

# Brain Breaks in the Classroom



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

# Authors

---

## **Tracy Nelson, Ed.D.**

Senior-Lecturer, Department of Health and Nutritional Sciences, South Dakota State University

## **Lindsay Moore**

SDSU Extension Community Health and Obesity (HOP) Program Director



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**

This material was funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program–SNAP.

SDSU Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer in accordance with the nondiscrimination policies of South Dakota State University, the South Dakota Board of Regents and the United States Department of Agriculture.

Learn more at [extension.sdstate.edu](https://extension.sdstate.edu).

P-00250

© 2022, South Dakota Board of Regents

6's & 9's

**Sixes and Nines**



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom

**Grade Level**  
**6th-12th**

## Sixes and Nines

- Stand up
- Move your right foot in a clockwise circle
- Simultaneously, with your right pointer finger, write the number 6 in the air
- Repeat several times and switch to left foot/hand
- Try reversing the motions to counter clockwise and write the number 9

**Space/Equipment needed:**  
desk space



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE**  
**UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



**Have a Seat**



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom

**Grade Level**  
**6th-12th**

## Have a Seat

Sit **on the edge** of your chair with your back straight

- **Hiking:** Swing your arms and reach left and right while tapping your toes and lifting your knees
- **Swimming:** Move your arms as if doing the front or back crawl and kick your legs in a flutter kick
- **Cycling:** Hold onto your seat and pedal your legs as if riding a bike
- **Kayaking:** Use an imaginary paddle to paddle your kayak on both sides
- **Boxing:** Keep your elbows in tight, shadow box

**Space/Equipment needed:**  
minimal, desk space



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE**  
**UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



**Let Them Move: Basics!**



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom

**Grade Level  
6th-12th**

## Let them Move: Basics!

SUPER Easy, almost NO PREP!!

- How many of you have discussions?
  - » Can you walk and talk at the same time?
    - (outside, in the hall, lunch room, walk to bathroom and back, in classroom)
  - » Partner up and walk and walk about it
  - » Set a timer, after a few minutes, switch groups or share as a large group
- Read out loud to your students?
  - » When you read aloud we often have them sit, why can't they walk?
  - » English: Stand for the verb, sit for the noun, etc. OR stand for a key word or theme
- Fill out worksheets?
  - » Hang worksheets up around room, have them do one problem and then move to a new worksheet
  - » Have a problem? Go get a drink of water. Sending them on a quick walk will refocus them.
- Give tests?
  - » Like worksheet activity, add activity into the test. Can one of the questions be to walk 1 lap around the room? They could get encouragement or a hint during this time. Just get them moving for a quick minute.
  - » NOTE: May want to scramble what number you do this. If the students work at about the same pace, they all may head to you at once!



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



**Language Arts: Tongue Twister**



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom

**Grade Level**  
**6th-12th**

## Language Arts: Tongue Twister

For this brain booster, the students would be spelling words out loud. When they come across a vowel, they are supposed to do the action assigned to that letter. The following are examples of actions that could be used for each vowel. The teacher could decide on other actions, or the class as a whole could come up with different actions.

### Action Spelling

- A = 1 jumping jack
- E = two strides forward, two strides back (two large steps)
- I = reach up then touch the floor
- O = knee lift on each leg
- U = forward, side, back lunge

### Words

- Elephant
- Assistant
- Hawaiian
- Two-toed Sloth

### Tongue Twister

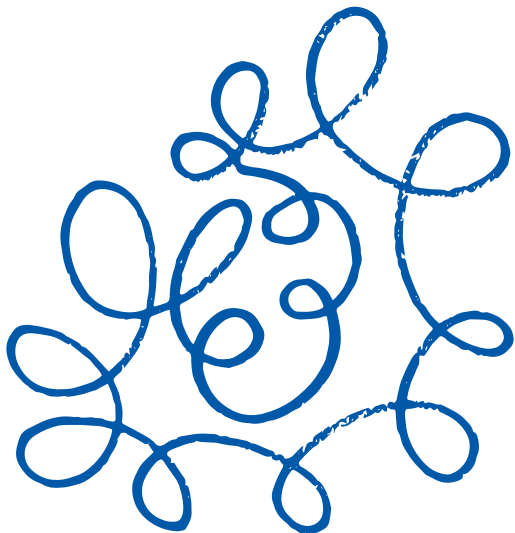
- You will alternate standing or sitting every time you hear the word "night"

Tongue Twister: (go faster and faster)

- You've no need to light a night-light  
On a light night like tonight,  
For a night-light's light's a slight light,  
And tonight's a night that's light.  
When a night's light, like tonight's light,  
It is really not quite right  
To light night-lights with their slight lights  
On a light night like tonight.



