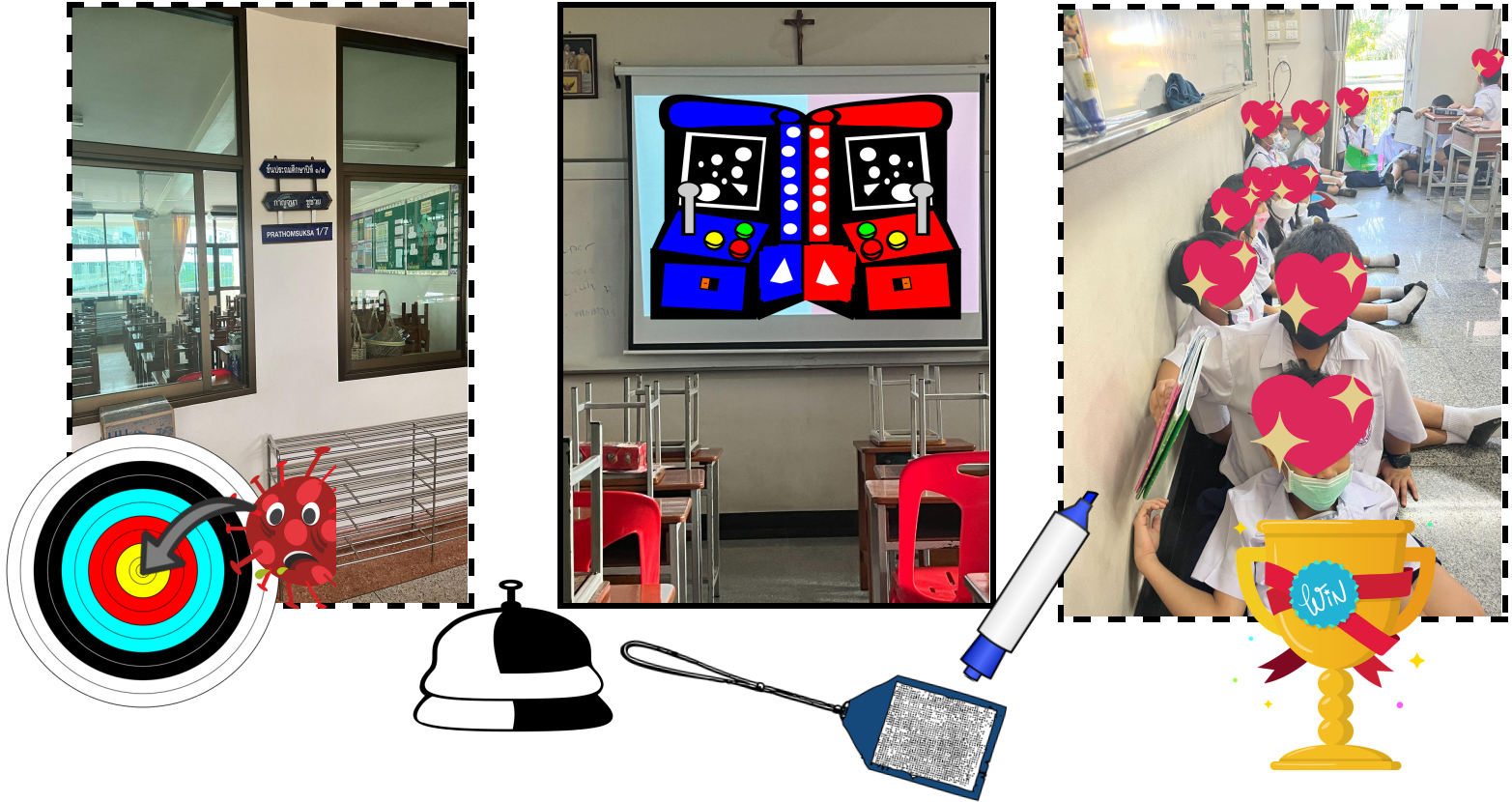


Classroom Games

by Elizabeth A. Clayborne



Picture this:

