

# ***Tell Me More:***

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## **Student Stories & Nonfiction**

by *Juanita Weber-Shirk*

Drawings  
by *Chihiro Sakai &  
Tomomi Motomiya*

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## About the Author and Artists

**Juanita Weber-Shirk** is a lifelong TESOL/ESL/ESOL/ELL/ENL teacher and Reading teacher. She taught from K to 12 before moving to Adult Education. She currently teaches in T-S-T BOCES's Adult ESL Program in Ithaca, NY. She loves teaching, and she loves learning from her students. She thanks every student who has ever told her their stories.

**Chihiro Sakai** is from Japan. Drawing is her hobby. Professionally, she is a pharmacist. She has been studying English in Ithaca for 7 months. She likes to sleep, travel, go shopping, and talk.

**Tomomi Motomiya** is also from Japan. Drawing is her hobby, too. She studied agriculture in Japan. She has been studying English in Ithaca for 6 months. She wants to make a lot of international friends.

March 2018

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## Notes to the Teacher

This material is a distillation of what I have found to be most useful in helping English learners make sense of our seemingly chaotic reading system. This material also benefits students' speech production, particularly in pronunciation, aiding communicative competence. Error analysis of my students' spoken English has shown that missing phonemes, syllables, and incorrect stress most interrupts others' comprehension of their speech.

I have used this pre-reading format with purchased materials for a number of years. Now I have compiled stories my students told me, and nonfiction selections, with the pre-reading format I have used for years. I piloted this material for several semesters in the Adult ESL Program where I teach, and have been heartened by student responses: "Like me!", "I understand first time!", and "How my story (can) get in your book?"

Handing a reading selection to students to read "cold", to read aloud with no pre-reading development, overloads the processing centers of the brain. Readers must process visual text into sound, move the appropriate muscles to produce the sounds, process the sounds into meaning, access prior knowledge, and connect the meaning to prior knowledge all at the same time. The processing load is too heavy, and parts of the text-to-meaning process get dropped.

My children brought a full knowledge of English to the task of learning to read in English. My students don't. Your attention to pre-reading exercises will pay off greatly in the communicative competence, and reading confidence, of your students.

Pre-reading exercises will vary according to the literacy and language needs of the students you teach. Students at all levels benefit from pronunciation, stress recognition, vocabulary development, and activating prior knowledge for the materials they will read.

This material is designed to be used with high-beginner, or low-intermediate, adult English language learners. Each Reading Selection (story or nonfiction) can best be used in the following sequence of activities:

1. Introductory Questions for Conversation

The Opening Questions have a connection to a theme in the story. Write the Question (on the board or large paper) for all to see, read the question aloud, then give an example answer of your own. Students then talk in pairs, asking and answering the question. Circulate and listen in, asking prompting questions if a pair needs help to keep talking.

It is important to have students' voices be heard every day, early in the class session. This sets the expectation that everyone talks here.

## 2. Word-Pairs

This exercise trains students' ears in the specific sounds (phonemes) of English. It also trains students' eyes in the written patterns of letters that produce different phonemes.

Ask students to fold their paper vertically *on the black line*. Tell them to look at #1, to see that there are 2 words in the first box, and to listen carefully. You will say only 1 of the words. They will circle the 1 word that they hear. Say each word at least twice, the first time very slowly so they can hear the syllables (but **do not pause** between syllables). Repeat a word as often as requested.

Direct students to open (unfold) their papers, and check their answers. Wait. Then ask students if they want to hear both words in a specific pair. Students will identify which pair they want to hear by saying "4-1" meaning line 4, box 1, or "9-3" meaning line 9, box 3. You say both words in the box, so they can hear the difference. Continue until no more troublesome pairs are identified.

## 3. Syllables and Stress

Direct students to the bottom of the page. Ask them to listen for the number of syllables (3) in each word, and to write the number on the line before the word. You can clap or hold up a finger for each syllable as you read each word. (Do not pause artificially between syllables.) Some words have more than 1 correct answer. For example, "different" has 2-3 syllables, depending on pronunciation, and both are OK.

