



Fun Learning Activities for Mentors and Tutors

Mentors can best support children’s academic development by having fun learning activities prepared to engage in if the child needs a change in academic/tutoring activities, there is extra time available, or when child is having a tough time concentrating. The following activities are transportable, literacy-based, and learning-rich. They require minimal materials and, best of all, they’re fun!

Icebreaker Activities

Use these activities when meeting a child for the first time. Instead of jumping into schoolwork right away, take some time to break the ice. These activities will allow you to learn a little bit about the child and get comfortable with one another.

Conversation Starters

Directions:

1. Ask open-ended questions to put the child at ease and to get to know each other a bit. Some openers might include: *I bet your teacher reads stories to your class. One of my favorites is The Cat in the Hat. What are some of your favorite stories?*; or *I love animals. My favorite is the cheetah because it can run very fast. Which animals do you like?*; or *I know lots of kids watch television. Can you tell me about some TV shows that you like to watch?*

NOTE: Remember that a conversation is an exchange. Offer your ideas but focus most on what the child says. The goal is to encourage the child to speak. A good way to do this is to say, *That’s interesting—tell me more.*

Getting to Know You Game

Supplies:

- Index cards • Pens or pencils

Directions:

On an index card, have each person (including yourself) do the following:

1. Write an alliterative nickname for yourself (i.e., Adventurous Andrew) in the middle of the card.
2. Write something that is important to you in the upper right-hand corner of the card.
3. Write something you want to learn in the top left-hand corner of the card.
4. Write something you are good at doing in the bottom right-hand corner of the card.
5. Write the name of your favorite food in the bottom left-hand corner of the card.
6. Share answers with each other.

Variation:

- If working in a group, have children pair up and share answers with each other, then introduce their partners to the group.

Drawing Activity

Supplies:

- Paper
- Pencils, crayons, or markers

Directions:

1. Ask the child if she likes to draw.
2. If so, invite her to draw a picture.
3. Ask her to describe or tell you about what she's drawn.

Variation:

- Depending on skill level, invite the child to write a caption or short story that describes her drawing.
- If the child is very young, have her dictate a caption or story for you to write down.

Naming Activity

Supplies:

- Paper
- Pen or pencil
- Timer or stopwatch

Directions:

1. Set a timer for 3 or 5 minutes.
2. Ask your mentee to make a list of everything he can see from where he sits, while you do the same.
3. Compare notes when time is up, and cross off any objects that appear on both lists.
4. Players earn a point for every object that does not appear on another player's list.

NOTE: The child will most likely choose the most obvious objects. In order to give him a chance, begin your list with things that he may not focus on immediately or may not know the name of—i.e., ventilator, hinge, clasp, etc.

Variation:

- If working with a very young child, have him name the things he sees around the room, rather than write them down. Take turns naming objects.
- If working with a very young child, play "I Spy"

Creative Brainstorming

Supplies:

- Everyday object (i.e., comb, fork, etc.) in a baggie

Directions:

1. Show the child the item.
2. Have the child take 5 minutes to brainstorm creative uses for this item. For example, a comb might be a musical instrument (by strumming the teeth); a fork might be a comb or a backscratcher, etc. The idea is to come up with a number of "new" ideas for the object.

Variations:

- Both you and the child can come up with ideas independently and then share with each other.
- If the child is particularly enthusiastic about one of her ideas, use it to create a story out in your next session.
- Invite the mentee to bring an object from home for the next session.

Read Aloud

Directions:

1. Select a short piece to read to your student.
2. Read the story aloud.
3. Engage the student in a conversation about what you have read.

Pair Writing

Supplies:

- Paper
- Pen or pencil

Directions:

1. Ask your mentee to choose a number between one and ten. (With beginning writers, choose a number between one and five.)
2. The first person starts a story, only writing as many words as the number you have chosen.

For example, if you chose the number four, you can only write four words at a time.

3. The next person starts where the last player left off. For example, the first writer begins, *The great, green, slimy...* The second writer adds the next four words, such as *alien drank from the...*

4. Continue writing together until you agree the story is complete.

NOTE: The story can get a bit silly but it should still make sense as a whole.

*Variation:

- Use a die rather than one specific number to designate the amount of words written per turn. In this case, each writer rolls the die when it's her turn. The number she rolls tells her how many words to write on that turn.

I'm Going on a Trip

Directions:

1. Begin with the phrase, *I'm going on a trip and I'm going to pack...* Each player decides how to finish the sentence.
2. The first player might begin: *I'm going on a trip and I'm going to pack a book.*
3. The second player repeats the phrase with the first player's item and an item of her own: *I'm going on a trip and I'm going to pack a book and a lizard.*
4. Continue, with each player repeating all the previous items and adding something to the list until someone makes a mistake. If the child is young and/or has not played this game before, pick a theme with which she is familiar, such as animals, sports, or another appropriate category.

Variation:

- Create rules for what players can or cannot bring on the trip. For example, items to be packed can only begin with a certain sound; they must rhyme; they must end with a certain sound; or they must have something to do with a particular subject.

Echo Reading

Directions:

1. Select a story to read.
2. Read one page or one sentence at a time. Then have your mentee echo read the same sentence or page aloud.
3. Engage the student in a conversation about what you have read.

