

Fun and Learning at the Same Time?! It CAN Be Done!!!

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We need to stand together to resist the academics – the “skill and drill”, “the teaching to the test” – we need to bring the learning to the FUN place!

- Melba Beals

Planning For Fun and Learning

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Activities for Fun and Learning!!

Portrait Painting

This is a partner game that requires a little preparation. You'll need to make a blank canvas - like a mask to be worn by the players. Take a piece of construction paper or tagboard, any shape you want but bigger than your face, and poke holes on two of the sides. Attach a string into each hole so the paper can be tied around your head. The one partner wears the mask and has a marker. The other partner will tell them what to draw, i.e. "Draw your right eye" and the first partner draws their right eye on the front of the mask they are wearing! This continues until the entire mask is completed. Then the roles are switched.

Name Designs

Fold a piece of paper in half lengthwise. Using the fold as the base, write your name in cursive. Try to write large enough to fill the paper from end to end and fold to the top. Cut out along the top edge of the name (don't cut the fold!), open the paper, and you'll have your own personalized design to decorate any way you want.

Musical Drawing

Cover a long table with bulletin board paper. Each child chooses a different color marker and takes a place around the table. On the word "GO" each child begins to draw a picture on the paper directly in front of them. After they each have gotten a picture started the leader turns on some music, which is the signal for the children to stop drawing and start walking around the table. When the music stops they must add to the drawing in front of them until the music starts playing again. This can go on for as long as it's fun or until the entire paper is covered with drawings!

It's Emotional!!

This is a fun game that is sure to exercise their problem solving brain cells and at the same time give them the opportunity to hone their wonderful dramatic skills. It also gives them the practice they all need in recognizing what feelings and emotions look like in others. For this game you'll need 2 sets of cards, One set of cards will be "emotion" cards. Write one emotion on each card. The other set of cards will be "song" cards and will have one familiar song on each card. Simple preschool songs like "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" and "Itsy, Bitsy Spider" work well. The performing group secretly chooses one "emotion" card and one "song" card. They must then perform the song using that emotion. The audience tries to guess what the emotion was.

Community Music Making

This activity is similar to Design a Game above, but this time the groups are each given a paper bag filled with items they could use to make music - pots and pans, sticks, cymbals or pot lids, combs and tissue paper, kazoos, harmonicas, horns, sand blocks, maracas, finger cymbals, bells, etc. anything you can think of!! Each group will secretly get the name of a tune they should try to play together. The other groups try to guess what the tune is after the performance! Each group gets a turn to present a song.

Musical Mobiles

Hang a variety of different size nails or small pipes from a metal hangar using string. Then "play" the nails or pipes. Try using different things to strike the nails or pipes (another nail or pipe, a pencil, a small hammer, a stick, etc. to see if the sound changes.

Story Boxes

Choose a familiar or favorite story. The story should be one that the kids know or can learn by heart quickly – such as "The Three Little Pigs" , "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" or similar stories. Using a small box gather up the materials so the children can "act out" a table top version of the story.

Grab Bag Dramatics

Some school age children are ready and able to do plays and skits, but you will need to keep in mind that all children are unique. Not all children enjoy being on stage! But you can find jobs for all of them, scenery building, script development, props master, costume design, etc. Keep the skits very short to begin with until they get the hang of it - then expand! They can even write and develop their own! This activity - Grab Bag Dramatics is a good way for them to practice developing their own skits. The activity is simple - give each group of kids (groups of 3-5 work best) a bag with seemingly unrelated props. For instance, one bag might include: a telephone, a sheet, a length of rope, a tray, and a cowboy hat. The object is for the group to come up with a short skit utilizing all of the props - that's the only rule, they must use all of the props!

Scrambled Quotes

Write the words to a familiar quote or saying on separate cards – then scramble the cards and challenge the kids to figure out the quote.

Comic Strips

Try this idea to get kids started on the path to creating comic strips. Look through the Sunday comic section of the newspaper and collect a selection of comics to share with the children. To begin, look for comics that do not require a lot of dialogue. White-out the original dialogue, copy the comics and give the copies to the children. Encourage the children to create new dialogue for the comic strips. As the children get better at this you can add comics that need more dialogue, or encourage the children to write and draw their own comic strips.