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE**  
**UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



**Language Arts... But can't we all do these?**  
**Stop and Scribble**



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom

**Grade Level**  
**6th-12th**

## Language Arts... But can't we all do these? Stop and Scribble

Teacher calls out physical activity:

- Knee lifts
- Twisting
- Jogging
- Jumping jacks
- Hopping
- Playing air guitar

Students begin activity and continue for at least 30 seconds or until the teacher calls out a spelling word.

Students freeze and partners work together to try to spell the word correctly on a piece of paper.

After 10 to 15 seconds, teacher calls out new activity.

**Space/Equipment needed:**  
minimal space, around the desks



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**

$$a + (b + c) = (a + b) + c$$

**Mathematics: Jump by Numbers**



## Brain Breaks in the Classroom

**Grade Level**  
**6th-12th**

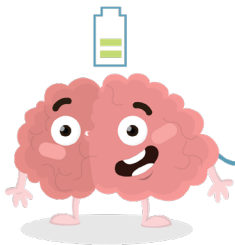
# Mathematics: Jump by Numbers

- Use flash cards to work on math problems.
- After the students solve the problem, have them “jump rope” that number of times or that many minutes depending on level and ability of students.
- Remember, you don’t have to actually have a jump rope in hands to “jump rope.”

**Space/Equipment needed:**  
Flash cards



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE**  
**UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom

**Grade Level  
6th-12th**

## Content area: More ideas!

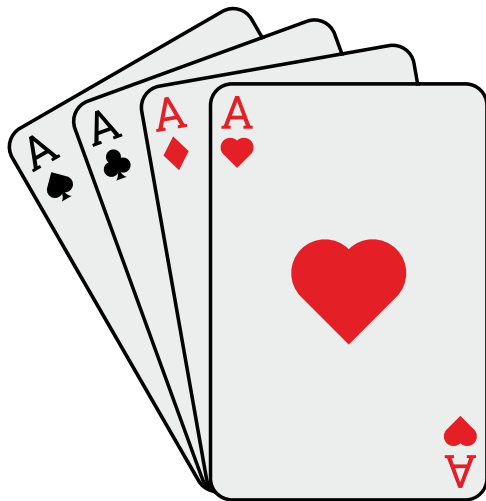
- Math
- English/Language Arts
- Health
- Science
- Social Studies

### **Resources: Have you tried?**

- Pinterest
- YouTube
- ACTION for Healthy Kids ([actionforhealthykids.org/activity/classroom-physical-activity-breaks/](http://actionforhealthykids.org/activity/classroom-physical-activity-breaks/))
- SPARK ABC's ([sparkpe.org](http://sparkpe.org))
- TAKE 10 ([take10.net](http://take10.net))
- GoNoodle



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



**Math & English & History, Oh my...**  
**Card Play**



## Brain Breaks in the Classroom

**Grade Level**  
**6th-12th**

# Math & English & History, Oh my... Card Play

### Description:

1. Teacher takes out all the kings, queens, and jacks from playing cards. That leaves about 40 cards in the deck. Teacher distributes two cards to each student and has the students stand up next to their desk
  - a. If you used cards with letters on them, students could spell words, moving around the room and working together.
  - b. What if the cards had Years on them and students had to talk about history that happened in that year? (Test review)
2. Teacher gives the go signal and students

