

Activities & Games

Simon Says

This game works great as a warm-up activity or a way to take up some time if you finish your planned activities early. After learning the game, it quickly becomes a student favorite. For those who don't know the rules: The ALT/JTE (Simon) gives simple commands like, "Simon says touch your nose." "Simon says stand on one leg." "Jump!" When the ALT/JTE gives a command with "Simon says," the students copy the action. If it is not said, students should not move. When someone makes a mistake, they sit down.

Janken Train

Great as a warm-up, this is a short activity that can be used for a variety of things. Students walk around the classroom while music plays. Stop the music randomly, and the students find a partner nearby and have a conversation. (For example, greeting, how are you?, I'm fine, thank you and you, etc.) Then they play rock-scissors-paper. The loser becomes the train "caboose" and follows the winner, either holding on to the winner's shirt or hands on the shoulders. Keep playing rounds until there's only one long "train." I always let them take a victory lap.

Keyword Game

A fun game to play on days when the students are learning a lot of new vocabulary words. Students match up in pairs and place an eraser between them. From the new words of the day, select a "keyword." Have students put their hands on their heads. Begin by saying new vocabulary words at random, having students repeat each word. When you say the keyword, the students try to grab the eraser.

Missing Game

Also good for days with a lot of new vocabulary words. Place picture cards of the new vocabulary on the board. Give students a few seconds to memorize them. Then have them cover their eyes while you remove one or more of the vocab cards. Have students raise their hands and say which word(s) are missing.

Shinkeisuijaku (Memory)

Make sets of cards with matching pairs. Students place all the cards facedown and take turns trying to find pairs. It's important to remind them to say the vocab word as they flip over each card. Takes prep time (making the card sets), but pretty much all kids know the rules of shinkeisuijaku, so it can be done with minimal instructions.

BINGO

Kids go crazy for any sort of BINGO game. You can make BINGO sheets in advance, or with numbers and letters, you can have them write up BINGO sheets on regular paper.

Janken Evolution

Works especially well if students are working on a simple phrase or dialogue. Make an "evolution chart" in advance, starting with something like a bug, moving up to bigger and cooler animals (Kumamon at the top goes over well). Kids go around the classroom finding partners to practice the dialogue or phrase with. At the end, they rock-scissors-paper. The winner can move up an evolution stage, but the loser stays at their current stage. At the end, go through the evolutions and have students raise their hands for how far they got.

Timebomb

A quick and easy game for practicing number, the alphabet, months, and days of the week. Have students sit in a circle. Set a timer (preferably a loud one) for 20 - 60 seconds, but keep it hidden from the students. Have students pass around a soft ball or similar object as they say the vocabulary in order. When the timer goes off, the counting stops as the bomb "explodes." It's basically hot potato with a countdown. I try to make it less about who gets caught at the time and more about how far they got as a team.

Gesture Chain

Great for any sort of vocabulary that can be gestured like sports or animals. Divide students into small teams. As a team, they come to the front of the class and line up single-file; all facing one way so that all, except the last person, are looking at the next person's back. Show the first student in line a vocabulary card. That student will tap the student in front of him/her, and try to communicate the vocabulary word using only gestures. The second student will gesture to the third, and so on until it reaches the end. The last student will try to guess the original vocab word. If that student doesn't know, move back down the chain giving each student a chance to guess.

Vocabulary Race

With large vocab cards, create a line of about 10 cards either on the blackboard or on the floor. Divide students into two teams and have one team stand at each end of the line of cards. When the game starts, one student from each team begins walking toward the middle, saying each vocabulary word as they go. When the students meet, they rock/scissor/paper. The loser must return to the end of his/her team's line. The winner gets to proceed. The losing team sends the next student in line down the vocab cards. If a student makes it through all vocab cards, they earn point for their team. This game can quickly get out of control as students get excited and noisy, so it takes some active class management by the ALT/HRT.

Karuta & Fruits Basket

Everyone probably knows these by now...