

**WANNA PLAY?
ICEBREAKERS
AND
ENERGIZERS
FOR ANY
CLASSROOM**

PRESENTED BY: BECKY OSTERFELD, KIM SEARS, AND ALLISON WOLF

Introduction

We are three middle school teachers with extensive experience in college organizations, summer camps, coaching, and student leadership groups at the middle school level. In all of our activities, both in and out of the classroom, we use games like the ones in this packet. They're great for bringing a group together, bringing the group closer throughout the year, and sometimes bringing the group back down to Earth when the energy level has gotten just a bit too high.

Many of these games are taken from our memories, so we cannot tell you where they came from. However, several of the games in this packet came from ResidentAssistant.com (<http://www.residentassistant.com/games/index.htm>); their site is great!

We hope you enjoy the following collection of name games, ice breakers, pairing activities, teambuilders, and sponges. Use them in your small groups, in your content area classes, with your student teams and clubs. Most games require minimal supplies and very little set-up; all you need is lots of enthusiasm and a positive attitude. You won't be disappointed with the results!

Name Games

Name Juggling - Arrange the group in a circle and have one ball in your hand. Start the ball moving by saying, “Here you go, _____ (person’s name),” and throwing the ball to that person. The person receiving the ball will catch it (hopefully) and say, “Thank you, _____ (name of person who threw it to them).” Continue in this way until each person has received and thrown the ball once. The last person to receive it should be the first person who threw it, so that a complete circuit is made. Each person must remember whom he or she threw it to and who threw it to him or her! Once the circuit has been established, tell students that the goal is to see how quickly they can complete one full circuit without dropping the ball and with getting everyone’s names right. As you see that students are achieving this, randomly add another item (bouncy ball, koosh ball, nerf ball, rubber chicken) to the same circuit. See how many items the group can juggle at one time.

Tip of my Finger—Group practices saying everyone’s names in random order. Leader calls out a name and taps the balloon to that person with only his/her index finger. The person called must then tap the balloon, using only his/her index finger, towards another person while calling out his/her name. Students may move around, even out of the circle if necessary, to try their best to get the balloon. The goal is to keep the balloon in the air and within the circle, as long as possible, calling as many different names in the group as possible. When the group is ready for a new challenge, have them play the game while pretending that one foot is glued to the floor. The next challenge is to play the same way, but with both feet glued to the floor. The final challenge is to name all the members of the group without repeating a name or letting the balloon hit the ground. The group may be stopped at any time to problem solve and discuss how to meet this challenge.

Balloon Bop – Like Tip of my Finger, but with a twist. To prepare, blow up a balloon to be used. To begin, toss the balloon to another student while calling out their name. You must also call out a body part that that student must use to keep the balloon up in the air until he/she calls another students name and body part.

The Web - Everyone sits in a circle; person starting the activity is holding a large ball of yarn. To begin, say your name and one thing about yourself (or any other discussion topic you choose). Then roll the string to someone else in the group (hold on to the end!), and that person says his/her name and answer. Continue until everyone has received the string, and it has come back to you. A discussion at this point is good, focusing on how everyone together has created a web, and how that is similar to/different from your own group. Some groups have carefully tacked their web onto a bulletin board, wall, etc. with each person decorating his/her point with a personal name tag/info sheet.

Concentration - Start a pattern with the whole group, slapping your hands on the table, clapping them, then snapping your fingers (slap, slap, clap, clap, snap, snap). Make sure the group has the pattern established, and then add the next element. On the first snap, the person beginning the game says their own name; on the second snap, they say the name of someone else in the group. The person just named now says their own name on the next first snap and names someone else in the group on the second. The goal is for the whole group to be able to call everyone’s names at least once without breaking the rhythm.

Nifty Names—Get the group in a circle. Tell everyone to get an adjective starting with the first letter of his or her own first name and add it to the front of their first name [Adventurous Adam]. Then, introduce

yourself, and tell the person next to you to introduce you then himself/herself. Each person farther down the circle will then introduce everybody in front of them then finally, himself/herself.

Zombie—Have the group stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder, and review everyone's names by going around the circle. Leader demonstrates zombie stance: hands held out in front of your waist, palms down, feet glued to the floor but body slightly swaying. One student is chosen to stand in the middle. He/she should also assume zombie stance, except that his/her feet are NOT glued. The leader begins by saying another student's name. The zombie in the middle must find that student and tap their hands before they say another student's name. If the zombie is successful and taps hands before another name is said, he/she trades places with the person on the outside of the circle, who becomes the new zombie. If the person on the outside of the circle is able to name another person in the circle, he/she is safe and the zombie must go tap his/her hands before he/she can name someone else.

Shopping for a Name—As students go around the circle introducing themselves, each should give their name and one thing at the mall they are most like and why. For example, "My name is Jeni and I am most like a pair of work boots, because I like to be comfortable and don't really care about whether others like the fashion statement I make with them." Not only do you learn names, but you learn a little something about each person as well.

Sentence From a Name—Have everyone pair up with someone they don't know. Each person writes his first name on a piece of paper and exchanges it with his partner. After a minute or two getting to know each other, each person makes up a sentence with words starting with the letter of the other person's name. For example: KEVIN: Koalas Enjoy Vegetables In November.

Blanket Name Game—Have your group divide itself into two groups. Tell them to sit on the floor facing each other. Hold up a blanket between the groups so that each team cannot see the other. A member of each team is quietly selected to move up to the blanket. On the count of three, drop the blanket so that each of the selected members is facing each other. Whoever says the other person's name first, wins. Whoever loses goes to the other team.

Motion Name Game—Have everyone stand in a circle. Anyone can begin the game by saying his/her name and demonstrating a [physical] motion to go with it. When the person is done, the entire group repeats the name and the motion. Then, the second person (on either side of the first) introduces him/herself and does a motion. The entire group repeats that name/motion and then the first name/motion. This will continue until each person has given their name and done their motion, and the entire group has repeated everyone's name and motions.

