

Games and Language Activities in the Italian High School Classroom

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ABSTRACT The author suggests that available Italian textbooks can be improved through the imaginative intervention on the part of the teacher. Games which will recall and / or expand the vocabulary of a given lesson and activities which will promote and encourage language interaction should constitute an integral part of the basic program. To help students recall and expand basic vocabulary, the teacher should make use of word puzzles, mazes, and word-search puzzles. To en-

courage interaction, there are mathematical and detective puzzles, legal cases, dialogues, as well as picturesque speech. A unit on Italian geography shows how different types of games will help the student to become better acquainted with Italy. Although the article is based on *Basic Italian* by Speroni and Golino, the exercises can be adapted to any other Italian text, and the ideas to any other language.

A cursory glance at the various Italian textbooks will show that the element of fun is conspicuously absent from the process of learning. Grammar textbooks often contain dull repetition exercises or nonsense drills, and authors seem to be at loss as to how to recall or expand the lesson's basic vocabulary. In the reading program, exercises emphasize morphological or syntactic competence rather than expanding basic vocabulary or promoting language interaction. Morphology and syntax have been taught in order to introduce the student to a pleasurable reading and oral program, and yet we find that editors of readers, having introduced novels or short stories, use them to emphasize morphology and syntax. It is a vicious circle from which there seems to be no escape.

This paper will be divided into two sections:

- (a) games which will recall and / or expand the vocabulary of a given lesson;
- (b) activities which will promote and encourage language interaction.

Crosswords and other word puzzles

Crossword puzzles are extremely useful for recalling isolated words, and their successful

completion gives us a sense of achievement. In this example (Figure 1), based on Lesson 4 of *Basic Italian* by Speroni and Golino,¹ the definitions for the words are given in English.

Since the traditionally "boxed crossword" puzzles may be somewhat difficult to prepare in a short time, the teacher may opt for a less traditional format and include words related to a given theme (Figure 2). All the words in this puzzle relate to the reading passage of Lesson 4, "Una lettera."

The teacher may adapt this theme and present the class with an envelope (Figure 3). The students are then asked to identify cultural differences which exist between a North American and an Italian address. The following differences should be identified:

- Italian uses adjectives to modify titles;
- Surnames generally precede first names;
- There is no abbreviation for *c/o* in Italian: *presso* is always written out in full;
- The street name precedes the street number;
- The postal (or zip) code precedes the city;
- The different ways of writing some capital consonants and vowels;
- The number seven is crossed to distinguish it from number one.

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1. Although the exercises are based on Charles Speroni and Carlo L. Golino, *Basic Italian*, third edition (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), the games are suitable for the fourth edition (1977) as well.

CRUCIVERBA

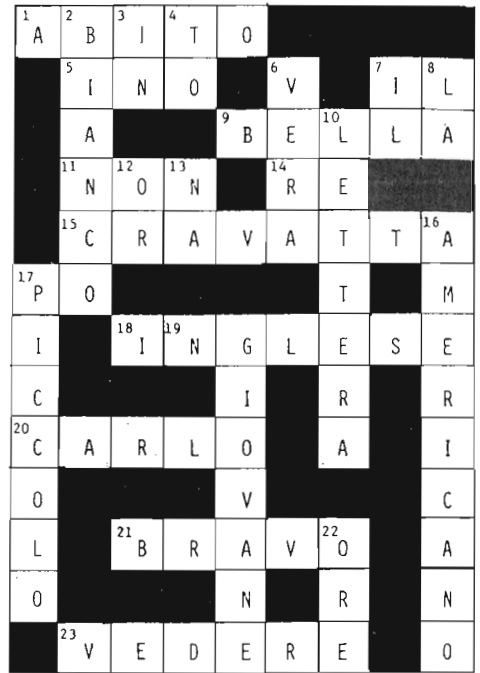
Orizzontali

1. suit
5. half "Torino"
7. definite article
9. beautiful (f.s.)
11. not
14. king
15. necktie
17. a little
18. English
20. boy's name
21. fine, good
23. to see

Verticali

2. white
3. preposition
4. Torino (abbr.)
6. true (f.s.)
7. definite article
8. definite article
10. letter
12. two-thirds of "hour"
13. Napoli (abbr.)
16. American (m.s.)
17. little
19. young
22. pl. of "hour"

Figure 1



Another variation on the crossword puzzle can be seen in Figure 4. This puzzle can be used in the very first lesson of *Basic Italian* to test the translation of isolated words.

