

## Getting to know your class

When you start the school year you may or may not know all the members of your class and, moreover, they may or may not know each other. During the course of the year they are going to work together in different group organisations and it is a good idea to try to set up a good working relationship among the members of the class at the beginning of the year. This means that they should all get to know as many of their classmates as possible, as should you.

### Familiarisation activities

Here are some suggestions for activities which will help the class to work together. While the children are doing these activities, you will have the opportunity to learn their names and to observe the interaction taking place. You will be able to see who is assertive and active in group/pairwork and who is less able to assert themselves. This will help you when you have to divide the class up for group activities. The students will obviously speak L1 during these activities.

#### ACTIVITY 2: NAME BADGES

**Level:** beginners/elementary

**Aim:** student co-operation

**Group dynamics:** whole group

**Language:** classroom instructions, *My name is ...*, *I am + age*

**Materials:** one 10 × 5cm card per student, passport-sized photographs of students, glue, coloured pencils, one safety pin per student

**Note:** You will have to do this in your second or third lesson. Ask the children in the first lesson to bring in small photographs of themselves.

This activity is designed to encourage the students to organise themselves. Do not intervene in the organisation unless it is absolutely necessary. It is a valuable moment for you to observe the working dynamics of the class and to encourage social co-operation among the students.

- Ask the children either to glue a photograph of themselves onto the card or to draw a picture of themselves on it. Do one yourself to demonstrate. If some students have forgotten their photographs, let them draw themselves.
- They write their name and age on the card, e.g. *My name is Maria. I am eight.*
- When all the children have finished their badges, they pin them onto their chest. Ask them to organise themselves in a line in alphabetical order (using their first names). Do not be tempted to intervene at this point, although there will be a lot of L1 going on in the classroom. This is the moment when you can observe the interaction. Who is doing the organising, who is disagreeing and who is being organised?
- Check the alphabetical order and correct the line if necessary.

#### Other activities

You can perform different tasks using these badges, all based on the same principle of getting the students to organise themselves, e.g.

- The students organise themselves into two groups: names with six or fewer letters and names with more than six letters.
- The students organise themselves into two groups: names beginning with the first half of the alphabet (A–M) and names beginning with the last half (N–Z).

#### Adapting for older children

- Students could draw a picture of their favourite pop star or sportsman/woman and write, e.g. *I am Gloria Estefan*. Then proceed as before with the alphabetical organisation.

#### Adapting for higher levels: Who am I?

- Cut out pieces of card  $5 \times 2$ cm and write the names of famous people on them.
- As the children come into class, stick a card on each child's back with sticky tape. Don't let the child see the card on his/her back.
- The children have to ask each other questions to find out who they are. They can only answer with *yes* or *no*, e.g.

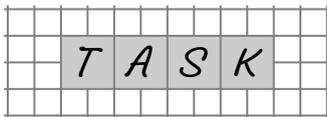
A: *Am I a man?*

B: *No.*

A: *Am I from Europe?*

B: *Yes.*

- They continue until they guess the name stuck to their back. Do not limit the students to one partner only. Let them walk around asking several students. Choose funny characters but be careful not to make any one student the centre of fun. Until you know your students well, it is wise not to make them too self-conscious.



After you have observed the students organising themselves, make a note of what you think might be good working groups. Try these out in the classroom. Did they work as you expected? If not make adjustments.

#### **ACTIVITY 3: WHOSE FEET?**

**Level:** beginners/elementary

**Aim:** getting to know the class

**Group dynamics:** whole group

**Language:** classroom instructions, *This is + name*

**Materials:** a length of washing line (long enough to be hung up across the room), a sheet, four or five pegs

This is a fun activity in which the teacher has to identify the children by looking only at their feet! Done at the beginning of the school year, it is a wonderful ice-breaker and shows the students that English classes are going to be fun. It also helps you to learn their names!

- Hang a washing line across the classroom at about 1.7m above the floor.
- Hang a dark sheet up across the washing line with pegs, so that the bottom of the sheet is about 25cm from the floor.
- Tell the children to stand behind the sheet so that you can only see their feet and part of their legs. If you are feeling adventurous, you can ask them to take off their shoes and socks so you can see their bare feet. If the class is very

big, the children will have to do this in small groups. The others can watch and laugh!

- Try to identify the children just by looking at their feet. Use natural language that you feel comfortable with. They may only understand their names but they will hear you speaking in English, e.g.

T: *Let's see. This is Maria.*

Class: *No!*

T: *Well, Roberto, then.*

Class: *Yes.*

- As you identify the children, they stand in front of the sheet, until all the class has been identified.
- Alternatively, you could do the same activity using the children's hands. In this case, hang the sheet so that the bottom is about one metre from the floor.

