
Games That Encourage Talk

These games foster communication among students. They allow them time to listen carefully to one another, to talk, to laugh, and to have fun. They are meant to help students pay attention to the language they are using. They also encourage students to interact with as many people as possible in the classroom—in partners, in small groups, and as a whole. Students work with word language and body language, honing their communication skills.

The games encourage students to look more critically at human interactions and to talk about their intellectual and emotional responses to these interactions in an honest and open fashion. Students share opinions and debate choices as they work together, building off one another's ideas. They find language appropriate to the situation and encourage one another to excel and contribute.

Fortunately/Unfortunately

Ask the students to sit in groups of five or six. Have them number themselves off (1-2-3-4-5). Student 1 starts a story beginning with the line “Last night, as I was coming home from work, my car broke down.” Student 2 continues the story but must start her part with the word “fortunately.” Student 3 continues the story but begins his sentence with “unfortunately.” The words are used alternately as the story is told by each member of the group. Encourage the group members to go around the circle at least twice. Ask for volunteers to share the gist of the story with the class.

Here is how one story might go. You might want to use this as an example for students to understand the exercise a bit better.

- 1: Last night, as I was coming home from work, my car broke down.
- 2: Fortunately, I had my cell phone.
- 3: Unfortunately, when I called home, no one answered.
- 4: Fortunately, I was close to a gas station.
- 5: Unfortunately, the gas station attendant was locking up when I arrived.
- 6: Fortunately, he listened to my story.
- 7: Unfortunately, he was rushing to the hospital because his wife was in labor.
- 8: Fortunately, he gave me a lift to the nearest bus station.
- 9: Unfortunately, I didn't have any money to buy a ticket.
- 10: Fortunately, the ticket agent took pity on me and lent me some money.

Are You Thinking What I'm Thinking?

To demonstrate how this game works, have two volunteers sit in chairs in front of the class or in the centre of a circle. Tell the two volunteers to each think of a word, preferably a noun. On a signal, each player says the word out loud, for example, “computer” and “puzzle.”

Direct the players to think of a word that comes to mind when they hear those words. Players do not say the words out loud, unless told to do so. On a

With thanks to Jack Bevington

“We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.”

—Epictetus

signal, each player says the word that came to mind, for example, “game” and “challenge.” The game continues, until each player says the same word simultaneously—the challenge is to do so in as few turns as possible. Encourage players to be spontaneous in their word choices. They do not have to explain the reason for their choices.

Here is a sample of how the game might go:

A: Computer.

B: Puzzle.

REFEREE: Think of a word that connects to “computer” and “puzzle.”

A: Game.

B: Challenge.

REFEREE: Think of a word that connects “game” and “challenge.”

A: Olympics.

B: Hockey.

REFEREE: Think of a word that connects “Olympics” and “hockey.”

A: Score.

B: Goalie.

REFEREE: Think of a word that connects “score” and “goalie.”

A: Puck!

B: Puck!

Variation #1: Once the class is familiar with the game, students can play in groups of three, with one person being the referee.

Variation #2: For a further challenge, the game can be played with three players offering words.

Drawing Game

Drawing Game provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate effective oral communication skills by giving and following directions accurately. To begin, students find a partner and sit back to back. Alternatively, this game can be played in small groups with one person chosen to be the leader.

With paper and pencil, a leader begins by drawing a simple picture. The leader then gives directions that will allow the partner to duplicate the picture. At the end of the game, partners compare their creation with the original design.

Extensions

1. Students make up their own designs and rather than give oral instructions, write precise directions for others to follow.
2. Partners take turns giving instructions on how to draw a monster. (For example: #1: draw a large circle in the centre of the page; #2: put a triangle in the centre of the circle; #1: add two large eyes shaped like cherries on top of the circle.) After each instruction, both partners draw what has been requested. Each partner can give 8 to 10 instructions. At the end of the activity, students compare their drawings to determine their success in giving or following directions.