The nostalgic smell of the dry erase marker wafts towards you as you draw a flower on the board. You're enjoying yourself. The kids will definitely roast it, but whatever. "Plants create food through photosynthesis," you chant loudly. 30 voices *should* raise to repeat the word after you: photo-SYN-thesis. But you only hear 3 students; the three students who rock with you tough, the ones who always reply to your call and response signals. You (reluctantly) pause midway through drawing the petals on your flower and turn to look at your class. Most pairs of eyes are closed or locked on something in their desks—something you're pretty sure isn't related to photosynthesis. You catch eyes with one of your rock solid students. They give you a look like "What are you gonna do teacher, they're kids 🙄." You shrug back like, "Yeah 😒." Unless you bring the energy back up, most of your students simply will not absorb this lesson. It's time to shake off the blanket of sleepiness that boredom has thrown over your class. It's time to remind your students that learning is fun. It's *game* time. Too bad about your flower...



In this post I'll go over the process of playing games in your class. My explanations will work best in conjunction with another post I wrote called "[Classroom Management](#)." But even without reading that one, this post should help you feel more prepared to initiate games in your class. Also, you can always ask other teachers about the games they play in their classes. It's a great way to get fresh ideas, and also to bond with your co-workers. Take what you like, tweak what you like, and leave the rest.



Before we get right into it, here are some things to think about when evaluating whether you want to use a game for your class. I personally won't bother with a game if a.) it's going to require a lot of prep-time into it every time I want to play it, b.) it's physically awkward to carry with me on a regular basis (because we have to walk between three classrooms every day. And there are stairs involved...), or c.) it's not flexible in what subjects it can be used for. Basically, I want my games to make my life as a teacher easier, not harder. I want to be able to pick them up at a moment's notice and use them.

Another thing to think about is logistics. I think the main purpose of classroom games is to help students burn off physical energy while they learn. Obviously, the kids need a big clear space to move around. But there's a problem— we have lots of kids per class, and not much room. IEP and MEP classes aren't set up the same, so we set up game time a little differently in each class.

In MEP classes, we have a "standard" class size: about 30 kids. So for MEP, I think it makes the most sense to divide the class in half. We move the desks slightly to the sides to open up an aisle of space in the middle of the room. The desks stay this way for the entire day. The aisle is (just) big enough for 2 students to run down without tripping each other. The first to make it down the aisle wins.

In IEP classes, we have 50 kids (I know that sounds wild 😅 But somehow these are the easier classes). Because there are so many desks, there's no room to move them. So for IEP, it makes more sense to allow the students to start running *next* to the central group of desks. One student starts on one side of the classroom and one starts on the other. The first to make it to the middle point wins.

So you have your game criteria: they're easy to carry/set up. They don't require too much prep. They're flexible. They get your students moving *and* get them thinking. Boom. You have your open spaces established. Boom.

Now you're set up for several different games. You can flow between them throughout your class. In each game description, I'll include what item you might need to find, borrow, or purchase for it. Everything I list will be extremely cheap. On the last page of this post, I'll list where you can buy the game items I use.



✨ Hangman ✨

♥ Item(s) Needed: Dry Erase Marker -or- Chalk

♥ Energy Burned: 1/10

♥ Lesson Flexibility: 2/10

♥ Fun Level: 5/10

♥ Amount of Students Engaged at Once: Whole Class

♥ Time Before the Students Get Bored: 1-2 Rounds



Hangman is a great game for when you're just starting class off and want a warm-up activity. Or for when you're ending class and need to fill up some time. It's suited for spelling and word association practice.

♥ How to Play:

[Note: When I start any of my games, the first thing I do is call up one of the 2 students who have been designated as Team Helpers for the week. We alternate between the 2 helpers throughout the day. During games, Team Helpers keep track of the points/keep the board neat, which helps you focus on your role as teacher/referee during game time. I explain more about how I set up Team Leaders and Helpers in the article "[Classroom Management](#)."]

If you're pressed for time, you can be the one in charge of everything— writing and drawing the letters as they're called out and drawing the person. The students will simply call out letters/words.

