

‘Golden Bell’ as a Tool for Teaching Writing

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ABSTRACT

‘Golden Bell’ is a popular quiz in Korea. The basic concept is that the teacher has a set of questions. Students are put into small teams and are equipped with a whiteboard, a marker and an eraser. The teacher then reads out the first question. The students are given a time limit, within which to write the answer to the question on their whiteboard. When the time limit is reached, the teacher calls time and each team must immediately raise their whiteboard over their heads. Upon inspection of each team’s answers, teams who answered incorrectly are ‘out’ of the game. A variation on the theme includes bonus rounds, to prolong the game for those that are ‘out’. The game then resumes with a further question and continues in such fashion until there is one winning team.

I will explain how ‘Golden Bell’ can be used in regular classroom settings as a means to teach and review writing skills. I will demonstrate variations of the format that I have used to not only review writing in a quiz format, but also to introduce writing the alphabet, learning basic vocabulary, spelling, and onto writing sentences.

Keywords: Writing, primary English, activities

I. Introduction

Writing is akin to saying your thoughts, but on paper, using a pencil or pen instead of your mouth. Both require the actor to think and to convey their thoughts. When children turn two or three years old, most people are able to at least say a few words, and as they get older they find themselves more and more able to converse with others, to put their thoughts into intelligible utterances. Cook (2003) explains that his first design feature of language is spontaneous use, and that with children, spontaneous acquisition means that children acquire the language around them without the need for exerting any pressure on them. Children like to speak.

In the language process, learning to write doesn’t happen immediately. Unlike the skills of listening and speaking, which we absorb, we have to make an effort to acquire and learn the skills of reading and writing.

Then who can transfer those skills to children, especially to children learning English as foreign language? Children need a facilitator, a teacher to show them the way. They need to learn the alphabet, the shape of the letters, the way to write the letters using a writing implement such as a pencil, how to put letters together to form words, to put words together to form sentences – in essence, how to speak on paper. Children see being able to write well as being able to express themselves correctly on paper. Graham (2010) has a good example:

The famed playwright Harold Pinter, having just been introduced as a very good writer, was once asked

by a six-year-old' boy if he could do a *w*. I suspect that *w* was a difficult letter for this young man, and he judged the writing capability of others accordingly (Graham, 2010, p.49).

With elementary school students, can writing only be taught from a textbook, from a teacher's commands, using workbooks to practice handwriting, etc? What activities can be used to make it more fun, and more memorable for students? How can we make that child, who was so curious as to whether the man in the street could write the letter 'w', not only learn, but want to learn how to write?

In my teaching career, I have used numerous activities to teach writing, some from textbooks, some from the Internet, some from sharing ideas with my peers, and some from my own invention, or adaptations of other games. I would like to share with you how to use 'Golden Bell' to teach writing to elementary school students.

II. Background

'Golden Bell' can be a useful tool to make writing not only educational but also a fun and rewarding classroom experience. What exactly is 'Golden Bell', and how can it be used in the elementary school classroom to teach writing? I first heard of it when I came to Korea. I saw it on the TV program '스타골든벨' on KBS. During my teaching career I have created numerous and hosted various 'Golden Bell' quizzes for the local education office, the 'Jeonju English Festival', and on teaching training courses. I have experimented with various formats for different age ranges and abilities, and also focused on different skills depending on the course matter being taught.

The basic rule of the quiz puts students into pairs to write answers to the teacher's questions. The equipment needed is minimal, simply a marker pen, an eraser and a mini whiteboard. The teacher must prepare the questions beforehand. Then the teacher must explain to the students:

- Listen to the question.
- You will hear and the question once.
- Use your marker pen and whiteboard for the answer.
- Don't start writing until you have heard the whole question and possible answers.
- There will be a time limit.
- When the time is up, STOP writing and raise your whiteboard above your head.

III. Method

1) Using the regular format, the quiz runs through three rounds. The first round follows a true or false format, where statements are read and the students must decide if they are true or false. The second round has a multiple choice option. The teacher must read out a question and give the possible answers, up to five. Then the students must write down the correct one(s). The final round involves written answers, where the students have to either write single words, or sentences.

After each question and the time limit, the teacher checks each pairs' answer. The students with correct answers remained seated. Incorrect pairs must go to the back of the class. With elementary school students, an interesting additional part of the game that I favor is to let the students at the back continue

playing. During regular play, if those students can answer the next three questions in a row correctly, then they can come back into the game. If not, then they must remain out. Furthermore, so as to continuously keep all of the class involved, I have developed two further rules of play. The first is called 'Lifeline'. This in essence brings those students that have given an incorrect answer, and then failed to give three correct answers in a row from the back of the class, a final attempt at play. The 'lifeline' is an extra question, also with a time limit, whereby if they can answer correctly, then they can come back to the game. I only use that rule when it is obvious that the quiz will finish prematurely. The last rule is the use of 'Bonus Activities'. To hold students' interest throughout the game, including any that are out at the back of the class, I use a series of bonuses, including word searches and writing games such as 'Hangman'. When the game is down to the last remaining two pairs, remove the time limit and the winning pair will be the one to answer first and correctly.

2) To adapt the quiz specifically for use with writing, I considered the levels of writing used in elementary schools. For younger students beginning to learn English, in the third and fourth grades, a game revolving around alphabet practice serves to review how to write both lower and upper case letters of the alphabet. An additional facet is the skill to listen to the letter the teacher says and to correctly write it down. Korean learners of English often confuse the shapes of letters, like b and d, and the sounds of letters like b and v. The quiz allows for practice and reinforcement of that. Of course, during the course of play, the teacher should go over arising problems. For fourth and fifth grade students, the game can cover spelling and simple dictation. A higher level activity to be used in the 'Golden Bell' format is sentence writing and free writing. This is for fifth and sixth grade students.

IV. Conclusion

The 'Golden Bell' quiz in itself is not to teach writing to elementary school students. Rather it is a tool to use *in* teaching. It is especially useful for reviewing, for checking up on students understanding. It provides a tool to avoid the question '*Do you understand?*' By using the extra rules of three correct answers in a row, and 'lifeline', no one gets left behind in the class when using this activity. By using the bonus activities at appropriate intervals in the quiz, the students' interest and excitement can be maintained throughout the activity.

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About the Presenter

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