



TPRS Lesson Planning

FL6900 | India | China | USA Workshops Handout

Prepared by Shelley Thomas, Ph.D.

Introduction: Lesson plan for any one-hour class: Plan for 50 minutes and allow for 10 minutes of classroom management or unexpected things. Also, have one extra activity in case you finish early.

Phase 2: Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling

(TPRS)

For more information, see Blaine Ray's *Fluency thru TPR Storytelling*

- 1) **Establish meaning** (comprehension of all vocabulary)
- 2) **Story creation**– 1) beginner teachers can tell and circle questions of story they have already created 2) more advanced teachers can ask with banal/cute choices of story they have already created, helping students learn how to play the TPRS game 3) advanced teachers/students can create the story together.
- 3) **Process** with literacy activities

Preparation: ADD BRAIN BREAKS if attention lags during literacy activities. After about 20 minutes of sitting, take a brain break. It lasts about 15 seconds. Ex. "Everyone stand. When I say "go," as fast as you can, touch 1 window, 2 tables, and 3 chairs, and have a seat. The first to sit says, "I won!" Any questions? Go!" For information on brain breaks, see *Brain Gym* by Dr. Paul Dennison.

1. **Choose three high frequency**, practical phrases like (1) "there is," (2) "he wants," and (3) "he goes." These CANNOT be TPR'd because they are abstract.
2. The story should consist of **three locations**, be characterized by **BEP details** (Bizarre, Exaggerated, Personal), and **one problem/ solution**.
3. **All necessary vocabulary should be known and practiced by the students before the story begins and NOT on the same day it is taught.** (e.g., has already been TPR'd, or has been worked with games and activities if abstract). For beginning stories, make a list of ALL POSSIBLE COGNATES, well-known places (e.g., Berlin), names (e.g., politicians or actors), and brands (e.g., Coke).
4. **Bring appropriate materials**, including props, a comic of the story, the story written, written activities, and interrogative question words (WWW) on a poster(s) (i.e., who, what, when, where, why). Activities might include (1) putting mixed phrases into chronological order according to the original story, (2) filling in the blanks (a 'cloze exercise'), (3) true /false sentences, (4) WWW questions, or (5) an extended reading.

5. **Some TPRS teachers give a gesture to each of the 3 abstract TPRS story phrases, but I now avoid that** because this takes away from attention units needed to actually understand and use them in the story. Instead, I pre-teach the phrases through games and other “CI” (comprehensible input) activities long before the TPRS story is taught. Ex. “There is, he wants, he goes” - I teach these through a matching game. I take a double pair of little pictures of concrete vocabulary that has been TPR’d in previous classes. I put them into a shoe holder. Each pocket has a number. Divide into 2 teams. Students hear over and over “which 2 numbers do **you WANT?** [students say “I want...”] **There is** a dog or a cat behind #2 #7? Does dog **GO with** cat?” If they win, we practice positive emotions and verbal reactions. If they lose, negative emotions. All is prep for TPRS story.
6. **Put up 1-3 positive and 1-3 negative emotions** in the target language and practice having them emotive to different situations (in native language) so there is 100% comprehension. Ex. “You just won a million dollars” or “Your car has a flat tire” [they give reaction in target language]
7. **Teach the “time out” signal** for those who do not understand. Slap hand against fist so it makes an audible sound. When others hear 1 person, they join in to help person not feel alone. Say, **“My responsibility is to make everything comprehensible, yours is to stop me when I don’t. When you stop me, you are making me a better teacher and you are helping your classmates who are too shy to stop me.”** Practice **THANKING** them when they stop you by saying, “Thank you! Good question!”
 - Interesting side notes for them: **The benefits of trial and error learning:**
 - *It grows dendrites and makes you smarter.* Tell students about experiments on rats finding cheese in the maze. Rats who are shown where the cheese is and who find it quickly do not grow as many dendrites linking left and right hemispheres as rats who try, make mistakes, back track, and try new paths. When they cut the brains open of the 2 rats, they could see the physical evidence of the connections in the rats who did trial and error. Connections equal intelligence.
 - *It prepares you for the real world.* In a safe environment like the classroom, there are no negative consequences—so it provides a space for experimentation and practice without negative results: e.g., bear cubs play-fight to prepare them for an encounter in the wild. They are not killed for making mistakes in playing!
8. **Pick actors from the class** and get their consent. Have pictures of the actors/actresses in color to paper clip to their clothing. Use props like wigs, dresses, big glasses, etc. when appropriate.
9. **PQA (Personal Question and Answer):** The teacher creates tiny questions using the three high-frequency practical phrases to warm up students and get more repetitions in long before the TPRS story. Lots of cognates must be used at first because students know very little. Use the students in the class as the center of each little question. Ex. **“There is** an elephant in the class, etc? Bob **wants** chocolate? Pam **goes to** Vegas?”
10. **Teacher tells the story or asks it into creation.** With beginners, state the story line by line for the main actor with four levels of questions (circle questioning) and encourage emotions. Each time you pose a WWW question, go over and **touch the word** in the target language on the board. You want to try to get at least 50 repetitions of all the new words at the beginning and after they have more fluency, in later stories, you might only circle each of the three phrases.

