

Inventions

- Time:** 90 minutes
Age: teenagers or adults
Level: intermediate +
Aim: The main objective is speaking fluency, but also comparative and superlative adjectives and modal verbs of speculation (could be, might be...)
Materials: List of important inventions (worksheet 1) and Japanese 'chindogu' pictures and descriptions (worksheets 2 and 3)

This is a fun and slightly off-the-wall speaking lesson that can also be used to practise a number of grammar points.

Step one:

Give students two minutes to think of one or two inventions that have changed the world, and how. You may need to highlight the difference between a discovery and an invention.

Step two:

Give out list of inventions (worksheet 1) Explain that the information is from a major survey in Britain to find the ten best and ten worst inventions of all time. In pairs or small groups, students decide which column each item goes into – and which two appeared in both the best and worst inventions lists. Students can also order the inventions into 'top tens.' Be ready to answer vocabulary questions, especially about cat's eyes and the Sinclair C5.

Step three:

Whole group discussion about the lists the students have made and why. If you choose to focus on comparative adjectives, encourage the use of '...is more useful / important than...' or '...isn't as dangerous / harmful as...' Try to reach a group consensus and write the agreed lists up on the board.

Step four:

Give true best and worst lists to compare with their ideas.

The best inventions were:

1. Bicycle
2. Radio
3. Computer
4. Penicillin (annoying because it isn't really an invention!)
5. Internal combustion engine
6. Internet
7. Light bulb
8. Cat's eyes
9. Telephone
10. Television

The worst inventions were:

1. Nuclear weapons
2. Landmines
3. Internal combustion engine
4. Plastic bags
5. Speed cameras
6. Mobile phones
7. Car alarms
8. Television
9. Tetra-pak cartons
10. Sinclair C5 (an early and widely-ridiculed electric car.)

Step five

Give out pictures of Japanese 'chindogu' (the art of inventing things that seem practical but have obvious and comical drawbacks, worksheet 3). If necessary, elicit language of speculation such as 'it could be...' 'it might be...' 'maybe it's...' and 'we think it's...' Students work in pairs, describing the pictures they have to each other and speculating about their use.

Step six

Give out the descriptions (worksheet 2) and ask students to match them to the pictures. Pre-teach or help with vocabulary.

Step seven and follow up

A great follow-up activity is to elicit and write a number of household items (dishwasher, radio, TV, dog bowl, tin opener, toilet brush...) on the board and ask students to put two of them together (or come up with their own ideas) and create a chindogu invention of their own. They can then make a promotional campaign and two-minute presentation to 'sell' their idea to the rest of the group.