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# **Making Good Communicators**

**A Sourcebook of Speaking and Listening Activities  
for 9–11 year olds**

**Catherine Delamain & Jill Spring**

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Speechmark Publishing Ltd,  
2nd Floor, 5 Thomas More Square, London E1W 1YW, UK  
Tel: +44 (0)845 034 4610 Fax: +44 (0)845 034 4649  
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**RESOURCES** (also available online at [www.speechmark.net](http://www.speechmark.net))

# Preface

*A word devoid of thought is a dead thing, and a thought unembodied in words remains a shadow.* Lev S Vygotsky

*Making Good Communicators* completes a quartet of resource books<sup>1</sup> for teachers, teaching assistants and speech and language therapists. It is intended for children in Key Stage 2 of the National Curriculum of England and Wales in Years 5 and 6. These children will range in age from 9 to 11 years. The authors have many years' experience working in education settings alongside teaching staff and have learned to value the enormous benefits engendered by collaborative working and shared expertise. They are aware of the demands of the National Curriculum and have made every effort to produce activities that are relevant to the classroom.

*Making Good Communicators* offers

- a range of carefully structured activities
- clear instructions for use
- resources to support the activities (also available online at [www.speechmark.net](http://www.speechmark.net)).

<sup>1</sup>*Developing Baseline Communication Skills; Games for Speaking, Listening and Understanding; Understanding and Using Spoken Language*

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# Introduction

*Language is the armoury of the human mind, and at once contains the trophies of its past and the weapons of its future conquests.* Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Language is the medium by which the majority of teaching is delivered, and spoken language underpins the development of reading and writing. It is also the means by which relationships are formed, social skills acquired and through which a child learns to make sense of his or her world.

In the National Curriculum of England and Wales, recognition is repeatedly given to the pivotal role played by spoken language throughout a child's entire educational career. Stress is laid on the importance of spoken language in pupils' ability to access the whole curriculum – cognitively, socially and linguistically.

In particular, the programme of study for English states as its overarching aim the promotion of high standards of language and literacy, by equipping pupils with a strong command of spoken and written language.

The Department for Education strategy for the development of Speaking, Listening and Learning offers teaching objectives and classroom activities for Key Stage 2. It emphasises the importance of making time for the development of oral language skills.

The acquisition of these skills can sometimes be assumed to occur spontaneously and therefore be taken for granted.

Increasingly heavy demands are laid upon pupils' language competence as they reach years five and six and a need for several new types of skill is recognised. This book offers activities which build upon those in the previous books in this series. In addition, new areas including note-taking, analysing and generating different types of text, and inference are addressed.

# How to use this book

*Making Good Communicators* is divided into ten sections, five in Part 1 and five in Part 2. Each section targets a specific skill area and contains ten different activities. The activities have explicit aims, a list of the equipment and preparation needed and suggestions as to suitable numbers of students to include. Some of the activities are quick to organise, need little or no equipment and are quite brief, so they can be fitted into convenient gaps in the curriculum. Others take longer and may need to be allocated specific time in lessons. In general, the first activity in each section tends to be the easiest. Throughout, equipment and preparation have been kept to a minimum as far as possible.

There is an extensive resource section containing sample texts and pictures to be used with specific activities. The resource section is also available online at [www.speechmark.net](http://www.speechmark.net).

Although the authors have made reference to the National Curriculum of England and Wales, the activities are not dependent on knowledge or experience of the National Curriculum and can be carried out by any English-speaking user.

## The skill areas

### Part 1

#### ***Explaining and describing***

To promote the ability to give clear descriptions of objects, places, situations or events. To promote the ability to explain a reason, a process or procedure or a problem and its solution. To foster the use of a wide range of descriptive vocabulary, complex sentences and mental-state verbs.

#### ***Narrating***

To encourage the use of language to recount a story or series of events in logical sequence, using standard grammar and including phrases and clauses. To be able to enhance narratives with gesture and body language and by modifying voice and speech.

#### ***Predicting and hypothesising***

To be able to make predictions about the future based on facts and experience or using imagination. To be able to speculate about how different events and feelings might affect outcomes. To be able to use future and conditional language.

