

THE TOP 20 TOYS FOR TERRIFIC TEACHING

#1: Dice



Description/Cost: Begin your collection with basic, regular dice. These are available cheaply from Wal-Mart (or for an even better deal... try the "dollar" stores!). You can then add "specialty" dice to your arsenal. There are big, foam dice that you can buy at teaching stores. There are dice with more than the traditional six sides (you can find these at most game or hobby stores--imagine having dice with 8 sides, 12 sides, 20 sides--your students will go wild!).



Activity Idea: I use dice for a lot of work with learning numbers. You can begin by partners rolling one die and stating the number in the target language. The next person rolls the die again and adds this number to the previous one, etc. If your students only know how to count up to a certain number, tell them to start subtracting numbers once they reach the peak number.

Activity Idea: I also use dice for conjugation drills. Have students work with one die. Whatever verb you are working with, use the rolls of the die to determine which of the conjugations to give. To expand this activity, if you are working with multiple verbs, add another die. One die determines the subject pronoun to be used, the second die rolled determines the verb. If you really want to make it complex for upper-level students, add a third die and make that determine the verb tense!



Activity Idea: Sometimes I use dice to have fun with extra credit for tests. When a student completes a quiz, he or she comes to my desk with the completed quiz and rolls one die. If a 1 or 2 is rolled, they receive 1 point extra credit on the test. If a 3 or 4 is rolled, they receive 2 points extra credit, and if a 5 or 6 is rolled, they get 3 points extra credit. I would recommend you not do this during the test, otherwise students will want to watch others rolling dice and will not work on their own tests.



Activity Idea: Make your own dice and place words over the sides. For example, you could put six different verbs on the sides of these dice. Whatever a student rolls, he or she must invent a sentence that correctly uses the verb. If you are working with upper-level classes, tell them all sentences must be in the past tense (and depending on what the verbs are, you could force them to use different past tenses).

Activity Idea: There are also mathematical dice available. Have students state complete math problems by using "plus," "minus," "times," "divided by," and "equals" with their numbers!

Other Ideas: _____

#2: Timers

Description/Cost: You can use any type of timer, but I recommend going to Radio Shack and purchasing a “count down/count up” timer with a beeper. The example shown costs about \$10. This obviously can be used for any activity that needs to be timed.



Activity Idea: Use a timed warm-up each day. Give students a specific, limited task and a definite time limit. This will let students know that the task has a specific beginning and ending. For example, if you are working with a specific verb, tell students to invent as many sentences as possible in two minutes correctly conjugating this verb.

Activity Idea: Another useful pattern to establish is just the open-ended timed speaking. You could tell students to speak in the language with a partner for two minutes. No English is allowed! Since the timer has a beeper when time is up, the teacher can circulate to listen and help students (or can also be that time when a teacher records attendance and/or takes care of all those other miscellaneous tasks).

Activity Idea: Any time you need to time a competition, this works great! Sometimes I have done “Indoor Scavenger Hunts” where I have a list of items that students are looking for (example – clothing items). I have a sheet of poster board in front of the class for each team. I give them 15 minutes to find as many of the clothing items that I have listed on their handouts as possible. When they find the item, they race up to the board and tape it to the poster, writing the correct vocabulary (and spelling) beside it. I verify their items as they are still racing.

Other Ideas: _____

#3: Ink Stamps

Description/Cost: You can find rubber stamps in your target language from Teacher’s Discovery (usually costing around \$7 each). You can also find them at various stamping and scrapbooking stores.

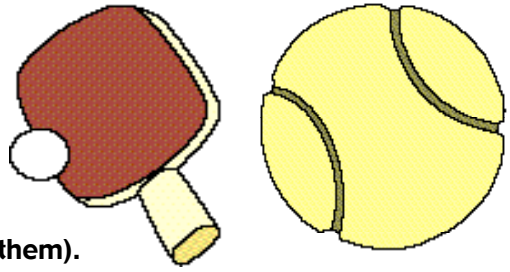
Activity Idea: Use these to stamp assignments or quizzes that you return to students. It’s cheaper than using stickers (which high schoolers still love).

Activity Idea: I also use a “passport” program in my classes. I make up a mock passport in the target language with the inside containing 6–10 bubbles (circles). Any time a student gets an A grade on a quiz or test, I stamp their passport with one of my stamps. When they have filled their passports, they may turn it in for a free homework assignment (or extra-credit points if they do all their assignments).

