



# chatzka games

## Imaginative Language Arts Activities Using Odds & Ends

by Elaine Kirn © Authors & Editors

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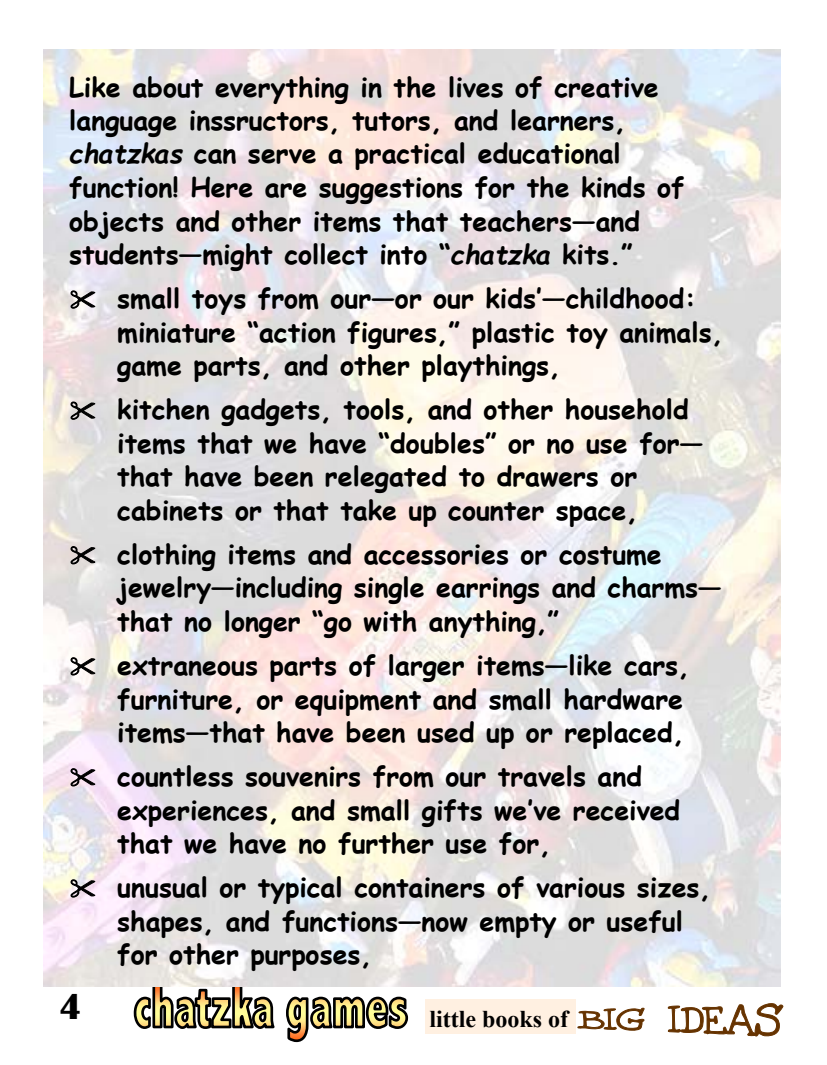
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## Five Imaginative (Flexible, Multi-Level) Language-Arts Activities Using Odds and Ends

*Chatzkas? Tsatskes? Czazkas? Tjatjkes?* No matter how it's spelled or pronounced (and Yiddish speakers disagree on the answer), everyone has plenty of *chatzkas* around the house or workplace:

- ☞ the pretty (but impractical) little momentos we place on shelves for show,
- ☞ the clever gadgets that seemed like a good idea when we bought them,
- ☞ the leftover pieces of sets that are no longer complete, and
- ☞ the many other small objects that elicit such questions as "What's this?" "Where does it belong?" "What's it for?" or "Do we have to keep this thing in the drawer (or on the shelf or in the closet or . . . )?"





Like about everything in the lives of creative language instructors, tutors, and learners, *chatzkas* can serve a practical educational function! Here are suggestions for the kinds of objects and other items that teachers—and students—might collect into “*chatzka kits*.”

