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Lina Lee
University of New Hampshire, Durham, lina.lee@unh.edu

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Let's Play Bingo: A New Way to Learn
Numbers, Vocabulary, and Verbs

Lina Lee
State University of New York, Plattsburgh

Abstract: The objective of this activity is to help beginning students learn numbers, and practice vocabulary and verbs in an interesting and meaningful way. In addition, this activity attempts to improve their listening comprehension and speaking ability.

Key Words: games, vocabulary, verbs, numbers, bingo, loteria

Many beginning students have the difficulty of understanding numbers as well as of composing simple sentences in a foreign language. The activity of “Vamos a jugar a la lotería” is a great way for practicing Spanish by listening, asking, and answering questions to each other as well as reinforcing what they have just learned in the classroom. In addition, it creates interaction among students.

The following is an example of playing lotería with numbers. The instructor decides the range of the numbers to play, for example from one to a hundred, writes the numbers on paper, and cuts them into small pieces to place in a plastic bag or a box. The instructor also brings pinto beans for the students to mark the items on their cards.

Each student prepares a cardboard bingo chart of 12 blocks (3 x 4) or 16 blocks (4 x 4). They then write the desired numbers within the selected range in the boxes on their cards, as illustrated below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lotería (0–100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27 7 87 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 68 100 99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43 33 2 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 6 0 56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the instructor reads numbers from the bag, students place a pinto bean on the number they hear that matches the number on the bingo card, taking care to mix the numbers well before drawing them. Before the game, the instructor explains the following rules to students in Spanish:

1. Primero se van a decidir las alternativas para ganar (una fila completa o tarjeta completa).
2. Se dirá cada número tres veces.
3. Hay que colocar un frijol en el cuadro que corresponde al número leído.
4. Se dice “lotería” en voz alta cuando uno gane la lotería.
5. Se van a leer los números otra vez para comprobar los números de la cartilla ganadora.
6. Se le premiará al ganador con dulces o con crédito extra [optional].
A variety of this activity is to ask students to write a short phrase on each box of the bingo chart, such as “Tener una familia loca” or “Tener un tío soltero” in Spanish. The instructor can choose the thematic topic, such as “familia,” “viaje,” and “fin de semana” activities for students to create a set of sentences to write on the bingo chart. Some examples for family situations that students can write on their cards follow:

Lotería (Familia)
una familia loca
una madre que trabaja
un pariente que bebe mucho
más de cuatro hermanos
un tío divorciado
una tía que cocina bien
una sobrina que canta bien
un padre que fuma
un pariente de México
una cuñada rica
más de siete tíos
una hermana casada
un hermano menor
gemelos/as en la familia
un primo que vive en Tejas
cuatro abuelos vivos

Instead of the instructor’s reading phrases, the students themselves present each situation to their classmates. Once they get a “sí” answer of confirmation, they ask the classmate to sign his or her name in the square. Students continue to play the activity until they have enough signatures to get lotería. In order to evaluate the learning outcome of this activity, the instructor can call on individuals and ask them questions or have them ask each other questions in Spanish at the end of the activity.

This activity can also be used to reinforce grammatical concepts, such as servir estar, gustar, or saber vs conocer. Students can create their own sentences, such as “conocer al presidente de la universidad” or “saber cocinar la comida china” for their bingo chart. Another way of using lotería is to acquire cultural knowledge by asking questions, such as “¿Cuál es la capital de Cuba?, “¿Quién es el presidente de Perú?,” “¿Qué es una sobremesa?,” etc. Overall, the activity of lotería is an effective and fun way for students to learn and to practice their numbers, vocabulary, grammatical concepts as well as cultural knowledge in the target language. Students feel less anxious while speaking Spanish and interact actively with their peers by playing lotería.