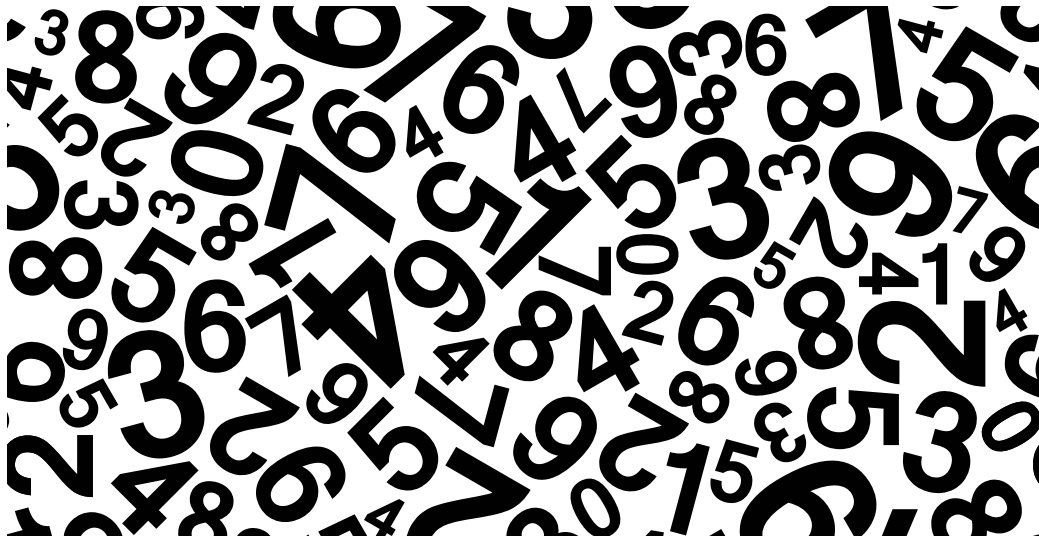
- begin circulating around the room. When the teacher says stop, the teacher calls out a number and the student must find another student to make an equation out of their two cards.
3. For example: The teacher calls out the number 6, and one student has a 2 and a 9 and the other student has a 3 and a 4. The students can use the 2 and the 4, add them together to make 6 (Or they can use the 9-3 to get 6)
  4. After making an equation, students start to circulate around the room again until the teacher says top and calls out another number.

### Space/Equipment needed:

Deck of Playing Cards



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



**Math ... History ... Geography**  
**Number Hunt ... or President, Continents Hunt**



## **Brain Breaks** in the Classroom

**Grade Level**  
**6th-12th**

# **Math ... History ... Geography** **Number Hunt ... or President, Continents Hunt**

### **Description:**

1. Hide popsicle sticks throughout the room.
2. Students work with partners/groups to find as many numbers as they can in the allotted time frame (or find as many presidents and VP's as they can find).
3. Once time is up, students would arrange their sticks in order from smallest to largest numbers, largest to smallest numbers, etc (See how many pairs you have).

### **Space/Equipment needed:**

Popsicle sticks numbered 1-20  
(can do several sets: write presidents and vice presidents; states and capitals; countries and continents)



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE**  
**UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



**Science Sort?**



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom

**Grade Level**  
**6th-12th**

## Science Sort?

### Description:

1. Place students on one side of the room and shapes/colors on the other.
2. Give students an objective

### Examples:

- Collect only Blue objects
  - Collect Triangles
  - Collect Orange Squares
  - Collect only soft objects
3. Students perform an active movement down to the end, gather an object(s), and bring it back,

placing it in the designated area. Students continue to go down and back until you say STOP.

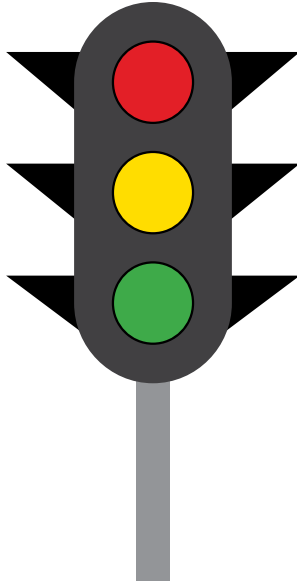
4. Upon completion, look at the pile collected and see how it met the objective. Students take materials back and you could start again with a new objective.

### Space/Equipment needed:

Whatever sorting content you are covering (colors: different colors of objects; shapes: different shaped objects; Sizes (small, medium, large); textures: soft, rough, fuzzy)



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



**English/Language Arts: Light It Up**



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom

**Grade Level**  
**6th-12th**

## English/Language Arts: Light It Up

### Description

1. Call out a color of a street light and have students move as the color dictates.
2. Red light means stop.
3. Yellow light means jog.
4. When you call out "green," pause for just a second and then say one of the letter or words from the lesson. For example, if you say b, b is a consonant so the students must jump like a frog. If you say u, u is a vowel so the students must swim like a fish. If you call out "Pit Stop," students stop and complete a stretch.

### Adaptions to other Content

**MATH** – Assign numbers instead of word types and have the students move based on whether the number is odd or even, whole, decimal or fraction, tens, hundreds or thousands, a square root or not, or it is divisible by a particular number.

**SCIENCE** – Assign animals, plants, simple machines, weather or types of rock instead of word types.

**GEOGRAPHY** – Assign movement types to North, East, South, and West. Call out a state or country and have the students move based on where the state or country is compared to their current location.