If you have more time, you can let a student come up and run the game while you assist from the sidelines. I'll call that student the player. You can have the player choose a word from the week's vocabulary and whisper it to you. You need to know which word they choose to make sure they spell it right. If the player makes a mistake during the game, the entire class will erupt into mutinous chaos. To save the player from disgrace, I write their chosen vocabulary word on my clipboard. Then I hold it up for them so only they can see it as they write the blanks. I check that the number of blanks is correct. Then they run the show. They call on their teammates. Their teammates call out letters. After each letter is called out, I check the player's spelling on the board. Whoever guesses the last letter or the entire word wins.

[Pro Tip: Have students call out letters in the format of "E like elephant." It helps things go smoothly, and it encourages them to make mental connections between English words/letters. It's also a chance for them to compete over who can come up with the most interesting word which is fun.]

Points System

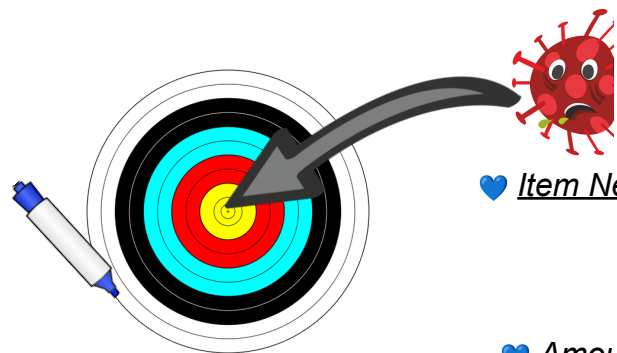
 *Correct Letter: 10 pts*

 *Incorrect Letter: -5 pts*

 *Correctly Guessed Word/ Last Letter: 100 pts*

 *Incorrectly Guessed Word: -50 pts*





✨ Ball Game ✨

- ♥ Item Needed: Sticky Ball ; DE Marker/Chalk
- ♥ Energy Burned: 6/10
- ♥ Lesson Flexibility: 10/10
- ♥ Fun Level: 10/10
- ♥ Amount of Students Engaged at Once: 1
- ♥ Time Before the Students Get Bored: 5-8 minutes

I know that picture above looks like a germ (and it is actually, I appropriated the clip art for my own needs) but it's meant to be the best thing I've ever bought for my class: the sticky ball. Which incidentally looks like a germ. My MEP students call it the COVID-9 ball 🦠. Kids are so unserious. Regardless of how it looks, it's my most prized teaching possession. You can turn any lesson into a game in seconds by pausing, drawing a bullseye on the board, and holding up the ball. "Who can tell me what photosynthesis is?" Hands erupt upwards. The crowd goes wild.

♥ How to Play:

I start off by calling up a Team Helper to write the points. Then I ask a question. Hands will raise. You can decide which student to choose in several ways. You can choose the student you're sure knows the answer, the student you're sure *doesn't* know the answer, the student bouncing in their seat to get you to notice them, or the student playing with a toy in their desk and ignoring you completely. However you go about choosing your player, I go team by team so each team gets equal opportunity to win points.

[Pro Tip: I've noticed that the girls are either 1.) under the impression that they are "supposed" to be bad at sports or 2.) legitimately too shy to try their best. So in my classes, if any of my students just throws absolutely terribly (I don't wanna just single out the girls), I correct their stance, tell them I expect them to throw HARD, and have them try again. I've noticed this increases everyone's confidence, not only in the game, but also in other areas of class.]

♥ Points System

☀ Whatever amount you want to write in the rings of the bullseye.



✨ Popcorn Reading ✨

♥ Item Needed: DE Marker (x3) / Chalk (x3)

♥ Energy Burned: 0/10

♥ Lesson Flexibility: 8/10

♥ Fun Level: 4/10

♥ Amount of Students Engaged at Once: The Whole Class

♥ Time Before the Students Get Bored: 5-8 minutes

This game is more of a necessary evil than a fun game. This one is strictly to make reading a little less boring. It works for any passage of reading you have in any text. For this game, though, you have to be *merciless* in how you enforce the rules.

