

A Genre-Based Unit of Study: Preparing Novice Zen Buddhist Monks for Oral Storytelling in English

Mahsa Shahini

TESOL Practitioner

Macquarie University

Mahsa.shahini@students.mq.edu.au

Abstract

This report presents a genre-based unit preparing novice Zen Buddhist monks at Wat Santi temple, Chiang Mai, Thailand, for oral storytelling in English within a Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) context. Drawing on Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics and Derewianka's (2022) lexico-grammatical analysis, the unit addresses the monks' limited English and needs for the annual Zen Insight Symposium. A holistic needs analysis (Huhta et al., 2013) identified learners' necessities, lacks, and wants, guiding instruction on anecdotes and exempla, key Zen genres. Following Rothery's (1996) Teaching and Learning Cycle, learners progress through deconstruction, joint construction, and independent storytelling. The unit integrates Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles to develop linguistic, discourse, and strategic competences, enhancing fluency, confidence, and effective delivery of Zen teachings.

Keywords

Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), Genre-Based Pedagogy, Oral Storytelling, Zen Buddhist Monks, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Teaching and Learning Cycle, TESOL

Executive Summary

The unit of study presented in this report is designed to prepare a specific group of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) learners—novice Zen Buddhist monks at Wat Santi temple in Chiang Mai, Thailand—for oral storytelling in English, using a genre-based approach informed by Halliday’s (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) model and Derewianka’s (2022) lexicogrammatical genre analysis. These monks participate annually in the *Zen Insight Symposium*, where they adapt and deliver complex spiritual and ethical content to a global, multilingual audience.

The monks, all Thai L1 speakers in their twenties, have limited English proficiency (pre-intermediate level) and minimal exposure to the language outside of class. They have acquired approximately 1,000–2,000 high-frequency word families (Richards, 2001), sufficient for basic interaction. Their participation in the symposium places them in a unique LSP context: they must use English in a professional capacity, though it is not part of their daily lives (Gollin-Kies et al., 2015). Despite these limitations, their strong sense of duty to share Zen teachings with an international audience drives their motivation to improve.

To support their preparation, the temple has initiated a short-term, privately funded intensive course consisting of four three-hour sessions over two weeks, taught by a native English-speaking instructor. In order to tailor this instruction to the learners’ actual needs, a holistic needs analysis (Huhta et al., 2013) was conducted through unstructured interviews. Following Nation and Macalister’s (2010) tripartite model, the analysis revealed the monks’ necessities (delivering moral stories clearly and fluently), lacks (shyness, pronunciation issues, weak control over grammar and pragmatics), and wants (natural speech flow, intelligibility, and fluency over accuracy).

The main genre taught is oral storytelling—particularly anecdotes and exempla—which are central to Zen discourse because they convey expected behaviors and ethical principles (Droga, Humphrey & Feez, 2012). Anecdotes, as outlined by Thornbury and Slade (2006), include an orientation, a significant event, and a reaction. Exempla add a moral interpretation. The monks often combine these structures, forming hybrid narratives where elements of different genres are combined (Bhatia, 2004).

The unit's instructional tasks and materials draw on Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics framework and are shaped by Derewianka's (2022) analysis of genre-specific lexico-grammatical patterns, aiming to build learners' linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences (Canale & Swain, 1980). Key principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) are integrated throughout, including learner autonomy, collaboration, and fluency, aligning with the monks' real-world communicative needs (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The unit follows the three stages of the Teaching and Learning Cycle (Rothery, 1996). In the deconstruction stage, learners analyse a model Zen anecdote to explore its structure, lexico-grammatical patterns, and discourse-pragmatic features. During joint construction, they work with the teacher to create a new story, applying this knowledge collaboratively. In the independent construction stage, they plan and deliver their own oral anecdotes with increasing fluency and genre control. These stages also reflect the key principles of Ellis's (2002) consciousness-raising approach: noticing (becoming aware of target linguistic and discourse features), structuring (formulating and modifying hypotheses about how language works), and proceduralisation (integrating and using new language features fluently and automatically in meaningful communication).

Unit of Study (Instructional Guide)

This section first presents Stage 1: **Deconstruction** (Sessions 1–2), where learners analyse a model Zen anecdote (*The Empty Cup*) to explore its structure, key lexico-grammatical features, and pragmatic elements through listening, discussion, and guided text work (see **Appendix A** for the annotated text).