Scrambled letters and words

Scrambled letters might be used to recall the vocabulary of a given lesson.

Anagrammando le lettere seguenti, trovare dieci verbi della seconda lezione.

1. GERLEGE
2. ALPRARE
3. ARMIPARE
4. RIAVRARE
5. CASTALORE
6. SAERDEDIRE
7. ADARMONDE
8. NOICCIMINER
9. CRATONNERI
10. SODERPINER

Scrambled words are particularly useful in recalling basic structures of a given lesson. The following is useful for Lesson 5. All sentences are drawn from the *lettura* of that lesson.

Formare una proposizione mettendo in ordine le parole seguenti.

1. il bello in se a piscina tempo nuotare è una andiamo.

2. libro pomeriggio nel io un leggo.
3. dello piscina vedo la dalla studio finestra.
4. idea non è ma una ho eccellente soldi io
5. tempo in resti oggi molto biblioteca?
6. tutti prendere perché a un andiamo non caffè?
7. il e il prima dovere piacere poi.
8. alla aspettano di sono biblioteca dei scuola e davanti compagni.

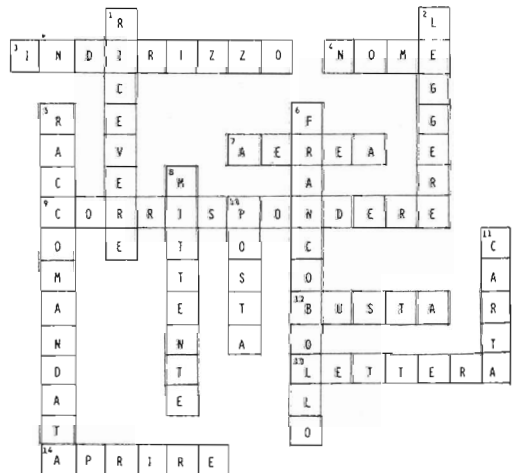


Figure 2

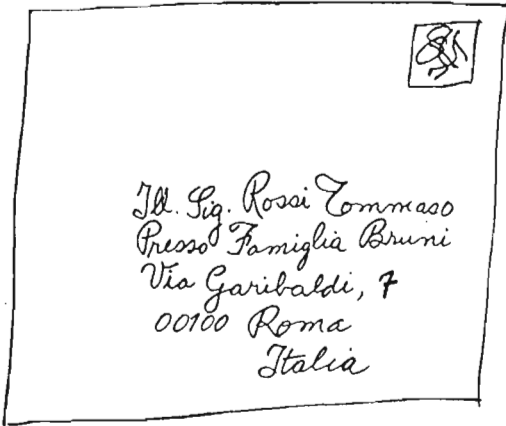


Figure 3

Inserire nello schema la traduzione italiana delle parole elencate a sinistra. Leggendo una dopo l'altra le lettere iniziali delle parole tradotte si otterrà il nome di una ragazza.

1. pen
2. too, also
3. very
4. examination
5. Louise
6. friend

1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

Figure 4

Mazes

Mazes might be used to recall an answer to be found in the reading selection. Figure 5 may be suitable for Lesson 5; Figure 6 for Lesson 9. These should be carefully planned, since the aim of the teacher should be to mislead the student before the correct answer is found.

Word-search puzzles

Another kind of puzzle is the word-search or the *crucipuzzle*, as the Italians call it. Several variations are offered. The student is asked to find in the *diagramma* the various words listed. I found that when students were trying to find the words, they kept asking one another: "Where's *amico*?" "Did you find *cognome*?" "Is *professore* spelled backwards?" That was exactly

Begin at the letter **P** and find your way from left to right of this maze. If you follow the right path, you will find out what Mario suggests that he and his friends do before going to the swimming pool.

