

Ideas for Games and Activities:

For use as Starters, Warm ups or Active Assessment Tools.

Beanbag or Kooosh Ball: To throw among the class.

Examples:

- One child starts a sentence – another finishes it. It must be a complete sentence – how will we know?
- Throw it to other children to add punctuation marks.
- Change the verb / noun / adjective in the sentence each time.
- Turn the word /phrase /sentence in to an opposite – i.e. Change the verb ‘skip’ into a verb that denotes someone less happy – such as ‘trudge’
- Throw it to give everyone a turn - the alphabet, times tables, word with a particular phonic/spelling pattern

Point and Say can be another variation:

- Children point to the next person instead of throwing something. They have to say their name and ask for the next answer – or make up questions for each other to recall key learning points of a topic
- ‘Name three foods the Romans would eat’
- ‘What is your favourite Greek God?’
- ‘Where might you see an active volcano?’
- ‘What is the third stage of digestion?’
- ‘What is 2 plus 5?’
- If I went shopping with a pound and bought something for....

And so on

Rhythmic Clapping:

The whole class agrees on a sequence they all do together: "Clap...clap...clap...clap..."

In between each rhythmic clap, the pupils, in turn around the circle or all together, say whatever item you are trying to teach/consolidate.

If you want to make it more difficult, have them stand up if they make a mistake – turn it into a process of elimination.

Variation: Half the class sits in a circle; the other half stands outside and pair off. They practise what you have set them (e.g. times table or the planets in order) – the others listen and then swap over and/or move around the circles.



Flashcards

These can make a change from central whiteboard teaching, and they allow you to use them for more physical interaction. Children can find them, pass them around or can go outside etc.

You can use laminated ones or words scrawled on pieces of paper, with or without pictures. Here are some ideas:

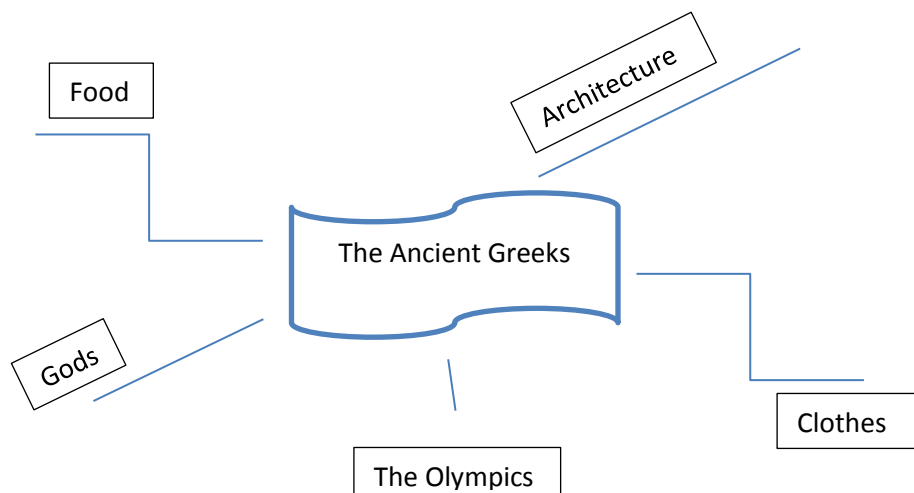
- Lay cards out (words depicting a spelling pattern) and say 'Find me the odd one out'
- Find pairs of CVC cards with the same beginning letter / end / medial vowel
- Play happy families (would take some setting up) with different groups – foods, jobs, names, etc.
- Display the cards around the room, and ask "Where is the X?"
- Play "Snap!" with sets of cards. *'Find two cards that are multiples of 4.'*
- Odd one out - *Find three cards that are linked to our topic of Flight / My Body. Now say which could be the odd one out.*

Ask children to work in pairs /small groups to make their own sets of cards – one card with the question the other with the answer. Let them 'hide' the cards in a particular room or area for another group go and find them all.

Mind Mapping

Used to brainstorm ideas on the whiteboard. Write down the central theme in the middle and draw lines and labels branching out from it with ideas about it. A good tool to find out what they know prior to a scheme of work, a way to generate creative ideas and also as an assessment tool.

