

# **Using Authentic Materials in an Elementary Language Class**

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# Overview

## Session goals:

- To discuss what authentic materials are
- To explain why they are effective and motivating for students
- To provide guidelines in selecting and using them
- To provide suggestions on acquiring authentic materials

# How do we tend to teach?

- Teachers like to break down learning goals into smaller objectives
  - Example: Skills are isolated from new vocabulary
- This leads to focused activities and high repetition of specific tasks
- This is how most non-native speakers learn a language unless they are immersed
- Most teaching materials are set up this way
- This makes sense and it is sound
- Language activities are mechanical, abstract and artificial

# Gramática

## Repaso

### El pretérito de los verbos

You use the preterite to talk about things that happened in the past.  
Here are the regular preterite forms of verbs ending in *-ar*, *-er*, and *-ir*:

#### **caminar**

caminé	caminamos
caminaste	caminasteis
caminó	caminaron

#### **comer**

comí	comimos
comiste	comisteis
comió	comieron

#### **vivir**

viví	vivimos
viviste	vivisteis
vivió	vivieron

Here are the preterite forms of the irregular verbs *hacer*, *dar*, and *ver*:

#### **hacer**

hice	hicimos
hiciste	hicisteis
hizo	hicieron

#### **dar**

di	dimos
diste	disteis
dio	dieron

#### **ver**

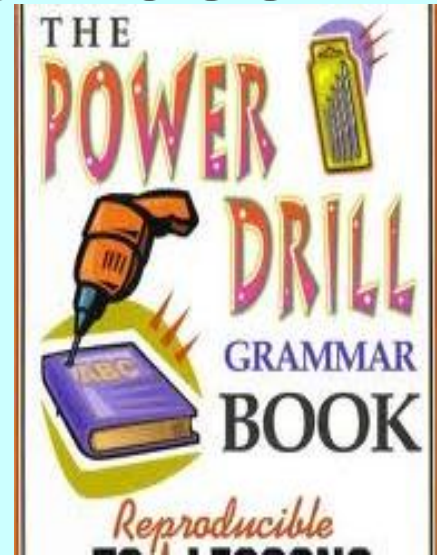
vi	vimos
viste	visteis
vio	vieron

# Language teaching materials

- Many teaching materials tend to focus on vocabulary in isolation
- Textbook activities build on past lessons
  - Methodical, builds confidence, predictable, user-friendly
- Frequently avoid high-frequency language because it is slang or does not follow the book's rules
- You can use non-authentic materials in creative ways, but it does not have the same meaning for students

# Changing how we do business

- This is not how we learn our native language
- The goal is to use and build confidence with AM



# Fútbol metaphor

- Imagine you want to play but don't get to until you have had years and years of just trapping and passing the ball
  - This is not motivating and doesn't seem to make sense
  - You might be good at those skills but not good at putting them together



¿Qué pasa por la cabeza del consumidor en el punto de venta?



¡Achís!, ¿cuál será el bueno?



¿Qué..? No le entiendo



¡No alcanzo!



¿Me estarán  
tomando el pelo?



¿Será que tiene todo eso?



¿Este será el machín?



# Authentic materials

- Authentic materials are materials that have been produced to fulfill some social purpose in the language community
- Their purpose is not to educate non-native speakers

# Quiz: Authentic Materials?

1. An online “salsa radio channel”
2. A menu from a Chinese restaurant in your town
3. A children’s book in German
4. The Guardian (a London newspaper)
5. A postcard of La Plaza Mayor, Madrid



# Challenges with using AM

1. Acquiring materials
2. Selecting materials
3. Presenting materials
4. Deciding what students should do with the AM

# 1. Acquiring AM

- Ideally: travel
- Get photos of you in the target environment
  - Encourage students to see you as a guide/intermediary to the language and culture
  - You can frame images to draw a connection
- “Packaged cultural materials”
  - Collections of authentic stories can be bought
- Find immigrant communities

# Online authentic materials

- <http://www.unh.edu/spanish/lina/resources.html>  
free online resources, activities for teachers of Spanish (and a few other languages)
- Music-easy to find but lyrics are harder
- YouTube – preview, avoid ads, be careful about calling representative



Using a  
photo, versus  
video, versus  
a live dance





Do photos count as an AM?  
How would PowerPoint compare with a poster?

