



Seeing What You Expect to See

Stephen M. Ryan, Sanyo Gakuen University

stephen05summer@yahoo.com

1. Overview and Objectives

Activity Overview

In order to engage with (intercultural) experience, we need to see it. This activity can be used to convince students that they do not perceive everything going on around them. In it, they are given an observation task that induces them NOT to see some totally unexpected things that are happening within their field of vision. This activity originated in a psychological experiment first reported in 2010 (<https://doi.org/10.1068/i0386>) which then led to a book (<http://www.theinvisiblegorilla.com/>) and a number of online videos.

Learning Objectives

General Objectives

- To understand that observation is selective, but can be trained and focused.

Keywords

intercultural awareness, observation skills

2. Activity Context

I first used it as part of a short course (4 lessons with two large homework assignments) taught to a group of university students who were waiting for Study Abroad (SA) assignments. The course aimed to prepare them to be observers of the foreign SA locations once they got there.

Students

Number of students	5 Min.	100 Max.
Do students need to use a second language?	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No

Comments

There is some English text in the video, for which students need to be at least CEFR A2, but the teacher can provide an L1 explanation, if necessary.

3. Activity Materials & Prep

Activity Duration

Total duration in minutes:	20
How many sessions?	1
Any homework?	No

Materials

Material # 1 Title:	The Monkey Business Illusion" - other similar materials are available on YouTube
Material Type:	Video File
Material Access:	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGQmdoK_ZfY

Set-Up Instructions

1. Make sure you are familiar with the video, the steps it takes students through, and the time (elapsed video time) at which each step begins and ends.

Estimated Set Up Time (min.): 20

4. Activity Description

Suggested Time	Activity Instructions
4m	Explain to students that they are about to watch a video of people playing with basketballs. They are to count the number of times players in white shirts pass their ball between them.
1m	Play the first part of the video.
2m	Stop the video when all the players leave the screen (0:41) and debrief the task: How many times did the white team pass the ball?
4m	Ask: Did anybody notice anything unusual? Some students have, some haven't ...very few will have noticed all the unusual events. Let students share what they have seen.
1m	Play the rest of the video.
	<p>Discuss with students the implications of this activity for their encounters with the new and different. You may do so by eliciting the discussion with questions such as the following:</p> <p>Why do you think some people didn't see the gorilla?</p> <p>What can we learn about our observation skills by doing this experiment?</p>

4. Additional Information

Tips during the activity:

Some students may have seen this kind of video before and know to watch for the gorilla, but they are unlikely to be expecting the other bizarre events that happen during the basketball "game", so you can still make your point with them.

Post-activity suggestions:

This activity makes a good introduction to training students to be better observers.

Acknowledgements:

The scientific article: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1068/i0386>

The book: <http://www.theinvisiblegorilla.com/>