


# BRAIN GAMES

FOR BUILDING FOCUS, REMEMBER, AND  
STOP AND THINK POWERS



EASEL  
lab



SEL KERNELS



## What are SEL Kernels?

Kernels are activities or strategies used by effective prevention programs that have been shown to effect specific behavior changes. Drawing from a content analysis of 25 leading social-emotional learning (SEL) programs, we pulled strategies and practices common to programs and designed them to fit the Kernels model. These kernels of practice represent a **smaller scale, personalized approach to SEL**, and aim to provide teachers with a menu of needs- and preference-based strategies that are quick, targeted, effective, and easy to integrate into everyday classroom practice.

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# I SPY

ALL GRADES

**WHAT IS IT?** A game to build executive function skills.

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT?** Practicing focus and attention.

WHY DO THIS?

**IF WE...**

practice focus and attention...

I SPY

**THEN WE...**

can organize thinking and behavior to meet goals...

**SO WE...**

can engage deeply in learning with each other.

## THE BIG IDEA

**This game is about practicing careful looking so you can find the object I'm thinking of.**

## INSTRUCTIONS

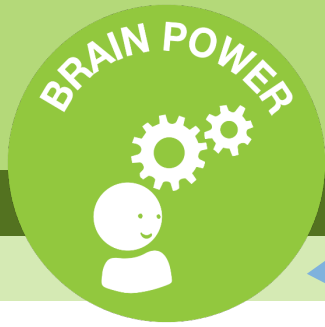
1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Gather students in a circle. Say, "Let's make sure our Focus Binoculars are working before we play. See if you can catch what I do" Make a small movement with your face (e.g., *wink one eye, blink twice, or wiggle your nose*).
3. Say, "Now let's use our Focus Binoculars to see if you can guess what object in the room I'm thinking about. I spy with my little eyes something that is \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., *choose a color*)."
4. Students point their Focus Binoculars at their best guess. Ask them what they are focusing on, and the first person who guesses right gets to pick the next object!

**»» MUST DO:** Must require students to ignore distractions/irrelevant information.

**↪ CAN ADAPT:** Look for more complicated objects.

MATERIALS


None required.




## AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- During this game, were you able to notice small things that you don't normally see? What made it hard? What made it easy? Why do you think that is?
- How did you feel when you couldn't find an object?
- When are other times during the day that we need to focus, but might have a lot of distractions around us?

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

 For emergent bilingual learners, incorporate color words from their home languages (e.g., say "azul" in addition to "blue" if you have Spanish-speaking children in your class).

 Give students who may need additional support extra time to prepare by practicing with them ahead of time (just the two of you) prior to playing the game with the whole class.



## ADAPTATIONS

- The first time you play, try starting with 2-3 rounds of guessing, then do a post-game talk.
- To make it easier, give students hints about where they should point their Focus Binoculars. If no one has guessed after about a minute, give a second clue (e.g., location, size, etc.)
- Invite students to take a turn leading the game.
- To make the game more challenging, add more rounds and choose clues besides color (e.g., shape, texture, first letter/sound of the word, etc.).

# MY HAT HAS 3 CORNERS


**WHAT IS IT?** A game to build executive function skills.

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT?** Practicing focus and attention.

ALL GRADES

**WHY DO THIS?**



```

graph TD
    A((IF WE...  
practice focus and attention...)) --> B((THEN WE...  
can organize thinking and behavior to meet goals...))
    B --> C((SO WE...  
can engage deeply in learning with each other.))
    C --> A
    D[MY HAT HAS 3 CORNERS]
  
```

**MATERIALS**

✂ None required.

**THE BIG IDEA**

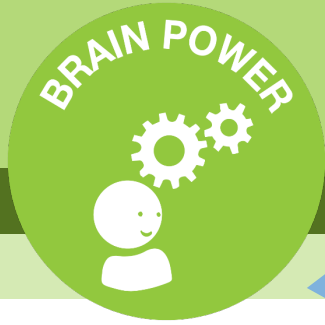
**This game is about focusing on specific words and remembering when to use motions instead of words.**

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Say, "Let's practice the words to the chant. It's just two phrases:  
My Hat has three corners, three corners has my hat.  
If it didn't have three corners, it wouldn't be my hat."
3. Once students have practiced and are familiar with the chant, tell them you are going to replace one of the words. When you get to the word "hat," DON'T say it. Instead, students should point to their heads (*demonstrate motion*).
4. Try the chant again, this time remembering to stay silent on "hat."
5. Next, tell students you are going to add one more hand motion. Now, in addition to pointing instead of saying "hat," when you get to the word "three," DON'T say it. Instead, hold up three fingers (*demonstrate motion*).
6. For the last round, add one more hand motion. When you get to the word "corner," make a corner with your arms and touch your elbows (*demonstrate motion*).
7. Repeat the chant until students can remember to replace key words with motions.