Name Tag Mania—Participants are given a nametag and a magic marker. They are asked to print their names on the upper portion of the nametag and then to draw three objects that represent who they are on the bottom portion of the tag. After completing the activity, participants are then asked to share their names and what they drew on the tags. (i.e. My name is Jess. I drew a sailboat, a dolphin, and a paintbrush.)

Icebreakers

People Bingo – Make a 5x5 grid, like a bingo board. In each space write things such as, “Has lived in another state,” “Is an only child,” “plays an instrument.” Try to hit different topics so all students will feel included. This can also be done where the spaces have activities that must be completed. For example, in each space write something like, “Can do 10 pushups,” “Can sing our national anthem,” “Can hop on one foot for 20 seconds.” Students must circulate and find students to sign the different boxes by saying what’s in the box applies to them or who can do the various activities. Once they have completed the activity, the student gets that person’s signature, and moves on to someone else.

Two Truths and a Lie – This activity works well at the beginning of the year as an icebreaker activity. If you have a larger group, you may want to break them up into smaller groups (15-20 people or less). Explain that each person will write down two truths and one lie about themselves and then the others will try to guess each other’s lie. Explain that their goal is to convince others that your lie is a truth, and to try to figure out what other people’s lies are. Give them several minutes to write down their truths/lie (remind them to not make their lie obvious). Once finished, have students walk around to one another and discuss what they wrote down. They should quiz each other about their statements to help determine what is true and what isn’t. They shouldn’t say their guesses out loud just yet. Once they’ve finished, get in a circle, and have each person take turns reading their three statements, while stopping in between to have students vote on each statement. You can make this competitive, and count up how many correct guesses each student had, or which student tricked the most people about their lie, or just play for fun!

Where Are You?—Two people stand face-to-face, arms-out, palms touching. Then, each turn around three times and try to find each other's palms again and return to the original position without opening your eyes. This is a great spectator sport and is also a riot if a whole group of pairs is trying to do it at the same time.

Non-Verbal Introductions – Have students pair off. Taking turns, each member of the pair should communicate to their partner as much about themselves as they can without speaking or writing (drawing pictures is okay though). For example, they might draw a picture of their house, or pretend to play an instrument if they’re in the band, or make other gestures that relates to activities they do, etc. As the teacher you could even call out different topics they have to nonverbally share. When finished, have everyone introduce their partner (verbally), and allow their partner to make corrections or fill in other details about themselves.

People To People—Form pairs facing each other. A single player at the end of the line is designated the caller. As the caller yells, “Toe to toe,” “Knee to knee,” “Elbow to foot,” etc., the pairs perform the described connection. On the call, “People to people,” the players switch partners. The player without a new partner becomes the new caller. Students can’t have the same partner twice, unless it’s a small group.

My Life Story – To prepare, you need to cut up strips of different colored construction paper and make sure you have something to keep track of time. Give each person one strip of paper and something to write with. Have the students pair up with someone they do not know. Explain that they will have exactly one minute to tell their partner everything they can about themselves. Then, when a minute is up, the listener will have 30 seconds to write down whatever they can remember about the person on the strip of paper. Then have students switch roles and repeat the steps. You may want to brainstorm topics

together such as, favorites, hometown, pets, family, sports they play, etc. Once both partners have shared their life stories, you have the students introduce their partners to the rest of the class. Once finished, staple all the strips together to create a chain to hang around the room as a decoration and reminder of the activity.

Non-Verbal Line-Up – Divide students into groups 5-10 people (the more students, the more difficult the activity). Have students stand in a line side by side with their group. Explain that you will give them a topic and that they will have to organize themselves in some type of order without talking to one another. Some topics to try are: alphabetical by first or last names, length of hair, birthdays, number of letters in last name, alphabetical by best friend's first name, alphabetical according to their favorite food, shoe size, etc. It's fun to watch the different ways the students communicate with each other and the roles they play in their groups.

Do You Love Your Neighbor—Pick one person from the group to be in the center; everyone else forms a circle around them, standing shoulder-to-shoulder. The person in the middle thinks of a characteristic, an interest, anything that some of the group might have in common (wearing blue, likes Chinese food, listens to country). The person in the middle calls out, "One, two, three!" The rest of the circle calls out together, "Do you love your neighbor?" The person in the middle responds, "Yes, we love our neighbors, especially the ones... (insert characteristic here)." At this point, anyone who fits the characteristic must scramble to find a new position in the circle. The person in the middle runs to find an open place in the circle. The remaining people in the circle, who do not fit the characteristic, try to keep anyone from finding a space in the circle. More than one person may end up stuck in the middle of the circle with no place to go; these people now choose their own characteristic and begin the game again.

M&Ms, Skittles, Lifesavers, Toilet Paper—Pass around whatever object you have decided to use, and tell students to take as much as they think they will need. Once everyone has theirs, tell them that they will go around the circle and tell one thing about themselves for each item they took.

M&Ms, Skittles, Lifesavers, Toilet Paper II—Pass around a bag of M&Ms and tell everyone to take as many as they would like. They must go around the circle telling one thing about themselves for every piece they took. They have to tell something different for each color in their hand. You can make up your own categories for this, but one example is red=their favorite vacation place, orange=worst memory from grade school, yellow=most embarrassing moment, green=favorite breakfast food, blue=favorite teacher they have had in the past.

