

Brain Breaks

Ear Nose Switch

This is an advanced version of Snap Wink. Students follow your lead as you grab your left ear with your right hand and touch your nose with your left hand. Uncross your arms before grabbing your right ear with your left hand. Then, touch your nose with your right hand. Go slowly the first round. Then repeat three to four times, going faster each round.

Encore Brainwriting

This brainstorming activity, which is done in small groups, is based on the notion that generating ideas and discussing and analyzing those ideas should be two separate activities. Assign a Materials Manager and a Recorder for each group. When students are ready, call out a word such as *hope*, *love*, *meet*, *time*. The Recorder makes a T-chart and writes the word in the left-hand column. Using sticky notes supplied by the Materials Manager, individual students spend one minute writing down the titles of songs that the word reminds them of. Then they post their sticky notes under the word on their group's T-chart. In the right-hand column, the Recorder tallies the number of unique songs; the number of repeat songs; and any song that has an unusual characteristic (such as everyone has sung the song in a karaoke performance at a party). The Materials Manager displays the finished poster, and students view other groups' posters during break or lunch. Repeat as time allows.

Evolution

Evolution is an energetic variation of rock-paper-scissors. There are five levels of evolution in this order: Egg, Chicken, Pterodactyl, Superhero, and Omniscient. Students start off as Eggs and everyone plays at once, moving about the room looking for partners. Students "evolve" up or down depending on whether they win the rock-paper-scissors game. Only similar beings may play against each other (except those who become Omniscient). For example, in the first round, the student who wins becomes a Chicken; the other student remains an Egg. When two Chickens play, the student who wins moves up to become a Pterodactyl and the Chicken devolves to an Egg, and so on. Once students become Omniscient, they can play against anyone they want—if the other student wins, he or she evolves up, but the Omniscient student never devolves. Play as many rounds as time allows, or until everyone becomes Omniscient.

Fidget Family

This activity gets students energized while reinforcing listening skills. Assign students different parts from the Fidget Family story, which you read aloud. When students hear their part, they stand up, twirl around once (or do another movement), and sit back down. When you read the phrase Fidget Family, everyone stands up, twirls around once, and sits back down. You can delete and add characters as necessary or assign the same parts to multiple students. Adjust the story as necessary to fit your curriculum needs. Once students are familiar with the story, they can create their own Fidget Family stories and characters to add variety to this activity.

Characters: Ma, Pa, Billy, Tommy, Bridget, Baby, Grandma, Grandpa, Old Mol, Old Dol, cat, dog, canary, gate, tree, road, house, wagon, blanket

THE FIDGET FAMILY

Once upon a time, there was a family called the Fidget Family. There were lots of people in this family. There were Ma Fidget, Pa Fidget, Billy Fidget, Tommy Fidget, Bridget Fidget, and Baby Fidget. They had several pets. They had a cat, a dog, a canary, and two horses named Old Mol and Old Dol. Through the gate, past a tree, and down the road in another house lived Grandma and Grandpa Fidget.

One day, the whole Fidget Family decided to go visit Grandma and Grandpa Fidget at their house through the gate, past the tree, and down the road. Billy wanted to bring the cat, Tommy wanted to bring the dog, and Bridget wanted to bring the canary, but Ma and Pa Fidget said no. Baby Fidget cried. So they loaded up the wagon, hitched up Old Mol and Old Dol, and headed out through the gate, past the tree, and down the road to Grandma and Grandpa Fidget's house. They had just passed the tree when Baby cried again. The whole Fidget Family realized they'd left Baby's blanket back at the house. Baby kept crying.

So the whole Fidget Family turned the wagon around, and Old Mol and Old Dol pulled the wagon back up the road, past the tree, and through the gate. They finally found Baby's blanket back at the house. Before they left, Billy asked if he could bring the cat, Tommy wanted to bring the dog, and Bridget wanted to bring the canary, but Ma and Pa Fidget said no. Baby started chewing on the blanket.

Then the whole Fidget Family got back into the wagon being pulled by Old Mol and Old Dol. They rode out through the gate, past the tree, and down the road to Grandma and Grandpa Fidget's house. They had a wonderful time, and the whole Fidget Family lived happily ever after!