Critics Corner

This was an activity that some of our older school agers came up with. They were reading good books that they thought other kids might also want to read so they started the critics corner. After reading a book they would write a bit about the story, but not enough to give the whole plot away, and then add their thoughts as to why this should be a must read for other kids. They added photos of themselves and posted them in the Library section of the room or added them to the class newsletter. We found that there was a lot more demand for the books that had been critiqued and reading, in general, during the summer program skyrocketed.

After “Happily Ever After”

A fun storytelling experience is to take up telling the story of a famous story after the traditional end of the story. For example, what happen after Cinderella and the Prince got married? What happened after the Wolf got out of jail in “The Real Story of The Three Pigs”? Use you imagination and come up with some interesting follow – up stories.

Caption Writing

This is a very easy, and often funny, activity. Take photos, cartoons, magazine pictures, etc. and paste them on posterboard with blank “thought bubbles”. We laminate ours so we can use wipe off markers and use them over and over again. The challenge is to write what you think is being thought or said – write a caption. It’s amazing the variety and imagination of the ideas that come up. Sometimes we take a photo of them to send home or post as a permanent reminder before they are wiped away and ready for the next one.

Name Stories

The challenge of this storytelling experience is to make up a story where each sentence of the story begins with the next letter of your name. For example: **T**homas might write this story – “**T**he fire engine raced to the scene of the fire. **H**ow high the building was!! **O**nly one ladder in the entire state could reach to the top of this building. **M**onkeys have been trained to climb up the tall ladder to rescue people in the tallest buildings because they can climb so much faster than the firefighters. **A**s soon as the fire engine reached the scene of the fire the ladder was raised and the monkey went to work! **S**aved, the people were all saved by the brave, firefighting monkeys!!”

Poetry Pebbles

Take a bag full of smooth river pebbles (usually available in craft stores) and using permanent fine tipped markers write a different word on each pebble. Make sure to provide a variety of words, pronouns, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs, etc. One you have your pebbles ready put them in a big bowl. You can play this game as individuals or as teams. Each person or team, without looking, takes 5 pebbles out of the bowl and lines them up in front of them. The object is to make up a poem using all 5 words. Be creative!

Sensible Sentence

Players are given a strip of paper with 5 – 7 letters on it. The object of the game is to make up a sentence using the letters that are on the strip of paper for the beginning letters of the words in the sentence. The letters must be used in the order shown on the strip of paper. For example, if the strip of paper has the letters: A H J D W Y F they might come up with the following sentence: Always have jelly donuts when you fly!

Word Lightning

This game can be player by two players or in teams or groups. The first player chooses a letter. The second player has sixty seconds to think of as many words as possible that begin with that letter. After the sixty seconds the number of words is added up then player 2 gives player 1 a letter. Player 1 must think of as many words that begin with that letter. In the name of fairness, the following letters should not be used: Q, U, V, W, X, Y, Z.

Weather Vanes

For this game you’ll need direction signs (North, South, East, and West) to hang around the room. Have the children stand in the center of the play space. Leader begins calling out directions and the players turn to face that direction. Just to liven things up every once in awhile the leader calls out “tornado” and all the children spin in a circle until the storm blows over, another direction is called out, and the game continues.

Word Relay

This is a great way to have some fun with literacy! For this game you'll need a set of Alphabet cards. To make the cards, write each letter of the alphabet individually onto an index card, making a 26 card set. Then you're ready to play! Place all the letters into a pile at one end of the room and put the kids at the other end of the room. Working in teams of three or four when a word is called out the first team must run to the letters, find the letters they need to spell the word, run back to the starting point and place the letters in order to spell the word. Start out easy with small words and make sure each letter is only used once in each word. As you use longer words you'll need to add multiples of the more used letters, such as e, t, l, etc.

Memory Match Card Game

I'll bet many of you have played this game with a regular deck of cards or a special, commercially made version of cards. But you can very easily make your own deck of cards for memory match that will be of special interest to the kids and will reflect the diversity of the children in your classroom. To make the cards, take a picture of each child in your class and make a copy or duplicate so you have 2 of each child (a digital camera is very useful for this, but a place like Kinko's can make duplicates for you.) Glue the pictures onto cardboard and laminate so they will last longer. Now you are ready to play the game. Shuffle and lay out all the "Kid Kards" face down. Make as many rows and columns as you need to use all the cards. Kids take turns turning over one card, and then trying to guess where the matching card is. When they think they know where it is they turn that card over. If the card is the same they have a match and remove both cards from the pattern, and they get another turn. If it doesn't match, they turn both cards face down and the next person tries. Continue until all the matches have been found.