Secret Agent, Guardian Angel—Have the group stand in a circle. Each person should slowly look around the circle, secretly picking out one person to be his or her "secret agent." This will be the person they want to stay away from. Each person should slowly look around the circle again, this time secretly picking out one person to be his or her "guardian angel." This will be the person who can protect them from their secret agent. At the leader's signal, everyone begins running. The goal is to always keep your "guardian angel" in between you and your "secret agent." The tricky part is that your agent and angel are unaware that they are "yours," and so they are constantly in motion. Meanwhile, you are probably someone's angel and/or agent, so others are chasing you and getting in your way. The leader calls a halt, usually after three or four minutes, and brings the group back into a circle. Have the group member simultaneously point to their "secret agent", then their "guardian angel." The students can then pick two new people, and play the game again.

Human Taco—Stick labeled note card (with taco ingredient) on the back of everyone's shirt. (i.e. the word meat printed on a note card) Have each player mingle around asking yes/no questions to find out the taco ingredient that is on their back. Explain the correct order of ingredients in a Human Taco: shell, meat, cheese, lettuce, tomato, salsa and then give the start command, "I'm hungry! Let's eat! Run for the Border!" Each individual must find out which ingredient they are and then find enough to form a complete Human Taco.

Lollipop Lingo—Pass out dum-dum lollipops to the group. For every letter that appears in the flavor, the participant has to share something about him/her with the group.

Tag—Nothing gets a group loosened up like a good game of tag, no matter how old they are. There are as many variations of tag as you have students in your classroom (and then some!) Possible versions are listed below; feel free to create your own!

- o *Ballet tag*—play ballet music as students move; they can only move as if they are ballet dancers, including the leaps and steps and moving in time with the music.
- o *Everybody's It*—Have the group stand in the center of the space. Review boundaries that students must stay within. On the count of three, the game begins and everyone is it. Anyone may tag anyone else. If a student is tagged, he/she must sit down on the ground where he/she was tagged. He/she MAY still tag those who run by, but may not move off the ground. Play continues until only one person is left standing.
- o *Army tag*—If tagged once, put right hand over the place tagged and keep it there. If tagged a second time, place left hand over place tagged and keep it there. If tagged a third time, the student is out of "bandages" and so is out.
- o *Chess tag*—Tell everyone they are a knight. Appoint one person to be The Black Knight. Tell the knights that they can move like a knight in chess (define if necessary). If the black knight tags a white knight, the white knight becomes a black knight. Note: At the end of the game everyone will be a black knight.
- o *Blob tag*—One person is it. When he/she tags someone, the two must join hands and continue to try to tag players. Each tagged person joins hands and becomes part of "it." The group begins to look like a blob as it travels through the playing space, trying to tag all of the players.
- o *Cow Tails Tag*—Give each student a strip of material (in a pinch, we've used sections of paper toweling from the student restrooms ☺) to tuck loosely into the back of his or her pants. Designate one person as "It," and allow everyone else to spread out in the designated tag area. "It" runs after the "cows," and a cow is tagged if "It" successfully pulls off the tail. Once a student loses his or her tail, he or she is now also "It." The game ends when no one has a tail left.
- o *Ongoing Tag*—This is an ongoing tag game that you can initiate at the first meeting of the group. You tell the group that one of them is "it." (Tell that person privately.) The object is not to be "it." The "it" may tag another person in any way they like (i.e. touch, telephone, sight, fax, email, mail, through a friend, etc.) as long as the person being tagged can realize they are it. The game can last for as long as you wish and makes for a lot of laughs and funny stories. The group need not know who it is so that the surprise factor is increased and ongoing. There are no rules and no limit to the number of times the "it" can change in any given time period.

Hand Clap—The leader explains that the point of this game is to get the group to clap entirely together, in sync. The cue to clap will be when the leader's left hand passes in front of his/her stationary right hand. (Leader demonstrates with right hand sticking out to side of body at 90-degree angle, left hand crossing body swinging up and down.) Leader then begins passing left hand up and down in front of right, having students clap each time the left hand crosses the right. After students get into the rhythm, leader deliberately stops the pattern by pretending to pass again, but stopping just short. The pattern should be two claps, followed by a near miss (clap-clap-nothing). Students will begin catching on, but rarely does a whole group manage to get the pattern. Continue to encourage them to get everyone together, repeating the same pattern of two claps and a near miss. Eventually, stop and ask someone who gets it to share the pattern with the group (two claps, not three). Once everyone knows the secret, have them try once again to succeed as a group in clapping (or not clapping) in unison.

Happy Birthday: The Game—You will need 1 pair of gloves, 1 hat, 1 die (perhaps two dice if group is large), and a prize wrapped in several layers of newspaper and boxes. The group stands in a circle. The gloves, hat, and wrapped box are placed in the center. Someone begins by rolling the dice. If he or she rolls a 6, he or she hurries into the middle and puts on the gloves and hat. He or she then starts to unwrap the package one layer at a time. The student must move fast, because the next person to roll a 6 takes the hat off of the person in the center. The person in the center stops immediately and takes off the gloves and gives them to that person, and he/she goes back to the circle. The game continues like this until the package is completely unwrapped and the last person receives their prize.

Student Jeopardy—This game is best done later in the year, after students have gotten to know each other better. About a week before you want to do the activity, pass out the questionnaire sheets (sample found at the end of this handout). Encourage students to be honest. They do not have to fill in every blank, but anything they do put on the sheet is fair game for you to use in class. Once you have the questionnaires back, go through them, noting interesting facts, unusual stories, fun things that you think most students might not know about their classmates. Design a set of Jeopardy-like questions using their answers (This person is allergic to peanuts. This student attended elementary school in Alaska. This student wishes he/she were an eagle, so that he/she could fly.) On the day you play the game, divide students into small groups of 4-6 players. To make it more of a fun activity rather than competitive, run the game in a modified Jeopardy format, allowing all groups to answer each time, not just the first group to be ready. After reading the question, give the groups time to come up with their answers. Provide each group with a small whiteboard, or other way to indicate their questions without all groups seeing what they've guessed. When you call time, have all groups hold up their questions; award one point to each group with the correct answer. For the activity to truly work as a getting-to-know-you event, be willing to allow students to question/comment on the information revealed. When students say, "Justin, I didn't know you went to school in Germany in first grade!" and Justin takes a minute or two to tell what that experience was like, everyone learns something new, and it brings the group closer together. Don't be afraid to fill out your own questionnaire and throw it into the mix; students love to learn "secret" things about their teacher!