Folded Drawings

Supplies:

- 8 ½" x 11" sheets of paper
- Crayons or markers

Directions:

1. Fold a sheet of paper into four parallel segments (as one would to make a paper fan).
2. Together, decide on something to draw, such as a person, dragon, animal, building, etc.
3. One person begins the drawing in the top segment of the folded paper. The other person should not look. Continue a bit of the drawing over the fold that divides the top segment of the paper and the second segment so your partner has something to start with when it's her turn.
4. Fold the segment back so your partner can't see what you drew and then pass her the paper.
5. Without looking, the second person continues the picture based on the only part that is visible. She makes her piece of the picture, again with a small part of it extending over the next fold, folds her part back, and hands the paper back to the original artist.
6. Take turns until each folded segment of the paper has been used and the drawing is complete.
7. Unfold the paper and see what you've created together!
8. Have your mentee write a caption or story about the picture.

Variation:

- Instead of writing a caption or a story, engage the child in an extended conversation about the drawing.

Concentration

Supplies:

- Index cards or cardstock
- Pen, pencil, or marker

Preparation:

1. Cut index cards in half or cut cardstock into roughly 2" x 2" squares.
2. Create pairs of cards with the same word on each. Example: two cards with the word *fan*, two with the word *kick*, and so on. Use words appropriate to the mentee's ability or from a text he is reading.
3. Create a deck of cards containing about 14 pairs (for younger kids) or 30 pairs (for older kids).

Directions:

1. Shuffle the deck and place cards face down.
2. On each turn, a player turns one card over, leaves it face up, and reads it aloud.
3. On the same turn, he selects one more card to turn over and read. If the two cards match, he takes them and places them in his personal pile. If they don't match, he flips them back over, leaving them in the same spot. (Hint: Try to remember the location of the cards for future turns.)
4. When all cards have been matched and the board is empty, players count their pairs. The person with the most pairs is the winner.

NOTE: Play this game more than once with your mentee and may make new sets of cards based on his needs.

Variation:

- Use the same deck of cards to play *Go Fish*.

Partner Drawings

Supplies:

- Paper
- Crayons or markers

Directions:

1. With the child, agree how many turns you will take to make a drawing together.
2. Make a line or small part of a drawing on the paper.
3. Have the child continue the picture by adding another line or series of lines.
4. Take turns until you reach the number previously agreed upon.
5. Together, decide what you have created.
6. Have your student write a caption or story to accompany the drawing, offering him support as needed.

Word Chains

Directions:

1. Begin by saying a word aloud (you or the mentee can go first).
2. The next player says a word that starts with the last *sound* of the first player's word.
3. The next person begins his word with the last one's ending sound.
4. Take turns making words, following this pattern. For example, *cat* — *ton* — *nut* — *take* — *cane* — *nothing*, etc. Note that *cane* begins with a hard /c/ sound and it fits the pattern because *take* ends with a hard /c/ sound. The *e* is silent. Focus on the last *sound* heard in the word rather than the last *letter*.

Variation:

- Depending on the skill of the player(s), you can make all sorts of additional rules—e.g., the words must be only 3 letters long, the words must be more than 3 letters long, the words must rhyme, etc.

Pictures

Supplies:

- A variety of pictures from magazines and newspapers

Directions:

1. Choose some pictures corresponding to a topic that interests your mentee. Animals are almost always inspiring subjects.
2. Bring in a few pictures and have the child sort through them to find one that is interesting.
3. Have a conversation about the picture to help him take note of its details.
4. Ask him to describe and write a scene or story to accompany the picture.

Variations:

- A younger child can dictate the story for you to write down.
- Ask your student to make a drawing to show what might happen before or after the chosen picture.

Questioning Games

The following activities, done over time, will encourage a child to think more critically. Critical thinking is one key component in reading comprehension. Good readers interact with a text; they apply their own thoughts, ideas, and knowledge in order to gather meaning from what they read. Therefore, learning how to ask critical questions is an important skill.

20 Questions

Directions:

1. Think of something specific and tell your mentee whether it is a person, place or thing.
2. Give her as many as 20 yes-or-no questions to figure out what you've got in mind.
3. Encourage her to ask meaningful questions rather than guessing something right off the bat.

For example, *Is what you're thinking of bigger than a book?* will be more helpful than simply guessing the answer at random with questions such as, *Is it a pencil?* or *Is it my chair?*

Guess My Number

Supplies:

- Paper
- Pen or pencil

Directions:

1. Write the numbers 1 through 20 on a sheet of paper.
2. Silently choose a number.
3. Have the child guess your number by asking yes-or-no questions. The idea is for him to ask questions that will eliminate as many numbers as possible versus just trying to guess the number. For example, *Is it an odd number?* yields more information than a wild guess such as, *Is it 19?*
4. Have the child cross out the numbers that have been eliminated by your answers to his questions.
5. The child can ask a total of 20 questions to guess your number correctly.

Talk on a Chosen Topic

Directions:

1. Ask your student a question about a mutually interesting topic. This might be a book, a movie, a certain kind of food, a hobby, or anything in which you are both interested.
2. The child answers the question you pose and then asks you a question on the same topic in return.
3. Answer the student's question and then ask him something else. As you take turns, model inferential or thoughtful questions as opposed to literal, less substantive questions. For example: *What part of the character was most like you?* versus *What was the character's name?*

Opposites

Directions:

1. Ask the child a question about a subject that has an opposite. For example: *What's the opposite of light?*
2. The child answers your question and then asks you a question in a similar manner. Example: *Dark. What's the opposite of hard?*
3. Answer the student's question and pose one in return. Example: *Soft. What's the opposite of on?*
4. Continue until you can no longer think of a new set of opposites or as long as appropriate.