Autobiography Mobiles

Have the children make a list of words that describe them, things they like, things that are important to them, etc. Once they have the list they can begin the design. Using their list as a guide they can look through magazines for pictures to use to represent their list, or they can draw pictures or symbols, or they can use the computer to create designs that represent them!!! Once they have all their designs, including a design with their name on it (try for at least 5-6 designs), have them punch holes in the top of each design and tie a length of string to it. Tie the designs to a wire or plastic coat hanger, adjust them so they hang without getting tangled, and display it in the room.

Make Your Own "____opoly" Game

Many kids know how to play Monopoly, but it might not hold their interest or it takes too long to play. How about making a Monopoly game that uses the streets and things familiar to your kids, families, and staff? This is a great way to get the children involved in really learning about their neighborhood, the school, your program or anything else you use for your inspiration. Remind the kids to be creative in choosing what the "Chance" and "Community Chest" cards will say, be inventive about the board pieces, they can even use a spinner rather than dice – it's up to them. Remember to laminate the board so it will last and you can really enjoy it and play it for a long time. You'll be amazed at all the other ideas that take off and all the other "Opoly" games that are invented!!!

Clothespin Towers

Divide into 4-6 player teams. Each team is given 50 clothespins and the object is to build the tallest freestanding tower they can in a certain amount of time (i.e. 5 minutes). They can only use the clothespins they have been given (no other materials or supplies) and cannot take the clothespins apart.

Money Balloons

Kid's just think this is fun – but you can help them explore the science of it! Give each person a clear or white balloon, have them place a dime inside of it, then blow the balloon up. Make sure to blow the balloon up to a good size, but not so far that it gets too "thin". Tie the end of the balloon to hold the air in. Grab the balloon by the tied end holding it like a bowling ball. Start to spin the balloon around quickly in a circle. Everyone will hear the dime bouncing at first, but eventually it will start travelling around the inside of the balloon in a circle. Once it is travelling in a circle hold the balloon still and watch what happens! Try turning the balloon in a variety of ways – can you still make it go in a circle? Will it always act in the same way? What if you use a penny or a nickel, or a quarter – will it still act the same way? Remember – balloons are choking hazards so make sure if they pop to gather all the pieces and dispose of them properly.

Countdown

Shuffle the deck. Count like this: Ace, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, Jack, Queen, King, Ace, 2, 3, and so on. Each time you count, turn over a card from the deck. If what you say matches what you turn over, you lose. The object is to see if you can get through the deck without matching a card.

Stick Dice Game

For this game, you'll need a supply of "stick dice". It's fun for each child to make their own. For each set you'll need 3 craft sticks or tongue depressors and a large supply of "counters" (these can be any small item such as beans, pebbles, dried corn, marbles, or anything else you can think of. Have each child decorate one side of each of the three sticks in their set of sticks, and leave the other side of the stick blank. To play the game, you throw the three sticks into the air and you earn counters depending on how they land:

Three designs up = 10 counters; Two designs and one blank = 2 counters; One design and two blanks = 3 counters; Three blanks up = 5 counters. The player with the most counters after 10 throws is the winner!

Face Up

This is a card tossing game. The rules are pretty simple. You'll need a deck of cards, a bowl or a bucket and a pad and pencil to keep score. The object is to throw the cards from a distance and try to get them into the bucket. This is how you score points:

If the card lands face down on the floor = zero

If the card lands face up on the floor = face value of numbered cards

If the card lands face up on the floor = 12 points for face cards

If the card lands face up on the floor = 15 points for Aces

If the card lands in the bucket = double the points

Winner is the highest score after throwing the whole deck.

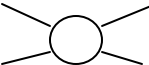
Safe Driving

Players choose a partner. One partner is the car and holds their arms in front of them to form bumpers. Their partner stands behind them and places their hands on the cars shoulders. The car then closes it's eyes! The "Driver" must successfully drive (guide) the "Car" around the area while avoiding other cars and obstacles - remember, speeding is not allowed! After awhile partners switch roles and continue the fun!

Name Scramble

This is a rock, paper, scissors game. Players pair off for an initial game of rock, paper, and scissors (remember, paper covers rock, rock smashes scissors, and scissors cuts paper). The winner of the challenges earns the first letter in their name and quickly moves to the next challenger. Pairs of players are continually playing and moving to new partners. With each win they earn another letter of their first name. The player to earn the first 3 letters of their name the quickest is the winner and a new round starts!!

