

# SIM

## ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES FOR ALL STUDENTS

Created by the Strategic Instruction Team  
at ESC, Region 13

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# INTRODUCTION

Creating true engagement in our classrooms can be a difficult process. It's already a struggle just to make sure we're teaching the right information, but making that information active and engaging? Well, that can be exhausting.

That's why we, the Strategic Instruction Team at the Education Service Center, Region 13 created this ebook. It's originally designed to be used with our MySIMToolbox site in connection with the Strategic Instruction Model, however all of these activities aren't specifically limited to SIM.

The activities in this ebook fall into four categories: movement, discussion, reflection and writing, and check for understanding. We've compiled them all here to make it easier for you to quickly find an engaging activity to use in your classroom. Some activities repeat in certain categories, and they can absolutely be used in new and creative ways.

We challenge you to read through this ebook, see which activities you already use, and try out some new ones that you haven't before. Let us know your experiences too: which ones worked for you, and which didn't. Hey, if you've got a brand new idea you think would be great, share it with us too, we always love seeing new innovative engagement activities.

So go forth and get your students active and engaged!



## SECTION 1

# ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES: MOVEMENT

Classrooms can often be sedentary places: students stuck in their desks, and teachers stuck at the front teaching away.

These activities or strategies are designed to pump some energy back into your classroom. They're great for getting students out of their desks, on their feet, talking, engaging, discussing, and getting the most out of your already fantastic lessons.

#1

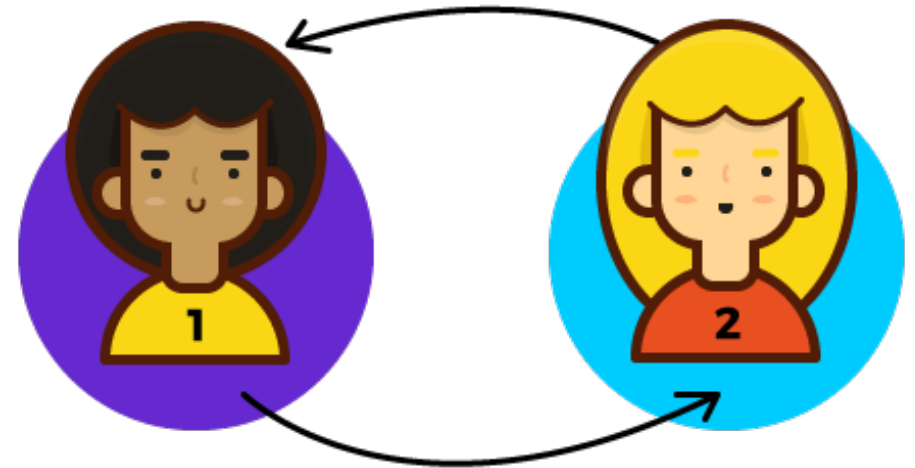
## LINE UPS

Number the class off by twos.

Ask the "1s" to line up and ask the "2s" to line up facing a "1."

Give "1s" a minute to tell the "2s" everything they think they already know about today's lesson, topic, or objective.

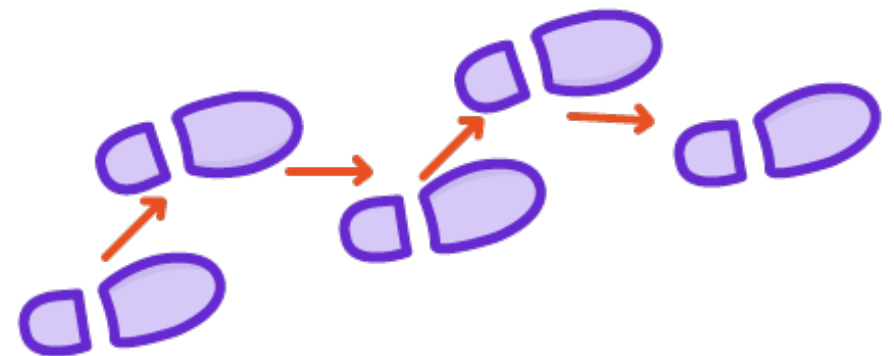
Now Switch! You can do several rounds.



#2

## WALK AND TALK

Direct students to stand up and walk in any direction for 5 steps, stop and turn to the person closest to you and talk about the current topic/objective/lesson/etc.