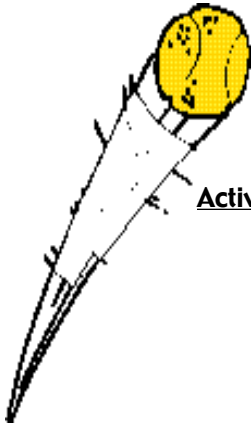
Other Ideas: _____

#4: Ping Pong Balls / Tennis Balls

Description/Cost: All of these are available at Wal-Mart, Target, K-Mart, etc. You can buy traditional ping pong balls (but also look for them in various colors and designs). If you know any tennis player, ask him or her for the used balls (we go through a lot of them).



Activity Idea: I like to use tennis balls early in the year for an excuse to go outside to work on numbers. Divide your students so they are standing in a circle (or sitting if you prefer). One student says a number in the target language and then bounces or rolls the ball across the circle to another student. Before the student catches or picks up the ball, he or she must say the next highest number. That student then picks any other random number and repeats the process. This forces students to listen to each other and know their numbers.



Activity Idea: I also like to take old tennis balls and write vocabulary or verbs on the balls. I then have students form a big circle (inside or outside). We place all the tennis balls on the ground/floor in the middle of the circle. I usually have subject pronouns on one set of colored balls and verbs on another. When I say *go!*, students race to the center and grab any ball they can. They must then find another person to partner up with who has the opposite color ball. The two of them must make a complete sentence (with more than just their pronoun and conjugated verb). They then race to me to see if their sentence is correct.

Other Ideas: _____

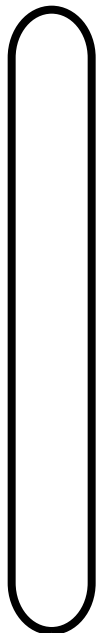
#5: Popsicle Sticks

Description/Cost: Buy a box of wide “craft” sticks at Hobby Lobby or Wal-Mart (in the craft section). A box of 500 will cost about \$3.00 to \$5.00.

Activity Idea: I use these at the beginning of the school year. After the first couple of days, students write their names on a stick. On the reverse side, they write their new “target language” name. I then use these to help me memorize names (and also get to know them by their French names). Keep each class set of popsicle sticks together (use a rubber band). When you are having a day where you need to pick on students to respond in class (and they seem to not be volunteering much), grab the popsicle sticks and use them to choose students at random.

Activity Idea: I also use popsicle stickstiks as a way to hang items and displays from my classroom ceiling. I use fishing string (invisible) to attach posters and signs. I then wrap the fishing string around a popsicle stick and just “wedge” it in the dividing strips that criss-cross my ceiling. You don’t have to worry about tape or damaging your walls this way, and with a slight tug, everything comes down.

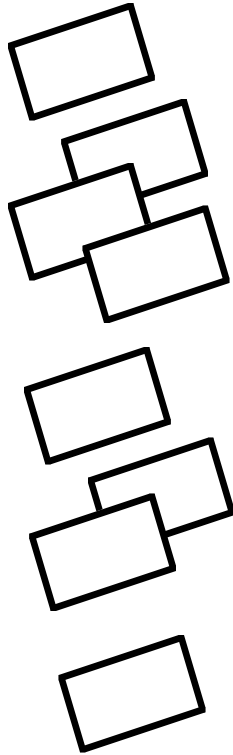
Other Ideas: _____



#6: Sacks

Description/Cost: These are cheap! You can buy a whole package of paper lunch bags for a couple of dollars!

Activity Idea: A game you can play with flashcards is called "Zut!" ("¡Ay!"). For each small group in your class, prepare a paper bag. Inside each bag, photocopy a set of vocabulary cards in English or in the target language. Also inside each bag, put two or three cards that say "Zut!" in big letters.



Students take turns drawing one item from each bag (they can play as individuals or form partners or teams). They must correctly give the opposite language of the vocabulary on the card (if the word on the card is in English, they have to give the target language, and vice versa). The other students will be the judge of whether the vocabulary is correct. If any groups are unsure of a vocabulary word, they can raise their hands and have the teacher act as the final judge. If a student (or team) gets a correct vocabulary word, one point is scored (record it on a sheet of paper). That student must then decide whether he or she wants to continue. A student or team can continue to draw out flashcards and score points as long as the answers are correct. Any time the student gives an incorrect answer, he or she loses all accumulated points, and his or her turn is over. If a student decides to "bank" his or her points, the turn is done, but that student forever keeps those points. The trick is probably to do one or two and "bank" the points in small amounts.