#### ***Asking and answering effective questions***

To be able to ask questions that go beyond the basic 'who, what, where?' type and to answer questions that demand a higher level of abstract thinking as described by Blank, Rose and Berlin in *The Language of Learning*, 1978.



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## Part 2

### ***Note taking***

To be able to extract and record key facts from spoken information in order to 'get the main idea' in a classroom setting and use the recorded information for later use.

### ***Understanding and using complex structures***

To be able to understand and use complex sentence structures such as connectives and mental-state verbs. This will allow the user to put forward ideas and arguments in a cohesive, comprehensive way.

### ***Analysing and generating different types of text***

To recognise and be able to use different ways of speaking or writing to match a specific context, for example, persuasive, argumentative, descriptive or nonchronological reporting.

### ***Matching language to context***

To communicate effectively children need to be able to adjust the way they use language for different purposes, in different contexts, including formal letter writing, email and text messaging.

### ***Debating***

To begin to understand the procedures of formal debate and the language associated with it. To be able to think of topics on which there can be divergent views, to muster arguments in favour or against motions and use persuasive language to back up arguments.

### ***Inference, idiom and irony***

To be able to make deductions or come to conclusions based on known facts, general knowledge and experience, where the underlying meaning is not spelt out. To begin to understand subtleties, innuendo and sarcasm. To enjoy and begin to use the language of idiom and metaphor.

## Where to start

Teachers may choose to work on one skill area alone to begin with or to work across several different areas simultaneously. They may also want to choose activities in areas where they have identified particular needs.

We have tried to make the first activity in each skill area the easiest. Thereafter the activities are not grouped in any particular order, and there is no developmental gradation.

It is probably appropriate to start with one or more skill areas from Part 1 of the book. The children's ability to cope with the first activity in any skill area will be the best guide on how to proceed.

