

CLASSROOM ENGLISH GAMES

| Abbreviations | | <i>ES = Elementary School</i> | | <i>JHS = Junior High School</i> | | Highlight in yellow = Great games | |
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| Game | Level | Time | Organisation | Good for | Materials | Description | |
| Super Mega Janken | ES/JHS | 10 to 20 mins | Group/Pairs | Vocabulary | Big Flashcard/Small flash cards | Arrange cards facing backwards on the black board (or place big card on a chair/ or place small cards on the table. One player starts on one end and the other player on the other end. Two players turn over the cards and say the vocabulary word until they meet. When the players meet they do Rock Scissors Paper. The winner continues down the line while the loser goes back to the end of the teams line and the next member starts saying the vocabulary from the start until they meet the winner and play Rock Scissors Paper again. When one team makes it the other team's end, that team wins and you can end the game. Make kids who don't say it properly or audibly start over | |
| Fruit Basket | ES/JHS | 15 to 20 mins | Group/Pairs | Vocabulary/ Answering questions | Small cards | This is one of the best games for ES students and also works well with JH students. Students sit in a circle with one student in the center. There is one less chair than the total number of students. Each student is given a card representing the vocab (usually I limit it to four different words so there aren't too few of each group). The student in the center says a word, and those with the corresponding cards get up and race to switch chairs while the student in the center tries to find a place of their own. Whoever is left standing at the end without a chair moves to the center and calls a new word. If the students says "color basket" (or fruit basket or whatever) then ALL students must stand and switch places. | |

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| Key Word Game | ES | 15 to 25 mins | Group/Pairs | Listening | Small cards | Students pair up, put one eraser between them, and put their hands on their heads. The ALT chooses a "key word" and places that flash card where students can see it. The teacher then goes through the day's vocabulary one word at a time, with the students repeating out loud. When the ALT says the "key word," students try to be the first to grab the eraser. I like to use this game for teaching the months because the words are difficult and need lots of repetition. It obviously doesn't work if you do them in order, so what I do is show the flash card and say the word for a few rounds, then I just say the word without a card, then I just show the card, and finally I say the words in Japanese and have the students repeat them in English. You can also do a "Snake/Mouse" version of this where one student makes a fist (the "mouse") and one has their hand open like a mouth (the "snake") and when the key word is called the "snake" tries to eat/grab the "mouse" for a point while the "mouse" tries to escape for a point. |
| Karuta | ES | 10 to 20 mins | Group/Pairs | Listening/ Vocabulary | Small cards | require you have access to (or make) several sets of small flash cards for the day's vocabulary. Have students get into groups of 4-6 and give each group a deck of vocabulary cards. Have the students make a circle and spread the cards in the middle. The ALT will then call out vocabulary items one at a time and students race to be the first to grab that card. I usually use this for numbers and the alphabet because they have a sufficiently large number of cards to make the game last and because their abstract nature doesn't suit a lot of other games. |
| Flysquatter/Haetataki | ES/JHS 1 | 15 to 25 mins | Group | Listening/ Vocabulary | Flysquatter/Uchiwa (fans) Big Flash cards | This is a scaled up version of karuta. Make 2-4 teams and give the first players each a flyswatter or other soft striking instrument (they can use their hands in a pinch). Put flash cards of the day's vocabulary up on the board, have the students line up at the starting point (I like the back of the classroom if it's not too crowded), then call out one of the words and watch the kids race to be the first to strike the correct card. To make it more interesting, you can have the kids hop on one foot, moonwalk, hop like frogs, etc... I use this for the alphabet lesson. You can even |

