

Ideas for Screen-Free Activities in the Classroom



The use of screens for student instruction has many benefits, but a balance of screen-free activities is also important. Opt for screen-free activities for unstructured time, in substitute teacher plans, or for a special celebration.

Writing & Reading Activities

- **Create a card.** Give students time to make a card for someone special in their lives. This can incorporate drawing and coloring and writing.
- **Tell a descriptive story about a picture.** Ask students to find an image from the classroom (from a book, poster, etc.) and describe it in as much detail as possible using sensory adjectives. Next, have them write a story about what is happening in the photo.
- **Play a game of Snowman.** A new twist on the game of hangman. Each time students guess an incorrect letter, a new piece of the snowman is added.
- **Read a story.** Everyone loves a good story, and you may be surprised at how attentive middle-grade students can be when listening to a book.
- **Write a letter to a local, national, or world leader.** Have students write a letter to an elected official or leader and persuade them to take action. The letter can be imaginary or something the students will actually send.
- **Write a thank-you note.** Studies continue to explore the benefits of practicing gratitude, which include lower stress levels, increased happiness, and better sleep. Have students write down three things in their lives they are grateful for and then choose from the list to compose a thank-you note to a person in their lives who made it possible.
- **Write in journals.** Ask students to write a short passage about the day- it can include any good news or challenges they face. The goal is simple — get them thinking about and practicing how to put those thoughts on paper.

Movement Activities

- **Dance it out.** Research from leading universities has shown dancing has beneficial effects on the brain. It even stimulates reward centers, improves memory, and strengthens neural connections!
- **Do a little mirroring.** Mirroring is a way to focus and develop concentration skills. Students stand facing each other and pretend they're looking in the mirror. Tell them to move slowly. The goal is to copy each other's movements precisely. Allow one student to lead first, and then the other. Then, challenge them to mirror each other without one specified leader.
- **Practice yoga.** You might think of it as an adult pastime, but yoga is perfectly suited for students, too. It enhances their strength, balance, and coordination, and it promotes awareness.
- **Strike a pose.** Play a song and tell students to freeze and strike a pose when the music stops. Use a variety of tempos and musical styles to mix up the fun.



Games & Mindful Activities

- **Conduct an interview.** Pair students up and give them an opportunity to interview one another for three or four minutes. You might give them a specific topic to discuss — a hobby, pet, or a family member. Then, go around the room and have the interviewers report on their subjects to the class.
- **Color.** While you may think an activity like this is appropriate for only younger students, coloring can be a relaxing and meditative activity for all ages.
- **Create crossword puzzles.** Using graph paper have high school students create a crossword puzzle for their classmates using words from the chapter they're studying.
- **Hold an open question session.** Sometimes, students just need an open forum to ask questions during a particularly complex lesson. Before jumping in and answering, open each student's question to the class and guide and refine their answers as needed.
- **Play Telephone.** In this classic game, players whisper a message from student to student. Telephone teaches students about the importance of listening closely.
- **Play 20 Questions.** This guessing game helps students learn how to use reason and logic. Choose one student who knows the answer — a person, place, or thing that the other students will try to guess. Bonus learning opportunity- incorporate content from class material.
- **Play Would You Rather.** Simply ask, "Would you rather..." questions, such as, "Would you rather be turned into a giant bunny rabbit or a miniature giraffe?" or "Would you rather sneeze 75 times every single day or always have to wear flip-flops everywhere you go?"
- **Practice mindfulness.** Lead your students in a mindfulness activity. Mindfulness has been shown to mitigate bullying, help students with ADHD focus, and improve overall social skills. In the classroom, mindfulness can be as simple as breathing exercises.
- **Tell or write a communal story.** Ask students to generate a story that begins with "once upon a time" and incorporates a list of concepts or words you select from class material.