

Brain Breaks

Activities for stimulating student engagement
and enhancing teacher-student relationships.



INSTITUTE OF
**POSITIVE
EDUCATION**

With Grateful Hearts

The Institute of Positive Education would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this book, especially the teachers at Geelong Grammar School for their willingness to trial these practices in their classrooms.

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Brain Breaks Can Increase Student Engagement

Studies over the last 15 years have shown promising results, suggesting brain breaks have multiple benefits for student learning.

A multitude of studies has shown that regular brain breaks across the school day are found to enhance students' cognitive functioning and ability to sustain focus for academic work (Donnelly et al., 2009; Grieco, Jowers & Bartholomew, 2009; Ma, Mare & Gurd, 2014; Mahar, et al., 2006; Mahar, 2011).

Importantly, brain breaks only take up small amount of lesson time yet the benefits of increased engagement levels and cognitive functioning have been found to significantly increase academic performance. Research has shown that students participating in regular brain breaks display improved academic performance in core subjects like Mathematics and English, as well as academic standardised tests (Álvarez-Bueno, et al., 2016; Ahamed, et al., 2007).

Additionally, brain breaks have been shown to increase students' perceived competence and raise classroom motivation levels (Vazou et al., 2012).

Brain breaks decrease students' sedentary time and increase their overall level of physical activity across the day. Studies have also shown brain breaks can have a positive influence on students' Body Mass Index (BMI) and can support students in regard to maintaining healthy weight (Liu, et al., 2008).

Finally, and not surprisingly, brain breaks have been shown to improve classroom behaviour and decrease student referrals for discipline issues (Sibley, et al., 2008).

Accompanying Notes

Age levels

We have not included recommended age levels as the following brain breaks can be adapted to be suitable for almost all school-aged children. Younger kids and older kids alike can most definitely reap the benefits of participating in the following brain breaks...and so can teachers!

Duration

We have deliberately chosen brain breaks which require minimal, if any, equipment and can be completed within a few minutes. We have not included any activity which requires more than five minutes to introduce and run.

Implementation

The following brain breaks are designed to be used as a short energiser during a lesson. They can also be used successfully as lesson starters or lesson closers.

Variations

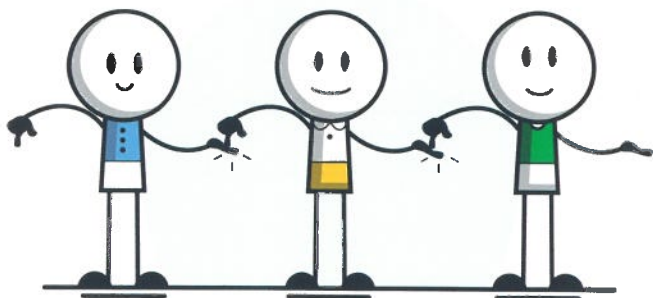
We warmly encourage educators and students to enjoy the following brain breaks and then to have fun designing innovative variations that can add freshness and ongoing wellbeing and learning benefits.

Role of the Teacher

The following suggestions are mentioned to assist you in running brain breaks as effectively and successfully as possible.

- **Be enthusiastic!**
Your enthusiasm, or lack of it, is contagious and will impact student participation and buy-in.
- **Expect that you will be able to inspire your students to enjoy these fun breaks.**
All of these tasks are relatively simple and unsophisticated. However, that doesn't mean that your students can't love them and reap the many benefits from participating in them.
- **Ensure a sense of belonging.**
Remember that one important aim for incorporating brain breaks is to help students develop a sense of belonging to the group.
- **Keep the rules to a minimum.**
Explain the rules as briefly and as clearly as possible.

Activities



2. Gotcha!

Energy: Medium

Equipment: None

Duration: 3 minutes

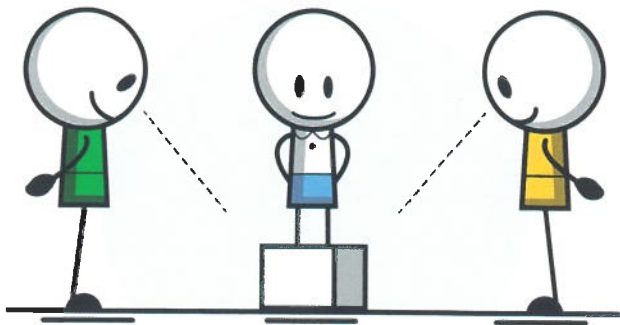
Students stand in a circle facing inwards.

Students place their left hand out flat, palm up, to their left side.

Students point their right index finger and place it into the outstretched palm of the person to their right.

On 'Go!', students attempt to grasp the index finger of the student on their left, whilst simultaneously escaping the attempted grasp of the student on their right.

'Go!'



4. Look Down, Look Up!

Energy: Low

Equipment: Small object

Duration: 5 minutes

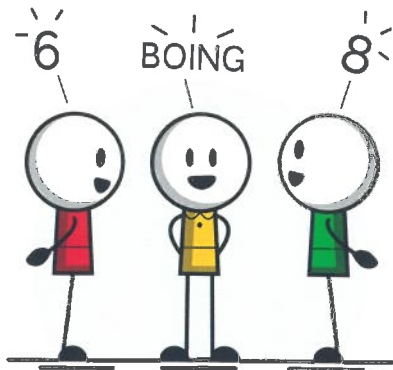
Students stand in a circle facing inwards. Groups of approximately 10 – 12 are ideal.