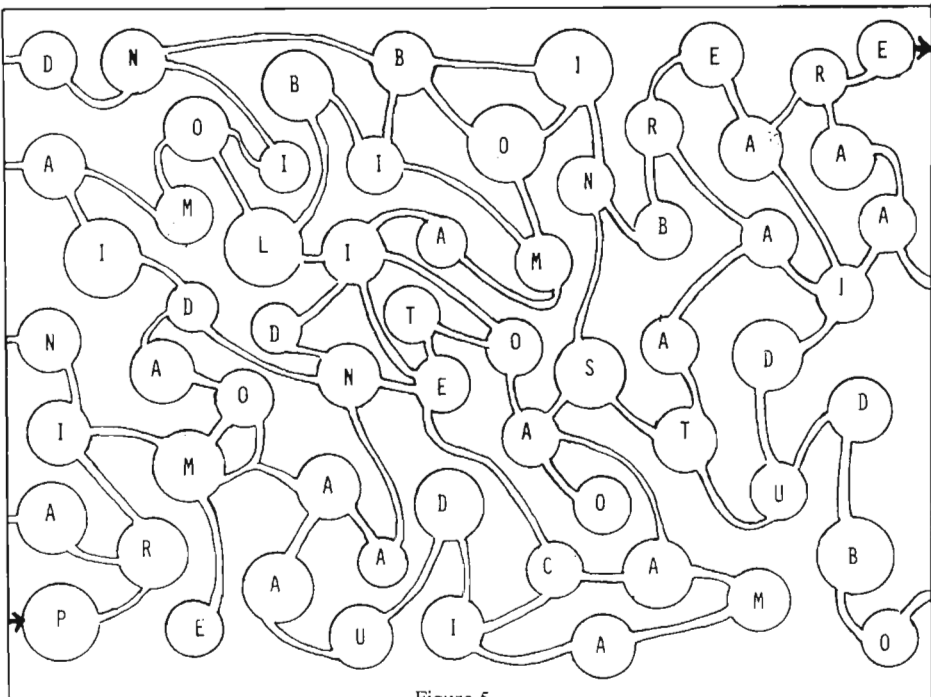


Figure 5

Find the hidden sentence. Begin at the letter **N** and follow your way to the letter **A**. If you follow the right path you will find the hidden sentence.

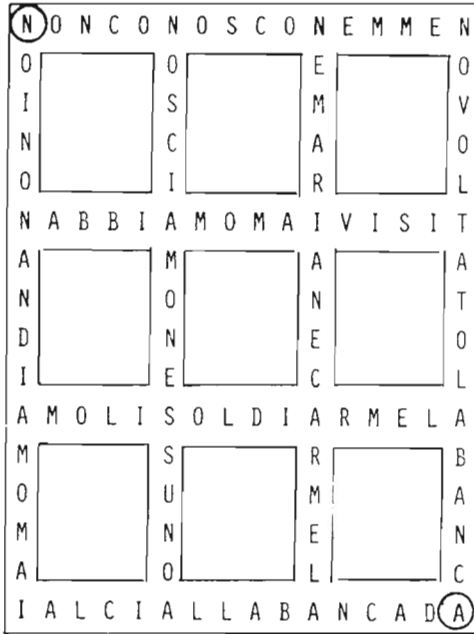


Figure 6

my aim: to get the students to repeat the words either aloud or mentally (Figure 7). If the puzzle is placed on a static transparency, an overlay may be used to show the answers.

The *crucipuzzle* which seems to be most popular is the one in which a message is hidden. Figure 8 is suitable for Lesson 2. All eleven verbs of that lesson are listed. Once all are found, the answer to the question "Leggi e scrivi ogni giorno perché desidero imparare." will be "Sì, leggo e scrivo ogni giorno perché desidero imparare." The square or rectangular diagram need not be the only format for this puzzle. The teacher may decide that the puzzle itself should be closely associated with the theme. The result might be Figure 9.

