

OCTOBER CHALLENGE: Write about creative ways to use grammar in the classroom.

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Teaching grammar is a problem in most classrooms, because it is boring. I teach it by beginning the year with a challenge to my students, that I call "The Grammar Game." I have them write a two page paper describing their neighborhood to me. (In this way I learn about them, while at the same time, getting them to write.) Then, I say to them, "If anyone can write a paper that has no grammatical errors, he or she will not have to do any grammar homework for the year. Then, when I collect the essays, each person lines up and I read his/her essay as he/she stands in line. I mention to the students that chances are, they won't get through the first paragraph without making a mistake. Then, as I find a mistake, I circle it, and the student has to A) sit down, B) write a one page grammar lesson about the grammar mistake he/she made.

I have been doing this for 22 years, and no one has ever written a perfect paper. Sometimes it takes a little while to find, but each student invariably makes a mistake.

I once had a student whose mother was a grammar teacher, and the student was convinced she had written a grammatically perfect paper. It took me two days to find the mistake, but I found it. (The problem was the classic problem of someone writing, "I know a person that lives in Chicago." rather than the grammatically correct idea that "I know a person who lives in Chicago."

Anyway, after everyone writes his or her grammar mistake, and turns it into a lesson, I compile those lessons and create a self-published book from it. Please see the website <http://www.lulu.com/browse/preview.php?fCID=1261944> to see the Whitney Young High School Book of 101 Grammar Lessons (second edition).

In any case, the "Grammar Game" allows me to let students know, in a gentle way, that everyone makes mistakes. Everyone. This also allows us, as a class, to review various grammar lessons that many students do not 100% know.

I have had great success with this process, because it is humbling and enlightening at the same time.

We get great student discussions of grammar as a consequence of the students trying to "Win the Grammar Game" and learning about the nuances of the English language. It also keeps me on my toes.