- ✕ small toys from our—or our kids’—childhood: miniature “action figures,” plastic toy animals, game parts, and other playthings,
- ✕ kitchen gadgets, tools, and other household items that we have “doubles” or no use for—that have been relegated to drawers or cabinets or that take up counter space,
- ✕ clothing items and accessories or costume jewelry—including single earrings and charms—that no longer “go with anything,”
- ✕ extraneous parts of larger items—like cars, furniture, or equipment and small hardware items—that have been used up or replaced,
- ✕ countless souvenirs from our travels and experiences, and small gifts we’ve received that we have no further use for,
- ✕ unusual or typical containers of various sizes, shapes, and functions—now empty or useful for other purposes,

- ✂ prepared food items and other non-hazardous substances (liquids, powders, pastes, etc.)— especially sample sizes, new products, and new product varieties, and
- ✂ any other small objects, things, items, and other “stuff” we hardly noticed before.



Even in the “neatest” of rooms, there are plenty of *chatzkas* that can be put to productive educational use.

# How to Make Educational Use of Collected “Clutter”

Here are suggestions for five (5) tried-and-true (or just invented) games and activities that make productive, educational use of sets or kits of *chatzkas* and other small, interesting items.

What these ideas have in common is that they:

- 👉 have a practical and well-defined language-learning goal—whether to provide practice in specific grammar patterns or vocabulary or to focus learners' attention on one or more of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing),
- 👉 require little or no preparation of language materials—other than the collection of objects or other items of similar size or type,
- 👉 provide creative challenge, motivation, and structure to language lessons in effective and efficient ways,
- 👉 incorporate “language-acquisition feedback” in the form of natural, real-life reaction of co-learners,

- enable helpers and group leaders to use their time and talents as “learning facilitators,” providing correct language models as well as correction and commentary on students’ attempts to communicate,
- provide variety, prevent boredom or “tune-out,” and offer hours of fun!

## 1 The Game of Memory

This simple game used to be popular at children’s parties and baby showers.

To prepare a “kit,” collect about 20 small items that are interesting or “memorable” in some way.

1. Place the items on a tray or table in everyone’s full view. (Or game players can move around to examine the objects more closely.) Allot five to ten minutes for people to look over the collection—but don’t allow any writing yet.



Be sure to vary *types* of items as much as feasible—*toys, clothing, household objects, tools & utensils, fridge magnets, and so on and . . .*

**L**ANGUAGE-TEACHING TIPS: If speakers of *English as a first or second language* lack vocabulary, talk with them first. For beginners, name relevant items in random order and have participants point them out or hold them up. Then model the pronunciation of each item and have learners repeat. Finally, show each item and have the group name it. With more advanced learners, ask (and help provide answers to) questions like these: "What's this?" "Describe how it looks— its size, shape, color, material, etc." "What's it used for?" "How can you remember it?" "What else . . . ?"

2. After the time limit, put all objects back in a container (a box or bag). Now allow time for players—individually, in pairs, or in small groups—to list what they remember.
3. Reconvene the class. Each person or group in turn tells one item they recall—that no one else has mentioned. As each object is named, get it from the container. Place it on the tray/table.
4. The winner of the game is the player or group with the largest number of correct items in their list. (Competitors could receive an extra point for anything on their list that no other player or group remembered—or subtract a point for every item that is wrong). Do players receive prizes to keep? Then have the winner(s) choose one of the *chatzkas* from the game!



5. If the group wants to play the game again, keep about half the items. Replace the other half with new items from your *chatzka* collection.
6. For variation at another time, instead of putting things in a container, cover them with a cloth or newspaper page. Participants list and tell not only the objects but also their location in relation to other objects on the table/tray.
7. Here are suggestions for language “follow-up” for the vocabulary presented in the activity:

- ☞ Later in the day—or at the beginning of the next class period, ask learners to recall items from the last “Game of Memory.”
- ☞ Give oral meaning clues for the things students have just named—such as “It makes your voice louder.” (possible answer: a *microphone*) or “It’s worn on a foot.” (possible answer: a *sock*). Learners try to recall the names of the objects from the *Memory Game*.

- ☞ One by one, hold up each item, and have the group name something *else* that can be associated with it. List their names on a sheet of paper. Then remove the paper and have students tell, write, or draw all the items they remember from the list.

- microphone (mic) / wire
- sock / shoe
- paint (brush)
- stapler / staples
- fork / spoon
- screwdriver / screws
- scissors / paper



## The Game of Observation

This simple classic activity can be played with the same or different *chatzka* items—depending on the group's language-acquisition goals.

