Games and Cooperative Learning Activities for the Classroom

By Lisa Moore and Eva White Schellenbach

Improve Student Achievement

Increase Student Motivation

Engage Every Student With Classroom Activities
How to use:

Overview
Motivate, engage, and improve student performance using these tried-and-true games and activities.

How to Use
1. Begin by reading through Notes to the Teacher for suggestions and information about incentives and rewards, banking questions and answers, and equipment.
2. Review the games and activities and mark those that suit your needs.
3. Schedule the game or activity into your lesson plans.
4. Collect the required supplies and review the steps and hints.
5. Have fun!

Time
The time required for each game and activity is shown on the page with the instructions.
There are many people who helped make this book possible and who we would like to thank. First, our deepest gratitude goes to Blair Brown and Deidre Mathews, who helped proofread and edit our materials. This book may not have reached publication without their help. Second, we would like to thank our students, whose patience and honesty allowed us to experiment with new ideas and develop activities that actually work in the classroom. Last, we owe thanks to our families, whose support enabled us to complete this book. The teaching profession requires long hours spent after school, and ours were made even longer working on this publication. Our families made sacrifices that allowed us to complete our work; for that, we are eternally grateful.
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A Letter from the Authors

Dear fellow teachers:

Studies show that students who enjoy school perform better on standardized tests, have better attendance, and are more likely to succeed than students who dread going to school every day. For these reasons and many more, we have worked together to develop and incorporate games and cooperative learning activities in our classrooms. Studies also indicate that students retain more information when content is delivered in combination with movement. You’ll find many of our activities require students to get up from their seats and move around. We’ve seen that students enjoy coming to our classes more because they look forward to discovering the tricks hidden up our sleeves.

Colleagues who teach social studies, English, science, and world languages have successfully incorporated the games and cooperative learning activities described in the following pages into their curricula.

We sincerely hope you’ll be able to incorporate many of our ideas into your curricula and discover the many benefits associated with using games and cooperative learning activities regularly in your classroom.

Good luck!

Lisa & Eva

About the Authors

Lisa Moore received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Lenoir Rhyne University and her Master of Arts degree in American history from the University of North Carolina, in Charlotte. She has received numerous awards, including the 1994 First Union Outstanding Educator Award for Catawba County and the 1999 Bandys High School Teacher of the Year Award.

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Incentives and Rewards

Much debate has been focused on the use of incentives and rewards in the classroom. Should they be used? Are they detrimental to learning? Can they be useful? It is important to begin by distinguishing how these two things differ. Incentives are offered as a motivation for improvement and positive behavior, while rewards are given to merit success measured by results. Rewards are given for winning and good grades, while incentives are given for improved teamwork and better work habits. This said, while rewards have their place, it is incentives that will eventually produce the desired results.

Experience suggests that if incentives are employed they are more effective when a few simple guidelines are considered.

1. Use multiple incentives to achieve a reward. For example, students earn points or stickers for improvement, and the resulting total is rewarded at established increments. A real-world example would be earning travel miles towards free airfare.

2. Make improvement milestones measurable on both an individual as well as a group level. A good reward system allows for smaller rewards to those who improve but do not necessarily achieve top results.

3. Provide an end reward or scope of rewards that are truly desirable to students. If possible, give students a choice as to what reward they will receive and do not limit choices to the tangible. Be creative.

4. Do not over-reward. Set limits, such as only give incentives to the first five students who show improvement. The purpose for this is to motivate NOW, rather than later.

5. Do not allow the incentive/reward system to overshadow the focus: learning.

6. Incentive/reward systems should be fun and work with a teacher’s style and the current student mix present.

Whatever your personal belief might be, it seems that the reality of the classroom is, when used in moderation and with forethought, an incentive/reward system is an effective tool. Students are programmed—rightly or wrongly—to expect and need some type of motivating incentives to keep focused and moving forward. This is done effectively in sports, games, and business, so why not do the same in the classroom?
Bingo

Supplies
- copies of Bingo cards (next page) for each student
- list of 28 or more terms with definitions
- Bingo chips

Appeal
Bingo is an easy game to play and is a great review game. Students play as individuals, which requires them to explore their own knowledge base.

Time
20 minutes minimum to play three games

Players
whole class plays, competing against one another

Scoring and Game Goal
to be the first one in class to call out “Bingo”

Directions
1. Distribute blank Bingo cards and chips to each student.
2. Write the list of terms on the board.
3. Instruct students to randomly write the terms in the boxes on their blank Bingo cards, one word to a box. Not all words are used.
4. Read definitions aloud and instruct students to place a chip on the word each definition defines.
5. Instruct students to call “Bingo” when they have covered a horizontal, vertical, or diagonal row.
10. Read off the words that were defined to check the winner's answers.

