

ADVANCED TECHNIQUE: BELIEVE THE STORY

A colleague wrote an email to me summarizing what went on in one of his classes. He had the basics of TPR Storytelling going well, but he needed to make his class more lively. This is my email reply to him. I recommended that he begin to work on the advanced technique called "Believe the story."

- > In 20 min. all they did was come up with "There is a
- > boy whose name is Schooby who is 18 (it took us 5 min.
- > to decide the age as they signaled thumbs up or thumbs
- > down as way of voting on an agreed upon age), who is
- > from Happy Holllow PA who is stupid. And there is a
- > lemon who is not 18 who is not named Shooby but is
- > named Warren." All that in French.

Staying in French and getting their input is awesome! Not worrying about doing a pre-set story line is wonderful. Look into the eyes of one kid and then another kid to get a feeling for their level of commitment to the story. In my mind 5 minutes on age is too long. There are times when a detail is exciting and everyone is really into it, but I have a hard time imagining "age" remaining interesting for that long. I think if you just pick an age and get on with something else you will hold their interest better.

Now that you have made such incredible progress, I am going to tell you an advanced teaching technique that makes a big difference:

Here it is: BELIEVE THE STORY. THE STORY IS FACT. IT IS THE TRUTH!!!
How could anybody's honest-to-goodness age be VOTED on???

When you try these techniques in your next class, you will see so many grins on their faces you won't believe it. For example, let's say that a kid said the age was 17. Here are three techniques for handling this answer.

Technique #1 "presque" (almost)

You say, "17 ans ? Presque. En réalité il a 17 ans, 3 mois, 27 jours, et 55 minutes." (17 years? Almost. Actually he is 17 years, 3 months, 27 days, and 55 minutes)

This is an advanced technique because your posture has to be SOLID for this to work. You see, the kid almost got it right. You are explaining how close he was! No wiggling around, no changing your mind, no standing with your weight on one foot. This is a precise, accurate answer. (And it teaches numbers and it is bizarre!)

Technique #2 CORRECT!!!

You say, "CORRECT!!! Il a 17 jours! Bravo!" (He is 17 days old!)

This is an advanced technique because you have to sell the kids that this really is his age and some lucky schmoe guessed it! You knew it all along and you can't believe how accurate this kid was! You react with amazement and you point to the lucky kid with big wide eyes. You react with even more enthusiasm the more bizarre the answer is. This teaches your students that the goal is to come up with the most imaginative answer. Pretty soon they figure out that TPRS is a game. The way to win is to say the cutest answer. (You know that when he said "17" he was thinking "years," but you pretend that he actually intended "days." That is how you teach them that bizarre is how to win the game.)

Technique #3 Non, quelle idée! (No, what a silly idea.)

You say, "17 ans? Non, quelle idée! C'est ridicule! Il n'a pas 17 ans!" (17 years? No, what a silly idea! That's ridiculous! He isn't 17 years old!)

The reason this is advanced is because you must do it with the right amount of light-heartedness. The student who offered that response must NOT feel hurt. To do this, your body does the opposite of #2. You do not look right at the kid who said this. You look sort of generally at the class with a head shake that says you absolutely can't believe anyone would offer such a ridiculous answer. And you do NOT want to dwell on the negativity of this. You toss the "ridiculous" off really fast and then give the true answer. Teach the kids that when you give them the right answer, they reply with "C'est évident!" or "Bien sûr!" or "C'est normal." (It's obvious, of course, that's normal) In Spanish we train them to say "Es obvio." Every really cute and unexpected answer is obvious, and every predictable answer is ridiculous.

Like I said, you have to strike the right note to get this to work. Go ahead and start to polish this. It will start to work for you and when you come back in the fall, you will have it as a powerful tool.

Now, the reason for using these three techniques is to keep moving. If you get bogged down on a detail of the story, you will see student interest begin to wander. You have to keep the story moving!