## 2. Selecting materials

- What is the goal? Just the wow factor?
- How typical is it of the country/region/culture that speak the language?
- What materials will your school pay for?
- Is it attractive and engaging for students?
- Can students use it for it's intended purpose or is it too fragile?
- How much does it look like “the US version?”

# How flexible is the AM? Can it:

- be used with multiple language levels?
- be used as a cultural artifact?
- be engaging and useful for different lessons?
- reflect history?
- reflect pop culture?
- be used as a decoration in your classroom?
- be used for higher-order thinking?
- reinforce values/beliefs you want students to think about?









# Things to consider

- No AM is perfect
  - Distracting
  - Not typical/authentic
  - Authentic, but not representative
- Don't over-use any one activity type, trick, material
- What does it say about the people's values, experience or how they see the world?





## MALE DRESS

### White



Has not made the hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca.

### Black and White



From a country with Presidential rule (i.e. Libya or Egypt) and has made the hajj.

### Red Checkered



From a country with a monarch (i.e. Saudi Arabia or Jordan) and has made the hajj.

## GESTURES



Right hand over heart is a sign of respect or thanks



Hand is Motionless

Right hand, palm up, fingers touching, means to slow down or be patient.



Quick upward head snap with tongue click means no.

# Is the AM age-appropriate?

- Cultural expectations are different in the target culture
- You will need to carefully help students contextualize and unpack the symbols and meaning of the AM

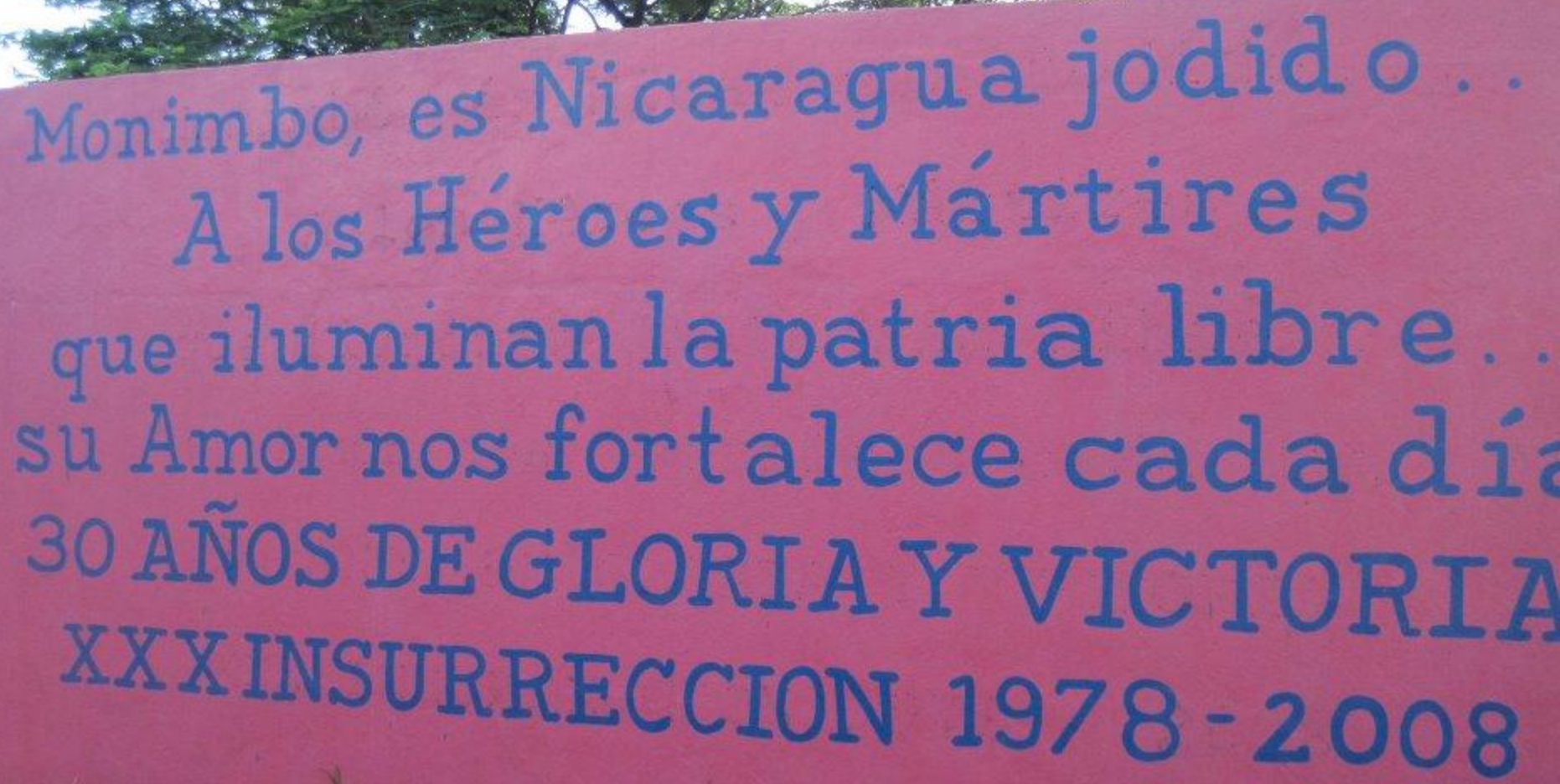
# Is the AM age appropriate? Cont.

