

Ideas for Early Finishers

Early finishers can challenge even the most experienced teachers. Many of us have had the experience of barely getting the work passed out to everyone before our Fast Finisher is waving her completed assignment in the air. Really? You're done *already*?

The secret is planning because consistent early finishing is a symptom of a bigger issue around the differentiation we are providing in our classroom. Differentiated instruction means making sure work is designed to meet the needs of the student. It's not "more differentiation" – we are not giving two worksheets instead of one just so everyone's done on time. The work itself should be more complex.

Resources and Ideas for Early Finishers:

In Math, all kids should have the opportunity to demonstrate mastery as they are ready. We know that high-ability math students need significantly less practice. Have a system in place for students to show early mastery (early exit ticket or "must do" versus "can do" problems on a practice page). Once they've mastered today's learning objective, students can work on a meaningful and related math extension – a project, more complex application problems or games, an [interactive journal assignment](#). Below are some resources for math extension ideas. Also feel free to reach out to your PEAK staff for more ideas to extend the current math unit you are teaching.

[Illustrative Math - search by grade level and content standard](#)

[Byrdseed - Lots of Great ideas for Differentiating Math](#)

[RFSD Schoology Math Resources - Search by Grade Level/Content Area](#)

[You Cubed](#)

[Marcy Cook Math Centers](#) – your PEAK staff member can share these with you

[Open Middle](#)

In Language Arts, we can assign higher lexile level or companion texts to early finishers. Companion texts allow students to make comparisons

across texts and could be within the same genre as the core text or could be a related text from a different genre. Early finishers could also write (or revise) a piece that imitates the style of an author you are studying. The RFSD High School ELA Team put together some great ideas and resources for ELA teachers [here](#). My favorite way to up the rigor in Language Arts is to use the Depth & Complexity [Multiple Perspectives](#) prompt.

We want to avoid early finisher ideas that involve

- the student's doing something that involves practice of things they probably already know,
- the student's doing something completely unrelated to the content,
- materials that are simply generic, and while fun and even educational, are not actually moving *that* student forward
- early finishers as tutors,
- the student's doing more of the same work they just completed.

Even with the best of planning, we're going to have early finishers. So what are some "emergency" ideas that are also worthwhile?

- Games related to the content being learned like [this](#).
- For older students, check out the [SAT Question of the Day](#) app.
- Mensa has [TED Connections](#) that take TED talks and turn them into self-exploration activities for all ages.
- The best defense against boredom at school for many high ability kids is a book, so help them out by guiding them to quality literature. One resource is the [Excellence in Reading](#) program with free printable lists of books by grade level.
- Math or logic puzzles, traditional or things like [Sudoku](#).
- Subscribe to [Ian Byrd](#)'s mailing list and he will email you five great "Puzzlements & Curiosities" every Friday that get kids noticing and wondering.

A word of caution. We need to be careful to set expectations ahead of time. We don't want students rushing through their work just so they can do the

“cool” extension stuff. Build in a classroom system to make sure that students are creating quality work and that they understand the behavior expectations for extension work.

The goal here is not just to keep them busy. (OK, that may be our goal from time to time.) The goal is to make sure that they are spending the time they have for the development of that skill, not just killing time with unrelated stuff. We need to consider whether the work is respectful of the students’ abilities. How can we add challenge to even out the time (and effort) completion takes?

Remember, the PEAK team is here to support you with this work so never hesitate to reach out to us.