

Quick and Constructive: Easily Implemented Learning Activities

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These are a few activities that can be done with minimal equipment and explanations, so your students can be active with minimum instruction and management time. Teachers are increasingly expected to show they are developing critical thinking in their classes, and to document their impact on student learning. Suggestions for achieving this too often take away from time that could be spent moving and learning. Because of this, we will be thinking about nonintrusive assessment and critical thinking that can be done even—perhaps especially—with fun simple activities such as these. We will also discuss some of your favorite activities and how they fit this model.

Other points:

- Students can be asked for ideas for varying difficulty; it doesn't all have to come from us.
- Critical thinking questions can be used for assessment at any point in a class.
- Depending on class size, it may not be practicable to assess a whole class. If you stop while they are still enjoying it, they will be willing to play it again another day, and you can finish observing.
- All these work well for NASPE S6, "Values physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and/or social interaction."

Group Juggle

Students ($n = 6-8$) in circle toss objects back and forth maintaining pattern of who tosses to whom.

Skill level: High control

Develops: Throwing and catching, attentional focus and switching, cooperation.

Varying difficulty: Use multiple, varied objects, all following same pattern. Have them reverse the pattern. Once pattern is established, time them to see if they can do it faster from one trial to next. (Larger circles aren't recommended; they aren't more challenging so much as they increase wait time unless you proportionally increase the number of objects.) If your circles are the same size, finish with a contest to see which can complete the task fastest.

Critical thinking: "What if" questions.

Assessment opportunities: Observe for ability to toss and catch different objects, how they manage it when two objects are closely spaced. Be sure all students are equally involved.

Bean Bag Fun

Can you toss a bean bag up and down, and catch it every time?

Can you toss it from one hand to the other?

Can you toss and catch back and forth with a partner?

Can you toss it straight up, spin halfway around, and catch it?

Spin all the way around and catch it?

Can you toss it straight up, clap and catch it? Clap twice? Clap 3x? Jump in the air, clap, and catch it?

Can you balance on your elbow/back of hand/foot/knee, pop it up in the air and catch it with your hand? Pop it up in the air and catch it on your elbow/back of hand/foot/knee?

Toss it up in the air and catch

Skill level: Precontrol/ control

Develops: Tossing and catching, basic body and space management (NASPE S1)

Varying difficulty: This allows a lot of teaching by invitation to individualize instruction. Besides the variations in the activity description, varying the height of the toss while maintaining control is easily done.

Critical thinking: What-if questions related to tossing and catching techniques and affective domain questions about space.

Assessment opportunities: Observe for critical elements of toss and catch, ability to use either hand or dominant only, ability to extend skill by using a scoop, ability to move to the beanbag.

Observe for respect for other students' space.

Triangle Tag

Groups of four, three holding hands to form triangle, one chaser who tries to tag a designated one of the three. The triangle maneuvers to protect the one. (Chaser can't dive under or over to tag.)

Skill level: Utilization

Develops: Cooperation, chasing, fleeing, and dodging.

Varying difficulty: Add a person.

Critical thinking: Success requires they think strategically. Questioning can get them to verbalize strategies and how they relate to sport.

Assessment opportunities: Observe for ability to change directions quickly in response to other players' moves, whether they are making good decisions for how to move, whether they are being responsible for their behavior and for helping teammates, how they deal with the frustration. Your questioning can allow them to make the connection to effective movement strategies in invasion games.

Scuds

Have class in groups of 3-4 behind a “firing line.” Each group should have discs and assorted balls and beanbags. One person throws the disc and the others try to knock it out of the air. Because they are throwing hard, students will be developing good form. Because everyone is busy and no one really expects to hit the disc, less skilled students are more likely to participate and enjoy the task. (They tend to get excited, so be firm about their staying behind the firing line until you give the signal to retrieve. Retrieving is much easier if they play facing a wall.)

Skill level: control and higher

Develops: throwing

Varying difficulty: accommodates the full range of throwing ability

Assessment opportunities: good to assess their throwing skill

Popsicle Pushups

This is a challenge activity for only your stronger students, and should be done under your direct supervision. In a group of four people of approximately the same size, can they position themselves to form a square and do a pushup together that raises their feet in the air along with their bodies? Check that their feet are over one another’s bottoms, not their lower backs, before they push up. (From *Silver Bullets*)

Skill level: proficiency

Develops: requires a good bit of strength, challenging problem-solving skill

Varying difficulty: usually not an issue! If they succeed, ask if they can walk on their hands so that the group moves. Theoretically, you can do it with larger groups, but I would not do that with adolescents.

Critical thinking: a real challenge. You can have other students involved as associate problem solvers.

