



Zooming with Zest



By Ruth Gilmore Ingulsrud

How can teaching online be optimized for young children?

5 tips of energy, imagination, and direct engagement

Holding the attention of a young child is hard enough in person—but what about online? Practically impossible . . . unless you have a few tricks up your sleeve or at least close at hand. During this extended pandemic, many teachers have had to engage their learners through the lens of a computer camera. Jesus said, “Let the little children come unto me and do not hinder them” (Matt. 19:14 NIV). While nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, I’m sure that lots of kids have felt hindered during this past year. Close connections and personal contact are so important, especially with little ones. Many teachers have also felt sorely hindered over the past year as they struggle to teach digitally.

Zooming through the pandemic could have been a slog for me too, but a few tricks and techniques have added “zest to the Zoom.” Regardless of the limitation of communicating through a camera, my students have tried to feed potato chips to a pig, **5** songs with a sheep, and danced **5** a dog. It helps to have a menagerie on hand in the form of puppets, but a bag of props and toys can also add zest to your own Zoom.

Using the camera frame to your advantage

The frame of a camera may seem limiting, but it can also become the proscenium, or the doorway to a theater, with you as director. Create magic with a bit of acting and some props that suddenly appear and disappear just out of the range of the computer’s camera.

Here’s one example: When students ask for a certain puppet, I can call out, off screen, for that puppet to join me.

“Hamlet! Hamlet the Pig, where are you? We are going to do our potato chip pronunciation game!” Feigning impatience, I move off-camera to look for my wayward pig. The student hears my voice, now softer and farther away, calling. Enter the pugnacious piglet, holding the bag of chips. The student can see the pig, but not the teacher. The pig disappears, and the teacher reappears. “Have you seen my pig? Oh great! Now my bag of chips is gone.” The student may or may not tell on the purloining porcine puppet, but the learner is engaged and looking forward to the next act of the lesson plan.

Other camera tips

Set your computer on a box to keep the camera at eye level. Make sure your sound is working and adjust your lighting. Your face should be well lit from in front. Having a window directly behind you doesn’t work so well. The view can distract, and while lighting the back of your head may give you a holy halo, your face will be on the dark side.

I’ve taught English lessons for over a year in orphanages and in private lessons via Zoom and have learned a few things that have helped me capture and hold the attention of my young students.

My top **5** tips:

- **Check your tech**—Before you begin your lesson, make sure that you have a strong internet connection, a functioning microphone, and good lighting.
- **Teach standing up**—Not only is this healthier for you, it is more engaging for the learner. It gives you the freedom to move towards and

away from the camera. A changing perspective is more interesting. It also encourages your students to get up and move as well. Movement stimulates the brain, keeps your blood flowing, and helps improve your energy level.

- **Keep props close at hand**—Be aware of your own screen along with the screens of your students. Be ready to bring an interesting prop or illustration into view to spice up your lesson.
- **Connect with individuals**—Noticing and addressing each student is important for their self-esteem, and it helps to keep them engaged. Other students enjoy watching the interactions as well. We are all creatures of a creative and loving God, and we thrive on healthy interpersonal connections.
- **Enjoy creative breaks**—Positive emotions promote learning and foster enthusiasm. Students appreciate a healthy dose of play especially during longer study sessions. Take a dance break, or play a song that encourages action. Have a silly conversation with a puppet. Talk to the student’s pet. Having fun together is a great way to build relationships and reinforce deep and lasting learning. **JH**

Check out a sample JOEE Lesson here: <https://youtu.be/eInm4IEiVY>

Joyful Opportunity English Education: JOEE.joee.jp
Children’s Message Resources: Kidsermons.com
Science Poetry for Kids: BelovedOfBeasts.com

Images submitted by author

Ruth Gilmore Ingulsrud (US) heads up JOEE.joee.jp, which brings lively English lessons to kids **5** hanages. She maintains a YouTube channel and several websites for children and Christian education.