»» **MUST DO:** Must require students to listen carefully for specific words.

↪ **CAN ADAPT:** Let kids choose a favorite song. Play classical music and have them listen for a specific sound (e.g., clarinet).



## AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- That was a little tricky! Chanting, moving, and positioning is a lot to do. How did your Focus Brain Power help you?
- What else helped you play this game? What could you try differently next time? (e.g., *I said all the words silently in my head to help me do the right motions at the right time, I remembered what words were silent in each verse by picturing them in my mind while we were chanting, etc.*)

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS



Translate the chant into the home languages of emergent bilingual learners in your class.



For students who may need additional support, write the chant on chart paper, and draw accompanying pictures, if helpful. Then post it up in the room, so children can see it as you sing.

## ADAPTATIONS

- For younger students, spend more time practicing the chant. Remembering those few words can be hard! Or, don't have them memorize it – focus instead on doing the hand motion for one key word at a time.
- When students are ready for a challenge, introduce a new chant and come up with your own replacement movements.

# WHO STOLE THE HONEY POT?

**WHAT IS IT?** A game to build executive function skills.

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT?** Practicing focus and attention.




ALL GRADES

## WHY DO THIS?



## MATERIALS

 A bell or other small object that makes noise.

## THE BIG IDEA

This game is about careful listening to hear who stole the honey pot.

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Gather students in a circle. Choose one student to be the listening bear. The listening bear sits in the middle of the circle with the bear's honey pot (*which is represented by a bell or anything that makes a noise*). The bear will need to pay attention to the sounds to guess who takes the honey pot.
3. Ask the bear to cover their eyes by getting the entire class to say together, "Ms./Mr. Bear is very sleepy. Ms./Mr. Bear is dreaming deeply."
4. Silently point to another student you would like to be the honey thief. The honey thief will quietly go to the bear and take the honey pot back to their seat in the circle. The thief should ring the honey pot, and then hide it behind their back.
5. Have the class say, "Ms./Mr. Bear, uncover your eyes and guess who has the honey pot."
6. Play multiple rounds, giving different students a chance to play the roles of bear and thief.

» **MUST DO:** Must require students to listen carefully for a specific sound.

↪ **CAN ADAPT:** Change the object or animal.



## AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- What was it like to listen with your eyes closed? Did that make it easier or harder to focus? What did you hear when your eyes were closed?
- What else did you hear that might have been a distraction? What helped you focus your listening?
- Did you look around and use your Focus Brain Powers to notice any extra clues about who had the honey pot, like classmates' facial expressions and body language (e.g., *wiggles, smiles, eyebrows, etc.*)?

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS



For students who may need additional support, play in a small group to help them choose the honey thief from a smaller number of people. Ask the thief to ring the bell a few times, as well, if helpful.



Create a schedule ahead of time for who will be Ms./Mr. Bear each day to assure children they will all have a chance to play that role.

## ADAPTATIONS

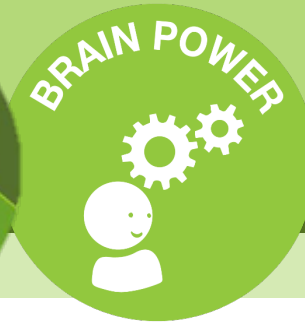
- For younger students, simplify the prompts to wake/put the bear to sleep, or just say them yourself without asking students to recite them.
- You can make the game more challenging by increasing the number of honey pots.



# HOCUS POCUS, EVERYBODY FOCUS

**WHAT IS IT?** A game to build executive function skills.

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT?** Practicing self-control.




ALL GRADES

## WHY DO THIS?



## MATERIALS

 None required.

## THE BIG IDEA

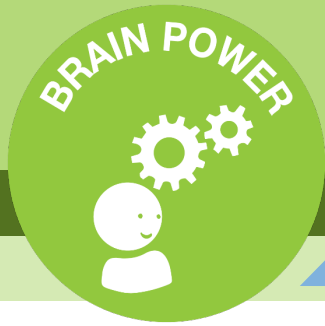
This game is about listening carefully as we count and remembering the right motion for a key number.

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Gather students in a circle. For the first round, go around the circle and count to 10 (have each person count one number). After the tenth person has said "10," the next person should say "Hocus Pocus, Everybody Focus."
3. Practice. Repeat the "1-10 + Hocus Pocus, Everybody Focus" sequence until every student has had a turn.
4. Say, "Great! Now, we're going to add a challenge. Every time we get to the number five, the person with that number will clap instead of saying the number five. Remember to just clap without saying the number. Pay careful attention to when it's your turn and whether you need to say a number, do a motion, or say 'Hocus, Pocus, Everybody Focus.' Let's practice."
5. Go around until every student has had a turn.
6. As your class becomes more comfortable with this game, feel free to add additional challenges for different numbers.

