Information for Educators

Index

cambridgeenglish.org/english-adventures

Section 1:

Overview of English Adventures with Cambridge pilot

[English Adventures with Cambridge](#) is a unique three-chapter language learning experience created by Cambridge Assessment English in collaboration with Minecraft: Education Edition.

The language that the learners encounter is embedded in an immersive world, populated with a range of engaging characters. The learners need to communicate with these characters, follow their instructions, and help to solve their problems.

Language learning takes place through exposure and practice of natural, contextualised language. Learners are encouraged to use the visual clues in the game to discover and use new language. Repetition, mistakes and exposure are important when learning and the unique world in which this language is embedded helps to consolidate learning and increase motivation, engagement and confidence, all necessary attributes for successful language learning.

1.1 Who is it for?

The learning experience is targeted at young learners aged 8+ who are level A1 and above of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Commonly known as the CEFR, it is the international framework for organising language ability.

This game is suitable for learners at this level (A1) but the environment is language rich, so it is suitable for higher-level language levels and ages too.

1.2 How is the game organised and how long will it take learners?

Learners arrive in the hub world and enter the library where they meet key characters such as Lilac, the librarian, and Gary, their game companion.

The game is organised into chapters or lessons. Each lesson comprises 30 minutes of learning which takes place in the game. We have also provided an extra 45 minutes of speaking and writing practice, which can be facilitated by an educator.

1.3 How is language practised in the game?

Language is practised through a variety of task types. Below is an example of some of the task types in the game.

- Letter based activities e.g. stepping stones, placing blocks
- Curiosity bonus activities e.g. optional puzzles, hidden dialogues
- Dialogue based activities e.g. follow the instructions, answer the questions

For more information about task types, please see section 3.3.

1.4 What language is practised in each lesson?

Below is an indication of the language and skills the learners will practise in each chapter (lesson). For a full overview of language for young learners (at A1 and above), please see https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/149681-yle-flyers-word-list.pdf

1.5 Lesson 1: Hub World

Description: The hub world is an area that sets the premise for the whole game: it's a giant library where something is wrong. Some pages from the books are missing and the stories in the books are broken as a result. The learner is sent into the broken stories, one at a time (The Book of Treasure and The Book of Snow) in order to fix them. After 'fixing' a story, the learner returns to the hub world. The librarian congratulates them and gives them their next mission. Aside from setting the premise, the purpose of the hub world is to teach the learner how the game works. For that reason, all of the tasks (puzzles) in the hub world are relatively simple – they're there to provide a taste of all the task types and to demonstrate how each of them works.
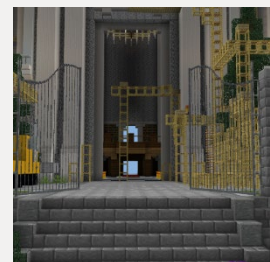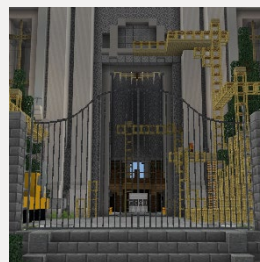
Lesson aims:
- To review familiar vocabulary
- To learn new vocabulary in context
- To introduce a key part of the gameplay – following instructions

Skills practised: Matching object descriptions, following instructions, spelling, listening comprehension

Language focuses:
- Questions using *Can you…?*
- Imperatives for instructions
- Adjectives
- Forming simple sentences: Pronoun + *is a* + adjective + noun

1.6 Lesson 2: The Book of Treasure

Lesson aims:
- To practise familiar vocabulary
- To learn new vocabulary in context
- To use critical thinking and problem-solving skills

Skills practised: Fulfilling requests, following directions, writing in context

Language focus:
- *There is* and *there are*
- Polite requests
- Vocabulary for giving and following directions
- Imperatives for instructions
- Adjectives and numbers

1.7 Lesson 3: The Book of Snow

Lesson aims:
- To consolidate the vocabulary on following directions, both written and spoken
- To practise understanding descriptions of people and places
- To understand new vocabulary in context
- To use critical thinking and problem-solving skills

