

Host Family Home-work

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Sak to
EF Gaz

If you are teaching in a place like New Zealand, Australia, US, Canada, South Africa or UK and if your students are in home-stay accomodation this intimate contact with native-speakers offers marvellous classroom opportunities. Why should the coursebook, audio-tapes, videos, CD-roms, your voice and the voices of people you bring into class be the only sources of language? Why not ask students to "quarry" language from their host families and bring their slabs of language to share with each other in class?

Here are some the of the host-family homework exercises I have used with intermediate to advanced students.

1. The Kitchen

Ask your students to find a moment when someone in the host family can take them on a guided tour of the kitchen and teach them all the words for utensils like

ladle
collander
sieve
rolling pin etc.....

Ask your students to also find out all the words they can for different kitchen process words like:

to soak
to marinate
to stir
to simmer
to poach etc...

In class, the next day, get the students to fill the board with these terms. If the class is an advanced one teach them some of the metaphorical uses of kitchen-connected words:

" a head like a sieve "
" I've heard some stirring news "
" simmering with rage..."

Not every student, in my experience, can do this kind of homework everytime I set it. There may be no appropriate moment to drag a family member into the kitchen and quiz them, notebook in hand! It all depends on the social situation. Most students seem able to do it most of the time.

(other good "home" vocabulary areas to work on are
DIY, THE GARDEN, BABY-CARE, THE CAR etc....)

2. Images of English towns

Set the ball rolling by asking your students what they know about a couple of second order towns in their country:

eg Brest (France), Zamora (Spain), Saarbrücken (Germany)
Pattaya (Thailand) Matsuyama (Japan).

Explain that the image they have of a town in their country will depend on what they know about it and the general feeling they have about it. People may well have an ignorant image of a particular place.

Ask the students to find out what image their host families have of three towns of your choice in the country where they are studying. In UK I have used BIRMINGHAM, OXFORD and ABERDEEN. Natives of a country often have strong feelings about towns, even when they know little about them.

In the next class have the students fill the board with the natives' love of and prejudice towards the three towns.

In this exercise the students have to recycle the language they have heard and explain it to classmates. In so doing they stand a good chance of internalising chunks of language they have garnered from speakers whose voices and idiolects are very familiar.

3. The house we've most liked living in

Ask the students to find out from the host family how many houses they have lived in and which they feel was the best one for them. (There may be different opinions in the family on this)

In the next class ask the students to report on their findings and put useful words up on the board.

Then ask students to tell each other how many houses they have lived in and which house has been best for them. (If they have only ever lived in one house, ask them to outline the good and bad things about it). It makes sense for students to listen to a native talk about a particular area before themselves tackling the same general area.

Call for sharing

When Morgan and I wrote ONCE UPON A TIME (CUP,1984) we did not know if many EFL teachers told their class stories. Now we know there are lots.

When Burbidge, Grey, Levy and me wrote LETTERS (OUP,1996) we did not know if many people showed their own junk, business and personal letters to their classes. Now we know there are some who do.

If YOU set host-family homework, please let me know directly (Pilgrims, Orchard Street, Canterbury, or <http://www.pilgrims.co.uk/>) or better by writing a short piece for the EF Gazette and thus sharing your work with the EFL community world-wide. I have a hunch I am not the only teacher to be exploiting this obvious resource. Please write.