# A story-based approach to video

# VIDEOGLOSS

## About this activity

A versatile way for using short videos in the classroom

▶ **Language level**: A2 and above
▶ **Age of learner**: Teenagers and adults
▶ **Duration of activity**: 60 minutes
▶ **Activities**: Videogloss (explained on the next page)
▶ **Topics**: Pandas; visual literacy
▶ **Aims**: To write a short narrative text using language in spoken register

What you will need:

• **A viral video** which has come to be known as the "Sneezing Baby Panda" (page 3)
• **A handout** for each student (page 5)
• **A video gallery** (page 6)
• **A video** about the story of the "Sneezing Baby Panda" (page 7)

There is also a Canva slideshow to support this activity.
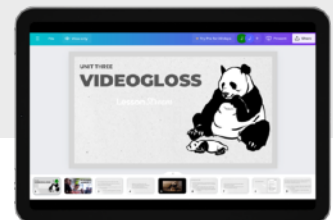
## The video

For a while, the "Sneezing Baby Panda" was the most viewed animal video on the internet. Originally uploaded to YouTube in 2006, the video gained over 200 million views before being deleted due to copyright violations. The 15-second clip depicts a simple action and reaction, and provides the perfect visual narrative for a videogloss activity.
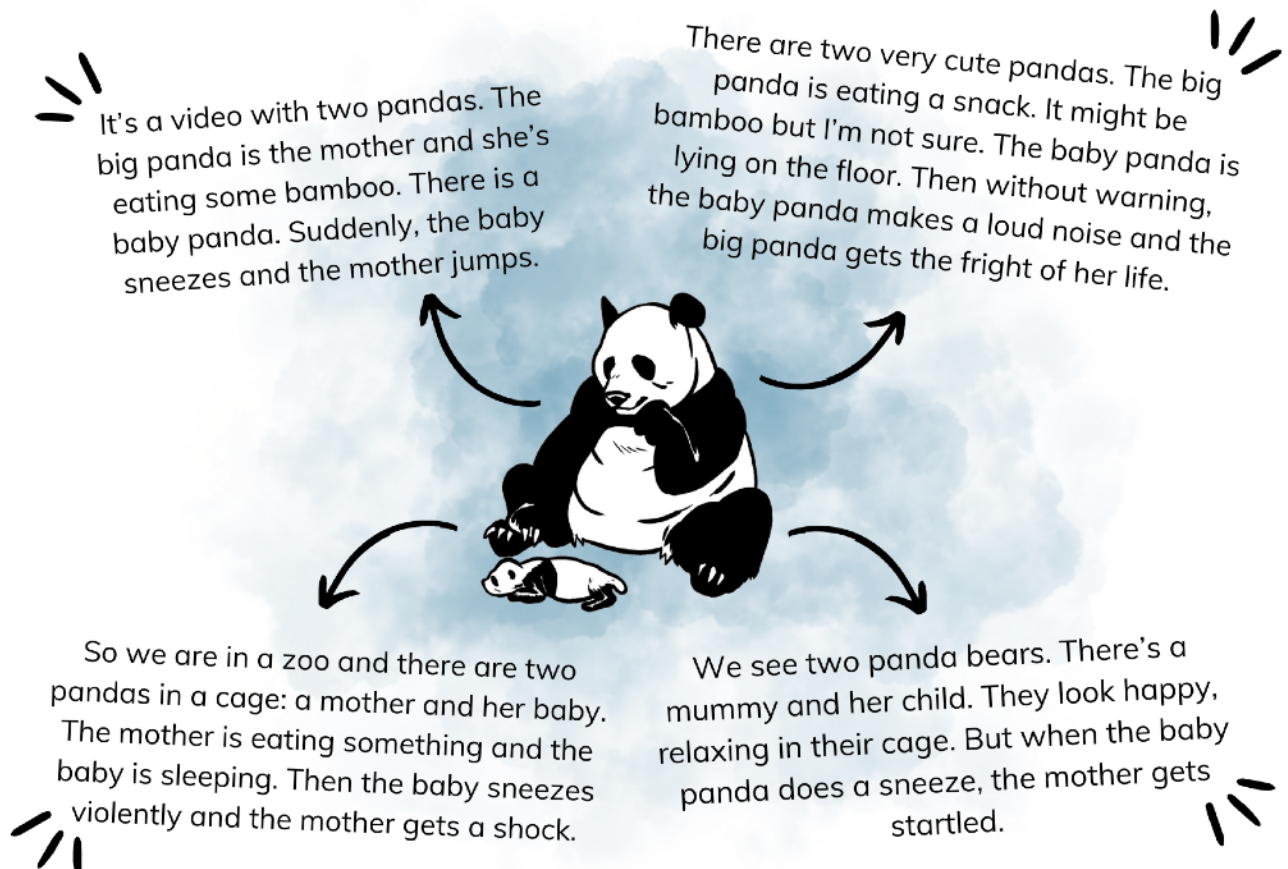
## What is a videogloss?

