

Abracadabra

Previous compulsory steps / Prior students' knowledge	None
Learning objectives	Practice your vocabulary and imagination.
Subjects	English as a foreign language, arts, writing
Recommended Age	10-14
Material needed	PCs that can run the game (light), smartphones
Sequence duration	2 – 3 hours
Individual or group activity	Individual
Skills developed	Problem-solving, creativity
Price range of the game	20€ on pc, 5€ on smartphones
Similar games to use with the approach of the sequence	Other Scribblenauts games

Step by step: how to implement the sequence

One of the possible origins of the word abracadabra is the Aramaic “évra kedebra” which means “what I speak is what I create”. This could be the name of this game. In Scribblenauts, the player can use a magical notebook that materializes or modifies reality based on what’s written in it.

This sequence can be used in any subject that deals with language, like learning a new language. In this case, the game will have the player use or search for vocabulary. But in a class on literature/writing or even philosophy, you can illustrate or dive into the subject of language in a playful manner.

Cutting the cost

The least expensive version of the game is on smartphones. You can save more money by having the game on a tablet and sharing it between students.

Step 1: Explain the concept (20 minutes)

Tell your students that they will play a puzzle game where language and creativity are their main weapons. Play the tutorial with them. It is better if you have played it on your own beforehand to make things run smoother when you show it in class.

The tutorial will guide you through the gameplay: you can use the notebook to create a thing. You can add adjectives to existing things. The goal of the game is to collect “starites”. They appear when you do enough good actions in the world. Most of the time characters in the game will give you a quest to solve.



Figure 1 – Tutorial of the game (Scribblenauts showdown, 5th Cell Media LLC, 2012)

Step 2: Students play at home (1 - 2 hours)

You can let players play freely or give them some constraints.

Play some levels on your own and notice solutions that may be obvious. For example, the very first puzzle of the game where you must wash a pig can be solved by invoking a “soap”. But the game is tolerant and using a similar concept like “detergent” would work.



Figure 2 – Invoking soap (Scribblenauts showdown, 5th Cell Media LLC, 2012)



Figure 3 – Using invoked soap (Scribblenauts showdown, 5th Cell Media LLC, 2012)

You can forbid the use of certain words to force your students to find a richer vocabulary. They should be allowed to use online dictionaries, translators, and synonym finders. We better remember what we manipulate, so the process of searching and using these words in a game will hopefully make them stick a bit better in their memory.

You can ask your students to keep track of the words they used to solve in-game puzzles and to share them with the class afterward.

Step 3: Debrief and discussion (30 minutes)

You can now have a debrief session where you go through a level and ask your students how they solved it at home. You can also review all the new words the students used while playing and build a lesson on them.

You can try to fuel your students' desire to increase their vocabulary and mastery of language by discussing the impact of language on psychology.

15-18 years old:

“The limits of my language mean the limits of my world”

These are the words of Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*.

To illustrate this concept, you can open a simple discussion on George Orwell's 1984's *Newspeak*.

Having an opinion is to be able to formulate it, at least mentally. An opinion inexpressible in my language is an opinion that I can't think.

In 1984's depicted dystopian society, language is impoverished on purpose to limit the thinking capabilities of the mass. Honor, justice, equality, science, all these words are

replaced by “crime-thought”. These ideas exist, but their distinctions, relationships, articulation, what gives them their meaning, are summarized in an all-encompassing word: “thoughtcrime”. When faced with someone saying that slavery is good, someone raised speaking Newspeak might feel an intuition of disagreement but will lack the words to express their point of view.

10-14 years old:

Discuss with your students the richness and precision of language, how we have many different words for things because words may be both explanatory and artistic at the same time, i.e. giving us more information and a richer experience of the world.

Getting the game:

https://store.steampowered.com/app/491950/Orwell_Keeping_an_Eye_On_You/

https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.OsmoticStudios.Orwell&hl=en_US&gl=US

<https://apps.apple.com/fr/app/orwell-keeping-an-eye-on-you/id1476541931>



References:

All screenshots are taken from [Scribblenauts Unlimited - Gameplay Walkthrough Part 1 - Funny Times in Capital City \(PC, Wii U, 3DS\)](#)

Brioli, D. (2021, November 1). 'Language games'. superjumpmagazine.com Retrieved from <https://superjumpmagazine.com/language-games-68988fbabb1a>

TEDx Talks (June 11th , 2014). The magic of words - what we speak is what we create: Andrew Bennett at TEDxTowsonU. [Video]. Youtube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVK4mWaS3F8>

Webb, B. (2018, August 7). How to master your fear like a navy seal. Medium.com Retrieved from <https://medium.com/s/story/how-to-master-your-fear-like-a-navy-seal-ffde5fe8d11>