» **MUST DO:** Must require students to listen carefully for a specific number.

↪ **CAN ADAPT:** Change the motions and number of motions in the series.



## AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- During this game, we had to pay careful attention to when it was our turn and what to say or what to do. What other times of the day do you need to pay careful attention to what to say and do?
- What strategies did you use to be successful in this game?

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS



Ask emergent bilingual learners to say “Hocus Pocus, Everybody Focus” or a similar phrase in their native language when it’s their turn to say it.





This game can be tricky when students are first learning! The first time you play, intentionally make a mistake, and have a follow-up discussion about how mistakes are normal and to be expected in this game. Model how to move on quickly after making a mistake and how to keep playing with a good attitude.

## ADAPTATIONS

- To make the game easier for younger students, try shortening the phrase to just “Hocus Pocus.” Or, only ask them to count to 5.
- Create additional challenges that have an academic focus. For example, every time you get to a certain number, name something from a subject you’re studying, such as:
  - Different animals
  - The name of a country
  - State capitals
  - Different kinds of angles
  - Addition or subtraction sentences that equal X
  - Different verbs for even numbers, different adjectives for odd numbers
  - Etc.
- Encourage the last student (i.e., the student who says “Hocus Pocus, Everybody Focus”) to make up the next challenge.

# ZIP, ZAP, ZOP

ALL GRADES

**WHAT IS IT?** A game to build executive function skills.

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT?** Practicing focus and attention.

### WHY DO THIS?

**IF WE...**

practice focus and attention...

ZIP, ZAP, ZOP

**THEN WE...**

can organize thinking and behavior to meet goals...

**SO WE...**

can engage deeply in learning with each other.

### THE BIG IDEA

**This game is about paying attention to know when it is your turn and to know the right thing to say.**

### INSTRUCTIONS

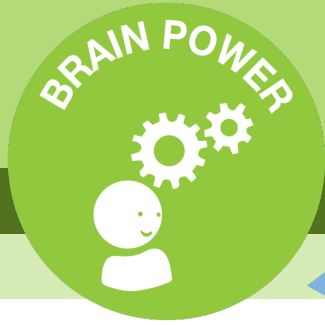
1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Gather students in a circle. Say, “Let’s use our focus skills to pay attention as we take turns and send the chant ‘Zip, Zap, Zop’ around the circle.”
3. Have students repeat after you: “Zip, Zap, Zop.”
4. Tell students, “During our game, we are going to take turns passing the Zip, the Zap, and the Zop around/across the circle. I will start by saying ‘Zip’ and clap my hands at someone else. That person will then say ‘Zap’ and clap their hands at someone different, who will then say ‘Zop,’ etc. We will send this same chant around the circle over and over again.”
5. The goal is to send the chant quickly around the circle. While students are waiting for their turn, they should pay careful attention and follow the chant around the circle. They should also pay attention to make sure everyone gets a turn!

»» **MUST DO:** Must require students to pay careful attention, say the right word, and do the correct motion.

↪ **CAN ADAPT:** Change the chant (e.g., Zoop, Zeep, Zipe).

### MATERIALS

✂ None required.



## AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- Was it hard to use your Focus Power and pay attention to where the Zip, Zap, and Zop were in the circle? What helped you stay quiet or react quickly?
- Is it easier or harder to focus when playing this funny game versus when doing something serious (e.g., school work)?
- What other times of the day do you have to pay careful attention to do something in a certain order?

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS





For students who may need additional support, use different words that don't sound so similar and aren't confusing, such as banana, apple, and grapes or cat, dog, and bunny.

## ADAPTATIONS

- To make the game easier for younger students, go around the circle in order chanting “Zip, Zap, Zop.” To change things up, add a ball for them to gently toss around the circle as they go.
- For a variation, ask students to do a different motion, such as winking, while saying their part of the chant.
- To make the game more challenging, add additional words to “Zip, Zap, Zop” (e.g., Zoop, Zeep, Zipe).
- To boost phonemic awareness for younger children, adjust the chant to reflect any letters or concepts you're working on (e.g., if you're focusing on the letter 'b,' the chant could be “Bip, Bap, Bop.”).
- For added challenge, ask children to pass around each word of a children's song to each other until they get through a verse, e.g., “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes.” It will require them to pay extra attention to where they are in the verse.

# NAME GAME

ALL GRADES

**WHAT IS IT?** A game to build executive function skills.

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT?** Practicing memory and attention.

### WHY DO THIS?

**IF WE...**

practice  
memory and  
attention...

NAME  
GAME

**THEN WE...**

will keep track  
of and use  
important  
information...

**SO WE...**

can engage  
deeply in  
learning with  
each other.