Then, go back to the first word that you numbered, and direct students to listen for the 1 syllable that is stretched longer (stressed), and to underline that syllable only. I open my arms wide on stressed syllables and put my palms together on unstressed syllables as I read the words, to slow myself down. Circulate and check that students understand what to do. Repeat for all the words in this section.

Native speakers do not speak like the dictionary! We routinely pronounce final consonants of a syllable or word as the beginning consonant of the next syllable or word. Do this consciously when counting syllables, as students are more able to hear syllables this way. Students' pronunciation is clearer when they produce syllables that begin with consonants, too. (Example: na-tio-nal vs. na-tion-al)

Ask students to work in pairs (preferably, 2 students who speak different languages). They read each word, making sure they say the "long" syllable correctly. The vowel sound in the "long" syllable is fully expressed, while vowel sounds in other syllables may be diminished or minimized.

## 4. Vocabulary

This sheet is organized according to parts of speech.

Pronounce each **noun**, asking students to tell the meaning or give an example. They can write in their language or English. You can organize the students into language-groups, if you like. When 1 student “gets it”, they can translate for all others in their language group.

Pronounce each **adjective**, and remind students that adjectives go **before nouns** in English! Say each adjective before appropriate nouns from the noun section. Ask students to tell the meaning or give an example.

(If there is an **adverb** section, remind students that adverbs usually go **after verbs** in English! Say each adverb after appropriate verbs. Ask students to tell the meaning or give an example.)

Read each **verb**, asking students to say the past or present verb tense that is missing. For example, if students read “are”, they write “were”. If students read “saw”, they write “see”. Ask students to give an example for each verb (past **or** present, not both).

#### 5. Drawings

Ask students, “What do you see in Picture 1?” Continue through all 8 pictures. Especially praise use of the story’s vocabulary. With a more vocal class, ask pairs to talk together about what they see in the 8 pictures. Circulate and listen in.

#### 6. Reading

Before children learn to read, we read to them. As children begin to learn to read, they read aloud to themselves. Eventually they read silently to themselves. Listen for that magical moment when your classroom falls silent as the last of the murmuring voices moves inside a student’s own head. It gives me shivers.

Read the Selection aloud **to the students**. Read slowly enough that students are able to move their mouths along with your reading. Students at this level process oral language more slowly, and need time to connect what they **hear** to what they **see** in print. One trick professional speakers use to slow down (without inserting “ummm” or “errrr”, or putting robotic pauses between words) is to stretch out the vowel sounds in words. Try it!

Then, students read the Selection **to themselves**. Tell them that their job is to **understand** this English. Comprehension is the focus when students read silently, or quietly, to themselves. Do not skip this step! This is brain-time!

When they are ready, students read aloud **to a partner**. Ask students to look around for another student who is ready, too. They can walk to any corner of the room to read together. Their job is to speak this English clearly. Can the listener understand? The listener’s job is to correct mispronunciations. Partners switch roles.



## 7. Questions

Yes-No questions: Students think about the story. They check the Yes box if the sentence agrees with the story. They check the No box if the sentence disagrees with the story. (Nonfiction selections have True-False boxes, to introduce academic language for the same thing.)

What/Who/Where/When/Why questions: Students answer according to the information in the story. Full sentences are not necessary. The answer should be complete for a *listener* to understand.

Note: English question words differ very little from each other in comparison to question words in other languages. Students need a lot of practice in hearing English question words and answering the question *that was asked!*

Student pairs work together, one reading aloud and one answering orally. Then, they switch roles for fluency practice. Encourage the listeners to lay down their papers when they answer the questions, to focus on listening/thinking/answering.

**Talk about** topic is for additional conversation in pairs or small groups. For the students who finish quickly, encourage continued conversations for more practice.

## 8. 2nd drawing / Re-telling

Students re-tell the story **in their own words** to a *new* partner. Drawings can be used to prompt the retelling. Retelling is difficult. Encourage students to use their own English (memorization is **not** the goal).