- Can students:
  - place the AL in the context of the culture/time/country?
  - communicate the meaning and purpose of the AL in their own words?
  - use critical thinking and their experience to avoid stereotyping people based on a photo?

The image shows a screenshot of a Spanish tax form, specifically 'Modelo 212 DECLARACIÓN DE RENTAS DE NO RESIDENTES'. The form is from the 'Agencia Tributaria' (Tax Agency) and is titled 'Impuesto sobre la Renta de no Residentes. No residentes sin establecimiento permanente'. It includes a section for 'Contribuyente' (Taxpayer) with a placeholder for an identification tag. A barcode is visible with the number '262763055349 3'. The form also features a 'Relenar Formulario' button and a 'Devengo' section at the bottom.



Appropriate? Consider maturity and lesson goals



Monimbo, es Nicaragua jodido...  
A los Héroes y Mártires  
que iluminan la patria libre...  
su Amor nos fortalece cada día  
30 AÑOS DE GLORIA Y VICTORIA  
XXX INSURRECCION 1978-2008



An altar for Day of the Dead in Puebla in 2001

Would this be ok for students in California? Australia? In 2020? A discussion about 9/11?



# 3. Presenting materials

- How materials are presented is just as important as the materials themselves
- Be enthusiastic
- Place it in context
- Look for the hidden meanings and lessons
- Be knowledgeable about the AM
  - How can it speak for a culture/people?
- Students can research the materials, but this is a lesson on doing research and takes a long time



# Presenting materials, cont.

- Consider if you want them to figure it out
- Anticipate interruptions by students
- Anticipate push-back based on students' own values/beliefs
- Be careful of cultural relativism
- Be self aware of what you say and value judgments
  - “It seems kind of strange ...”
  - “They were stronger than the natives.”
  - “That was not a very Christian thing to do.”