### THE BIG IDEA

**This game is about remembering what each person has said, and repeating it in the correct order, along with an accompanying motion.**

### INSTRUCTIONS

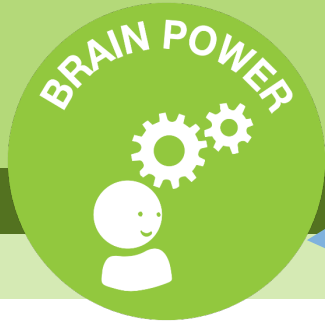
1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Gather students standing in a circle.
3. Explain that you will go around the circle, and each person will get to share their name and a move or motion with the group. Then you'll all repeat it, e.g. "My name is Carmen, and I like to ride my bike." <All students repeat> "Your name is Carmen, and you like to ride your bike." Be creative with your motions!
4. Model by sharing your name and a move or motion (e.g., *bend to touch your toes, do a jumping jack, or make a lasso motion*), and have students repeat after you.
5. Give students a moment to think of a move they want to make when it's their turn.
6. Continue around the circle, having all students repeat back the name and motion, until everyone has gone. When it gets back to you, have everyone sit where they are for a post-game talk.

**»» MUST DO:** Must require students to remember and keep track of a growing list of information.

**↻ CAN ADAPT:** Change the descriptor and/or motions.

### MATERIALS

None required.



## AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- What was the hardest part of the game for you? What made this game easy for you? What will you try the next time we play?
- What are some times that we need to use our Remember Power in school or at home?

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS



Give emergent bilingual learners the opportunity to teach other students how to say phrases from the game in their native language, such as “My name is...” and “Your name is...” Then, incorporate these phrases into the game.



Provide students who may need additional support with the opportunity to play in small groups to cut down on the amount of focus time needed while other students introduce themselves.



## ADAPTATIONS

- This game can be played with many different themes where motions match the prompts, such as:
  - How are you feeling today?
  - What kind of animal would you want to be?
  - What would you bring on a trip?
- Once your class gets better at Remember Power, ask each person to repeat back the previous person’s response before saying their own.
- To increase the difficulty level, have students repeat all the names and motions that have been said before their turn, in the correct order. This can be done as a whole class (so students are helping each other to remember collectively) or for older students, can be done individually (when it is your turn, you say aloud all the names and motions that have come before you, and then add your own name).

# WHAT IS MISSING?

**WHAT IS IT?** A game to build executive function skills.

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT?** Practicing memory and attention.

ALL GRADES

**WHY DO THIS?**

IF WE...

practice memory and attention...

WHAT IS MISSING?

→

THEN WE...

will keep track of and use important information...

SO WE...

can engage deeply in learning with each other.

**MATERIALS**

✂ Small objects to hide

Something to cover the objects (e.g., scarf)

## THE BIG IDEA

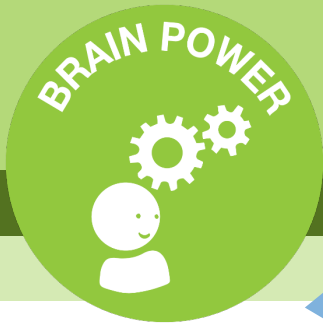
**This game is about keeping track of objects in your mind so that you can tell which one is missing.**

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Assemble a group of 5 small objects that you can display on a surface (e.g., *pen, button, coin, paper clip, rubber band, etc.*). Find some way to cover all of the objects for the part of the game where you have to move one (e.g., *large folder or scarf*).
3. Make sure everyone can see the objects. Name all of the items along with students (make sure they know what each item is).
4. Take 15 seconds to Remember (*rub your temples*) the objects before one is removed.
5. Cover the objects and remove one without letting students see.
6. Ask, “Can you use your Remember Power to guess what’s missing?”

»» **MUST DO:** Must require students to remember and keep track of a growing list of information.

↪ **CAN ADAPT:** Number of/type of objects to hide.



## AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- What Brain Power helped you while you were looking at the objects the first time? How did you remember? (E.g., *I made mental images of the objects in my head, I repeated the names of the objects to myself, I listed them in alphabetical order.*)
- Is there any other time you need to remember a set of objects and figure out if something is missing? (E.g., *to pack my bag in the morning, to double-check I have everything I need before I leave school, to make sure I included all the right information in my assignment.*)

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS





As you're playing, ask emergent bilingual learners to share the name of each item in their native language.

## ADAPTATIONS

- To make the game easier, use fewer objects, larger objects, or more distinct objects that are easier to tell apart.
- Make this game harder by removing more than one object at a time, adding more objects, or limiting the amount of study time.
- For another challenge, ask students to close their eyes, and then move/remove a larger object in the classroom (e.g., *something on the shelves or your desk*). See if they can figure out what's different now!
- Have a small group of students line up in the front of the room and stand in certain poses. Ask the class to study them for 15 seconds, and then have them close their eyes. Have one student in the small group change their pose. Ask the class to open their eyes again and identify who is standing in a different pose.