You might be familiar with a standard dictogloss activity, which works like this:

i. The teacher reads aloud a short narrative text, two or three times.
ii. As students listen, they write down key words and phrases that they hear.
iii. Students then attempt to rewrite (or reconstruct) the text. Naturally, there will be some differences between their reconstructed texts and the original.
iv. Students compare their reconstructed texts with each other.
v. Finally, they compare their reconstructed texts with the original.

A videogloss is similar. But instead of a written text, we start with a visual narrative in the form of a short video. Here is how it works:

i. Students watch the video.
ii. Students put the video narrative into words.
iii. Students compare their texts with each other. They explore their different language choices as well perceptive differences.

It's a video with two pandas. The big panda is the mother and she's eating some bamboo. There is a baby panda. Suddenly, the baby sneezes and the mother jumps.

There are two very cute pandas. The big panda is eating a snack. It might be bamboo but I'm not sure. The baby panda is lying on the floor. Then without warning, the baby panda makes a loud noise and the big panda gets the fright of her life.

So we are in a zoo and there are two pandas in a cage: a mother and her baby. The mother is eating something and the baby is sleeping. Then the baby sneezes violently and the mother gets a shock.

We see two panda bears. There's a mummy and her child. They look happy, relaxing in their cage. But when the baby panda does a sneeze, the mother gets startled.

# Part one: the videogloss

1. Give students the following instructions:

> *I am going to show you a video.*
> *It's possible that you have seen it before.*
> *It's a very short video – only about 15 seconds long.*
> *It is important that you watch the video in silence.*
> [Gesture this by putting your finger to your lips]
> *And it's important that you don't say anything after you have watched it.*
> *Don't even laugh, OK?*
> *Any questions?*

2. Play the "Sneezing Baby Panda" video. As soon as it is over, put your fingers to your lips again and say:

> *No laughing, please!*
> *Now, don't say anything.*
> *But put up your hand if you have seen the video before.*

If possible, make a note of who has seen the video before and who has not.

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**Tips**:
- When you forbid someone from laughing, the natural result is laugher and that is the intention here.
- There is a good reason for discouraging students from speaking. Specifically, you do not want anyone to acknowledge that this is the "Sneezing Baby Panda". This could influence other students' perception of a key detail in the video and, as well will see later, this is important.

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3. Tell students:

> *Now, imagine you are with a friend …*
> *And your friend has never seen that panda video before.*
> *You are going to write a description of what happens in the video from the beginning until the end.*
> *Write it as if you are talking to your friend.*
> *Before you do that, watch the video two more times …*
> *Again in silence, without laughing.*
> *Any questions?*
> *Are you ready?*

Scan or click the code to see the video

*JAMIE KEDDIE, 2024*

4. Play the "Sneezing Baby Panda" video two more times. Then repeat the instructions for the task (see step three above) and ask students to get writing.

**Tips**:
- Remind students to write as if they are speaking with a friend. Their texts should be friendly and conversational.
- For students with a lower level of English, it might be tempting to provide them with useful words and phrases for the writing (e.g. *in a cage*, *lying on the ground*, *bamboo*, *to sneeze*, *get a fright*). However, an important part of the activity deals with how students perceive the video. Instead, I suggest providing students with bilingual dictionaries so they can express their own individual ideas.
- Students might appreciate some help with the first line. You can make suggestions:

  - "Have you seen that panda video on YouTube? Let me tell you about it."
  - "Oh, I've got to tell you about a YouTube video (that) I saw recently."
  - "There's a funny video on YouTube that involves two pandas."

