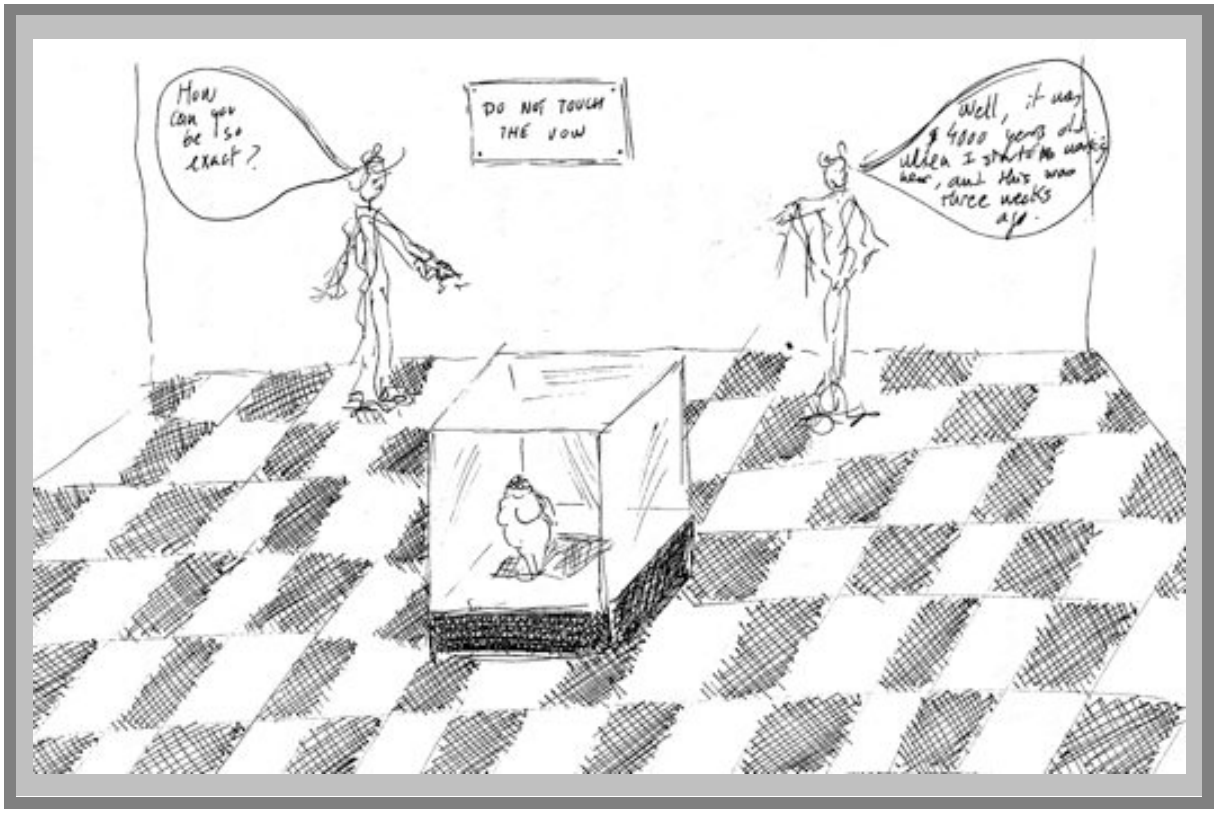
The Venus of Willendorf

Language level:	Elementary; Pre-intermediate (A2)
Learner type:	Young learners; Teens; Adults; CLIL
Time:	60 – 90 minutes
Activity:	Listening; Drawing; Making questions
Topic:	Art
Language:	Question forms
Materials:	Images



Preparation, materials and equipment

1. Download a picture of the Venus of Willendorf. The one below, for example, came from Wikipedia. To access this, click on the following link:

   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venus_of_willendorf

2. The activity will involve a picture dictation. For this, students will each need a blank piece of A4 paper and a pencil.

Lesson plan

1. Write *The Venus of Willendorf* on the board and ask your students if they can tell you what it is and what they know about it.

2. Show students an image of the Venus of Willendorf.

3. Tell your students that you are going to ask them to draw a picture. Ask everyone to have a pen or pencil and a piece of blank paper ready.

