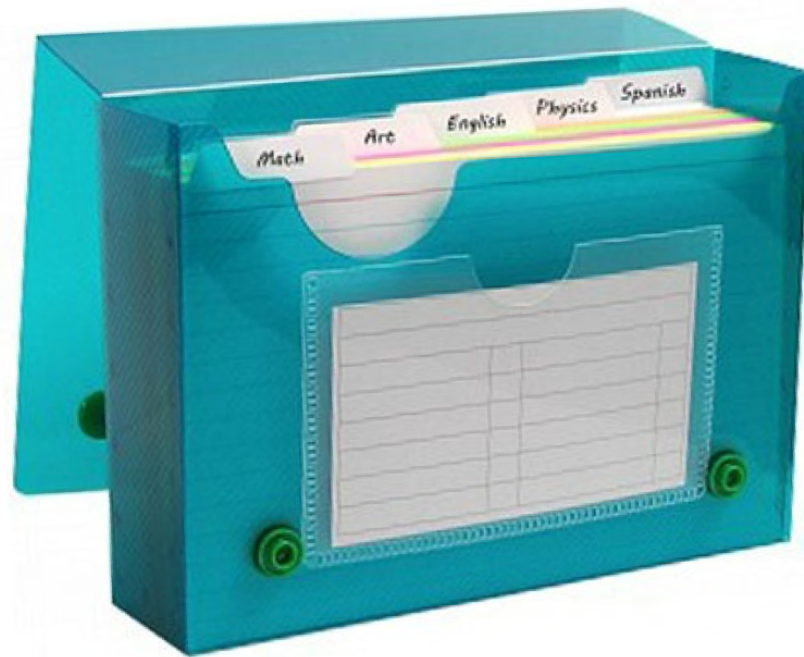


**35 NO-PREP, COLLABORATIVE
ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES
FOR ALMOST ANY LESSON!**



by Angela Watson

The Teacher's
BOX OF TRICKS

THE TEACHER'S BOX OF TRICKS: NO-PREP, COLLABORATIVE ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR ALMOST ANY LESSON!

How the Activities Work:

Students enhance their learning by constructing the content themselves, instead of you as the teacher creating the content on your own time and passing it out for students to passively consume.

All of these activities can be implemented on the spot with no advance preparation. The only materials you may need are standard classroom resources like scrap paper, chart paper, pencils, markers, scissors, a stapler, or the texts/worksheets/printables you had already planned to use but need a more engaging way of incorporating.

Many of these activities are designed to take boring (but necessary) worksheets and test prep materials and turn them into highly engaging activities that encourage critical thinking, discussion, collaboration, and the active participation of students as they their construct their own knowledge.

Most of the activities will take around 15-20 minutes, but can be easily and intuitively adapted to 10-45 minutes as needed. You could use these activities as part of your instruction, but most are designed to be used after the lesson as practice/review/assessment activities.

Getting Started:

Print out the cards on card stock, cut them apart, and store them in an inexpensive recipe file box or flexible index card case like those shown below (from Amazon.com). Alternatively, you can keep the list of activities (provided at the end of this PDF) on your computer for easy reference, or print the list out and store in your lesson plan binder.



[Yoobi Commit To Memory Index Cards](#)



[OXF01461 Plastic Index Card Flip Top File Box](#)



[Esselte Corporation ESS73569](#)

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**No-prep,
collaborative
active learning
strategies
for almost any
lesson!**

**<<<<< OPTIONAL:
Print this card and insert
it in the front of your
index card case**

Quick Start Guide:

If you want to get started quickly, just read through the list of ideas and stop as soon as you find two that would work for your upcoming lessons. (You don't have to read the rest until you need them!) You may want to think about the lessons for which you would ordinarily pass out a worksheet for students to practice a skill or concept, and use one of the ideas here to turn that worksheet into a fun, engaging, collaborative activity.

Build those two strategies into your lesson plans. Let your class get comfortable with them, and when the strategies start to get mundane, dig back into your box of tricks and find 2 more strategies to add into your rotation.

Classroom Management Tips:

- **Like any new activities and learning strategies you introduce to your class, you must explain, model, and practice before releasing students to play on their own.** Either do the activity as a whole class the first time, or call a small group of students up to the front of the room to demonstrate what to do while you facilitate and the class watches.
- **For most classes, it's better not to introduce more than 1 or 2 of these activities per week.** Allow students to do the same activity multiple times with different topics so you don't have to focus as much on management issues, and they no longer have to focus on the rules of the game and can instead concentrate on the content.
- **For activities that require movement around the classroom, practice the movement before the activity begins.** Ensure everyone understands where to move to or pass materials to next, which direction is clockwise, etc. Be prepared to go slowly through the first couple of rotations.
- **Many activities that require students to generate questions for their classmates to answer, so model and practice this many times as a class.** Display a wide range of student-written questions and have the class discuss which ones are most effective and why. Also consider displaying question stems or sentence starters to help students construct their questions. If students really struggle with this concept, you can also allow them to reference textbooks and workbooks, and use the questions there as a guide.

10 WORD WRAP UP

Challenge students to use exactly 10 words to make a prediction, summarize learning (or a text), explain the main idea, define a key vocabulary term, etc. Provide several minutes of quiet thinking and writing time, then allow students to share with a partner or group.

Also try:

- ✓ selecting a shorter amount of words, such as 3 or 5
- ✓ asking each small group to choose the 10 Word Wrap Up that they feel is most accurate, and share it with the class

ACTIVITY PREVIEW

Choose two sets of information on the same topic that you had planned to share with all students. Divide the class in half, providing one set of information (text/video/audio/online resource/app) to one half of the class and the other set of information to the other half of the class. Provide time for student learning, then pair students up so they have several minutes to meet with a person who learned the other set of information. Instruct students to prepare their partners for the switch by summarizing the main ideas, explaining a preview of what the person is about to learn, sharing the most interesting/confusing/important piece of information, etc.