Stage 1: Deconstruction (Sessions 1–2)

1. Icebreaker Activity

Find Someone Who... (Zen Edition – Bingo Version)

1. Distribute the *Find Someone Who...* worksheet (**Appendix B**). Have learners walk around and ask each other the questions using present simple. Each peer must answer only one question. The first to complete the sheet calls “Bingo.” Play soft Zen music in the background. This draws on the **Suggestopedia method**, which emphasises a low-anxiety, stress-free learning environment to increase receptivity (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).
2. This task builds classroom rapport and activates topic-related schema (Harmer, 2015). It also involves kinaesthetic engagement, aligned with **Total Physical Response** (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

2. Listening for Gist

Visual Story Prompts and Sequencing Task

1. Building on the themes introduced in the icebreaker, move learners into the core narrative of the unit by showing six illustrations that depict key scenes from *The Empty Cup* (see **Appendix B**). Ask **closed and display questions** (e.g., “Who are they?” “What is

happening?”) to elicit key vocabulary, activate background knowledge, and reduce teacher talking time (Scrivner, 2012). Elicit and pre-teach key vocabulary (e.g., *monk*, *Zen master*, *tea*). Explain that the images relate to a Zen story. Read the story aloud while students **sequence the images** in order. Have them compare in pairs, then discuss: “What is the message of the story?”.

2. This **live listening** task promotes awareness of intonation and expression (Harmer, 2015) and supports content and structural schema activation (Helgesen, 2003). Learners also engage with the “**field**” of the text in SFL terms —learning about the what, who, where, when, and why (Derewianka, 2022).

3. Stage Awareness

Sorting Narrative Stages

1. Explain that stories often follow a structure. Elicit meanings of **orientation** (who, where, when), **remarkable event** (what happened), and **reaction/interpretation** (what was learned or felt). Provide simple examples. In pairs, students read and **sort jumbled sentences** from *The Empty Cup*—an **encoded** Zen anecdote used as a model text—into the correct stage (see **Appendix A** for the annotated version). Follow with brief pair discussions and class feedback.
2. This builds awareness of anecdotal structure (Thornbury & Slade, 2006) and supports learning through **peer checking**, which enhances interaction and reduces teacher talk time (Lee & Yu, 2016).

4. Exploring Lexico-Grammatical Features

Identifying Verbs, Participants, and Tense

1. Using the **first colour-coded version** of the story (**Appendix B**), ask students to label the **three stages**. In pairs, they discuss **action (pink)** and **saying and other verbs (blue)** using **Concept-checking questions (CCQs)** like “Are the blue ones about speaking?” to elicit that saying verbs signal perspectives and interaction, while action verbs help visualise events (Derewianka, 2022). CCQs and elicitation promote active engagement and support clear comprehension of meaning and form (Spratt et al., 2011).
2. Elicit **participants** (e.g., Nan-in, he, him) and discuss **pronouns**. Then compare verb tenses: orientation uses **past simple**, while dialogue often shifts to **present** (Derewianka, 2022). Give students a short graded text (*The Mirror*, **Appendix B**) to label verbs and participants. Follow up with group practice using a more difficult version. Have students work in groups of three. According to Scrivener (2012), small groups of three allow peer scaffolding, where more proficient learners can support their peers effectively.
3. In Session 2, show a **second colour-coded version on the smartboard** with **yellow** for describers, **green** for adverbials, and **red** for intensifiers (**Appendix B**). Ask: “What changes if these are removed?” and guide reflection on how these elements shape tone and detail. Then, in pairs, complete a **gapped anecdote** (*The Candle*), where one student reads with gaps, and the other supplies suitable describers or adverbials. One student reads the story aloud with gaps; the other guesses suitable describers or adverbials. This **read-aloud** technique helps assess whether learners can distinguish between sounds, especially in connected speech (Kelly, 2000). After noting all guesses, the class shares ideas. This

integrated task supports listening, speaking, reading, and writing, while exposing students to varied language use and giving the teacher an opportunity to monitor pronunciation and engagement (Harmer, 2015)

4. To introduce sentence structure, write three examples from the story on the board: one **simple**, two **compound** with *and*, *but*. Ask: “What joins these ideas?” Elicit **FANBOYS** conjunctions. Then give students **sentence slips** from **Link and Speak** activity (**Appendix B**) to find matching halves and say aloud using a chosen conjunction.

