Playing Jackbox Party Packs to Practice Authentic English in the Classroom

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DOI:https://doi.org/10.55853/CP1_10

Short summary:
I am always on the lookout for digital games that support authentic language practice in the classroom. Jackbox Party Packs create a space where students can play with language in a meaningful yet low-stakes manner. These games encourage social and playful engagement, allowing learners to explore timing, humor, and collaboration—essential skills for real-world language use—without the pressure of formal assessment.

Game information

Title: Jackbox Party Pack Series (1-10)

Publisher: Jackbox Games

Availability: Digital download for Microsoft Windows and macOS (via Steam, Epic, and Humble Bundle), Android, iOS, Apple TV, Linux, Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, and 5, and Xbox 360, One, and Series X/S.

Technology requirements: PC or gaming console, internet connection, projector or large screen

Cost: Jackbox Party Packs typically range between $13.74 to $29.99 USD for a pack of five games. Prices can drop significantly during frequent sales, where 20% to 50% discounts are common.

Play time: Most games are about 15-20 minutes long.

Player count: Most Jackbox Party Pack games can accommodate 1–10 players. Additionally, each game often includes an audience mode that allows up to 10,000 people to participate—making it a flexible choice for both small and large classes.

Other important details for classroom implementation: Each student (or group of students) needs a smartphone, tablet, or laptop to join the game. If some learners do not have individual devices, they can participate in small groups sharing a single device.

📱 Technology Setup

All you need: one screen + internet + student devices. Flexible for any class size with audience mode up to 10,000.

Why is the game important for play (for ludic literacy)?

1	Students use authentic language for gameplay in real-time in order to practice timing, humor, and reading the room in a safe framework of a game. Instead of rote learning of set phrases, students learn how to speak and engage in lively and organic exchange and banter.
2	Students practice following instructions and directions in the target language which mirror social and cultural rules one must negotiate while communicating by working within the framework of the rules of the game.
3	Gameplay is straight-forward. The audio and video reinforce the 'magic circle' (Huizinga, 1938/1955), providing signals and boundaries that, as Salen and Zimmerman (2004) note, help maintain the rules of play. Media cues such as sound and visuals deepen immersion, fostering a shared playful mindset (Goffman, 1961).
4	The games make it easier to encourage students to participate, regardless of language level, so no student is left behind. Inclusive participation is critical to the social dimension of play. Everyone has a role—even if some are more vocal, others can still participate.
5	The humor and ability to vote allows the games to provide a safe space for low-risk, low-stakes experimentation, so they may express themselves creatively without being put into the spotlight. The funny, collective decision-making fosters shared meaning-making, which highlights how playful activities generate a sense of co-creation and communal storytelling.

🎲 Why Jackbox in the Classroom?

Students play with language in real time. Humor, timing, and collaboration create authentic practice without exam pressure.

🌀 Magic Circle of Play

Audio and video create a shared playful mindset with clear boundaries and signals (Huizinga, 1938/1955).

🤝 Inclusive Engagement

Even quieter students join in through voting or teaming up. Every role matters.

Why is the game important as a teaching tool (for pedagogic literacy)?

1	Several games can be used to review classroom material. The immediate feedback given by both the teacher as well as their peers serve as formative assessment. This can inform the teacher of students' strong and weak areas in order to adjust future lessons.
2	By allowing students to make their own questions and answers, the game creates a constructivist learning space (Vygotsky, 1978; King, 1992; Yu, 2009) to use what they have learned in class to think critically and problem-solve for deeper engagement with the language material from the textbook (Gee, 2003; Whitton, 2014). This improves their metacognitive awareness (Flavell, 1979; Tanner, 2012) and encourages them to think about how they could improve their play next time.
3	Games can be chosen or adjusted for various language levels in order to match students' zones of proximal development. Teachers can add their own prompts or answers to balance the playing level of some games.
4	Larger classes can work in teams or participate as "audience members" who create a collaborative learning environment where peer feedback and social dynamics ensure full class engagement. Social-constructivist aspects of learning are demonstrated through the need for students to justify their answers and collaborate on team responses (Vygotsky, 1978).
5	Through post-game discussions or reflections, students engage in self-assessment and peer feedback. This helps them understand how they learn, reinforcing self-regulated learning strategies that are fundamental to strong pedagogic practice.