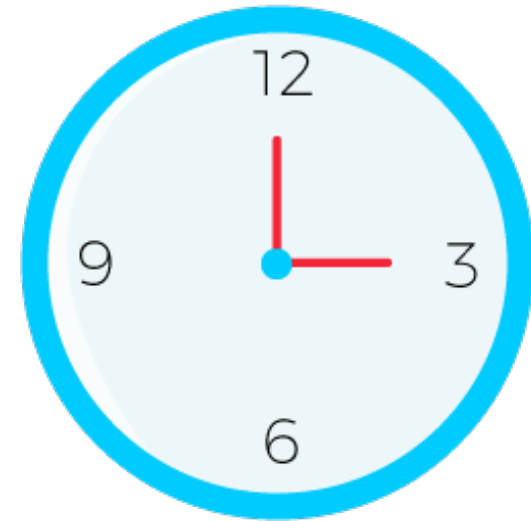
## #3

# ROUND THE CLOCK LEARNING PARTNERS

Give each student a paper with a clock in the middle and a blank at 12:00, 3:00, 6:00, and 9:00.

At the beginning of the unit have the class mingle and make 4 appointments with 4 different peers.

When discussion stalls during a routine, ask the students to meet with one of their “time appointments” and answer a question. Your appointment sheets may last a week.

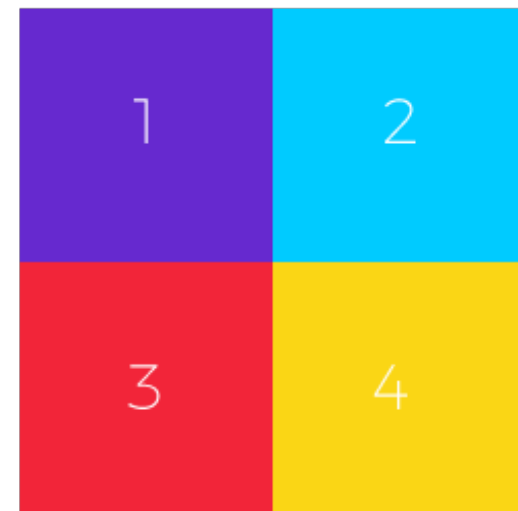


## #4

# FOUR CORNERS

Ask the students a question which has four possible answers (What is your favorite sport: football, baseball, soccer, basketball).

Label each corner with an answer and ask students to stand in their respective corners. Once they're in their corners, ask them questions related to the routine. Share out thoughts and come back together.

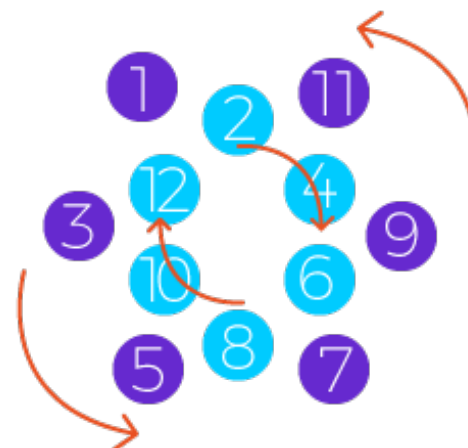


## #5

**INSIDE-OUTSIDE CIRCLES**

Students count off: one, two. All odd-numbered students form a big circle and walk counterclockwise. All even-numbered students form an inside circle and walk clockwise.

The teacher tells them to start walking, showing them what to do. Everyone keeps walking until the teacher tells them to stop, face a partner, and the teacher asks them a content related question. Questions can to activate prior knowledge, trigger memories of previous lesson content, debate an idea, or specifically talk about a linking step of a routine.

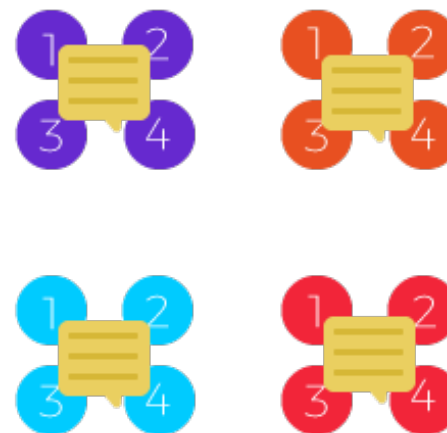


## #6

**NUMBERED HEADS TOGETHER**

Make groups of four-five. Each student in a group is numbered. Teacher poses a question from the Expanded Map. The table group puts their heads together and whispers their possible answers to one another. The goal is for the group to decide on an answer together and make sure everyone knows this answer.

Teacher calls “Time’s Up” and calls a number. Each group should have someone standing up and teacher calls on the first one to answer. If the answer is incorrect, the second person to stand up has a chance.

