

# Games for Collaboration

Pembroke's Friday Freebie

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## Creating Caring Classrooms

How to encourage students to communicate, create, and be compassionate of others



**Drama  
&  
Play**

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## Games That Build Collaboration

Collaboration requires a certain generosity of spirit, patience, maturity, listening skills, and a definite “buy in” to the classroom work by all involved. In fact, most students usually have no difficulty collaborating with others as long as the work has some sort of personal connection to them and if their voice and ideas are heard by all. Teachers need to ensure that those who are shy or learning English as a second language have an opportunity to offer their ideas. It is important to be aware of whose voices are present a lot of the time and whose voices are often silent. Everyone in the group needs to become aware of who is in the room so that there is a more inclusive ethic about the work that lies ahead.

All voices—even the ones that ask difficult questions or are unsure about the merits of some of the ideas being put forward—need to be heard. Making sure that all ideas are heard takes more time but often what students create together is of much better quality.

Part of the work of the collaborative classroom focuses on having students imagining, inventing, and creating something together. It means that students are talking with one another in partners, in small groups, and as a whole class to examine and debate different perspectives about material that matters. As they engage in collaborative talk and work alongside each other in collaborative activities, students become more knowledgeable about the content and also begin to see that their particular classroom community is made up of people who think differently and respond in many unique ways. This knowledge of difference, this understanding of varied response, this experience of having to open oneself up to something that one has never thought of before, allows students to become more empathetic to differing viewpoints, perspectives, and reactions. The classroom may be noisier, the work may be more intense, but it is also more interesting because it is more alive with people who want to share their ideas rather than worrying that they might be wrong. A collaborative classroom encourages debate, interaction, thoughtfulness, problem solving, and ambiguous response.

### Untangle

This drama game provides an instant challenge for students to work together to solve a problem. Students are divided into groups of 8 to 10, and each group forms a circle, members standing. Direct students to stretch out their arms to the front of their bodies. Each student takes the hand of another student, connecting with two different students. On a signal, challenge the students to untie the knot of tangled hands—no one can let go of a partner’s hands. The students are successful if they can return to a circle formation.

#### *Extensions*

1. Repeat the activity, but this time, students are not allowed to talk.
2. Have an Untangle competition. Which group can untangle in the quickest time?
3. Increase the group size to 12 or more to form a tangle. Are the students able to untangle as efficiently as they did in smaller groups?

**Name Call, Ball Toss**

Students stand in a circle. To begin, a ball is given to one player, who calls his or her name and tosses the ball to someone else in the circle. The ball continues to be passed, ensuring that all become familiar with the names in the group. The activity is repeated. This time, students start with their hands folded in front of them; after tossing the ball to someone else in the circle, they place their hands behind their backs. In this way, each person passes (and receives) the ball once. The activity is repeated again, following the sequence of passing the ball. Draw the students' attention to the pattern that has been established.

*Extensions*

1. Challenge the students to complete the activity within a certain time.
2. Students pass the ball in the same pattern without calling names.
3. The pattern of passing the ball is reversed. The ball is passed from the last person to the first person.
4. Two balls are passed, one using the original pattern and one using the reverse pattern.
5. Students find a new spot in the circle. The game is repeated.
6. Additional balls, up to five, are added.

**Word Call**

Students now choose a word or phrase that has been placed in an envelope. These words can be on a particular topic (e.g., food) from a script or from a novel. The words listed below are from the novel *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen.

- |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| TURBULENCE            | MICROPHONE            |
| HELP                  | DIFFICULTY            |
| CPR                   | OVER                  |
| PLEASE ...            | SIGNAL BREAKING UP    |
| DOWN-ANGLE            | HOPELESS STATIC       |
| STILL TREMBLING       | EASY SAY              |
| INCREASED SPEED       | HARD DO               |
| HORIZON               | REDUCE THE IMPACT     |
| TRANSMITTER           | WINDMILLING PROPELLER |
| EMPTY AIR WAVES       | COCKPIT               |
| HELLO?                | PLANE DOWN            |
| SOUND OF HIS OWN SOBS |                       |

Explain to the students that the word they have selected will be their word or phrase—they need to “own” it. Tell them that they need to remember their word or phrase.

Students stand in a circle to play the game. This time when someone tosses the ball to someone in the circle, the word or phrase they own is called out. The game continues until everyone has had a chance to receive the ball and throw it. Like the Name Call, Ball Toss exercise, the students need to pay attention to who throws and receives the ball.

The activity is repeated, but students are asked to add an emotional dimension to the word or phrase. So, as they throw the ball and say the word, they need to do it perhaps angrily, sweetly, with despair. Ask the students: “How does the meaning of the word or phrase change? What images come to mind?”

*Extension*

Students work in groups of three to five to create a short scene in which everyone says their word. What order will they present the words? What physical gesture will they add as they say the line? Who is the line being said to? Provide students with time to rehearse their short scenes before sharing them with the whole class.

*Variation:* This exercise could be adapted to make it about the students' own identities. Have the students come up with a word that describes them. (These words could be alliterative, for example, Marvellous Martha, Energetic Ed.) The game is repeated with students calling out adjectives. Conclude by asking the following questions:

- What is our collective identity in the classroom?
- What do these words say about us as a group of people?
- What questions do you have about some of the words that were chosen?
- How can we reflect on these words to learn new things about ourselves as a community of learners?

**Photo Contest**

*With thanks to Debbie Nyman*

Students are divided into three groups (or four if there is a large number). To begin each group can decide on a name for their team. One team is invited to sit down while the other two groups are told that they are going to create a photo. The judges can have their backs turned to the players, and on a signal they are invited to turn around to declare which of the two groups is going to be the "winner" of the photo contest.

A caption is provided and group members are given 60 seconds to spontaneously create the corresponding photo as a still image to show the judges. Once the images are made, judges turn around and examine the two photos. The group discusses which of the pictures should get the prize. Encourage the judges to give reasons for their choices. What criteria are they using to judge the success of the photo?

The game is replayed with the judges replacing the group that won; a new photo caption is given.

**Possible Caption Titles**

- Halloween Night
- The Parade
- Haunted House
- The Weekend
- Off to War