Students stare at a small object placed on the floor in the middle of the circle.

Each student decides on a person that they will directly look at when instructed to 'Look Up'. If they find that this person has also chosen them and is looking directly back at them, then both students step out of the circle.

After each turn, students are asked to 'Look Down'. They return their gaze to the floor and decide who they will look at as they await the next call of 'Look Up'.

Play continues until only one or two players remain.



6. Boi-ing 7

Energy: Low

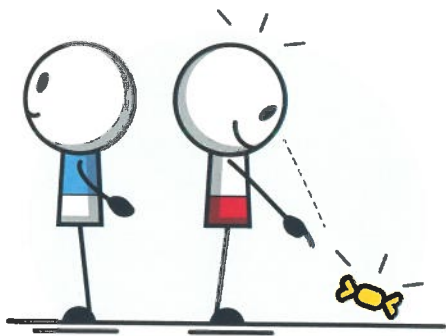
Equipment: None

Duration: 4 minutes

Students stand in a circle facing inwards. A nominated student begins by saying 'one'. The student to the left of the first one says 'two' and so on around the circle, calling out numbers in numerical order.

Every time a number comes along that contains a '7' or is a multiple of 7, students must call out 'boi-ing' (a jumping sound because '7' is being jumped) in place of the actual number. Counting then continues as normal until the next '7'...

...be careful!!



7. Find the Fantale

Energy: Medium

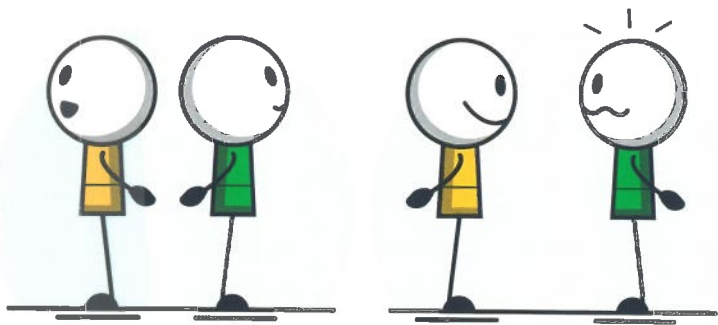
Equipment: 1 Fantale

Duration: 1 minute

Prior to the lesson beginning, the teacher carefully hides a Fantale somewhere in the room.

At a random point in the lesson, the teacher calls out 'Find the Fantale!' Students hunt for the Fantale (in a controlled fashion!)

The end.



9. What Do You Look Like When?

Energy: Medium

Equipment: None

Duration: 3 minutes

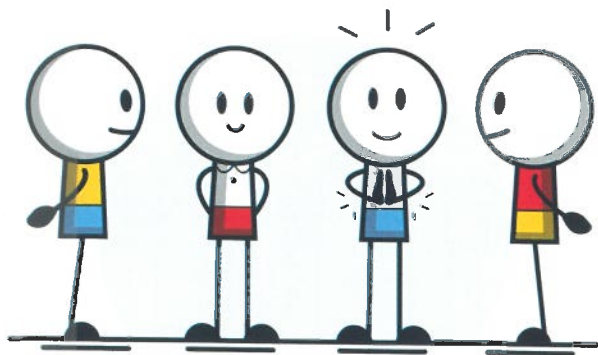
Students stand back to back in pairs. Either partner initiates the action using the phrase: 'What do you look like when...'

After two seconds of silence, as a moment of facial preparation, each player spins 180° and faces one another with their best facial expression depicting the moment described.

Partners may like to have several goes.

'What do you look like when...' examples include:

- ...you wake up in the morning?
- ...you get an 'A' on a Maths test?
- ...you find out your teacher is away?
- ...your pet wees on the carpet?
- ...the pilot says to expect turbulence?



11. Quick Clap

Energy: Medium

Equipment: None

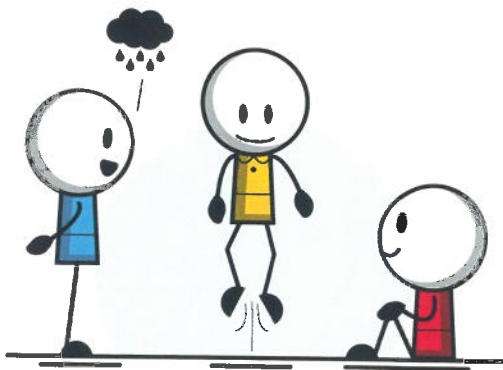
Duration: 4 minutes

Students stand in a circle facing inwards.

The teacher, or a student, starts by clapping their hands together. The person immediately to the right then quickly claps their hands, and the clap progresses around the circle.

It can be very effective for the clap to be a double or a triple clap, with the next person starting straight after the person's first clap.