# WIGGLE COOL DOWN

ALL GRADES

**WHAT IS IT?** A game to build executive function skills.

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT?** Practicing memory and attention.

**WHY DO THIS?**

**IF WE...**

practice memory and attention...

**THEN WE...**

will keep track of and use important information...

**WIGGLE COOL DOWN**

**SO WE...**

can engage deeply in learning with each other.

**THE BIG IDEA**

**This game is about remembering a series of motions and doing them in the correct order.**

**INSTRUCTIONS**

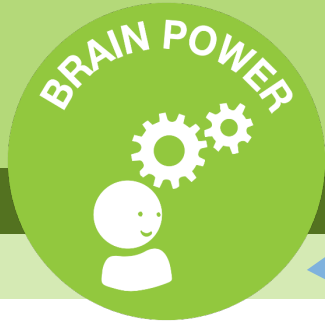
1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Have students each find their own space in the room, where they can move around and respect the space of others.
3. Say, "We are going to count down from 10 to 1, doing different motions that help us release extra energy to get our bodies and brains calm, focused, and ready to learn."
4. Start the countdown: "Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle for 10, 9, 8..." (*Everyone should be standing, wiggling their whole bodies and making silly noises.*)
5. "... at 7 and 6 we are getting quiet..." (*Lower your voice to a whisper as you say this.*)
6. "... at 5 and 4 our bodies sit silently..."
7. "... at 3 we take a deep breath and roll our shoulders back... at 2 we take a deep breath and cover our eyes... and 1 and 0."
8. Finally, have students uncover their eyes.

»» **MUST DO:** Must require students to remember a series of movements associated with numbers.

↪ **CAN ADAPT:** Change the numbers/motions (e.g., count down from 20 instead of 10, shimmy for 10, etc.).

**MATERIALS**

✂ None required.



## AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- How did you feel playing the game? Did your feelings change as the movements changed – from fast and exciting, to slow and calm?
- What are other times when it might feel good to do a calming or relaxing activity? (E.g., before you take a ride in a car, when recess is over and we need to get our minds and bodies ready to go inside.)

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS



For emergent bilingual learners, do the countdown in students' native languages.



For students who may need additional support, start at the number five, and assign one motion to each number.

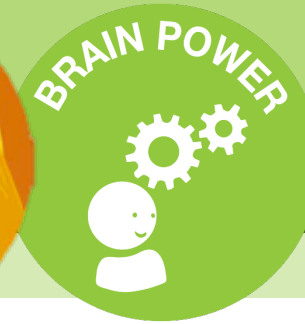
## ADAPTATIONS

- When first learning the activity – and continually with younger students – practice each move one by one: *wiggle, get quiet, sit silently, breathe deeply, roll shoulders back.*
- Over time, see if students can remember the sequence without the directions; try just counting down the numbers aloud.
- After students have mastered counting down from 10 – 1, increase the challenge level by starting at the number 15 or 20 and inviting them to create new motions for the different numbers.

# HOT POTATO

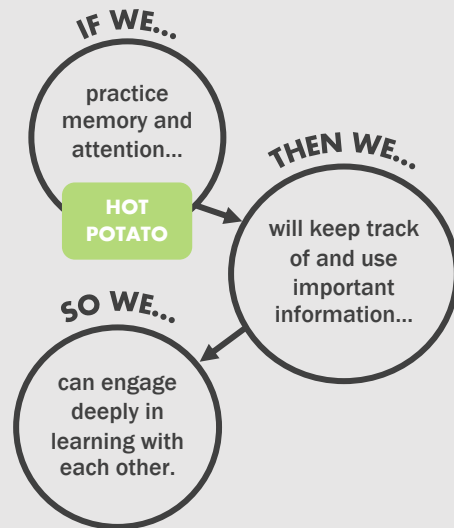
**WHAT IS IT?** A game to build executive function skills.

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT?** Practicing memory and attention.




ALL GRADES

## WHY DO THIS?



## MATERIALS

 A "hot potato" (e.g., ball or eraser).

## THE BIG IDEA

This game is about remembering what you're supposed to do while doing a different motion (passing around the hot potato as quickly as possible).

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Find an object that can be passed easily from hand to hand to use as your "hot potato" (e.g., ball or eraser), and cue up some music for the game.
3. Gather students standing (or sitting) in a circle.
4. Say, "I have a hot potato (*show the object*) that we're going to keep passing around as long as the music is playing."
5. Tell students that when the music stops, everyone will do this dance move: \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., jump, turn around in a circle, touch your head, etc.). The person who is holding the hot potato will do a different dance move: \_\_\_\_\_. Practice the two moves.
6. Demonstrate and have kids repeat.
7. Start the music and play multiple rounds.

» **MUST DO:** Must require students to remember an assigned movement/dance move.


↻ **CAN ADAPT:** Change the object and/or the dance moves.



## AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- How did it feel to play this game? Did anyone feel nervous about ending up with the potato or worried they might forget the move? Everyone feels nervous sometimes!
- What are things we can do to remember next time? (*E.g., when I'm nervous, take a deep breath to calm down and stay focused on what we should be doing when the music stops; give each other hints to support each other when someone forgets; say the two actions to myself to distract myself from the nerves.*)

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS



 For emergent bilingual learners, use music featuring their home languages.

★ As an added challenge, ask each child sitting on either side of the person with the hot potato to do a third dance move.

## ADAPTATIONS

- Kids can take turns deciding the dance moves for each round.
- To make things more challenging: increase the number of “hot potatoes” or increase the number and/or complexity of motions. For example:
  - When the music stops, turn around to the right one time, walk to the window, look out the window to the left, and tell me one thing you see.
- To integrate this game with academic content for older students, ask a math/science/grammar question before you start the music. Students should not answer the question right away, but keep the question and answer in their mind as they play the game (pass around the hot potato as quickly as possible); student have to remember and say the answer when the music stops. For example:
  - When the music stops, name a parallelogram.
  - When the music stops, answer: what is  $12 \times 7$ ?
  - When the music stops, say three different verbs (or other part of speech).
  - When the music stops, name a mammal/reptile/etc.

# SHIPWRECK

ALL GRADES

**WHAT IS IT?** A game to build executive function skills.

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT?** Practicing memory and attention.

### WHY DO THIS?

**IF WE...**

practice memory and attention...

SHIPWRECK

**THEN WE...**

will keep track of and use important information...

**SO WE...**

can engage deeply in learning with each other.

### THE BIG IDEA

**This game is about remembering what motions accompany each phrase, and doing them correctly and quickly.**

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Introduce the game, and review directions with students before getting started (see back of card for direction list).
3. As you call out directions, students will be out of the game if they don't follow them or do them quickly enough.
4. For some directions (*\*marked with an asterisk*), students will have to form a group and work with others. If they don't form a group, they will also be out of the game.
5. The game is played until two people are left standing.
6. Teachers or students can lead the game.

»» **MUST DO:** Must require students to remember specific movements associated with specific phrases.

↪ **CAN ADAPT:** Change the commands and/or the accompanying motions.

### MATERIALS

✂ None required.



## AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF...

- Was Shipwreck easy or hard to play? Were some directions easier/harder to follow than others (e.g., group tasks)?
- What skills did you use to play Shipwreck? Did you use any tricks to help you remember your actions? Did you use any strategies to form a group and work together?

### TIPS FOR SUCCESS



For students who may need additional support, start with three directions only. Provide visuals for each direction, if possible.





Incorporate academic content into this game by creating different themes from your lessons, such as the different stages of a butterfly (e.g., when you call out “egg,” students have to crouch down into a ball; when you call out “chrysalis,” students have to curve their bodies like a chrysalis).

LEADER SHOUTS OUT:	ACTION OF PARTICIPANTS:
“Swab the deck”	Pretend you are sweeping with a broom (Sweep up into the air)
“Port”	Run to the left (Run to the right)
“Starboard”	Run to the right (Run to the left)
“Bow”	Run forward (Run backward)
“Stern”	Run backward (Run forward)
“Jellyfish”	Lay down on the floor on your back, jiggle your arms and legs (Hands and knees and shake)
“First mate”	Pretend to steer a wheel by holding hands out front
“Seasick”	Pretend to get sick to your stomach (Walk around smiling and giving thumbs up)
“Stormy weather”	Rock from side to side standing (Squat up and down)
“Life jacket”	2 people link arms back to back
“Captain’s ball”	2 people link one arm and dance around in a circle
“Mealtime”	1 person makes a table by getting on their hands and knees, and 2 other people sit across from each other and pretend to scoop food into their mouths
“Rowboat”	4 people sit in a line with their knees up and pretend to row
“Starfish”	5 people link arms and form a circle, with each person bending one leg at the knee so their five legs spread out like a starfish

# SIMON SAYS


**WHAT IS IT?** A game to build executive function skills.

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT?** Practicing self-control.

ALL GRADES

**WHY DO THIS?**



**MATERIALS**

✂ None required.

**THE BIG IDEA**

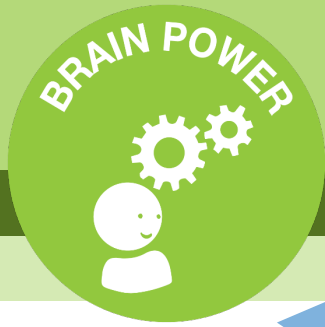
**This game is about listening for a key phrase (Simon Says) before you do the motion.**

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Ask students to find their own space in the room where they can move around without bumping into anyone else.
3. Say, “Watch me and copy my actions, but only when I say ‘Simon says’ first. For example if I say, ‘Simon says touch your nose,’ you should touch your nose. But don’t do anything if I just say, ‘Touch your nose.’”
4. Give a series of fun, active commands – some with “Simon says” before, some without.
5. End with “Simon says sit down for our Post-Game Talk.”