**L**ANGUAGE-TEACHING TIPS: If your instructional styles and purposes incorporate a lot of review (grammar or vocabulary recycling)— or if you prefer to teach specific material to “mastery,” then use the same collections of things over and over in different lessons and activities.

On the other hand, if the *amount* of language that learners are exposed to takes priority— or if you tend to emphasize “teaching students how to learn” over teaching through repetition, then use as many *different* items as you can, both within each game and in separate activities.

1. Divide the class into two teams of equal size and the objects into two equal sets. Place each set on a separate table. Allow up to ten minutes for each group to study their items and tell one another their answers to these questions:
  - ✕ *What items do you see? (What are they called? How do they look? What are they used for?)*
  - ✕ *How are items placed in relation to one another?*

The two groups exchange positions, each moving to the other group's table.

Each group member in turn makes a change to one item—removing it, replacing it with something from another place (especially an object of the same kind but of a different size or color), moving it to a different position, or altering it in another way. As each person makes a change, he/she describes it in a sentence; a “group recorder” writes it down in a list, which will serve as an “answer key.”

3. The recorder stays where he/she is, while everyone else returns to their original tables and item collections. They try to tell precisely what changes have been made to the objects—and perhaps describe their actions as they return the collection to its original condition. The other team’s “recorder” checks off the changes correctly observed. The most observant team wins. There are several ways to “score” and “reward” each group’s “performance.”
  - ⊕ They can receive two points for every change they observed accurately and one for each they “sorta got”—or one point for each correctly-observed change—minus one point for each change they missed or described inaccurately.
  - ⊕ The “winning team” can receive a group prize—something that is easily divided or shared—or their choice of *chatzkas* from various collections.

# 3

## Object Associations

This version of a simple, common word association game incorporates an added element—real objects that players can see and handle. Thus, students can make use of their visual and tactile learning abilities in addition to their linguistic memories.

1. Divide the class into small groups. Each team receives a collection of objects consisting of the same number of items (perhaps ten to 20 each).
2. Working together, team members arrange their items into a “chain,” according to what characteristics the things have in common. For example, the following “random articles” might be arranged (linked) in this order:



3. In turn, each group shows its objects and explains their chosen arrangement. Here's a sample rationale for the above sequence:
  - ✎ The first item is a lock. The key comes next because we use a key to open a lock.
  - ✎ Next is the toy cash register. It has keys.
  - ✎ Coins are put in a cash register.

- ✎ What the paper clip container has in common with the coins is its shape. Both items are round.
- ✎ After the paper clip we put a push pin—because it is also a kind of small office supply.
- ✎ The push pin is sharp. So's the pencil, so it's next.
- ✎ Pencils are made of wood. So a wooden block follows, before a cube of the same 6-sided shape.

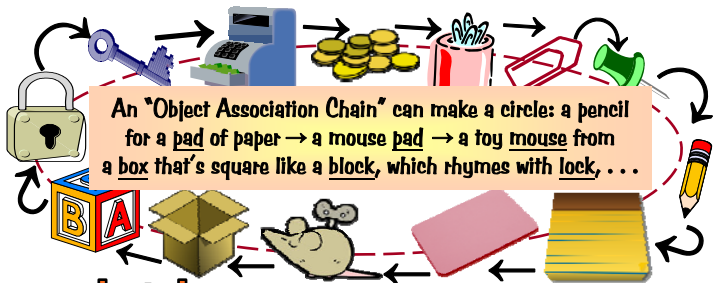
The group continues its presentation in this way until the placement of every item in its chain has been explained. A list of the items in this “logical order” will serve as an “answer key.”

4. Of course, as group members explain their chain of associations, everyone else pays close attention—to find errors in logic or language, to remember the stated connections, and so on. If groups are competing, here are scoring ideas:
  - ☞ Each team receives one point for each item in its chain—if it can plausibly explain the association of each object to the previous one.
  - ☞ Any team that logically sequences *all* of the items in its collection gets an additional two points—five if they can “fasten the chain” by associating the last object with the first.



What might two items have in common?  
 Their material, number, size, shape,  
 texture, color, use, or another feature . . .