💪 Pedagogic Power

When students make their own questions, they construct knowledge, develop critical thinking, and build metacognitive awareness.

How did you show and play the game on the day of the event?

For this presentation, I used Drawful Animate from the Jackbox Party Pack 8. I selected this game because it allows for high teacher control and flexibility, making it adaptable to any language level—from beginner to advanced. It is particularly effective for reviewing vocabulary, grammar points, or sentence structures. Its intuitive gameplay, similar to Pictionary, ensures a low learning curve and makes it accessible even to mixed-level classes

One of the key advantages of Drawful Animate is the "make your own prompts" feature. Teachers can create customized word lists, or in higher-level classes, students can submit their own vocabulary, phrases, or sentences for peer review and collaborative input. This supports flipped classroom methodology and enhances learner engagement as they decide what the prompts the game will include.

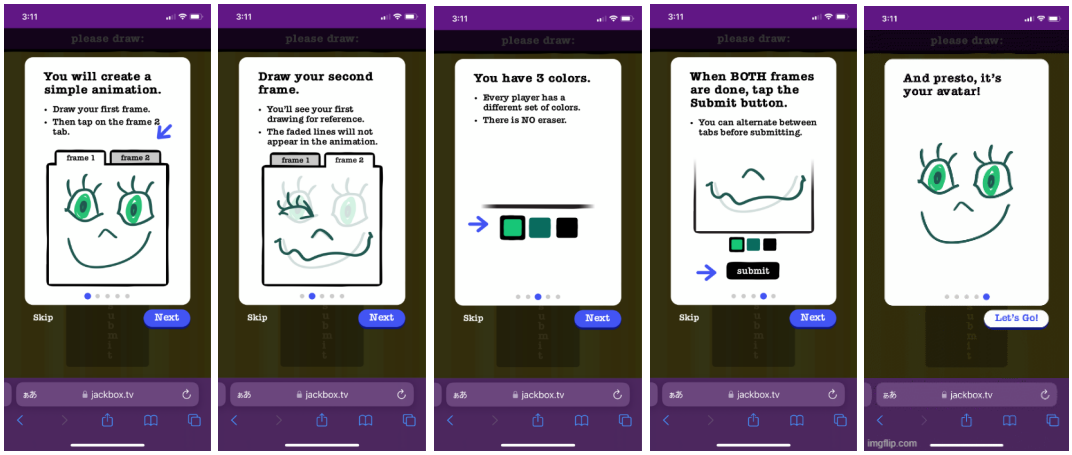
For this demonstration, I used a vocabulary review list from my first-year beginner-level English course for Japanese students. The theme focused on the Interests and Activities units from their textbook. Students had previously studied gerund forms (~ing) or 動名詞(～すること), and had practiced converting these into present continuous verb forms (現在進行形, ～している) by adding the correct
be-verb (am/is/are). These structures were also introduced as complements to preference verbs such as like, dislike, enjoy, and hate.

For this presentation, we played with the gerund forms of the activities. Additionally, especially in this particular type of review using action words, the animation theme of the game runs parallel to the material, invoking an image of "action". For this particular exercise, the participants were shown (or would be instructed to enter) prompts in the format shown in the screenshot below:

The game flow was as follows:

Setup & Mini-Tutorial

- I launched the game and shared the room code.
- students joined via jackbox.tv on their own devices.
- As part of the login process, they created two-frame animated avatars—offering a built-in tutorial on how animation works in the game.