It can be fun to start multiple clapping chains and have them chase one another around the circle. Alternatively, send claps off in different directions and see what happens when they collide.



14. Pop-Up Facts

Energy: Medium

Equipment: None

Duration: 3 minutes

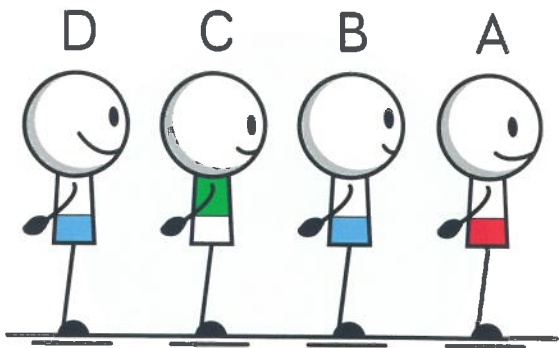
Students sit at their desks or on the floor in a circle. They take it in turns to call out a category and an action.

All those who fit the category pop-up in their place, complete the action and then sit back down. Have fun, and be creative with the categories and actions.

Example categories and actions include:

Stand up if you...

- have a brother – click your fingers
- have lived in more than three houses – punch the air five times
- like rainy days – wink an eye
- play a musical instrument – beat your chest
- are wearing a watch – hop on the spot
- made your bed this morning – take a bow



16. Line-Up (and fold around)

Energy: Medium

Equipment: None

Duration: 3 minutes

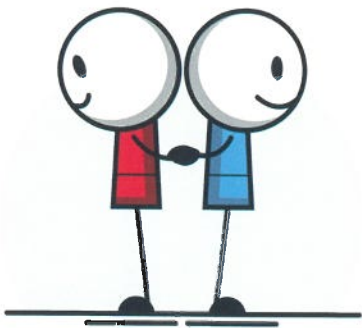
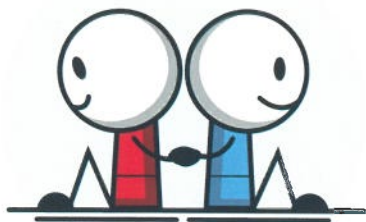
Provide students with an instruction to arrange themselves in one orderly line according to the theme provided.

At the end of the line-up, the head of the line could fold around to the tail and suddenly all class members are in random pairs - ready perhaps for a follow-on lesson activity.

Example line-up instructions include:

Line-up according to...

- birthday (day of the year)
- alphabetical order of middle names
- time you got out of bed this morning
- the length of your hair
- the number of people in your family
- your locker number or phone number



18. Back-to-Back

Energy: Medium

Equipment: None

Duration: 2 minutes

Students arrange themselves in similar height pairs. Each pair sits down back-to-back.

Once the pairs are sitting back-to-back, they link arms and then attempt the challenge of working together to stand up without using their arms or hands to help.

Challenge a pair to stand up and then sit back down five times in one minute.

Challenge some expert pairs to become larger groups and see if they can still find a way for them all to stand up whilst their arms remain linked.



19. Flip It!

Energy: Medium

Equipment: Plastic bottle and other objects

Duration: 3 minutes

Embrace the craze of Bottle Flipping and challenge students to successfully flip a water bottle.

Allow the students to design their own challenges by placing limits on the throw (non-preferred hand, eyes closed, etc) and by suggesting different landing zones (floor, desk, windowsill, door handle!)



21. Keep Me Up

Energy: Medium

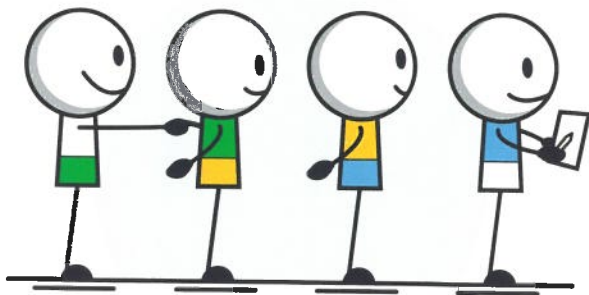
Equipment: 1 or 2 balloons

Duration: 3 minutes

Challenge the students to simply keep a blown-up balloon in the air for as long as possible. They can use any body part, as long as the balloon does not touch the ground/carpet (and/or walls/ceiling).

By all means challenge the class with multiple balloons.

What would this look like if you had one balloon that the students could keep up in the air for an extended period of time, while the lesson continued?



23. What's Back on TV?

Energy: Medium

Equipment: None

Duration: 3 minutes

Divide students into teams of six to eight.

Each team sits in a straight row, one team member behind the other. The first person in the line is given pen and paper.

Each team is like a transmission station. Team members try to see how quickly and accurately they can pass along a picture by drawing it with a forefinger on each others' backs.

Decide on a simple picture for the teams to draw and show this image to the back person in each team. Teams then send the transmission, with it concluding with the front person drawing the image they felt drawn on their back onto the supplied piece of paper.

Compare times and accuracy (and have a laugh).

'People will forget what
you said, people may
forget what you did, but
they will never forget how
you made them feel.'

Maya Angelou

