The Captain's shirt story

Origami might not be the first thing to spring to mind when talking about English language teaching. Be that as it may, I'll try to show a quite simple model (as finished figures are generally named in origami) that you may use in you class with young (or not so young learners). I believe the little ones will be amazed with your skill and they will hear an interesting seafaring story in addition to that.
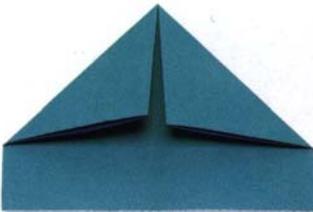
For this story you need:
- a spread of newspaper
- a little patience
- a bit of imagination
- and a sure plus is a 'story-telling voice' ☺

After folding the traditional paper boat, you can tell your learners the story of the Captain's shirt, where, by tearing the paper, you can produce a surprising result.

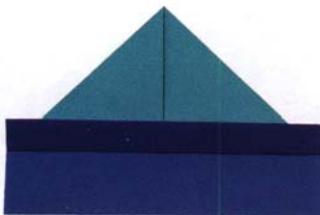Here's how to make a boat in 9 easy steps

1 Fold the paper in half, bringing the two shorter sides together. Rotate the paper 180^0, so that the fold you have just made now runs along the upper edge.
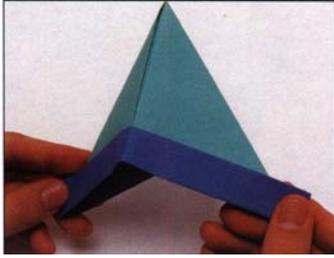
2 Fold the paper in half again, side to side, to establish the vertical centre crease. Unfold, then fold both of the upper corners down to lie along the crease just made.
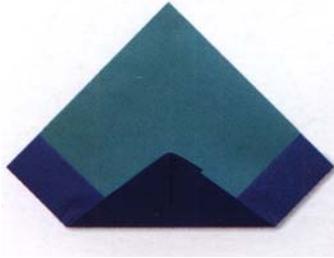
3 Fold the lower edge (single layer only) up to lie along the edges of the flaps in step 2
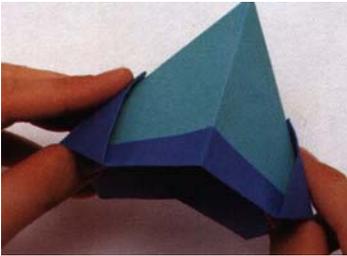
4 Fold the lower edge over once more, doubling the thickness of the horizontal band.

5 Repeat steps 3-4 on the reverse face, then open up form below what is the traditional paper hat. Push the two end corners of the hat together, until eventually the model can be flattened into a diamond shape. At the opening the borders folded in steps 3-4 will need to be overlapped.
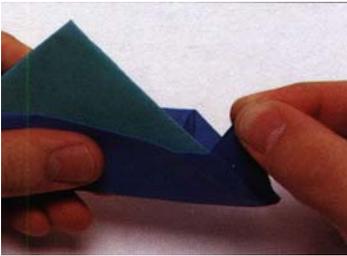
6 Once you have the diamond shape, fold the lower corner up (single layer only) to a point approximately a third of the way up the height of the hat. Repeat on the reverse side.

7 Separate the front and the rear sides of the model, while pushing the outer edges together. You are simply repeating the step 5 in reverse. Flatten the model.

8 Fold the lower edge (single layer only)upward as far as it will comfortably go. Repeat on the reverse side.
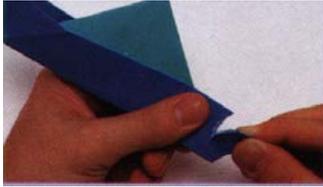
9 Hold the boat firmly in one hand, while using the other to carefully tease out the point that lies behind the wide band folded in step 8. Keep pulling the point out until you can flatten the model once more. Repeat at the other end, and you'll have the finished boat.

Now to the story…

You can tell the story as elaborately as you like, focusing on tenses, sea-related vocabulary (animals, weather…), physical description (of the Captain, other sailors…) – you name it! Essentially, it goes like this:
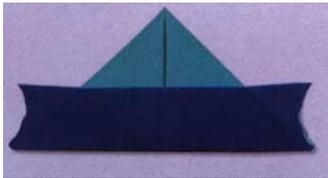
"*There was once a sea captain, who, not being very clever, decided to set sail in a boat made of paper. Not that anyone could talk him out of it – as you can imagine, he was old, he thought he knew everything, and to tell the truth, he was a bit stubborn. No sooner had the first signs of a*

storm come up than he began to get worried. His fears proved justified when lightning struck the prow of the boat and tore it off."

At this point, you hold the boat tightly in one hand and tear off one end. Tear in a circular motion from halfway along the upper deck around the lower corner of the boat.

"The sea was very rough, the waves 10 meters high! Clouds were thick, and loud thunder crashed in the sky. More lightning struck the boat, and the distressed captain watched in tears as the stern was destroyed…"

Tear off the other end of the boat in the same way.

"…Then with a loud crash the mast and sails were torn down by the wind. Now the boat was helpless, all the sailors in danger. No island in sight! No other boats on the horizon to help them! And sharks are coming!! What will happen to them? "

Tear off the remaining point in a circular motion beginning halfway along the edge of the sail.

At the end of the story, you open out the paper as shown and say:

"And there was NOTHING left but the Captain's shirt!!

(Admit it, you must've started wondering 'what's with the shirt?' Right? ☺ Well, now you know!)

(photos John Freeman)

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