11. **Don't circle every sentence after they have more comprehension, which comes after a few TPRS stories.** Just circle the 3 new phrases or any words they don't know, which gradually turns out to be just the 3 abstract phrases. Mix up WWW questions as they get more fluency.
12. **Vertical questioning:** Once they have more language, you can park and move up the ladder of specificity. Ex. Of horizontal questioning: "Who goes to Vegas?" Now just stay with that "who" question, and use vertical questioning, asking questions from vocab they already know about numbers, color, clothing, etc. "How old is he? Does he speak French or Spanish? Does he have green hair or brown hair? Is he wearing a bikini or a coat?"

Processing Activities That Work All Four Skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking)

- ✓ *Notice you go from passive skills to active skills [output] to ensure readiness, and therefore success, at each skill, keeping affective filter low.*
1. **Comic:** Hand out 6-8 square (numbered) of comic of story. Describe the story out of order and have students call out the number of the square described. Make sure you have the students edit the comics according to their own version of the story created in class. I already have a comic ready to hand them, but I give them choices of normal or unique possible answer to teach them to choose what's unusual and produce as many of the facts as they can. They enjoy editing the comic to reflect their choices.
 2. **True or false statements:** Just ask 10 quick statements. Then grade. (80% or better – have them exchange papers/correct/raise hand to indicate who got 80% or better. Ask, "did we meet our goal?")
 3. **Choral reading and translation:** ASK students to translate each sentence—one sentence per student at first. This goes quickly and is enjoyable because they feel successful. *Translating is not a means of acquisition, it is a processing activity. It is a form of trial and error.* Beginning students frequently do not realize that they are putting their own interpretation to new words that only exist in their minds. Until they say them aloud and get corrected, they are not aware of it. **FOR BEGINNERS:** The teacher reads a sentence in the target language, students repeat chorally in the target language—no more than 3-5 syllables at a time on the very first day. After that, you can do several words.
 4. **Pop-up grammar:** This might happen naturally during the choral reading/translation or during the "on board" dictation. You can let them lead with their questions or have your questions prepared according to what you want them to notice, based on natural order of acquisition [see Krashen]. You might point out: subject/verb agreement, plurals, etc. Remember to *ask for meaning first*, and then get them to tell you what the form is in the target language. Then ask them to find another example among the other sentences. If none, create another example they haven't seen to see them apply it. Ex. "If I tell you "douce" means "soft" in French, how would you say "softly?" If they answer correctly, that means they got enough repetitions of other adverbs and picked up on the pattern.
 5. **Chronological order** (writing activity): Have 5 mixed sentences summarizing story out of order. Students reorder the story details chronologically (good in pairs).
 6. **Fill in the blanks** (writing activity): A cloze exercise created directly from the story just told, leaving out certain parts of speech that you want them to notice.

7. **WWW questions** (writing activity): One person at a time can volunteer to write answer to 1 of the 10 questions on board. All grammar, vocab, spelling can be checked. I like to get EVERYONE at the board at once writing their answer. With all standing at the board after they are finished, I can ask in the target language “who did #1?” and I teach them to start using the object pronouns by their answer “I did it” or ask the wrong person and teach them the negative “I didn’t do it”
8. **Teacher retell with errors** (going from location to location as she retells to jog memories and reinforce acted out version). This usually happens at least one day after the story is told. If you haven’t gotten to the running dictation, do this first so they’ll have it fresh in their minds. Teacher retells original story with funny mistakes, but totally acting as though she’s serious. Students naturally shout out corrections as the mistakes are made by the teacher. They love this! I facilitate this for myself by writing the goofy, wrong choices on my script in bold after the correct ones. You can try to think on your feet, but if you’re tired, you’ll give the same choices over and over. Give yourself a break and prepare beforehand, but be open to another alternative goofy answer that may pop into your head. It happens all the time as you become more and more like a stand-up comedian.
9. **Dictation:** This prepares them for the ‘running dictation’ (next activity listed). I use the same dictation for both. I have one person go up to the board and write it as I say it. Others write at their seats. Teacher invites corrections to each one before calling up another student. This dictation should have samples of the target grammar you’re trying to focus on for that day/week. Six statements are given for dictation.
10. **Running dictation:** Take the 6 sentences you used at the board and type them out big letters. Tape at least 2 copies outside classroom (if this can be done quietly, and depending on size of class). If not outside class, tape them to either end of the classroom. Tell students to get up, find pairs, and have paper and pen. One person runs and gets the sentence in their head and brings it back orally to the other, who writes it. At first, people can’t remember anything and keep having to run back and forth. It’s funny and fun. Tell them partner "A" will run and do first three sentences and partner "B" will run and do last three. The first couple done wins and yells, “We won!” in the target language. As people win at different times, I tell them to check for correctness by going outside and circling their errors. Since it's all just for fun, there's usually no problem. Students enjoy reporting out loud how many errors their team got (usually ~5) and what their errors were like.
11. **Pair retell:** first pairs take comic and person A starts w/ #1, person B #2 until finished. Then partner B starts.
12. **Timed writing:** The purpose is to produce as much of the target language as possible in 5 minutes based on the TPRS story they acted out. It is simply another form of processing (not for a grade). Tell them not to worry about grammar. Native speakers can produce 100 words in 5 minutes with no errors. Beginners usually do 25-50 words. Have the guide words on the board [a verb for each comic square] and say “Go!” After 5 minutes, they count the number of words written and put it at top of paper. I collect the papers and tell them the average of the class after they do a partner retell (below). They are super encouraged about getting the feedback so quickly and when they see how much language they could produce. As TPRS stories get longer, I give them 10 minutes and shoot for 200 words, which comes eventually in its own time for each individual.

