

Images



For Jamie Keddie,
a picture gives rise to a
thousand words.

What's going on? Why are my students not talking? I did everything right. I spent time selecting a good article on a topic I was sure would be close to their hearts. I successfully predicted the words and items that were necessary to pre-teach and I thought that the activities that I planned around the text would set up the conversation seamlessly. But they just don't seem to be taking the bait. There's been no discussion and now I am standing at the photocopier outside the classroom printing off emergency grammar activities for all.

Texts

How many discussions or chats have you had in the last week? How many of them were initiated by texts? Not many, I suspect. Of course, we often like to share our experiences of books and articles that we have read, but most conversations are spontaneous and unpredictable; they are difficult to prepare or plan.

Sometimes we need to ask ourselves 'What do I really want to achieve with the material that I bring into class?' Imported texts certainly have an important role in the language classroom. They are excellent for reinforcing learners' understanding and awareness of vocabulary, grammatical

structures and discourse, etc. But if our specific objective is to get our students writing or talking, perhaps we should take a tip from the world of advertising. In his book, *All Consuming Images*, Stuart Ewen writes: '... if you really want to move people, don't use words, use images'.

Images

For many, the 'mug shot' taken of O J Simpson when he was arrested for the murder of his ex-wife and her lover defines what has come to be known as the trial of the century. By implication, it connects with other related images such as that of Simpson trying on the gloves in the courtroom, the famous car chase and the murder scene.

As I stare at his portrait, I wonder if the thoughts going on behind Simpson's tired yet unfazed eyes are thoughts of regret. Perhaps they are thoughts of righteousness or feelings of resentment against those who are interrogating him. Or maybe they are thoughts of remorse or resignation. How did a man who was certainly not held in high regard for his acting abilities manage to maintain such a poker face in spite of all that he had been through and all that was coming to him?

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A good image will place memories in our heads and give rise to little outbursts of thought and curiosity. Whereas a text supplies the language explicitly, an image *implies* it and thus creates a void to be filled in the classroom.

Mug shots

Humans are obsessed with other humans and the most convenient way of bringing a new person into the classroom is via a photograph. Police mug shots, such as the one described

Images

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▶▶▶ above, are excellent since they portray both a person and a story, the story of their arrest. There are literally hundreds of interesting mug shots strewn throughout the internet that can be downloaded and used in the classroom. Many of these involve famous people or incidents. Here are some examples.

Bill Gates (1977)

It is hard to believe that this 22-year-old entrepreneur (who looks as if he could still be in his teens) had already founded Microsoft almost three years before this shot was taken by the New Mexico police who arrested him for a minor traffic violation. He sports a blond mop of hair, big brown-tinted glasses and a cheery smile for the camera.

Rosa Parks and Dr Martin Luther King, Jr (1956)

In 2004, while cleaning out a county sheriff's department storage room, a deputy came across these two historical mug shots. Rosa Parks and Dr Martin Luther King, Jr were among 156 people

arrested in February, 1956, in Montgomery, Alabama, for 'hindering' a bus. This incident took place during the third month of the infamous Montgomery Bus Boycott which had been triggered by Rosa Parks' first and more famous arrest when she had refused to give up her seat to a white passenger.

Elvis Presley (1970)

A commonly cited explanation for this image is that Elvis asked for his mug shot to be taken for fun while being shown around the FBI headquarters after visiting President Nixon at the White House. It is also possible that the shot was taken in order for the King of Rock and Roll to obtain a Drug Enforcement Administration badge as a souvenir.

Ten ideas and activities

Here are a number of suggestions for the language classroom that centre around mug shots.

Virtually all of the images referred to here are rooted in US history, culture and media. This should be kept in mind at all times. Learners will have varying attitudes and connections with the personalities and stories that are being considered. When using pictures of celebrities, it may well be more advantageous to encourage students to seek out images of those that they know and connect with from their own cultures.

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1 Who, what, why, when?

Create a classroom gallery or set up a slideshow of a number of mug shots pertaining to well-known crimes, incidents, arrests, scandals, court cases, criminals, etc. For example:

- Hugh Grant
- Mel Gibson
- Al Capone
- Lee Harvey Oswald
- Michael Jackson
- O J Simpson

Pair up students and have them make notes about everything they know about these people and incidents before reporting back to the whole class. Ask them to consider details such as:

- Who is the person in the mug shot?
- Why is he or she famous?
- Why was this person arrested?
- When did this happen?
- What happened as a result?

2 Mini-texts

Prepare a gallery of mug shots and a sheet containing summaries of the incidents which the people pictured were involved in. Have students match the summaries with the images. For example:

This person was arrested in 1938 for committing adultery with a married woman. The charges were dropped. (Answer: Frank Sinatra)

Here are some suggestions for good mug shots for this activity:

- Al Pacino (arrested for carrying a concealed weapon)
- Mick Jagger (arrested for assaulting a photographer)
- Keanu Reeves (arrested for drink-driving)

Obtaining internet images

1 Go to the Google search engine and above the item entry space, you will see the word *Images*. Click on it and you will be taken to the Google Image Search site.