A Unit on Italian Geography

Teachers may want their students to learn the names of the Italian regions and the names of the *capoluoghi* (Figure 10). A map is ideal for both teaching and testing. Answers can be checked almost immediately with overlays after the 'test' maps are exchanged for marking if the map is placed on a static transparency. The map of Italy with its regions and dots indicating the cities should be the static transparency while the names of the regions and cities should be placed on overlays.

Trovare nel diagramma le parole elencate a sinistra. Le parole possono essere ricercate leggendole sia da sinistra a destra che da destra a sinistra, o dall'alto in basso o dal basso in alto, oppure anche diagonalmente sia verso il basso che verso l'alto, perché sempre in linea retta.

- amico
- Carlo
- casa
- cognome
- esame
- italiano
- matita
- penna
- professore
- scuola
- studente
- zio

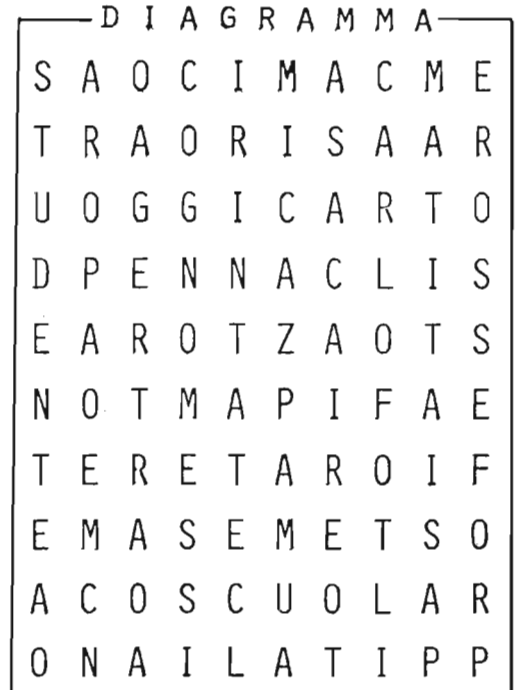


Figure 7

Trovare nel diagramma gli undici verbi della seconda lezione elencati a sinistra. Le parole possono essere ricercate leggendole sia da sinistra a destra che da destra a sinistra, o dall'alto in basso o dal basso in alto, oppure anche diagonalmente sia verso il basso che verso l'alto, purché sempre in linea retta. Le lettere rimaste daranno la risposta alla domanda "Leggi e scrivi ogni giorno?"

arrivare
ascoltare
desiderare
domandare
imparare
incominciare
incontrare
leggere
parlare
rispondere
scrivere



Risposta:

Figure 8

Trovare nel diagramma le parole elencate a sinistra. Le parole possono essere ricercate leggendole sia da sinistra a destra che da destra a sinistra, o dall'alto in basso o dal basso in alto, oppure anche diagonalmente sia verso il basso che verso l'alto, perché sempre in linea retta. Le lettere rimaste daranno un augurio per le feste.

