

# Dictation Riddles



## Introduction

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# Introduction

## Choosing a Riddle

This photocopyable collection of dictation riddles is appropriate for a wide range of ages and levels of proficiency. It is divided into Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 – from high-beginning through advanced. Each level is further divided into three sections: people, places, and other.

The vocabulary and grammar are progressively more advanced from Level 1 to Level 3. Some key vocabulary is listed in a box before each riddle in the order in which it appears in the riddle. Within each level, you'll find some riddles that are easier, some that are more challenging. Level 1 has fewer than 100 words per riddle; Level 2, fewer than 130; Level 3, fewer than 160.

The most recognizable topics are in Level 1. The subjects that fewer students will recognize, or ones that most likely only an adult student or the more educated will be familiar with, are in Levels 2 and 3.

The actual dictation and corrections on the board take my class (Level 3) about 25 to 30 minutes.

## Using the Dictation Riddles

If your class has never done dictation, and even if your students are familiar with dictation, start with a very easy one like The Statue of Liberty (Level 1, Other 1) or George Washington (Level 1, People 7). Immediate success is always better than intimidation or failure. Walk them through it step by step as a demo. You may need to explain that a riddle is a word game.

As you work with the dictations with a class that is comfortable with Level 2 or 3, sometimes use a dictation from a lower level to show them how much they've improved. It's always nice for the students to look back once in a while and see how far they've come instead of always looking at how far they still have to go. Also, you can easily customize a riddle to make it easier or more challenging.

Below are two basic ways to use the riddles. Use the option that works best for you and your class. The asterisks in each line are suggested places to pause to give time to write. Watch to see if everyone is keeping up. (*There is a photocopyable blank dictation sheet on page 155.*)

### Option One

- 1 ♦ Tell your students that the riddle is about a person, place, animal, or thing.
- 2 ♦ Write the vocabulary that you believe they don't know on the board and go over the meanings within the context of how they're used in the riddle. Do **not** put words on the board that will give away the answer.
- 3 ♦ After getting the vocabulary out of the way, do the dictation line-by-line. See *Dictation Patterns* for two possible patterns. At this time do not let anyone give the answer.
- 4 ♦ As the dictation progresses, keep reminding them not to give the answer, although you can let them say, "Teacher, I know."
- 5 ♦ When you reach the last line, dictate the first part of the line and then ask, "Who knows the answer?" If the students disagree with each other, discuss the answers. If no one knows, give the answer and consider having them do some follow-up research.

### Option Two

- 1 ♦ Tell your students that the riddle is about a person, place, animal, or thing.
- 2 ♦ Write the vocabulary that you believe they don't know on the board and go over the meanings within the context of how they're used in the riddle. Do **not** put words on the board that will give away the answer. Put those words on the board after the initial reading (Step 5).

- 3 ♦ Then say, “Pencils down. Do not write yet.”
- 4 ♦ “Don’t shout out the answer if you know it. Give others a chance. Wait until the end.”
- 5 ♦ Slowly read the riddle in its entirety. If there’s a word you omitted on the board, now’s the time to clarify what it means.
- 6 ♦ When you reach the last line, do not say the answer. Say, “If you know the answer, don’t say anything.”
- 7 ♦ “Are you ready to write? Pick up your pencils. Don’t shout out the answer if you know it. Give others a chance. Wait until the end. Sentence 1 ...”
- 8 ♦ When you reach the last line, dictate the first part of the line and then ask, “Who knows the answer?” If the students disagree with each other, discuss the answers. If no one knows, give the answer and consider having them do some follow-up research.

## Dictation Patterns

*These examples are from King Tutankhamun in Level 1.*

**Pattern 1:** Say the entire sentence first, deliberately:

*My life as a pharaoh was short.*

Then go phrase-by-phrase without repeating the previous phrase:

*My life* (wait)

*as a pharaoh* (wait)

*was short* (wait)

And finally, repeat the whole sentence again:

*My life as a pharaoh was short.*

**Pattern 2:** Say each sentence phrase by phrase, repeating as much as necessary.

*My life* \* (wait)

*My life as a pharaoh* \* (wait)

*My life as a pharaoh was short.* \* (wait)

And finally, repeat the whole sentence again:

*My life as a pharaoh was short.*

### *Other suggestions on giving these dictations:*

- ◆ 1: I do not usually help with spelling during the dictation, because I firmly believe we learn by making mistakes and correcting them ourselves.
- ◆ 2: Give the punctuation as you feel it is needed.
- ◆ 3: Whichever pattern you use, try to use an intonation pattern that “hangs” at the end of each phrase, and falls only after the last one, unless the line is a yes/no question. This helps the students recognize the end of the sentence.
- ◆ 4: Do you allow students to interrupt to ask questions or for repetition? Whether you do or not, establish the ground rules before you begin.
- ◆ 5: Do your students have to know the answer? NO! If no one knows it, it’s a learning experience for all. If only one student knows the answer, it’s that student’s opportunity to be the star! For example: Most likely, only a student from South America will know who Manuela Saenz is, but she was a very interesting person, and maybe there’s someone similar in the history of another student’s country, and that can lead to an interesting discussion.
- ◆ 6: Give instant feedback by correcting the dictation immediately after it is done. A student who is there the night we do dictation may not be there for another week or two due to work, family, a trip back to Mexico, etc.
- ◆ 7: It’s an old but true expression: A picture is worth a thousand words. It’s very easy to go online to find pictures of the subject of any riddle to show the class after the riddle. If a student is unfamiliar with Mount Rushmore, a picture will make it come alive and be more meaningful. Also check online for current statistics if you believe, for example, that a recent earthquake broke the record for the biggest one.