Can be done as whole class, pairs, groups or individually. You can provide the key ideas for the lines to start with. Children to add all they know in words, phrases and/or pictures to each one. For younger children you might want to add one branch line at a time:



Concept Mapping

Similar to Mind Maps. Again, there is a central concept and again words related to the central concept are written around it. This time, though, there are no radiating lines; instead, draw lines between the different words around the central concept, and along these lines write connections you can think of.

For example, if the central concept is “food” you might think of words like ‘fry’ and ‘unhealthy’ and you might draw a line between these two words and write *‘people tell us that fried food is unhealthy’*.

Children can then ‘interrogate’ and research these links to see how true they actually are.

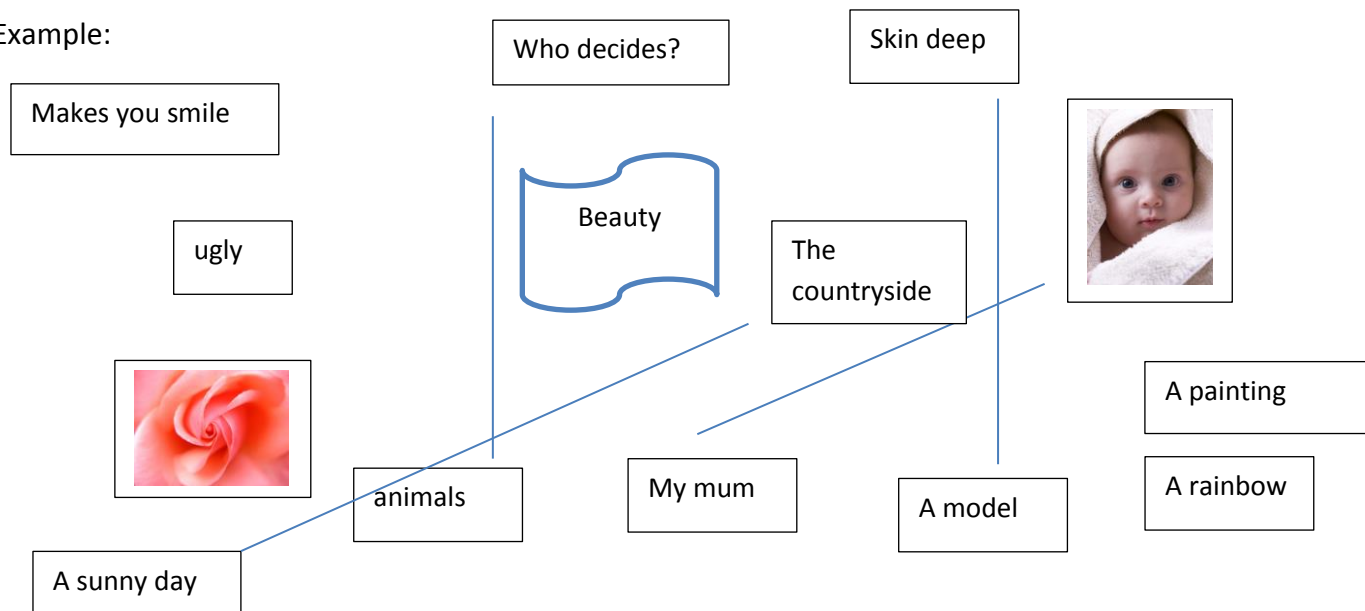
Concept maps are a great way into a philosophy session (P4C) too:

Take an abstract concept such as Truth or Beauty or Friendship and place that in the centre of the map.

Ask children to write words, questions and phrases – or draw/stick pictures about what comes to mind through that word. Then try and make connections. You can do it whole class or each child / pair/group can discuss which might be connected.

They then have an opportunity to give their reasons to the rest of the group.

Example:



A Box of Thinking Starters

Find an unusual bag, case or box and fill it with things that are likely to interest your children.

E.g. bits of metal parts from machines, baby’s cardigan, old shoe, photos of unusual places or people, menus, extra huge novelty paperclip, recipes, pieces of fabric, quirky ornaments or old artefacts like a huge key or old fashioned radio. Anything you can catch their curiosity with.

These can be used to start P4C sessions with but also with a set of suggestions on cards to stimulate some independent thinking – in pairs or small groups – or individually. On the cards write a series of questions to kick-start children’s talking and thinking. You could attach the cards to the object so children choosing the artefact also choose a question or challenge from the card attached to it.

