# ACTIVE PLAY ACTIVE LEARNING

Brain Breaks Guide

# Table of Contents

### General Brain Breaks

Rock, Paper, Scissors, Jump!1
12 Days of Fitness
Morning Routine
Boogie Days4
No Stress Test
Mime Yourself
Take the Long Way7
Future Trainer
The Classroom Workout Circuit
Do the Conga!

# Vocabulary/Spelling Brain Breaks

Write Your Name	11
Stand Up for Vocabulary	12
Spelling Words Relay	13
Spelling Mix- Up	14
Letter Toss	15
That Sounds Like	16
Wiggles	17
Vocabulary Scramble	
Pass it On-Uno Style	19
As If	20
Over-Under-Around-Through	21
Stop and Scribble	22
Frozen Vocabulary	23

# Math Brain Breaks

24
25
27
•

### Social Studies Brain Breaks

Train Like a Pro	31
Quiz Me	32
U.S. Walk and Talk	33
Take a Tour	34

# Science Brain Breaks

Calm Down	35
Rainstorm	
Shake It	
Take a Seat!	
Animal Instincts	

# **Creating a Physically Active Classroom through Brain Breaks**

### What?

Energizing Brain Breaks are quick activities for the classroom. They take virtually no preparation and no extra materials to perform. Students and audiences of all ages love them because they are fun and make people laugh. They also challenge the brain. Brain Breaks help you to cross the mid-line of your body which helps both sides of your brain engage. It is suggested to use an Energizing Brain Break throughout the day with your class. The more students are active throughout the day, the more focused they will be. Movement also helps to anchor the information students are learning.

### How?

Children seem to have an endless source of energy that carries them through their day. They run rather than walk, jump rather than step over, and drop down rather than sit. Brain Breaks are designed to help channel that energy into the academic activities of the day. Each activity includes step by step instructions for easy implementation. Variations are provided to easily change an activity to a different academic focus. These activities take into account the busy academic day and are meant to only provide bursts of activity to satisfy even the squirmiest of students as well as provide transition time to refocus to a new topic. Teachers can choose one activity for the day or choose several activities for an extended break.

### Ready, Set, GO!

Getting started is easy. The teacher should set very clear expectation for student behaviors during the activities. Students will stay so busy with the activity that conflicts should be minimal. Stopping an activity is a bit more challenging. A stop signal is vital and should be included in the clear expectations set at the beginning of the activity. Specific stop signal examples can be found in the **Ideas for Signals** section on the next page. Most of the time students are ready to refocus after an activity. If your students are having trouble calming down you can play soft, calming music or take students through a series of deep breathing exercises.

### **Helpful Hints:**

- Create a positive atmosphere that enhances the self-esteem for all students. Each student should feel respected and valued. All students do not move alike or at the same speed.
- Have a signal or sign that can refocus students quickly so that they can "freeze" and listen to you when you need to speak or end the activity.
- Make certain each student understands the teacher's expectations prior to the start of the activity.
- Model enthusiasm for physical activity. Be aware that students (at first) may seem apathetic or silly. These are common expressions of being self conscious about trying something new in front of their peers. With practice, this discomfort can be minimized and students will be more relaxed and willing to participate.
- Give instructions before and after arranging the room to get ready for participation. Remind students of the rules for the activity and the "freeze" signals.
- Take time to make sure that objects are out of the way for safe movement.
- Set a time limit for the activity before beginning movement. Be sure to share that time with students.
- Compliment groups or individuals so that all groups or individuals feel as though their participation was valued.

### **Ideas for Signals:**

- "Give me a hand" Tell the kids, "give me a hand" and students raise one hand in the air.
  "Give me a clap" and students clap. "Give me a stomp" and students stomp one foot. You can then ask any combination such as "Give me three claps and a stomp" and the attention is focused on you.
- 2. Have a "laughing scarf". When the kids see the scarf students may laugh.
- 3. However, when you put it away, that means "silence" and all attention is on the teacher. This keeps students from laughing at others.
- 4. Have live music you can play and stop when you want students to freeze.
- 5. Begin to clap 3 times, then repeat as often as needed to refocus students. You can also clap at different levels of loud to soft or change the tempo of the clap to gain their attention.