5. Exploring Discourse and Pragmatic Features

Fillers, Discourse Markers, and Direct Address

1. To introduce discourse and pragmatic features, begin with a **role-play**: perform a hesitant storyteller using fillers like “uh,” “so,” and “you know.” Ask students what stood out—guiding them to notice these natural features of spoken language. Write two plain sentences from the story (e.g., “He poured the tea” and “You can’t learn like this”) and ask, “How do people really say this when they’re thinking?” Elicit more natural versions and group responses into *fillers* and *discourse markers*. Explain how these features help maintain flow and spontaneity. Then, shift focus to the **interpretation stage**. Display the line, “Only then can *you* really learn something new,” and ask what effect “you” has. Elicit that it creates direct address and makes the listener feel personally involved. Highlight that this shows *independent face*, where the speaker respects the listener’s autonomy and choice (Scollon & Scollon, 1995).

2. Wrap up with a **gapped Zen-style dialogue** (see **Appendix B**) that pairs complete using fillers and discourse markers, then act out—promoting **habit formation** through repetition and role-play, a core tenet of the **Audio-Lingual Method** (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

The following section now presents Stage 2: **Joint Construction** (Sessions 3–4), where learners collaboratively co-construct a spoken version of a new Zen anecdote, *The Moon Cannot Be Stolen*, using guided planning, rehearsal, and teacher scaffolding to apply the genre, language, and discourse features previously explored (see **Appendix A** for the annotated text).

Stage 2: Joint Construction (Session 3)

1. Schema Activation and Stage Mapping

1. Display a list of **key words** and expressions from *The Moon Cannot Be Stolen* (e.g., *hut, thief, night, offered, moon, runs off*) on the board or handout (**Appendix C**). In pairs, students discuss what these clues suggest. Prompt them to **guess** the possible topic, theme, or plot of the story. This activity serves as a **pre-reading task** designed to activate learners' content schema and promote **top-down** processing (Harmer, 2015; Helgesen, 2003).
2. Next, provide learners with **short summary prompts** representing the three stages of the story—but in **jumbled order** (**Appendix C**). Ask them to sort the ideas into the correct order: *Orientation*, *Remarkable Event*, and *Interpretation*. Pairs justify their choices and compare with another group before teacher confirmation.

2. Collaborative Planning and Language Focus

1. Once learners have ordered the stages, tell them they are now “**Zen storytellers in training**” and their task is to **rebuild the story from fragments**. In pairs, they select key words and stage prompts from the previous activity. Provide **sentence starters** for each stage to support their narrative construction (see **Appendix C**). Also, prepare a mini “**language toolbox**” (see **Appendix C**) on the board or handout with useful verbs, adverbials, and discourse markers explored in Stage 1.
2. Learners try to co-construct a short oral version of the story. The teacher monitors and supports with **pronunciation** and **fluency**, encouraging natural delivery.

3. Collaborative Performances and Reflection

1. Pairs perform a practice run of their draft to a neighbouring pair. Partners give feedback using a simple **checklist** (see **Appendix C**), with prompts such as *Did they include all three stages?* and *Was the moral clear?* As Jamrus and Razali (2019) highlight, checklists support learner autonomy, self-regulated learning, and reflective practice by helping students monitor their own progress and engage critically with performance criteria.
2. Conclude with a **whole-class reflection**. Prompt learners with questions like: *Which version stood out to you? What line or phrase was most memorable?* Highlight examples of effective storytelling, and provide teacher feedback on genre control, fluency, and use of discourse features—reinforcing successful strategies and suggesting improvements.