Skills practised: Finding people based on descriptions, matching colours, following directions (written and spoken), writing in context

Language focus:
- Adjectives for places
- Vocabulary for describing people
- Adjectives for describing state/character
- Clothes
- Colours
- Food and drink
- Directions

Section 2
Guidance on self-study, classroom use, and blended learning

English Adventures with Cambridge is designed so that it can be used in multiple ways. As a self-study tool, students will certainly benefit from the experience of playing the game on their own. However, the game can provide an even richer, deeper experience when facilitated by an educator. Alongside the game itself, teachers and parents/guardians can access a pack of support materials which provide guidance on how to support learners in playing the game in a classroom context (face-to-face or online) and in a blended context (face-to-face *and* online).

Both the classroom and blended options enable the educator to make use of extension activities, building on the experiences within the game and the language encountered there. These activities provide opportunities for the students to consolidate what they have learned during the game, particularly through speaking and writing practice. The support and guidance that the educator provides ensures that the learners are making the most of the learning opportunities afforded by the game.

The lesson structure is as follows:

10 minutes	Warm-up activity
30-45 minutes	Gameplay phase (in-class or at home)
45 minutes	Classroom activities phase
10 mins	Extra practice or homework

The warm up activity helps learners to become familiar with the language and characters that they will meet in the game. It should be led by a teacher and completed before the gameplay phase. If the learner is self-studying, this part is optional.

The gameplay phase itself can be completed in class, or set as a homework task. The teacher support materials provide a written 'walkthrough' of the level, including a list all of the key events and tasks that the learners will need to complete. Each gameplay phase is also supported by a page from three different books: 'Explorer's Guidebook', 'The Book of Treasure', and 'The Book of Snow'. These are the worksheets designed to help the learner record new language that they have learnt, and to guide them or give them hints about the tasks that they need to complete in the game. Each page has an answer sheet to help the teacher and learner check their work.

Finally, the classroom activities and extra practice are designed to expand on the topics covered in the game, and to make the most of the unique communicative opportunities presented by the classroom context. They can take place any time after the gameplay phase has been completed, and the extra practice tasks are designed to be completed either in class or as a homework task.

EXPLORER'S GUIDEBOOK

Section 3
About Cambridge Assessment English

Cambridge Assessment English is a department of the University of Cambridge, which means we abide by the same standards of educational excellence that the university is famous for. We have over 100 years' experience designing and delivering world-class assessments for learners of English as an additional language. What's more, we've been offering gold standard teacher training courses for over 30 years.

3.1 The Cambridge approach to language learning

During the last century, Cambridge's research-based approach to English language teaching and assessment has evolved alongside modern second language acquisition methodologies. We understand that successful communication is at the heart of learning a language and we follow several core principles:
- Using the language is more important than knowing facts about it
- Learning experiences should be relatable to real life
- Errors should be treated as a natural part of learning
- Grammar and vocabulary can be most usefully learned within a *meaningful* context
- Extensive exposure to the language facilitates learning.

Some people think language learning is all about memorising vocabulary and studying grammatical forms. In reality, knowing *about* the language isn't enough. Instead, students need to be able to *use* the language successfully for communicative purposes.

3.2 Outline of the purpose behind the world and activities

So how does our video game built in Minecraft align with these language learning principles? The Minecraft setting provides a context-rich environment, ideally suited to expose learners to the language in a meaningful way. The language that the learners encounter is embedded in an immersive world, populated with a range of engaging characters. The learners need to communicate with these characters, follow their instructions, and help to solve their problems.

The game is aimed at students with a beginner's level of English (A1 on the CEFR) so comprehension through listening and reading in communicative contexts is a particular focus. Speaking and writing activities are included in the support materials that go alongside the game itself. All of the content is underpinned by our CEFR-aligned young learner syllabus of vocabulary and structures to ensure that the language being taught and practised is relevant and at the right level of complexity.

