

A-Z Learning Activities



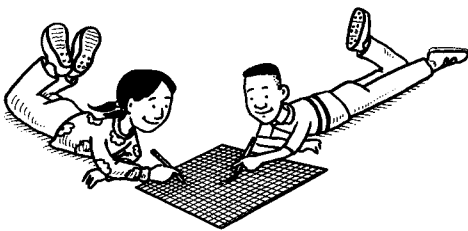
Looking for an answer to the complaint, “There’s nothing to do”? Use these ideas to help beat the boredom blues—and build the skills your child needs to succeed in school.

Action math

Have your youngster turn math word problems into mini-skits to act out. For “Annie had five apples; she gave three to Dan; how many does she have left?” she could gather five apples, use dolls to represent Annie and Dan, and create silly dialogue.

Block out

Use graph paper to boost spelling and vocabulary skills. Draw a 15 x 15 box on the paper, and take turns writing words crossword-style until no more words will fit. Score one point for every letter you fill in. High score wins.



Coin counter

Practice money skills when dining out. *Example:* How many quarters does the chicken dinner cost? Your youngster can use paper and pencil or a calculator to find the answer. (If the dinner costs \$5.75, he would divide 5.75 by .25 for an answer of 23 quarters.)

Describe this

Choose an object, set a timer for one minute, and have everyone list words that describe it. For a rock, your

child might write, “gray, hard, round, rough.” When time’s up, players compare lists and cross off duplicates. Whoever has the most words left is the winner.

Eavesdropper

Try this game to practice listening skills with a radio or an audiobook. Pick a fairly common word (please, music, table). The first person to hear the word raises her hand and gets to pick the next word to listen for.

Firsts and lasts

Name an animal (alligator). Ask your youngster to name another animal that starts with the last letter of the first animal (rabbit). Continue (tiger, rattlesnake) until one of you is stumped. Then, choose a new topic (movie titles, foods), and play again.

Growing science

Cut a half inch off the tops of two carrots. Put the carrot tops in separate saucers of water. Keep one in a sunny spot and the other in a dark place. Have your youngster check them daily and add water as needed. Which one grows faster?

Hand signals

Use sign language in a home spelling bee. Pick words from your

child’s spelling list or a favorite book, and have her sign the letters instead of saying them aloud. *Tip:* Borrow *Sign Language for Kids* by Lora Heller from the library to learn the sign language alphabet.

Inside, outside

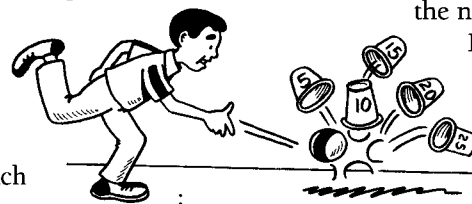
Teach your youngster classification skills. Secretly think of a category (school supplies), and have him figure out what it is by guessing various objects. If his guess belongs in your category (pencils), say, “Inside.” If it doesn’t (tomatoes), say, “Outside.” When your child names the category, he gets to start a new round.

Jumbled numbers

Work on place value and addition with this three-dice game. With your child, take turns rolling the dice and making the largest three-digit number possible. Write down your numbers on a piece of paper as you go. *Example:* If your youngster rolls 2, 5, and 1 on her first turn, she would write 521. At the end of five rounds, add up your numbers. Whoever has the largest total wins.

Knock five

With a permanent marker, write the numbers 5, 10, 15, 20, and 25 on five paper cups. Stand the cups on the ground 10 feet away.



Take turns rolling a small ball toward them, and score the total on the cups you topple. Then, reset for the next roll.

Letter lookout

Have your youngster list seven random letters on a piece of paper. While in the car, ask him to search for places that start with each letter. *Example:* For “O,” your child might write “office supply store” or “Opal Street.” *Variation:* Play this at home with a map or road atlas.

Magnetic pull

Experiment with different-sized magnets. Let your youngster guess how many small objects (paper clips, pins, nails) each magnet can pick up at once. Have her test each guess. Does the size of the magnet make a difference?