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| Oni Tag | ES | 10 to 20 mins | Group/Pairs | Listening/ Vocabulary | None | This game primarily works for colors and classroom objects. The ALT starts as the oni (demon), and says "I like (color or classroom object)." The students then race to touch the color or object chosen. The first person the ALT can tag, before they reach the safety of that color/object, becomes the next oni. If using colors, only allow one student per object. This one is great for special needs and very young students. You can also do it "zombie style" where every kid who gets tagged becomes another zombie until the entire class has become zombified, or the few survivors get stickers. |
| Janken Train | ES | 10 to 20 mins | Pairs | Speaking | No materials | Students move about the classroom finding partners. In each pair they will perform the day's conversation topic, and then play Rock-Scissors-Paper. The loser moves behind the winner and puts his/her hands on the winner's shoulders, forming an ever-lengthening train. Not surprisingly, this often results in one long all-boy train, and one long all-girl train. When there are only two left, have the leaders come to the front while everyone else sits down for the final English demonstration and Rock-Scissors-Paper match with a prize for the winner. |
| Janken card | ES | 10 to 20 mins | Pairs | Speaking | Small cards | Great for self introductions. Make sure they use English. First, teach whatever the grammar is for the day, along with Rock-Scissors-Paper. Then give each student three small cards (I use decks of expired bus cards I buy at the Eco Shop, but play money or any other cards will do). Students wander around the classroom finding partners. With their partner they practice the day's phrase(s) (e.g. a short self-introduction) and then play Rock- Scissors-Paper. The winner gets to take one of the loser's cards. Whoever has the most cards at the end (usually 10-15 minutes) wins! If students run out of cards, I let them come to me and after they perform the day's topic they get one new card. |

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| Evolution/Shinka/ Gokiburi game | ES/JHS 1 | 10 to 20 mins | Pairs | Speaking | No materials | <p>This game makes the kids crazier (i.e. noisier) than anything else I've tried playing. Tell the students at the start of the game that they have all become gokiburi (cockroaches). This captures their interest nicely. During each round of the game, the ALT will play music, ideally something in English the kids know. While the music is playing, the kids do the gesture of whatever creature they are (at first, all cockroaches). When the music stops, kids pair up, practice the day's conversation topic, then play Rock – Scissors - Paper. The winner gets to evolve up to a new creature in the following order: cockroach – frog – monkey – human – God (obviously you can add additional steps or change as you see fit). The loser evolves back down into the previous creature, unless they're already a cockroach (as low as you can go). After each round I check who has become what creature with a show of hands, then we start again. I only let similar creatures pair up – frogs with frogs, humans with humans, etc... except for Gods who can pair with anyone. In addition, a God cannot devolve (i.e. if a God loses at Rock-Scissors-Paper, they remain a God), unless two Gods pair up whereby the loser goes back to being a cockroach. It's a good idea to have something to designate the Gods (e.g. a paper crown or scepter). Inevitably you'll have more Gods than is mathematically possible (e.g. with 40 students, 20 should become frogs, in the next rounds 10 will become monkeys, 5 of the monkeys will become human, and then magically 8 students will become Gods!). I don't know how to avoid this, but as long as they're using English I try not to worry too much about such things.</p> |
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| Bingo Games | ES/JHS | 10 to 20 mins | Group/Pairs | Speaking/Vocabulary | Bingo worksheets | <p>A simple game that works well for vocabulary and speaking practice. To practice numbers up to 75 you can go with standard bingo (cards available at Daiso). For fifth graders learning 1-20, I bring 5x5 blank cards, and let them choose their own numbers, 1-20 for each column. I do the same for sixth graders, except that the "B" column becomes 1-20, the "I" column 21-40, and so on. In another game I have the students fill out 4x4 blanks with numbers they choose from one up to the number of students in the class. Then they use their shusheki bangou or classroom number for their age and ask each other "How old are you?" to try and get bingos. You can also have students fill out their cards with one another's birthdays, then pick students at random to call out their birthday while students check their cards for bingos. Lastly, you can use prefilled bingo cards on most any topic (Google "MES Tools for Educators") and have them get bingos by interviewing classmates (e.g. With food vocabulary bingo cards, students ask each other "What food do you like?" and each answers according to a small vocab card you give them, and they each mark their partner's answer off of their sheets."). Interview bingo also works for junior high school.</p> |
| Hot Potato | ES/JHS | 10 to 20 mins | Group/Pairs | Vocabulary | A "hot potato" (any object you feel comfortable with the students throwing)A music player | <p>Hand out one or two balls to the students, play some music, and while the music is going the students try to pass the ball as quickly as possible. When you stop the music, whoever is holding the balls answers a question or demonstrates the day's topic. With two balls you can have students engage in mini dialogues. e.g. what do you like? I like apples."</p> |

