

Bag of Tricks

This is a page full of various resources to help make your day a bit less stressful. The suggestions, ideas, and/or tactics/techniques found on this page have range from classroom management tips to fun classroom games.

If you have a trick or two that you love and would like to share with others, please feel free to email Nichelle Penney, npenny@sd73.bc.ca or myself, bmcnair@sd73.bc.ca and we can upload it to this page for others to view.

As teachers, one of the best perks is being able to borrow and trade ideas, tricks, tips, etc., so please feel free to use any of these resources available for you.

* TAKE 5

This is a classroom management tip that works well when dealing with a student who is seeking attention in a negative manner. Rather than calling the student out, or embarrassing him/her in front of the class (which is something we don't generally do anyway), simply walk to the student's desk and tell him/her to take 5 - take a breather. Let them know you will be with them shortly. Tell the student to take 5 and wait outside of the classroom. Once done speaking with the rest of the class and have them working on a task, step outside and speak with the student who needed the breather. Stay calm and simply ask, "What's up?" Usually the student has calmed down quite a bit and is easier to communicate with.

* Riddles/Word of the day/Quote of the day

This can be created, adapted, and/or revised to you're liking. Write one of these on the board for students to see at the beginning of class. If it is a riddle, students can try throughout the day the solve it; if it is a word, students can try and figure out the meaning; if it's a quote, have them write or tell you what it means to them. You really have free range over this activity and can make it anything you want it to be.

* Pico Ferme Bagel

Place between 4-6 dashes on the board (_ _ _ _ _). Students (individually or in pairs) are to guess what the number is. If the number is 1234, and a student guesses 3264, under the dashes you put a X / X / (where / is a check mark). The students now know that the second digit is 2 and the fourth digit is 4. The game continues until someone has guess the right number. **This can be used in language classrooms as well, where students have to say the numbers in the corresponding language.**

* Silent Ball

Students usually love silent ball. Buy a squishy ball from the dollar store and keep it on hand. For the last five minutes, students can sit on their desk, and they toss the ball to each other. If they speak, they are out of the game. The last person wins.

Survival kit

Should you need a little more time to read through the teacher's lesson plan, you can engage the students with one of the following activities.

Problem-solving activities for teams of students

These activities should:

- be fun.
- require minimal explanation.
- take between 20–30 minutes to complete.
- be something that the whole class can share briefly when completed.
- challenge and engage students' minds and imagination.

Here are some examples:

Thinking activities

- think of all the things that come in pairs.
- think of all the things with:
 - buttons —handles —zippers.
- think of what you could eat if there were only:
 - purple things for dinner
 - yellow things for dinner.
- draw the dashboard of your parent's car.
- think of all the things that are:
 - pointed
 - red and hard
 - cold and soft.
- what are some things to smile about?

Discovery activities

Assign the following questions for discussion and online research if computers are available in the classroom. Advise students that there will be a sharing of creative responses.

- Are there two kinds of rainbows? Where do wood knots come from? Can a fish drown?
- Why are furs warm?
- Can seaweed predict the weather? Why do aging things turn yellow?
- Do plants sleep?
- Why do stars twinkle?
- Does oil calm troubled waters? Why does a glowworm glow?
- What do blind people dream about?
- Why does an egg harden when it is boiled? What is 24-carat gold?
- Why does salt make us thirsty? What is Fool's Gold?
- Why does tea run up through a lump of sugar?
- What is the origin of blue jeans?
- Why doesn't the sea freeze?
- What makes fabric shrink?
- Why is the sky blue?
- What makes the holes in Swiss -cheese?
- Why will a rotten egg float?

Ideas for forming groups

The following ideas will help you divide the class into groups of different sizes. Ideas for random grouping are followed by strategies to form assigned groups with a balance of skills and skill levels.

Ask students to become partners with the first person they see who:

- enjoys the same sport as you do.
- gets up on the same side of the bed as you.
- rolls out of bed on a different side than you do.
- has a birthday in the same month as you.
- has a birthday in a different month than you.
- has a different favorite TV show than you.
- has a different hobby than you.
- has on the same color socks as you.
- has on different colored socks from yours.
- has the same favorite color as you.
- has a different favorite color than you.
- has the same first vowel in their first name as you.
- has a different first vowel in their first name than you.
- has the same last digit in their home phone number as you.
- has a different last digit in their home phone number than you.
- has the same number of brothers and sisters as you.
- has a different number of brothers and sisters than you.
- has the same number of letters in their first name as you.
- has a different number of letters in their first name than you.
- puts their shoes on in the same order as you.
- puts their shoes on in the opposite order as you.
- was born in a different province than you.
- was born in the same province as you.