# Rock, Paper, Scissors, Jump!

Academic Focus: General Activity

Activity: Teachers ask students questions and students respond by jumping into the correct position. Ex: If the answer choice is "A," students should land with their feet together; if the answer is "B," students should land with their feet apart in a straddle position; if the answer is "C," students should land with one foot in front of the other. The teacher asks a question and the students jump three times, on the forth jump they should land in the position that corresponds to the correct answer choice.

# **12 Days of Fitness**

Academic Focus: General activity

**Activity:** Students act out the following routine:

"On the first day of fitness, my teacher showed to me..."

- 12 Jumping Jacks
- 11 Raise the Roofs
- 10 Knee Lifts
- 9 Side Stretches
- 8 Jogs in Place
- 7 Giant Punches
- 6 Kicks to the Front
- 5 Side Twists
- 4 Jumping Ropes
- 3 Muscle Pumps
- 2 Scissors (Feet apart and criss cross in front and back)
- 1 Stork Stand (Balance on One Foot)

# **Morning Routine**

Academic Focus: General Activity

**Activity:** Have students start the day with a series of simple activities lasting 30 seconds or more:

- o Jumping jacks
- o Knee lifts
- o Flap arms like a bird
- $\circ$  Hopping
- o Scissors
- Follow each activity with a basic stretching movement:
- o Reach for the sky
- o Runner's stretch
- o Butterfly stretch (sit with bottom of feet together)
- $\circ \quad {\sf Knee} \ {\sf to} \ {\sf chest}$
- o Rotate ankles
- o Scratch your back

Mahar, M. T., Kenny, R. K., Shields, A. T., Scales, D. P., & Collins, G. (n.d.). *Energizers: Class-room based physical activities K-2*. Retrieved from East Carolina University website: http://www.ecu.edu/cshhp/exss/upload/Energizers\_for\_Grades\_K\_2.pdf

# **Boogie Days**

Academic Focus: General activity

**Activity:** Have students spread out across the room and play one school-appropriate song and let kids dance along. Have them follow your moves and make sure movements are appropriate. Choose a student to be the leader and have them follow that person's moves.

# No Stress Test

Academic Focus: General activity

**Activity:** Before a test or quiz have a 5-minute walking break or stretching break to help students relax.

# **Mime Yourself**

Academic Focus: General activity

Activity: Have students get into pairs and without talking mirror each other's actions. Specify who will be the leader to start, and tell students that without talking they should switch back and forth as to who has the lead. Suggest that students mime their favorite sport or outdoor activity.

# Take the Long Way

Academic Focus: General activity

**Activity:** Before your next subject change, stop class for 3 minutes and take your students on a walk around the classroom.

# **Future Trainer**

Academic Focus: General activity

**Activity:** Have a student lead a 3-5 minute physical activity break doing any activities or games of the class's choosing —be creative and have everyone in the class get involved.

# The Classroom Workout Circuit

Academic Focus: General activity

Activity: Have students do the following in place for 1 minute each (feel free to mix up the order): jog in place, high knees, jumping jacks, hop on one foot, hop on the other foot, and/or jump on both feet.

# Do the Conga!

Academic Focus: General activity

**Activity:** Have students line up, placing their hands on the shoulders of the student in front of them. Start some music and lead students around the classroom. Follow the pattern, right foot, left foot, right foot, kick with the left foot, left foot, right foot, left foot, kick with the right foot. Repeat.

# Write Your Name

Academic Focus: Spelling/Reading

Activity: Using your index finger as an imaginary pencil, write your name in huge cursive in the air. Now repeat using different body parts as your pencil — elbow, knee, toe, belly button, head. Don't forget to make sure all your i's are dotted and t's are crossed!

Variations: For older classes, change out students' names with vocabulary words.