The final section now presents Stage 3: **Independent Construction** (Session 4), where learners independently create and perform their own original Zen anecdote, drawing on the genre structure, lexico-grammatical patterns, and discourse-pragmatic features modelled and practised in earlier sessions. In this session, each pair of learners revisits the two model anecdotes—*The Empty Cup* and *The Moon Cannot Be Stolen*—and re-creates both stories in their own words. This dual retelling task serves as a simulation of a “Zen Teaching Moment” at the symposium. This stage reflects Thornbury’s (2005) notion of **appropriation**, where learners internalise language in structured but communicative settings, and aligns with Harmer’s (2015) emphasis on role-play and simulation as tools for reducing performance anxiety and enhancing motivation

Stage 3: Individual Construction (Session 4)

1. Recollection and Planning

1. Begin with a brief pair discussion in which learners recall the two Zen stories—*The Empty Cup* and *The Moon Cannot Be Stolen*—from memory. Distribute a **blank planning grid (Appendix D)** with three columns: Orientation, Remarkable Event, and Interpretation. Pairs collaboratively note key story elements in their own words.
2. This supports **schema activation** and deepens internalisation of narrative structure (Harmer, 2015)

2. Language Rehearsal and Personalisation

1. Elicit sample sentence starters on the board (e.g., “One day, a visitor arrived...”, “The monk looked at the moon and said...”). Encourage students to **personalise** their language using **discourse features** from Stage 1, including **fillers**, **adverbials**, **intensifiers**, and **direct address**.

3. Simulation Task: Zen Teaching Moment

1. Set the scene: “You are novice monks presenting at the Zen Insight Symposium. Choose one of the two stories and share it with the audience to teach a life lesson.” In each group, one learner acts as the **presenter** while others become the **audience**. Presenters practise **eye contact, voice projection, natural pauses, and expressive delivery**. Allow rehearsal time using an **audience feedback card (Appendix D)**, focusing on narrative clarity, genre control, fluency, and audience engagement
2. This structured **simulation** supports Thornbury’s (2005) notion of **appropriation**—practising language in semi-authentic contexts—and reduces anxiety while boosting motivation (Harmer, 2015).

4. Live Performance and Reflective Debrief

1. Pairs perform either to the full class or in small rotating groups. Listeners complete the checklist and note standout expressions. Conclude with a **reflective** discussion: *Which story left the strongest impression? Which performance strategies were most effective?* The teacher offers formative feedback on **fluency, storytelling techniques, and lexicogrammatical features**, consolidating learning and reinforcing confidence.

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Appendix A (Text Annotations)

Colour coding patterns for salient features:

- Human participants and personal pronouns (named or unnamed)
- Concrete participants (particular and general)
- Noun groups (with their functions as pointers, determiners, describers, and quantifiers) are underlined
- Material processes (action verbs)
- Relational processes (relating verbs)
- Mental processes (sensing verbs)
- Verbal processes (saying verbs)
- Circumstances of place and time (only the preposition is highlighted not the entire phrase)
- Fillers like “um,” “uh,” “right,” “so,” and “yeah” and discourse markers like “oh” in bold

- Tag questions, the rhetorical question, the command, the offers, and the discourse marker of “and” (inserted a comment box)
- Personal adjectives like “angry,” “confused,” “empty-handed,” and “poor”
- Intensifiers like “really” in interpretation stage
- Compound and Complex sentences

Text 1: “The Empty Cup” (The Spoken Version)

Stages	Text	Lexico-grammatical features
Orientation	<p>So, like... there was <u>this university professor</u>, right? He wanted to <u>learn</u> about Zen, so, <u>um</u>, he went to <u>visit</u> this Zen <u>master</u> named <u>Nan-in</u>.</p> <p>And, <u>uh</u>, <u>Nan-in</u> <u>invited</u> <u>him</u> <u>in</u>, and, like, <u>he</u> <u>said</u>, “Please, have <u>some tea</u>.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concrete and human participants help to create a specific and grounded setting, aiding visualisation and immersion - circumstances of place help to set the scene - The noun groups that include pointers (e.g., “this zen master”), quantifiers (e.g., “some tea”), and describers (e.g., “this university professor”), enrich the text and add depth to the description and keeps the internal cohesion