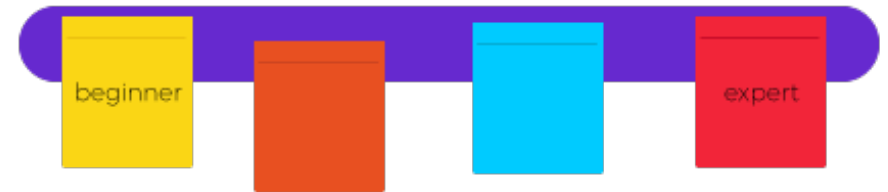


## #7

## LEARNING LINE-UPS

Identify one end of the room with a descriptor such as “novice” or “beginner” and the other end as “expert” or “exemplary.” Students place themselves on this continuum based on where they are with a task or learning target.

Invite them to explain their thinking to the whole class or the people near them.



## #8

## HUMAN BAR GRAPH

Identify a range of levels of understanding or mastery (beginning/developing/accomplished/confused/I'm okay/etc.) as labels for 3-4 adjacent lines. Students then form a human bar graph by standing in the line that best represents their current level of understanding.





#9

# ACT IT OUT/ DEMONSTRATION

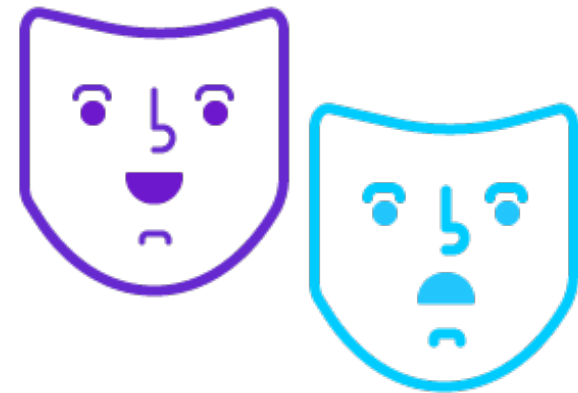
By yourself, or with the help of students, demonstrate something that will pique students' curiosity.

Demonstrate a technique, a scientific phenomenon, or some kind of observable trick or performance that will make students wonder "how did you do that" or "why did that happen that way?"

Perform some action incorrectly and see if they can tell you what you did wrong.

Arrange students in the room to physically represent a concept (balanced, sides of an equation, congressional appointments)

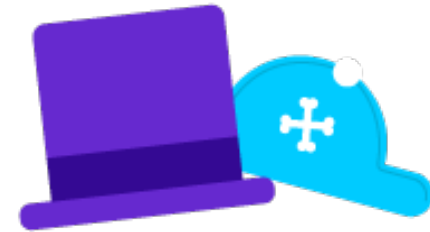
Perform a few steps of a process and ask students what you should do next.



#10

## DRESS UP

Dress up as a person, thing, or concept in front of your students. Play the role of the person, concept, or thing, using the content in a real-world setting. Ask students to figure it out.



#11

## PERFORM A SKIT

Have your students perform a skit, using a script written by the teacher or students, which illustrates a concept, presents a mystery, or demonstrates how new content will help them.



#12

## ASSIGN ROLES

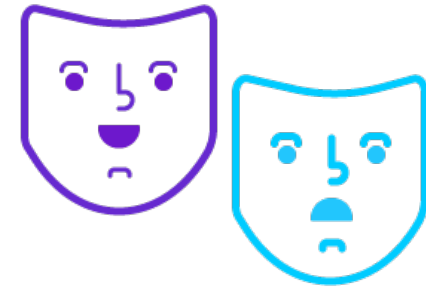
As students arrive, give them cards with assigned roles to play based on their previous learning.



#13

**CHARADES**

Students act out key vocabulary words that have been learned so far.



#14

**PICTIONARY**

Students draw out clues to key vocabulary words that have been learned so far.



#15

**MATCHING**

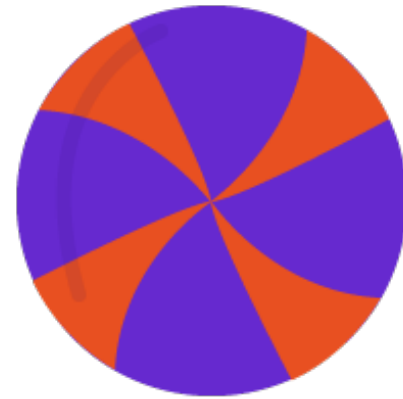
Give half the students cards with vocabulary words, and the other half cards with definitions. Have students find their "matches." Try throwing in a few words that they haven't learned yet, but will be part of the day's lesson.