# Stand Up for Vocabulary

Academic Focus: Spelling/Reading

**Activity:** Create a poem or song using vocabulary words that all start with the same letter. Every time a word starting with that letter is said or sung have students stand up or sit down.

# **Spelling Words Relay**

Academic Focus: Spelling/Reading

Activity: Students practice spelling new words with team members.

- o The teacher will divide the class into four teams of equal number.
- The students stand in a line and the first student of each group will be given the spelling word and they will use the dry erase marker / chalk and write the first letter on the board.
- The student will then move quickly to the next person on their team, pass the chalk / marker off and the next student will come to the board and write the next letter.
- This procedure will continue until one of the teams has completed the spelling word.
- The team must say and spell the word to the class. If the word is correct they get a point. If it is incorrect the other team has a chance. If both words are incorrect, then the teams get 30 seconds to fix their word.

# Spelling Mix- Up

Academic Focus: Students practice spelling new words with team members.

**Equipment:** One piece of paper with a letter of the alphabet for each student.

Activity: Divide the students into two teams. Give each student a piece of paper containing a letter of the alphabet. Call out a spelling or vocabulary word. Each team will arrange themselves to spell the word. The team that spells the word the quickest and correctly receives a point.

# **Letter Toss**

Academic Focus: Practicing new vocabulary words.

Equipment: One yarn ball

Activity: Teacher places a letter for the day on the board and hand a yarn ball to one student. Students stand around the room in a circle. One student will state a word that begins with that letter and then toss the yarn ball to another student who will then say another word.

# That Sounds Like

Academic Focus: Practice with grammar/parts of speech.

**Activity:** Teacher will write the following on the board:

- Period: STOP
- Exclamation Point: EXCITED/ STOP
- Question Mark: SHRUG SHOULDERS
- Comma: PAUSE and CONTINUE
- Teacher then gives students a movement to do (ex: jumping jacks, run in place, march, etc.). Teacher then calls out a word phrase (Period) and students will STOP. Or (Exclamation Point) and students will go faster and then return to a normal speed.

# **Wiggles**

Academic Focus: General activity

**Activity:** Students stand at their desks and jog in place while doing the following activities:

On teacher's command, the students begin to wiggle their fingers.

- Then fingers and wrists.
- The students wiggle their fingers, wrists, forearms.
- Then fingers, wrists, forearms, and elbows.
- Then fingers, wrists, forearms, elbows, and shoulders.
- Then fingers, wrists, forearms, elbows, shoulders, and rib cage.
- Then fingers, wrists, forearms, elbows, shoulders, rib cage and hips.
- Then fingers, wrists, forearms, elbows, shoulders, rib cage, hips, and knees.
- Then fingers, wrists, forearms, elbows, shoulders, rib cage, hips, knees, and head.

Mahar, M. T., Kenny, R. K., Shields, A. T., Scales, D. P., & Collins, G. (n.d.). *Energizers: Class-room based physical activities K-2*. Retrieved from East Carolina University website: http://www.ecu.edu/cs-hhp/exss/upload/ Energizers\_for\_Grades\_K\_2.pdf

# **Vocabulary Scramble**

**Academic Focus:** Recognize level appropriate sight words and content vocabulary, identify level appropriate vocabulary, use conventions of spelling in written composition.

**Equipment:** Letters of the vocabulary words written on separate sheets of paper; paper and pencil (for the records)

### Activity:

- 1. Divide the students into two groups of two.
- 2. Give each group letters, written on separate sheets of paper, that make up a vocabulary word. Example vocabulary word: friendship
- 3. Ten students will each receive one letter, one student will be the checker, and one student will be the recorder.
- 4. The students with the letters will scramble to arrange themselves to make as many different words as possible with the letters they have. for example: Friendship- ship, friend, dip, end, red, sip, etc.
- 5. The checker will make sure that the words are spelled correctly and the recorder will write the words down on a sheet of paper.
- 6. The group to spell the most words in 10 minutes is the winner.

