

Role Play



Role plays can be used with all but the most novice learners. They involve 2-6 people and can vary in length from 1-2 minutes to an entire class period. They are good for problem solving tasks and discussing issues about which there are multiple positions. Role plays best support interpersonal communication when there is a conflict; this ensures that students will have something to talk about.

Procedure:

1. Select a topic, preferably one with inherent controversy. This can be simple (a mother and daughter who have different ideas about what to eat for dinner) or complicated (a UN discussion about Human Rights).
2. Identify 2-6 roles that would be significant for the topic. Try to select a wide range of viewpoints.
3. Write a short character description for each one that gives a brief summary of the person's position (2-3 sentences).
4. Each student gets a slip of paper with his/her role on it.
5. In groups, each student introduces his/her character, then discussion ensues as students attempt to solve the problem at hand. In a role play, students are always speaking for their characters!
6. Students work to come up with a solution before the pre-set time limit is up.

Tips:

1. While it is important to set up a conflict, in most cases, it is also good for the final goal to be one common solution. That makes it harder for one highly motivated student to hijack the discussion in the hopes of winning. Coming up with a solution that all participants agree on requires at least some participation from each member.
2. It's much easier to assess smaller groups (2-4) of students.

Variations:

1. With more experienced students, you may give them only their roles, without a description. Students then determine how their character would argue. If you have multiple role plays with the same parts, you might consider letting all of the individuals playing a single character work together for 5 minutes to discuss their argument.
2. For real-world topics (environment, immigration, etc), students might enjoy a reflection time when they share their own thoughts (rather than those of their character) and discuss how they felt about arguing the position they were given.