Grouping/Pairing Activities

Name Tag Categories - As everyone enters the room, give them a nametag with their name and a pre-chosen category on it, but don't tell them yet what it is for. Categories could be colors, movies, majors, etc. Once the meeting starts, have people get in groups by their name tags and begin getting to know each other.

Who Am I?—Come up with well-known names, and make sure they are a pair (Mickey and Minnie Mouse, Abbott and Costello). Names go on the back of each person. Students must find out whom they are, using yes-or-no questions and not asking the same person two questions in a row. Once a person has discovered his/her hidden name and moved the name from back to front, he/she needs to find the match. However, the two people can't pair up until both people have moved their names to the front.

Barnyard—Have the group leader whisper to each person an animal to imitate. Make sure there are multiples of each animal; for example, assign 4 ducks, 4 pigs, etc. When the leader says go, the students must shut their eyes, put hands out in front to they don't run into walls or each other, and find the other members of their group by making their noise. When each group has found each other, they may open their eyes and stop making their sounds.

Puzzle Jumble – To prepare, you need to cut up a few pictures into puzzle pieces (from a calendar, or an old poster). Use one picture for each group you want to have, and the number of pieces is the number of group members..Have each student grab a piece from a bag and keep them a secret until you say Go. Once you say Go, the students will try to locate the other members of the group with the pieces to form the pictures. Whichever group finishes first, wins.

Batman and Robin—Great for when you need two groups of students and want them mixed up well! Ask students to find a partner quickly. Usually, they will go find a friend for this, thinking they will be together; that's great. Ask partners to take about five seconds to decide who will be Batman and who will be Robin. Then ask all Batmen to line up on one side of the room, all Robins on the other side. You now have one entire group of Batmen, each separated from their buddies, and one group of Robins.

Name that Tune—Each person in the group is given a small piece of paper with the name of a nursery rhyme or other song written on the paper. (i.e. "Row, row, row your boat," "Rock-a-bye baby," etc.) All of the people who are given the song must hum that tune and fine everyone else singing the song.

Comic Strip Chaos—Each participant takes a turn at picking a comic frame out of the large container. After the entire group has each chosen one, the participants begin to search for others with the same comic strip sequence. After the participants have found everyone in their group, they must arrange themselves so that the sequence of frames are in chronological order to form the comic strip correctly. Upon completion of sequence, the newly formed group sits down together.

Psychic Shake—Each person decides on a number from 1 to 3. Silently, everyone in the group wanders around shaking people's hands. The number of shakes should match the number chosen. There will be an unmistakable moment of tension when the numbers don't agree. But when they do the two should silently decide how to group themselves. Eventually, everyone will be in three groups. Surprisingly, the groups are often very evenly divided. It must be something psychic.

Team builders

Who Am I? II – To prepare, write the names of well-known famous people on sticky notes (one name per paper). Try to vary the types of people you choose. For example, celebrities, political figures, athletes, people who work at your school, cartoon characters, characters from books or movies, etc. Put a sticky note on the back of each student. They will circulate and try to figure out who they are by asking yes/no questions to other students. Encourage them to talk to different students. Once they figure out who they are, have them move their sticky note to their chest and then they can continue to give clues to other students.

Gotcha/Grab the Finger – Works with any size group and can be done in 5-10 minutes. Students stand in a circle and put their arms out to the side. Have them put their left palms up, and then have their right index fingers pointing down and touching their neighbor's palm that is held up. When you say go, explain that the students are supposed to do two things, grab the finger in your left hand, and prevent your right finger from being grabbed. This is just a quick, fun activity for students to do.

Gum Game – Set up teams of five. Give each set of students a pair of gloves and a pack of gum, (make sure it's the kind that needs to be unwrapped and has at least five pieces in it). When you say go, the first person in each team puts on the gloves, opens the package of gum, pulls out a piece, unwraps it, and chews it. They then pass the gloves and pack of gum to the next person. The first team to complete the task wins.

Catch Me if You Can – Have students pair up and then form two lines side by side standing opposite their partner. Have them look at their partners for 30 seconds, paying attention to all the little details about each other (clothing, hair, jewelry, etc). The teacher then tells the students to turn away from each other. Give them 20 seconds to change something about their appearance (change your watch to a different hand; take off a belt, etc, as long as your change is discreet but visible). Have them turn toward their partner again and give them 30 seconds to figure out what is different.

Posture Relay—Two teams line up side by side. The first person in line runs up and around a cone and back with a beanbag on his/her head. He/she then hands off the beanbag to the next person in line and so on. The bag cannot be held with one's hands. The game ends when one team completes the relay. That team wins.

Ha Ha Ha—Sitting in a circle, the first person says, "Ha" once. The second person says it twice, the third person three times, and so on. The catch is that you can only say, "Ha." If anyone begins laughing for real, even if it's not his/her turn, the group must start over.

Balloon Juggle – To prepare, blow up one balloon per student. Challenge the students to keep all balloons in the air. This encourages cooperation. Once they've got the hang of it, make it harder by adding in more balloons or placing restrictions (for example, no hands, or have them sort the balloons into colors, etc).

Telephone—One person starts a saying and passes it around the circle by whispering in his/her neighbor's ear. The neighbor is allowed to say "operator" one time to have the message repeated. Check the message at the end to see if it is the same.