♥ How to Play:

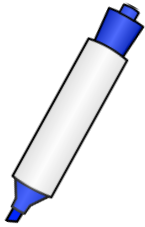
For this game there is no helper. Sadly, I have to write the points on the board yourself. I have everyone take out their book and turn to the correct page. Once everyone is on the right page, I tell them we're doing popcorn reading! Cue groans. I call on any student to start reading. At some point as they read, I call out "STOP" and call on another student. The next student I call on to read could be the one next to the student who just finished. Or I might call on a student across the room. I want to keep them on their toes. Students have five seconds to read, starting at the correct word, or they "lose." To count down the five seconds, I silently hold up my hand and fold in my fingers (cause if they start reading I want to be able to hear them). If a student starts reading within 5 seconds, but they start on the wrong word, their team loses points. If a student "loses," and doesn't make the 5 second mark, their team loses points AND the reading starts over. This is why you have to be merciless. The kids hate this. But it's effective—students are encouraged to focus, listen, and remain engaged during a portion of the lesson they find boring. If the class gets on a roll, you can stop one student in the *middle* of a word, and the next student has to start at the same syllable or they lose points. It can get fun if you catch them on a good day. Once everyone has read, you can write the points on the board. If you forget who won and who lost, the students will remind you (they don't play about their points 😊).

♥ Points System

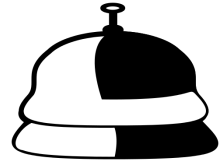
☀️ Correct Reading: 50 pts (or whatever you want)

☀️ Incorrect Reading: -50 pts





✨ Running Bell Game - Basic ✨



♥ Item Needed: Bell and DE Marker/Chalk

♥ Energy Burned: 10/10

♥ Lesson Flexibility: 10/10

♥ Fun Level: 7/10

♥ Amount of Students Engaged at Once: Most of the Class

♥ Time Before the Students Get Bored: 3-4 Rounds

This game is super flexible. It really shines for its ability to help students burn off physical energy, and for the fact that it engages most of the class at once.

♥ How to Play:

I call up my Team Helper to write the points. Next, I set up the bell (the kind you see at customer service desks) on a small table at the front of the class, right in front of the board. If there is no small table, I ask a poor student at the front of the class to borrow their desk. Next, I ask a question. Finally, I choose 2 players, 1 from each team. They start at the very back of the class, at the wall furthest from the board. I make them touch the wall until I do the countdown to start running, cause kids are dirty cheaters. Then I countdown (1... 2.....3!). On three, they take off.

First one to ring the bell wins. If it was a tie or there is contention for the win, the two players play rock, paper, scissors. Rock, paper, scissors solves all debates.

[Pro Tip: The Thai word for rock, paper, scissors sounds like “Bai sho.” So if you suggest rock, paper, scissors and the kids don’t know what you’re talking about, you can try mime-ing it and calling it by that name.]

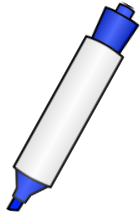
♥ Points System

☀ Winner: 100 pts (or whatever you want)

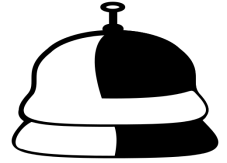
☀ Loser: 50 pts (they participated so they should still get something I think)



✨ Running Bell Game - Drawing ✨



- ♥ Item Needed: Bell and DE Markers (x3) / Chalk pcs (x3)
- ♥ Energy Burned: 10/10
- ♥ Lesson Flexibility: 7/10 (doesn't always work for math)
- ♥ Fun Level: 7/10
- ♥ Amount of Students Engaged at Once: Most of the Class
- ♥ Time Before the Students Get Bored: 3-4 Rounds



Again, super flexible. It helps students burn off physical energy, and engages most of the class at once. Plus it helps students balance perfectionism (how well they draw) with efficiency and speed. Ultimately helps with time management skills.