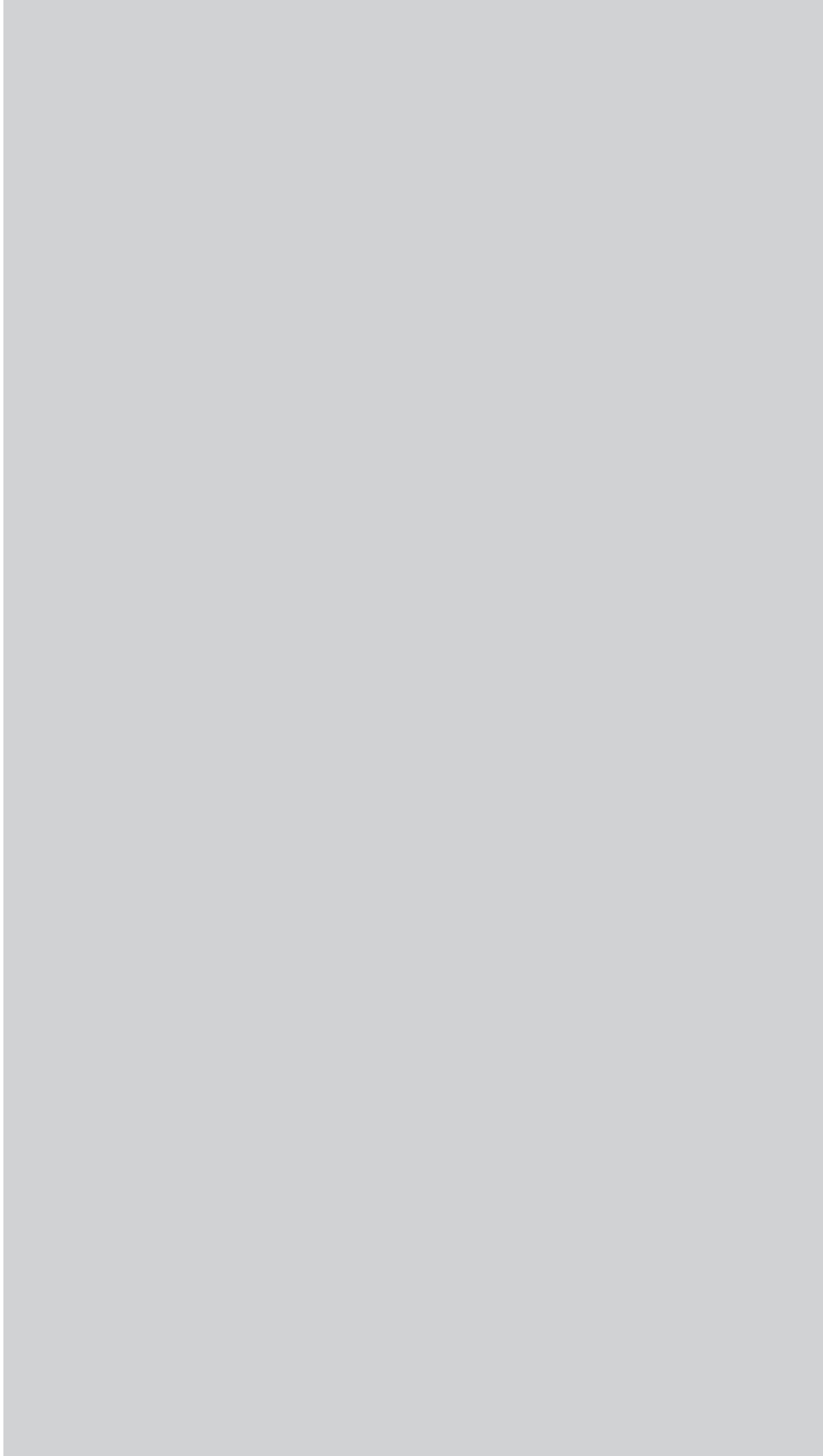
## **Making Good Communicators**

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Younger children would not be expected to tackle all the activities and might not be ready for any of those in Part 2. We recommend that teachers use the book as an à la carte menu, selecting activities according to their immediate relevance to the English curriculum and to the needs of their children. More able and older children could be offered the opportunity to sample the entire menu.

The target for any child is to be able to deal successfully with the language demands he encounters in the classroom.

# ACTIVITIES





# Part 1.1

## **Explaining and Describing**



# Who is X?

**Aim:** To understand the difference between open and closed questions. To be able to identify a person by asking closed questions.

**Suitable for:** Whole class, large group.

**Equipment/  
preparation:** None.

**Activity:** This is an adaptation of a table-top game and is an introduction to a range of speaking and listening activities. Once the children have got the hang of it, the game only takes a matter of minutes.

Select a 'chooser' or ask for a volunteer. The chooser thinks of somebody in the room but doesn't say who it is. He or she comes and stands in front of the class or group and must try to avoid looking at their chosen subject, as this would give the game away.

The rest of the children ask questions in order to discover the identity of X. The questions must be 'closed' questions, that is, answerable only by yes or no. Children to whom the answer 'no' applies must sit down. As the questioning continues, one group after another is eliminated, until only one person is left. If the questions have been effective and the answers correct, this should turn out to be X!

**Example:** Is it a boy? If the answer is yes, all the girls sit down. If the answer is no, all the boys sit down. This question immediately eliminates about half the group, but the children should be allowed to ask questions in any order they like.

Has he or she got fair hair? Those answering 'no' sit down.

Does he or she wear glasses? All the 'noes' sit down. Continue until only one person is left.

**Tips:** The game is much more difficult to explain than to play, and it is probably best just to have a trial run and sort out problems as they occur. Once the children have grasped the principles, change choosers and challenge the group to see how quickly they can identify X. If you play the game again on another occasion, can they beat their previous time?

A great deal of learning can arise out of this activity. The children will learn the difference between open and closed questions. The guessers will discover there can be killer questions such as 'Is he or she wearing a yellow jumper with elephants on it?' which might reveal the identity of X immediately.

The chooser will learn how to choose an X with the fewest possible identifying characteristics to make the identification as hard as possible and to use their skill in remembering the details of their X, so they don't have to keep looking.