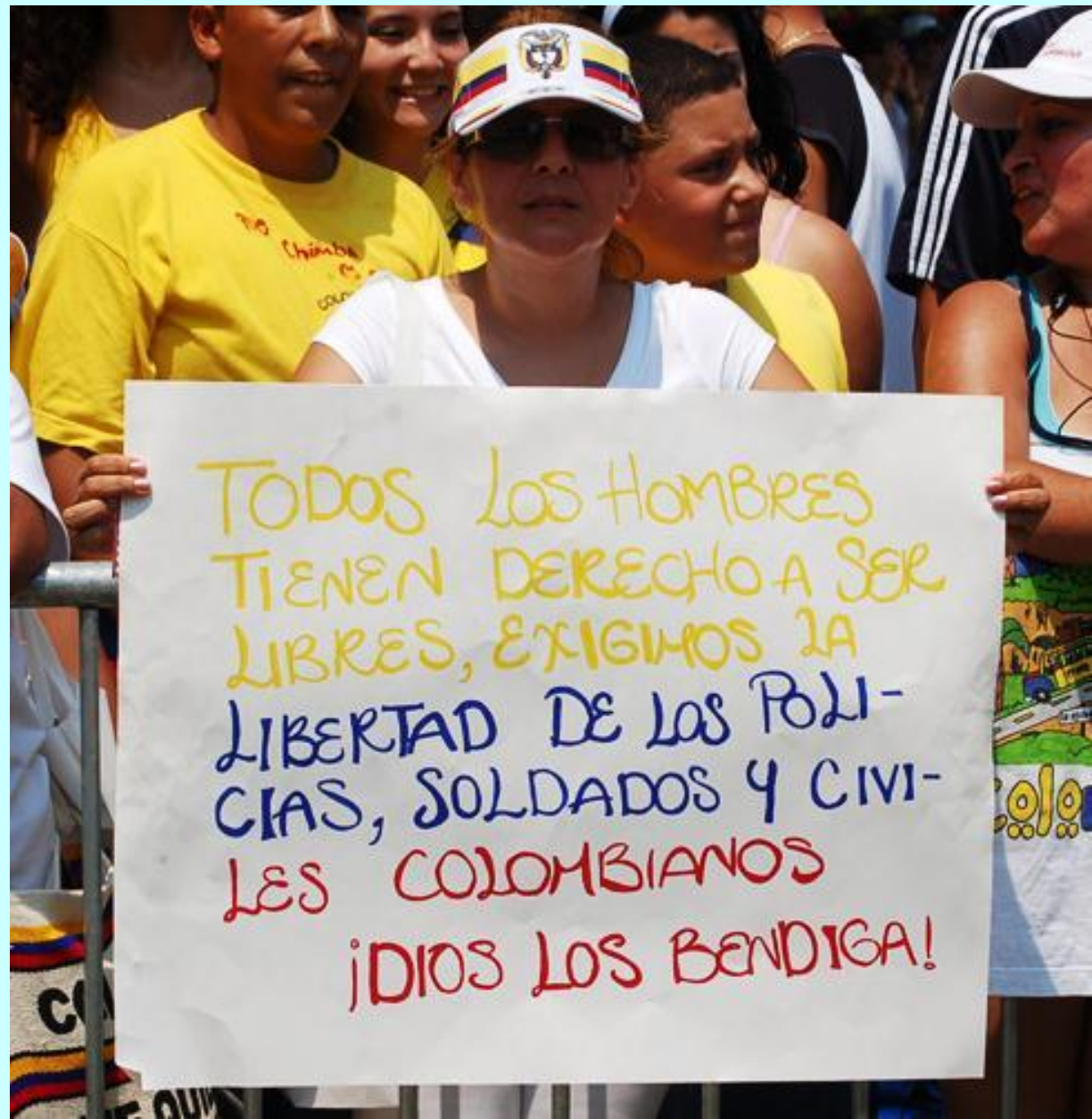


PAZ, BIEN, SOLIDARIDAD!