Assessment opportunities: Assess problem solving and cooperation skills

Cooperative Jump Rope

How many students can jump a long rope at the same time?

Skill level: Utilization

Develops: Fitness, cooperation, timing

Varying difficulty: With older students, can tie two long ropes together to accommodate larger groups of jumpers.

Critical thinking: This requires problem solving and cooperation.

Assessment opportunities: Assess problem solving, respect for others (especially when someone messes it up). Not the best for assessing jump rope skill.

Bean Bag Pushup

Each student is in the pushup position with six beanbags in front of them. Alternating hands, they pick up each bean bag and move it. Reverse to put them back. Some marker helps here; it can be in and out of a hula hoop, on and off a carpet square, front to back of a line on the gym floor, etc.

Skill level: low control

Develops: upper body strength

Varying difficulty: Stronger students can do pushups between moving bean bags. Can vary the distance they have to move the bean bag. Increasing speed makes it harder.

Critical thinking: questions related to fitness impact

Assessment opportunities: observation for ability to maintain pushup position, rhythm

The Bean Bag Story

Have children in a circle, each with a bean bag. For the italicized words, they pass to the left/right, circle it around their waists, put it on their feet or on top of their heads. (I got this from Madge Ashy, who doesn't remember where she got it.) There are other activities that call for children to match movements to key words. Look at them critically before using, as they can be too long for children to maintain interest. Don't be afraid to edit; the games police won't come after you!

One day the Bean family *left* on their vacation to drive *around* the country. *Right* after they *left* their house in the car, Mrs. Bean asked Mr. Bean to make a *left* at the corner so she could use the restroom at the store. She had to go *down* to get the manager from his office on the *left* side of the store to get the key. Then she had to walk *around* to find the stairs, because the restroom was *up* on the second floor. After she used the restroom, she walked *around* a little and then went *downstairs* to give the key back to the manager and then *left* the store to get back in the car. Mr. Bean said, "Where is the map? I need it to see where we go from here. It says to keep going *up* around this hill for two miles, then make a *right* at the corner and go *down* the hill until we see a sign that says 'The Get *Down* Hotel.'" Well, they drove *around* and *around* and *up* and *down* and they finally got there. The hotel owner got *up* from his chair and said, "Sit *down right* here. Your room is *up* on the twelfth floor. Someone will come *around* to pick *up* your luggage and carry it *up* for you."

The Beans stayed at "The Get *Down* Hotel" for two weeks. Every day they got *up* and walked *down* twelve floors to the lobby. Then they drove *around* to look at things they had heard about. When it was time to leave, someone came *around* to pick up their luggage again and tie it *down* on their car. They wrapped a rope *around* the luggage to keep it *up* on the roof of the car. When they got home, the Beans sat *down* to watch a TV show called "Looking for Mr. *Right*." The Bean children, Leroy and Lorraine *left* to go *down* the street to play a game with their friends called "*Right to Left* and *Upside Down* Julie Brown."

Skill level: This looks like a good one for K-1, but they struggle with the passing. For them, have them put the bean bag in their right or left hands, rather than passing it to the left or right.

Develops: Attention skills, understanding of directions.

Varying difficulty: How quickly you speak affects difficulty. You can do some judicious editing or delete one or more of the terms to make it simpler.

Critical thinking: Application level

Assessment opportunities: Understanding of directions, respect for others who make mistakes.

Invisible Jump Rope

Whether it's beginning jumping or learning a new skill, have them jump with an invisible rope or with both ends of the rope in one hand. This lets them work on the timing and coordination.

Skill level: Any

Develops: Jump rope skills

Varying difficulty: Teach by invitation; students can decide when they're ready to jump the ropes. I like to start them with the rope in both hands because it gives them the noise of the rope hitting the ground to time their jumps to, and it makes it simpler to transition to jumping the rope.

Assessment opportunities: Timing, technique

Favorite sources:

CATCH <http://www.flaghouse.com/Athletic-activityGuides.asp> has good activities, with teaching tips and suggestions for variations.

Graham, G., Holt/Hale, S. A., & Parker, M. (2013). *Children moving* (9th ed.) Boston: McGraw Hill. *Children Moving* makes task selection easier by identifying the difficulty level of all activities and breaking them down for task development.

SPARK <http://www.sparkpe.org/> Whether it's their books or their folios, SPARK has great stuff. A lot of my favorite activities come from SPARK, but I didn't use them for this because they are regular STW presenters.

J. D. Hughes' books (Human Kinetics Publishing) have good activities, suited to upper elementary/middle school.

Anything from the Project Adventure people. You need to be judicious; activities that are designed for adult adventure programs aren't always suited to children or to school settings. Karl Rohnke's *Silver Bullets* is my favorite.