

MEMBERSHIP

REGRETS



About this activity

A short story of regret

- ▶ **Language level:** A2/B1
- ▶ **Main task:** A dictogloss activity in two parts
- ▶ **Topics:** Regrets; love & death
- ▶ **Language focus:** *Wish* to express regret, direct speech

For this activity, you will need a very short story which could be described as flash fiction (see below)

Note: For all materials and discussion, go to the corresponding page in the Resources section:

<https://membership.lessonstream.com/resources/regrets/>



The short story

This activity makes use of a short story without a title. It was written by Marc Chernoff who posted it on his blog. The title of the post was “16 tiny stories of regret”.

In the final decade of his life, my grandfather woke up every single day at 7am, picked a fresh wild flower on his morning walk, and took it to my grandmother. One morning, I decided to go with him to see her. And as he placed the flower on her gravestone, he looked up at me and said, “I just wish I had picked her a fresh flower every morning when she was alive. She really would have loved that.”

About dictogloss

The short story is perfect for a dictogloss – an activity that is described in post 9.4 of the Story Course. A dictogloss is a text reconstruction activity in which the teacher reads aloud a short narrative text two or three times. As students listen, they write down key words or phrases that they hear.

Students then attempt to rewrite the text as accurately as possible. Of course, there will be some differences between their reconstructed texts and the original.

Finally, students compare their reconstructed texts with each other and then compare them with the original.

Activity outline

1. Tell students that you have a very short story for them. You are going to read them the first half. They should listen carefully and write down as many words and phrases that they hear.
2. Read aloud the first half of the story – slowly and clearly:

In the final decade of his life, my grandfather woke up every single day at 7am, picked a fresh wild flower on his morning walk, and took it to my grandmother. One morning, I decided to go with him to see her.

3. Ask students to share and compare what they heard and what they wrote.
4. Repeat the process. Ask students to listen again and continue to add words and phrases to their lists. Then invite students to share what they heard with the whole class.

When I tried this activity with a strong A2 student, she had some problems identifying the following phrases which you can write on the board:

- *the final **decade** of his life* (*decade* is a B2 word)
- *every single day* (My student was unfamiliar with the collocation “every single” to emphasise the idea that this really did happen every day.)
- ***picked** a fresh wild flower* (*pick* is a B1 word)

5. Read the the first half of the story again but this time ask students to write the text as accurately as possible from memory, using the words and phrases that they wrote down.
6. Ask students to compare what they wrote and then write the first half of the story on the board.

7. Put students into pairs and ask them to answer the following questions:

- Where do you think the grandmother is?
- How do you think the story will continue?

There are clues in the text that tells us that the grandfather and the grandmother do not live together:

- The grandfather “takes” (not “brings”) the flowers to her.
- The author “goes” with him to see her.

Perhaps the grandmother is in a care home. Or perhaps she is dead and he goes to visit her *grave*. (You can introduce/pre-teach *grave* and *gravestone* to students.)



8. Now repeat the dictogloss process for part two of the the story:

And as he placed the flower on her gravestone, he looked up at me and said, “I just wish I had picked her a fresh flower every morning when she was alive. She really would have loved that.”

For this second half of the story, you might have to point out the following:

- Standard punctuation for direct speech
- We can insert adverbs in the phrase *looked ____ at* (e.g. *He looked up at me; look back at something; look over your shoulder at someone.*)
- The verb *wish* is being used to express regret and is followed by the present perfect.

9. Ask students the following questions:

- What do you think of this story? Do you like it?
- The story comes from a blog post titled “16 tiny stories of regret that will change the way you live”. Do you think that stories like this can help us change?
- If you could write a little note to your future self, what would you say?

Note: This last task might require students to get more personal than they want to. Please don't force it.