The other aspect of the game involves the "Zut!" cards that you've put in the bag with the vocabulary flashcards. If a student draws a "Zut!" card, his or her turn is automatically finished and he/she loses all current points. At the end of any turn, a student must return all the cards to the bags for the next player(s).

Other Ideas: _____

#7: Fun Scissors



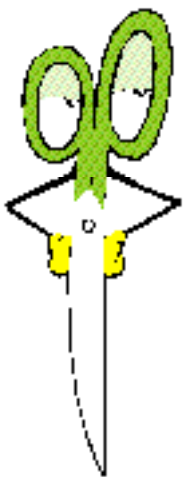
Description/Cost: I bought a collection of weird scissors at Sam's Club for around \$12. You can also buy these at Wal-Mart (cheap) or go to a scrapbooking store (pricey).

Activity Idea: I specifically bought these scissors as a "treat" for my students for when we made Valentines in the target language. I had gathered construction paper, but my students went nuts when they saw how many different patterns they could cut with all these scissors!



Activity Idea: When I have had students make posters for projects on regions of France, they used these scissors to really jazz up their posters. Some students' mothers already had these at home, but my other students were glad to have these as a resource.

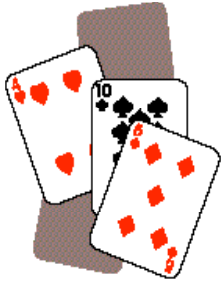
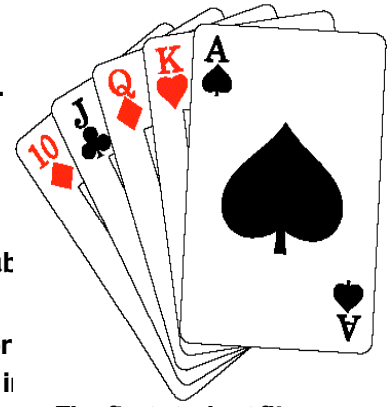
Other Ideas: _____



#8: Playing Cards

Description/Cost: Purchase several standard decks of playing cards.

Another option is to purchase playing cards from your target culture(s). What students usually recognize as “K” for king, “Q” for queen, “J” for jack, and “A” for an ace are usually different in other languages. I also love to have a giant deck of cards to use for various activities (these are usually available at stores like Spencer Gifts). These are very cheap.



Activity Idea: One idea for playing cards usually involves working with numbers.

Once students have learned their numbers in the target language, for a warm-up, have students work in groups. The first student flips over a card and says the number in the target language. The next student flips over a card and adds that to the first card. Students continue flipping cards and giving the running total. A variation of this is that the teacher can, from time to time, give a signal to the class. At this point, students start subtracting cards and giving totals.

Activity Idea: This is also an easy way to divide students into partners or small groups for any activity. Determine how many students you have in a class. If you want partners, just put two of each card in a stack (or if you want triads or quads, use three or four). Have each student draw a card from the deck and then they can find their partner (which forces them to work in various groups). From time to time, I also will have students take a “partner quiz” (which cuts down on grading time). This can quickly determine partners.



Other Ideas: _____

#9: Stuffed Mascots



Description/Cost: I usually buy some cheap “touristy” type souvenirs while I am on trips with students. I love to get cheesy Eiffel Towers that look like stuffed animals. You can also buy various objects to designate as your class “mascot.”



Activity Idea: Use these mascots for various speaking activities in class. Have your students give your mascot a name. This gives you an example to use to build class unity. I would suggest a separate mascot for each class section. Students will take pride and ownership of their mascot. Many of my students have then taken their mascot with them to France! They all wanted to get pictures of “Georges Curieux” at the top of the Eiffel Tower or on the beach at the Riviera.

Activity Idea: In your upper-level classes, use your mascot for an opportunity for creative writing projects. When studying a new verb tense, have students write an adventure. You could even work on a continuing story as a class project. By the end of the year, your students will have a complete story.

