

Mad Libs, parts of speech and morphosyntactic features
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This lesson plan was originally developed for Raphael's 4th grade class in 2015 and then adapted for his 6th grade Language Arts class in 2017. This is the 6th grade version. The lesson plan begins with a thematically related warm-up exercise (at the request of the LA teacher), which students worked on independently before discussing as a full group. We based the Mad Libs on a book that the students were reading for class, *Ishmael* by Daniel Quinn (1992).

Lesson plan:

Get settled/warm up: 5 min

Overview: 5 min

Define linguistics as the study of language as a natural phenomenon and give a few examples of what that means. Focus for today is parts of speech. What's that? Why does it matter?

Break into groups of 3, hand out Mad Libs

Do Mad Libs: 10 min

Discuss questions: 10 min

Reconvene as class

Share answers to questions: 10 min

Conclusion/what is linguistics?: 5 min

Warm up:

The following sentence is ambiguous and the ambiguity turns on part of speech. What are the two different meanings of the sentence, and which words change their part of speech between them?

Time flies like an arrow.

Mad Lib A

I listened to the _____ of this strange

NOUN

admonishment as if it were a fragment of music I

couldn't quite _____ . I looked at the chair and

VERB

_____ : *Would it be best to sit down*

VERB (PAST TENSE)

and be still? And if so, why? The answer came

_____ enough: *Because, if you are*

ADVERB

_____, *then you will be better able to hear.*

ADJECTIVE

Yes, I thought, that is undeniably so.

(Ishmael, p.9)

Mad Lib B

To make a long _____ short, I was sold to the

ADJECTIVE

owner of a traveling _____ with an

VERB, PAST TENSE

empty wagon to _____. I was a large

PLURAL NOUN

and _____ adolescent and doubtless

VERB

represented a sensible long-term _____.

ADVERB

(Ishmael, p.13)

Mad Lib C

I was _____ it up and sorting it out in
VERB, PAST TENSE

a bewildered _____ when my aged
PLURAL NOUN

bribee turned up. He _____ and held up a big
VERB

black plastic bag to show me what he was doing

there: clearing away some of the hundreds of

_____ of trash that had been left behind. Then,
NOUN

when he saw the pile of stuff at my feet, he looked up

at me and said, "It _____ the
VERB ENDING IN -ING

pneumonia."

(*Ishmael*, p.260)

Discussion Questions

- Which Mad Lib made the most sense?
Which one was next?
- Why do you think one made more sense than the others?
- What does Mad Lib B tell you about different kinds of words?
- What does Mad Lib C tell you about different kinds of words?
- How do people learn to use different kinds of words differently?