#16

## **BALL TOSS**

Toss an inflatable ball or other soft object from student to student as you ask them review questions.



A large, stylized blue number '2' is positioned on the left side of the page, partially overlapping the text. It is a solid blue color and has a thick, rounded font style.

## SECTION 2

# ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES: DISCUSSION

Discussions are critical to getting your students to understand a topic. Through discussions, students can show us what they already know, what they don't know, and what they'd like to know. They can also get access to new points of view and build long-lasting and trusting relationships with their fellow students!

These activities or strategies are designed to get your students talking to one-another, or to you. They're all about building healthy and intellectual dialogues within your classroom.

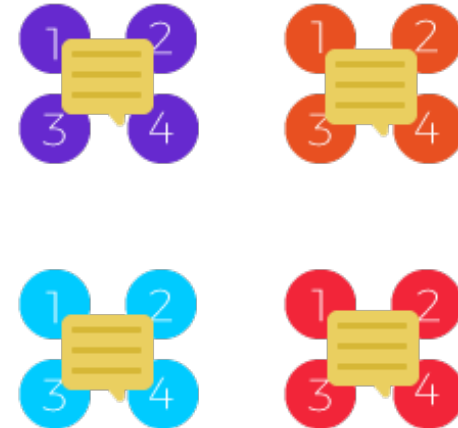
## #1

**CAROUSEL WALK**

Divide the class into groups of 4 - 6.

Write one unit/lesson question at the top of each poster (one chart paper for each group).

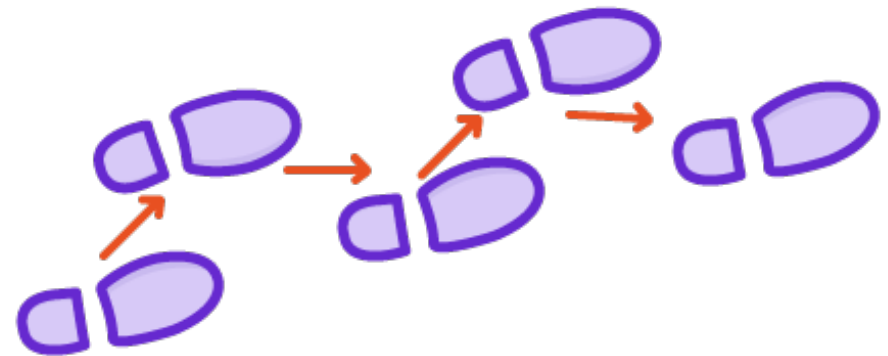
Assign one group per poster, discuss the question and write a group response in 2-3 minutes. Go to next poster and add new responses or agree with previous.



## #2

**WALK AND TALK**

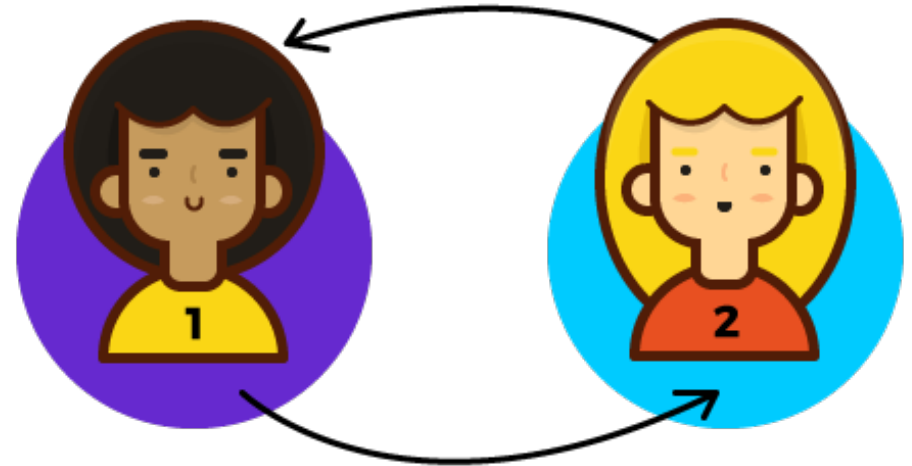
Direct students to stand up and walk in any direction for 5 steps, stop and turn to the person closest to you and talk about the current topic.



## #3

**TURN TO YOUR NEIGHBOR**

Ask students to turn to their neighbors and reflect on what you just said. Identify 2 key points from the last 10 minutes discuss another place you've heard about this. What questions do you have right now?