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Action verbs show the dynamic nature of the events and help visualise the characters' actions - the past tense is typically used in the orientation because it is introducing events that happened before the main action. It helps to create a clear distinction between the setup (past) and the main event (present). - fillers like "so," "right," and "uh," signal informality and a low modality, fostering a sense of immediacy and a spontaneous engagement with the audience - The use of statements and the declarative mood provides information about the time, place, and characters. However, one instance of a tag question as an opener is used to engage the listener and invite agreement - The Zen master's use of polite offer like <i>"Please have some tea"</i> reflects their respectful, guiding role. These lower-modality expressions, rather than commands, align with Zen values and foster
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		<p>a humble, inviting tone, emphasizing reflection over authority.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coherence is achieved through compound sentences linked by conjunctions such as “and,” and “so”. - Internal and referential cohesion is achieved through personal pronouns like “he” and object pronouns like “him”
<p>Remarkable Event/Incident (sometimes followed by resolution)</p>	<p>So, Nan-in starts pouring the tea into the professor's cup. And, you know, he doesn't stop. The cup fills up... but he just keeps pouring, and the tea starts spilling over, right? It goes onto the table, then onto the floor.</p> <p>Now, the professor, like, can't just sit there anymore. He, uh, says, “Stop! The cup is full! There's no more room!”</p> <p>Nan-in puts the teapot down, and, like, smiles. And then he says, “Just like this cup, you're full of your own ideas. How can I teach you Zen if your mind is already full?”</p> <p>And, um, the professor didn't say anything. He just, like, sat there and thought about it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concrete and human participants help to create a sense of realism, immediacy, and relatability - The noun groups that include determiners (e.g., the floor), pointers (e.g., “this zen master”), quantifiers (e.g., “some tea”), and describers (e.g., “this university professor”), enrich the text and add depth to the description and keeps the internal cohesion - Action verbs show the dynamic nature of the events and help visualise the characters' actions - saying verbs and verbal processes are used to convey direct reported speech, making the text more conversational and relatable (Reporting verbs such as in “he

		<p>says" introduce varying perspectives, enriching the narrative)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The use of present tense and active voice conveys immediacy, making the events feel current and enhancing the sense of timelessness - circumstances of place and time (mostly prepositional phrases) help to build a vivid picture that draws the listener into the world - fillers like "you know," "right," "um," and "uh," signal informality and a low modality, fostering a sense of immediacy and a spontaneous engagement - The rhetorical question "How can I teach you Zen if your mind is already full?" prompts reflection on preconceptions, signaling a learning shift. The monks guide rather than assert, maintaining a low power dynamic and close social distance, fostering engagement - Imperatives like "Stop" stress key moral choices, using high modality to highlight wrongdoing
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		<p>and emphasize Zen's experiential learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coherence is achieved through compound sentences linked by conjunctions such as "and," and "but,". The complex sentence is also evident in the "if clause" part, building suspense and keeping the listener's attention. This sentence creates a sense of anticipation, drawing the audience into the story - Internal and referential cohesion is achieved through personal pronouns like "he" and possessive adjectives like "your" - Lexical cohesion is created through repeated thematic words like "cup
Reaction/Interpretation	<p>(Pause)</p> <p>So, yeah... sometimes, you have to, like, let go of what you think you know, you know? And, uh, only then you can really learn something new.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The dominance of mental processes (sensing verbs). Emphasising reflection and insight - Fillers like "so," "yeah," and "uh" signal immediacy and foster a sense of spontaneous engagement with the audience - Second-person pronoun "you" directly address the audience, making them feel involved and personally

		<p>connected to the story. The pronoun “you” has low modality, encourages freedom of choice and opens space for negotiation (independent face)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - intensifiers like "really" adjust the message's force, with "really learn" emphasising the lesson's importance. - Direct address like “you know?” keeps the listener involved, while pronouns like “he” ensure clarity and continuity (internal cohesion)
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Text 2: “The Moon Cannot Be Stolen” (The Spoken Version)

Stages	Text	Lexico-grammatical features
Orientation	<p>Okay, <u>so, uh, there was this Zen master called Ryokan, right? And he was really simple. He lived in, like, this tiny little hut with hardly anything—just a mat and some clothes.</u></p> <p><u>So, one night, a thief breaks into his hut, looking for something to steal. But... there's nothing to steal.</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concrete and human participants help to create a specific and grounded setting, aiding visualisation and immersion - circumstances of place and time (mostly prepositional phrases) help to set the scene - The noun groups that include determiners (e.g., a mat), pointers (e.g., “this zen master”), quantifiers