#### ACTIVITY 4: INFORMATION CHARTS

**Level:** beginners/elementary

**Aim:** getting to know the class

**Group dynamics:** small groups/pairwork

**Language:** classroom instructions, various

**Materials:** card, coloured pencils, bathroom scales, measuring tape

There are several charts that you can make at the beginning of the school year to provide you with useful information throughout the rest of the year. Remember to vary the type of chart. The activities described below are good for cross-curricular work because they fit in particularly well with maths activities. You could check with the maths teachers about the type of charts the students are working with and use the same type. The charts should be mounted and pinned up on the wall (if possible) for later use when the students are practising specific language structures. If you can't put them on the wall, keep them safely in the staff room so that you can bring them to class when necessary.

Choose the type of chart which best illustrates the information. In each case below, one type is suggested but you can use other types.

#### Birthday wheel

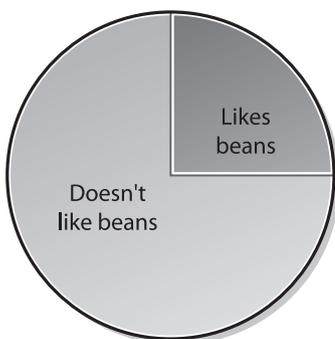
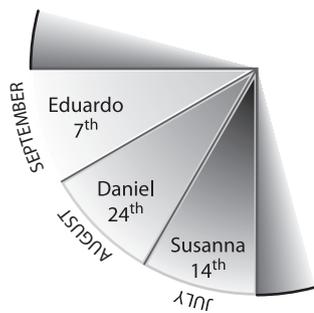
**Language:** *Whose birthday is it this week/month? Which is the most/least popular month for birthdays?*

All children like to be the centre of attention on their birthday. You can make a point of playing popular games when it is somebody's birthday and singing *Happy Birthday To You*. Make a birthday wheel at the beginning of the year and ask students to check whose birthdays take place each week/month.

#### Preferences pie charts

**Language:** *Twenty-five per cent of our class likes beans.*

This type of diagram is for showing proportions and will work well with questionnaire-type activities. If you have questionnaires or surveys in your coursebook, you can get the students to transform this information into pie diagrams. Check with the maths teacher for cross-curricular activities.



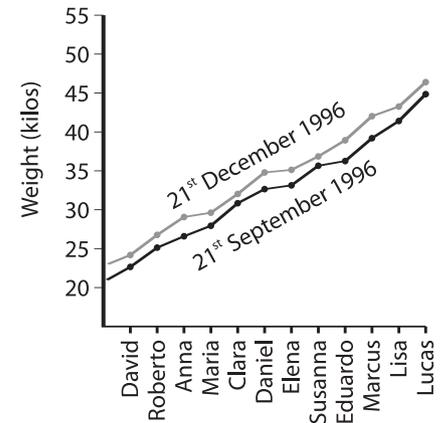
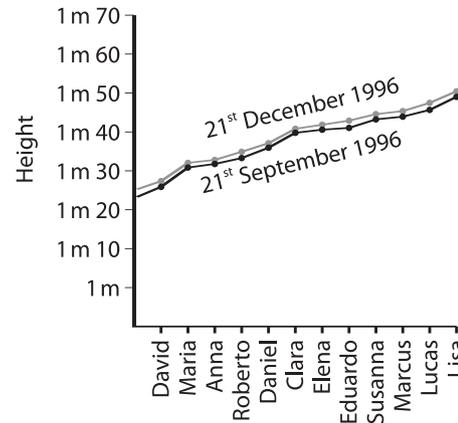
### Height and weight line graphs

**Language:** *Now I am one metre 44cm. I weigh 40 kilos.*

*I have grown two cm this term. I have put on three kilos.*

*Who is the tallest/the shortest/the heaviest/the lightest in the class?*

*Maria is taller/heavier than David.*



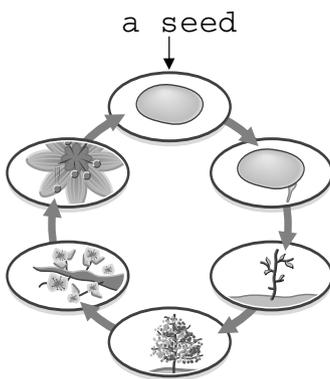
Children like to monitor their growth. Make the diagram at the beginning of the year and chart their growth at the beginning and end of each term.

**Note:** Be sensitive to variations in your class. Don't insist on weight charts if you have any heavy children in your class.