Hints
- Upon reading the definitions, mark the terms in a different way each game (dot, check, dash, etc.), ensuring all of the terms are covered.
- Save the Bingo cards to reuse in other classes. Laminate them and use with dry erase markers for repeated use.
- Use images of scientific equipment, or of items from the unit of study, and then call out the definition and cover the matching picture. That process could be reversed also. This could work for English, world language, social studies, or science.
- Make a set of cards that focuses on a unit that is taught every year and laminate them. It can take more time than is desirable for students to fill in the squares on the cards.
The Slap Game

**Supplies**
- 2 flyswatters
- list of 25 or more terms with definitions
- masking tape

**Appeal**
This game is easy to put together and play. It’s easily modified to fit most objectives and time constraints. Students enjoy participating and moving around.

**Time**
10 minutes

**Players**
two teams

**Scoring and Game Goal**
to be the highest-scoring team

**Directions**
1. Before class, write the terms on the board, spread out and in random order.
2. Place a six-foot-long strip of masking tape four feet from the board and parallel to it.
3. During class, divide students into two teams and have them form two lines: one per team.
4. Have the first players from each team stand behind the tape with their backs to the board.
5. Give each student standing at the tape a fly swatter.
6. Explain that, after you read a definition (and not before) they are to turn around and seek the answer on the board. The first student to swat the correct answer wins a point for his/her team.
7. Both students then pass the fly swatters to the next players on their teams.
8. Continue playing until all clues have been read.
9. Reward the winning team in whatever manner is customary for the classroom.

**Hints**
- Play this game using terms such as names, dates, events, etc., provided the clues are clear and unique to each name, date, event, etc.
- This activity is not for all classrooms. It is a great reward in itself for well-behaved students who need and want to get out of their seats.
Bluff

Supplies
• list of 30 or more questions (15-plus per list)
• whiteboard

Appeal
This game has little preparation time and is fast-paced and fun. Students enjoy moving around and bluffing to win.

Time
20 minutes

Players
two teams

Scoring and Game Goal
to be the highest-scoring team

Directions
1. Before class, generate two lists of review questions, number the questions, and title the lists A and B. There must be an equal number of questions on each list. Write the numbers (only) on the board.

2. Divide students into two even teams: A and B. Teams must be even. Assign an odd student out to score the game.

3. Starting with Team A, have a team member pick a number from the board.

4. Explain to Team A that the corresponding numbered question is being read.

5. Instruct the students to stand up if they know the answer, but discussing the answer is forbidden.

6. If students don’t know the answer, they have the option to stand up anyway—bluffing that they know the answer. The more students who know the answer, the more points for that team, but beware—the bluff might be called.

7. Read the corresponding numbered question to Team B, and erase that number from the board.

8. Instruct a student from Team A to call on any one of the standing Team B students to answer the question. If the student answers correctly, his or
her team is awarded a point for each person standing. However, if the student answers incorrectly, his or her team loses 2 points for each person standing (yes, teams can have negative scores).

9. Next, a student from Team B picks a number on the board and the game continues this process until all questions have been asked. The team with the highest score at the end of the game is the winning team.

**Hints**

- Give students only five seconds to stand up once the question is read. If they are not standing within that time, do not allow them to answer the question.
- Don’t let students discuss answers; students must know the answer on their own.
- When calling on students to choose numbers or opposing team members, go down the rows so that every student gets to choose a number and opposing team member.
- Have the students write the questions as a review before the game. Use the activity as an assignment or extra credit.
### Order Activity

#### Supplies
- copies of a story or a series of events, arranged in the wrong order on the page
- scissors
- glue

#### Appeal
This activity forces students to think through the process to successfully put the story or events into the correct order. Students enjoy cutting and pasting.

#### Time
45 minutes

#### Players
pairs

#### Directions
1. Pair students together.
2. Give each pair of students a copy of a story/events page.
3. Instruct students to cut apart the story/event pages and work together to arrange the strips of paper in the correct chronological order.
4. Once students have the events in order, instruct them to glue or tape them, in order, onto a piece of notebook paper.
5. Have students write their names on the top or back of the paper.
6. Give the students the correct order while they self-correct their results.

#### Hints
- Change things up by putting students into groups rather than pairs.
- Always check students’ work to make sure it is correct before they start to cut and paste stories in their notebooks.
- Chronological events, such as battles, work great for this activity.
- Ten to twelve events or a half-page story works best because students will become frustrated if they are given too much material to put in order.
• To make this activity more challenging, leave blank spaces for students to fill in with terms such as vocabulary terms, important names, places, or events. For example: Battle in which General ________________ crossed the Delaware and captured the Hessian.

EXAMPLE:

**Civil War Worksheet**  
Name: ______________________

1. Date: ________  At Appomattox Court House _______, surrendered to Grant.

2. Date: ________  At the Battle of __________, Lee lost one-third of his men. This is called the turning-point battle.

3. Date: ________  At the first battle of the Civil War, Bull Run, the _________ won, and _________ earned his nickname, Stonewall.

4. Date: ________  One day after Gettysburg fell, the Union army, under _________ took control of the Mississippi River at the Battle of _________.

5. Date: ________  At the Battle of __________ Stonewall _________ was accidentally shot by one of his own men.

6. Date: ________  After the Battle of __________, the Emancipation Proclamation was issued by _________.