## #4

**ROLL THE DICE**

Put a die at each student's desk. At the end of the class, each student rolls and briefly answers aloud a question based on the number rolled:

"I want to remember"

"Something I already knew"

"Something I learned today"

"I'm still confused about"

"One word to sum up what I learned" "an AHA moment I had today"



## #5

## SHOW AND TELL

Show an interesting, unsettling, or detail-rich picture or advertisement and have students:

Diagnose a problem with it.

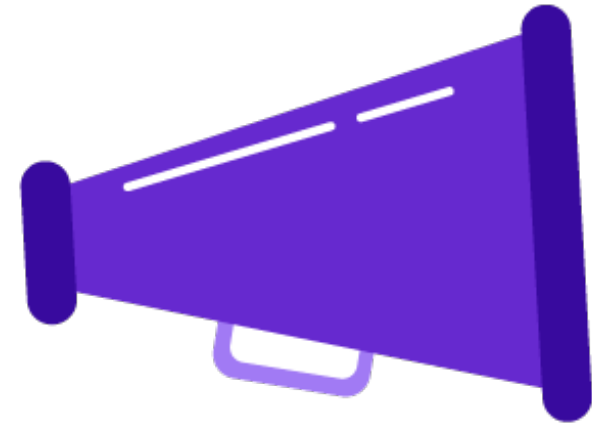
Make a guess about what is happening in the picture.

Predict what will happen next.

Pick out details that illustrate a concept in your content area.

Use the picture as a springboard for personal or creative writing.

Find evidence in the picture to support their opinion about something.



## #6

## ASK A QUESTION

Ask students a thought-provoking question one that:

Asks “what if”

Connects the day’s lesson to student’s experiences.

One that poses a problem (this can be similar to open-response type questions on a test, or more real-life problems along the lines of

“what should this person do?”)





#7

## USE A METAPHOR

Create a metaphor or analogy for the day's key concept.



#8

## SHOW A VIDEO

Show a high-interest video clip that connects to the day's lesson and have students respond the way they would to a picture or an audio clip.



#9

## LISTEN TO AUDIO

Play an audio clip, podcast, or news report and have students discuss how this clip relates to their current lesson.



## #10

**USE A QUOTE**

Read (or write on the board/screen) an interesting quote or passage, then have students respond to the quote in the following ways:

Whether they agree/disagree, and why?

How it makes them feel.

Take a stance on the quote, and support their stances with evidence from the quote.

Pick out details that illustrate a literary, linguistic, scientific, historical, philosophical, psychological, or rhetorical principle.

Predict how the quote connects to the day's lesson.



## #11

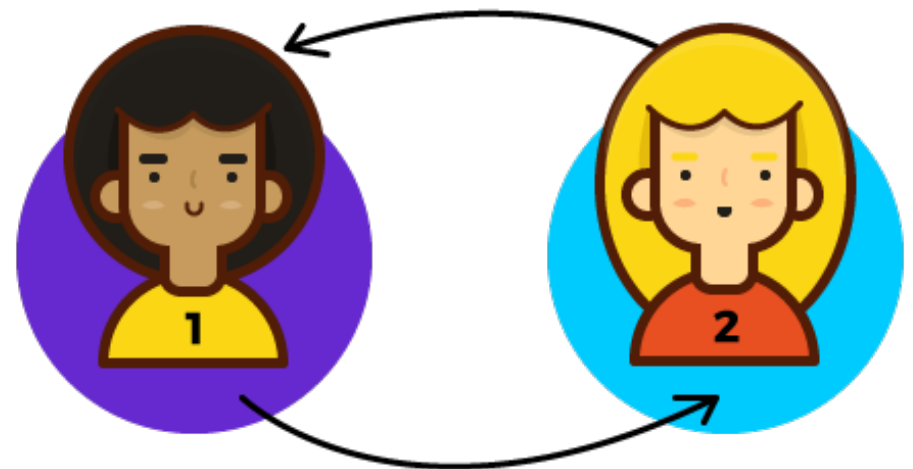
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Number the class off by twos.

Ask the "1s" to line up and ask the "2s" to line up facing a "1."

Give "1s" a minute to tell the "2s" everything they think they already know about today's lesson, topic, or objective.

Now Switch! You can do several rounds.



## #12

**TELL A STORY**

Focus students' attention with a story that connects to the day's lesson.

Tell a story from your own person experience that either illustrates a concept from the day's lesson or shows its connection to real life.

Ask students to share their stories.