### Movement Associations (10 seconds):

Consonants: Jump like a Frog

Vowels: Swim like a Fish

Nouns: Crawl like a Bear

Verbs: Tree Pose

Adjectives: Hop



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



**English/Language Arts: Catch It**



## Brain Breaks in the Classroom

**Grade Level**  
**6th-12th**

# English/Language Arts: Catch It

- Students stand in a circle. Teacher says a one syllable word.
- She tosses the ball to a student
  - » 1st student who catches it says the initial sound; then tosses to another student.
  - » 2nd student to catch it says the medial sound; then tosses to another student.
  - » 3rd student says the final sound and tosses it back to teacher.

### **Modifications:**

Smaller circles

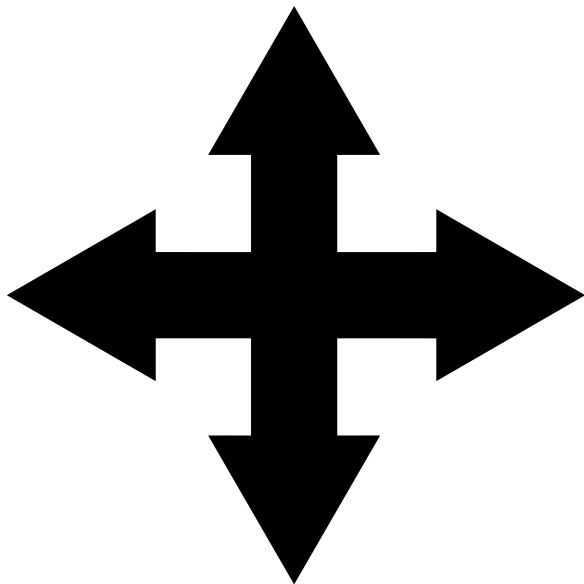
Person who says final sound  
holds onto ball until next word  
is given.

### **Examples:**

Life  
Love  
Heart  
King



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE**  
**UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



**Up Down/Left to Right**



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom

**Grade Level**  
**6th-12th**

## Up Down/Left to Right

- Hands out in front of you; palms facing away from you
- Right hand moves up and down, while Left hand moves left to right
- Switch (Left hand moves up and down, while Right hand moves left to right)

**Variation:**

Try crossing arms and doing it



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE**  
**UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



**Speed Walker: Everybody's it!**



## Brain Breaks in the Classroom

**Grade Level**  
**6th-12th**

# Speed Walker: Everybody's it!

- If in open space, set up a perimeter
- Spread class out on the playing surface; no bases
- On your signal, students chase each other
- If you are tagged, you do one of the following exercises, then you are back in the game:
  - » 5 jumping jacks
  - » 5 mountain climbers
  - » 5 crunches
- Tie breaker: rock, paper, scissors

**Equipment needed**  
List of fitness activities



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



**ROCK**



**PAPER**



**SCISSORS**

**Rock, Paper, Scissors Legs**



## Brain Breaks in the Classroom

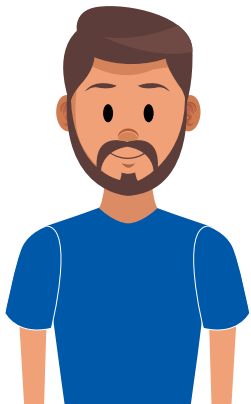
**Grade Level**  
**6th-12th**

# Rock, Paper, Scissors Legs

- Partner up (back to back 5..4..3..2..1)
- Will play rock, paper, scissors fitness style:
  - » Rock= feet together
  - » Paper= feet apart
  - » Scissors= feet split
  - » \*RPS shoot (on shoot, show your choice)
- If you lose, you line up behind your partner and jog in a line to find a new person to play. Only the winner gets to play RPS, people in line hop, jump, run in place.
- Continue until there is a winner; then restart



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE**  
**UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



**Man, Monkey, Camera**



## Brain Breaks in the Classroom

**Grade Level**  
**6th-12th**

# Man, Monkey, Camera

- Play like rock, paper, scissors
- Man beats camera (man can take a picture)
- Monkey beats man (big monkey)
- Camera beats Monkey (flash scares the monkey)
- Standing facing a partner jump 3 times while saying Man, Monkey, Camera
- On "Camera" student chooses a man (arms at side), monkey (arms up in air), or a camera (hand in front of face like taking a picture)
- I have 3 zones designated in the area
- All students start at zone one; play a partner, if you win, move to zone 2, if you lose, stay in zone 1 and play someone new. In zone 2, play someone and if you win, move to 3, lose drop down to 1. Once in zone 3, play someone, winners stay, if you lose drop back down to zone 2.
- Continue to play someone new and switching zones until time is up.