### **Post Dictation Techniques**

- 1 ◆ Put the sentence numbers on the board and ask for volunteers to write the sentences. In the beginning of the year, students may be slow to volunteer, so I beg. As a last resort, I assign the sentences to the students. Later, when they become more comfortable, it’s like a stampede to get to the board first.
- 2 ◆ At the board, students are allowed to help each other. It’s a cooperative learning activity.

◆ *Note: Rule 1 in my class: Have fun!*

*Rule 2: Never be afraid or embarrassed to make a mistake.  
(If you don't make mistakes, I'm unemployed!)*

3 ◆ Go over each sentence as a class.

◆ *Note: The procedure I use for going over sentences is something like this:*

*Sentence 1: "Does anyone see any mistakes? Is it 100% correct? Great job, Luis!" I let them find the mistakes. I rarely have to point them out; someone almost always can figure it out or be on the right track. If I do, I'll point to the mistake and ask, "Does this look right?" "Is this the word I said? Did I say 'thought' or 'taught'?"*

◆ *Note: This is the perfect time to explain spelling rules (hoping vs. hopping) and grammar and punctuation. (The malapropisms can be very funny. One of my students once wrote, "He (Valentine) gave his love a farewell massage" instead of message.)*

4 ◆ The students make their corrections on their papers as we go over the sentences before handing them in for me to recheck. The student who may not be there for the next class knows immediately what his mistakes were and can benefit from that.

5 ◆ You may, of course, copy the dictation for them to use as they self-correct. You may want to cover the notes, which can be a distraction.

## **Discussion**

You may want to try small-group discussions about something in the riddle. Each group can report to the class. (For example: Do you think dolphins and killer whales can be happy in captivity? What if a dolphin or killer whale is born in captivity? If released, would it know how to survive? Would the wild ones accept it?) It's usually best in discussion groups to appoint one student to be in charge of making sure that everyone contributes to the discussion and it isn't dominated by one or two students.

You can also stimulate discussion by sharing some of the other information in the "Notes." Because this is additional information (not in the dictations) it may encourage your students to comment and add information of their own or ask questions.

## Other Options

- ◆ In more advanced classes, the students may volunteer to give the dictation.
- ◆ After the dictation, students can take turns reading lines of the riddle.
- ◆ Partners can compare their dictations and see how many of their own mistakes they can correct before putting the sentences on the board or handing them in.
- ◆ You can hand out a copy of the riddle to use for self-correction.
- ◆ If time is short, you can collect the students' riddles to be corrected and returned later.
- ◆ **And lastly**, sometimes you may want to edit the riddles for use as reading exercises. Photocopy the riddle, covering up the title and the answer. Go over the key vocabulary, and then let the students read the riddle and guess the answer.

## Student Project

Have your students write their own riddles to read to the class! Help them choose a topic if they need help. Explain that they need to start with a very general statement and gradually become more specific, giving clues to the answer. Even the shyest ones may surprise you with how eager they are to get in front of the class and read their riddles! You may want to tell them to write at least 4 (or 5, or 6) lines. And, of course, you can then join in the fun of guessing the right answer.

## The Notes

After each riddle there are notes with additional information to share with your class. You can use these to stimulate further discussion. For example, you can copy the page and read and/or discuss the notes with your students. With levels 1 and 2, however, you may decide not to give them copies of the notes and use the information very selectively for brief “FYIs” and possible discussion.

**Caution:** Read the information first if you plan to hand it out to students. For younger students, you may not want to share with them information, for example, on Thomas Jefferson's relationship to Sally Hemings, or information that Oprah was illegitimate and a promiscuous teen.

## Using the Internet

The Net is always a valuable source for the newest statistics and current information – like whether or not Lonesome George, the Galapagos tortoise, is a daddy yet!

If your students show an interest in a topic and computer time is available, have them do a bit of research, find some new information, and report back to the class.

## Using the CDs

The CDs can be used for listening practice or for giving the dictation. We don't realize how much we depend on visual cues when we are having a conversation. Using the CD is a good way to develop listening skills that prepare students for phone conversations, radio, public address systems, and other situations where they cannot see the mouth of the speaker.

If you use the recording to give the dictation, try it with a riddle easier than one you would normally choose. Here is a procedure that will work with some CD players; be sure to practice it before you use it in class:

- ◆ Play the track once in its entirety. (The answer is not recorded)
- ◆ Do the dictation phrase by phrase (the brief pauses on the CDs are the same as in the book.
- ◆ Because the pauses on the recording are short, the use of the pause button will be necessary to give your students time to write.
- ◆ Play the riddle through one last time after dictation for students to check their work.
- ◆ You can also play the entire track before doing the dictation to introduce the entire riddle.
- ◆ You can just play the CD for listening practice, and have the students write a paragraph reconstructing what they heard.