

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Bell Ringer Exercises

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Photo credit: iStockphoto

Because of pressure to teach bell-to-bell -- the pedagogical equivalent of force-feeding geese to make *foie gras* -- many classrooms now start with bell work, short exercises that students complete while the instructor attends to attendance and other administrative chores. Journal prompts and concept questions can focus students on nutritious academic content and initiate a positive tempo for the next 90 minutes of class.

With the help of graduate student David Fictum, I collected several creative, practical and entertaining exercises that can function as bell ringers or sponge activities. Here they are:

Journaling

Education *über*-blogger Vicki Davis writes 20 things she is thankful for in a joy journal **(1)**, citing research studies **(2)** indicating that this practice produces greater long-term happiness than winning the lottery -- *serious happy*. Some of my students volunteered to write joy journals before each class this semester. After five minutes, I ask if anyone in the class wishes to share good news. Each announcement earns a 3-2-1 *clap*.

Lateral Thinking

Brain Food **(3)** lists number and logic puzzles. Even better are its lateral thinking puzzles **(4)**.

Situation: A man marries 20 women in his village but isn't charged with polygamy. How come?

Answer: He's a priest -- he's marrying them to other people, not to himself.

Pop Culture

"*Tropes* are devices and conventions that a writer can reasonably rely on as being present in the audience members' minds and expectations," according to TVTropes **(5)**, a wiki that houses hundreds of these figurative concepts. In the *tempting fate* trope, for example, the hero says, "At least it's not raining." An instant later, she's drenched. Have students identify horror movie or police procedural tropes, then reveal the answers from TVTropes to see how many they selected.

Challenge students to deduce whether a story is true, a scam or an urban legend, using scenarios featured in TruthorFiction (6), Hoax Busters (7) and Snopes (8). Despite video evidence (9), Bruce Lee never played ping pong with nunchaku -- but he *could* have.

Grammar

Like its cousin, Daily Oral Language (10), Education World's Every-Day Edits (11) features a new error-filled text for students to diagnose and rewrite every day of the school year. An answer key is included. Animals A to Z (12) is the primary grade version: "The skills emphasized in the series are those found on all standardized tests in grades 2 and 3: simple word usage, end-of-sentence punctuation, comma placement in a series, basic spelling, and others."

Reading and Writing

For an entire school year, ninth graders in Sarah Gross (13)' and Jonathan Olsen (14)'s humanities classes at High Technology High School (15) in New Jersey started each day by reading *The New York Times* and composing current event essays. Watch the students in this inspiring video (16) talk about how much they learned from the experience.

Student News Daily (17) posts contemporary articles from a variety of newspapers. Comprehension questions ("How has the Obama administration been able to get around usual requirements for individual warrants to access the records of millions of Verizon customers?") follow each report. Sign up here (18) to have articles, questions and answers sent to your email every morning.

On the hilarious Writing Prompts That Don't Suck (19) Tumblr blog, prompt #570 challenges students to write "a story about a massive cat colony and the one human who knows about its existence." In contrast, WriteSource (20) categorizes more orthodox writing topics ("the hardest thing I've ever done") by grade level.

Geography and History

StudentHandouts.org's geography questions (21) for grades 6-12 align with the Common Core State Standards. Citing the Common Core's emphasis on cultural literacy, the site also offers short cultural literacy (22) quizzes for every day of the school year. History questions abound. (Classical civilization hangman, anyone?)

WorldAtlas.com contains blank outline maps (23) of every country, province, state and territory in the world.

Clever Bell Ringer Procedures

The Pennsylvania State Education Association describes (24) a novel way for students to **sign into class**. "Write each child's name on a strip of tag board, laminate it, and glue a magnet to the back. Each day, post a question and possible answers on a whiteboard. Students can 'sign in' by placing their magnets in the appropriate answer column."

Patty Kohler's round table review (25) requires minimal teacher effort. "I have students get out a sheet of

paper and write a list of numbers from one to ten. Then I instruct them to put one important idea from the previous lecture on the first line. The paper is passed to the person on the left. Each time the paper is passed, the person receiving the paper writes a different idea. After a few minutes I call time, and the papers go back to the original owner. This represents a collection of ideas for future review and study."

Finishing Touches

Play Chopin to signal that your classroom demands different behaviors than the hallway. Always locate bell work instructions in the same place. Save the ones that students appreciate the most, the ones that they'll be glad to remember.

Source: www.edutopia.org/blog/bell-ringer-exercises-todd-finley

Links

- 1 coolcatteacher.blogspot.com/2013/04/9-fine-reasons-to-keep-journal-and-how.html
- 2 happierhuman.com/benefits-of-gratitude/
- 3 www.rinkworks.com/brainfood/c/box.shtml
- 4 www.rinkworks.com/brainfood/p/latreal1.shtml
- 5 tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/HomePage
- 6 www.truthorfiction.com
- 7 www.hoaxbusters.org
- 8 www.snopes.com
- 9 www.youtube.com/watch?v=SncapPrTusA
- 10 dk061.k12.sd.us/daily_oral_language.htm
- 11 www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/edit/edit01.shtml
- 12 www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/archives/animalsAtoZ.shtml
- 13 www.edutopia.org/user/68634
- 14 www.edutopia.org/user/195748
- 15 www.hths.mcvsd.org
- 16 learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/05/it-opens-your-mind-a-student-made-video-about-a-year-of-reading-the-times/?_r=2
- 17 www.studentnewsdaily.com/daily-news-article/nsa-collecting-phone-records-of-millions-of-verizon-customers-daily/
- 18 www.studentnewsdaily.com/signup-for-email/
- 19 awesomewritingprompts.tumblr.com
- 20 thewritesource.com/writing_topics/
- 21 www.studenthandouts.com/Geography/Worksheets/001-Form-Size-Earth.htm
- 22 www.studenthandouts.com/01-Web-Pages/A-Practice-Test-a-Day/000-A-Practice-Test-a-Day.htm

23 <http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/testmaps/maps.htm#.UijWq78-aCc>

24 www.psea.org/teacher.aspx?id=5379

25 www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-classroom-management/creative-ways-to-start-class-getting-students-ready-to-learn/

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