4. Tell everyone to put down their pens (no drawing yet!) and then give the following instructions:

> *"I want you to draw a picture of a visitor in the Museum of Natural History of Vienna. He or she is pointing to the Venus of Willendorf and speaking to a guide. The Venus of Willendorf is in a glass case in the foreground of the picture. The visitor and the guide are in the background. The visitor is on the left hand side and the guide is on the right hand side. There are two large speech bubbles: One coming out of the visitor's mouth and another coming out of the guide's mouth."*

In order to strengthen students' comprehension of the instructions:

- Use gesture. For example point in the air to demonstrate "*pointing at the Venus of Willendorf*"
- Change your standing position to demonstrate "*on the left hand side*" or "*in the background*"
- Demonstrate what a speech bubble is by drawing an imaginary one in the air - coming out your own mouth - with your finger
- Speak clearly and write any new language on the board
- Repeat the instructions 2 or 3 times
- Learn the instructions off by heart. Instructions are clearer when they are not being read from a piece of paper.

5. Before students draw their pictures, ask them to relay the instructions back to you (there is a lot of useful language here). You could even ask them to write them down.

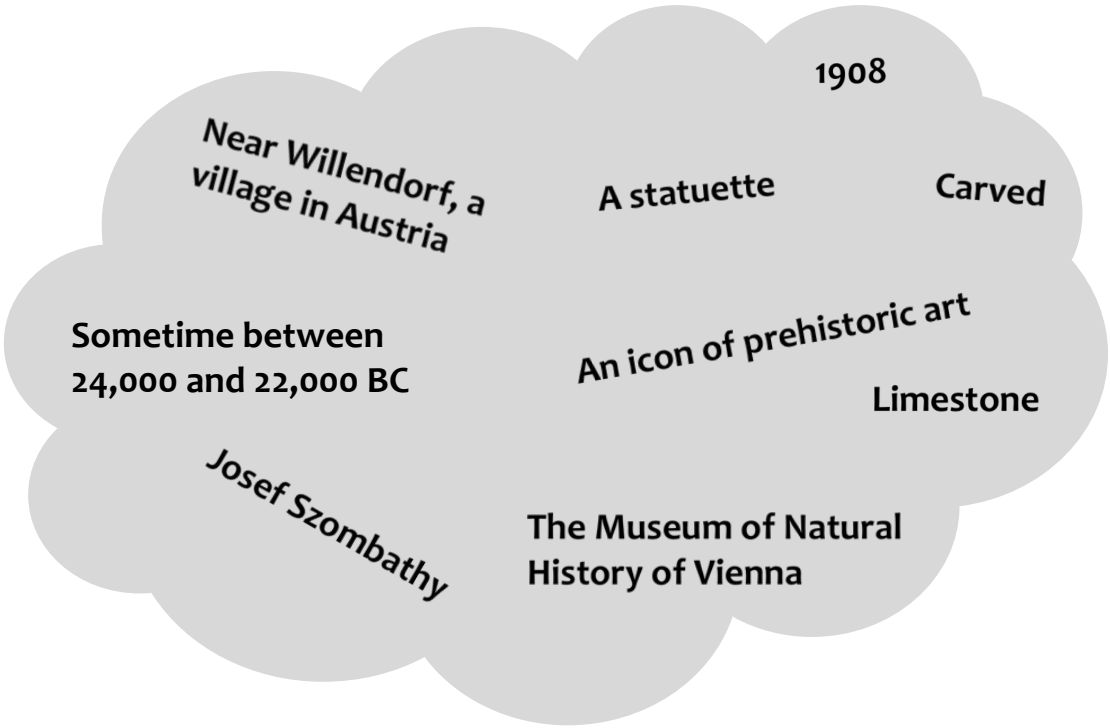
6. Let everyone draw their pictures - one drawing per person. Tell them not to write anything in the speech bubbles at this stage. The drawings don't have to be masterpieces.

7. After letting everyone compare their artwork, ask them to suggest what the visitor and the guide are saying to each other. Be prepared for rude ideas, especially if you are teaching teens. Note that the speech bubbles should still be left blank at this stage.