# Pass it On-Uno Style

Academic Focus: Spelling/Vocabulary

**Equipment:** One Uno card for each student.

**Set Up:** Students form a circle around the perimeter of the room. Teacher hands out one card to each student.

**Activity:** Students identify color of card and perform activity that corresponds to that color for 10-15 seconds:

- Blue- jump to the sky
- Red-squats
- Yellow-twist
- Green- swim

When teacher says "Pass it On," students then pass their cards to the student to their right and perform the activity that corresponds to their new card.

Mahar, M. T., Kenny, R. K., Shields, A. T., Scales, D. P., & Collins, G. (n.d.). *Energizers: Class-room based physical activities K-2*. Retrieved from East Carolina University website: http://www.ecu.edu/cshhp/exss/upload/Energizers\_for\_Grades\_K\_2.pdf

# As If...

Academic Focus: Storytelling, Vocabulary practice, Language Comprehension.

**Activity:** Teacher reads sentences to class. Have students act out each sentence for 30 seconds.

- Jog in place AS IF a big scary bear is chasing you.
- Walk forwards AS IF you're walking through chocolate pudding.
- Jump in place AS IF you are popcorn popping.
- Reach up AS IF you are grabbing balloons out of the air.
- March in place AS IF you are in a marching band.
- Shake your body AS IF you are a wet dog.

Mahar, M. T., Kenny, R. K., Shields, A. T., Scales, D. P., & Collins, G. (n.d.). *Energizers: Class-room based physical activities K-2*. Retrieved from East Carolina University website: http://www.ecu.edu/cshhp/exss/upload/Energizers\_for\_Grades\_K\_2.pdf

# **Over-Under-Around-Through**

Academic Focus: Vocabulary.

Activity: In groups of three, have two players face each other and hold both hands or hold a scarf between them. The teacher will call out a specific sequence for the third player to accomplish as quickly as possible. For instance, over, under, around, through. The player will go over the joined hands, under the joined hands, circle around both hand holders, and through the middle of the joined arms. Mix the sequence up and do some several in a row. Time each attempt as an incentive to go faster. Switch positions frequently.

The teacher can have each group compete with the other groups to see which group can finish the pattern first.

DeLine, J. (2008). Coordinated approach to child health: CATCH physical education. Retrieved from University of Texas School of Public Health website: http://www.sph.uth.tmc.edu/catch/PDF\_Files/Iowa\_AHPERD\_Nov%20'08.pdf

# **Stop and Scribble**

Academic Focus: Spelling/practicing new vocabulary words

**Activity:** Students stand at desks with partners. Need a piece of paper and pencil for every 2 students. Teacher calls out physical activity:

- o Jumping
- o Twisting
- o Jogging
- Jumping Jacks
- Hopping
- o Knee Lifts
- o Playing air guitar
- o Marching

Students begin activity and continue 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 10-15 seconds, teacher calls out new activity. Continue until all spelling words are used. As students cool down, teacher will write correct spelling on board and students will check their work.

Mahar, M. T., Kenny, R. K., Shields, A. T., Scales, D. P., & Collins, G. (n.d.). *Energizers: Class-room based physical activities K-2*. Retrieved from East Carolina University website: http://www.ecu.edu/cshhp/exss/upload/Energizers\_for\_Grades\_K\_2.pdf

# Spelling/Vocabulary Brain Breaks

# **Frozen Vocabulary**

Academic Focus: Practicing new vocabulary words.

**Activity:** Begin by having students do an activity standing at their desks for at least 30 seconds:

- o Jumping
- o Twisting
- o Jogging
- Jumping Jacks
- Hopping
- o Knee Lifts
- o Playing air guitar

Students continue activity until teacher calls out a vocabulary word at which point the students freeze. Teacher calls on a volunteer to use the vocabulary word properly in a sentence. Resume activity or begin new activity when a student uses the vocabulary word properly.

