

Taboo

(Source: based on Nichols, A. and Kinninment, D. (2001))

Taboo is a guessing game used to encourage students to define terms, develop vocabulary and use prior knowledge. It was developed as one of the 'thinking skills' strategies and it is a very easy one to use. It is a useful activity for retrieval practice and it helps to support students' conceptual understanding.

Players take turns to describe the top word (usually a geographical term/concept) on a card without using any of the additional five words below (obvious words). It helps students to think about and recall definitions and is also a useful tool for diagnostic assessment in the version where students decide their own taboo words. If this is used as a game you will need to devise rules and a scoring system. The other players have to listen and guess the word. The person who guesses the word correctly has the next turn.

The rationale is to encourage students to think carefully about the meaning of a geographical term/concept, recall what they know about it and explain it to others so that they can identify it from the description. The activity requires a good understanding of the concept so that the person describing it can do so without using the obvious words listed.

The activity can be used with either a small group or as a whole class activity.

A possible strategy for use of taboo

- Give each group a card with a term, and a list of words. They have to describe the term **WITHOUT** using the words on the list.
- Give time for the group to plan their description.
- Each group presents their description to the other groups who try to identify it. They should read the description slowly and say it twice.
- A point is awarded to each team that correctly identifies the description.
- A point is awarded to the describing team for each of the groups that correctly identifies the term.
- Using a taboo word means no points.

Some hints on managing taboo

- Students need some understanding of the concepts and vocabulary before they can play the game – this is an activity for consolidating, recall and checking understanding, and using and grouping terms.
- Make sure the terms of the taboo cards are the ones you have used in your lessons.
- Consider student groupings carefully. You may wish to group by ability and adapt the word lists or key terms by leaving some out or adding others. You may decide that mixed ability groups are best.

- Make any scoring system clear (if you use one) and apply it consistently!
- Students should play the game without reference to textbooks or notes – they need to recall the information and work out the solutions, not look them up.
- Make sure you have a master copy of the terms and taboo words.
- A possible homework can be to develop the definitions further, including the taboo words on the cards.

An alternative approach is for *students to devise* the taboo words. The idea is to ask teams to write three words on cards that might be used in a definition of the Taboo Keyword given at the top of the card. Once this has been done the cards are given to the other team face down. Each player in turn draws a card and the students have to describe the keyword without using it or the other three words in their definition.

- See Roberts (2023) Figure 9.9 for further activities that support the development of conceptual understanding.

Reference

- Nichols, A. and Kinninment, D., (2001) *More Thinking through Geography*, Chris Kington Publishing.
- Roberts, M. (2023) *Geography Through Enquiry: Approaches to teaching and learning in the secondary school*, Second edition. Sheffield: Geographical Association.

Case studies to illustrate taboo

- Nichols' examples are: *water cycle, settlement*
- At the end of this activity sheet, there are some ready-made taboo cards on the themes of weather and climate, coasts, and settlement.

(Last updated Nov 2023)

Taboo cards: Weather and climate

(Source: Victoria Ellis, Swanwick Hall School, Derbyshire)

CLIMATE	PRECIPITATION	FORECAST
weather average conditions atmosphere hot cold wet dry	rain hail sleet snow moisture water atmosphere cloud	weather television news predict satellite measure symbols map

DEPRESSION	MICROCLIMATE	GLOBAL WARMING
pressure front rainfall low high anticyclone warm sector	climate area small local shelter weather urban mountain coast	increase temperature earth greenhouse effect ice melt sea level

GREENHOUSE EFFECT	FRONT	PREVAILING WIND
blanket gas atmosphere global warming carbon dioxide CFC's deforestation cars	warm cold air mass depression rainfall cloud warm sector occluded	direction dominant common frequent usual sea land

Taboo cards: Coasts

(Source: Victoria Ellis, Swanwick Hall School, Derbyshire)

BEACH	LONGSHORE DRIFT	HYDRAULIC POWER
sand shingle deposit cliff sunbathe holiday mass dumped	movement along zig-zag estuary Spurn Head sand shingle deposit	water air crack cliff break waves crash

BACKWASH	TRACTION	EROSION
movement back water wave swash down beach wash	transport roll heavy rock bed beach energy	wear away rock cliff attrition corrosion hydraulic power waves water

ATTRITION	ABRASION	RIP-RAP
erosion pebbles rocks material crash each other wear	cliff erosion waves water throw hit rock wear away	rocks boulders Norway cliff protect waves erosion

SALTATION	GABION	SEA WALL
transport rocks water bounce bed heavy energy waves	boulders cage wire cliff protect defence erosion	concrete expensive ugly protect cliff erosion

CORROSION	WAVE	SPIT
erosion dissolve wear away chemicals	water circular up down movement wind energy swash backwash	bar deposit shingle sand Spurn Head estuary longshore drift movement

GROYNE	STACK	ARCH
wood rock sea defence stop longshore drift trap protect beach	chalk headland Old Harry erosion arch stump cliff rock	chalk rock cliff arch erosion stack Old Harry cave

Taboo cards: Settlement

(Source: Victoria Ellis, Swanwick Hall School, Derbyshire)

SITE	URBANISATION	URBAN CHANGE
situation location place area land functions building	city urban rural migration movement shanty towns growth population	improve restore old houses better new houses trendy development inner city

CBD	INNER CITY	SETTLEMENT
central business district shop office middle entertainment city	city crime rough run-down industry derelict middle	town city place area development build village services

DEVELOPMENT	SHANTY TOWN	COMMUTER VILLAGE
economic development rich poor country money	slum shack favela poor immigrants city dirty area	rural work drive people transport dormitory city