2 In the search window, type in the name of the person you are interested in. For example:

'O J Simpson' mug shot
'Elvis Presley' mug shot
'Bill Gates' mug shot
'Rosa Parks' mug shot
etc

(The inverted commas are important as they keep the first name and surname together.)

3 In each case, you will find multiple copies of the mug shot presented as thumbnail (miniature) images. Click on one of them and you will be given the option to see a full-size image. Find one that is both clear and of good size.

4 To save an image, right click on it and choose 'Save image as ...'. Save it onto your hard disk.

5 Print these images off so that you can pin them up on the walls of your classroom, thus converting it into a gallery. Alternatively, organise them on your computer so that you can display them as a slideshow.

3 Class discussions

Focusing on images can give rise to a whole range of unpredictable class discussions such as:

- Whether or not Hugh Grant's career was affected by the incident with a prostitute in Los Angeles
- Whether or not adultery should be a criminal offence
- Whether or not we suffer from celebrity-worship syndrome

4 Student-teacher information gaps

Learners may be reminded of similar incidents and personalities from their own culture. Encourage them to tell you about these or write short accounts. If they don't already know how, students can be shown how to download accompanying images from the internet.

5 Dictogloss

I have always found that a dictogloss works better when there is a picture to accompany the text. In a dictogloss, the teacher reads a short text, two or three times, to the students, who then attempt to reconstruct it from memory in their own words. Some teachers like their students to write down key words and items from the text during the listening stage. During the text reconstruction process, students can work alone or in pairs or small groups.

Use the internet to find the stories behind images and prepare short texts that can be used for dictogloss activities. For example, the mug shots of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King described above could be used in conjunction with an account of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. This story (and others) can be found at the image share site given at the end of the article.

6 Wanted posters

Take mug shots of your students with a digital camera and use them to create 'Wanted' posters to put up on the classroom wall. If you have computer access, this can be done by pasting the images onto a Word document. Show your students how to do this so that they can make their own posters. 'Crimes' can be fictitious (bank robbery, horse theft) or real (borrowing the teacher's pen and not giving it back). Make sure your own mug shot is included.

WANTED

for sleeping in class

JOANA



While the teacher was giving an English class, 12-year-old Joana fell asleep. She is extremely dangerous. If you find her or have any information about her, please phone the police immediately.

This is urgent!

Reward: \$200

7 Make it up!

Use mug shots or student-created Wanted posters to motivate students to write a mock newspaper story or create a fictitious newflash about a celebrity or classmate and a crime or scandal of their own choice.

8 Roleplays

Images can be used to make a roleplay situation more authentic. Have students choose a celebrity mug shot or a student Wanted poster and create a list of questions for the alleged offender (the questions could be either those put to the individual by an interrogating police officer or by a journalist during an interview following the arrest). Bring interviews to life by assigning the role of the arrested celebrity to another student. Do this by giving them the mug shot if possible.

9 Homework and projects

Present students with a number of mug shots (O J Simpson, Lee Harvey Oswald, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Ronnie Biggs (a famous British train robber), etc). Identify the personalities and allow each student (or pair of students) to choose an image that they will investigate.

Have your students find out about the people, their stories and the historical background behind them. A good place to start looking for information is at www.wikipedia.org. Students could be invited to give short presentations or create informative posters for the classroom wall.


10 Quizzes

Images are excellent for recapping and revising language that has arisen in previous classes. Designate a question master to show the other students mug shots that have previously been seen and ask questions, such as:

- *What happened to Mick Jagger?*
- *When was Frank Sinatra arrested?*
- *Where was Keanu Reeves arrested?*

etc

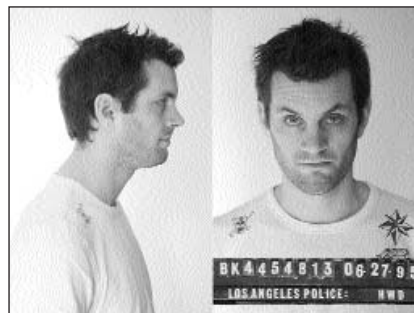


Rather than using texts to engage our students and get them thinking, speaking and writing, we may find images to be a better resource. An image is the key to unlocking language in our learners' minds. 

In the next issue Jamie will continue this series on using images in the classroom.

All the images that have been mentioned in this article (and others besides) can be found at www.flickr.com/photos/jamiekeddie. Please feel free to leave comments. In addition, you can upload your own images and suggest teaching ideas at the following discussion group: www.flickr.com/groups/imagesforlanguagelearning/.

Ewen, S *All Consuming Images* Harper San Francisco 1990



Jamie Keddie is a writer and English teacher based in Barcelona, Spain. He is currently wanted by the FBI for crimes against English learners, such as giving out too much homework and speaking too fast.

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