

Using Vertical Surfaces to Enhance Student Collaboration

The Benefits

A non-permanent surface means:

- Students begin a task faster
- Students stay on task and stay engaged longer
- A wider variety of ideas get shared
- You can use prompts and problems that you already have on hand!

The Essentials

- A vertical, non-permanent surface is best. A horizontal, non-permanent surface is a good back up.
- Groups should be random and no more than 3 students.
- Groups should use the “muscle and brain” protocol - the person holding the white board marker is the “muscle” and may only write what the other two “brains” say. The muscle switches throughout the group's time together.
- This is meant to be quick - 3 to 5 minutes.
- Many of the prompts given on the next page are things you are already using in your class!

Ways to Implement the Strategy

- Divergent thinking questions, non-content related (list as many uses for a brick as you can in 2 minutes)
- Activating Prior Knowledge/Brainstorming
- Problems that encourage “productive struggle” or outside-the-box thinking

Ways to Randomize Groups

- Playing cards
- [Popular characters](#) (Shrek, Donkey, and Fiona end up as a group)
- [Flippity Random Name Generator](#)

Ways to Regroup at the End of the Activity

- Return to seats and have a whole class share out/discussion
- Gallery walk
- Have each group select their favorite response and share with the group - this can be done while students are still standing and grouped or can be done back at seats.

Some Content Specific Examples

Math

- Have students draw a coordinate plane and list everything they remember about that topic.
- Give students an [Open Middle](#) problem to solve as a group.
- Give students an application problem and have them work through it as a group.

Science

- Draw and label an animal or plant cell
- Give them an equation to balance
- Brainstorm all of the important vocabulary needed for the unit (this could be done as a WU on review day)
- Have students do a mini version of a “one-pager”

Civics/History

- Give them a thought provoker: What would the United States be like today if England had won the Revolutionary War?
- Describe the bill to law process
- Brainstorm the powers of ___branch of government (this could be a pre-assessment activity or a review day activity)
- Have students list 3 similarities and 3 differences between 2 given ancient civilizations

English

- Brainstorm replacement words for those pesky frequently used words in writing (List replacements for the word “said”)
- Character analysis for a novel
- Give students a painting or picture and have them list descriptors for the scene
- Give students a sample piece of writing. Have students provide constructive feedback.
- Have students brainstorm what constructive peer feedback looks like in the peer writing review process

World Language

- Brainstorm/review vocabulary
- Have students list cultural similarities and/or differences between here and a country that speaks the target language

Counseling/Advisory

Give students a situation and have them work together to come up with an appropriate response:

- students brainstorm real ways to “put up a put down”/avoid being the bystander
- students give specific ways they can be inclusive in the cafeteria, on the bus, etc
- A counseling group working on social skills could brainstorm appropriate ways to interact given a specific scenario

Health/FACS/Music

- Record students playing/singing the current piece of music. Play the recording back and have students provide two pieces of feedback - one positive, one constructive.
- Have students brainstorm ways to be healthy - emotionally, socially, and/or physically
- Have students list examples of things they will have to budget for as they become adults