Hand Uno—The group begins by lying on their stomach in a circle with their heads facing the middle of the circle. Every participant's right arm goes underneath the left arm of person to his or her right. The left arm should be over the right arm of the person on the left. One person will be designated to start by slapping the ground once with one of their hands. The person whose hand is to the right will do the same and so on counterclockwise. If someone decides to slap the ground twice, the direction will reverse. If a hand makes a fist and hits the ground, the next hand in the circle is skipped. If a hand messes up by hesitating longer than two seconds, slaps prematurely or out of order, that hand is removed from the game. Once a player has removed both of his/her hands, they are out of the game until the next game. When there are only two people remaining, the game has ended. NOTE: This is a great cool down activity.

Solemn and Silent – Explain that students will need to display self-control for this activity. Have students pair off and stand back to back with one another. On the count of three, everyone must face their partner, look each other in the eyes, and then try to remain serious (no smiling or laughing) and also no speaking! The first person to smile/laugh, or speak must sit down. The people left standing finds a new partner and the activity continues until only one person is left. During the second round, you may want to encourage those students sitting out to heckle or distract those left in the game.

Balloon Frantic – To prepare, blow up two to three balloons per student, and get something to keep track of time. Each person has one balloon and the others are in a nearby pile. Everyone begins bouncing his or her balloons in the air. Every five seconds, the teacher adds another balloon. See how long the group can continue before receiving six penalties. A penalty is announced loudly by the teacher when a balloon hits the floor, or when a balloon is not back into play within five seconds of it hitting the floor. The teacher will say their score out loud until they reach six. Once they reach six, stop the time. Discuss how to improve their time for the next round and then try to reach your new goal.

Talking Behind Your Back – Have students write their name on a piece of paper, and then tape them to their backs with the name not showing. Have students go around and write something positive about that person on their back. The teacher removes all the papers and lays them out names down for everyone to view. Ask the students, "How well do you think you know yourselves, or what do you think other people think about you?" "What would they say behind your back?" Have students read them and try to predict which one they think was on their back. When finished, turn them over so their name is facing up, and have them find their name and see what people had written about them. Hopefully they'll walk away feeling good about themselves after this activity.

This Is A What?—A very confusing icebreaker to explain, but once you've got the hang of it, it's fun! Each person is given some sort of small object to hold (a toy car, an eraser, a comb, a pencil, a cookie, a rubber chicken, etc.). Sitting in a circle, each person holds their item out to the person on the right and tries to tell him/her what it is: they must say, "This is a _____ (car)." The fun part is that everyone is turned to their right talking, so no one is listening to the person on their left. So everyone immediately turns to their left, and in unison they say, "A what?" Then everyone turns to the right and answers the question: "A _____ (car)." If everyone has been able to concentrate while they were talking, they will now know what the person on the left is holding; they will say, "Oh, a _____ (car)." Each person takes the object the person to his or her left is holding out, and the game begins again, with each person trying to pass along the new object without getting confused about what it is. Eventually, the goal is to see how fast the group can go while still saying the correct things and making the handoffs.

Shoe Scramble—Everyone takes off their shoes and tosses them into the middle of the circle in a big pile. On your signal, each person goes up to get one left and one right shoe; they may NOT be the person's own shoes. Everyone goes back into the circle and puts on the shoes (as well as they can; most won't fit). The goal is for everyone to find the matches for their shoes and stand next to them. If I have a blue Nike on my left foot and a pink flip-flop on my right, I need to find the person wearing a blue Nike on their right and the person wearing a pink flip-flop on the left. The craziness while they try to find and stand next to each other is a lot of fun to watch! If it is done correctly, when everyone is matched up they take their feet out of the shoes, leaving them perfectly matched up for the owner to reclaim them.

Drawing Back—Similar to Telephone. Everyone lines up facing in one direction. The person at the back picks a simple picture and finger-draws it on the back of the person in front of him/her. That person must decide what the picture is and pass it on by drawing it on the back of the person in front of him/her. Have the person at the front of the line tell the group what he/she thinks the picture is, and see how close the two ideas are.

Four Corners—Think of several topics that could have at least four answers (for example, OJ did it, OJ didn't do it, OJ was framed, I don't care whether or not OJ did it). Designate one corner of the room for each response. Give the question, and students should go to the corner designated for the answer they agree with. Once everyone is in their chosen corner, students in each corner can discuss among themselves why they chose the way they did, or each corner can present its viewpoint to the other three corners.

Balloon Toss—The group lines up in two teams, each line facing the other, fairly close together. Give everyone in one line a water balloon. The two groups pass the balloon back and forth, trying not to break the balloon. For each successful toss, the thrower must take one step back. Last team to break their balloon wins.

Egg Toss—Just like the balloon toss, but much messier.

Row, Row, Row Your Boat—Very similar to the childhood game of Hot and Cold. Show the group a small object that you are using for the game (ball, book, rubber chicken). Have the group choose one person to leave the room briefly. While he/she is gone, hide the object somewhere in the room. When the person returns, tell him/her to find the hidden object. The group sings "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" as the person searches, getting softer as the person is farther away from the object and louder as they get closer.

Drop that Thing!—Prepare a bag containing 20 or so different objects (ideas: key, rubber ball, tin can of food, book, pencil, penny, quarter, orange, shoe, rubber chicken). One person in the group is blindfolded, and the rest of the group takes turns dropping items onto the floor (tile floor works best). The blindfolded person has to try to identify by sound what the item is. Keep going until that person gets one wrong; then change the blindfold with someone else. The person who can identify the most wins.

Human Knot—Have participants form a circle, shoulder to shoulder. Each person should reach one hand out to the middle and grab someone else's hand. Do the same thing with the other hand. All hands should now be connected to different people. Do not let go of your hands from here on! Have the group untangle itself without losing their grips. Three possible solutions will look like this at the end (depending on whose hands are joined): one large circle, a circle within a circle, and a figure eight.