Ideas for forming pairs

Have students find the other half of a pair. To prepare, write paired items on slips of paper. To accelerate pairing, one half of the slips should be one color and the other half a second color. In other words, part one of a pair is one color and part two of the same pair is another color. (Save the slips to use again. You might laminate them.) Have each player draw a slip from the container and find the person with the matching half.

Here are some ideas:

- Capital and small letters—A and a, B and b, C and c.
- Famous couples—Bert and Ernie, Hansel and Gretel, Simon and Garfunkel.
- Fairy tales—Split the title in two: Snow/White, Sleeping/Beauty.
- Opposites—Hot and cold, tall and short, quiet and noisy, neat and messy, smooth and rough, easy and difficult, wide and narrow, north and south, morning and evening, big and little, up and down.
- Pictures and words—A picture of an apple and the word apple.

Dividing into teams randomly

Counting off

Have players count off by:

- Arm positions—Example: For two teams, players count off by alternately raising both arms up high or holding them close to the sides. Arms up high are one team; arms close to the sides, another.
- Colors—Example: For three teams, count off with red, white, and blue. Reds are one team; blues, another; and whites, a third. Select familiar groups of colors, such as school colors or province colors, or those in a country's flag.
- Days of the week—Example: For seven teams, count off by the days of the week.
- Exclamations—Example: For five teams, count off with Oh no!, Ahhh, Wow!, Hmmmm, and Huh?
- Motions—Example: For six teams, count off by motions, such as clap hands, snap fingers, pat thighs, wiggle fingers, circle arms, raise elbows.

Word groups

Choose a word with the same number of letters as the number of groups you need. If you need four groups, you could use the word team. (All the letters have to be different.) The class counts off by saying the letters. All the Ts are one group, the Es another, and so on.

You can write the letters or words in large print on separate pieces of paper. As each student says her or his letter, she or he holds up the letter so that the same letters can find one another quickly.

Create a calendar

Divide the class into 12 groups, and have each group create one month of a calendar on a sheet of newsprint. Each group member will write a significant day or event on the group's calendar. Post the months so classmates can add important dates and family celebrations to one another's calendars and share events in their lives.

Question box

Set up a question box, and call it "Dear Funny-Bones," or another humorous name. Encourage students to write humorous questions and jokes and put them in the box. At various moments during the day, invite a student to read a question from the box and invite the class to answer it.

Food favorites

Students count off with food combinations, such as the ingredients for a great pizza. For example, "sausage," "pepperoni," "cheese," "mushrooms," and "onions." All "sausages" then come together as a group. Do the same using ingredients for a favorite ice-cream sundae or for trail mix.

Card games

A number of books are available on educational card games that show how to use a deck of cards as an educational tool through games that develop memory, number skills, visual/spatial concepts, and problem-solving.

Creativity and problem-solving

Students can benefit from problem-solving activities which act as a break from subject-oriented lessons and activities. A number of “mental exercises and warm-ups,” such as brainstorming and synectics, can take up those difficult 15 or 20 minutes of “dead time” at the end of a period.

Trivia games

The huge popularity of Trivial Pursuit and similar games can be exploited easily in the classroom. Regular classroom teachers use homemade trivia games to liven up Friday afternoons and to lessen the agony of reviewing course content.

Facts versus opinions

The following is a variation on a theme used most often by History and English teachers. Students are given a number of sentences and asked to identify which are fact and which are opinion.

Social science and mass media teachers use similar exercises, in which the students examine a short newspaper or magazine article/editorial and separate the facts from the opinions.

Directions: If the following statement is fact, circle the F. If, on the other hand, the statement is an opinion, an inference, or a judgment, circle the O.

- She goes to church only to show off her new clothes.
- It was a wonderful car.
- She really thinks a lot of herself.
- Jerry was convicted of theft and served two years in prison. Look at that drunken driver.
- A man was killed and two teenagers injured in an auto accident.
- The performance began at 8:30 sharp.
- He is un-Canadian.

Communications

There are several types of writing assignments including the use of social media. Students can write letters, emails, or a “Tweet,” as an exercise in many different subjects. Specify the length required. Also consider the evaluation to be used.

- History—Students write to a world leader they admire (past or present).
- Geography—Students write describing another country or region.
- Languages—Students write to a pen pal in the language they are studying.
- Art—Students write to their favorite artist, asking questions about the artist’s style, subjects, etc.
- English—Students write to their parents or to their future child.

Using newspapers and magazine articles

An interesting article from the morning’s newspaper or downloaded from the internet can be put to good use in the classroom, so can a short article from a magazine. Students can analyze, dissect, and criticize the article. They can debate a controversial topic raised by the article. They can write their own letter to the editor in reply to an article.