♥ How to Play:

Exact same set-up as the Basic Running Bell Game, with a few additions. I set up the bell at the front of the class. I uncap 2 dry erase markers / pieces of chalk and set them on the metal board rack thingy. Then I use my dry erase marker to draw two big, empty boxes in the middle of the board. I make sure there's a good amount of space between the 2 boxes. Next, I choose my 2 players and whisper a question so only they can hear it. Then I tell them to draw the answer. For example, I whisper "Draw the second stage in a plant life cycle" It could be anything though. Just like in the Basic Running Game, the 2 players (1 from each team) will start at the back of the class. On three they'll run to the board. The 2 players will race to draw the picture in their box. Once a player is done drawing, they turn to their team. The players cannot speak. Someone in their team has to shout the word(s) related to the picture they drew (this is to encourage class participation and discourage scribble drawing). Only when someone from their team shouts out the right answer can they ring the bell. First one to draw the correct picture, cap their marker, get their team to shout the correct answer, and ring the bell wins.

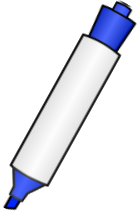
Remember— Rock, paper, scissors solves all debates.

♥ Points System

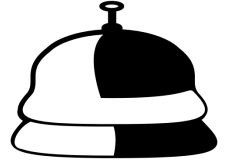
- ☀ Winner: 100 pts (or whatever you want)
- ☀ Loser: 50 pts (they participated so they should still get something I think)



✨ Running Bell Game - Speed Math/Speed Spelling ✨



- ♥ Item Needed: Bell and DE Markers (x3) / Chalk pcs (x3)
- ♥ Energy Burned: 10/10
- ♥ Lesson Flexibility: 8/10 (mostly works for Math and English)
- ♥ Fun Level: 7/10
- ♥ Amount of Students Engaged at Once: Most of the Class
- ♥ Time Before the Students Get Bored: 3-4 Rounds



This particular version of the running bell game especially shines for how it relies on team support.

♥ How to Play:

Exact same set-up as the Drawing version of the Running Bell Game, with a couple tweaks. I uncap 2 dry erase markers / pieces of chalk and set them on the metal board rack thingy. Instead of drawing two boxes though, I draw two lines with plenty of space between them. In between the lines, I write a math problem -or- I draw a picture of a vocabulary word. In this version of the running game, the students will either complete the math problem, or spell the vocabulary word. Just like in the Basic Running Game, the 2 players (1 from each team) will start at the back of the class. On three, they'll run to the board. They race to finish the problem/spell the word. First one to finish (correctly) and ring the bell wins. This version of the game doesn't require team participation.

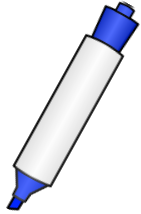
Remember— Rock, paper, scissors solves all debates.

♥ Points System

- ☀ Winner: 100 pts (or whatever you want)
- ☀ Loser: 50 pts (but if they got it wrong they get -50)



✨ Fly-swatter Game ✨



♥ Item Needed: Flyswatter and DE Marker / Chalk

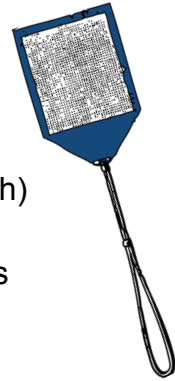
♥ Energy Burned: 10/10

♥ Lesson Flexibility: 8/10 (mostly works for Math and English)

♥ Fun Level: 7/10

♥ Amount of Students Engaged at Once: Most of the Class

♥ Time Before the Students Get Bored: 3-4 Rounds



In particular, this game shines because it's the simplest of the running type games to set up and play.

♥ How to Play:

This game is similar to the bell games. Like in most of my games, the Team Helper writes the points. Instead of using the bell, though, I take 2 fly-swatters and place them at the end of the aisle. I place them on the last 2 student's desks on either side of the aisle, just before you get to the board. I make sure to place the fly-swatters with the handles angling towards the players at the back of the room, so they can easily grab them while they run. If I don't, I know the players are more liable to trip as they try to grab the fly-swatters at top running speed. Next, I draw a line down the middle of the board. I draw two big pictures on the board, one on either side of the line. Or, depending on the subject, I'll draw two numbers on the board. Finally, I ask a question. One of the pictures/numbers should answer the question, and one should not. For example "2 + 2 = ?" and on the board I have written 4 on one side and 6 on the other. Or you could ask "Plants make what through photosynthesis?" and on the board you can draw a flower eating a burger on one side of the board, and on the other you can draw a seed getting planted. In a very unlikely turn of events, in that last example the flower eating the burger is the correct answer. First student to run down the aisle, grab the flyswatter, and hit the correct answer wins.