- 1st Homework: **Tell** someone about this story (someone not in our class), for **speaking** practice. Do **not read** it to them.
- 2nd Homework: **Read** the story to someone, for **reading** practice.

## 9. [Optional] Drawing / Writing / Matching Captions (after Reading)

- a. Give large newsprint, folded 3 times (into 8ths), to students in pairs
- b. Pairs talk about which part of the story will be in each of the 8 pictures
- c. Students put numbers 1-8 in the story to indicate which part of the story will be in which picture
- d. Student-pairs draw 8 storyboards
- e. Give 8 blank cards to the student-pairs
- f. Students write 1 sentence per card per storyboard
- g. Hang the drawings around the room
- h. Students leave their (scrambled) sentence-cards with the drawing
- i. Students rotate to another pair's drawings, pick up sentence cards, and match each sentence to a storyboard box

Extension: When you want students to tell their own stories, give them 8-panel sheets of paper to draw their stories → tell their stories → write their stories

### Opening Questions (before each chapter)

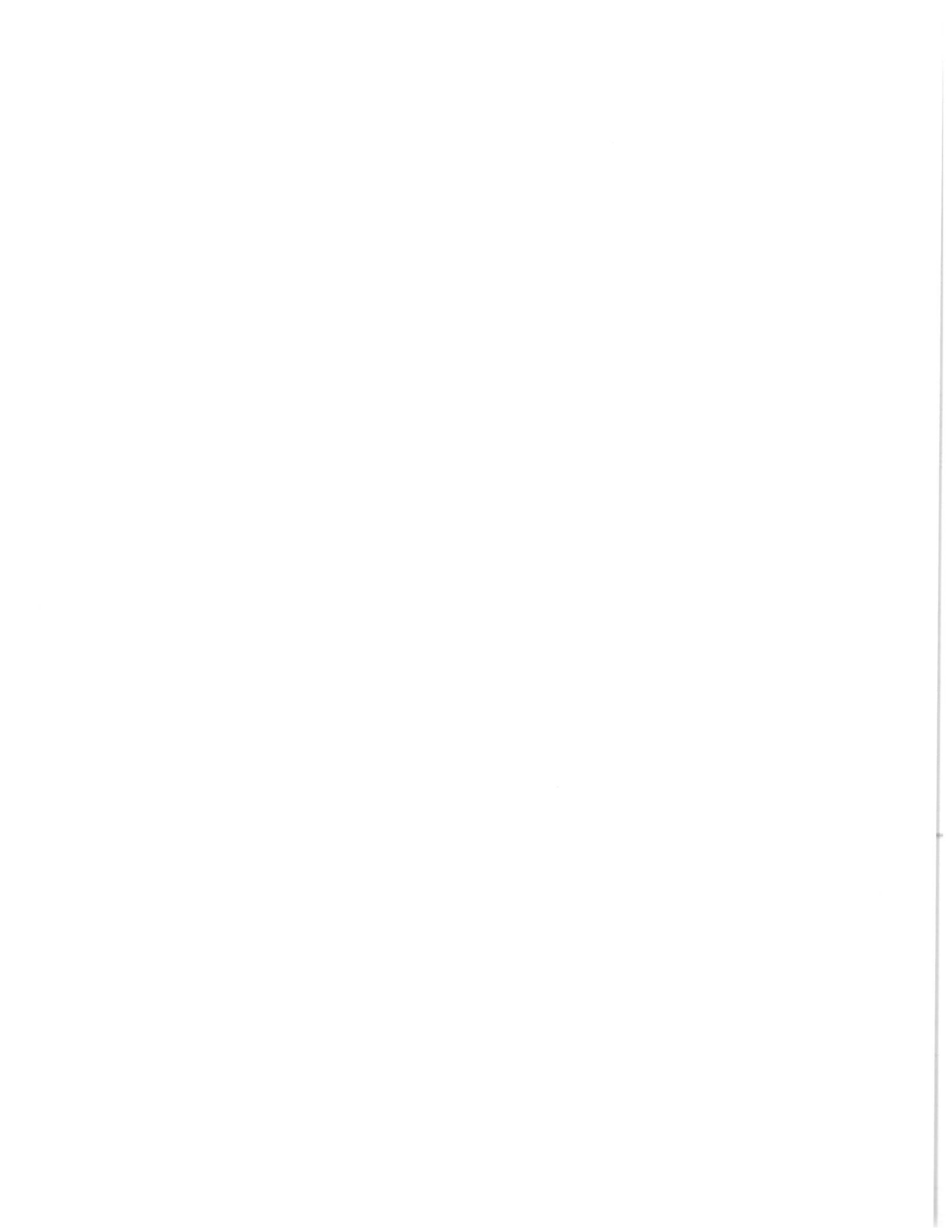
1. **When** you were a child, **where** did you live? In that place, **do people go fishing**? If yes, **where** do people catch fish?
2. What is a **driver's** license? What is a **fishing** license? Tell anything you know about fishing licenses.
3. Who has a **garden**? What do you grow? What animals like to eat your garden plants? What do you do to keep animals out of your garden?
4. **Where** is the Amazon? **What** is the Amazon? **Why** is the Amazon important to the world?
5. What are **ducks**? What do ducks look like? What do ducks eat? Where can you see ducks?
6. **Poultry** is the name for birds that people eat for meat. What birds do you think are in this group? What poultry do you eat?
7. What are **peacocks**? What do peacocks look like? What do they eat? Where can you see peacocks?
8. What do you know about bird **feathers**? How do feathers help birds? How do people use bird feathers?
9. Did you ever see an animal eating YOUR food? What did you do? What did the animal do?
10. What are **skunks**? What do skunks look like? What are skunks famous for? What do you know about mammals?
11. Who is a **smart** woman you know? How do you know she is smart? Who is a **strong** woman you know? How do you know she is strong?
12. What is a **landlord**? Do you have a landlord? What do you do when something breaks in your house?
13. Did the **police** ever **stop** a car (when you were in the car)? What happened? Why did the police stop the car?

