

Pumpkin Cowboy: A Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) lesson plan

Shannon Pederson

Teacher: Shannon Pederson**Level:** Novice-high to intermediate-high*This lesson plan is built upon the song and music video “Pumpkin Cowboy” by Brian David Gilbert on YouTube.*

Description and justification: This is a fully fleshed out lesson plan that utilizes Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) to help novice-high to intermediate-high learners of English practice summarizing stories and media. TBLT is a popular language teaching method in which students must work together in the target language on some sort of task in order to reach a relevant, meaningful goal (Long, 2014). This lesson was specifically created for a course centered around TBLT, and thus carefully incorporates as many aspects of TBLT and its benefits as possible. For example, this lesson targets a hypothetical group of Korean high school participants in an English conversation club, and thus a hypothetical “needs analysis” was conducted. This led me to focus on “movies” and “narrative stories,” which Park (2015) found to be in the top 10 most desired discussion topics in English among a group of Korean middle schoolers. It also follows a three-step “weak” TBLT style by including a pre- and post-task alongside the main task; this is to give the students the proper amount of scaffolding needed to succeed in this new type of activity (Ellis, 2009). The *pre-task* provides students with limited scaffolding to lower cognitive load and raise awareness of useful linguistic forms; the *main task* encourages both one-way and two-way processing and improves fluency through repeated exposure; and the *post-task* of presenting in front of peers increases the stakes to ideally improve accuracy (Skehan, 2009). This task is designed to be adjustable in difficulty, and teachers are also encouraged to solicit media from the students themselves to further orient the activity towards their interests.

	Content/Activity	Time
A – Description of Class	Korean high school students between the ages of 14–19. 10 students; 6 girls, 4 boys.	
Levels	<p>All are L1 speakers of Korean with oral English proficiencies ranging from novice high to intermediate high. This lesson was designed for a conversation club, and thus is optional and is conducted separately from their regular English classes while focusing on different goals. It is also not graded or evaluated formally. Students are likely to have a relatively large mental lexicon (given the amount of emphasis that is placed on vocabulary memorization in their regular English classes), and better receptive skills than productive skills.</p> <p>The class takes place from 3:30 to 4:20 pm (50 minutes) on Mondays and Wednesdays. Students participate well during the lesson, but many are a bit tired because the class comes right after classes finish, and many are expecting to go to private classes after dinnertime. Some students don’t eat lunch before class. These factors affect concentration.</p>	

B – Recent work	One activity that is frequently repeated is a Zoom/Skype session with another English class in Taiwan; they have some confidence speaking in English and Korean with each other, but struggle to express this confidence in their regular English classrooms due to anxiety or lack in fluency.	
C – Aims and Outcomes	<p>Target task (main real-life language ability to be learned): Discuss/recommend your favorite movie/tv show to a friend.</p> <p>Pedagogic task (subskill needed to achieve target task): Summarizing.</p> <p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students will build awareness of common techniques used to describe plots in fictional media. - Students will practice using cohesive devices and mental organization techniques in their listening, writing and speaking to effectively create summaries. - Students will collaborate to write and present their own summaries of the provided media in pairs. <p>Objectives: Students Will Be Able To...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brainstorm and list techniques used to cohesively summarize a piece of media. - Paraphrase and organize important events and information for each section of the provided story/media using a handout. - Implement cohesive devices in English in their writing and speaking. - Compose and Present in pairs a summary of the provided story/media. 	
D – Preparation	Preparation time of approximately 10 minutes ; teacher must prepare by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - printing out the appropriate number of handouts and stapling; - Setting up the music video on the board. 	~10 minutes
E – Procedure	<p>1. Pre-task:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The teacher will display this video of Olaf summarizing <i>Frozen</i> in 2 minutes on the board. It can be replayed if students request it, but it is not crucial that students understand it fully. As many students are likely to be confused by the fast pace of the video, the teacher will ask students if this was a good or not very good explanation, and discuss why or why not. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Students are likely to say it was <i>too fast</i>, <i>too little details</i>, <i>the listener may not know context</i>, etc... if students are not participating, these are the kinds of answers that the teacher should suggest to the class to get ideas flowing. Teacher will guide the conversation into what makes an understandable movie or media summary. Things to mention are <u>characters, genre, mood and tone, plot structure, memorable</u> 	~10 minutes