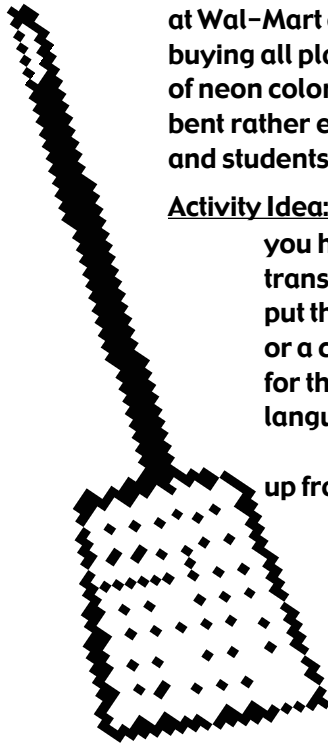
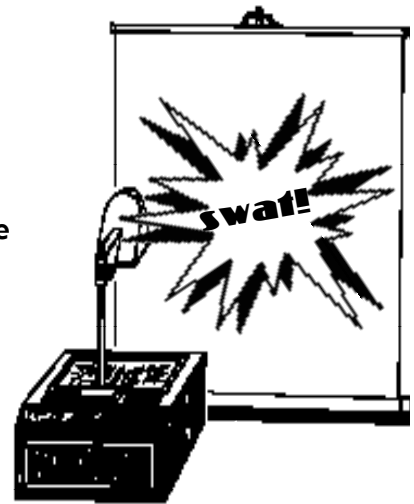
Other Ideas: _____

#10: Fly Swatters

Description/Cost: You can buy a few flyswatters very cheaply at Wal-Mart or even at Menards. I would recommend buying all plastic fly swatters (I found a bunch in a variety of neon colors). The fly swatters with the wire handles get bent rather easily because this game ("Swat") is very active and students get really excited.

Activity Idea: Put the names of all the vocabulary items that you have studied in a unit on individual pieces of transparency film (you can decide if you want to put the target language or the English on the slips, or a combination of both). You can also use clip-art for this if you are going to give the item in the target language). Place all these small slips on your overhead projector.

Divide the class into two teams. Ask each team to send one of its members up front and then give that person a flyswatter. These two people face away from the overhead screen. The teacher will then turn on the projector so that the rest of the class can see the vocabulary items and their locations on the screen. The teacher then says aloud a vocabulary item (in the opposite language of what is displayed on screen); the two students then turn around and with their flyswatters, try to be the first to "swat" the name of the correct vocabulary used in your prompt. The winner gets 1 point for his or her team. As teams send up their next members, turn your overhead off and scramble the vocabulary slips so that students don't just memorize where they are on the screen. Students love playing with flyswatters!



Other Ideas: _____

#11: Clocks/Time Props

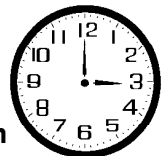
Description/Cost: This may seem like an obvious toy for teaching time, but there may be some options that you are not aware of.

Activity Idea: You can purchase a set of mini-clocks from Teacher's Discovery for about \$1.00 apiece. Call out a time in the target language and have your students set their clocks to that time and hold them up for you to check on learning. You can also go to a teaching store and find sets of classroom clocks.

Activity Idea: Time bingo games are available. I have had students fill out their own clocks on a worksheet for bingo. I bought a pre-fab time bingo kit for about \$10.00. It comes with two rows of four clocks (this works much better for time management than a 5x5 grid of 24 clocks and one free space).

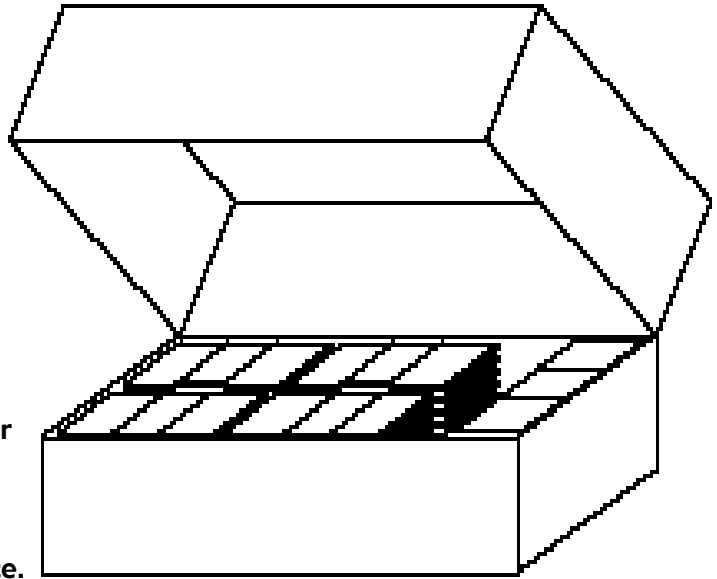
Activity Idea: Buy clock dice! My students love these! You can buy a set of four dice for about \$7.00. One die has times on the hour, the other die has times in 15 minute intervals.

