

Managing Resources 2 – Using Topics and Apps For Kindergarten and Primary Learners

1. Using Topics to Formulate Lessons

It is perhaps fitting that we end this section with topic-based lessons, as these give the teacher the greatest freedom to incorporate all of the above areas that we have looked at.

The great thing about topic based lessons is the fact that young learners are inquisitive and will often be genuinely interested in the subject. While some learners will feel the security of book based lessons is more comfortable, I have seen greater learning when the teacher and students are able to put away the book and engage in something more creative. We have already touched on this area in our discussion in part 1 of 'Theme based lessons', so rather than look at topics which may or may not be of interest, here we will look at the process of planning for topic based lessons.

Because that is the key to success or failure here - planning. Be aware that planning, writing and adapting materials for topic based lessons is a time consuming process and one that often requires you to plan several lessons at one time, in order for it to be effective. That said, topic based lessons can be so rewarding with your younger learners, who get so much out of the process and are genuinely motivated to learn. If you have the freedom to plan your own lessons and are not tied to a course book, then this section is for you.

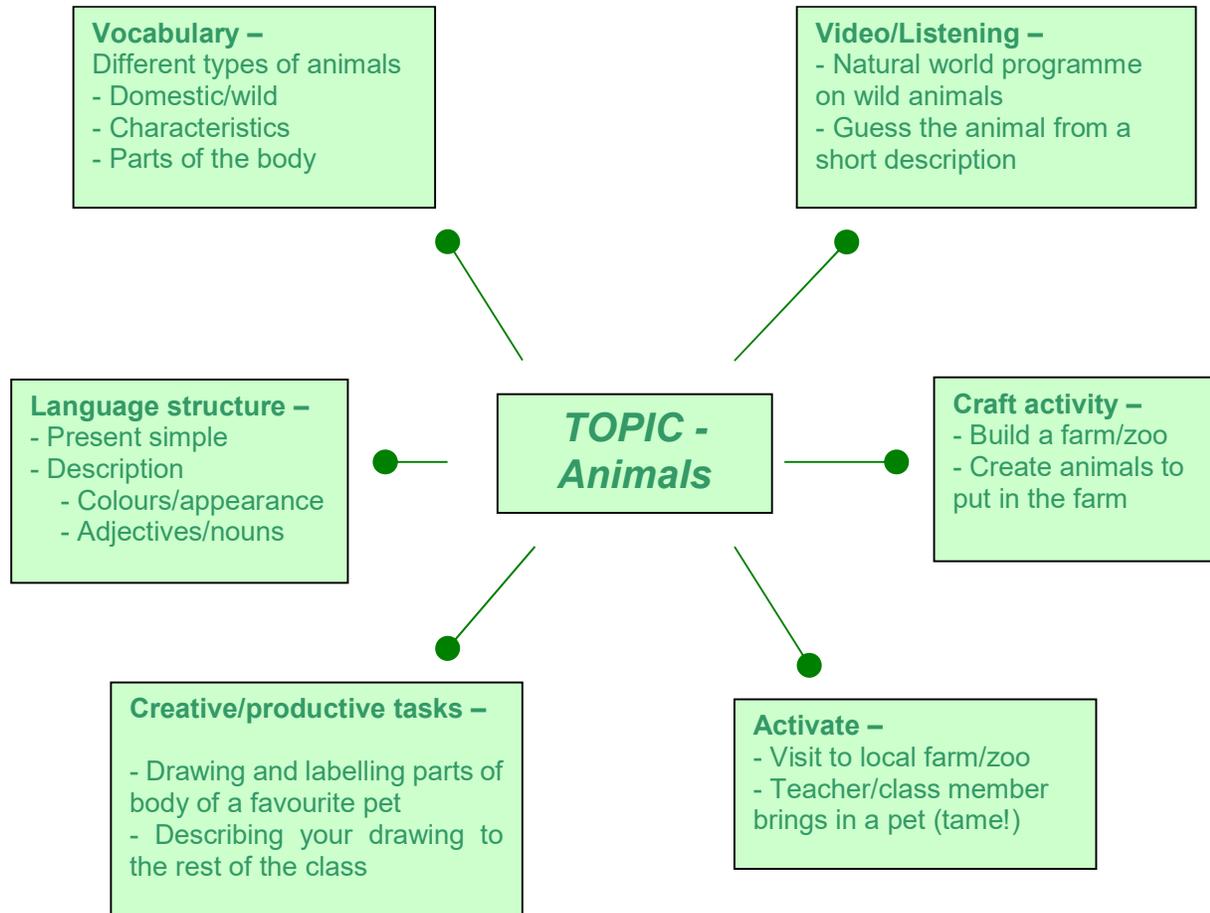
Firstly, select your topic. It could be anything that you and your class are interested in and it may be relevant to your teaching environment, or it may be more generic. We've listed some of the more popular ones for learners at this age range in the box below.

Sample topics		
Family	Food	Holidays
Seasons (Christmas etc)	Animals	
Environment	Health	Colours

Once you have chosen your theme, you then need to have a think, or a brainstorm, about different games or activities that you could work into your topic based lessons. When you brainstorm, think about the follow questions:

- How are you going to introduce the new language based around the topic?
- How are you going to control the input, making sure that students aren't overloaded with new vocabulary?
- How will you ensure that what is taught is practised in a controlled way?
- What games or activities are best suited to each lesson?