5. Once students have finished the writing, put them into pairs or groups. Ask them to do the following:

> *Now, take turns to read out your texts.*
> *Listen to each other very carefully.*
> *For each text that you hear, compare it with your own and look for differences.*
> *For example, pay attention to the different ways that people describe the pandas or what happens in the video.*
> *Any questions?*

6. After students have done this, ask them to report back and describe some of the differences they identified.

7. Give out copies of the handout on the next page. Ask students to continue working together in their pairs or groups to answer all of the questions in the handout. This will require them to compare their texts again, but this time for a much deeper analysis of the language. They should make notes as they do this.

**Tip**: As students do this, you can circulate and get involved. When possible, try to find a few good example texts that illustrate different aspects of language mentioned in the handout. Later, you can invite the authors to read these out to the rest of the class.

8. Now it's time for a whole class discussion. Go through the handout and encourage students to report back on the discoveries they made. You can also invite individuals to read out their texts to the whole group.

# Lesson*Stream*
# HANDOUT



The action



The reaction

# Compare your texts

### i. Tense
- Did you tell the story in the past or present tense?
- Or perhaps you moved between the past and present tense?
- How does the tense affect the story that you are telling?

### ii. Setup
- Did you describe the pandas at the start of the video? Did you say what they were doing?
- Which did you mention first: the big panda or the small panda?
- Did you mention the location and say where the pandas are?
- Did you say what the big panda is eating?

### iii. Relationship
- How did you describe the pandas' relationship – a mother and child, for example?

### iv. Action and reaction
- How did you describe what the little panda did at around 10 seconds (the action)?
- How did you describe the big panda's reaction?

### v. Verbs
- Underline all of the -ing form verbs in your text.
- Underline all of the present or past simple verbs in your text.
- Do you notice anything?

### vi. Hedging (uncertainty)
- Did you use phrases like *maybe*, *probably*, *could be*, *I suppose*, *I think that*, *seems to be*?

### vii. Interpretation
- Did you use any adjectives to describe the pandas or the video?
- Did you imagine what the pandas might be thinking or feeling?
- Did you ask any questions about the pandas or about the video?
- Did you include any personal thoughts or opinions about the pandas or the video?
- Did you make any connections between the video and your own life?
- Did you include any details about your own viewing experience or reaction to the video?

### viii. Word knowledge
- Did you mention any facts or other information about pandas in general?

### xi. Register
- Do you agree that the language you have used is friendly, conversational and informal?

### x. Grammatical person
- Did you tell parts of the story in the first person? (e.g. *In the video I saw two pandas*.)
- Did you tell parts of the story in the second person? (e.g. *In the video you can see two pandas*.)

## Part two: Video gallery

In the PDF that accompanies this lesson plan, I mentioned an informal experiment from 2013, where I asked over 30 people to describe the panda video and filmed their responses.

All of the videos can be accessed on an accompanying Padlet board.
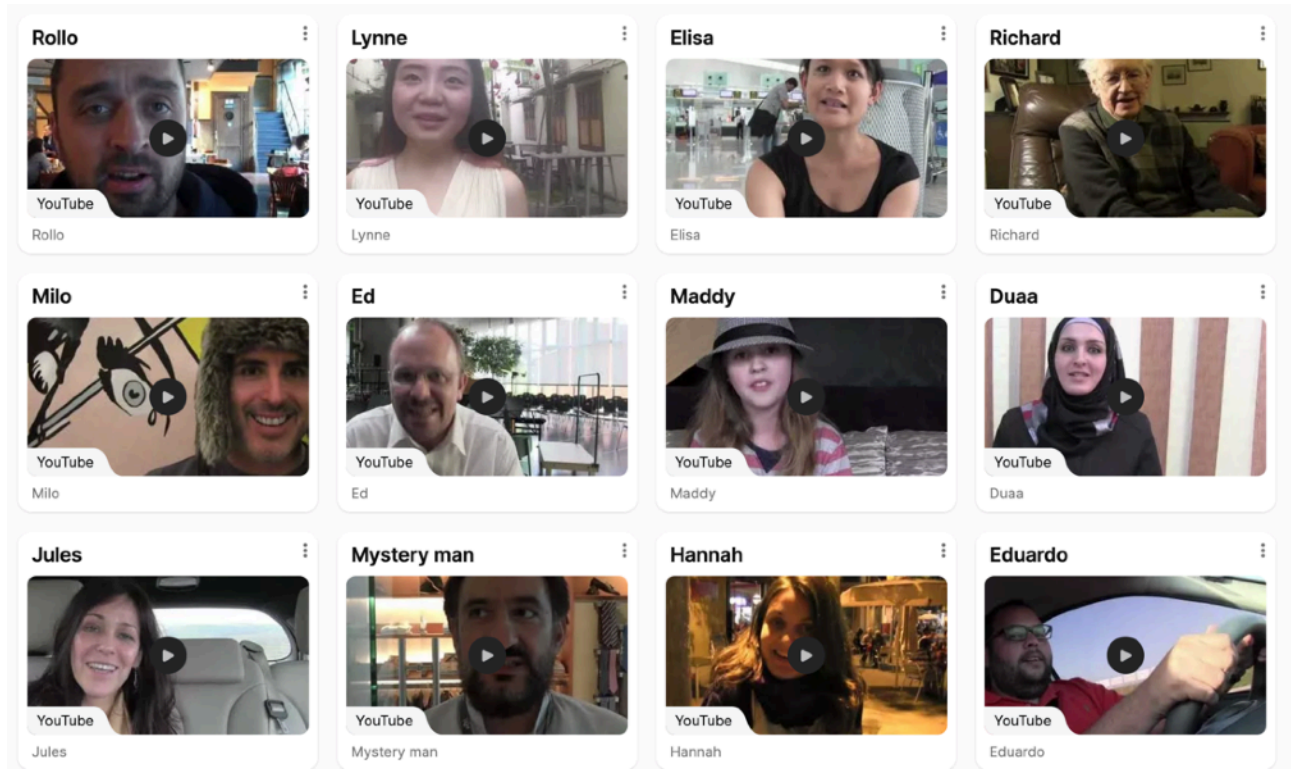