Sardines—This game can be played indoors or out. The goal is similar to Hide and Seek, except that it hides first. Everyone else then tries to find it. When someone finds it, they hide with it in the same spot. The game ends when everyone finds the hiding spot.

Human Machine—Sort of like group charades. Have students get in groups of five to six people. Give each group a card with the name of a machine on it (toaster, hair dryer, answering machine, PlayStation...). The groups figure out how to imitate that machine together. They demonstrate their machine to the rest of the group, without making any noise, and the rest of the groups have to guess what they are.

I Love You...But I Just Can't Smile—Students are in a circle, with one student, "It", in the middle. That student must get someone in the circle to smile or laugh. "It" picks one person, walks up to them, and says, "I love you". The person must answer back, "I love you, but I just can't smile." "It" tries three times on each person; if the person cannot answer without smiling or laughing, that person becomes "It" and the other person rejoins the circle.

Caterpillar Race—Divide the group into two teams. Have them line up, one in front of the other, with each person holding on to the waist of the person in front of them. Position a chair about 30 feet in front of the leader of each line. The object is for the two teams to race down to the chair, go around it, and get everyone back across the start/finish line, without letting go of the person in front of them. If someone lets go, the leader makes the entire group go back and start over.

Orange Pass—Divide group into two teams (for younger groups, best done by gender). Each team stands in a line. The first person in each line puts an orange under their chin, holding it up without using their hands. When you say go, the teams must pass the orange from player to player down the line, all without using their hands. If someone drops the orange or uses their hands, that group must start over.

Lap Sit—Everyone should get into a very small circle, all facing to the left. Everyone's foot on the inside of the circle should touch toe to the heel of the person in front of him or her. Very slowly, at the same time, everyone sits down on the knees of the person behind him or her. If everyone trusts their partners, the entire group can balance like that for quite a while. If they are able to do it, see how long they can hold it.

Stretch—You need quite a bit of space to do this one; a long hallway works well. Count the number of people in your group, multiply by 3 (by 2 if you have students about 6th grade or lower), and measure off a line that many yards long. For example, for a group with 20 eighth graders, measure off 60 yards (180 feet). Line up the group next to each other, with the person on the end touching the starting point. The group's goal is to find a way to stretch their line to reach the finishing point. The line, when finished, must be unbroken. This will seem like an impossible goal to the group, but it is possible; if they need a hint, remind them that their hands don't necessarily have to be touching; they just have to be connected in some way all the way down the line.

Frozen T-shirt Relay—This game is very self-explanatory. Take two large t-shirts, fold as if you were putting them away, then soak in water and freeze them. When it's time to play, choose two students to participate, and divide the class in half to cheer each person on. Hand the students the two stiff-as-a-board frozen shirts. On your signal, the first student to unfold his/her shirt and put it completely on (arm and head holes must be used!) wins.

Frenzy--Arrange 4 hula hoops on the ground spread out from each other at the four corners of an imaginary 25 foot square; place one in the middle (imagine the dots on the five side of a dice). Place all tennis balls in the middle (neutral) hoop. Divide into four even teams. Have each team pick a hula-hoop and stand by it. Explain the object of the game: each team is trying to place all of the tennis balls in its hoop; once you have all the balls, you win. Rules: There is no throwing or tossing of the balls. All the balls must be out of the middle before you can take them from others' hoops. No defending the hoops. If, after several minutes, no one seems to be winning, call a time-out and have groups discuss new strategies. Allow play to resume, calling for one more time-out if needed to brainstorm strategies again. With some planning and thinking about what you've told them, they should realize that the only way to win (other than all of the other groups agreeing to lose -- not likely) is for them *all* to win, i.e., place all of the balls in the middle hoop, then place their hoops around the balls.

Traffic Jam—Divide the group depending on how many people there are. The groups need to be of even numbers of six, eight, etc. If there is an odd number of people have them help facilitate the activity and then switch off. To set up the game, place marked squares (one more than the number of people in the group) on the floor. The boxes need to be placed in a straight line. Have each person stand on a marked box, leaving the center open. The challenge is for the groups on either side of the center unmarked box to completely change to the other side, by moving one at a time, like in a game of Checkers. Players may move into the vacant spot next to them, or they may jump another player on the opposite side, but they cannot jump a player from their own side. Players may not move backwards, and two people cannot move at once. After the group has figured out a solution to the traffic jam, have them show the leader.

The Clock—Define a large circle by having the group join hands. Mark one spot inside the circle as 12 o'clock and another as 6 o'clock. Have the group rotate in one direction, returning to the start position, in as little time as possible. After discussing strategies, the group can try to improve its previous record.

Human Overhand—This game can be time-consuming; it seems simple, but takes a lot of thinking. Divide students into groups of four. Give each group three four-foot lengths of rope. The objective is for the group to tie an overhand knot in the middle section of rope without anyone releasing their ropes. First, demonstrate an overhand knot to all students (the kind that you start tying your shoes with ... half of a square knot...). Now instruct the group to face you and grab on to the end of someone else's rope so that they form a connected line - not circle - with a rope connecting each person. To truly belabor the point, the human configuration should be person-rope-person-ROPE-person-rope-person. Why the caps in that center ROPE? Because that is the rope in which the group must tie an overhand knot without anyone letting go of the ropes that they are holding. Simply instruct the group to tie an overhand knot in the center rope without anyone releasing the ends that they are holding and step back.

Touch The Can Get the group around the can. Tell the group they all must be touching the can at once with their (finger, toe, knee, elbow, shoulder). Depending on the size of the group, use larger AND smaller items, and gradually get the group to come closer and closer together physically. Facilitator may have the group transport the object to a different area with a bizarre matching of body parts (imagine a group of 10 people carrying a plastic throwing disc across the room on their knees).