14. What should you do when police stop your car? Do you think the police are afraid? If yes, what do you think the police are afraid about?
15. Did you ever **lose** something important? What happened? Did you ever find it again?
16. Did you ever **find** something that is not yours? What did you do?
17. Are you **honest**? Do you tell the truth? How did you learn this?
18. What does it mean to “**forgive**”? Do you forgive people, after they do something bad to you? How did you learn this?
19. How do you learn **new** words? What do you do to remember new words? What works the best for you?

Unit 1:

People and

Animals



**Listening Pairs:** Each pair of words differs by only 1 sound or syllable. Listen carefully! Circle the word you hear.

(Fish in the Streets)  
**Fold your paper back along the black line!**

1. in on	rainy runny	country county	season session	1. in-rainy-country-season
2. a little a lot	something sometimes	match much	came come	2. a lot-sometimes-much-come
3. eat out	of off	liver river	waiter water	3. out-of-river-water
4. couple cover	stress streets	flesh fish	easier easy	4. cover-streets-fish-easier
5. them then	cash catch	all are	day they	5. then-catch-are-day
6. on one	went when	were where	fiend friend	6. one-when-were-friend
7. Cam Can	dog duck	lucky lucky	went when	7. Cam-dog-lucky-when
8. eat it	barked parked	found pound	ran run	8. it-barked-found-ran
9. bag big	fifth fish	did died	want went	9. big-fish-did-want
10. net not	gate get	galled growled	should showed	10. not-get-growled-showed
11. teeth tooth	do to	necks next	disappointed disappointing	11. teeth-front-next-disappointing