5. For follow-up, each group collects its items and exchanges its collection with that of others. Then teams work together to try to put the new objects in the same order as the previous group did—recalling the logic of that sequence. They check their arrangement with the first group’s “answer key” (their ordered list).
6. Then, using the same things, each team tries to organize them in a completely different way from the original group, using *other* logic and associations to create connections from one object to the next. Participants repeat Steps 3 to 5 as described above.
7. Continue playing the “Object Association Game” until learners have had a chance to consider, arrange, and talk about all items—or until these have generated *enough* vocabulary for one lesson or until everyone is ready for something else.





## The “Whatchamacallit” Game


This game is a “realia” version of *Idea P: Chain Writing with Visuals*, described in the *Doing Without the Photocopier How-to Resource Book*, ISBN 978-0-9627878-4-3.

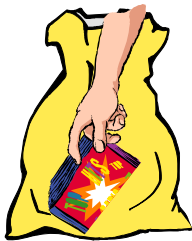
Often, native speakers or second-language learners need items whose names they don't know or have forgotten—or whose names have escaped them at the moment. When the words *whatchamacallit*, *thingamabob*, or even *chatzka* don't get them what they want, they need the ability to describe items precisely—as to *appearance*, *function*, and other distinguishing features. This language-learning activity helps develop that skill:

From a *chatzka* collection, choose twenty practical items or object parts that people might use for repairs, to make things, or for everyday work. To add challenge to the game, choose objects that learners may not know the names of—such as *index cards*, *micro-cassettes*, *a nut and a bolt*, *flat washers*, *eyelets*, *a needle threader*, *thimbles*, *a rubber stamp*, *paper fasteners*, *earring backings*, *a staple remover*, *an oven mitt*, *a plug*, *a magnet*, *a hand pencil sharpener*, *scouring powder in a can*, *vinegar*, *cornstarch*, *incense*, *masking tape*, etc. Then follow the steps on the next page.




**L**ANGUAGE-TEACHING TIPS: In presenting or facilitating any game or activity, adapt steps and instructions to the overall needs, abilities, and personalities of the group— not only their language skills level but also their level of sophistication, preference for “hand-holding” vs. independence (or vice versa), desire for “comfort” vs. “challenge,” and so on. Beginners or students that lack confidence may need more— and smaller— steps. More advanced or confident learners will want to move faster— and even contribute their own ideas for game rules, procedures, prizes, and follow-up.

1. If students lack basic descriptive vocabulary, you might want to add this “pre-game” activity:

 Before showing the class the things that the game will be based on, put the first item in a paper or cloth sack. (Use only items that are safe to touch without looking at them—not sharp objects). Someone in the class or in each small group puts his/her hand into the bag to feel the item for a few seconds. Even if that person knows its name, he/she uses only descriptive words to tell about it—such as *tiny, about an inch long, thin, a few millimeters thick, delicate, bulky, broad, flat, round, oblong, hard, soft, mushy, smooth, rough, cold, (un)even, carved, furry, knitted, powdery, metallic, wooden, broken, scratched, damaged, plastic, damp, solid, hollow, pliable, in one piece, made up of (moveable) parts, etc.*





-  Listeners ask any questions necessary to help them visualize the thing and guess what it is—either by naming it or by telling its function. He/She then shows the item. Everyone adds describing words relating to its appearance.
-  Repeat the above two steps with most or all items to be used in the “Whatchamacallit Game”—at least until each learner has had a chance to describe an item through touch alone (tactilely).
-  Alternatively, instead of having students in turn describe the *feel of things* orally, try a written version of this activity that keeps everyone occupied at the same time. Put each item into a separate paper bag; number the bags, starting with 1. Pass them around. Each person puts a hand into each bag. Without looking at the item, he/she jots down at least three words to describe each object—in a numbered list on a piece of paper. Then he/she passes it on to the next person and gets another bag to work with. Finally, have students show the items one by one so that others can contribute the describing words they thought of. Collect all the objects.

Now use them for the “Whatchamacallit Game.”



2. For the "Whatchamacallit Game," give a different item to each student (or pair of partners). Learners pretend they need to buy their item but don't know the name of the thing. Including descriptive words (size, shape, texture, color, function, other relevant details), they write a description of their item(s) on paper.