Cup Pyramids

For this activity you'll need to first make "cup movers". To make your cup mover take a rubber band and lay it on a table in the form of a circle. Cut 4 strings, each about 8 inches long. Attach the 4 strings to the circle so the rubber band ends up looking like this:  Provide the kids with 10 paper or plastic cups. The object is to stack the cups, working as a team of 4 and using only the cup mover, into a pyramid!

People To People

For this activity each player needs a partner. When the leader calls out "finger to finger" the partners touch finger to finger, when the leader says "head to head" the partners gently touch their heads together, and so on until the leader says "people to people". When this is said, the partners split and go to find new partners. When they have their new partner the leader begins again - "toes to toes", "elbow to elbow", and so on. Every time "people to people" is called they change partners.

Switch Moves

This is a fun game where the object of the game is to follow the directions on the cards that the leader holds up. Some suggested movements to put on the cards include: run, jump, hop, fly, wiggle, side-step, spin, etc. To play the game, have the children scatter around the room. One by one hold up the cards, they do the movement on the card for as long as it's up. Then put up another card, and so on. Change them quickly for a fast paced game!!

Peteka

In this game from Brazil the “peteka” was originally a piece of leather sewn into a cone shape and filled with sand until it was about the size of a tennis ball. The top of the peteka was tied off with feathers inserted into the top. If you feel ambitious go ahead and make a peteka, or you can use a badminton shuttlecock to play. To play, players stand in a circle and pass the peteka around the circle by striking it upward with the palm of their hand. Players can send the peteka around the circle in order or in a random pattern. If the peteka drops to the ground that player simply picks it up and strikes it upward to continue around the circle and the game continues.

Next!

For this game you’ll need objects that come in four different colors (legos, counting bears, etc.). Set the four different colored objects in a straight line across the middle of the table – like this: * * * * . The players line up on either side of the table facing each other. The first player in each line places one hand face down on the table with the heel of their hand on the edge of the table. Their other hand must go behind their back. This is the ready position! The leader calls out a color. Each player tries to grab the object of that color. The person who gets the correct object says “Next!” to their opponent. The opponent must leave and the next player in line on that side steps into the starting position. They assume the ready position and the game continues in this fashion as long as it’s fun.

Puzzle Sticks

The object of this activity is to complete the picture by placing the sticks side by side. You’ll need 8 tongue depressors to make each puzzle. Using two pieces of tape, tape the 8 sticks together on the backside to hold them together while you draw. On the front, draw a simple picture, making sure a part of the picture is on each stick. Make sure the picture is something the child would be familiar with (e.g., jack-o-lantern, Christmas tree, flowers, etc.). Then turn the picture over and remove the tape, mix up the sticks, and the puzzles are ready for play.

Team Juggling

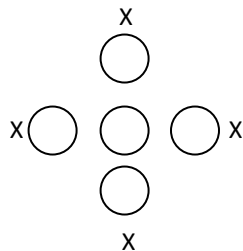
Split the group in half and form two lines facing each other. One player begins by tossing a soft ball to the player across from him. That player throws it to the next player across from him, and so on until everyone has caught the ball. The last person starts the ball back up the line. Throughout the game, each player always throws the ball to the same person. After you’ve succeeded with this, try it with 2 balls. The first person starts the first ball, waits three seconds, then starts a second ball, and so on. Add as many balls as you want. Remember, because this is a cooperative game it doesn’t matter if you drop the ball - the game doesn’t end, just pick it up and keep going! Remind players that the object is to try to keep all the balls in the air (juggle!) so they need to try to make catchable throws to their teammates. With younger children who are still not sure of their catching skills, start them out on the floor rolling the balls back and forth to each other.

Telephone Words

Kids will definitely be challenged to find out what their telephone numbers have to say! Each numeral on the telephone has three letters assigned to it (except one and zero). Write down your phone number, see what letters are involved and see if you can come up with words!! Very Challenging!!

Get Three

For this game from New Guinea you’ll need five hula hoops and five small nerf balls. Place the materials in the following formation with a 5 nerf balls in the center hoop:



A player is assigned to stand behind each hoop. The object of the game is to get three balls in your own hoop. Balls can be taken from the middle circle or from someone else’s hoop, but players may only carry one ball at a time. Players cannot prevent others from taking balls from their hoop and balls must be placed into the hoops, not thrown. A referee should be elected to determine which player got three balls in their hoop first.