If you provide each child with their own Thinking Journal e.g. <http://www.thinkingchild.org.uk/thinking-journals-2/> - then they can add their thoughts as and when they occur to them.

Possible questions /starters for the cards:

- What are the first three things you think of when you look at this?
- Can you think of 5 words that would best describe how this makes you feel?
- Where do you think this started its life?
- Why do you think it was made / created ? Who for? What sort of person might have made it and where might they have been at the time?
- Imagine you're a secret agent and you have to describe this object/photo to someone on the phone who can't see it You have to be as detailed as possible but you only have time for 3 sentences – what will you say?
- What do you think it cost to produce it?
- What is it for? What are three possible different uses for it?
- Could you design something better?
- What if this hadn't been invented? What might people be doing differently now? (e.g. If the paperclip or sticky tape hadn't been invented)

Musical chairs

As with the favourite party game – a ring of chairs for children to walk around; sit down at the signal; take one chair away each round so that there is one person out each time and an eventual winner.

But you can also use it as a learning game, choose one teaching point and have the children sit down when you say it.

E.g.

- Say random letters; children sit down when you say a vowel or if it would be in the 1st / 2nd/ 3rd/4th quartile of the dictionary.
- Say some words out loud – sit down when you hear a double letter, or a silent letter(s) or any other spelling pattern.
- Call out numbers; children sit down when you say an even or odd number / a multiple of 3/4/7, etc.
- True/False: children sit down when you tell them a 'true fact' from a selected topic.

Change places – similar to above – all sat in a circle but can include more personal opinions – getting children to express what they think about something:

- Change places if you prefer school dinners to MacDonald's.
- Change places if you think it is always wrong to tell a lie
- If you think girls are better readers
- If you would rather eat a worm than be bitten by a spider
- If you believe Henry VIII was a bad man

Guess what's in my head

You can demonstrate to start with but can then be done in pairs, trios, groups or as a class. Very useful for revising vocabulary for a topic or particular piece of writing. There are a number of ways to do this:

Mime the word. E.g. what is the adverb? Or if you were doing instructions – what is the imperative verb that is being mimed? E.g. 'Cutting a piece of wood'

Gapfill: 'The wives of Henry VIII who were beheaded were..... and.....'

Describe the word / give information but without saying the actual word: *This is the part of the plant that takes in nutrients and water from the soil. (roots).*

This part of the thing in your head controls and coordinates your muscles like when you walk or swing your arms. (The brain's cerebellum)

Match it up

The basic idea is that there are slips of paper with words or parts of sentences on them which children have to match up. These could be either words and their meanings, or first and second halves of sentences (or even sentences cut into three or four parts) or one sentence and a following sentence. You can throw in some mistaken cards. You could have several sentences and a group of children have to find each other and arrange it into a coherent paragraph.

You can throw in false leads for more fun. You can either do this with you making the cards, or the children preparing their own and then mixing them up.

Could also be used for phonic / spelling patterns, distinguishing between phrases and sentences, maths equations – one card with the question the other the answer, words and their definitions etc.

Whiteboard Races:

A number of different games, all based on the idea of items to be revised will be written or drawn on the whiteboard, and children working in teams to try and 'win'. Sometimes they might race each other to be the first with the answer.

This can also be differentiated for small groups – possibly using ipads or other handheld devices you can send the questions to.

Examples:

Whiteboard Quiz: Reveal a question at a time on a topic or concept you want to revise. Provide a time limit to answer it and then ask for / mark the answers. There doesn't have to be just one right answer – just a 'thoughtful and well-judged one.

E.g. Can you name three things that are used for energy efficiency? What could happen if you eat too many sweets?

Whiteboard Race: Done in short bursts with key vocabulary this can extend children's vocabulary and also help with spellings. Write words on the board and split the class into two teams. Give the front member of each team a pen, one red and one black. Read out the word and have them race to circle the right spelling or read out the definition and have them choose from three different meanings. Once one of them has done so, they both pass the pens on to the next in their teams.

Whiteboard Writing Race: This time, start off with a blank board. Split the class into two teams and give the first member of each a pen. Stand them in front of the whiteboard and say a word; they have to race to write it – correctly. Points for the correct spellings – if children work together in mixed ability teams then it should be a fair 'race'.