While the setting contains some fantasy elements, the language experiences in the game are authentic to real life. In some cases, the situation itself is transferrable, such as being given directions to follow. In other cases, the authenticity of the activities can be found in the thought processes they engage, rather than in the actions themselves. For example, walking across letters on the floor to spell the right word is not a common activity in real life. But the cognitive process of figuring out the appropriate word for the context and then spelling it correctly is a regularly occurring feature of the language learning journey.

The overarching story makes the language more memorable by engaging the learners emotionally. This is particularly important for children, who rely on their episodic memory when learning a language. We have also observed that learners enthusiastically discuss the events of the story after having played engaging video games, even among themselves at break time. This motivation provides a springboard to extension activities with a teacher or parent/guardian.

The game's story was written by language learning experts with training in narrative design for video games. This means that all the words and phrases which feature in the game have been specially selected for their level of difficulty, their usefulness, and their suitability for young learners. What's more, the voice recordings in the game were read by professional voice actors to ensure natural pronunciation, delivered at a speed appropriate for the learners. All of this is delivered within a fun experience.

Key phrases and vocabulary are repeated throughout the game, and again in the lesson plans and teacher support material provided. The repetition helps to reinforce the words and phrases being learned. A full list of the words and structures covered in the pilot will be made available as part of the teacher support materials.

Another important aspect of the game is how mistakes are handled. Learners are free to get things wrong. Failure is not punished, except in the normal ways that any video game punishes failure – through in-game feedback (e.g. you might have to try again and therefore spend more time on that section). Allowing learners to make mistakes is very important for their development as confident language learners, and as learners in general. They need to be able to persevere in order to be successful. Mistakes, after all, are simply learning opportunities.

The game makes use of a trophy system, which encourages learners to replay the lessons, and some trophies can only be unlocked when the tasks are completed correctly on the first attempt. This is framed as an additional, more challenging objective for learners to achieve, rather than there being an expectation that they'll get everything right first time. There are also hint blocks available for any learner who gets stuck, although the game encourages them to be used sparingly as each use consumes a valuable 'Gormi Coin'.

There is a range of activity types. These have been designed to make the most of the Minecraft setting, while also requiring the learners to interact with the language in different ways. Each of the activity types appears in a simplified form at the start of the game in order to teach the learners how to do the activity. After that, they increase in complexity. Short descriptions of each activity type in the game are listed below:

3.3 Letter-based activities

There are three activity types within the game which deal specifically with letters.
These are:
- Combination lock – move the letter-dials to spell the word
- Stepping stones – walk across the letters to spell the word
- Place the blocks – find, dig up, and place letters to complete the word or phrase

Each of these activities helps with learning words and phrases and practising spelling, but importantly, they always require the learners to spell words that are meaningful in the context. For example, the answer might be the name of a prominent object in the room (e.g. TREASURE in a room full of treasure), or a phrase on a sign which give instructions (e.g. dangerous earthquakes. PLEASE USE THE EXIT).

3.4 Dialogue-based activities

Throughout the game, players meet many different characters, like Gary the captain and Lilac the librarian. They have to talk to these characters and many activities are found within the dialogue itself.

Here are some example:
- Follow the instructions – e.g. follow directions or bring someone the right object
- Answer the questions – e.g. give the correct answers when given a short quiz
- Use the object – e.g. you are given a watering can and asked to water some plants
- Understand descriptions – e.g. find the person or object based on their description

Each of these activities focuses on helping the learners to practise their listening and reading comprehension in the context of conversations, as well as providing short responses for them to choose from. User testing has revealed that children often like to say their responses out loud while they play the game, and this should absolutely be encouraged by a parent/guardian or teacher if you are playing together.

3.5 Curiosity bonuses

There are several secrets hidden within the world in order to reward learners for curiosity. This might come in the form of a funny line of dialogue, hidden objects, or extra rewards for completing optional puzzles. This has been included in the game because encouraging curiosity is one of the things video games do so well, and curiosity is something which is considered a 'learning skill' – something that helps us to be better learners, irrespective of the subject being learned.

cambridgeenglish.org/english-adventures