Mahar, M. T., Kenny, R. K., Shields, A. T., Scales, D. P., & Collins, G. (n.d.). *Energizers: Class-room based physical activities K-2*. Retrieved from East Carolina University website: http://www.ecu.edu/cshhp/exss/upload/Energizers\_for\_Grades\_K\_2.pdf

# Shoot 11

### Academic Focus: Counting

Activity: Divide the class into groups of 4-5 students, each group standing in a circle. The object of the game is for the groups to try and total 11 fingers displayed – without telling anyone what number they are going to show. Students do this by, standing in a circle with their left hand behind their back. Instruct the groups to say out loud, "1, 2, 3...Shoot!" On "Shoot", each student will display either: o(closed fist), 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 fingers on their right hand. Once all the fingers are displayed, the students in the group quickly add up the total of all the fingers shown. If the group's total equals 11, the group gets a point (students high-five each other). If the group's total is less than 11, then everyone in the group does that number of jumping jacks (e.g., if the group total was 7, each student in the group would do 7 jumping jacks). If the group's total is (e.g., if the group total was 16, each student in the group would do 16-11=5 squats). Groups try to get as many points as they can (1 point each time they total 11) during the game.

# **Sports Galore**

### Academic Focus: Math

Activity: Teacher calls out the following sports skills to mimic for 10-15 seconds:

- 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

**Variations:** Teacher can integrate skills into word problems and have students repeat the number he or she calls out:

• If Juan made 5 jump shots (students act out) and 2 went in the basket, how many did he miss? 3.

Mahar, M. T., Kenny, R. K., Shields, A. T., Scales, D. P., & Collins, G. (n.d.). *Energizers: Class-room based physical activities K-2*. Retrieved from East Carolina University website: http://www.ecu.edu/cshhp/exss/upload/Energizers\_for\_Grades\_K\_2.pdf

# Feel the Beat

Academic Focus: Math

**Location:** This activity is best in an area with more space than the classroom.

**Activity:** Have every student get a partner and sit cross legged on the floor facing their partner 2-3 feet away. Place a hacky-sac or other object between them. Have students perform the following actions:

- $\circ \quad \text{tap knees} \\$
- o tap shoulders
- o clap
- tap knees, shoulders, clap
- clap partners hands (both, right-right, left-left)

When the teacher calls out a math question, students try to be the first to grab the hacky-sac. Repeat 5 times.

# Pac Man Chomps Again

Academic Focus: Review of "greater than" and "less than" concepts.

Equipment: Fraction flashcards

Activity: Teacher will choose two students to come to the front of the class to represent different fractions. The teacher will give each of the two students a fraction flashcard. Next, the teacher will choose a "PACMAN" from the remaining students to represent "greater than" or "less than." The student will then correctly arrange himself/herself between the two students to correctly solve the equation. Once the equation has been correctly solved, the "PACMAN" will choose an exercise for the class to do (jumping jacks, jog in place, jump up and down, etc.). Game continues with new students representing fractions and a new "PACMAN."

# Task Master

Academic Focus: Math

Activity: Have students stand up and push in their chairs. Teacher explains that he/she is going to give them a series of tasks and the goal is to complete them as quickly as possible. Direct students that once they have completed the task, they should stop where they are and raise their hand. For the first task have students touch 10 chairs not in a row. For the next task have students touch elbows with 8 classmates. For the last task, touch toes with 6 classmates wearing 6 different colored shirts.

# **Chair Aerobics**

Academic Focus: Math

**Activity:** Have students pull their chairs out from their desk. Students should sit up straight, keeping their ankles together to do leg lifts by extending their legs to a 180-degree angle for 20 repetitions. Then have students stand behind the chair and while holding the back for balance, extend their right leg out to the side to a 45-degree angle for 20 repetitions. Then repeat with the left leg.

# **Fitness Math**

Academic Focus: Review of math concepts; even and odd numbers.

**Equipment:** One die for each group of four students.

Set Up: Teacher divides students in groups of four and gives each team a die.

**Activity:** Teacher instructs the students to take turns rolling the dice, and with each number rolled, students identify it as either an even or an odd number and perform the physical activity associated with the number rolled.