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| Simon Says | ES/JHS | 10 to 20 mins | Group | Warm up, review of body parts | None | You act as "Simon," or you designate one person to act as Simon and the other players must do whatever Simon says, as long as the phrase "Simon says" comes before the command. If Simon does not say "Simon says" before the command, players are not supposed to follow the command. If a player does follow a command without a "Simon Says," that player is out of the game. You can add your own variations to the game. For example "Simon says touch your nose" students would then touch their nose. For higher grades you can add different actions, such as Simon says play baseball, or pick up your pens. |
| Memory Game Mental Breakdown | ES | 10 to 20 mins | Group/Pairs | Vocabulary | Small cards | Have a small set of cards for each group of 4 or 5 students. On one side are matching pairs of vocab pictures which are randomly spread out, face down. Students take turns choosing two cards and saying out loud what the pictures are (in English, ideally – you'll have to constantly police this in every activity you do), whether they match or not. When they do match, the student gets to keep them and try again. Student with the most cards at the end wins. This works well for alphabet practice; I do it so that the upper and lower case of the same letter count as a pair. Make sure the kids don't shuffle the cards each round (they'll try... completely defeating the point of Memory Game... I have no idea why) or the game will last forever. |
| Number Golf | ES/JHS | 5 to 10 mins | Group | Warm up, review numbers | Golf ball made of cardboard | Draw a golf club and a green and a golf course hole. Assign the class into four teams giving them a different colour ball for each team. colored "golf ball" (a small laminated paper cutout of a golf ball with a magnet on the back). We jan ken to see which team goes first, I think up a number from 1-20 for fifth graders or 1-100 for sixth graders, then they take turns trying to guess my number. As they guess, move the golf balls accordingly. For example, if my number is 10 and they guess 20, move the ball way past the hole. When they guess correctly put the ball in the hole. Same game can be used with letters, months, or any naturally ordered set of words. |

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| Go Fish | ES | 10 to 20 mins | Group | Speaking | Matching cards | <p>Another classic card game. Give each group of 4-5 students a deck of cards (standard decks will work, or any custom deck with distinct sets of four similar cards). The point is to make sets of four cards by asking other players for them. Each player is dealt five cards and the remainder are spread out to form the "pond." Each player in turn asks the player to their left for the cards they are seeking (e.g. "Do you have any 4's?"). A player can only ask for a card they are already holding themselves. If the player asked has the desired card, he must surrender them all to the asker ("Here you go!"). The asker can then make a request of the next player to the left and so on. However, if a player does not have the card requested, he responds "Go fish!" and the asker has to take a card from the "pool." If the card was the one originally asked for, the player can continue but otherwise their turn ends and play moves to the left. This works well for practicing the "do you have" grammar topic, but can be modified for others, for example "I like ~~,," or "I want ~~,," or for younger students, simply "~~ please!" When a player gets a set of four cards (a "book") they can lay it down in front of them and it's no longer up for grabs. Whoever gets the most "books" by the time the pond runs out wins.</p> |
| Pictionary | ES | 10 to 20 mins | Group/Pairs | Vocabulary Speaking | No materials | <p>Make 3-4 teams, take the current round's draw-ers from each team out into the hall and give each a different vocabulary word. They come back in and draw until a teammate raises their hand to answer. The first team to answer gets 3 points, the next 2, the third and fourth each get 1 (if they know they'll get zero points they might just give up). You can also set a time limit (somewhere around 10-20 seconds for each round) then have their teammates guess. Like so many vocab games, you can add sentences/grammar (e.g. the draw-er asks, "What's this?" and the teammate answers "It's a ~~~").</p> |

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| Gesture Games | ES | 10 to 20 mins | Group | Emotions/Sports | Small cards | After learning appropriate vocabulary (emotions, sports, jobs, actions, etc...) the ALT performs a gesture and students race to guess what it is; often you will do the first gesture, and whoever guesses it then performs the next gesture and so on. You can also make teams, have them line up, spread out small vocab cards face down in front of each team, and have them come up one at a time, take a card, and act it out until the next teammate in line guesses it correctly. At that point the gesturer goes to the back of the line, and the guesser becomes the new gesturer. Play continues until a team has gone through all the cards. You can also do a gesture denson game where students race to pass a message/vocab word up the row using only gestures. You can also play according to the Pictionary format described above, substituting gestures for drawings. |
| Guess Who | ES/JHS | 10 to 20 mins | Group | Speaking | Character cards | For this game you first hang a multitude of pictures of characters and celebrities the kids know on the board (AKB, Obama, Pikachu, etc...). Then use the day's grammar/ vocabulary to describe one of them and have the students race to identify the character (for example, in the clothing chapter, "I have black pants and a red tie"). I've had good success with a keisatsu (police) variation on this where a player from each team gets a laminated set of prison bars to place over the character/criminal I described (kind of a cross between Guess Who and Flyswatter Game). |
| Quick Draw | ES | 10 to 20 mins | Pairs | Vocabulary | Small cards | This is a very fast and simple game. Each student receives three cards. Students find a partner, then count to three and show one of their cards. The first one to call out his/her opponent's vocabulary word gets to take the card. |
| Old Maid/Babanuki | ES | 10 to 20 mins | Group | Speaking | Small cards | In this game each student receives two vocabulary cards, two cards in the whole class having been specially marked as the "old maid" cards. Students find partners and perform a dialogue based on their two cards (e.g. for food vocab, "I like hamburgers and pizza" if those are the cards held). They then each take one of the other's cards without looking. When the preset time is up, the two kids with the "old maid" cards must come to the front and perform the dialogue for the class, and then receive a small reward for their effort. |