Have a look at the 'model brainstorm' for one of the subjects on the previous page, which illustrates different areas of learning we can introduce into our topic based approach to classes.



Once you have brainstormed your activities, you need to think carefully about your objectives for each of the activities you plan to use with your class. Getting from the brainstorming stage to the lesson ready stage is sometimes the most complex part of the process, and usually the most time consuming for teachers. However, remember that for every lesson you should have an objective. This will help you to focus your ideas and your activities.

On the following page is an example of an objective for a first lesson with this new topic.

Lesson 1 Objective: Introduce names of different animals and categorise them

Vocabulary focus: animal names (dog, cat, cheetah, lion etc.)

Structure focus: present simple – ‘the Cheetah is a wild animal. It lives in the jungle’

Next you will need to plan your lesson to help to meet this objective, using the ideas from the brainstorm and also the relevant material you have to work with.

For the above topic, and indeed for most topic based lessons, you will most likely need to have access to a variety of resources. Different kinds of realia, other course books or the internet, or a combination of all 3, will enable you to find material to build interesting and stimulating lessons.

Here are two really good websites which we have found that you could use for the internet based materials for topic based lessons:

<http://www.tefl.net/esl-lesson-plans/esl-worksheets-tbw.htm>

<http://123child.com/>

As a tip, try to vary your lessons. So if you start lesson one with a listening, before proceeding with a drawing and labelling task, in lesson 2, try a song or a chant which will revise some of the new language, and then perhaps introduce a group activity or a game to keep your students interested. Always make sure that you repeat new language and structures to reinforce what has been learned.

This has been a brief look at topic based learning and how we can promote it in our classrooms. Topic based lessons can be some of the most fun, with students and teachers feeling ‘liberated’ from the constraints of the course book.

For further examples, look at Teaching Young Language Learners by Annamaria Pinter (OUP), pages 124>> where creating your own materials is also covered, giving further examples of how you can plan your own topic based lessons.

We will expand on topic-based lessons later in the course where we look at the topic-based syllabus. However, for now let’s move on to look at a new and upcoming area of young learner language learning, via the use of apps.

2. Using Apps to Support Student Learning

Young learners are much more 'tech savvy' than they used to be, especially in the west and in Asian countries, where a lot of kindergarten teaching takes place. So this interaction with smart phones and tablets continues to have a significant impact on the way that they learn. Languages are by no means outside the scope here.

Parents can be quite pushy too when it comes to assisting their youngsters get ahead. So quite often the teacher will find that learners have been engaging in English outside the classroom far earlier that they did previously.

Similarly, publishers are not getting in on the act and supporting this drive for early language learning by developing technologies that support language learning, both in the classroom and increasingly at home.

For some learners, and we mustn't make the assumption that all children fall into this category, apps give them a route to channel their natural inquisitiveness. When done well, they can add something significant to the learning process, as they draw in greater engagement and stimulation for language learning outside the classroom. The best ones are intuitive, easy to follow and build through different stages. Some incorporate gaming into their learning and are generally very appealing to students of all ages.

We have mentioned parents here. Even if they have very minimal English themselves, they can get more involved in their youngster's learning than ever before. Increasingly learning apps engage youngsters effectively with opportunities to improve a whole range of skills.

So what kind of activities do these apps present, particularly at the kindergarten age?

Home learning apps that are specifically designed for this age range often include very simple listening and pointing activities, stories with visual clues, simple games, music to sing along to and songs to aid vocabulary learning and pronunciation.

A good app will have been created to ensure learners don't get bored easily, so developer will have tried to build in visuals and tasks that help maintain engagement. Often this is done through a gradation of task, from more simple activities to facilitate initial engagement, through to greater degrees of challenge and skill as learners progress through the app.

Some of the best apps seek to work on a mirroring of classroom tasks, which helps learners as they are replicating what they are doing in the classroom in a group setting back at home on their own. However, it works best if parents engage too and it can even help them to develop their abilities in a new language.

Similarly, a good app can be used in the classroom by students who can work individually on a tablet, the same way as they do in their house.

While there are several apps available, we will look at two or three here which will give you a flavour of what is available on the market currently. Bear in mind that this is a fast-developing market too, so expect new apps to be launched regularly.



The British Council has a couple of great apps that would help both kindergarten and primary aged learners. **Learning Time with Timmy** gives users at the younger age range a really good start with their English language learning.

Developed in partnership with Aardman Animations, this visually stimulating app is for those up to aged 6 and gives them the opportunity to get a good start in English. There are three Apps in total and they start at £2.99 for each app. It's available on the Apple App Store or via Google Play, also at Amazon.

There is a natural progression through to primary when youngsters need a little more stimulation or advanced learning, via the British Council app **LearnEnglish Kids**. In their playtime section, they have over 100 songs to sing along to, as well as phonics stories and videos that will help keep youngsters engaged. Currently this is only available on the Apple App Store. The app is free with in-app licences purchases starting at \$3.99 USD for one month.



You can find out more about these apps here:

<https://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/apps>

The second app we've decided to feature is...