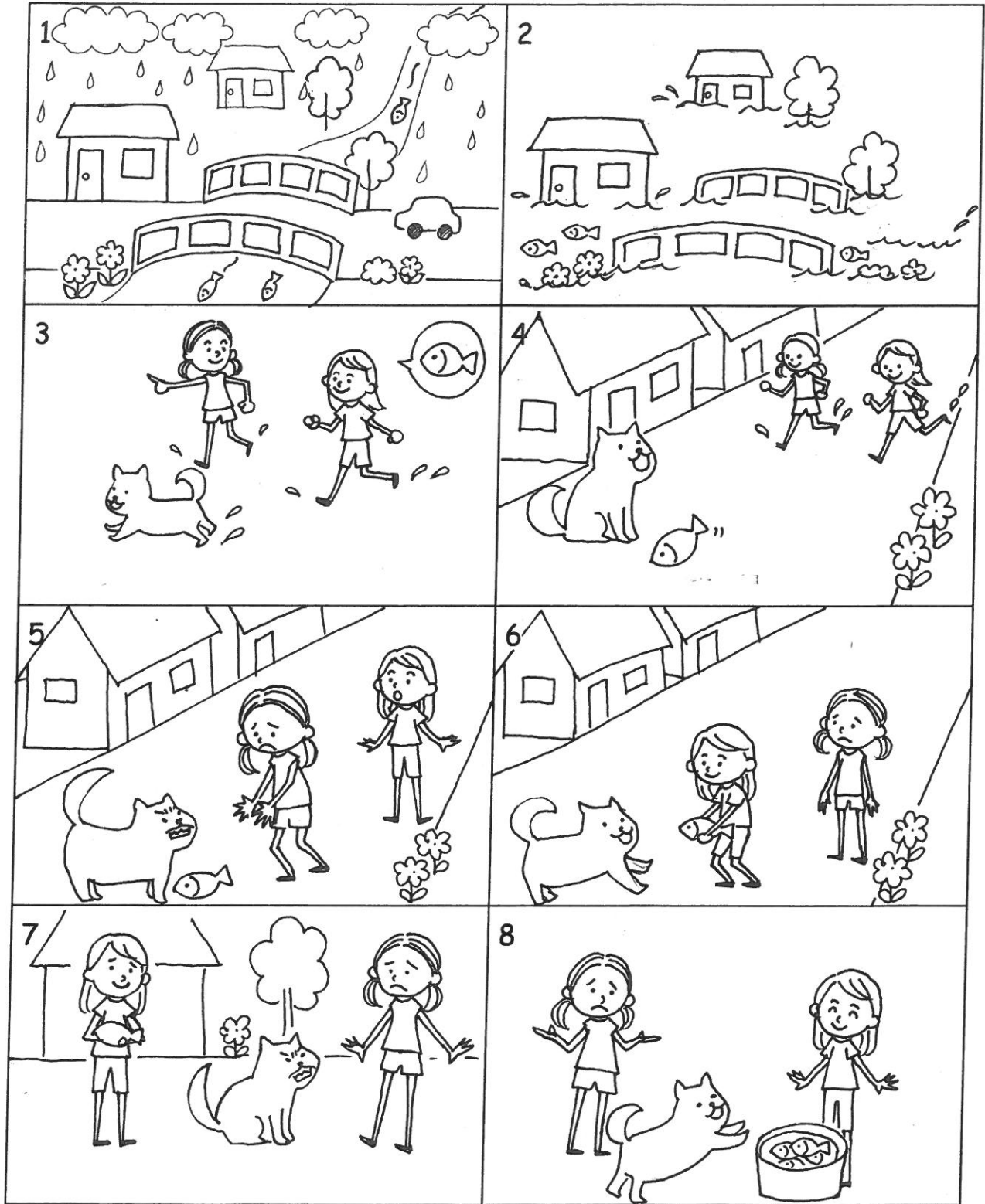
Write the number of syllables. Then, underline the 1 syllable that is stressed.