**Space/Equipment needed:**  
larger space for students to  
pair up



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE**  
**UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



**Deal or No Deal?**



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom

**Grade Level**  
**6th-12th**

## Deal or No Deal?

- Inside each envelope, place repetition variations on separate pieces of paper (i.e. 1 more, 5 more, none, times 2, one less, -5, divided by, square root of 36).
- Student (or teacher) picks an envelope.
- Envelope says "20 crunches"- "My deal is 20 crunches. Deal or No Deal?" \*Students put thumbs up for Deal, thumbs down for No Deal.
- If Deal, perform activity.
- No Deal, student reaches in and chooses a card that was in the envelope.
- All students complete the activity.

### **Space/Equipment needed:**

A minimum of 4 envelopes  
with one exercise listed on the  
outside of each envelope



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



**Limited Space Bingo**



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom

**Grade Level**  
**6th-12th**

## Limited Space Bingo

- Read the activity. Students who have it on their card mark it off.
- ALL students perform the activity for a certain amount of time.
- Call next activity.

**Space/Equipment needed:**

Bingo card for each person/  
pair/group

Paper or marker to mark card



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE**  
**UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



**Sports Galore**



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom

**Grade Level**  
**6th-12th**

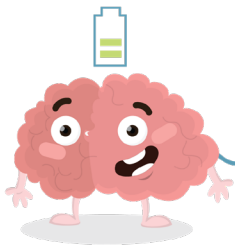
## Sports Galore

- Teacher calls out sports skills to mimic (15-30secs):
  - » Shooting a jump shot
  - » Running through tires
  - » Batting a baseball
  - » Serving a tennis ball
  - » Downhill skiing
  - » Spiking a volleyball
  - » Swinging a golf club
  - » Throwing a football
  - » Juggling a soccer ball
  - » Shooting an arrow
  - » Shooting a hockey puck
  - » Swimming underwater
  - » Fielding a ground ball and throwing it to first base
  - » Dunking a basketball
- Can also work great for activities/ movement on “worksheet” or “test” movement breaks!

**Space/Equipment needed:**  
desk space



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE**  
**UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

## Is your brain ready to burst?

**Create a Shake** – Students create a secret handshake with a partner, creating five parts, taking turns with shake ideas.

**Rock, Paper, Scissor** – Students play rock, paper, scissor. Winner moves to next line or row. Find a new person to challenge. Keep moving forward or backward until there is a winner.

**Find it Fast** – Call out a color or trait, ex. Something round or something made of wood. Students must find an object in the room that fits that trait. Students move to the object quickly. Can pick a student to call out next object.

**Mirror Mirror** – Students find a partner or group of three. Teacher announces a characteristic, ex. Longest hair, tallest, biggest shoe, to identify a leader. The teacher then announces a number of exercises, so the statement could be tallest and five. Followers must mirror the leader, who performs an exercise of choice.

**Who's Leading Who?** – Students stand in a circle. One student turns around and closes their eyes and another student is identified as the leader by the teacher. The leader leads all others in movements, switching every five seconds, while the selected student tries to find, "Who's Leading Who?" They get three chances to identify them.



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

## And just a few more before you Pop ...

**Olympic Rock Paper Scissor** – Section the room into three sections. One section is bronze, one silver, and one gold. The students start in bronze and play R-P-S. If you win, move up, and if you lose, move down. Time for a minute, clap 3 for gold, 2 for silver and 1 for bronze. Find a new person to challenge in your area.

**Human Knot** – Students should be in groups of 8-10 people, forming a circle. Have them put their right hand in the air and grab someone across the circle. Then the same with the left hand. Can't hold hands with someone directly next to you and can't grab the same person twice. Students need to untangle themselves without breaking the chain.

**Mingle** – Have students “mingle” around in an area. When you call out a number, “four” they must link arms with that number. Students who are left out, must go off to the side. Continue until there are two left. When you say “one” the person who claps their hands above their head first, wins. Students who are out, can do number of exercises you yell or another activity. I also like to use addition, subtraction and multiplication problems.