		<p>(e.g., “some clothes”), and describers (e.g., “this tiny hut”), enrich the text and add depth to the description and keeps the internal cohesion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Action verbs show the dynamic nature of the events and help visualise the characters' actions - the past tense is typically used in the orientation because it is introducing events that happened before the main action. It helps to create a clear distinction between the setup (past) and the main event (present). - The use of statements and the declarative mood provides information about the time, place, and characters. However, one instance of a tag question as an opener is used to engage the listener and invite agreement - Coherence is achieved through compound sentences linked by conjunctions such as “and,” and “but”. - Internal and referential cohesion is achieved through personal pronouns like “he” and possessive adjectives like “his”
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<p>Remarkable Event/Incident (sometimes followed by resolution)</p>	<p>When Ryokan sees him, he, uh, doesn't get angry or anything. He just smiles and says, "Oh, you came all this way to see me. I can't let you leave empty-handed. Here—take my robe."</p> <p>The thief, um, kind of confused, just takes the robe and runs off.</p> <p>Later on, Ryokan is sitting by the window, looking at the full moon. He, uh, sighs and says, "Poor guy... I wish I could've given him this beautiful moon, too."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concrete and human participants help to create a sense of realism, immediacy, and relatability - The noun groups that include determiners (e.g., the robe), pointers (e.g., "this way"), and describers (e.g., "beautiful moon"), enrich the text and add depth to the description and keeps the internal cohesion - Action verbs show the dynamic nature of the events and help visualise the characters' actions - The use of present tense and active voice conveys immediacy, making the events feel current and enhancing the sense of timelessness - saying verbs and verbal processes are used to convey direct reported speech, making the text more conversational and relatable ((Reporting verbs such as in "he says" introduce varying perspectives, enriching the narrative) - circumstances of place and time (mostly prepositional phrases) help to build a vivid picture that
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		<p>draws the listener into the world</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fillers like “um,” and “uh” signal immediacy and foster a sense of spontaneous engagement with the audience - The Zen master's use of a polite offer like <i>"here, take my robe"</i> reflects their respectful, guiding role. These lower-modality expressions, rather than commands, align with Zen values and foster a humble, inviting tone, emphasizing reflection over authority. - personal adjectives like "confused" or "angry," which are commonly used in spoken language, express immediate feelings (emotive language) - Coherence is achieved through compound sentences linked by conjunctions such as “and”. The complex sentence is also evident in the “when clause” part, building suspense and keeping the listener’s attention. This sentence creates a sense of anticipation, drawing the audience into the story.
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Reaction/Interpretation	<p>(Pause)</p> <p>So, yeah, Ryokan didn't have much. But, um, he still felt like he had everything. Because, like, real wealth isn't about the things we own, right? It's really all about how we see the world.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - relational verbs like “is,” or “have,” help to deliver the moral lesson, emphasising the eternal nature of the lesson - Fillers like “um,” and “yeah,” “right,” and “uh” signal immediacy and foster a sense of spontaneous engagement with the audience - First-person pronoun (we) creates a sense of shared experience or collective understanding (inclusive “we” and involvement face) - intensifiers like “really” adjust the message's force, stressing that the way we perceive the world is crucial.
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Appendix B (Stage 1)

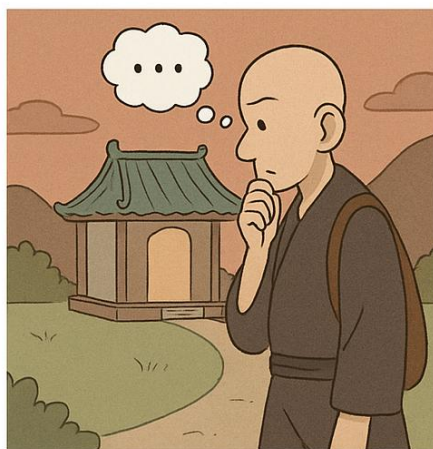
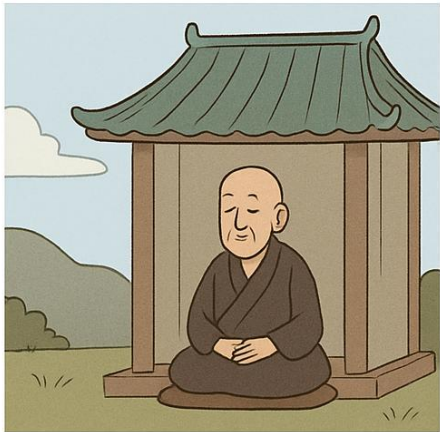
Find Someone Who Ice-breaker worksheet



Find someone who ...	Names	More Information
enjoys listening to Zen stories		
knows a Zen master's name.		
likes giving talks or presentations.		
feels nervous about speaking English in public.		
thinks storytelling is important in Zen Buddhism		
wants to share Zen ideas with foreigners.		
believes stories can teach deep lessons.		
remembers hearing "The Empty Cup" before.		
has a favourite Zen story.		
joined the temple to learn more about Zen Buddhism.		



