

Vanilla

We promised more information gap activities on line They are quick to download, and prepare for the classroom and are an ideal way to introduce material with difficult reading tasks but which we really want to teach. This activity was sourced from a book (Vanilla by Tim Ecott ISBN 0-7181-4589-5) about the history and politics of vanilla: a commodity much prized in Europe and the USA, but which brings very little money to those who grow it. Here is part of the story about a black slave who discovered how to fertilise the plant but was never rewarded. There are now a large number (many of them from Reunion and France) of websites with more information.

The webaddress for this activity is: <http://www.collaborativelearning.org/vanilla.pdf>

Last update 10th April 2011

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING PROJECT

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Supporting a cooperative network of teaching professionals throughout the European Union to develop and disseminate accessible teaching materials in all subject areas and for all ages.

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BRIEF SUMMARY OF BASIC PRINCIPLES BEHIND OUR TEACHING ACTIVITIES:

The project is a teacher network, and a non-profit making educational trust. Our main aim is to develop and disseminate classroom tested examples of effective group strategies across all phases and subjects. We hope they will inspire you to use similar strategies in other topics and curriculum areas. We run teacher workshops, swapshops and conferences throughout the European Union. The project publishes a catalogue of activities plus lists in selected subject areas, and a newsletter available by post or internet: "PAPERCLIP".

*These activities were influenced by current thinking about the role of language in learning. They are designed to help children learn through talk and active learning in small groups. They work best in mixed classes where children in need of language or learning support are integrated. They are well suited for the development of speaking and listening. They provide teachers opportunities for assessment of speaking and listening and other formative assessment.

*They support differentiation by placing a high value on what children can offer to each other on a particular topic, and also give children the chance to respect each other's views and formulate shared opinions which they can disseminate to peers. By helping them to take ideas and abstract concepts, discuss, paraphrase and move them about physically, they help to develop thinking skills.

*They give children the opportunity to participate in their own words and language in their own time without pressure. Many activities can be tried out in mother tongue and afterwards in English. A growing number of activities are available in more than one language, not translated, but mixed, so that you may need more than one language to complete the activity.

*They encourage study skills in context, and should therefore be used with a range of appropriate information books which are preferably within reach in the classroom.

*They are generally adaptable over a wide age range because children can bring their own knowledge to an activity and refer to books at an appropriate level. The activities work like catalysts.

*All project activities were planned and developed by teachers working together, and the main reason they are disseminated is to encourage teachers to work effectively with each other inside and outside the classroom. They have made it possible for mainstream and language and learning support teachers to share an equal role in curriculum delivery. They should be adapted to local conditions. In order to help us keep pace with curriculum changes, please send any new or revised activities back to the project, so that we can add them to our lists of materials.

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Collaborative Reading Materials with an information gap.

There are three or four different texts with a common question sheet. The principle here is that readers will be unable to complete the questions by simply using the information in their version, but will have to collaborate with other readers, asking questions and eliciting information, possibly arguing and negotiating. Some of the questions are factual but others try to be open ended. There is also a good opportunity for reading to draw on their own previous knowledge. The answer space on the question sheet is deliberately cramped to encourage notes rather than whole sentences.

We have outlined the following procedure, but you can reorganise things in a variety of ways. You can possibly arrange to pair slower readers with faster ones etc. You could start with threes rather than pairs etc. It depends on your knowledge of the class.

The class can work first in pairs or threes or fours. To start the activity only the question sheet is handed out and groups are encouraged to see what questions they may have some answers to. Each group member then is given a text sheet: within groups they have copies of the same text. The important thing is that the texts are equally spread across the class. E.g. A quarter of the pupils have Sheet A, another Sheet B etc. . Pairs/groups can read the text silently first, and then to each other, and then work together to answer as many questions as they can. They all have to produce a sheet with answers.

You will need to number the individuals in each group or give them an identity e.g. an animal card so that they can move to meet up with other pupils with different texts to form a group of three or four; i.e. they jigsaw. Each participant has either Sheet A, Sheet B etc. They need to take their partly filled question sheets with them. If you print each text on a different colour you will find organising things easier. You can easily see whether they have got into the correct groups. They can then go on to complete the questions by interrogating each other.

If you are thinking about producing your own information gaps, and I hope you do, you may find it easier if you try this method. Find a suitable whole single text containing the information you wish to teach. Formulate a series of questions for the text. Produce three or four texts where the factual and inferential information is shared between them. Some overlapping of information is fine. You can of course, where appropriate, include visual material, graphs, maps etc. There are now quite a few examples on the website.

