

Games and Academics

Cindy Mayo, Teacher, Chinook Winds Adventist Academy, Calgary, AB

Both routine and variety are important in the classroom. A fine balance exists between establishing routines that help students feel comfortable and creating a stimulating environment that grabs student interest. Teachers who plan for both find that class time speeds by and students enjoy the time spent in learning.

One strategy I like to use before a test is a game of pictionary. Junior high science is a great class for this because of the extensive vocabulary and science processes the students must memorize. To involve as many minds as possible for every question, I split the class into four or five groups. Each group has a draw-er, or they rotate, and the others must guess what the draw-er has been asked to illustrate. Each group is only to look at their own picture, but this rule is a little hard to enforce. At first I went by the first hand up, but often they didn't have the right answer, and it would hold up other groups who might have gotten it right. I now set a time limit for a recorder from each group to write down their answer on a slip of paper; all groups with the right answer get the point.

We all laugh and have so much fun watching the pictures go up to illustrate terms like *food chain, mutualism, abiotic factors, producers, bioinvasion*, etc. Cries like, "Well, that's what I meant," or "Gulp, how do I draw that?" are often heard. Students are usually very creative. And sometimes the students who never speak out in class are the first ones up to the board drawing and jumping up and down (because somehow that makes it more urgent for their group to guess their word).

Another review strategy I use, mostly in Junior high though my seniors love it too, is a game I've often seen played at class challenges. I divide my students into two teams and line them up on either ends of the room opposite a partner who I feel will be an academic challenge for them. I place a bell or pen or some object on a table in the middle of the room. I raise a flag to indicate I am ready for silence. When all is hushed, I address the first set of partners and ask a review question such as "What are the four basic requirements of all living things?" When I lower the flag, the two partners from each end of the room race to ring the bell or pick up the pen. After doing so, they have five seconds to answer the question. Occasionally they are so wrapped up in the race they ring the bell and then sheepishly look at me and their team saying, "What was the question again?"

Children of all ages love games. They love to laugh and move, and they do truly love learning when it includes a little of the previous two. With the current stress on brain-based learning and multiple intelligences, teachers are asked to use varied activities that address all learning styles. Games are one way of achieving this goal. The results I've seen with my student show me that brain-based learning really works. The games involve students who learn better by moving rather than simply sitting and reading to remember information. I want my students to love science and to love coming to class. I would burn out if I tried to plan every class like this, but it does help to create a little bit of excitement for the students and something to look forward to at the end of the unit.