# Ridiculous!

- Aim:** To be able to explain an absurdity in a picture and put it right.
- Suitable for:** Two or three groups or pairs.
- Equipment:** 'Ridiculous' pictures downloaded and printed from [www.speechmark.net](http://www.speechmark.net) – six for each group or pair. A set of the pictures and a list of acceptable answers for you (Resources, p129).
- Activity:** Tell the children you are going to show them some pictures in which something is obviously wrong. Their job is to explain what is wrong, why it makes no sense, what should be done about it and why that would make better sense. There are two, three or four points available for the answers, and you are going to keep a tally of scores for each group.
- Have a trial run with the first picture, inviting any child from the whole group to put his or her hand up to offer an explanation. Use prompts if necessary, such as: 'What is it that is wrong? Why? What would happen if ...? How would you sort it out? How would that make things better?' and let anybody else who has a hand up try to clarify or add to the explanation. When they have produced a reasonable answer, repeat it and remind the children that they need to include as much of this sort of detail as they can.
- Now play the game as a competition between groups or pairs. Choose a picture, and take a volunteer with his or her hand up from the first group. If their explanation is poor, ask if anybody else in their group can add to it or clarify it. That group carries on until you feel they have reached the best they can do, *but don't give any prompts*. Jot down explanations that you think deserve a point. Then it is the turn of someone from the second group with the next picture.
- At the end, add up the scores and identify the winning group.
- Example:** A picture of a girl using the keyboard of a laptop, wearing large padded ski gloves. A four-point answer might be as follows: She is trying to type on her keyboard wearing big ski gloves. She wouldn't be able to hit the right keys. The gloves would hit more than one key at a time. She needs to take her gloves off and then she would be able to type properly.



# Spotters

- Aim:** To be able to give a clear description of small and subtle differences between pictures.
- Suitable for:** One or more individuals, two small groups.
- Equipment/  
preparation:** Print out enough sheets of Spotters picture pairs downloaded from [www.speechmark.net](http://www.speechmark.net) for everyone to have one. Check you can spot the differences before you start! (Resources, p131)
- Activity:** Explain to the children that in every pair of pictures there are some tiny things that are different. Ask them to look at the first pair (No. 1 (a) and (b)) and see if anyone can spot the differences. Hands up. The spotters must try to explain the differences as clearly as they can. Move on to the next pair of pictures.
- If playing with groups, keep a tally of which group spots the most differences. As this activity is about explaining the differences, rather than just spotting them, give praise for good explanations. If a child is struggling, ask for another child to help clarify. If working one to one, give a model.
- Example:** Picture pair no. 1: pictures of a room. In one there is a book open on the table, in the other the book is closed and beside the settee on the floor. In one there is a budgie in a cage, in the other it is outside the cage and hiding behind the curtains. Otherwise the rooms are identical.

# Menagerie

- Aim:** To be able to describe a creature accurately enough for a child's partner to identify it.
- Suitable for:** Pairs or one child playing with the adult.
- Equipment:** Print out the menagerie sheets downloaded from [www.speechmark.net](http://www.speechmark.net), enough to have one for every child playing (Resources, p134).
- Preparation:** Something to act as a barrier between each pair, such as a box. This needs to be tall enough to screen the players' actions from each other.
- Activity:** Divide the children into pairs, and seat the pairs opposite each other at small tables with a barrier in between them. The tables need to be as far apart as possible to avoid copying. Give every child a copy of the menagerie picture grids. The paired children decide who will be the 'describer' and who will be the 'guesser'. Decide how much time you are going to allow them (say three or four minutes) and start them off. The 'describer' chooses a picture from his or her sheet, puts a circle round it, a number 1 beside it and describes it as carefully as he or she can. Their partner must try to identify it. When they think they know, they circle their choice and also put a number 1 beside it. They move on to another creature and continue in this way until either the 'describer' has used up all the pictures or time runs out. At this point they lift the barrier and compare their results. They count their score by putting a cross or a tick in the box by the picture number.
- Tip:** It may be useful to suggest to the 'describer' that they can help the 'guesser' by saying whether their chosen creature is, for example, a mammal or a reptile, and also by saying whether it is domesticated or wild. (Vocabulary needed: mammal, reptile, insect, fish, bird, wild, domesticated. For older children you might include aquatic, arboreal, terrestrial.) They can speed up their scoring by producing a clue that might give the game away immediately, such as 'it has a hump' (camel).