Hullabaloo

This activity helps build positive classroom community as students have a chance to move and make stronger connections with each other. One student begins by introducing him- or herself while doing a motion, such as jumping in place. Next, the student acknowledges each person in the group using a motion he or she chooses, such as waving their left hand. Then, the student shares briefly on a teacher-chosen topic, such as a favorite dessert, outdoor activity, or school subject.

Humdingers

This brain break strengthens listening skills and promotes teamwork. Write the titles of four different, very common songs (such as nursery rhymes or other childhood songs) on small pieces of paper—one piece for each student to create four equal groups. Students mix and mingle while humming their song and listening for others who are humming the same song. When students find a match, they stand together humming the song in unison, until each group is humming one of four different songs. The activity can end with each group taking turns humming their song while others guess the title.

Let It Rain

When everyone works together, you can create the sound of a rainstorm. Stand in a circle with students and demonstrate the movements in order: soft circular hand rubbing followed by vigorous back-and-forth hand rubbing, finger snapping, thigh tapping that gets progressively louder, and finally foot stomping (added to the thigh tapping). Now lead everyone through the storm and then repeat—but this time challenge students to make the rain get softer by performing the movements in reverse.

Relax, Breathe, Repeat

This two-part activity resets students' attention, helping them relax and refocus. Give directions before you begin each part. In the first part, students close their eyes and practice deep breathing. Ring a chime or play another soothing sound. When the sounds stops, students inhale slowly and deeply, then exhale slowly. They keep doing this deep breathing for 30 seconds. Then you ring the chime again. Students continue to do deep breathing until the sound ends. They open their eyes, remaining still and quiet until the second part begins.

For the second part, ring the chime (or play another soothing sound) again. Students turn and face their partner. They spread out their arms as if they're holding a large pumpkin, placing their fingertips together. Then they open their arms as they inhale to the count of five, and close their arms as they exhale to the count of five—keeping their eyes on the movement of their partner's fingertips. After they do this five times, students take a deep breath, bringing their shoulders up to their ears. Then they exhale, releasing their shoulders back into place.

Sentence-by-Sentence Story

This activity strengthens listening and critical thinking skills while promoting student collaboration. Students stand in a circle and one person says the opening sentence of a story. The person to their left says the next sentence in the story, and so on, until the last person says the closing sentence of the story.

Shake It Down

This is a rhythmic way to loosen up the body and get oxygen flowing to the brain. Students raise their right hand and shake it on each count from 1 to 16. Next they repeat the count with the left hand, then the right foot, and finally the left foot. Then you call out “Cut” (or “Slice”). Students start over with the right hand, cutting the count in half to 8. Each time you call “Cut” the count is halved—to 4, 2, and then 1. Last, you call “Shake it down!” and students shake their whole body from top to bottom.

Snap Wink

This activity helps students focus and strengthens their coordination skills. Standing in a circle, everyone winks their left eye and snaps the fingers on their right hand—starting slowly and increasing speed. When you call out “Switch,” everyone winks their right eye and snaps the fingers on their left hand—starting slowly and increasing speed. Repeat three to four times, going faster each round. For an advanced version of this activity, see Ear Nose Switch.

Strike a Pose

This activity gets students moving while reinforcing observation skills. Standing in a circle, each student chooses someone across from them—their mirror partner—and points to that person. (Mirror partners must not choose each other.) On your signal, every student strikes a pose and freezes. After a few seconds, signal again and students begin copying their mirror partner: Each time their mirror partner changes a pose, they copy it. After a few minutes, everyone in the circle should have the same pose.

Three-Person Machine

This energetic activity helps students learn communication and collaboration skills. Students brainstorm and chart types of machines used in daily life. Then they break into random groups of three and use their bodies to create models of actual machines. For example, to demonstrate a washing machine, two students might stand facing each other and hold hands with arms outstretched while the third student stands in the middle, turning from side to side. Each group performs their machine for the class to guess.

Twisted Brain

This “brain game” energizes students’ bodies and minds. Standing up, students perform a series of movements as follows: put hands out in front and clap—but miss (hands move past each other without touching); rotate hands so thumbs point down and palms are together; pull hands inward, rolling them until thumbs are pointing up and elbows are near sides; roll shoulders to stretch back and neck; cross right leg over left; roll neck clockwise (be careful not to fall). Then switch legs so the left is over the right and roll neck counter-clockwise. To finish the break, students close their eyes and spell their first name backwards and then their last name backwards.