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| Castle Game/Build and Destroy | ES/JHS | 10 to 20 mins | Group/Pairs | Review game | Castle parts | <p>Another great review game, as it can easily take up a whole class period, can be used for about anything, and makes the kids (ES and JHS) completely nutty. However, it does require a vivid imagination and a humorous lack of drawing ability! Or you can make castle parts if you prefer. Start each team with a small, basic structure drawn on the board to serve as their "castle." Draw the castle into four or more parts. Have one player at a time from each team race to answer your questions. If they get the answer right, they get to choose either "Build" or "Destroy". "Build" allows them to make one additional part to their own castle. "Destroy" allows them to tear down one part of an opponent's castle (note: if a team's castle has been completely obliterated, they have no choice but to build). It often ends one of two ways: either everything gets destroyed and the board is left blank, or all the teams unite to build one castle as big as possible. To spice it up, have a dice and what ever number a team rolls that team destroys or builds that many parts. Also prepare about a thirty-step drawing in advance. (e.g. moats with alligators, witches huts, blacksmiths, dragons, wizards, and battle scenes.) If you get tired of castles, pirate ships work well too (especially if you can draw OnePiece anything), and a deserted island might do as well. Use your imagination!</p> |
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| Typhoon Game | ES/JHS | 30 to 50 mins | Group/Pairs | Review questions | Typhoon point cards | Great review game to review a semester's English. Assign the class into four to six teams. Draw a grid on the board with numbers going vertically and letters going horizontally. On a paper you hold, which students cannot see, there will be a copy of the grid with some squares marked as "typhoons" and some as points. Students, in teams, have a chance to answer a question. If they answer correctly, they receive 1 point and can choose a square on the grid. If the square they choose is a point, they receive an additional point. If it is a typhoon, they can send the typhoon to wipe out one of the opposing teams' points. To make it more fun add tornado squares (which wipe out the points of the team that chose it), volcano squares (which wipe out everyone's points), and double point squares can be added. Also making point cards out of thick paper adds to the surprise element of the game. |
| Shiritori | JHS | 10 to 20 mins | Group/Pairs | Vocabulary | None | Works well if you split the class into two to four teams. |
| Listening Pyramids | JHS | 10 to 15 mins | Group/Pairs | Vocabulary | Worksheets | Practice pronouncing difficult words after the activity |
| Hangman | JHS | 10 to 15 mins | Group | Vocabulary, Spelling | None | A Classic Game! Works well for JHS students; they love the challenge and will get very competitive about it. A little challenging with ES students but could work for higher level classes. Think of a word, preferably from vocabulary word from the text book. On the board make lines for the amount of letters in the word. Have students guess letters and if they guess a letter not in the word draw a part of the stickman. If you draw the entire stick man they lose. If you think hang man is too violent you could draw a man with a parachute. Erase a line from the parachute for every |