The Empty Cup Visual Prompts in Order (created by ChatGPT)



The Empty Cup

So, like... there was this university professor, right? He wanted to learn about Zen, so, um, he went to visit this Zen master named Nan-in.

And, uh, Nan-in invited him in, and, like, he said, "Please, have some tea."

So, Nan-in starts pouring the tea into the professor's cup. And, you know, he doesn't stop. The cup fills up... but he just keeps pouring, and the tea starts spilling over, right? It goes onto the table, then onto the floor.

Now, the professor, like, can't just sit there anymore. He, uh, says, "Stop! The cup is full! There's no more room!"

Nan-in puts the teapot down, and, like, smiles. And then he says, "Just like this cup, you're full of your own ideas. How can I teach you Zen if your mind is already full?"

And, um, the professor didn't say anything. He just, like, sat there and thought about it.

(Pause)

So, yeah... sometimes, you have to, like, let go of what you think you know, you know? And, uh, only then you can really learn something new.

The Empty Cup first colour- coded sheet

So, like... there was this university professor, right? He wanted to learn about Zen, so, um, he went to visit this Zen master named Nan-in.

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(Pause)

So, yeah... sometimes, you have to, like, let go of what you think you know, you know? And, uh, only then you can really learn something new.

Short Zen Anecdote: "The Mirror"

One day, a young monk came to his teacher.

He said, "Master, I feel angry and confused."

The teacher smiled and gave him a small mirror.

He said, "Look into this mirror every morning."

The monk looked and saw his face.

Later, he felt calm and peaceful.

Answer Key:

- **Action verbs:** *came, gave, looked, saw, felt*
- **Saying verbs:** *said*
- **To be verbs/ other verbs:** *is, feel*
- **People Participants:** *a young monk, his teacher, he, master, the monk*

The Empty Cup colour- coded sheet on the smartboard

So, like... there **was** this **university** professor, right? **He** wanted to learn **about Zen**, so, um, **he went** to visit this **Zen** master named **Nan-in**.

And, uh, **Nan-in** **invited him** in, and, like, **he said**, "Please, have **some** tea."

So, **Nan-in** **starts** pouring the tea **into** the professor's cup. And, you know, **he doesn't stop**. The cup fills up... but **he** just keeps pouring, and the tea starts spilling over, right? It **goes onto the table**, then **onto the floor**.

Now, the **professor**, like, can't just **sit there anymore**. **He**, uh, says, "**Stop!** The cup **is full!** There's no more room!"

Nan-in puts the teapot down, and, like, **smiles**. And **then he** says, "Just like this cup, you're **full of your** own ideas. How can I **teach** you Zen if **your mind is already full?**"

And, um, **the professor** didn't **say** anything. **He** just, like, sat **there** and thought about it.

(Pause)

So, yeah... sometimes, you have to, like, let go of what you think you know, you know? And, uh, **only then** you can **really** learn something **new**.

Graded Anecdote with Gaps for Describers and Adverbials

The Candle

One evening, a monk walked into a [1] temple. Inside, it was [2], with only a single candle on the floor. He sat down [3] and closed his eyes.

Suddenly, a voice said, “Why are you sitting [4]?” The monk opened his eyes and saw a [5] man standing [6].

The monk smiled and said, “This light is [7] to see inside myself.”

The man paused. “And what do you see?”

The monk replied, “I see [8] things... but I let them go.”

He bowed and walked out [9], leaving the [10] candle still burning.

Link and Speak Activity Slips

Slips A (first part of the sentence):

1. He drinks his tea
2. She opens the window
3. They walk into the room
4. I hear the bell
5. We study Zen every day
6. He dropped the book
7. She smiled at him
8. They waited quietly

Slips B (second part of the sentence):

1. he doesn't say anything
2. the wind blows in
3. they don't say a word

4. I don't answer
5. we don't talk during meditation
6. it made a loud sound
7. he looked confused
8. no one came

Gapped Zen-Style Dialogue

Instructions for Students: Work in pairs. Take turns reading the dialogue aloud. When you reach a gap, try inserting a natural-sounding filler or discourse marker (e.g., *uh, so, you know, and, but, right?*). Your partner listens and writes down the word you said. Then switch roles.

