

Mermaids and Manatees

Supplies:

- pencils
- crayons
- paper for story and description of the "creature"
- paper for picture of the "creature"
- folders with the "creature" photograph

**This exercise stresses observation and communication skills in a small group setting.

Time: 1 to 1½ hours

Class: Up to 50 students

Instructions:

Assemble the group and read the following paragraph out loud.

"You and a friend were kayaking to Cumberland Island and were looking for dolphins along the way. Suddenly a creature rose out of the ocean striking your kayak and flipping you and your friend into the murky Georgia waters. You made it to shore safely. By sheer luck your friend had taken a Polaroid photograph of the creature. Upon telling your teachers about what happened they asked you to make a detailed written description of the creature and tell a little about the adventure for your school newspaper."

1. Make up groups of 2-3 students. Hand a photograph folder, sheet of paper, and pencil to each group. The photo is to be kept secret from the other groups. Situate groups around the room. Use other rooms if available.
2. Groups are given 15 minutes to write a detailed description of the "creature." Neat handwriting and complete sentences are important. Make sure kids names are on the paper. Also record the photograph number printed on the front of the folder.
3. Without advance notice to the groups, collect the pictures after only 7 minutes. Tell them the photo slowly disintegrated into mush after getting wet. They must finish their description from memory.
4. After the total 15 minutes is up, collect the descriptions and reassemble the class.
5. Now pretend you are the artists at the newspaper and you have to draw the creature sight unseen, from the written description. Distribute the descriptions making sure that groups do not get their original.
6. Using the description in front of them, each group must now try to draw a picture of the "creature." Work for 15 minutes.
7. After 15 minutes have each group read their description and hold up their drawing. Compare the drawings with the original photograph.

Conclusion:

This exercise shows how hard it is to concentrate on and communicate details. It isn't hard to see that stories about mermaids, giant flying fish, and myriads of fantastic creatures came about in the same ways that fantastic creatures were drawn by the students during this game.

In everyday life, communication breakdowns often happen causing misunderstandings. These can be avoided if we develop better observation and communication skills.

Instructional Tips:

1. If the students recognize the animal in the photograph, make sure they do not use the animal's name in their descriptive story.
2. Be sure the students know that they are supposed to be drawing the picture of the "creature" described in the story they received, not the one they had the photograph of.
3. Remember to have the students copy down the number of their "creature" photograph folder before you collect the photos.