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| Criss Cross | JHS | 10 to 15 mins | Group | Review vocabulary, answering questions (speaking and listening) | None | Pick a row of students to stand up. Starting with a vertical line is recommended because most students can easily see what their classmates are doing and can understand what they must do if they didn't catch the explanation of the rules before. Students must volunteer to answer a question and answer correctly in order to sit down. When there is only one student left standing, the intersecting row that student is in must stand up and volunteer to answer questions, then answer correctly, before they can sit down again. Ask any question. Students raise their hand to answer. Alternate between horizontal and vertical rows each time so that the last student standing from each row is still included in the next row that stands up. |
| Musical Letter | JHS | 10 to 15 mins | Group | Warm up/Listening speaking | Letter sized paper with a passage from the English textbook written on the letter. CD player with music of your choice | Have students stand up. Play your favorite music and have the students pass a letter around. When you stop the music the student holding the letter has to read it aloud to the entire class. This works as a good warm up activity, gets the students excited and energized for the lesson |
| Time Bomb | JHS | 10 to 15 mins | Group/Pairs | Vocabulary | None but can be used as a worksheet if played in pairs | Split the class into small groups of 4 to 5 students. In their groups have them say numbers 1-13 in sequence. Students can choose the numbers 1 2 or 3. For example if one student chooses three they have to say "4", the next student chooses one they say "5" and so on until someone reaches 13. ifThe student that has to say the number 13 is kicked out. Keep going until there is only 1 winner left in each group. For example 1, 3, 2, 3, 2, 1, the next person would be eliminated! |
| White out | JHS | 10 to 15 mins | Group/Pairs | Listening | CD player and CD with popular songs | Students listen to music from their favourite songs and find the missing word (verb). You can make it like mad libs You can also can up the songs verses and let the students work out the order by listening |

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| Partner Search | JHS | 10 to 15 mins | Group/Pairs | Questioning | Small Cards | Students search for another student under a certain set of conditions. When they find their match, they can sit down. For example a student has "I can fly" card and another student has the same card. One student has to ask "Can you fly?". Since the student has the same card they say "Yes, I can". If a student doesn't have the same card then the student answers "No, I can't". |
| Beach Ball Q&A | JHS | 10 mins | Group | Review grammar, vocabulary | As many beach volleyballs as you have groups A music player | Students are divided into groups and given a beach ball with questions corresponding to their level written on them (What is your favorite ice-cream? etc). When the music plays, students begin to toss the ball around their group. When the music stops, the student holding the ball must read and answer the question <u>their right thumb is covering</u> |
| Jeopardy | JHS | 30min to 50mins | Group | Review | Beach Ball | <p>Divide the class into five to six groups then draw a grid on the board e.g. 5 x 5 and write the topics above every column (prepositions, articles, math problems, etc). Then, write numbers from "100 to 500" in the boxes directly under each topic, the point value increases as you go downward.</p> <p>One student from each group stands up and plays Janken. The winner is the team that starts the game. The team can choose a topic AND point value. Any team can answer</p> <p>The team can discuss the answer but the team member standing is the one who must raise their hand to answer it.</p> <p>The team that correctly answers the question receives the allotted points and chooses the next topic/point value.</p> <p>To make it more fun include the Daily Double and Minus positions, so if a team makes a mistake they loses that amount of points or choose to take off points from another team.</p> |

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| Battleship | JHS | 30 to 50 mins | Pairs | Vocabulary/ Grammar | Battleship board worksheets A lot of patience for explaining the rules | <p>Create a Battleship board with subjects/personal pronouns (I, you, he, Kumamon, etc) down the vertical side and predicates (eat 1000 pizzas everyday; be friends with Lady Gaga; etc) across the horizontal side. It's recommended to have at least a 5x5 game board (25 squares total). Students should draw their "boats" (using the Japanese word for a game piece, 「コマ」 [koma], would probably be easier for the students to understand) anywhere within the squares of the board game. They have two vertical pieces (one 2-square length and one 3-square length) and three horizontal pieces (one 4-square, one 3-square, and one 2-square length).</p> <p>The students should then try to find out where their partners' boats/pieces/koma are by picking a square on the board and making a sentence using the subject and predicate corresponding to that square. Depending on what grammar you're trying to review, students should conjugate the verbs so that they match the subject (From my examples above, the "Kumamon" subject and "be friends with Superman" predicate would be read as "Kumamon is friends with Superman").</p> |
| Sleeping sentence | JHS | 10 to 20 mins | Groups | Grammar | None | <p>Divide the class into four to six teams so in a class all students in a vertical line are one team. Make all students fall a sleep then make the students in the first row wake up (or assign each student a number, so number 1's stand up). Show the students one word then tell them go back to sleep and the next row of students wake up and show them one word and so on until all students know one word. Then all students wake up and discuss with each other to make a sentence. First team to work out the sentence wins.</p> |