The Lava Pit—Make up a story that the group is being chased and they need to get across a field of hot lava. Give each group paper plates explaining that when they step on these plates they will not sink into the lava. (Give each team about 1/3 the number of plates as people.) The group must figure out how to get the entire group from point A to point B (both marked by scotch tape on the floor), from one side of the Hot Lava Pit to the other. Only one person can be on a plate at a time, and the plates may be picked up and moved. The key to the game is that only part of the team will be able to cross the field at a time and one person will need to work their way back across the field to help the rest of the team across. A time limit can also be placed on this game.

Duo-Sit/Group Sit—For this challenge participants will work in pairs. Each group must stand back to back and link arms. From this position, the pair will attempt to sit down and stand back up without unlocking arms. When a pair succeeds, they should join with another pair and attempt the challenge with four people. Eventually, the group should work towards being able to complete the challenge with the entire group.

Pass the Chicken—In this game, nobody wants to hold the rubber chicken -- the game's only prop! To begin the game, all students sit in a circle. Select one person to be It. That person holds the rubber chicken. The teacher or a "caller" says to the person holding the chicken, "Name five presidents of the United States. Pass the chicken!" As soon as the caller says, "Pass the chicken," the person holding the chicken passes it to the right. Students quickly pass the chicken around the circle. If it returns to the original holder before he or she can name five presidents of the United States, the holder is still It. Otherwise, the person holding the chicken when It finishes listing five presidents is the new It. You should prepare the topic cards for this game in advance. Topics can relate to your curriculum or be general information topics. The student who is It must name five items in the called-out category in order to get rid of the dreaded chicken! Some Suggested Topics: fast-food restaurants, authors of children's books, countries in South America, sports teams, things that grow in the desert, vegetables, cartoon characters, musical groups, cereals, rivers in the United States, candy bars made with chocolate, large bodies of water, animals found in salt marshes, cities in [your state].

Sing Down—Teams are created of five to six in a group. The leader will give the groups a word (i.e. love, boy, dance, etc.), and give the teams one minute to think of as many songs as they can with that word in it. Once the minute has passed, one team begins by singing a part of a song with that word in it. All team members must sing it to receive the point. The next team then responds. No songs may be repeated during a round. Start with a different group for each round, so that all have an equal chance of being the first group. The group who has the most songs, wins. The process can then be repeated with another word.

Dead Fish—The group starts by getting into a comfortable position that can be sustained for a long period of time. Once everybody has established a position, the leader will count down from ten to zero. At zero, the game will begin. Once the game has begun, nobody is allowed to talk or move, with the exception of the eyes and chest for breathing. If the leader and only the leader should notice anyone talk or move, they will verbally remove the person from the game. Anyone removed from playing may persuade others to talk or move, but they may not physically touch those players still in the game. The winner is the last person remaining, and they become the leader of the next game.

Big Boss—The group sits in a circle formation. One group member is asked to leave the circle to close their eyes and block their ears. At this time, the leader will select a “Big Boss.” The Big Boss will establish a rhythm of clapping, stomping, etc. The rest of the group will follow, carefully not giving away the Big Boss. The Big Boss is the only one allowed to initiate changes in the rhythm. The person asked to leave will return to the middle of the circle where they will try to guess the Big Boss. The person is granted three chances to guess. If the original Big Boss is successful in hiding his/her identity, they will be asked to leave the circle. If the Big Boss is successfully chosen, a new guesser and Big Boss are chosen.

Is Mrs. Mumble Home?—The group will sit in a circle formation. One person will start by turning to the person next to them and say, “Is Mrs. Mumble home?” To which the person replies, “Who?” Then the first person says, “Mrs. Mumble.” To which the second person replies, “I don’t know, let me ask my neighbor.” The conversation continues around the circle. The object of the game is to get the conversation moving fast without the two conversationalists showing their teeth. NOTE: To make it more difficult, send the message in opposite directions.

M & M Swap—Have the group form a circle standing up. After everyone is given a plastic spoon, the first player is given four or five M&Ms to hold in his/her spoon. Everyone must put the spoon into their mouths holding the handle between their teeth with the scoop of the spoon facing up. The group must pass the M&Ms from the first person to the last, without using their hands. The object is to get ALL of the M&Ms to the end, without dropping any.

Pass the Pebble—All players stand about while one goes around pretending to drop a pebble into the hands of each of the players, who hold their palms together. When the pebble has been completely around the group and has been left in one player’s hands, the one who has it slyly slips away and runs for the goal previously determined by the group, and all try to catch him/her. The one who succeeds passes the pebble in the next round. If no one succeeds in catching the player, that player passes the pebble in the next round. HINT: Ask players to spread out so no one knows who holds the pebble.

Red Handed—(Also called “Button, button, who’s got the button?”) The group forms a circle and one person, “It”, stands in the center. The group faces in, fists closed, palms up. “It” places a marble (or button, or other small object) into someone’s hand. “It” then closes her eyes. While her eyes are closed the group passes the marble around. The idea is to trick “It” so everyone pretends to pass the marble. “It” shouts out a word (any will do--“RED HANDED” for example) and opens his or her eyes. He or she then tries to guess who has the marble. Everyone presents his or her hands in the original position (fists closed, palm up) and “It” picks a hand. If you get caught with the marble, you become “It”. If “It” fails to catch someone “Red Handed,” then he or she must try again.

Create Your Own Team Building Activity—This activity is best done after students have experienced several teambuilders in your class, so that they know what kind of activities would be appropriate. Divide students into groups of four or five. Give them about twenty minutes to design their own team building activity, something that they think their group can do better than anyone else! After the planning time, have each group present their teambuilder to the class. Allow groups time to try each game; turn it into a contest and award one point to each team who can successfully complete another group’s teambuilder, and award two points to the team who designs a teambuilder that no other team can beat them at.

