verb slip at random from a hat or container. Then begin the story with a scenario.

For example, the teacher might begin:

> "For many years, the old Peterman house on the hill looked down on the town of Maybridge. The house was in bad condition, its paint peeling, its wood rotting. Nothing grew around the house. The grass was always brown, and the trees leafless and dead.
>
> Even though old Mr. Peterman had died twenty years ago, mysterious lights could sometimes be seen flickering in the house. Parents warned their children not to play near the house. But children sometimes dared each other to run up to the door of the house and run away again.
>
> Sixteen-year-old Jason took this game a step further one night. He dared his friends, Sarah and Bill, to go into the Peterman house, climb to the attic window, and wave to him from there. Feeling adventuresome, and wanting to show they were not frightened babies, Sarah and Bill agreed to go."

Then the first student near the teacher carries on the story. The student has to incorporate his or her verb in the simple past or past progressive tense. The student can contribute several sentences, and will often need to, to get to the part of the story where he or she can use the verb.

For example, let's say the first student has the verb *bring*. The student might continue where the teacher left off:

Student 1: "There was no electricity in the house, of course, so Sara and Bill *brought* two flashlights with them."

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Student 2: "They *climbed* the front steps of the house and opened the door."

Student 3: "The house was very dark. They *heard* a noise. It was like an animal noise."

Student 4: "Suddenly something jumped at them. It was some kind of animal. Bill *threw* his flashlight at the animal. The animal jumped out the window."

Student 5: "Now they only had one flashlight. Sarah wanted to go upstairs right away, but Bill wanted to leave and get another flashlight. His father *taught* him not to do a job without the right tools."

Student 6: "But Sarah insisted, so they went upstairs. The kids *were wear*ing tennis shoes. Their footsteps were quiet. But they could hear other footsteps in the house."

The story continues around the circle. Encourage creativity and moving the story along. If a student gets stuck and doesn't know how to fit his or her verb in the story, let the whole group help.

If the story lags because the students aren't moving the plot, the teacher can intervene with a sentence of his or her own that moves the story along. (For instance, a student, perhaps the second or third in line, might have the verb *dream*. She might say something like "…. and she had *dreamed* it all. None of it was true," which pretty much puts an end to the story before it even gets started. Encourage the rest of the class to help her come up with something different.)

About twenty students is the maximum for this activity or else students will have too much down time when they are not saying anything. If you want to break the class up into two groups, create two scenarios. One group works orally as described above; the other group works silently passing a piece of paper around, each student adding his or her part.

To make the writing group more productive, start two pieces of paper going in two different directions. This means that the same student will add the first line of the story going one way, and the last line of the story going the other way. This creates two stories out of the same scenario, each with the same target past-tense verbs. Additionally, it keeps the writers more involved since their activity is not as interactive as the oral group.