	<p><u>moments or lines, etc.</u> These important aspects of a summary should be written on the white/blackboard and referred back to throughout the activity as things students should take mental (or physical) notes of during the main task.</p> <p>d. Possible problems:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Conversation should be started in English, but if students seem overwhelmed, the teacher can switch to translanguaging with Korean (if possible) to decrease cognitive load. Students may make suggestions that are not covered by the handout; these should still be recorded and saved to be addressed in a future lesson. <p>2. Main Task:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The teacher will display this short music video about a Pumpkin Cowboy on the board. The teacher will explain that the class will be watching the video multiple times throughout the activity, and that our main objective is to be able to understand, break down, and clearly summarize the characters, genre, and plot of the story. The teacher should also say that the final result of this task will be creating a written summary with a partner, which will be presented orally to the entire class. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The teacher should state that a handout for notes will be provided soon, so students shouldn't take notes yet. The video will first be played without subtitles and students will just watch the whole thing through, likely relying a lot on visuals to get a general idea of the story. The teacher should then distribute the handout. The teacher will explain that the video will be played again, and that students should take notes on each section using the boxes <u>ON PAGE 3. The students should NOT write on the lines on page 1 and 2 yet.</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Students should be given ~5 minutes to read through the script, look over the words in the word bank, and ask any necessary questions about what they need to do during the activity. The teacher should check in with the students and ask if they found the video too hard to follow; if so, the video may be slowed down or paused more frequently, or played twice during the handout activity instead of once. The video can now be replayed, and should pause for ~1 minute between each section to allow students time to take notes and collect their thoughts on page 3. After the video is finished, students will then be given 10 minutes to individually summarize each section of the story using the blank lines under each section on pages 1 and 2. <u>Each summary should only be 2~3 sentences long.</u> Students should be reminded to consider the different elements of a summary that was discussed before, such as the 	~20 min.
--	---	----------

	<p>characters, genre, flow of the plot, and a memorable scene.</p> <p>d. In the final part of this activity, the teacher will pair up students so they can compare each other's results, then work together to determine which parts one person wrote down, and the other didn't. They will discuss why they felt some parts were or weren't necessary to include, and work to come up with their own final oral summary of the scene. <u>One (or both students) may write down this summary on PAGE 4 of the handout</u>, and may use any of the "useful phrases" provided on page 4.</p> <p>i. If the number of students is uneven, one student may join a pair to form a group of 3.</p>	~10 min.
	<p>3. Post-task</p> <p>a. When all pairs have finished their final summaries, the teacher should guide the students' attention back to the front of the class; the teacher will explain that one person from each group will now present out loud their final summary.</p> <p>i. Ideally, the person who did not write down the final summary should be the one to speak. If neither student in the pair wants to present, the teacher will volun-tell one of them to speak.</p> <p>ii. The teacher should also instruct the other students to pay attention to the structure, content, and language used by the presenter, and think about how the presenter's summary is similar or different from their own. <u>Each presentation should take ~2 minutes</u>, and the teacher should work to maintain a casual, low-stakes atmosphere in the classroom.</p> <p>iii. If the students are nervous, the teacher can start by giving their own brief summary about the plot of the music video as an example.</p> <p>4. Beyond the task:</p> <p>a. This task is designed to be reusable, with any music video, movie summary, etc. able to replace the Pumpkin Cowboy video used in this example. By repeating this task multiple times throughout the semester (or even turning it into a fun weekly activity), students will become increasingly familiar with the format, and thus less reliant on linguistic crutches that were provided in this example, such as a heavily elaborated handout, writing down final summaries, watching the video multiple times, etc.</p> <p>b. Teachers are encouraged to elicit media suggestions from the students. This will help increase the relevancy of the task and turn it into a way students can showcase their interests, which will likely improve engagement and motivation.</p>	~10 min.

F – Caveats and Options	<p>The video may be more difficult to follow than expected, depending on the group of students; if students need additional help beyond what is provided on the handout, the teacher can engage in a scaffolded conversation with the students (utilizing both Korean and English) to help work out the plot of the movie together; then, students can be sent off to compose their own paraphrased version using the handout.</p> <p>Extra time may be needed to watch the video, or for students to discuss their writing/spoken plan together. If time is running out, the post-task in which students present can be saved to be the pre-task/review in the following session; students should be given about 5 minutes to reread their work and prepare their presentation. The video may be rewatched.</p> <p>Finally, teachers can absolutely substitute the video presented above with media chosen from the students themselves; this is likely to improve interest and engagement as students get excited to talk about their favorite pieces of media (the original point of this task!)</p>	
-------------------------	---	--

Further reading:

- Ellis, R. (2009). Task-based language teaching: Sorting out the misunderstandings. *International journal of applied linguistics*, 19(3), 221-246. Blackwell Publishing.
- Long, M. H. (2014). *Second language acquisition and task-based language teaching*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Park, M., (2015). A needs analysis for a Korean middle school EFL general English curriculum. In Thomas, M. & Reinders, H. (Eds.), *Contemporary task-based language teaching in Asia* (pp. 261-278). Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Skehan, P. (2009). Modelling second language performance: Integrating complexity, accuracy, fluency, and lexis. *Applied linguistics*, 30(4), 510-532. Oxford University Press.

Appendix:

The summarizing handout for this activity can be accessed and downloaded through this public link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cmbEcO-z4fghR93jlzGISAbsXB4nNmry/view?usp=sharing>.

The YouTube videos featured in this lesson plan can be accessed here:

[“Pumpkin Cowboy” by Brian David Gilbert](#)

[“Olaf Retells the Story of Disney's Frozen” by Disney Princess](#)

A cover letter covering the theoretical backing and reasoning for the design of this program can be found here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1M8vxi4IKv7tdmzBwX1drmd8MSQhtdJhfCwle8nCTxk8/edit?usp=sharing>.