Zen Master: Hmm, ____, it's a quiet morning today.

Student: Yeah, ____ I was thinking the same. It feels peaceful.

Zen Master: ____, do you remember what I told you yesterday about the mind?

Student: I think so. ____ you said we should keep it empty.

Zen Master: Right. ____ an empty mind can hold wisdom.

Student: ____ it's just hard sometimes, you know?

Zen Master: Yes. ____, many people struggle with letting go.

Student: But ____ what do I do when thoughts come?

Zen Master: Just watch them. ____ let them pass like clouds.

Student: Okay... I'll try. ____ it's not easy though.

Zen Master: ____ only then can you really learn something new.

Appendix C (Stage 2)

Word Box: Clues from *The Moon Cannot Be Stolen*

Ryokan, thief, night, hut, moon, robe, window, runs off, beautiful, takes, confused, full moon, nothing, offers, robe, sighs

Jumbled Stage Summary Cards

Cut these out. Learners work in pairs to categorise under Orientation, Remarkable Event, or Interpretation.

- Who is the main character? Where does he live? When does the event happen?
- What unexpected thing happens during the night?
- What does the visitor want, and what does he find?
- How does the main character respond to the situation?
- What does the monk say or do that shows how he thinks or feels?
- What deeper message can be understood from the monk's final words?

Answer Key: Jumbled Stage Summary Prompts

Orientation

- Who is the main character? Where does he live? When does the event happen?
- What unexpected thing happens during the night?

Remarkable Event

- What does the visitor want, and what does he find?
- How does the main character respond to the situation?

Interpretation

- What does the monk say or do that shows how he thinks or feels?
- What deeper message can be understood from the monk's final words?

Rehearsal Sheet – Sentence Starters

Print and distribute a sheet like this per pair:

Orientation Starters

- One night, a monk was...
- A thief came to...
- It was quiet when...

Remarkable Event Starters

- The thief entered the hut and...
- The monk offered...
- Instead of reacting, the monk...

Interpretation Starters

- Later, the monk thought about...
- He looked at the moon and said...
- He realised that...

Language Toolbox (to display on board or as handout)

Useful Language Features:

- **Saying Verbs:** said, asked, told, replied, whispered
- **Feeling Verbs:** felt, realised, wondered, understood
- **Pronouns:** he, him, his, I, you
- **Adverbials:** that night, in the hut, quietly, suddenly, later
- **Intensifiers:** really, completely, absolutely, only

Zen Storytelling Peer Feedback Checklist

Structure and Stages

- ☐ Did the story include all three stages (Orientation, Remarkable Event, Interpretation)?
- ☐ Was the sequence logical and easy to follow?

Language Features

- ☐ Did they use **action verbs** (e.g., *entered, gave, ran*) to describe events?
- ☐ Did they use **describers** (e.g., adjectives, noun modifiers) to add detail?
- ☐ Were the **sentence structures** mostly simple or compound (linked with *and, but*, etc.)?
- ☐ Did they use any **fillers or discourse markers** (e.g., *um, so, you know*)?
- ☐ In the final stage, did they **address the listener directly** (e.g., using *you*)?

Message and Delivery

- ☐ Was the **moral or message** of the story clear?
- ☐ Was the **delivery fluent and confident**?

Appendix D (Stage 3)

Story Planning Grid

In pairs, recall and plan your story. Use this grid to write the main ideas for each stage of your selected Zen anecdote.

Orientation (Who, Where, When)	Remarkable Event (What Happened)	Interpretation (Why, Moral, Reaction)

Audience Feedback Card

As you listen to your classmate's performance, answer the following:

1. **What was one line or phrase you found powerful or memorable?**
→ _____
2. **What did the speaker do well in terms of delivery?**
(e.g., voice, eye contact, natural pauses)
→ _____
3. **What message or moral did you take from the story?**
→ _____

4. **One thing you might say to encourage the speaker next time:**

→ _____