<u>2</u> country	__rivers	__wanted		
<u>2</u> rainy	__covers	__growled		
__season	__easier	__snapped		
__sometimes	__Lucky	__happened		
__water	__fishing	__disappointing		

## Fish in the Streets

<b>nouns</b> → names of things	<b>verbs</b> → doing something, or being
1. country	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <span><u>EVERY DAY</u></span> <span><u>PAST</u></span> </div> 1. it rains
2. seasons	2. comes
3. rivers	3. covers
4. streets	4. catch
5. fish	5. <span style="float: right;">were</span>
6. friend	6. <span style="float: right;">went</span>
7. dog	7. <span style="float: right;">barked</span>
8. teeth	8. <span style="float: right;">found</span>
<b>adjectives</b> → more information about the noun	9. <span style="float: right;">ran</span>
9. rainy	10. want
10. easier	11. <span style="float: right;">growled</span>
11. big	12. <span style="float: right;">showed</span>
12. same	13. <span style="float: right;">got</span>
13. next	14. <span style="float: right;">happened</span>
14. good	15. <span style="float: right;">was</span>
15. disappointing	

Use the Vocabulary words to talk about these pictures. What do you see?



Tomomi M.



## Fish in the Streets

In my country, in the rainy season, it rains a lot. Sometimes it rains so much that the water comes up out of the rivers. Sometimes the water covers the streets. Sometimes fish come into the water on the streets. Then, the fish are easier to catch.

One day when the fish were in the streets, I went “fishing” on my street with my friend (Cam), and my dog (Lucky). Lucky barked when it found a big fish. Cam and I ran to catch the fish.

Lucky wanted me to get the fish. Lucky did not want Cam to get the fish. Lucky growled and showed its teeth to Cam. I got the fish.

The same thing happened when Lucky found the next fish. And the next fish. And the next. It was a good fishing day for me. It was a disappointing day for Cam.

Thuy, Vietnam

Yes	No	Think about the story!
		1. In my country, it rains a lot.
		2. Every day the water comes up out of the rivers.
		3. Sometimes the water covers the houses.
		4. Sometimes fish come into the water on the streets.
		5. The fish are difficult to catch.
		6. I went fishing with my brother Cam.
		7. My dog Lucky went fishing, too.
		8. Lucky ate all the fish.
		9. Lucky wanted Cam to catch the fish.
		10. It was a disappointing fishing day for me.

Ask your partner these questions. Listen to each answer! (Is it correct?)

**What?** → asks about **something (a noun)**

1. What comes up out of the rivers?
2. What covers the streets?
3. What comes into the water on the streets?
4. What did Thuy and Cam try to catch?
5. What barked at Cam?

**Who?** → asks about **people**

6. Who went fishing in the street?
7. Who got the first fish?
8. Who got the next fish?
9. Who had a good day?
10. Who had a disappointing day?

**(Talk)** Tell about a good day, or a disappointing day, you had.

Use the drawings to remember and tell the story to someone.



Chihito

**Listening Pairs:** Each pair of words differs by only 1 sound or syllable. Listen carefully! Circle the word you hear.

(Fishing License)  
**Fold your paper back along the black line!**

1. fishing flashing	Ithaca Utica	may my	country county	1. fishing-Ithaca-my-country
2. many money	ate eat	a little a lot of	way we	2. many-eat-a lot of-we
3. any every	tame time	place please	move moved	3. any-time-place-moved
4. lake like	fails falls	river rivet	stream street	4. lake-falls-river-stream
5. ends friends	tell told	need node	lice license	5. friends-told-need-license
6. her here	boy buy	at it	Walmart Wegman's	6. here-buy-it-Walmart
7. boat bought	want went	them then	cousin custom	7. bought-went-then-cousin
8. near nor	high him	saw see	starred started	8. near-high-saw-started
9. dare there	do too	party pretty	small smile	9. there-too-pretty-small
10. please police	came come	ran run	showed snowed	10. police-came-ran-showed
11. late let	same some	wakes weeks	course court	11. let-some-weeks-court

Write the number of syllables. Then, underline the 1 syllable that is stressed.