13. **Class retell in 2 groups** “parents and children” - One uses the picture and guide words on the board; the other reacts like a parent hearing a child with positive feedback in the target language that was used in class. Either stand or sit. Possible variations: Make concentric circles of students or make 2 lines, with one of the lines facing board where guide words are written for each square. Students on the inside of the circle are the parents. They simply stay still and listen. Students on the outside of the circle are the children. They tell the story for about 45 seconds until teacher says, “Stop!” (You can make the instructions in the target language once they understand what they are). Move to the next person and continue telling story. The teacher tells them to move on to the next person every 45 seconds or so. Students simply continue where they left off when they move on to the new person. Those who finish first simply restart until the teacher sees all are finished. Those inside the circle move to the outside and you follow the same routine.

14. **Group retell** – all sit kindergarden style while teacher says – “What happened in this story?” and everyone can add sentences as they come to mind. Teacher acts very interested and makes jokes in target language if apropos. **“Star” retell:** The teacher moves around room listening subtly in order to identify a “star” student, a student who will later volunteer to narrate the story in front of the class. The teacher does NOT make corrections. Just listen and give appropriate positive/negative emotional reactions to story line. Big applause. Ask for one more volunteer to see if anyone else can do it. If people are shy, suggest that the class do it together. Someone just starts by giving a line, then the teacher calls on another person if that person gets stuck.

15. **Stump the Chump!** – have students try to stump you by posing WWW questions about the story. Cute when teacher acts dumb and gives wrong answer.

16. **Create a Fantasy ending:** right there, sitting on floor, pairs take 5 minutes and create funny alternative ending. Teacher circulates, corrects, students share with whole group.

17. **Extended reading:** This is a larger story using the same vocabulary but in a more difficult format. It is still a BEP story. The teacher reads a couple of sentences in the target language; the students translate one by one. Ask some WWW questions, which you can give them for homework.

18. **Personal questions:** Have some funny personal questions that have rapport with the story just acted out and that use the target vocabulary or grammar. As people answer them, it is easy to do some “vertical” questioning. For example: “John, do you travel by car or by camel? If the student catches on to play with you and says “Camel” you keep asking WWW questions “Camel?! What’s your camel’s name? Is he French or Spanish?” If he doesn’t catch on, you say “class, a secret – John doesn’t travel by car, he travels by camel!” Then wink at the student and get him to play along.

19. **Homework:**
 - a. Tell students to translate the extended reading to a friend/parent and report back their reaction. It’s fun for them to show off their new skill.
 - b. Tell students who feel ready to retell (without a script) the original story acted out to two people at home and have them sign a paper saying they’ve listened. It’s fun.

They just write “I listened to . . .”

- c. Use a new version of the comic to get students to retell.
- d. Students write and draw a new version of the story. Pair-retell one of the new stories.
- e. Teams create new stories and act out for the class.
- f. ****Type up student stories and handout to classmates. Students like to read their own work. I ask that each person write at least one positive comment on the back. This produces a lot of bonding and good will.**
- g. Teach new vocabulary by asking students to insert new vocabulary into the stories they create.
- h. New perspective: Have students rewrite stories as if THEY were the main character, thus helping students conjugate verbs naturally.

Planning

Each story takes about 3 to 6 class days, depending on length: one day to tell and 2 -5 days to process, depending on if you decide to take time to have an extended reading and have them share their original stories at the end.

Reality Check

I don't have time to let students create stories on the spot, especially at the beginning. Not everyone knows how to play, and even if they do, some aren't good at contributing on the spot. I do have time to let them go off on funny details, but I have all the stories already created, with comic and processing activities, so that I'm sure to address the vocabulary and grammar needed for them to articulate into colleagues' classes. In a world without syllabi, I could give more time to allow the creation of the stories and the time to type them up so students have a record of what to practice. With creative questioning that has lots of goofy choices, you can give students the impression that they are part of the creative process. Once students understand how to play the game and have enough vocabulary and grammar under their belts, then I have time to allow them to create more.