Tell a joke that connects to the day's lesson.

Read a story from the news and discuss how it connects to the lesson.

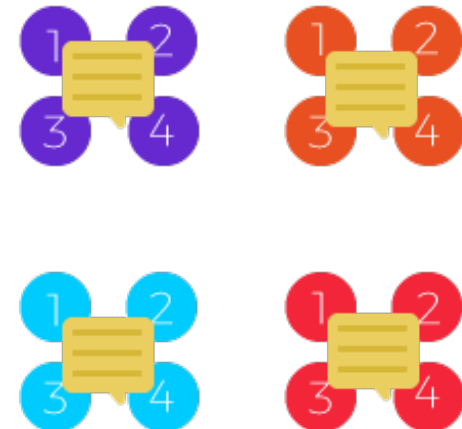


## #13

**NUMBERED HEADS TOGETHER**

Make groups of four-five. Each student in a group is numbered. Teacher poses a question from the Expanded Map. The table group puts their heads together and whispers their possible answers to one another. The goal is for the group to decide on an answer together and make sure everyone knows this answer.

Teacher calls "Time's Up" and calls a number. Each group should have someone standing up and teacher calls on the first one to answer. If the answer is incorrect, the second person to stand up has a chance.



## #14

## SKIMMING

Have students skim the book, chapter, section, or other reading materials before reading then:

Make predictions about what they'll be learning.  
Try to answer factual questions about the day's learning.  
Come up with their questions about the day's topic.



## #15

## ROUND THE CLOCK LEARNING PARTNERS

Give each student a paper with a clock in the middle and a blank at 12:00, 3:00, 6:00, and 9:00.

At the beginning of the unit have the class mingle and make 4 appointments with 4 different peers.

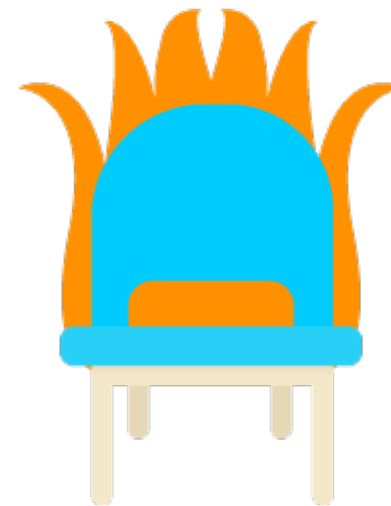
When discussion stalls during a routine, ask the students to meet with one of their "time appointments" and answer a question. Your appointment sheets may last a week.



#16

## HOT SEAT

Place key reflection, or probing questions on random seats throughout the room. When prompted, students check their seats and answer the questions. Students who do not have a hot seat question are asked to agree or disagree with the response and explain their thinking.



## SECTION 3

# ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES: REFLECTION & WRITING

Sometimes what your students need most is a chance to sit back and take a moment to think about what they just learned. We learn so much every day that sometimes, we even forget what we already know! Through reflection and writing activities, students can take a few moments to really process your daily lesson and rework it into their own words.

These activities or strategies are designed to get your students reflecting and writing. They hone in on your students' creativity, independence, and summarizing and analyzing skills.

#1

**3 - 2 - 1**

Divide students into partners or teams, and ask them to write:

- 3 - Most important ideas learned.
- 2 - Hardest ideas to understand or remember.
- 1 - A question that would be important for everyone to be able to answer.

Teams share out with class before leaving.



#2

**ONE SENTENCE SUMMARIES**

At the end of a lesson ask each student to write ONE sentence describing what they learned today. Using “Walk and Talk,” Talk To Your Neighbor or an appointment partner, have students read each others’ summaries.

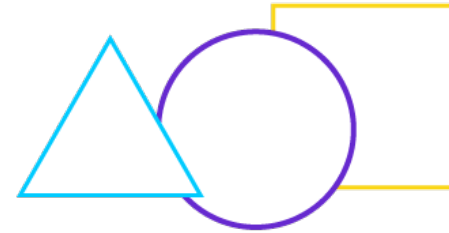
The teacher then asks individuals to identify a person with a summary they like.



#3

## QUICK DRAW

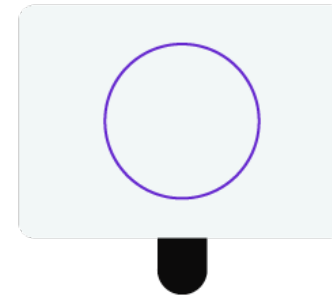
On paper or white board you have one minute to draw a sketch that shows your understanding of what we just discussed. Have students talk to their neighbor or partners and explain their drawings.