albero
campane
dicembre
luci
magi
neve
panettone
presepio
vigilia

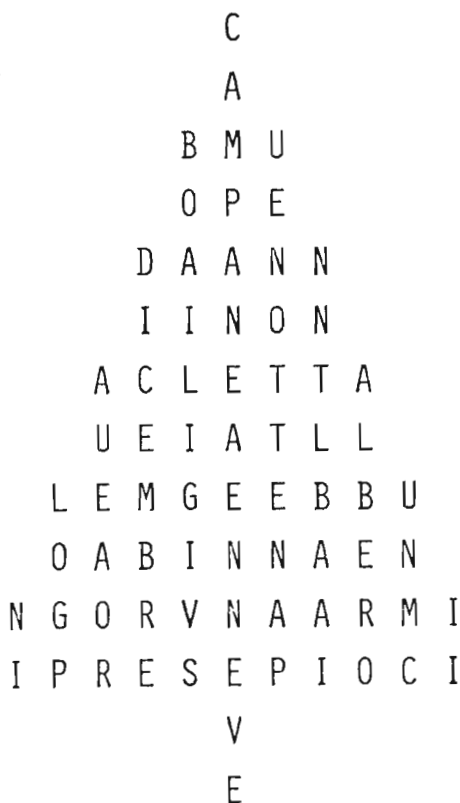


Figure 9

Ho ricevuto alcune cartoline da amici che passano le vacanze estive in Italia. Purtroppo nessuna delle cartoline porta la didascalia . . . So che hanno visitato le città elencate nella colonna B. Potresti dirmi dove si trovano le vedute elencate nella colonna A?

Colonna A

1. Il teatro San Carlo
2. La Basilica di Sant'Antonio
3. Il Cenacolo
4. Gli scavi
5. Il Colle dell'Infinito
6. Il teatro La Scala
7. La torre degli Asinelli
8. La Galleria degli Uffizi
9. La torre pendente
10. Il Vesuvio
11. Via Veneto
12. Piazza San Marco
13. Il Colosseo
14. Il Davide di Michelangelo
15. L'Università Bocconi

Colonna B

- a. Roma
- b. Milano
- c. Napoli
- d. Pisa
- e. Firenze
- f. Venezia
- g. Padova
- h. Pompei
- i. Bologna
- j. Recanati

Other Puzzles

Games which involve small group discussions include the following mathematical puzzle:

Quale professione esercitano . . . ?

Ho conosciuto, poco tempo fa, quattro signori: Carlo Rossi, Mario Bruni, Paolo Moretti e Gianni Martino ma non ricordo mai la professione che esercitano. So che . . .

1. Mario Bruni è più anziano dell'avvocato e dell'ingegnere.
2. Il chirurgo prende la colazione da solo.
3. Paolo Moretti gioca spesso a carte con Gianni Martino.
4. Il più anziano è anche il più ricco.
5. Carlo Rossi cena spesso in compagnia dell'avvocato e dell'ingegnere.
6. Gianni Martino è anziano dell'avvocato.
7. A Mario Bruni non piacciono le attività sportive.

Sapresti dirmi quale professione esercitano queste mie conoscenze?

detective puzzle:

Ispettore: Signor Moretti, questa barra d'oro pesa un chilo. Ne hanno rubate due da un gioielliere. Come ne siete venuto in possesso voi?

Moretti: L'ho comprata . . . Ma sì, da Ferri, vicolo del Moro.

Ispettore: Ah, il vicolo del Moro. Conosco quel Ferri, mercante di rottami. Ora vado a interrogarlo e se è stato lui a rubarle, vi arresterò come ricettatore.

L'ispettore interroga Ferri.

Ispettore: Ferri, bada a quello che dici! Secondo te, sarebbe stato tuo figlio a ripescare le due barre nel canale?

Ferri: Sì, proprio così. Quel ragazzo ha trovato da qualche parte una potente calamita e passa il tempo a pescare nel canale. Dovreste vedere quanta roba tira fuori!

Ispettore: Non me ne rallegro! Proprio no, Ferri. Ora verrai con me e anche Moretti. Tu sei stato il ladro e lui il ricettatore, perché in tutta questa storia c'è qualcosa che non va!

A che cosa si riferisce l'ispettore?⁵

or legal case:

Se tu fossi il giudice . . .

Alla lettura del testamento del fu Carlo Rossi, un nipote, Gianni, apprende che erediterà da suo zio, un bellissimo portafoglio di pelle. Gianni esamina il portafoglio e vi trova dieci biglietti da centomila lire. I cugini, gelosi, esigono che Gianni divida con loro questa somma. Gianni sostiene che suo zio, lasciandogli il portafoglio, gli ha lasciato anche il contenuto. Il caso finisce in tribunale. Se tu fossi il giudice, avresti diviso la somma tra i cugini o avresti dato l'intera somma a Gianni?