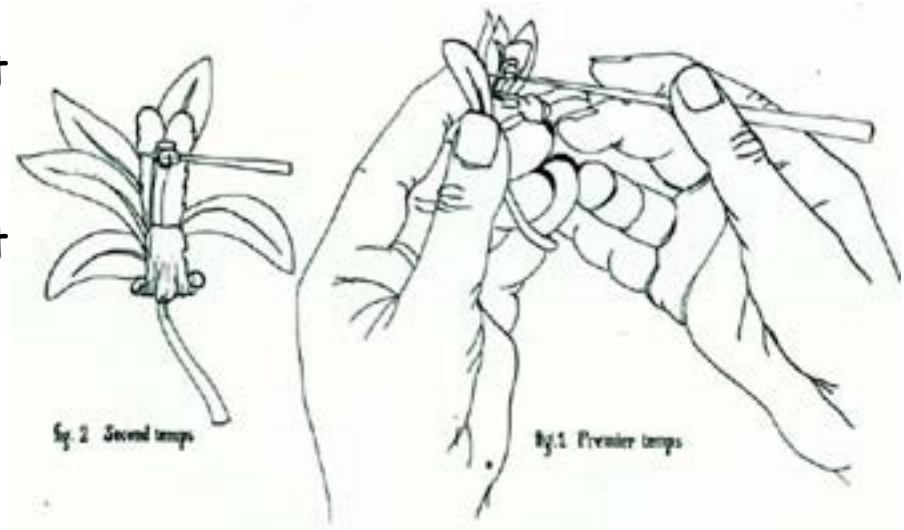
Vanilla Text A

Ferreol Bellier Beaumont owned a plantation called Belle Vue on the island of Bourbon in the Indian Ocean. The island is volcanic and has a hot, humid tropical climate. He had managed to grow one vanilla vine which was twenty years old. Unfortunately it had never managed to bear fruit, and produce the seed pods which were so valuable in Europe. He complained: "Of one hundred vanilla vines on our island, we would be lucky to see ten flowers, and even fewer fruits, in the whole year."



One morning he was surprised to discover two fruits growing on his solitary vine. He was with one of his slaves, a young boy called Edmond. Edmond said it was he that had fertilised the vanilla flower.

Edmond was sent around the island in a coach to visit all the large plantations. He was able to show other slaves how to fertilise the flower. As a result vanilla production increased rapidly. By 1898 the island sent 200 tons of pods to France. Planters on the island also developed a more efficient way of preparing the pods by blanching them in hot water before drying them in the sun.



Vanilla

Text B

In 1848 the revolutionary government in Paris abolished slavery in all the French possessions. The name of the island of Bourbon was changed to Reunion and 62,000 slaves were freed. Most of these slaves worked on plantations of sugar and vanilla. These crops need a lot of labour. Among these slaves was Edmond Albius who had made many planters rich. This was because he had discovered in 1841 how to fertilise vanilla flowers, and had taught other slaves how to do it. He used a small stick to press the male and female parts of the flower together. Edmond never received any reward for his discovery. In fact many people believed it was impossible that a slave could have made such a discovery. They still say it was an accident.



Official declaration freeing slaves in Reunion 1848

After emancipation Edmond went to work as a kitchen servant in the capital. He was accused of stealing jewellery and sentenced to ten years hard labour. His former owner wrote to the governor. He pointed out that Edmond had brought a lot of money to the island. He suggested that if he had been given a small reward he might not have become tempted by crime. He was released after five years. He died in poverty in 1880.

In 1980 the mayor of St. Suzanne put a small monument to Edmond Albius at the bus stop near the plantation of Belle Vue where he fertilized the vanilla vine. There is also a school named after him.



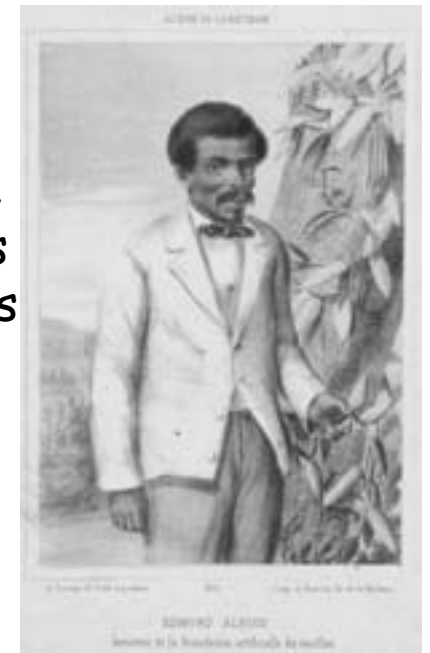
Vanilla

Text C

The vanilla vine is a native of Mexico. It is a kind of orchid which has white scented flowers. It is fertilized by a special kind of bee, and then produces long green pods. These pods can be cured and dried. After fourteen months of careful preparation they can be used to flavour ice cream, cakes and other foods and drinks. They cost a lot of money in Europe.

Until 1841 all vanilla came from Mexico, but then a slave in Reunion discovered how to fertilize the vine by hand. Vanilla replaced sugar as the most important island export. After that vanilla was grown in lots of other parts of the world with a similar climate.

M. Richard, a botanist in Paris announced that he was the person who had discovered the way to fertilise vanilla in 1838. Edmond's ex-owner argued that this was not true. Eventually Edmond's claim was upheld. His picture appeared in a history of the island beside the picture of the sea captain, who first brought the vanilla vine to Reunion. The writer of the history suggested that the rich planters should give a small amount of their vanilla to Edmond. "Surely it would not take much to build him a house with a straw roof and a small patch of land to farm." Nothing came of this appeal.



Vanilla - Question sheet with space for answers.

1. What kind of plant is vanilla? How does it grow?	2. What kind of climate does vanilla prefer?	3. What did Edmond Albius discover?	4. Why did vanilla pods only come from Mexico?
5. How did Edmond fertilise the vanilla vine?	6. How did Edmond spend his time after his discovery?	7. When were slaves freed in French colonies?	8. Did others believe that Edmond Albius was a great discoverer?
9. What is vanilla used for?	10. Why is vanilla so expensive?	11. What reward did Edmond receive for his discovery?	12. How is Edmond Albius remembered?