

SPONGE ACTIVITIES FOR ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

1. INVENT A FOOD

Students have to invent an entirely new food. What's it going to be? Salty, sweet? A packaged snack? A new vegetable or fruit? A fantasy food? And what will it be called, once they have suggested this new food? How will it be packaged and sold? Who will eat it? Is it slimy, gross, colorful, gooey, solid, liquid, or gritty? Have fun!

2. WHO'S GOT THE RHYTHM?

You will start a simple rhythm by clapping, tapping your feet, or using a ruler, for example, to tap out a short rhythm. It's up to the next student to copy that rhythm, and if successful, add one "note". Then it goes to the next student, who again, if successful, must also add a beat of his or her choosing, and so on. When a student misses the rhythm, however, everyone can clap (so this student won't feel bad) and this person will start a new rhythm, and go on from there.

3. WHISPER THE SECRET!

You will start a "secret message", using only the words, "short" and "long" (or two other words of your choosing that are opposites), that you write down on a piece of paper. You might say, "Short, long, short, short," and then pass on the secret. Make your message longer for students in 3rd grade, than for kindergarten students. See how it all comes out by the time it makes its tour around the room, and show your students the original message as written down on your piece of paper.

4. A WORD OF ADVICE

Discuss when people might seek advice; what might be their problems? Devise a few problems, and then see what kinds of advice your students, collaborating as a class, can come up to resolve those problems.

5. A BUCKET OF . . . ?

Have a plastic bucket ready in a corner of your classroom, full of strange little objects. For a sponge activity, your students can work in teams to come up with a unique use for whichever object you pull out of the bucket.

6. YOU TAKE IT FROM HERE

Pass out a box of colored pencils or colored crayons, where each student may take only one. Then give your students a theme, say, transportation, Thanksgiving, or sports. They may not say a word the entire duration of the exercise, so there is no communication. One student (you can start a different paper in each row if you are worried about maintaining a quiet classroom while the paper makes its rounds) starts with a piece of paper, and has only 5 seconds to start a design. He or she may have something entirely different in mind for the picture than the next student, so it's always interesting to see how it turns out. Give your finished picture a title, and put it on display.

7. A RECIPE FOR . . .

Happiness! Success! Disaster? Fortune? Let your students choose the concept that you will all come up with a recipe for. Explain first what a recipe is, and how it typically is written (e.g. 2 cups of sugar, 1 stick of butter, 1 teaspoon of vanilla, mix well, add..., etc.). See how many cups of sunshine you need to mix into your batter for a perfect day, or how long you need to stir to make a friendship. This idea makes a great Parent Night display, with text written out to accompany student pictures for your final recipe.

8. WHAT I SEE

Your students have all been given a secret magnifying glass, and they get to see some pretty special things. Go out into a grassy field if you can, and spend some time just letting your students look around with the magnifying glasses, with no further instructions. If it's not really feasible to go outside, then let them quietly and politely explore the classroom with their magnifying glasses. Have them come back to their desks after a specified amount of time, and then tell something imaginary they saw. (E.g. I saw a HUGE purple bug, with eyes that were diamonds, glittering in the sunlight! I wanted to grab it for its diamond eyes, but it looked at me so sweetly that I knew I should not touch it, etc.)

9. THE BEST THING

The best thing about school is... The best thing about lunchtime is... The best thing about my classmate is... The best thing about my family is... The best thing about reading is... The best thing about summer is... Your students can contribute topics so that you never run out of topics for your Best Things Discussions. Let students take turns filling in the phrase, until you run out of ideas. You may wish to list them on the board, and include them in a monthly or weekly newsletter sent home.

10. DESIGN A SILLY HAT

Pass out pieces of art paper and instruct your students to design the silliest hat they can think of. When they show their completed pieces, ask them to tell you about who would wear such a hat, rounding out a character by giving him or her some character traits to go along with their hats.