

I'm not robot!

Do you ever have 5-10 minutes during the day that you just need to fill, but don't know what to do? We've had plenty of those moments lately and I've been resorting to playing too much hangman. This afternoon, in the last five minutes of the day, I drew hangman on the board and my students said, "I knew that was what she was gonna do!" Ugh. I need some new sponge activities! So, I scoured my brain, my husband's brain, and the internet and came up with these 80 Sponge Activities that would work in my classroom. Some of these I've used in the past and had forgotten about. Others are new to me, but sound like so much fun! Madeline Hunter created the term sponge activities to describe "learning activities that soak up precious time that would otherwise be lost." The best sponge activities are fun and engaging, and have an academic component without seeming too "school-ish". That's my favorite way to use an extra five minutes! I have also seen some of these activities labeled as "Brain Breaks". The basic idea is to keep learning active while taking a break from the rigor of a specific subject matter and have a little bit of fun! Here are the activities in no specific order: Storytelling: Sit in a circle. Using a ball, start a story with one or two sentences. Toss the ball to another student. That student must continue the story with one more sentence. Continue passing the ball and adding a sentence to the story. Record the story on your iPad and have an older student type it up as a funny classroom book. Students can illustrate the sentences. The Price is Right: Post a picture of an object and in your head, determine a price for it. Have students guess the price. Keep a record of the guesses and indicate if the guess is too high or too low. Help students adjust their guess based on the chart of guesses. Add it up: give students a simple addition problem. If the student can give you the correct answer without fumbling or counting, accept it. Then select another student and have them add another amount to the previous students' sum. If the student says, "um" or counts aloud, start back with a simple addition problem. The goal is to get to 100 without making a mistake, counting aloud, or making other sounds. Use the Kids Book of Questions: Have students choose a number, read the question, and discuss responses. Table Topics offer another great source for questions. Play Around the World with flashcards Compliment Game: Write each student's name on a strip of paper. Distribute each strip of paper so that a student has someone else's name. Sit in a circle and have students give one compliment to the person whose name they have. 20 Questions: choose a person, place or thing. Have students ask you questions to try and guess the word. Count by twos, fives, tens, etc. while sitting in a circle. Start at a number, say 345 and count by 10s or 100s forward or backward. Flashcards: The first to answer correctly then lines up first. Four basic shapes: Find an object in the room that represents each shape. Give a consonant blend and have students say a word that begins with that blend. Dismiss students by color of eyes, hair, month of birth, season of birth, beginning letter of name, type of pet, etc. Have students tell one thing they learned today using a complete sentence. Or tell their partner one new thing that they learned today. Record it on chart paper or have students write a journal entry about the one new thing they learned. Tell one playground rule, one good health habit, one character trait, one doubles fact, etc. "I went to the grocery store and bought..." each student names an item, the next student repeats the items and adds one more item. Write a word on the board, have students write as many words as they can that rhyme with it. Name an animal that lives in the: jungle, zoo, farm, mountains, water, etc. List as many as the class can figure out. List things you can touch, smell, taste, hear, see. List the colors you are wearing. List the continents of the world, states, etc. Create names for three rock groups or bands. Name as many types of natural disasters as you can. Think of a number, write it down on paper, make it into a face. Write the names of all the boys (or girls) in the room. Write the names of as many teachers in the school as you can remember. Write as many as you can: abbreviations, roman numerals, trademarks, etc. How many cartoon characters (superheroes) can you name? List as many kinds of flowers (trees, ice cream flavors, fruits, vegetables) as you can. List as many nouns as you can see in the room (repeat for verbs at recess, etc.) Write numbers by fives as high as you can go (repeat with other patterns). List as many models of cars as you can. Name all the colors you know, even the really odd ones! Name as many countries (transportation types, breakfast cereals, etc.) as you can. Scramble the letters in 10 spelling (vocabulary) words. Switch papers with a partner and try to unscramble the letters. Create a word search using vocabulary or spelling words (hint: use grid paper). Choose a category and brainstorm words associated with that category. To make it more challenging, have students brainstorm a word for that category for each letter of the alphabet. Choose a category. One student says the name of something in that category. The next student says the name of something else in that category, but it must start with the last letter of the previous word. For instance, if the category was food: orange - eggplant - tomato, etc. Create a spelling chain. All students stand. Give them a spelling word. The first person says the first letter, the second gives the second letter, and so on. If a student gives the wrong letter, he or she must sit down. Play "guess the characteristic." Ask several students who all have something in common to stand. The class, must guess what they all have in common, such as they all have shoes with no laces, they all walk to school, or they are all in the after-school program. Expand a Sentence. Give students a very simple sentence (e.g., The child ran.). Include insert marks where you want students to add words and underline words that they may change to something more exciting. Make it into a silly sentence. Keep a supply of board and table games that require strategy and thinking. Use them for special fill-in times like rainy day recess. Collect word searches, crossword puzzles, kids' pages from Sunday comics, and Mad Libs. Laminate them for wipe-off and reuse. Write a multi-syllabic word on the board. Ask students to write as many words from the multisyllabic word as they can in a specified time. Only letters from the original word may be used. Set up a magnetic board. Divide the board into "yes" and "no" columns. Prepare a magnetic name