# Baffled!

- Aim:** To give the longest possible description of an object before your audience guesses the item correctly.
- Suitable for:** Individual children pitting their wits against a group.
- Equipment/  
preparation:** None except a list of suggested objects, biro and paper for taking notes.
- Activity:** An activity for a single child pitting his or her wits against the class or group. Explain what the contestant has to do and give an example, showing how descriptive words can be used without giving the game away. Then set the contestant off, and keep a tally of how many descriptive words or groups of words he or she can fit in before the item is guessed correctly. Any member of the 'audience' can put their hand up when they think they have got it.
- Example:** A deep freeze: It is made of metal. It is found in the kitchen. It is usually white. It runs on electricity. It has a light inside. It stores food. It can keep food fresh for weeks or months. (The clinching descriptive phrase needs to be left until there is nothing else left to say.)
- Some other objects: a jumbo jet, a submarine, a racehorse, a helter-skelter, a landline telephone, a skateboard, ice skates, a double-decker bus, a caravan. a remote-controlled toy car, a kite.

# Crisis

- Aim:** To be able to give an accurate description of a crisis scenario, giving relevant details of place, time and the help needed.
- Suitable for:** One or more small groups, about four or five to a group.
- Equipment/ preparation:** Scenario pictures downloaded and printed from [www.speechmark.net](http://www.speechmark.net), enough for each group to have at least two; paper and pencil or biro for a scribe in each group (Resources, p135).
- Activity:** Divide the students into their groups. Give each lot their first scenario. The groups need to choose a scribe to keep a note of any details they decide upon. They are going to pretend that they are phoning for help from the crisis scene shown in their picture. They need to give the rescuers as many details as possible: exactly where the crisis is, if anyone is hurt and if so how badly, what time they are phoning, how many people are involved, what the weather is doing if that is relevant. Give them about five minutes to decide who to phone and what they need to tell the rescuers, and the scribes write their suggestions down. Then one of each group, using their scribe's notes, 'phones' the adult, who takes the part of the rescuer. Other members of the group can chip in to jog their memory or add ideas. The adult can ask questions as necessary.
- There is no right or wrong or scoreable result for this activity, but the groups should be encouraged and prompted until the 'rescuer' feels they have all the information they need. Groups could be applauded after their efforts.
- Example:** A car has broken down somewhere out in the country. It is night, and the car is just by a road junction. There is a baby on board who is crying. Rescue is needed from the AA or RAC or Green Flag.

# Health and safety inspector

- Aim:** To be able to describe how you would organize a project, taking safety into account.
- Suitable for:** Two small groups.
- Equipment/  
preparation:** None. You just need to have decided what project(s) you are going to set the groups. There is a list of some suggestions below to start with.
- Activity:** Give each group their project, and explain what they have to do. Give them a few minutes to discuss how they plan to go about it. Then ask for a spokesperson from each group to report on their plan. Each group needs to come up with at least two health and/or safety precautions. The adult, as the health and safety inspector, makes a note of any precautions mentioned. When a group has finished describing their plan, the other group is asked whether or not they feel the project would be in safe hands. The inspector should then challenge any glaring omissions, elicit the precautions they might have taken and encourage discussion.
- Example:** Giving a three year old his or her first swimming lesson. Health and safety considerations might include where this should happen – for example, sea or swimming pool? Shallow or deep end? What sort of buoyancy aids should be used? Should the instructor be in the water or on the edge? How long should the lesson be? Should the child wear goggles?
- Other examples: painting upstairs windows, cutting a branch off a tall tree, teaching someone to ride a bike, teaching someone to drive a car, exploring a cave, going on a trek into the mountains, going fossil hunting, planning a bonfire-night party.