»» **MUST DO:** Must require students to replace an automatic response with an opposite response/motion.


↪ **CAN ADAPT:** Change the phrase “Simon Says” or the actions to copy.




## AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- In this game, Simon is telling us what to do. In real life, our brains tell our bodies what to do. The brain is a very special muscle that can grow and become stronger with regular practice and exercise.
- What does it feel like when you are trying NOT to do something you want to do? What does it feel like to tell your body to Stop and Think?
- Do you ever talk to yourself to help yourself do something the right way? You can build your Stop and Think Power by noticing what you are doing and thinking about whether you are doing the right thing: We can say, “Hey Brain, let’s stop and think right now!” What are other ways we can help our brains Stop and Think?

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

 For emergent bilingual learners, invite them to share how to say “Simon Says” in their native languages, and play in different languages.

 For students who may need additional support, play with them 1:1 beforehand to help them understand the rules of the game.

★ Allow all children to play even after they make a mistake during practice rounds. Feel free to play one final round where you ask children to line up or go to the rug for the next activity after they make a mistake.

## ADAPTATIONS



- As students get better at the game, increase the speed that you play.
- To practice careful listening, insert other, but similar, phrases like “Simone says.”
- To make the game more challenging, you can do the action yourself whether or not you say “Simon says, which tempts players to follow instead of listening closely.
- A more challenging variation that also practices mental flexibility: after a few rounds, change the rules. “Now we’re going to pretend it is opposite day. You will copy my actions only when I DON’T say ‘Simon says’ first.”



# SILLY STORIES


**WHAT IS IT?** A game to build executive function skills.

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT?** Practicing self-control.

ALL GRADES

**WHY DO THIS?**



**MATERIALS**

✂ None required.

**THE BIG IDEA**

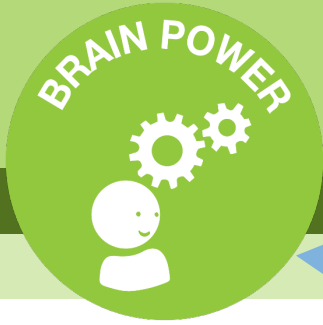
**This game is about using self-control to do the correct (silly) motion instead of the automatic one.**

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Tell students that to play this game, they need to learn a motion. Ask, “Can everyone drum quietly with your fingers?” (*Demonstrate drumming on the desk or floor.*)
3. Say, “This is the silly part: you’re going to do the drumming motion every time you hear the word ‘guitar’ in the story but NOT when you hear the word ‘drums.’”
4. Ask students to pay attention as you read the story, and be prepared to do the silly motion:
  - Benny’s Big Booming Band had a big show the other night. Benny was the main singer, Bobby played the guitar, and Bubba played the drums. Poor Bubba, he banged those drums so hard they broke, and a piece hit Bobby’s guitar and broke it too. Benny had his eyes closed and just kept on singing. He didn’t even notice that the drums and the guitar weren’t playing!

»» **MUST DO:** Must require students to replace an automatic response with an opposite response/motion.

↪ **CAN ADAPT:** Change the story and/or the motion.



## AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- What was easy or hard about our silly story and mixing up the motions? How did Stop and Think Power help you?
- Being able to control impulses is helpful but hard. In this game, we had to Stop and Think to NOT drum when we heard the word “drums.” What are other times we need to do this in school? (E.g., when I get excited to share and want to shout out an answer but need to raise my hand instead.)

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS





For students who may need additional support, have them start this game with shorter stories. You can also provide support by asking them to do a motion that represents the word—as opposed to doing a silly version (e.g., pretending to play the guitar every time they hear the word guitar).

## ADAPTATIONS

- As a challenge, read the story faster or add in a second motion (e.g., “sing la la la” every time you hear the word “drums”).
- Use stories from your curriculum that contain word repetition, or make up your own!
- As a challenge, ask students to create their own short stories with repeating words and accompanying actions to share with the class.

# SING IT WITH STYLE

ALL GRADES

**WHAT IS IT?** A game to build executive function skills.

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT?** Practicing self-control.

### WHY DO THIS?

IF WE...

practice slowing down and thinking before we act...

SING IT WITH STYLE

THEN WE...

will be in charge of what we say and do...

SO WE...

can engage deeply in learning with each other.