Also try:

- ✓ allowing the same partners to meet again after the switch to debrief, comparing/contrasting the information they learned and clarifying it with one another
- ✓ having each group of students learn only one set of information and completing a graphic organizer or other structured assignment to help them pair up with someone who learned the other set of information and teach it to them.

ASK ME ABOUT IT

Pair students up and assign a text for them to read. Partner 1 should read and re-read the first paragraph silently, anticipating questions about the text. At the same time, Partner 2 should read the first paragraph silently and think of a question to ask his or her partner about the text. When both partners are ready (or on your signal, if you want to keep the whole class moving through the activity at the same pace), Partner 2 asks the question for Partner 1 to answer. They should discuss their thinking and use the text to prove what they believe to be the correct answer. Then, switch roles for paragraph 2, continuing in this way until they've read the entire assigned text.

Also try:

- ✓ using question stems to help students form questions
- ✓ challenging students to create open-ended or higher-level thinking questions
- ✓ stopping after each paragraph to have any pairs of students who weren't able to agree on an answer share the question aloud and have the rest of the class discuss

CIRCLE OF AGREEMENT

Have the entire class stand up and form a circle, facing one another, while you stand on the outside. Read or spontaneously make up a set of opinions or true/false statements related to your topic, or read sentences from a text, occasionally replacing a word or phrase to make it incorrect. Have students listen and step into the circle if they agree with what you said and believe it to be correct. Encourage divergent thinking and challenge students to explain their reasoning.

Also try:

- ✓ have students generate statements/facts/opinions and enter them into a Google Doc or other shared list for you to read during the activity

CUT APART

Group students into teams of five and pass out one worksheet or printable to each group. Have the group cut apart the worksheet so each question is on a separate strip or "card." Students then place the stack face down and choose roles (to be Person 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5). Explain how the activity is played and write the following team roles on the board for class reference: Person 1 on each team chooses a card and reads the question or problem aloud to the team. Person 2 paraphrases the question and/or offers clues to the answer. Person 3 says the answer and explains his or her thinking. Person 4 explains why he or she agrees or disagrees. Person 5 places the question card in one of two piles, Agree or Disagree, and then takes on the role of Person 1 for a new "round" of play and reads the next question. [Person 1 now becomes Person 2, and so on. Because there is an odd number of people on each team, the roles (1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) will shift for each question so that everyone gets a turn to play each role.]

Also try:

- ✓ simplifying the concept by having 4 people on a team (eliminating Person 5's role) and having each person retain the same role for 2-4 minutes, switching to a new role when you give a signal
- ✓ providing time at the end for each group to go back through their "disagree" pile of questions and come to a consensus, either within the group or by reading the question aloud to the class and having other teams who did agree share their responses

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LINES OF COMMUNICATION

Have students stand in two rows facing each other. Ask a question or pose a problem to the class (perhaps review questions for a test or problems from an assignment students will complete later on their own.) Give students 30-60 seconds to discuss their responses and reasoning with the person across from them. Give a signal for each student to then move one position to the right (the student without a partner at the end simply walks to the other end to find his or her new partner.) Continue playing until students have discussed all the questions.

Also try:

- ✓ giving students an answer, and have them work with their partner to brainstorm possible questions/problems for that answer

LIST, ADD, SORT

Have students individually brainstorm at least 5 phrases, vocabulary words, or facts that are related to your topic. Then have students pair up to share their lists and add to them, ensuring that they each now have 10 or more words on their individual lists. Next, have each pair of students team up with another pair to form a group of 4 people, and add to their own lists to ensure they each have at least 20 different words. Finally, have students work independently to draw a tree map, 4 column chart, or other graphic organizer to sort the 20+ words on their list into categories of their choice. Provide time afterward for them to talk with their team of 4 about how they chose to categorize the words and why.

Also try:

- ✓ using a timer for each part the activity to make it feel more like a game

LIST ROTATION

Display a piece of chart paper or large construction paper for the class to see. Write an open-ended question about your topic on it, or write a category (types of plants, ways to make 20, famous historical figures from the Civil War.) Ask a student volunteer to hang the chart in one corner of the room and place a pen/marker by it. Repeat this process for 3 more pieces of chart paper, asking for student input on the topics if you like, and have a volunteer ensure there's a piece of chart paper hanging in each corner. Then divide the class into 4 groups and choose someone who can write quickly to be the designated "recorder" in each group. Have the groups rotate around the room to each list. Set a timer for 1-2 minutes and have students share as many ideas as they can for the recorder to write on the chart paper, then switch. For the last two rotations, you may want to allow 2-4 minutes for brainstorming, as the more obvious answers will already be recorded.

Also try:

- ✓ asking students to generate the questions for the chart paper
- ✓ promoting discussion by setting a timer for 2 minutes of talk time at each list, then 1 minute of writing time
- ✓ adding multiple markers to each rotation spot so that more than one student can write at a time
- ✓ adding more stations so the groups are smaller



BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE...

I'm **Angela Watson**, the creator of this resource. I'm a National Board Certified Teacher with a masters degree in Curriculum and Instruction, and have 11 years of classroom teaching experience and over a decade of experience as an instructional coach. I currently work as a Productivity and Mindset Specialist in the area of educational consulting. In practical terms, this means I author books, design curriculum, and provide professional development services. Everything I do is centered on sharing more effective, efficient, and enjoyable ways of teaching and learning!

I founded my website ([TruthforTeachers.com](https://www.truthforteachers.com)) in 2003 to connect with other educators. You can now find thousands of ad-free articles and resources there from me and our K-12 teacher-writer's collective.

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