Other Ideas: _____



#12: Cash box / Currency

Description/Cost: A classroom set of euros is available from Teacher's Discovery. A set of 500 bills in various denominations costs \$19.95, and set of euro classroom coins is \$24.95. A cash box is available cheaply at Wal-Mart (there are various sizes with various features; I spent about \$19 on mine). I love the cash box! I used to just keep the bills in rubber bands; this is so much more convenient, and I can get out the bills at any time and have an instant "cash register" for skits and practice.

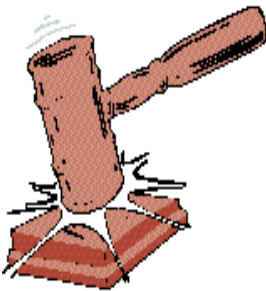


Activity Idea: There are tons of skit ideas that involve paying for products. You could use these for restaurant and cafe skits, shopping for clothing skits, bartering at a flea market skit, etc.

Activity Idea: This is also a great way to work on numbers and listening skills. Sometimes I set up shop with items around my classroom. Students select various items and bring them to my check-out stand. I usually take this opportunity to speak at a normal speed so it forces them to listen to prices. When I make change, sometimes I will deliberately make a mistake to see if they will count the money, and to know whether they can explain the situation in the target language.



Activity Idea: Many teachers try an auction in their classrooms. Each member of your class will bring one item to put up for auction. These can be creative homemade items (a dozen cookies?) or inexpensive store-bought prizes (a bag of chips, a Slinky, free movie pass, etc.). The teacher will also provide "mystery" items for the auction (sealed inside paper bags). On the day of the auction, each student will auction off his or her item to the class. The teacher will distribute fake Euro notes with which other students can bid. Start the bidding and bid in increments of ten and one hundred. Students will begin each bid with the phrase "I will give you..." in the target language. The auctioneer will repeat the value of each bid as it is called. Once the highest price is reached, yell "going, going, gone" in the target language. The student will immediately pay the teacher with the euros and the auction will then continue. Each student will orally participate, but you could have them keep a written log of all purchases. A variation of this is to have students earn fake euros throughout a whole chapter or quarter. Sometimes I design a fake euro with my face in the middle and the name of my high school in the borders. They can earn these euros by speaking in the target language to the teacher outside of class; having perfect homework, quiz scores, or attendance; great improvement, etc. The students then save this fake money for an auction. Again, they provide a lot of the items, but I also have some big-ticket items, like t-shirts or cool souvenir stuff I bought on a trip to France.



Other Ideas: _____

#13: Game Show Buzzers

Description/Cost: This great device, called “Eggspert,” is available from Teacher’s Discovery for \$49.95 (yes, it’s a bit pricey, but well worth the investment if you have some money available in your world language department). This is a major purchase, so you could buy one as a department and share it with all the teachers. This allows students to “ring in” answers like on a game show competition for activities in your classroom. There are six flashing and beeping “eggs” that are connected by 10 foot cords. It comes with an AC adaptor or can be run on batteries.



Activity Idea: Use this for fun review sessions in your classroom. I have never seen students get so excited than when they get to use *les oeufs* (the eggs) in my classroom). This also solves the problem for you of who to call upon and who actually “rang in” first. Use this with vocabulary review, grammar review, etc. I recommend that the students make the review questions as well (which will save you a lot of prep time and you can reuse them again and again).

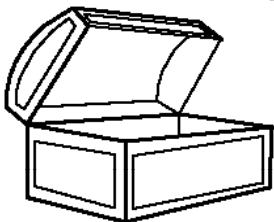
Activity Idea: You can reverse the action on this and use the “Spin Cycle” where it randomly selects an egg and the student or team with that button for that light has to answer.

Other Ideas: _____

#14: Costume Trunk

Description/Cost: This can be as expensive or cheap as you want it to be. I recommend buying a cheap footlocker at Wal-Mart (especially in the fall after college has begun and they put them on clearance). Begin your collection of wigs, capes, weird clothes, aprons, berets, fake glasses, make-up, ties, dresses, and anything you can think of.