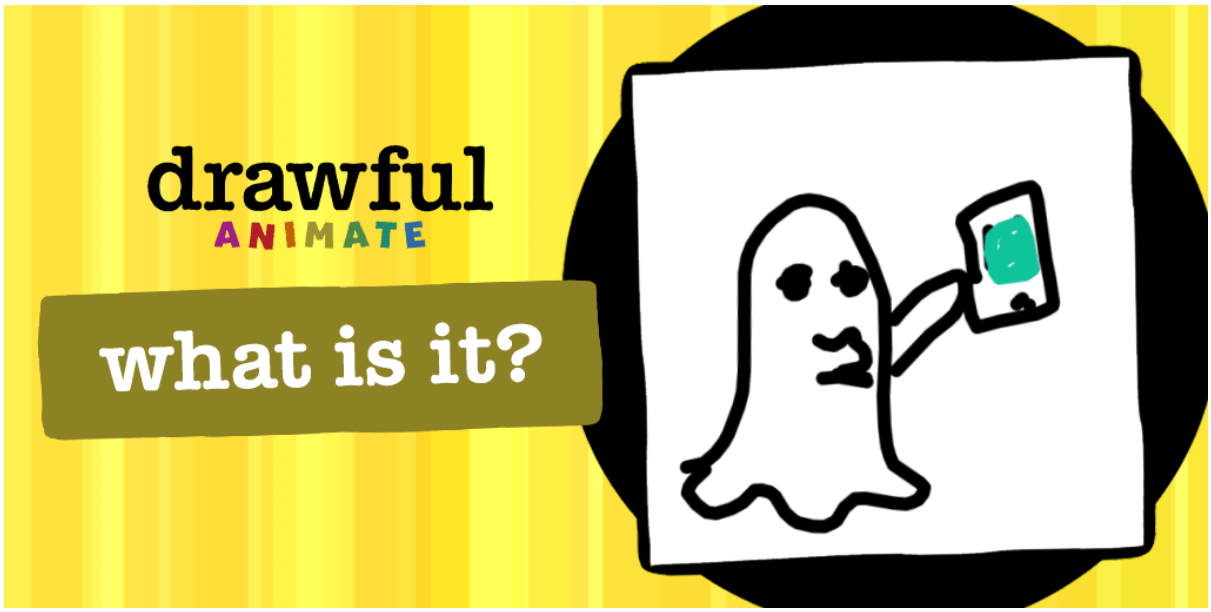


Gameplay:

- Each player receives a prompt from the list (e.g., playing tennis) and draws a two-frame animation:
    - Frame 1: Base drawing
    - Frame 2: a variation to show motion or progression.
- Once all animations are done, each one is shown to the group.
    - All players (save the artist) try to write a fake but convincing answer that others may pick in order to score points.
    - Players then choose from the prompts provided by all the other players and vote for the one they believe to be the actual answer.
- After everyone has voted on what they think the correct prompt was, the game shows list of checkboxes that players
    - ✅ …to"Like" funny, creative, or clever answers
    - ✅ …togive recognition to players even if their prompt wasn't picked
    - NOTE:Players are allowed to check more than one answer this time. These likes don't affect the main score, but they do count toward the "Most Liked" award shown at the end. They are a fun, social way for players and audience members to show appreciation for creativity and humor.

- Points awarded for:
    - Guessing the correct prompt
    - Fooling others into picking an erroneous prompt
    - Attracting guesses with the original answer

In typical classroom gameplay, after each round, the teacher or a student models a sentence orally using the correct grammar, depending on the grammar point being practiced from the list, e.g.:



"He is taking a selfie."
(the underlined portion being the correct prompt)

The student or teacher uses the prompt in a complete sentence, reinforcing the fact that the appropriately conjugated be-verb, along with the -ing form, now constitutes the present continuous (or present progressive) verb form.

- If the goal is to practice using a preference verb with the gerund, the prompts can be adjusted (taking selfies), and the instructions given to follow the format as follows:

"She likes taking selfies."

"She enjoys taking selfies."

"She doesn't like taking selfies."

"She hates taking selfies."

- If the goal is to practice using preferences with the to-infinitive, the prompts can be adjusted (to take selfies) and the instructions given to follow the format as follows:

"She likes to take selfies."

"She doesn't like to take selfies."

"She hates to take selfies."

Audience Mode (for groups larger than 10)

- If there are more than ten players, the remaining students are requested to sign in as audience members and:
    - Vote on what they think is the real prompt
    - React to funny or clever answers with "likes" that may show up on screen, increasing the engagement of the class
    - Influence the game by voting for fake answers that earn players bonus points
    - The audience also adds energy to the game by watching, laughing, and interacting live—evenif they're not in the main group of players

The game encourages students to write grammatically correct and believable sentences to score points, reinforcing language learning through creativity and peer interaction.

At the end of the game, the player with the highest score is declared the winner. Additionally, a "Most Liked" award is given to the student whose animations received the most audience approval—offering an alternative form of recognition that values creativity and humor.

✍️ Grammar in Action

Prompts become grammar practice when practiced post-round, orally: He is taking a selfie. / She likes taking selfies. / She hates to take selfies.

🏆 Alternative Recognition

The Most Liked award values humor and creativity alongside accuracy.

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