Variation is to play in smaller groups with individual whiteboards: One person chooses a word from a pack of spelling cards supplied by you in the middle and 'secretly' writes it on their board. The others then write it and are awarded points for being correct. Encourage them to talk about which parts of the word they might be struggling with and share spelling strategies to help each other.

Whiteboard Relay: This game is self-working, with no teacher participation necessary apart from monitoring, correcting and feedback afterwards. The team has to write a sentence together (you can shout out a theme or topic to start them off) but they have to construct it one word at a time – i.e. each member of the team takes turns running to the whiteboard and writing the next word – or adding the next correct punctuation mark.

This could also be done as a simpler version if you have the whiteboard items as self-explanatory – say, as children working in pairs to correct grammar mistakes or misspelled words

Word/Picture Race: here, you write up a word on the board and, for each one, a corresponding image or synonym. Split the class into two teams and give each a different-coloured pen. They then have a relay race – the first person stepping forward, drawing a line and then passing the pen to the next – to see who can match up the most words to their images. Teacher watches and corrects. At the end, see who drew the most lines (who won) and check the answers as a class.

Knock the teeth out! You need a big list of questions about the book or topic you are using – this is good for reading and responding / reading for information skills. E.g. ask children to read a passage and then ask them some questions about it.

Draw two big mouths on the whiteboard or on a large sheet of paper in the middle of the group. Give each mouth about 8 teeth. Split the group into 2 and ask individual team members questions. If they get it RIGHT, you erase one tooth from the OPPONENTS mouth. It gives the impression they are knocking out the teeth of the other team. (This game is basically a variation of Hangman)

Other metaphors could be:

- A juggler juggling balls (could add instead of taking away!)
- Draw sweets and take them away
- Eat up each other's apples, bananas, ice-creams, etc.

Hangman games: Good for spelling and vocabulary, or key words/concepts in a topic you want to reinforce

Classic Hangman:

In this game, one person writes up dashes indicating the number of letters in a word, and the other players have to guess by saying one letter at a time. Every time they guess a letter right the writer writes it in the appropriate space (more than once, if the word has more than one of the same letter). Every time they get it wrong, he draws another part of a picture of a man being hanged. The students win when they complete (or guess) the word; they lose if the picture is completed and the man hanged.

Revised Hangman:

Classic Hangman is an old favourite, but there are some ways to make it more fun. The picture of a man being hanged is a little dull. Instead, try:

- A man walking off a cliff into the shark-infested sea; he takes another step with every wrong letter (very quick to draw with stick figures).
- A balloon sinking into the (naturally) shark-infested ocean.
- A person sleeping at the bottom of the cliff while another person at the top pushes a big rock onto him. (could the one at the top of the cliff be the teacher?) Every wrong letter means the rock falls a little further.
- A plane crashing into a mountain.

Stand-up Hangman:

Don't draw a picture; just write up the dashes for the word. Every time a person says a right letter, it gets written in the correct space. Every time somebody says a wrong letter, though, it gets written on the board and that person has to stand up. This works best in large classes, because you're going to use people up pretty quickly. In smaller groups you could do things to make it easier: give them clues, give them two chances (the first time they get it wrong they stand up; the second time they stand on one leg), etc.

The Experts

A fun way to review a subject, and an alternative to the usual oral plenary feedback. The children must listen carefully and work together as a team.

Put children in groups of four. The first group comes up to the front of the class and stands shoulder to shoulder. They are now transformed into 'The Experts' (or the Dragons or The Wizard) - with four heads but one mind. The teacher and/or class asks them a question, and the four children answer – speaking in turn, and one word at a time.

The Secret Word:

Here, the class has to fill in the clues, like a crossword, to find the secret word that runs through them. Like so:

- Comes after one.
- This is good to have on a rainy day.
- Hens and ducks lay these.
- You wear these on your feet
- Sit at this to do your work
- One of these is said to keep the doctor away
- The colour of a buttercup

The words are "Two, umbrella, eggs, shoes (or socks), desk, apple, yellow and the secret word – from reading their first letters downwards – is Tuesday.

Children can make them up for each other on words relating to a topic or spellings.