Activity Idea: Any time your students do skits, they will love playing “dress up” with your costume trunk. You would swear that high schoolers love it as much as little kids! I usually raid Wal-Mart right after Halloween because they discount all their weird wigs and clothes. You can also raid the local Goodwill store; sometimes they will just give you things if you tell them you are a teacher! Another great source of fun clothes is to ask the drama teacher for old costumes.



Other Ideas: _____

#15: Balloons

Description/Cost: Cheap and available anywhere!



Activity Idea: Students love balloons! An activity that I do in the first week of school with my French classes with balloons is kissing lessons! That’s right...kissing balloons! After we talk about how to greet people properly in Europe, students always bring up the concept of all that kissing on the cheek. I tell them that we need to practice (which really gets them in a giggly mood). I then introduce them to my balloon “friend” (a balloon upon which I have drawn a face with markers). I then give each one of them a balloon and let them decorate their own French balloon friends. We then have kissing lessons with the balloons. Then, students take their new friends around to other students; the actual students shake hands with each other, but when they are introduced to the balloon friend, they do the cheek kissing. It’s a blast and my students love it. You will have to decide whether you are going to let your students take their balloon friends out of your classroom (hopefully they won’t cause too much of a disturbance around school...but it is a fun way of publicizing your class).



Activity Idea: Many teachers have their students play indoor volleyball with balloons. Find a really large balloon and blow it up. Use a string to act as a net in your classroom. One side of the class hits it to the other side, who must say a vocabulary word before anyone touches the balloon (if they don’t, that team has to eliminate one of its members before continuing). Some teachers play with no net and just tell the students to bat the balloon in the air, but before it comes down, the student must give a vocab word being studied (for example, if you are studying foods, tell the students to give a food in the target language; that food cannot be used again by another student...this forces students to think quickly and brainstorm as much vocabulary in a given topic area as possible!).



Other Ideas: _____

#16: Lights

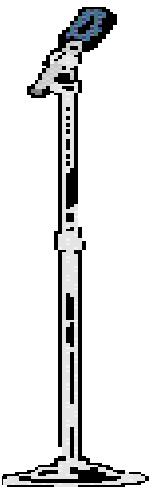


Description/Cost: Rope lights are available at most discount stores and come in a variety of colors. You can also buy strobe lights fairly cheaply, and you can borrow drama lights for your classroom as well. I wait until rope lights go on sale after holidays.

Activity Idea: Use rope lights to surround your bulletin boards. When you plug the lights in, it almost looks like a game show to highlight that special area. I will also use the rope lights to weave in and out of displays that I have in my room. Students’ attention is drawn there immediately.



Activity Idea: I have also borrowed portable lights from the drama department for special performance days in my classroom. I have staged “night clubs” with lights, special music, and even a microphone for our singers, poets, and performers for acts prepared to highlight the target culture.

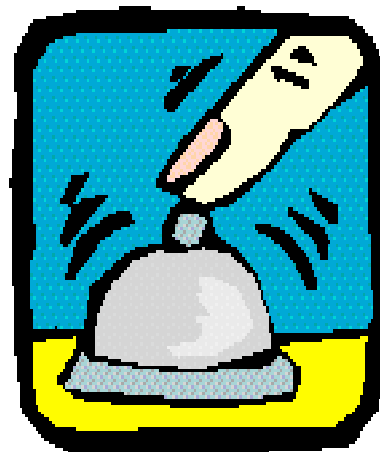


Other Ideas: _____

#17: Bells, Horns, and Whistles

Description/Cost: A cheap classroom bell ringer can be purchased at Wal-Mart for around \$3.00. A cheap bike horn can best be found in the bicycle accessories section at a discount store, and any sort of goofy whistle can be found in the party section (or at a music store if you want a better quality one).

Activity Idea: Mainly I use a bell or horn (or occasionally a whistle) to get students back on track after partner or group work. Instead of trying to raise my voice above all of theirs, one ring of the bell or one toot of the horn does the trick (I admit it sounds a little Pavlovian, but it works).