Name game

While waiting in line, challenge your child to make as many sentences as possible. The catch? Each word of the sentence must start with a different letter of his name. *Example:* Eric = Elephants ran into church.

One, two, three

Take turns counting to 30 by one, two, or three numbers at a time. The object of the game is to keep from being the person who has to say “30.” *Example:* The first player says “1, 2.” The second player can say “3, 4, 5.” Keep going until someone is forced to say “30.”

Picture writing

At the library, find a book about Egyptian hieroglyphs. Then, ask your youngster to invent a picture language of his own and use it to write you a note. Try to figure out what each symbol means—and ask him if you’re right.

Questions, questions

Think of a storybook character your child knows (Wilbur the pig in *Charlotte’s Web*). Have her ask questions about the story to guess who it is. For example, if she asks, “What is the character’s



problem?” you might say, “He’s afraid the farmer will eat him.” Limit older children to yes-or-no questions (“Is the character human?”). When your youngster figures it out, it’s her turn to pick a character.

Rap rhythms

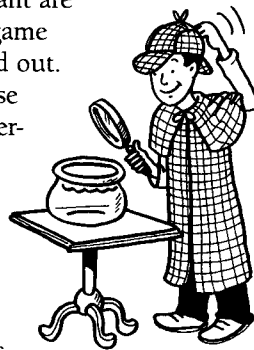
Play with poetry by having your child write rap lyrics to the tune of “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” Be sure he keeps the same rhythm. *Example:* “Someday we will travel far” works for the first line; “Some children run from dogs” does not. Show him how to count syllables to get the rhythm right. Then, have him chant his new poem like a rap star.

Save 12

Deal three cards to each player. Take turns drawing from the deck and discarding a card from your hand until someone can make a number sentence totaling 12 ($5 \times 4 - 8 = 12$; $4 + 9 - 1 = 12$). That player scores a point. Play to 10 points. *Note:* Aces = 1, and face cards = 10.

Thief!

How observant are your kids? This game will help you find out. While others close their eyes, one person (the “thief”) secretly removes something from the room. When everyone opens their eyes, they try to find what’s missing. The first one to guess correctly becomes the next thief.



Uncapped fun

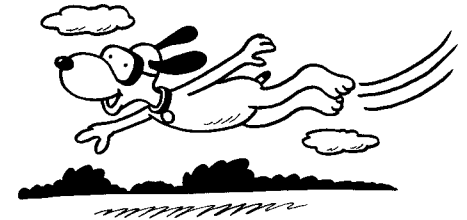
Build spatial skills by removing the lids from 10 or more different-sized plastic containers. Set a timer, and challenge your child to put the lids on the correct containers before time runs out.

Vocabulary view

With your youngster, look out the window and choose a familiar object. Then, each of you writes down everything that makes up the object. For example, a list for “tree” could include branches, leaves, bark, and blossoms. The longest list wins.

What if?

Ask your child a silly question (“What if dogs could fly?”). See if she can come up with a silly answer (“Squirrels couldn’t hide in trees”). Then, have her ask you a silly question. Keep going until one of you can’t think of an answer—or can’t stop laughing.



X-ray writing

Your youngster can make invisible messages by dipping a cotton swab in lemon juice and writing on plain paper. When the “ink” dries, the words will disappear. To read the messages, tell your child to hold the paper under a lamp. The letters will magically reappear!

Yardstick racetrack

Instead of speed, use distance to find the winner of this race. Take turns rolling toy cars across the floor, and have your youngster measure how far they travel with a yardstick or measuring tape. The car that goes the farthest wins the race.

Zany wordplay

Can your child find the hidden meaning of “sock sock” (pair of socks), “cycleycleycycle” (tricycle) or ^{man}board (man overboard)? Using index cards, create a deck of word mysteries for each other to solve. For extra fun, your youngster can illustrate each card.

Home & School CONNECTION