

Who are they?

- Aim:** To raise students awareness of *their/they're/there* and then of homophones in general -- in both English and French
- Materials:** Student worksheets, small whiteboards or slates - one for each team
- Vocabulary:** *Homophone* (but don't explain the term until after students have a chance to discover the instances of *they're*, *their*, and *there* in the riddles)

Note: We have used the term *homophones* for words that sound alike in this lesson. It is also correct to refer to such words as *homonyms*, a term that may be more familiar. *Homonym* is a blanket term that includes both *homophones* (sound-alike words like *bear* and *bare*) and *homographs* (words with the same spelling but different meanings like savings *bank* and river *bank*).

1. Tell students they are going to play a game. If you wish, make this competitive by forming teams, awarding points, etc. The aim of the game is to find the answer (person, place, or thing) in response to the clues.
2. The teacher reads out clues and the students guess the answer. Here is an example to practice:

They're very fast skaters. Their skates are very sharp. There are lots of people that watch them from around September to May. They're very sporty and their clothes are red, white, and blue. Their home is the Bell Centre.
Answer: the Canadiens
3. There are 10 riddles to read out. Be sure to pronounce *they're*, *their*, and *there* exactly the same. Feel free to modify the riddles by adding clues that your students are more likely to know. The important thing is to use *they're*, *their*, and *there* repeatedly.

Riddles: Who/what are they?

1. They're very small and their clothes are blue and white. They're not real. They're cartoon characters in comic books and on TV.
Answer: the smurfs

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2. They're people who like to drink tea and play soccer. There are many big red buses in their county. Their favourite food is fish and chips. Their capital city is London and their queen is Elizabeth.
Answer: the British
3. They're very cute and they spend a lot of time cleaning their coats. They're often sitting in a sunny spot of the house when they're alone. Their coats are bigger in the winter and smaller in the summer. There is a special purr-rrrr-ing sound they make when they're happy.
Answer: cats
4. They're people who work very hard. Their hair is black and their favourite foods are fish and rice. There are no Roman letters in their alphabet. Their famous car companies are Honda, Nissan, Mitsubishi, and Toyota. There was a big earthquake there.
Answer: the Japanese
5. They're an important room in all houses. You can smell food there. There are refrigerators there.
Answer: kitchens
6. They weren't used a lot 30 years ago, but now they're here, there, and everywhere. They're very useful, but they're expensive. There are large ones in offices but there are also smaller ones you can carry. You can type information into them or go online to get information from the internet.
Answer: computers
7. This is a place where there are lots of books, there are lots of tables, and the people inside this room work very hard. Their bags are next to their desks and they're very busy learning English.
Answer: your classroom
8. There are many people in this place - almost 2 million. They're always busy: shopping, working and going to festivals. The people there like to shop on their famous street, rue Ste-Catherine. There are people who speak English and French there.
Answer: Montreal
9. If I want to buy drinks or food late at night, I go there. They're open early in the morning too. They sell coffee and candy, and lots of people buy their lottery tickets there. There is one in almost every town. They have names like Boni-soir and Provi-soir.
Answer: the depanneur

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10. The (your name) family has one in their house. They're happy when it is full of food. It is in their kitchen. It is cold in there!

Answer: refrigerator

4. After you have gone through all the riddles, ask if students noticed any sounds or words that they have heard many times. If they haven't noticed *their/they're/there*, read one of the riddles again slowly till they do, but don't discuss the meanings at this point.
5. Give out the Major Homophones handout, which has five more riddles. There are two tasks. One is to read and guess the answers; the other is to underline all the instances of *there* and the other words that sound like *there*. You can introduce the term *homophones* at this point.
6. After answering the riddles and identifying the instances of *there*, *their* and *they're*, ask the students to discuss the difference in meaning of each of three spellings and what they think the French equivalents are. There is space at the bottom of the handout for them to write their ideas.
Answers: 1. China, 2. Washing machines, 3. Pizzas. 4. Bedrooms 5. The sea
7. Steer the follow-up discussion in the direction of the following points, eliciting what they already know as much as possible:

Their = French *leur/leurs* (French has two forms and English has one. Ask students what the difference is between *leur* and *leurs* and note that we don't do this in English).

They're = French *Ils sont*. Note that this is a contraction of *they are*.

There are = French *Il y a*. In English, we have *there is/there are*; in French, there is only *il y a*.

There = French *là-bas*

8. Set up teams and distribute the whiteboards. Ask each team to designate a secretary to write on the board. The goal is to check whether they understand the three different meanings of *there/their/they're*. Write the three words on the board so they can see how to spell each one.
9. Then read out this example question, "Which one is the opposite of *here*?" The teams consult and then hold up their whiteboards up so you can see if they have

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the correct answer. Proceed with the questions below. If lots of them are getting them wrong, stop and elicit explanations in English or French or both.

1. Which one is a short way to say 'they are'?
2. Which one goes with things that belong to people?
3. Which one is a faraway place?
4. Which one is like 'we have' something?
5. Which one has an apostrophe in it?
6. Which one belongs in the same group as *our, my, his* and *your*?
7. Which one is the next word in a story that begins "once upon a time, ..."?
8. Which one has a verb in it?
9. Which one goes with people's possessions?
10. Which one rhymes with 'chair'? (joke question, answer = all of them!)

10. Tell students that *their/they're/there* are not the only words that sound the same but are spelled differently in English. Elicit any examples of English homophones they may know. Write these questions on the board and ask students to identify the homophones:

Can you see the sea?

Can you hear me from over here?

Have you read my new red book?

There is also the famous silly question:

How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?