Sponges

(activities to “soak up” the last five minutes or so left in a period)

Around the World—Announce to the group that you are going on a trip around the world, and say the first country that you are going to is Argentina (or any other location that begins with “A”). Ask if anyone would like to come with you; tell them they can come if they choose the right place to go next. They will name many countries, but they may only come along if they say a country with the correct letter. The countries’ initials, in sequence, must spell out “Around the world.” If the second person says they want to go to Rio de Janeiro, they can come; if they want to go to Brazil second, they have to stay at home. Keep going with the guesses until everyone has caught on, occasionally adding a country of your own if the group is not getting the trick.

I’m Going on a Picnic—Similar to Around the World. Tell everyone that you’re going on a picnic, and tell them what you are bringing. Whatever it is, it must use the initials of your first and last name. For example, if your initials are “D. P.,” you can bring “dill pickles.” Have students tell you what they would like to bring; if the item starts with their initials, tell them they may come along. Keep going until everyone has figured out the secret.

I’m Going on a Picnic II—Sitting in a circle, the first person says, “I am going on a picnic, and I am bringing ____.” The second person says, “I am going on a picnic, and she’s bringing (first item mentioned), and I’m bringing ____ (new item).” This continues around the circle, with each person adding a new item to be remembered.

Buzz—This game requires some thinking; it is a counting game with a twist. The group sits in a circle, and the goal is to count to 100. Each person says one number at a time, going in order around the circle, making as many circuits as needed to reach 100. The twist is that anytime the number four or any form of the word four (fourteen, forty), that person must say, “buzz” instead of four. For example, “One, two, three, buzz, five...thirteen, buzzteen...thirty-three, thirty-buzz...” If someone forgets and says “four”, the group starts over at one.

Crossed/Uncrossed—Have everyone sit in a circle. The leader, who has to know the secret of the game), takes two pencils, announces “crossed” or “uncrossed”, and passed the pencils on to the next person in the circle. Each person must say whether they are crossed or uncrossed, and the leader tells them if they are correct or not. Continue passing around the circle until everyone is able to answer correctly. The trick is that it’s not the pencils that are crossed or uncrossed, like everyone is thinking; it’s the legs of the person holding the pencils at that time. To complicate things, every time they come back to you, make sure you have changed your legs’ and/or pencils’ positions to change your answer and confuse everyone.

The Alphabet Game—List all 26 letters of the alphabet on the board. The object of the game is to use all letters at least once, in as few words as possible. The only catches: each letter can only appear once in a word, you cannot use proper nouns, and you cannot use any letters used in the word directly above. For example, the first word could be “able” but not “apple” (two “p’s”). The second word cannot use any of the letters in “able”; a possible second word is “night.” The third word cannot use any of the letters in “night” but the letters from previous words (“able”) are now eligible again.

Silent Alphabet—Blindfold students; they stay blindfolded throughout the activity. Take them one at a time from their seats and lead them each to a different place on the perimeter of the room. Seat them any way you like: facing forwards, facing the wall, under a table, facing right or left. Tap one of these students on the head when you seat him/her. When all students are seated, tell them you selected one person as the leader; that person must begin. The goal for the group is to say the entire alphabet without pre-planning who is going to say each letter. Rules: the alphabet must travel one way around the circle (which way does not matter) and may not change, no one may say more than one letter at a time, two people may not say the same letter at the same time, and there must always be at least one silent person in between the person who said the previous letter and the person who said the current one. Any time someone makes a mistake, the teacher announces that the group must start again. If students prove they can do it, pick a new leader and challenge them to beat their previous time.

Body English—Split the group into two groups. Each group must plan and spell out the words by using their bodies only (no hand signals or signs). The other group must figure out what they are spelling. Start with single words, and move onto phrases as the groups get better at spelling in this fashion.

Good Frog, Bad Frog—Gather the group in a circle around you. Hold the thumb and forefinger of one hand about one inch apart, as if you are holding a small, invisible frog, then place them somewhere on the back of your other hand. Ask students, “Is this a good frog or a bad frog?” They will guess, you tell them whether or not they are correct, and then change the spot you are holding your frog to somewhere else on your hand, and ask the question again. Keep going until everyone has figured out the trick and can answer correctly. The trick, which only you know at the beginning, is that if you say, “Is this a good frog or a bad frog?” it is a good frog; if you say, “OK, is this a good frog or a bad frog?” it is a bad frog. Any time you add OK before it, it is a bad frog. Students often don’t clue into this, because they are so used to saying OK when they speak; they will think it depends on your hand placement.

Fox, Chicken, Grain—Divide the group into as many teams of four as you need. Give each team the same problem at the same time; the object is to be the first team to come up with the only possible solution and act it out for the group. One person in each group is the farmer, one is the fox, one is the chicken, and one is the grain. All groups are on one side of a “river” to start. Each farmer needs to get his grain, fox, and chicken across the river to the market. Unfortunately, the raft for the river will only carry the farmer and one other item at a time. The fox will eat the chicken if left alone with it; the chicken will eat the grain if left alone with it. How can all of the goods make it to the other side, one at a time, without anything being eaten? (Solution: the farmer takes the chicken over first, goes back for the fox, leaves the fox and takes the chicken back to the first side, leaves the chicken on the first side and takes the grain, leaves the grain and goes back for the chicken, takes the chicken and leaves for the market.). If students are getting stuck, a good hint is just reminding them that things can be taken both ways across the river; often that is enough to get them on the right track.

Strange Symbols—Begin by placing the first symbol in the row below on the board, and ask students if they can guess what might come next. If someone has a guess, have him/her come draw it on the board; usually this will take several symbols. Continue adding one symbol at a time, asking for guesses between each addition. If you finish adding symbols before anyone figures out the pattern, use a ruler or the side of your hand to bisect the first symbol, then the second, and so on, until someone guesses that the symbols are the numerals 1-9 with vertical symmetry.