Activity Idea: If you can't afford an expensive piece of equipment like "Eggsperter," the electronic ring-in game, you can always have relays or vocab games where students have to be the first to ring in with an answer using bells. The race element adds a bit of fun if they have to be the first to slam their hand on the bell. You could use a variety of bells for each team so you can better tell the difference (you could probably even borrow a cow bell from the band instructor).

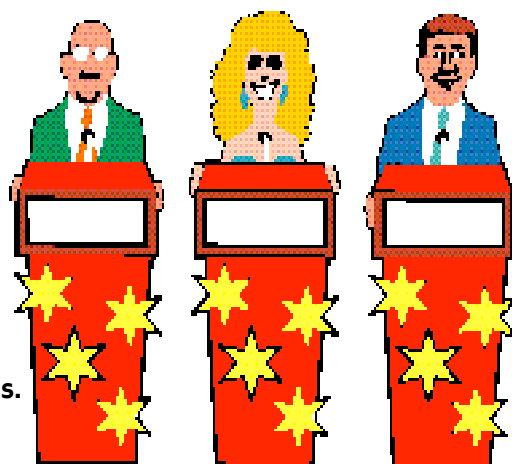


Other Ideas: _____

#18: Game boards

Description/Cost: The cost of these is minimal if you make them yourself from foam board or if you use solid wood backing (just ask nicely at Home Depot or Menards to have them cut for you). You could also laminate these for extra durability.

Activity Idea: Make your own version of Jeopardy, Family Feud, or "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?". You can even transform other/more recent game shows into boards. If you don't have the ability or equipment, how about giving the idea to your students as an extra-credit project? You'll probably get a dad with a complete workshop to do everything you could ever want and more. Plus, students know that they'll get to play games and have fun in class as a result.



Activity Idea: You can even take popular board games and convert them into classroom activities! I love playing "Guess Who?" with students when we have learned rooms of the house and possessive adjectives. Outburst is a great game too (and one of my products still marketed with Teacher's Discovery). You can make your version of Monopoly or Trivial Pursuit to use for trivia with your class!

Other Ideas: _____

#19: Bulletin Board Backgrounds

Description/Cost: Make your classroom come alive! Supe-up your bulletin boards. If you can't afford fadeless bulletin board paper (that is available in the standard school supply catalog), try a couple of different options: wrapping paper or cloth!

Activity Idea: I go to Wal-Mart and look in the fabric department in the discount bin (I've also been to fabric stores) to find cheap fabric to use as the backdrop behind posters. You can also use some great bold colors of wrapping paper to put behind your displays. Students will really notice.

Activity Idea: Jazz up your bulletin boards even more...cut small triangles of colored paper to staple between all your posters. It gives the bulletin pizzazz!

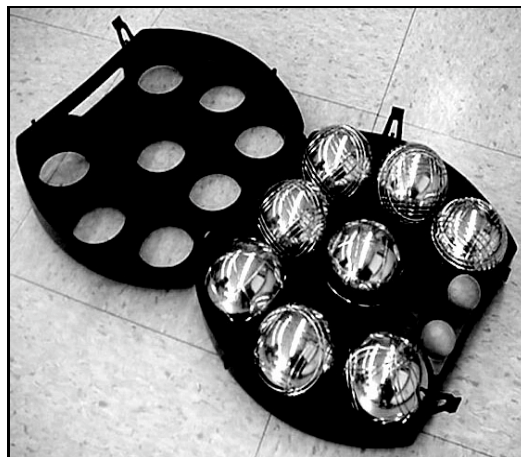
Other Ideas: _____

#20: Pétanque Balls (French)

Description/Cost: A set of authentic pétanque balls from France is a bit pricey, usually \$35-\$40 a set. I have purchased two sets on various trips to France. They are available here in the United States (but most places just have the Italian bocce balls that are ceramic and not the traditional steel (and smaller) ones from France).

Activity Idea: Kids love to go outside and play!!!

I usually take each class outside once or twice a year. It works best if you have some sort of gravel surface nearby; the best option I have used at various schools is a softball/baseball field. Even though there are traditional rules of pétanque, I have always used my own version for a more lively competition. Once all 8 balls are thrown, the closest throw to the cochonnet (wooden marker) gets 10 points, the next gets 7 points, then 5, 3, and 1; the other balls don't score any points. Usually the team that got the closest throw to the marker will throw the marker out for the next game.



Other Ideas: _____

More fun stuff:

- * trays and pitchers for waiter races
- * plastic page dividers in place of white boards
- *
- *