# Time-sensitivity

- Does time effect the material's usefulness?
- Is a newspaper engaging even if it is old?
- Is a teen magazine interesting even if it is old?
- Do you have time to prepare the lesson and the materials?
  - Do you know everything you need to know?

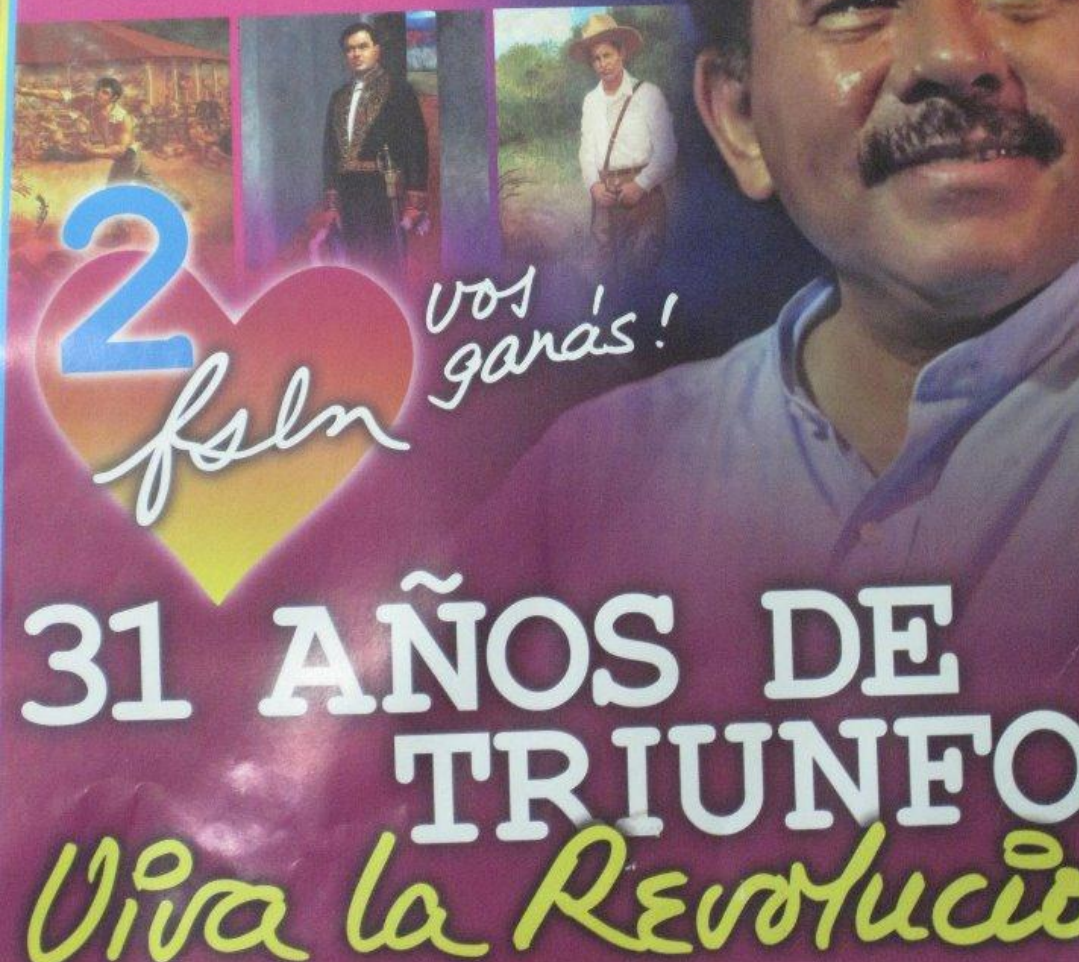
When was this  
photo taken? What  
is she referring to?





# Nicaragua

CRISTIANA,  
SOCIALISTA,  
SOLIDARIA!