Feely-bag: Have a bag full of objects; children put a hand in and try to identify the objects before taking them out. Has many applications:

E.g.

- Think of 3 adjectives to describe it.
- Ask a question about it.
- What is the link between this and our topic of money?
- Could it have more than one name?
- Describe it in only 1 sentence.

Beat the teacher: Tell a story/read an article/talk to the students about something or do a piece of shared writing - but warn them in advance that you're going to make mistakes, and see if they're clever enough to spot them. For every one they spot they get a point but for any mistakes they miss you get the point.

Odd one out: A good one to use as a quick recap, part way through a lesson – to make sure children have grasped your main teaching point(s). Write up two or three ideas/words on the whiteboard – e.g. parts of the body, possible descriptive words for a character, foods the Roman might have eaten. Throw in one that is not connected. Have the class tell you which the odd one is out. A variation is for them to add one or two more to yours.

Walk the room: Create a list of fifty or so review questions. Choose a place in the classroom for you to begin. Ask the children the questions, one by one. For each right answer, you move forward one pace; for each wrong answer, move backward one pace. The goal, of course, is to get around the class. You can choose a child to move instead of you.

Quick Starters for Literacy or MFL practice.

(All of these starters require practically no preparation.)

- Five anagram words on the board
- Write the middle or end of 5 known words
- Write 5 words with a letter missing each. The missing letters could spell another word, if you're that well organised.
- On a known theme (i.e. town) write the first letter of 5 different places.
- 5 words each with one deliberate mistake in the spelling.
- Odd one out i.e. chien chat cheval chance
- With times, numbers, dates or any other sequences, i.e. Days and months in French – put them in the right order.
- Mime a word they know (exaggerated lip-reading)
- Skywrite a word they know (you must write it backwards for them)
- Write a verb in the present tense – they write it in the past.
- They have one minute to write as many words in a given category: e.g. clothes as possible, colours, sports, fruit, veg, countries, pets, rooms, hobbies, furniture, planets, parts of the body etc.
- They have one minute to write as many words as they can beginning with....
- Writesixorsevenwordstogetherwithoutabreak.
- Show them five flashcards, jumble them up, and they must guess which one you have in front of You- or remember them and write them in order.

At the end of a lesson - "What word/sentence am I thinking of from the lesson". Do either from memory or with support. All can participate. Write the one you are thinking of on a piece of paper in case they accuse you of cheating! Then involve the kids up front.

A sweet for the winner is a great addition to this game...

Guess what I might say – make a short recording in advance. Tell children to think of 10 words to do with your lesson or topic and write them down. They then listen to your recording and every time they hear the words they tick them as a tally chart. Winner is the one with most ticks.

You can also use this with pupils preparing mini speaking presentations. They read them out (with/without support) and the others have chosen 5 words they think will come up and do the same tally idea.

Dictionary Race: 5 / 10 minutes to find as many words relating to the current topic - prize for the person with the most - then brainstorm them all onto a flipchart/the board so everyone has a wider vocab list.

Stand up Bingo. Get pupils to write down 3 words from what you have been teaching that lesson. They then stand up ready and sit down as soon as any one of the words on their list has been called out by you. The aim is to not have any of their words read out thereby being the last one standing. Good plenary.

Scramble: Get them to scramble up 5 things they've learnt from the lesson for a partner to unscramble.

Dictation: Might seem old fashioned but if used sparingly and in manageable 'chunks' it is a good way for children to do short bursts of writing and consolidate spelling and punctuation – choose funny paragraphs and topics that will interest them and/or make a funny noise for each punctuation mark you want them to write. Easy to differentiate for groups of children.

Stay in the 4: Choose four children to sit on the floor. (Randomly out of a hat is the fairest way). The other children have to ask each of them in turn a question on the topic or lesson ideas you decide upon. If one of the 4 answers correctly they get to stay there – but if not the child who asked the question swaps places and sits on the floor. (You need to make sure they did know the answer to their own question of course!) Whoever is left on the floor at the end of the lesson gets a prize. It is surprising how motivated children become to ask the 'hard' question.

Verbal Pictionary: Children describe something they have learnt in that lesson and everyone else tries to draw what it is.

If you have any ideas for starters and plenaries to share please send them in so we can share with other Thinking Child Network Members.

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