Eleven Fingers

Students sit in groups of three. Players chant the following: “North, South, East, West,” the signal for each member of the group to show any number of fingers from one hand. Players count the total number of fingers shown. A closed fist

To make the activity easier, listeners may be allowed to question their partners. To make the activity more difficult, instructions for more intricate designs can be given and no questions allowed.

counts as zero. The object of the game is to show a total of 11 fingers. Players cannot confer with each other. The first team to complete the task successfully five times or the team with the most successful completions within a given time limit can be declared the winner. A simple extension is for players to use both hands to count: the challenge is to show 23 fingers in total.

Rabbit in a Knapsack

An empty knapsack (or bag or box) is used for this activity, which can be done with the large group or in small groups. The knapsack is given to one of the students in the group. The person who hands the knapsack over asks: "Why have you got a rabbit in your knapsack?" The student has to think of a convincing or original reason to explain why the rabbit is there and be prepared to answer questions raised by the rest of the group. The interview should last between three and five minutes. The person who was interviewed then hands the knapsack over to another player with the same question, only this time another object is mentioned, for example: "Why have you got a hammer in your knapsack?" "Why have you got a pineapple in your knapsack?"

Scrambled Sentences

1. To begin, choose a sentence from a newspaper or a novel. The sentence is written on the board, but the words are not presented in the correct order. Challenge the students to work in pairs to determine what they think the correct sentence should be.

funny The thing about a bone is not that it is bone all at funny at
The funny thing about a funny bone is that it is not a bone at all.

2. Students can work alone or in pairs to create a scrambled sentence, writing the sentence on a piece of paper. Students exchange scrambled sentences and challenge each other to put the sentence in original order as quickly as possible.

Variation #1: Students are given five or six words that have been scrambled. Repeat the above activity, challenging them to unscramble the words correctly. For example, they could unscramble these color words: *genre, aoerng, iinodg, ileotv, bwnor.*

Variation #2: Combine the scrambled words and scrambled sentence activity so that the words of the sentence are scrambled as well as the order of the words.

Variation #3: Cut up lines from a free-verse poem and place them in an envelope. Challenge the students to arrange the lines in an order that they think was originally used by the poet.

Let's Discuss It

Students are organized into groups of six. Each member is assigned a number from 1 to 6. Two dice are thrown to indicate the students to participate in a conversation. A third dice is used to show the topic for the pair to discuss for a minimum of three minutes. Students can choose which of the two topics they would like to discuss under the main heading. Other members can eventually join in the conversation by asking a question, or contributing to the topic. When 6 is thrown, students can choose topics of their own to discuss.

#1—VIDEO GAMES

Video games are not very educational. Some video games are becoming too violent.

#2—MONEY

Buying lottery tickets is a waste of money. The government needs to better prioritize its spending.

#3—ART

Looking at nature, there is no need for art. Too much money is spent on buying art.

#4—FASHION

You can never have too many clothes. No one should tell you what to wear.

#5—SPORTS

There is too much violence in sports. It's not if you win or lose; it's how you play the game.

#6—FREE CHOICE

Variation: Students can write down topics for discussion and put them on file cards. The group collects the file cards and places them face down. Each card is given a number. The activity is repeated.

File Card Choices: Teaching Tips

File, or index, cards have proved to be very useful in our classrooms and are a convenient way to have students record their thoughts independently before sharing them out loud with a partner or with a group.

- File cards are small, so students don't feel intimidated about having to write a lot.
- File cards come in different sizes. With the same activity students might write a longer response and then eventually move to a shorter response (or vice versa). Some file cards are blank and some have lines so they are useful for both visual and written activities.
- File cards come in different colors, so they are useful for helping to organize groups. Students can meet with others who have the same color of card or different-colored cards.
- Written responses on file cards are useful to prepare students for discussion. Sometimes students are invited to write a short answer to a question or response to a text.
- Students are given a list of prompts to record their answers which will be shared with others. Students can be given permission to omit an answer if something doesn't come to mind for a prompt.