Remember– Rock, paper, scissors solves all debates.

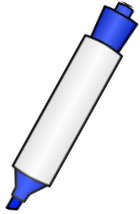
♥ Points System

☀ Winner: 100 pts (or whatever you want)

☀ Loser: 50 pts (cause they still participated so they should get something)



✨ Tic Tac Toe ✨



♥ Item Needed: Bell ; DE Marker (x3) / Chalk (x3)

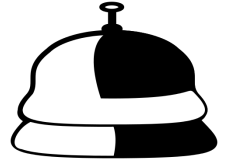
♥ Energy Burned: 4/10

♥ Lesson Flexibility: 8/10 (mostly works for Math and English)

♥ Fun Level: 7/10

♥ Amount of Students Engaged at Once: The Whole Class

♥ Time Before the Students Get Bored: 2 Rounds



I love this game. This one is good for a quick succession of harder questions. It's also really good for engaging the whole class. It takes a little longer though, so it's only good for about 2 rounds before everyone starts to get bored.

♥ How to Play:

The Team Helper will come up to write the points. I draw the tic tac toe board and set the bell on a small table or student's desk moved to the middle of the front of the classroom. Then I ask who wants to come up to play. Hands will shoot up. I choose 2 players, 1 from each team. Each of them gets a marker, and stands right by the bell. Then I ask a series of questions. They can all be from one subject, or they can be a mixture of all the subjects. The first one to ring the bell gets to answer. The first one to answer *correctly* gets to choose whether they want Os or Xs. Correct answers win team points, and also allow the player to draw their symbol on the Tic Tac Toe board. Incorrect answers lose team points and the player cannot write their symbol on the board. If one player answers incorrectly, the other player has a chance to answer the question. In *that* case, if the second player also doesn't know the answer, they have the choice to confer with their team-mates, come back, and give the answer for half points. This encourages everyone to pay attention in the class. First one to draw their symbol three times in a row wins. Winner earns bonus points.

If there's doubt about who hit the bell first— rock, paper, scissors.

♥ Points System

✨ Correct Answer: 50 pts (or whatever you want)

✨ Incorrect Answer: -25 pts

✨ Winner: 1,000 pts



✨ *Final Thoughts* ✨

As you play games in your classes, you'll notice kinks in the way things play out. Any behavior can almost always be encouraged or discouraged with games and points. This is a space where you can get creative. Make adjustments and changes to your games and your class management style as you see fit. Try new things. Scrap them and try something else. I think a great class management system is the product of trial and error. It was for me at least.

Most of all, I try to genuinely have fun in my classes. For my kids, but also for myself. In my experience, games aren't just good for managing the kids. They're good for managing myself, too. When I notice I'm getting impatient or frustrated, it's always because I've lost the fun of the moment. And a great way to move from frustration to fun is— you guess it— playing a game.

Games are such a fun way to engage with the students. To get to know them and bond with them. When I tell you I have as much fun as my students when we play the games (if not more), I am being so exponentially for real. I think tapping into our inner childishness as teachers helps everything in the classroom to flow better. So allow yourself to get silly!

Finally— you might notice that all of the games I play in my classes rely entirely on physical items and board writing— there are no digital elements. That's because I don't use a computer in my classes. If you do use PowerPoint in your classes, however, you can definitely incorporate PPT slides into the games I have listed in this post (like an image of a bullseye for the ball game, for example). There are also other digital games like wheel spinners and Craji games which are superrrr fun. But I think these are great games to start with, and to always have in your back pocket. No matter what happens, be that technical issues or whatever, you can turn to these games and have some fun.

I hope you found this post helpful. Happy game time!

[Look below to see where you can buy the game items like the sticky ball, bell, and fly-swatters.]



✨ *Where to Buy Items* ✨

💙 Bell (Mr. DIY)

💙 Fly-swatters (Mr. DIY)

💙 Dry Erase Markers (Makro [bulk] or Lazada)

💙 Sticky Ball (Lazada Online - <https://tinyurl.com/Sticky-Ball-Lazada>)