# Coach

- Aim:** To be able to explain the equipment, aim and rules of play of a table-top game.
- Suitable for:** Small group, not more than eight.
- Equipment/  
preparation:** A pack of Snap cards, prompts written out on slips of paper and numbered.
- Activity:** Three children take the main roles (one 'coach' and two 'players'), while the rest of the children are the 'supporters' and stand around the table to watch the action. Tell the 'coach' that he or she has to explain to the 'players' how to play Snap. The coach needs to be a child who is familiar with the game. Tell the two players that even if they know – or think they know – how Snap is played, they must pretend they don't, and only do exactly what the 'coach' tells them. If they don't understand his or her instruction, or it doesn't make sense, they must ask him or her for clarification. You are going to give the coach prompt slips to help him or her identify the main information needed.
- Put the pack of cards on the table, and give the 'coach' the first prompt slip. ((1) Describe what you need to play this game.) Once the players agree that they have got a clear idea (ie that this is a pack of cards which have several sets of identical pictures), you can give the coach the second prompt. ((2) What is the object of the game? How will you know when somebody has won?) Work through the remaining prompts. If the coach has been successful, the two players will end up being able to start playing a proper Snap game.
- Tips:** The success of this game depends very much on the adult taking a mentoring role. You can intervene a little or a lot, depending on the competence of the participants. You may want them to see the disastrous effects of poor explanation or poor understanding, or you may want to engineer a successful outcome. You can also allow intervention from the 'supporters' group if you wish. Discussion is to be encouraged, and the activity may result in frustration, laughter or both!
- To repeat this activity, you need some more games in reserve in your cupboard or to allow children to bring some in from home. Games which are relatively easy to explain are Pelmanism (pairs), Dominoes, Ludo and Snakes and Ladders.
- For Year 6, harder games to teach are Draughts, Beggar My Neighbour, Old Maid, Racing Demon, Happy Families (minimum three players needed for this), Chess and Monopoly. No prompts are given at this level.

# Emotion web

- Aim:** To be able to match an appropriate feeling to a scenario.
- Suitable for:** Two pairs or small groups.
- Equipment/  
preparation:** Pictures, matching word webs and unfinished sentences available online at [www.speechmark.net](http://www.speechmark.net), enough for both pairs or groups to have an identical set of at least three (Resources, p137).
- Activity:** Give the pairs or groups their pictures with accompanying webs and incomplete sentences. The groups work together to fit the most appropriate emotion word from the web into the gaps in the sentences. When they have all finished, ask for a spokesperson from each group to choose a picture and read out their sentence. Do the other groups agree? Does anyone think there was a better word? There is not always a right or wrong answer.
- Example:** Picture of three or four tiny puppies tumbling about in a basket.  
Web: annoying/amusing/amazing/astonishing. Sentence: It was endlessly ..... to watch the new puppies rolling about and falling over each other in their basket.

# Editor's choice

**Aim:** To be able to choose adjectives and adverbs appropriate to a particular scenario.

**Suitable for:** Pairs or small groups of three or four.

**Equipment/  
preparation:** Choose some scenarios available online at [www.speechmark.net](http://www.speechmark.net), with their accompanying dictionaries. Print enough copies for each group and for you. Print a copy of the Editor's choices for yourself. A pencil for each pair or group (Resources, p142).

**Activity:** Explain to the children that they are journalists. They are writing a report for their editor on the subjects which you will give them. They can choose some suitable words to include in their reports by looking at the minidictionaries you have supplied. They need to choose four, and they must hurry, as the paper will be going to press very shortly. Some of the words in the dictionaries are completely unsuitable, some are debatable. One of the pair or group must put a circle around the words they choose. Give them the first scenario.

When they have finished, they are going to compare their word selections with the ones the editor has compiled. How similar are they? If more than one pair or group is playing, whose list most closely matches the editor's one? Ask which words they have included which are not on the editor's list, and discuss the rights and wrongs of their decisions. Repeat with another scenario.

## Example

SCENARIO 1	DICTIONARY
A light daytime snowfall	Soft(ly), feathery, magical, dense, heavy, delicate, smothering, silent(ly), blanketing, isolating, damp, light(ly), bright, frightening

Editor's choice: softly, feathery, delicate, magical.



# Playpark designer

- Aim:** To be able to use vocabulary of shape, size, distance and perspective.
- Suitable for:** Two small groups.
- Equipment/  
preparation:** Picture of a proposed playpark available online at [www.speechmark.net](http://www.speechmark.net), for the 'planning group' (Resources, p144).
- Activity:** Explain to the players that one of the groups has drawn up a design for a new playpark. Give this group a copy of the proposed playpark. They now have to sell the idea and the plan to the other group, the council. The planners mustn't just give a list of the items in the proposed park but describe them. For example, they need to say that the pond is circular, not just that there is a pond, and give details of the tree house so as to stir the council members' enthusiasm. They also need to convince them of the benefits children will derive from this particular facility. Get the members of the planning group to talk about various items in turn. At the end, will the council go ahead with the project?