Deal Me In

Students sit in groups of five or six. Each group is given a deck of cards or one suit from a deck of cards which is spread out on the table face down. Each person, in turn, selects one card from the deck and answers the following questions depending on the card that has been chosen. Once played, cards can be returned to the pile. The game continues with students each having a chance to choose a card about four times.

- Ace Tell about the #1 book you have ever read.
- 2 Describe the most interesting part of your day 2 day.
- 3 Name 3 places you would like to visit.
- 4 Tell about the best gift you received 4 a birthday.
- 5 Name 5 movies you've enjoyed watching.
- 6 Share a memory of when you were 6 years old.
- 7 What is your favorite day of the week?
- 8 Describe the best meal you ever 8.
- 9 What would you do if you were given 9 thousand dollars?
- 10 What do you think or hope you will be doing 10 years from now?
- Jack picks another card
- Queen asks the person on right any question
- King is allowed to pass

Word Games

Crosswords, word searches, and other word puzzles are popular pastimes for many people young and old. Often when we can't figure out an answer, we turn to someone else for help. When working with others to play word games, students will have the opportunity to develop vocabulary, use logic, test spelling skills, and share ideas with others. They can play one or more of the games below with or without a piece of paper. By following the instructions, they can work with others out loud to solve the problems of attacking words.

- ***I Packed My Knapsack***

Each player adds one item that is packed in the knapsack. The game is cumulative so as the brainstorming continues, each player must list in order the items that have been previously mentioned. A further challenge is to list words alphabetically, as two syllables, or on a particular theme or topic (e.g., animals, food, colors).

PLAYER 1: I packed my knapsack with an apple.

PLAYER 2: I packed my knapsack with an apple and a banana

PLAYER 3: I packed my knapsack with an apple, a banana, and a comic.

- ***Scrambled Words***

A long word, such as *neighborhood*, *caterpillars*, *valentines*, or *conversational*, is decided upon. The players can compete to see how many new words of three letters or more they can spell rearranging the letters of the word. A letter can be used only as many times as it appears in the word. The player (or pairs of players) with the most words wins the game. You might wish to score the game by giving 1 point for three-letter words, 3 points for four- or five-letter words, and 5 points for words six letters or over.

- ***Ping Pong Words***

This game is played with each person in turn calling out a word quickly according to a topic that is suggested by one group member. This person, assigned the role of caller and timer (to begin, we suggest a time limit of two minutes), suggests a topic for the word game: How many words can you spell that end in *y*? have double consonants? have three syllables? include the letter *x*? are six letters only? begin with *o*? end with *-tion*?

An alternate way to play this game is to work in teams of two or three. You can have a competition to see which team has the most words on the list for the topic that has been assigned.

- **Word Race**

Groups of five or six sit in a circle. Player 1 names a letter (excluding *x y z*)—*l*, for example. On a signal the player on the right must, within one minute, name as many words as he or she can think of that begin with that letter. As the words are called—*lemon, lamp, licence, leader*—the first player counts them while keeping track of the time. Plurals and repetitions are not acceptable. Then it is player 2's turn to time the player on the right by calling out another letter of the alphabet. The game proceeds in this way until all the players have taken a turn, each with a different letter. The one who gets the most words wins the game.

- **Choosy Charles**

In groups, one person as the caller announces: "Let's choose a gift for Choosy Charles who doesn't like the letter *e*. I will give Choosy Charles a lamp. What will you give Choosy Charles?"

Each player, in turn, names a gift for Choosy Charles. In this case, the name of the gift should not have the letter *e* in it. If the player names a gift already mentioned or identifies an item that includes the letter *e*, he or she is eliminated.

PLAYER 2: I will give Choosy Charles a candy.

PLAYER 3: I will give Choosy Charles a flower.

LEADER: You're out! Flower has an *e*.

The game can be repeated by naming other vowels or consonants that need to be avoided. Another challenge is to play the game by announcing two letters that Choosy Charles does not like. These letters can be two vowels, two consonants, or a vowel and a consonant.