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

## Wait there is more ...

### **Snap & Wink (Modified from David Sladkey) (4-12)**

- Snap your right hand while you wink your left eye
- Then snap your left hand while you wink your right eye
- Alternate and repeat for 60 seconds
- Try to go as fast as you can

### **Toe Tap (3-12) Stand facing partner**

- Tap Right foot to Right foot one time
- Tap Left foot to Left foot two times
- Tap Right foot to Right foot three times
- Tap Left foot to Left foot one time
- Continue on with sequence

### **X and O (3-12) Teacher stands facing class; demo and give directions prior to start of activity**

- This activity will get the students standing up and sitting down
- When teacher uses left arm students move their arms into an "X" shape
- When teacher uses right arm student move their arms/hands into an "O" shape
- When teacher moves arm in upward direction, students do the X or O standing up
- When teacher moves arm in downward direction (by sides), student do the X or O while seated



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

## Wait there is more ...

### **Finger Trap (modified from David Sladkey) (5-12)**

Group of 3-10 people stand in a circle

- Hold Left hand out with palm facing up (flat)
- Hold Right hand Index finger pointing down and into the palm of the person beside you (their left palm)
- Teacher says "TRAP" and students try to grab other students index finger while avoid getting their own finger trapped.
- Variation: Repeat with arms crossed

### **ABC 123 (Modified from David Sladkey) (4-12)**

- Outline a letter in the air say a number
- Outline A in the Air, say one
- Outline B in the Air, say two
- Continue

### **Seat Exchange (K-12) Teacher yells, "seat exchange"**

- Students move to a new spot
- Can make 'qualifications' has to be "X" distance away, or boy/girl, or different row

### **Number Up, Letter Down (4-12)**

- Activity can be done teacher lead, or with a partner
- With younger students, it would be good to have an alphabet chart visible, and let students know they can use it
- Teacher says a number and the students have to say the number that comes next (ie. Teacher says 3, students reply 4)
- Variation: Teacher says a number and the students have to say the number that is prior (ie. Teacher says 3, students reply 2)
- Teacher says a letter and student says letter just after (ie. Teacher says B, students reply C)
- Variations: Teacher says a letter and student say letter prior (ie. Teacher says T, students say S)



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

## They keep coming ...

### **Opposite Hunt (4-12) Divide class in half**

- One half writes the vocabulary word
- Other half writes definition
- Shuffle cards and hand one to each student
- Students must then walk around room to find match

### **Air Hockey Pennies (K-12) 3 pennies per pair of students**

- Start with pennies in a triangle shape touching each other on a flat table
- Students sit across from each other
- One starts with pennies
- Other student uses thumbs and index fingers (palms down on table) to make a goal box
- Student two, with pennies 'slams' index finger onto

pennies to break them apart

- Student two then chooses one penny to "push" through the other two pennies, the penny that was just slide will serve as a new 'post' and the student will use one of the other two to "push" through the other two pennies
- Continue until they have pushed the penny (puck) into the First students goal box, or no moves are left
- Switch



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

## A couple more!

### **Jack-in-the-Box (K-12) Modification of Simon Says, great for listening**

- When the teacher says Jack in the Box, students sit
- When teacher says Jack out of the Box, student Stand
- Teacher should say the phrase quickly and try to trick the students to get 'caught'
- No consequences for mistakes, I challenge students to not make a mistake, if they do, it is ok. Next time we play, try to make one less.
- Variation: Great for dismissing for drinks, once eliminated, get a drink, and return to your work.

### **Ear & Nose Switch (Retrieved from: Energizing Brain Breaks by David Sladkey) (3-12) Stand up. Take your right hand and grab your left ear. Keep your right arm close to your body.**

- Now take your left hand and touch your nose.
- Uncross your arms and move your left hand to your right ear and your right hand to your nose. Your left arm should now be closest to your body.
- Switch back and forth as fast as you can.



# Brain Breaks in the Classroom



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

## Last one!

**Forward & Backward circles (Retrieved from:  
Energizing Brain Breaks by David Sladkey) (K-12)**  
**Point your arms toward the ceiling.**

- Keep your elbow straight and move your right arm forward creating a large circle. Continue making forward circles with this arm. Now do the same with your other arm except go BACKWARD. Continue with both arms moving at the same time. Make sure you have this pattern working before you continue.
- While both arms continue to move, lift your right foot off the ground and make a ninety degree angle with your knee. Hold this for a few seconds. Now extend your right knee out to make your leg parallel to the ground. Hold for a few seconds.
- Stop. Repeat the same process again with your left leg.