

Guess What?

At the zoo

.....

1. lions
2. elephants
3. monkeys
4. zebras
5. cages
6. bears

+

In the sky

.....

clouds
birds
the sun
the moon
airplanes
rainbow

+

At the beach

.....

sand
seashells
umbrellas
towels
bathing suits
waves

+

ABOUT GUESS WHAT?



Guess What? cards can be used for a variety of games in the classroom to provide an opportunity for students to practice making descriptions in English and to learn English vocabulary. *Guess What?* is a great form of fluency practice because success depends not on absolute accuracy, but rather on getting a message across to eager listeners. *Guess What?* also prompts quick exchanges as players rapidly make guesses and learn whether or not their guesses are correct.



An example of a *Guess What?* card appears on the right. Each card contains a topic, such as “At the zoo,” and below the topic is a list of six related words.

Activate: Games for Learning American English comes with a set of 24 *Guess What?* cards. These cards contain two levels of topics and vocabulary items: the side with + in the bottom right corner contains basic, common topics and vocabulary words, while the side with ++ contains more advanced topics and vocabulary words. A lower-level course will benefit from playing with the basic set of cards, whereas upper intermediate and advanced groups can enjoy playing with a mix of both sets.

As teachers and students become familiar with these sample cards, they will find that it is easy to create more cards to highlight vocabulary as it is studied in class.

STUDENTS' ROLE



Guess What? should usually be played by small groups of students so that each group member gets a sufficient amount of speaking and listening practice during the game. The exact number in each group is not important, but typically, groups of 3–5 students work well.

In a game of *Guess What?* each player in the group takes on the role of either the **Describer** or one of the **Guessers**. The Describer is responsible for describing a word on the card so that the other members in the group can guess what it is. The other members in the group are the Guessers. The role of Describer rotates with each new card.

TEACHER'S ROLE

Before Play

Teachers should demonstrate the games—usually more than once—because demonstrations are often more effective than instructions. The teacher should begin by demonstrating one round of the game with the entire class. It works best if the teacher starts as the Describer; the rest of the class will be Guessers. The teacher first tells the class the topic and then describes the first word on the card without using any of the other words on the card (including the title). When a student guesses that word, the teacher moves on to the second word. One entire card can be completed this way to ensure that students understand how to play.

A second demonstration using a student in the role of the Describer can really clarify how the game is played. Two to four students can be invited to the front of the class to play one round. One student is the Describer, and the others are Guessers. The students can complete an entire round (describe and guess all of the words on one card). Not only do students see again how the game is played, but they also see the group formation that they will use.

Guess What? should always be played in small groups (3–5 students per group). If the whole class plays the game together, with one student (or the teacher) as Describer and the rest of the class as Guessers, there is very little speaking practice. In small groups, more students have a chance to be the Describer, and therefore, they have more practice making descriptions in English. In a small group, students tend to be more engaged because it is possible for each player to speak and listen to each other. In addition, small groups allow students who are shy or nervous about talking in front of the whole class to participate more comfortably in small groups.

To prepare the classroom to play *Guess What?*, the teacher should make sure that each group of students has a place to sit where they can easily hear each other, but not be interrupted by conversations in other groups. Have students sit in a circle so they are all facing each other. Each group should be given a set of 5–10 *Guess What?* cards so that they can move on to a new card quickly. (*Guess What?* is a faster-paced game than *Picture This*.) If this is not possible, however, the teacher can provide a basket, bag, box, or other container to hold the entire set of *Guess What?* cards and place it in a central location in the room. Then the students can get up and get a new card when they have finished with a card.

The teacher should select a set amount of time to use *Guess What?* cards in the language classroom. Since students will be working in small groups and can exchange *Guess What?* cards once they have completed a card, each group can work at its own pace. It is not necessary for all groups to finish a card at the same time. Instead, the teacher should choose an amount of time to play *Guess What?*, and students can use as many cards as they need during that time. Teachers should end the game after the specified amount of time has passed.



During Play

Teachers may need to emphasize that students should not show the contents of their card to others. For many students, this will be the first time playing a game that requires them to keep information secret, and they may be unaccustomed to the process. Teachers may also need to remind players that they should not use the words on the card (including the title) in their descriptions.

While walking around the classroom and visiting each group, the teacher should remind the groups to exchange their card for a new one when they finish a card so that another group can use that card.

After Play

When the game is finished, or after the specified amount of time, the teacher can review for a few minutes. Teachers can focus on the grammatical patterns and their meanings in the sentences that the students produce. The teacher should collect the materials and store them for their next use.

Depending on the level of the students, some teachers may wish to offer translations on the card. In a classroom in which all students share a common language, the teacher can write translations of the words on the card next to them. Students can be enlisted to do this as an activity as well. Without the translations, Describers sometimes show the card to the Guessers when they do not recognize a word, and that puts an end to the card's usefulness.