- o 1=Push Up
- 2=Jump & Stretch
- 3=Toe Touch
- o 4=Curl Up
- 5=Arm Circles
- 6=Jumping Jacks

**Variations:** This game can be used with more advanced math concepts by instructing students to multiply even numbers by 2 and odd numbers by 3. For example, if a student rolls a 2, then students would perform 2\*2=4 jump and stretches; if a student rolled a 3, then students in that group would perform 3\*3=9 toe touches, etc.

# Train Like a Pro

Academic Focus: Social Studies

Activity: Have students act out various sports for 10-15 seconds each:

- kick a field goal
- shoot a jump shot
- run through tires
- swing a bat
- serve a tennis ball
- downhill skiing
- spike a volleyball
- swing a golf club
- throw a football
- shoot an arrow
- shoot a hockey puck
- swim

**Variations:** Discuss the origins of the sports acted out by students. Additionally, talk about the countries that are known for each sport.

# Quiz Me

Academic Focus: Social Studies

**Activity:** While reviewing for a social studies test or quiz, ask the students a series of true-or-false questions. If the question is true students should jump in place for 15 seconds. If it is false they should touch their toes 15 times.

# U.S. Walk and Talk

Academic Focus: Social Studies

Activity: Break students into groups of 2 or 3, and assign a topic related to a current social studies lesson that students need to discuss while taking a 5-minute walk. They should report their discussion back to the class.

# Take a Tour

### Academic Focus: Social Studies

Activity: Lead students on an imaginary tour of a different country or state in a charades-like game. For example, take a tour of Colorado: fly to Colorado Springs, hike through San Isabel Forest, swim the Arkansas River, climb the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Create other simulations that point out various landmarks within any state.

# Calm Down

Academic Focus: Science

Activity: Lead students in stretches to help loosen up tension. Have students each hold for 15-20 seconds each: reach for the sky, touch toes, arm circles, neck circles, knee to chest, etc.

Variations: Review science concepts while students stretch.

- Reach for the sky—review concepts relating to weather (cloud formations, rain, etc.)
- Touch toes—review concepts relating to the layers of the Earth.
- Arm circles—review concepts relating to waves and wind.
- o Neck circles—review concepts relating to the solar system
- Knee to chest—review concepts relating to pulleys/levers.

# **Rainstorm**

Academic Focus: Science

**Activity:** Have a rainstorm in your classroom. Have students follow your lead; begin by having students very lightly rubbing their hands together, then lightly snap, slap their thighs, slap their thighs and stomp their feet (the rainstorm is at its peak!). Then stop stomping their feet, just slap their thighs, return to lightly snapping, rubbing their hands and stop. Do each action for 20 seconds.

# Shake It

Academic Focus: Science

Activity: Students remain seated and raise their hands in the air. Have them start by shaking their right hand 10 times, left hand 10 times, left foot 10 times and right foot 10 times. Repeat counting down the number of shakes from 9-1. Speed up or slow down the counting to keep it interesting.

**Variations:** Tailor this to science concepts by reviewing the skeletal/muscular system while students complete the activity.

# Take a Seat!

Academic Focus: Science

Activity: Have students stand up and pull their chairs away from their desks. They should stand in front of their chair (seat facing out). Have students quickly sit, then stand, sit then stand 8-10 times. Next, quickly repeat sitting halfway down and standing, repeating 8-10 times. Last, have students barely sit (just touching the chair) and stand quickly repeating 8-10 times.

**Variations:** Call out a fruit/vegetable/ dairy product. If it's a "GO" food, students should sit, stand, sit then stand 8-10 times. If it's a "SLOW" food, students should sit halfway down and stand, repeating 8-10 times. Finally, if it's a "WOAH" food, students should barely sit and stand quickly repeating 8-10 times. Repeat by calling out different foods.

Science Brain Breaks

# **Animal Instincts**

Academic Focus: Science

**Activity:** Pick one student to call out an animal and have everyone mimic how that animal moves. Go around the room until every student has an opportunity to call out an animal and the class has mimicked that animal.