

When I was a new teacher in 1988, I was so revved up that I couldn't sleep. I'd lie awake at night with a brain like a runaway locomotive, my thoughts churning one after another. I dreamed up ideas for lessons and units, deep into the night, never mind that the alarm was set for 5:45 AM. Oh I loved that feeling and didn't think I might ever find it again.

But lo! Two years after retiring, suddenly I began to teach again - albeit just one morning a week. In November, I was given the Wednesday morning Zoom class for English Language learners at Neighbors Link.

I was terrified and exhilarated, wondering how to gather those familiar churning thoughts and ideas into something productive, for a two hour Zoom class of adults. Since there was no set curriculum, I could do what I wanted. What!? Infinite possibilities, and two hours, a seemingly yawning chasm of time.

So, into the waters I plunged. With just a little rudimentary knowledge, lots of advice and a few google searches, I mastered Google Slides workably well. I spent way too many hours watching TikTok videos featuring captioned fragments of songs, and other ESL teachers doing cute and catchy things, CGI short

videos with sweet moral lessons, images of sunrises, cute animals, and other things I thought my students might like.

All of my students are women. We work really hard together as we navigate vowel sounds, homophones, confusing idioms and expressions, words for body parts, grocery shopping, acronyms, strange pronunciation quirks like were and where, though, thought, through, thorough, and tough. An absolute favorite is “Dear Abby,” where we read the query and then they go into breakout rooms to take turns writing their own advice, then coming back to compare notes. We laugh and get sassy, do the cha cha slide, stretch, and take brain breaks. They call me “teacher” and when they sign in again week after week, I am crazily glad to see them again.

There are new challenges, along with the new technology that didn't exist when I first started teaching in the last millennium. How to teach to adults without being too boring or worse, superior, or condescending. How to teach to a screenful of women, some of whom have no English at all, one of whom is Japanese when all the others are native Spanish speakers. How to capture the attention of a diverse group of women of varying ages, experiences, and interests.

But what a thrill to teach to a roomful of people who have signed on by choice. What a joy to be reminded of all the tricky quirks of this ridiculous language of ours, which have always fascinated me.

And though now, unlike in 1988, I lie awake at night on my phone scrolling through TikTok - thank goodness my husband is hard of hearing - my passion for teaching has been re-awoken in the most unexpected of ways. You CAN teach an old dog new tricks.