### Changes in nature flow chart

**Language:** conjunctions: *and then, after that, before that, so, finally*

At primary school students are working a lot with changes in both themselves and the world around them. Flow charts are effective ways of illustrating this process of change. With older students you could use these charts to display learning strategies.

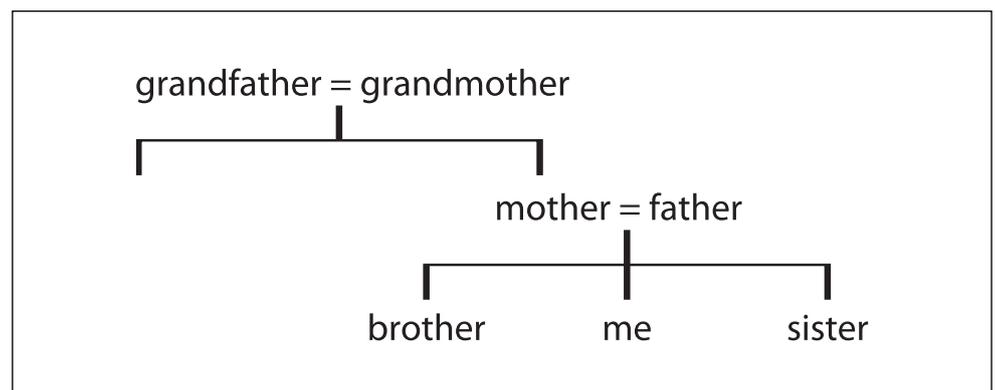


### Family tree

**Language:** *This is my mother.*

*I've got three brothers.*

*My father's name is Daniel.*



Choose the complexity of the family tree according to the age group of your class. Younger children should deal only with the immediate family (grandparents, parents, brothers and sisters), but older students can work with a complex family.

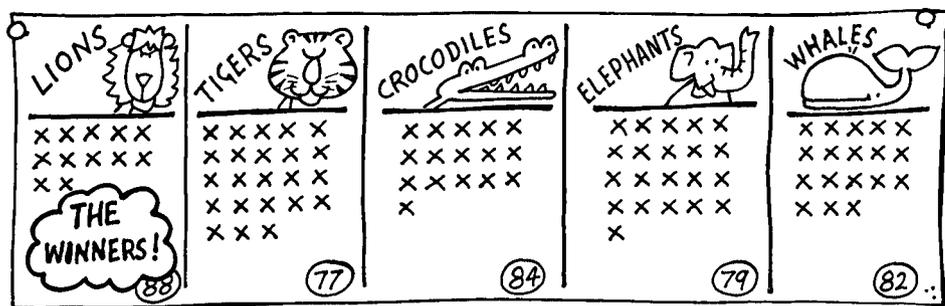
**Note:** When dealing with families most of us come up against the situation of a student who has no mother or father, or one who has step-parents. You cannot avoid this issue; just deal with it naturally. You may need to reassure the student in L1 at this point. Depending on the social environment of your school you may need to introduce other family words. It is important to reinforce the idea that there is not only one type of acceptable family group, but many varieties.

**Rules for the classroom**

At the beginning of the school year you can establish the working rules for activities in your class. You will probably have to remind students of the rules throughout the year, especially before a potentially noisy activity! PHOTOCOPIABLE PAGE 3 is an example of a 'charter' (contract) which you can photocopy, enlarge and pin on the wall. You will have to explain the rules in L1 at the beginning of the year, but the illustrations next to each rule will reinforce the idea.

If you anticipate particular discipline problems, try this approach.

- Divide the class into teams at the beginning of the term.
- Give each team a name, e.g. a colour or an animal.
- Make a chart for the wall and give each team 100 points to start the term.
- Explain that every time one member of a team breaks the rules, his/her team will lose a point.
- Count up the points at the end of the term and award a prize to the team with most points.



It is important that you group the students in such a way that a 'difficult' student is placed in a group with 'co-operative' students. If you put all the 'difficult' students in the same team, you will need more than 100 points! Alternatively, you could try using forfeits. SEE PAGE 66

If, by the end of the first term, you are still having problems of student integration and some students always seem to be left out of groupwork, get the students to make a Christmas card and tell them that it is for their 'invisible' friend. Inside the card they write *Happy Christmas to my friend, from David*. Let them decorate the card as they wish. On the last day of term put names into pairs carefully, making sure that you bring together students who are not working well together, and give each student the name of his/her invisible friend on a slip of paper. Before the students leave for the Christmas holidays, they exchange their Christmas cards.

**T A S K**

Think about any specific behavioural problems you are experiencing in class. Can you think of a way to negotiate with the student(s) in question? How could you make them feel responsible for a particular task in class, something to co-operate with the running of the class?