#4

## WHITE BOARD

Have students write answers to questions and flash for the teacher to see. Great assessment for learning of entire class.



#5

## CAPTION PHOTOS

Choose three photos that represent a process. Ask students to caption each photo.





#6

## POSTCARDS FROM THE PAST

Have students adopt the personality of a historical figure and write a postcard to another historical figure from the same era, discussing a significant event that had just occurred. (Connect it to Unit Organizer by having them find the significant event with their notes).



#7

## TWITTER BOARD

Have students summarize what was learned in a lesson using 140 characters. Pin small strips of paper to a poster or corkboard to resemble a twitter feed.



#8

## GRAFFITI CONVERSATIONS

Have students collect their thoughts on paper in words, images, or a combination of the two in order to make their thinking visible.

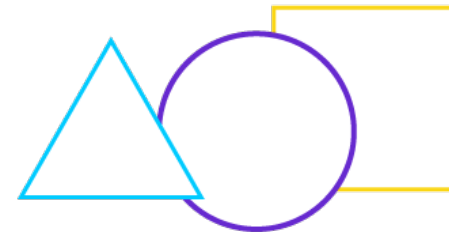
Students work individually to respond, but once thoughts are recorded can verbally share their reflections or rotate among and read the responses of their peers. Graffiti can be recorded on bulletin boards, white boards, paper “tablecloths” or sidewalks.



#9

## DOODLE

Challenge your students to use a drawing rather than words to show understanding of a concept.



A large, stylized blue number '4' graphic that serves as a background for the section header text.

## SECTION 4

# ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES: CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

It's always important to check to see if your students are actually understanding the content you're teaching them. However, sometimes it's hard to create an activity that checks for understanding but isn't boring or repetitive.

These activities or strategies are designed to be fun, stimulating, and engaging for your students, while also serving the dual purpose of allowing you to see just what they truly understand.

#1

# METACOGNITION TABLE

At the end of your class, have each student answer the following questions presented to them on index cards:

What did we do in class?

Why did we do it?

What did I learn today?

How can I apply what I learned today?

What questions do I still have about what I learned today?

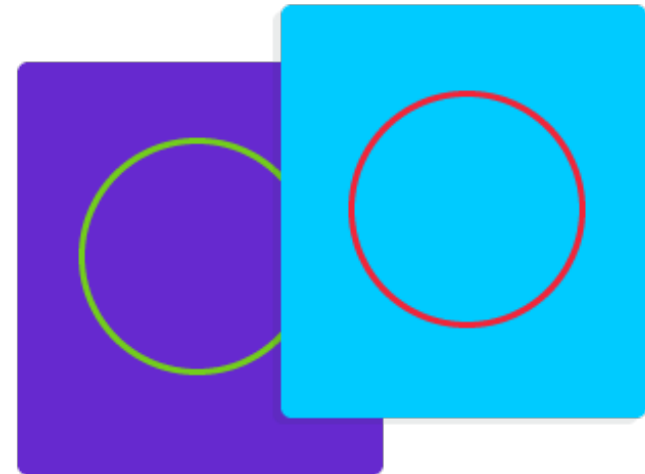


#2

# STOP AND GO CARDS

Have your students create index cards with a large green marker circle on one side and a large red marker circle on the other.

If they are following along and understanding the lesson, the green side is upright and visible to you. When they don't understand something and need clarification, they flip the card to show you the red side.



## #3

## VOTE WITH THUMBS

Ask your class if they understand a concept. A thumbs up is “yes,” thumbs down is “no,” and a thumbs middle is “not sure.” Choose concepts and ideas from the Unit Organizer expanded map, a previously completed FRAME, or from your daily lessons.



## #4

## ROLL THE DICE

Put a die at each of your students' desks. At the end of the class, each student rolls and briefly answers aloud a question based on the number rolled:

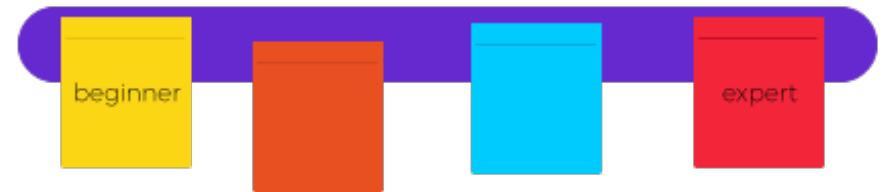
1. I want to remember.
2. Something I learned today.
3. One word to sum up what I learned.
4. Something I already knew.
5. I'm still confused about.
6. An “Aha” moment that I had today.