*I don't know what this thing is called, but I need it to put a bookcase back together. It's very small, between  $1/2$  and  $3/4$  of an inch, with a hole in the middle. It has 6 sides. It fits over a sharp object that looks like a nail but with metal ridges (a bolt?). You turn this thing. I need only one...*

3. When they finish writing, they place the item(s) on a table in a central location. Collect all their papers, mix them up, and redistribute them—one to each student or pair (not their writers). Learners read the papers they have received—making language corrections and suggestions if necessary and helpful.

Then they retrieve the items from the table that match the descriptions. If all the writings were accurate enough to communicate effectively, there should be no more objects left on the table. Collect them all.

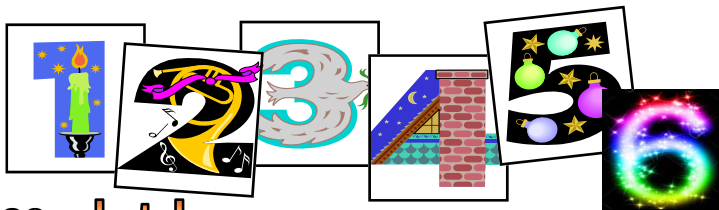




# 5 Chatzka Gift Exchange


This game is particularly appropriate before or during a holiday like Chanukah or Christmas in which gifts are exchanged. It's also a good activity for getting rid of *chatzkas* that are "only taking up space"—in your house or in those of your students. Remember—one person's "junk" may be another person's "treasure."

1. Collect at least as many items to give away as there are participants, or—if you would prefer to keep your own *chatzkas* for future purposes—have each student bring a used or new (low-cost) item that he or she would like to give away as a gift. Each item should be boxed, put in a bag, or wrapped—in decorative paper or newspaper, so that it is not recognizable.
2. Put numbers on small pieces of paper—one for each game player, beginning with 1. Fold the papers and put them in a container.






3. All wrapped packages are placed on a centrally-located desk or table. Each player picks out a slip of paper with a number on it.
4. The player with the paper that has *Number 1* on it comes to the table, picks out a wrapped package, holds it up for the class to see, and tells what he/she thinks might be in it—and why. The class adds questions and comments. The player opens the gift, shows its contents, and answers these questions orally:

 *What is it? What is it called? How does it look, feel, sound, smell, taste?*

 *What is it for? What's its function?*

 *Can you make good use of it? How? (or Why not?)*

He/she returns to his/her seat, putting the item in full view of everyone else for the entire game.



5. The player with the *Number 2* paper has a choice: he/she may “appropriate” the first player’s gift (explaining why he/she wants it) or may choose a wrapped package from the table, following *Step 4* instructions. If the second person chooses the item “belonging to” the first, that participant gets another chance to pick and open a package from the table.



6. The player with *Number 3* has three choices: the *first or second* player’s item item, or a wrapped package from the table. Player 4 has four choices, and so on. When any person chooses another player’s unwrapped item, that person can take someone else’s gift, and so on in a chain. To keep the game moving in a particularly “assertive” class, add this rule: No player may take back an item that has just been taken from him or her. On the other hand, in an especially “shy” class, it might help to “review” periodically what gifts have been unwrapped—to remind “overly polite” people that they’re “entitled” to choose from the things they can see instead of making a “blind choice” from the table. This way, most players will end up with items that they truly like or can use.

7. Continue the game as described above until all the packages have been taken from the table. In one final exchange round, allow time for all players to “negotiate” with everyone else—making one last trade if they wish.
8. If time permits, have evrybody speak for a minute about his/her gift. Here are some possible questions to answer: *“What memories does the item evoke in you? Why do people usually buy or keep this item? How about you?”*



Also called the “Bah, Humbug! Holiday Exchange,” this popular party game often includes “White Elephant” (burdensome) objects or gag gifts.

**L**ANGUAGE-TEACHING TIP: Your choice of scoring and grading methods should depend on the kind of course you are teaching (e.g., college, adult school, high school, credit, non-credit, open-entry, etc.)— and the learning styles and “spirit” of the typical learner. For example, some people thrive on competition while others benefit from cooperative learning methods; some learners are “perfectionists” about details while others are content— and can make use of— the point or main idea of a lesson.