<u>2</u> fishing	__waterfalls	__started	__anybody	__every
<u>3</u> Ithaca	__rivers	__police	__away	__explained
__country	__many	__over	__officers	__only
__any	__license	__cousin	__tickets	__different
__happy	__Walmart	__around	__licenses	__counted

## Fishing License

<b>nouns</b> → names of things	<b>verbs</b> → doing something, or being																																																
1. country	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center; border-bottom: 1px solid black;"><u>EVERY DAY</u></td> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center; border-bottom: 1px solid black;"><u>PAST</u></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">1. go</td> <td style="padding: 5px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">2. eat</td> <td style="padding: 5px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">3. fish</td> <td style="padding: 5px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">4.</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: right;">moved</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">5.</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: right;">was</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">6.</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: right;">saw</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">7.</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: right;">told</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">8. need</td> <td style="padding: 5px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">9. buy</td> <td style="padding: 5px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">10.</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: right;">went</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">11.</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: right;">bought</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">12. is</td> <td style="padding: 5px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">13.</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: right;">started</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">14.</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: right;">were</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">15.</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: right;">came</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">16.</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: right;">walked</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">17.</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: right;">looked</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">18.</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: right;">ran</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">19.</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: right;">gave</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">20.</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: right;">showed</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">21.</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: right;">said</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">22.</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: right;">explained</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">23.</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: right;">counted</td> </tr> </table>	<u>EVERY DAY</u>	<u>PAST</u>	1. go		2. eat		3. fish		4.	moved	5.	was	6.	saw	7.	told	8. need		9. buy		10.	went	11.	bought	12. is		13.	started	14.	were	15.	came	16.	walked	17.	looked	18.	ran	19.	gave	20.	showed	21.	said	22.	explained	23.	counted
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12. Walmart																																																	
13. cousin																																																	
14. police																																																	
15. ticket																																																	
16. days																																																	
17. weeks																																																	
18. court																																																	
19. store																																																	
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20. big																																																	
21. small																																																	

Draw pictures to **show** the story.

1	2
3	4
5	6
7	8

Now, use your pictures to **tell** the story to your partner.

## Fishing License

In my country, many people go fishing. We eat a lot of fish. We eat big fish and small fish. We fish any time, any place that we want to.

When I moved to Ithaca, I was happy to see the lake, the waterfalls, the rivers, and the streams. I saw many, many places to go fishing.

My friends told me, "You need a fishing license here. You can buy it at Walmart." So, I went to Walmart. I bought a fishing license.

Then, my cousin and I went to Ithaca Falls. It is a big waterfall near the high school. We saw many people fishing there. We started fishing, too. The fish were pretty small.

Some police came to Ithaca Falls. They walked over to my cousin and me. They told us, "You can't fish here." We looked around. We didn't see anybody fishing! They all ran away when they saw the police!

The police gave us tickets. We showed them our fishing licenses. They said, "A fishing license does not let you fish every day in every place."

They explained that people can fish only on some days or weeks. The OK days are different for every stream and river and lake.

The police counted our fish. They said the fish were too small. We could not take them home. We had to throw the fish back in the water.

Later, we went to City Court to pay our tickets. We each paid \$30.

After that, I don't go fishing anymore. Why? Because I don't understand the OK and not OK days. I don't want to pay more tickets.

I still eat fish. Now I buy fish at the store.

Lee Kee, Burma/Myanmar

True	False	Think about the story!
		1. In my country, we fish any time, any place.
		2. In Ithaca, I saw many places to go fishing.
		3. My friends told me about a fishing license.
		4. So, I went to Wegman's.
		5. My wife and I went to Ithaca Falls.
		6. It is a big waterfall near BOCES.
		7. The fish were pretty big.
		8. The other people fishing all ran away.
		9. Only my cousin and I got tickets.
		10. We each paid \$300.

Ask your partner these questions. Listen to each answer! (Is it correct?)

**What?** → asks about **something (a noun)**

1. What was he happy to see in Ithaca?
2. What did he do at Walmart?
3. What did he do with his cousin?
4. What did the police give him?
5. What did he do at City Court?

**Who?** → asks about **people**

6. Who goes fishing in Burma/Myanmar?
7. Who told him about fishing licenses?
8. Who gave him a ticket?
9. Who went with him to City Court?
10. Who buys fish in the store?

**(Talk)** Tell about **something you did**, and somebody told you to stop!



Draw pictures to **show** the story.

1	2
3	4
5	6
7	8

Now, use your pictures to **tell** the story to your partner.