tag for each student by gluing tagboard squares with the student's name onto a piece of magnetic strip. On the board pose daily yes / no questions or questions with two choices. Have students place their magnetic name tags in the appropriate column. Discuss responses. Line up in order of birthday (or other number or letter value) without talking. Silent Ball Spelling Bee Heads Up 7 Up Telephone Simon Says Play hangman with vocabulary or content area words. Play as either a whole class or in table groups. I Spy - who can find something in the room that has a short a sound, a long o sound, etc. Brainstorm ideas for class projects or something to study. Create a list on an anchor chart. Share weekend or holiday plans. Tell riddles or jokes. Play What's in the Box: Similar to 20 questions, but with an actual object in a box. This is a great game where students can bring in a mystery object for the teacher to guess. Clean up the classroom: Choose an item that is on the floor. Tell students that you have picked an item that needs to be cleaned up. Not the student who picks that item up and give them a prize. Change in my Pocket: grab a handful of coins and students try to guess the number and kinds of coins. ABCs: create a grid with a box for each letter of the alphabet. Name a category and have students fill the grid with as many things that they can think about that topic, one thing for each letter of the alphabet. To make it more challenging, add a time limit. Ask students to name all the things that are a specific color. Play Four Corners. Label each corner of your room, agree, disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree. Make a statement and have students move to the corner that matches their response to the statement. Problem Solving - Display a number of something and have students create a word problem to go with the objects. Sort the sentences. Create four or five sentences for a topic you are studying. Write one word on an index card. Be sure that every word has an index card. Have students find their group by creating an accurate sentence. For instance, a sentence could be Giraffes are the tallest land mammals. Each index card has one word: Giraffes - are - the - tallest - land - mammals. Students sort themselves to create the sentences. Create a problem solving box. When students have a problem, a question, or an issue. Have them write it down and put it in the box. When you have time, draw out a problem or two and discuss it as a class. Sometimes some distance from a problem creates the best solutions. Progressive Writing: Give each student a piece of paper and give them three minutes to start a story. Some students may need some story starters, like, "Once upon a time". After three minutes, have students pass their papers to another student. Or, collect the papers and redistribute them to a different table group. Continue writing for another three minutes. Repeat until the paper has writing from many students. Return the paper to the original student. Whiteboard Race: Divide the class into teams. Give one student from each team a whiteboard marker. Send them to the whiteboard and in one minute, have them write all the words associated with a certain category. Count the words, list the number of words on a t-chart and switch students. Repeat with other pairs of students from the two teams. Place this once, or keep a running total of the score. Keep a set of QR codes for books read aloud on YouTube. Pull one up to watch and display it through the projector. Pictionary - One student draws a picture while the rest try to guess it. Play as a whole class or in teams. Bingo - Have students write a list of words randomly in squares on their paper. I'm going on a picnic - Say, "I'm going on a picnic and I'm going to bring ___", where the item name matches the first letter of your name. For instance Sara can bring sandwiches. Don't tell students the pattern. Have students ask if they can go on the picnic. Answer yes or no, depending on whether or not they find the pattern. Number Talks - These are great 10 minute fillers where you prompt students to do some mental math and build their number sense. This is a great book of Number Talks. Scavenger hunt with iPads: photograph something for each letter of the alphabet in order. Find Someone Who: create a someone who grid where students can walk around and figure out who can go in each square. Some suggestions: Someone who loves baseball, someone who goes to the after-school program. Someone who has lived in a different state, etc. Orange, Orange, Orange - each student is assigned a fruit or vegetable. A student is chosen to go in the middle. He must say a fruit or vegetable three times. The person who's vegetable was called must interrupt the center student before the third time. If the student is successful, he can stay seated in the outer circle. If he is unsuccessful, he must take the center student's place. Spy in the Camp - One person leaves the classroom. The rest of the class sits in a circle. There's one person in the circle that is the leader and starts a movement. The spy comes back in and tries to guess the leader. The leader must change movements. Sneaky Statue - Students stay in one place. They can move when your back is turned, but when you turn around, they have to stop moving. If you catch students moving, they come join you. The last student left wins. Have students arrange themselves in groups based on the pet they own or would like to own, without using words. Coin matching - provide each student with a see-through bag of coins. There should be two bags with the same amount of coins, although not the same denominations. Students must find their partner who has the same value. You can also use pictures of coins instead. Clock Partners - Give students a picture of a clock with spaces at 12:00, 3:00, 6:00, and 9:00 to write student names. Have students find a partner for 12:00, a partner for 3:00, etc.. Be sure that students write down each other's names for a time slot. For instance, if Jessica is meeting with Sam during the 9:00 time slot, they should have their respective names in that time slot. Use these partner sets to have students meet and talk about any prompt. Note, some of the links above may be affiliate links. Do you have other activities that you do in your classroom to fill that extra five minutes and give students a brain break? What has worked with your students? I'd love to discover more ideas! If you'd like a list of questions that you can ask students to build community in your classroom, check out this blog post! More Back-to-School Ideas Would you like MORE back-to-school ideas that you can use in your classroom this year? Check out these ideas.

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