(Scegliere due avvocati: uno che sostenga la tesi di Gianni, l'altro quella dei cugini.)⁶

Dialogues

It is most important that the students be given an opportunity to create dialogues. Dialogues in wide a variety of situations should be created and acted out. Teachers should make sure that such dialogues are constructed around experiences compatible with the age and interests of the students; the language should not be pedantic or unreal. The teacher might begin with a multiple-choice type, such as:

In un caffè. Un signore chiama il cameriere.

Signore: Cameriere, ho sete.

Cameriere: A. No, non ho soldi.

B. Grazie, ne ho assai.

C. Le porto subito una sedia.

D. Le porto subito una bibita.

and then proceed gradually to a one-line blank dialogue:

È domenica mattina. Carla, una bambina di quattro anni, parla con Gianni, un suo fratello di dodici anni.

Carla: Non vai a scuola oggi?

Gianni: _____

5. Examples of this type abound in *La Domenica Enigmistica*, *Domenica Quiz*, *Nuova Enigmistica Tascabile*, etc.

6. The "legal case" and the "mathematical puzzle" have appeared in French in Anthony Mollica, ed., *Joie de vivre. Anthologie d'écrits québécois* (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing, 1976) and Anthony Mollica et al., *Fleurs de lis. Anthologie d'écrits du Canada français* (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing, 1973), respectively.



Figure 10

The regions and cities may be used as a point of departure to increase the students' vocabulary since, in many cases, to obtain the name of the inhabitants of a region or of a city, different suffixes are added.

Città e abitanti.

1. Gli abitanti di Milano si chiamano _____.
2. Gli abitanti di Venezia si chiamano _____.
3. Gli abitanti di Firenze si chiamano _____.
4. Gli abitanti di Roma si chiamano _____.
5. Gli abitanti di Napoli si chiamano _____.

A third exercise may be used to show in context how to translate *in/to* with a geographical name.

Abitanti, città e regioni.

1. I Piemontesi abitano _____.
2. I Milanesi abitano _____.
3. I Toscani abitano _____.
4. I Napoletani abitano _____.
5. Gli Abbruzzesi abitano _____.

Music may be another component in this unit on Italian geography. The teacher may want to teach old favorites which may very well make up a "musical tour of Italy." Such songs as "Piemontesina," "Reginella campagnola," "Arrivederci Roma," "Torna a Sorrento," "Calabresella," "Chitarra romana," "Santa Lucia," "Il Carnevale di Venezia," "Firenze," are only a few which are available either on records or

in books.² Songs are of great help for the acquisition of both linguistic and cultural knowledge. They may also be used to teach pronunciation and stress. Since a note represents a syllable and since every note must be sung carefully in order to sing in tune, the Italian word cannot be mispronounced. It is important, however, that at the beginning, the teacher choose a song whose melody is already familiar to the student. Songs also point out cultural differences to the non-Italian student, as well as teaching comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, colloquial phrases and useful structures.³

The teacher may wish to focus on a city. The students may be given a map of Florence, for example, and then be told that the whole class will be taking a sightseeing tour of that city. With the aid of slides, the teacher (acting as a guide) describes the various monuments as the 'bus' travels through the city. The teacher may decide to stop at a given place of interest and tour the interior. To encourage more student participation, the teacher may ask three or four students to take turns at being guides for part of the trip. The same procedure can be followed for a 'walking tour,' and students should be encouraged to stop along the way and to do some shopping. The latter technique requires more student participation, since some will be acting as vendors and others as tourists. Students who are involved in this presentation will be required to do some advance preparation. A guidebook will provide brief and useful information which the teacher (or the students) will relate in Italian using structures and vocabulary which are within the linguistic ability of the class. In addition to cultural insights, the activity can provide points of historical, geographical and human interest.⁴

The following exercise might be helpful in identifying some of the more important sights of well-known cities:

2. Cf., M. Shaw and G. Sciarillo, *Over 100 Italian Songs/Più di 100 canzoni italiane* (Toronto: Maganisa Associates Ltd., 1974). Copies are available from Maganisa Associates Ltd., Box 112, Station "U", Toronto, Ontario M8Z 5M4.