8. Tell students that the visitor is asking a question. Elicit a few possibilities and write them on the board. Help with grammar and language as you go. Some example questions:

- *Why is she called the 'Venus of Willendorf'?*
- *Where does she get her name?*
- *How long has it been in this museum?*
- *How did the museum acquire it?*
- *Did they discover anything else next to it?*
- *What was it used for?*
- *What do we know about the people who made it?*
- *Who made it?*
- *What does it represent? / What does it mean? / What do you think it meant to the people who made it?*
- *How much is it worth? / Is it valuable?*

9. Draw a cloud on the board that contains the following items:



10. Use the answers in the cloud to elicit more possible questions that the visitor asks. Each time a question is successfully constructed, score of the answer from the cloud and add the question to the board if it is not already there.

Q: *What is it?*
A: **A statuette**

Q: *What is it made of?*
A: **Limestone**

Q: *How was it made?*
A: **It was carved**

Q: *Where is it kept / displayed / housed?*
A: **The Museum of Natural History in Vienna**

Q: Who discovered it? / Who was it discovered by?
A: **Josef Szombathy**

Q: *Why is it important?*
A: **It is an icon of prehistoric art**

Q: *When was it discovered?*
A: **1908**

Q: *Where was it discovered? / Where is it from?*
A: **Near Willendorf, a village in Austria**

Q: *When does it date to? / When does it date from? / How old is it?*
A: **Sometime between 24,000 and 22,000 BC**

11. Divide your class into two groups: Group A and Group B.

12. Bring students' attention back to their drawings. Tell them that you are going to dictate the captions for the speech bubbles. Dictate the following

For A students only - to be written in the visitor's speech bubble:
Can you tell me how old this statuette is?

For A students only - to be written in the guide's speech bubble:
Yes, it's 25 thousand years and 8 months old.

For B students only - to be written in the visitor's speech bubble:
How can you be so exact?

For B students only - to be written in the guide's speech bubble:
Well, it was 25 thousand years old when I started working here and that was 8 months ago.

13. Put your students' drawings up on the classroom wall. Make sure that you pair up student A drawings with student B drawings so that the comic strip makes sense.

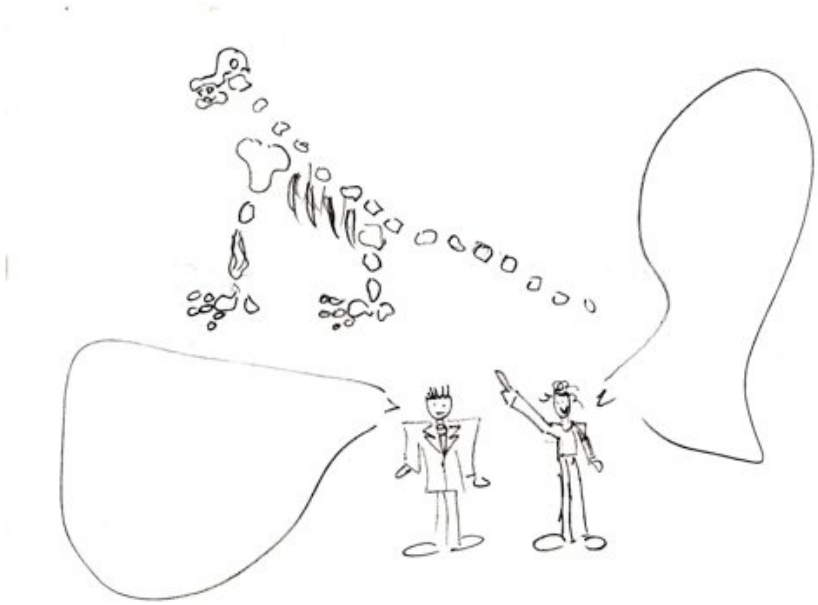
Follow up

Ask students to go online and find out the answers to any of the unanswered questions that arose in step 9.

Variation

Use the same joke for any of the following:

- Other examples of prehistoric art
- Early tools or artefacts
- The Tyrannosaurus Rex (64 million years and 8 months old)



"I want you to draw a picture of a visitor in the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. He or she is pointing to the skeleton of a Tyrannosaurus rex and speaking to a guide. The guide is standing on the left and the visitor is standing on the right. The T. rex skeleton is in the background, facing left. There are two large speech bubbles - one coming out of the visitor's mouth and another coming out of the guide's mouth."*

* This is home to *Sue*, the largest and most complete *T. rex* skeleton ever discovered.

Credits

The Venus of Willendorf drawing on the title page was done by Mariona. The *Tyrannosaurus rex* drawing above was done by Olga.