

Grammar Detective

Age: 9-12

Organization: pairs, whole class

Aims: To logically deduce a language rule from given input or data; to develop an interest in and awareness of language patterns and rules.

Language focus: *In the example:* determiners (*a/an*)

Alternatives: any grammar point where there is a regular pattern to 'discover', e.g. formation of comparative and superlative adjectives

Materials: *Essential:* none / *Optional:* photocopies of input/data for the activity

Procedure

1. Explain to the children that they are going to be 'grammar detectives' and discover a rule in English.
2. Either give out the photocopies or write on the board in jumbled order a range of familiar vocabulary including *a* or *an*, e.g. *a banana, an orange, an elephant, a lion, an apple, a coat, a shirt, an umbrella, a cake, an ice cream, a spider, an ant, an egg, a tomato*.
3. Divide the class into pairs.
4. Ask the children to work with their partner and see if they can discover the rule about when we use *a* before words and when we use *an*.
5. At the end, ask the children to report back and, if appropriate, introduce or use the words 'vowel' and 'consonant', e.g. *We use 'a' before words (or nouns) that begin with a consonant and 'an' before words (or nouns) that begin with a vowel*.
6. Explain and demonstrate that we do this because it's easier to say. If you like, ask the children to identify the five English vowels (a, e, i, o, u) from the words on the sheet or the board.

Comments and Suggestions

- By 'discovering' the rule themselves, rather than being told, children are much more likely to remember to use and apply it in their own work.
- This principle holds for any regular language pattern or rule, e.g. for the formation of selected comparative adjectives, children can be given a sheet with a range of examples, e.g. tall – taller, short-shorter, ugly-uglier, pretty-prettier, dangerous-more dangerous, beautiful-more beautiful and deduce how the comparatives are formed.