Elections tomorrow;  
Nov 7

- AM are meaning-rich
- Posters or ads are very carefully crafted: background pictures, numbers, symbols,

# Overwhelming students

- An overwhelmed student is frustrated and unmotivated
- AM is designed for native speakers so the level may be difficult
- Slang can be a stumbling block for you and students if it is too regional
  - But it can be interesting and motivating if it comes up often



# Materials don't fall into neat little lessons

- AM materials introduce new vocabulary, use unfamiliar formats and have unfamiliar topics
- Presenting materials might need to be broken down into parts or different lessons
- AM assumes the user has needed background information and experience
  - It takes time/effort to unpack the many meanings

## 4. Decide what students should do with the AM

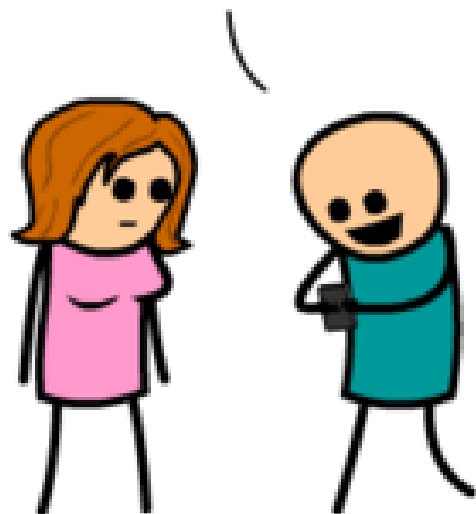
- Is the purpose to:
  - interest or motivate students to travel? Learn the language?
  - personalize people who speak the language?
  - show how vocabulary/grammar is used or how useful it is?
  - introduce a discussion topic?



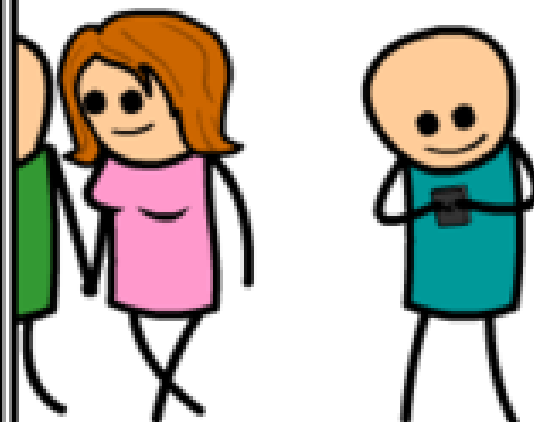
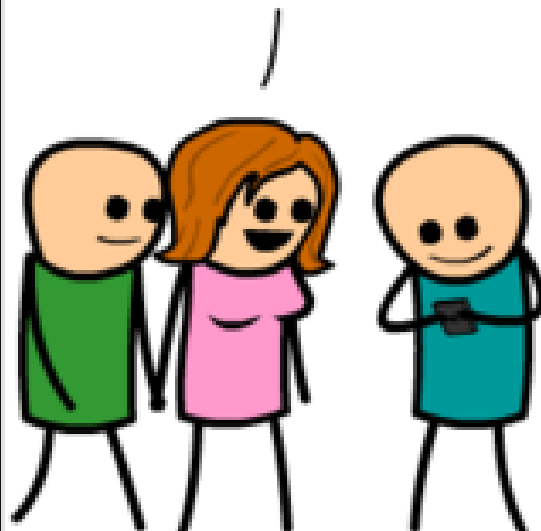
How could this  
palm frond animal  
be used in class?

How would you  
discuss the boys  
who make them?

MIRA CARIÑO, ACABO DE  
RECIBIR EL NUEVO IPHONE!



QUE COINCIDENCIA. YO  
TENGO UN NUEVO NOVIO



¿DIJISTE ALGO?



# Conclusion

- Common teaching materials are useful and effective but are not enough
- AM are necessary to motivate and prepare students
- AM need to be selected carefully
- Thoughtfully present AM

# ¿Tienen preguntas?

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