

The *Splurg* game

Language level:	Upper-intermediate (B2)
Learner type:	Teens; Adults
Time:	45 minutes
Activity:	Reading; Speaking
Topic:	April fools day; Agriculture
Language:	* Modals of deduction * Uncountable nouns * Noun collocations
Materials:	Video; Slideshow



Preparation, materials and equipment

1. For this activity, you will need a famous April Fool's day report that was broadcast by the BBC in 1957: ***Panorama Spaghetti Trees***. To access the video clip on YouTube, click on the following link:

<http://bit.ly/7VRqEN>

2. You will also need an accompanying PDF slideshow which you can download from Lessonstream at:

<http://bit.ly/dZ3k3j>

Decide how you are going to display the clip and slideshow in class. Possibilities include:

- Laptop or desktop (good for small groups)
- Computer, projector + screen
- iPhone or other mobile device (good for one-to-ones/small groups)

Don't forget the loudspeakers

If you don't have Internet access in class, you could download or 'capture' the video from YouTube. Use www.savevid.com or a similar site. Note, however, that in doing so, you will be breaching YouTube's Terms of Use.

Lesson plan

1. The *splurg* game is very simple. Basically, a *splurg* can be anything and anything can be a *splurg*. Explain this to your students and read out the following example:
 - *Splurgs get lost easily.*
 - *Splurgs fly through the air but they don't have wings.*
 - *Splurgs are small and white.*
 - *People like to hit splurgs with sticks.*
 - *People try to put splurgs into holes.*

In this case, *splurgs* are golf balls. Note that you can show students the above *splurg* sentences on Slide 1 of the slideshow. To clarify the puzzle, there is also a picture of a golf ball on Slide 2.

2. Tell students that you have another *splurg* puzzle for them. Go to Slide 4 and read out the first paragraph.

The last two weeks in March are an anxious time for the **splurg** farmer. There's always the chance of a late frost, which while not entirely ruining the crop, generally impairs the flavour and makes it difficult for him to obtain top prices in world markets. But now these dangers are over and the **splurg** harvest goes forward.

3. Ask students if they can suggest where the text came from. Ask them to suggest what *splurg* might be and write down ideas on the board. Also explain any unknown vocabulary. disappearance
4. Continue to ask for more suggestions as you read out the next three paragraphs. Write all ideas on the board.

Splurg cultivation here in Switzerland is not, of course, carried out on anything like the tremendous scale of the Italian industry. Many of you, I'm sure, will have seen pictures of the vast **splurg** plantations in the Po Valley. For the Swiss, however, it tends to be more of a family affair.

Another reason why this may be a bumper year lies in the virtual disappearance of the **splurg** weevil – the tiny creature whose depredations have caused much concern in the past.

After picking, the **splurg** is laid out to dry in the warm Alpine sun. Many people are often puzzled by the fact that **splurg** is produced at such uniform length. But this is the result of many years of patience and endeavour by plant breeders who have succeeded in producing the perfect **splurg**.

5. Close the slideshow. Write the following on the board:

Splurg _____

Ask your students to recall as many collocations as possible from the text. Write suggestions on the board and then check answers by looking at the text slides a second time.

Answers

- *Splurg farmer*
- *Splurg harvest*
- *Splurg cultivation*
- *Splurg plantations*
- *Splurg weevil*
- *Splurg picker* (not in text but implied)
- *Splurg tree* (not in text but implied)

6. Now ask students to consider whether *splurg* is a countable or uncountable noun.

Note that it must be uncountable or the last paragraph would read: ... *the splurgs are laid out to dry; splurgs are produced at such uniform length*. Demonstrate this with the following examples:

- *Many people are often puzzled by the fact that asparagus is produced at such uniform length* (uncountable).
- *Many people are often puzzled by the fact that carrots are produced at such uniform length* (countable).

7. Go back to all the suggestions that were written on the board during steps 3 and 4. Ask students to consider them one by one and ask questions that involve language of deduction and elimination (*could be, might be, can't be, probably isn't*, etc). For example:

- *Someone said it might be asparagus. Could it be asparagus?*
- *No, it can't be asparagus because that isn't dried in the sun.*
- *What about tomatoes? Could it be tomatoes?*
- *No, it can't be tomatoes. We are looking for an uncountable noun.*

8. Tell students the following:

"Imagine are living in the United Kingdom in 1957. You are at home watching television. You are watching a BBC programme called Panorama. Has anyone heard of it? It is the longest running current affairs documentary series and it still runs today. Anyway, this is what you see..."

9. Play the video clip
10. Ask students for an explanation. If they can't give you one, ask them what date the programme was broadcast on (Answer = 1st April).
11. Ask students if they celebrate April Fools' Day or an equivalent in their countries. Find out if they have experienced any similar media hoaxes.
12. For homework, ask students to find out more about the spaghetti tree story. In particular, ask them to find out how people reacted to the hoax.

The Panorama spaghetti tree report is believed to be one of the first times the medium of television has been used for an April Fools' Day hoax. An estimated 8 million people watched the programme and many phoned in the following day to question the authenticity of the story. Others asked for more information about spaghetti cultivation and how they could grow their own spaghetti trees.

Some viewers failed to see the funny side of the broadcast and criticised the BBC for broadcasting the report on what is supposed to be a serious factual programme.

Pasta was not an everyday food in 1950s Britain and was known mainly from tinned spaghetti in tomato sauce. It was considered to be an exotic delicacy.

References:

- Wikipedia: <http://bit.ly/gCPX7A>
- The BBC 'On this day': <http://bbc.in/1icVWo>

Comment

Rather than giving out copies of the text on paper, I have included it in a slideshow to be displayed on a projector in the classroom. Sometimes, 'heads-up' reading can be more of a social affair than 'heads down' reading. Sometimes this works well. Sometimes, students complain that they don't have a text to keep for their records – see variation below.

Variation

Don't be scared to ask students to copy the paragraphs into their notebooks (you could say that the photocopier is broken!) When a language learner copies a text word for word, there is a lot more potential for getting involved with the language and noticing aspects within it. This works especially well when there is a thinking task to accompany the copying (e.g. What is *splurg*?) On the other hand, you could give students a copy of the transcript below on page 7.

Follow ups

- Ask students to prepare their own *splurg* texts. These can be as simple or as complex as you like – anything from 3 sentences to a 300-word composition. After choosing a mystery noun (vacuum cleaners, love, goldfish, etc) students should then write their texts and give them to the teacher for marking. When they get their corrected work back, they should read their texts to the rest of the class who then have to guess what their *splurg* is (uncountable) or *splurgs* are (countable).
- Another good Panorama story to look at is the confrontation between reporter John Sweeney and the Church of scientology. For details, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientology_and_Me

Credit

I remember the splurg game from my early TEFL years. I think I got it from Jim Scrivener's *Learning Teaching* book.

Transcript

The last two weeks in March are an anxious time for the *splurg* farmer. There's always the chance of a late frost, which while not entirely ruining the crop, generally impairs the flavour and makes it difficult for him to obtain top prices in world markets. But now these dangers are over and the *splurg* harvest goes forward.

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