## #5

**STICKY BARS**

Create a chart that describes levels of understanding, progress, or mastery. Have students write their names or use an identifying symbol on a sticky note and place their notes on the appropriate place on the chart.

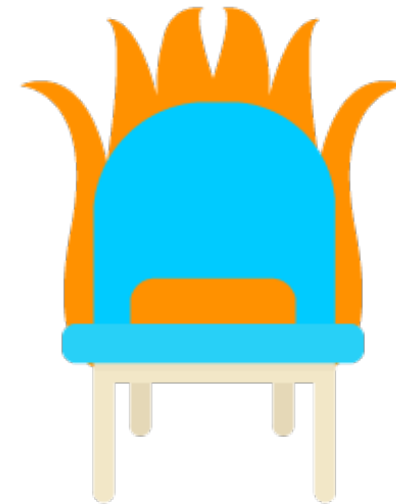


## #6

**HOT SEAT**

The teacher places key reflection or probing questions on random seats throughout the room. When prompted, students check their seats and answer the questions.

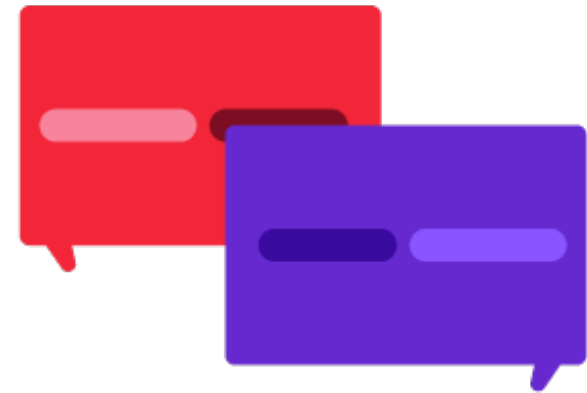
Students who do not have a hot seat question are asked to agree or disagree with the response and explain their thinking.



#7

## GO AROUND

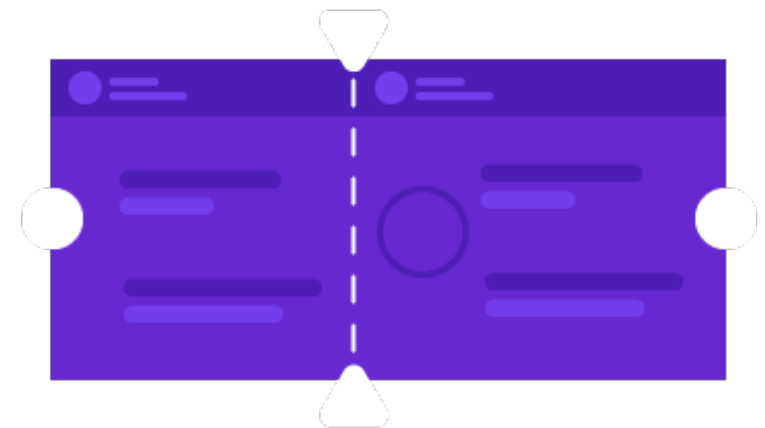
When a one to two word answer can show understanding, self or group assessment, or readiness for a task, have your students respond to a standard prompt one at a time, in rapid succession around the room.



#8

## ADMIT & EXIT TICKETS

Have students write down any relevant questions, prompts, or graphic displays of their thinking on a small sheet of paper. Either upon entering class the next day, or leaving class that day, teachers collect the tickets, read through them, and use them to start discussions, activities, or simply just check to see what students' know.



#9

## HUMAN BAR GRAPH

Identify a range of levels of understanding (from novice to expert) as labels for 3-4 adjacent lines.

Have your students then form a human bar graph by standing in the line that best represents their current level of understanding.



#10

## FIST-TO-FIVE

Have students use their fingers to show quick agreement, disagreement, readiness for a task, comfort with an idea, or understanding of a concept.

0 = a complete fist.

1 - 5 = respective fingers in the air





## **about the ebook.**

This ebook was created by, and is copyright to the Strategic Instruction Team at the Education Service Center Region 13 in Austin, Texas as a part of the new site MySimtoolbox.

The book is available for anyone to use, download, or print off for free, but not to re-distribute or resell for profit of any sort.

## **about our team.**

We're a team of education specialists located in Austin, Texas at the Education Service Center, Region 13. We're dedicated to providing teachers and students like you with the explicit and engaging tools necessary to increase your success.

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