Scan or click the code to access the video gallery



Introduce students to the gallery and let them watch a few of the videos. Invite students to comment on the videotellers' performances in each case.

Make sure you draw students' attention to the fact that some people communicate the mother panda's reaction using gesture as well as language. This is something students could not have done when they wrote their texts.

By now, students should have a broadened appreciation of how the story of the panda video can be told. You can get them to repeat the task, but this time, instead of writing a text, they can create a talking head video.

## Part three: The story of the "Sneezing Baby Panda"

1. On the board or screen, write the following:

- The video was shot (filmed) at a zoo.
- The big panda was a mother and the cub was her baby.
- The big panda was eating bamboo.
- The cub was sleeping.
- The cub sneezed.

2. Ask students the following:

> *Go back to the texts that you wrote.*
> *How many of these five things did you include in your text?*
> *For example, who guessed that the pandas were at a zoo?*
> *Put up your hand.*
> *Who guessed that the big panda was a mother and the cub was her baby?*
> *Put up your hand.*
> *Etc.*

3. Go around the class and ask students how many of the five ideas they included in their texts.

4. Tell students that only one of the five sentences is true. Ask them to guess which one it is and give a reason for their answer.

5. The following video comes from a call that I had in 2014 with Lesley Hammond, one of the filmmakers responsible for the panda video. It is suitable for students with a strong B1 level of English and upwards. Since the audio quality is not great, I highly recommend playing it with subtitles. Ask students to listen carefully and determine which of the five sentences is true.



Scan or click the code
to see the video

According to Lesley:

- The video was shot at a panda breeding centre (in Wolong National Nature Reserve in China).
- The big panda was a mother and the cub was her baby.
- The mother was eating a special biscuit to supplement her diet.
- The cub did not sneeze – it cried out to get its mother's attention.
- This last point would imply that the cub was not sleeping.

This means that only the second sentence is true: the big panda was a mother and the cub was her baby.

6. Ask students if they are surprised by what they heard.

## A sneeze or not a sneeze?

When the panda video was uploaded to YouTube in 2006, it was given the title "Sneezing Baby Panda," and that is how it came to be known.

Personally, I always assumed that the small panda sneezed. But I wonder if I would have made this assumption if I had been unaware of the video's title.

During the videogloss, I suggested that students watch the video in silence and without exchanging comments. The reason for this is to ensure that no student's perception of the video is influenced.

At this stage, you could carry out a simple classroom experiment. Find out the following:

- Who was already familiar with the video's title ("Sneezing Baby Panda")?
- Of those students, how many of them mentioned a sneeze in their text?
- How many of the students who were not familiar with the title mentioned a sneeze?

I have tested this several times and observed that people tend to be influenced by pre-existing knowledge of the video's title.

For the panda, there is no harm done. But you can ask students if they can think of any situations in which assumptions could be problematic. The story of the 2017 BBC interview discussed in the other PDF that accompanies this lesson plan.