3. The following excellent articles immediately come to mind: Manuel Gelman, "Poetry and Songs in the Teaching of Languages," *Babel*, Journal of the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers' Association, 9 (1973), 13-15; Olivia Munoz, *Songs in the Foreign Language Classroom* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1969); and Meguido Zola and Joachim Sandvoss, "Song in Second-Language Teaching: the Uses of Imagery," *The Canadian Modern Language Review/La Revue canadienne des langues vivantes*, 32 (October 1976), 73-85.

4. See Anthony S. Mollica, "A Touch of . . . Class!," *The Canadian Modern Language Review/La Revue canadienne des langues vivantes*, 33 (March 1977), 568-69.

to a five-line blank dialogue:

Due studenti parlano della televisione.

Gianni: *Raramente guardo la tivù. Non ho tempo da perdere.*

Carlo: _____

Gianni: *La tivù non m'interessa. Preferisco altre attività.*

Carlo: _____

Gianni: *Cosa fai quando hai il tempo libero?*

Carlo: _____

Gianni: *Se decido di guardare la tivù, generalmente scelgo un vecchio film.*

Carlo: _____

Gianni: *Cosa succede a casa tua quando tua sorella e i tuoi fratellini vogliono guardare un programma differente?*

Carlo: _____

The situation and the possible strategies should be clearly indicated in two or three short

sentences using vocabulary which is not the same as that which the student will use to provide his/her answer.

The teacher might ask individual students or groups of students to work together. Eventually, the teacher might simply give the situation and suggest the strategy; the students will do the rest. The teacher may have to clarify some of the cultural content, otherwise the student will assume that what is said and done are the same as in his own culture.

Toward a more picturesque speech

The teacher should make sure that students know idiomatic expressions. From time to time, exercises of this type might be used to expand the basic vocabulary found in grammar textbooks.

A relatively simple exercise is to ask the student to match the expression with its meaning. This may be presented in a two-column format.

Colonna A

1. in bocca al lupo
2. salvare capra e cavoli
3. il calcio dell'asino
4. stuzzicare il cane che dorme
5. topo di biblioteca
6. essere come cani e gatti
7. mangiare come un canarino
8. essere quattro gatti
9. cavallo di battaglia
10. non sapere che pesci pigliare
11. essere a cavallo
12. a volo d'uccello
13. fare d'una mosca un elefante
14. gatta ci ova
15. qui casca l'asino

Colonna B

- a. irritare chi potrebbe nuocere
- b. compagnia composta di poche persone
- c. di sfuggita, rapidamente
- d. qui è la difficoltà
- e. auguri
- f. essere fuori d'ogni pericolo, d'ogni difficoltà
- g. soddisfare a due condizioni apparentemente contraddittorie
- h. mangiare pochissimo
- i. c'è sotto qualche malizia o inganno
- j. ingratitudine
- k. trovarsi in continua discordia
- l. non sapere come risolvere la situazione
- m. persona che passa tutto il giorno sui libri
- n. ciò che un artista eseguisce più volentieri perché in esso mostra meglio la sua abilità
- o. esagerare

Students should be encouraged to use some of these idioms in sentences or in their dialogues (if applicable) so that they become part of their linguistic baggage.

Usare ciascuna delle seguenti espressioni in una frase che ne dimostri chiaramente il significato.

1. salvare capra e cavoli
2. stuzzicare il cane che dorme
3. non sapere che pesci pigliare
4. a volo d'uccello
5. fare d'una mosca un elefante

Conclusion

I am firmly convinced that the element of fun must not be discounted from the process of learning. Authors of textbooks have the responsibility of providing not only lists of basic structures and high-frequency vocabulary, but textbooks which are imaginative and highly motivational for the student who opts for Italian. Italians have never lacked either ingenuity or creativity. As teachers of Italian we must be more demanding so that the textbooks that we buy are constantly being improved.