### THE BIG IDEA

**This game is about using self-control to manage how you sing a familiar song – loud, soft, fast, slow. Body (movement, voice, etc.) control is a great way to practice self-control.**

### INSTRUCTIONS

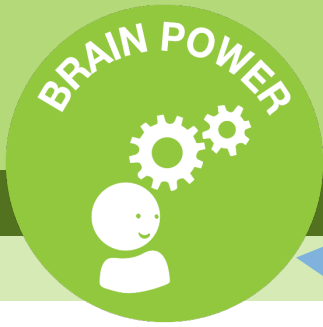
1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Create large cards with different styles (e.g., *loud, quiet, quick, slow*) visually represented with words and/or images. Choose a classic children’s song that has associated motions that you’d like to sing with the class (e.g., *Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes; 5 Little Monkeys; Hokey Pokey; etc.*).
3. Ask students to spread out and find their own space in the room.
4. Say, “We are all going to sing \_\_\_\_\_ together. Let’s sing the song normally first to learn the words and motions. Repeat after me and follow along.” (*Lead students through the song.*)
5. Say, “Now let’s try singing the same song in different styles. I have four cards that say ‘fast, slow, loud, and quiet.’ Let’s try singing in one of the styles.” (*Show one card, and sing together.*)
6. Continue singing new rounds in different styles.

»» **MUST DO:** Must require students to replace the automatic style of singing a song with a new one.

↻ **CAN ADAPT:** Change the song and/or the styles.

### MATERIALS

✂ Cards showing various singing styles.



## AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- We had to use our Stop and Think Power to do something different than what we were used to. It can be hard. How did that feel? What can help us when it's hard to do this?
- Let's pay attention to styles today. When I tell us to use "quiet" voices during \_\_\_\_\_, think about how to Stop and Think to talk in a different style.
- When are other times that you're asked to do something in a specific style? Do you always feel like doing things that way?

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS



Translate the different style words (i.e., loud, quiet, quick, slow) into the native languages of bilingual learners, and add those words to your cards.



If you have children in your group who have experienced trauma, use caution with the "loud" style, and only use it if you think it won't be too stressful for the students.



## ADAPTATIONS

- Variations: switch styles mid-song or invite students to choose styles.
- This game gives students clear practice for common classroom expectations such as "slow down" or "use a quiet voice." Incorporate other styles that you'd like to work on in your classroom.
- Invite children to create their own styles (e.g., robotic, like an opera singer, like a rapper, etc.)

# FREEZE FEELINGS

**WHAT IS IT?** A game to build executive function skills.

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT?** Practicing self-control.

ALL GRADES

**WHY DO THIS?**

**IF WE...**

practice slowing down and thinking before we act...

FREEZE FEELINGS

**THEN WE...**

will be in charge of what we say and do...

**SO WE...**

can engage deeply in learning with each other.

**MATERIALS**

✂️ Dance music.

**THE BIG IDEA**

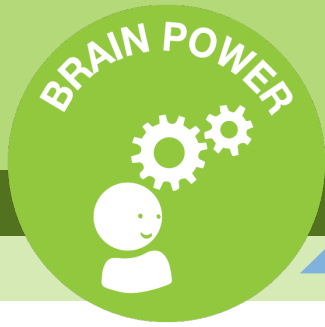
**This game is about exercising body control - stopping yourself from moving or dancing when the music stops. It is also about listening and remembering the feeling/motion you need to demonstrate when the music stops.**

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Cue up some music to use during the game.
3. Ask students to find their own space in the room where they can move around without bumping into others.
4. Tell students that before each round, you will say a feeling, like “happy” (or *sad, angry, scared, embarrassed, etc.*). You’ll also give them a moment before each round to Stop and Think about how they would show that emotion with facial expressions and body posture (and without talking or moving).
5. Let them know to dance when the music starts. When the music stops, they should freeze in a pose that shows “happy” (or *other emotion for that round*).
6. Play multiple rounds. Give students a new feeling before each round.

»» **MUST DO:** Must require students to stop and think about how they would show a certain emotion.

↪ **CAN ADAPT:** Change the song and/or the feelings.



## AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- In this game we used our brains to Stop and Think about how to express the emotion with our faces and bodies. What was easy or hard about this game?
- I was picturing different emotions in my mind and what they look like on my face. What were you thinking about before you froze?

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS



Play music in emergent bilingual learners' home languages.





For students who may struggle to demonstrate emotions with body language or read social cues, model each feeling that you call out and/or have picture cards featuring children demonstrating each emotion.

## ADAPTATIONS

- For younger students, limit the feelings to the few they're familiar with. Introduce new emotions gradually.
- Over time, use this game to explore more complex feelings vocabulary with the group (e.g., *frustrated*, *proud*, *jealous*, etc.).
- To increase the challenge, ask students to freeze when the music stops for a count of five BEFORE doing the specific pose.

# WAIT FOR IT

ALL GRADES

**WHAT IS IT?** A game to build executive function skills.

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT?** Practicing self-control.

WHY DO THIS?

### THE BIG IDEA

**This game is about exercising self-control to wait before doing a series of motions.**

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Say: “First, I will say or do a series of movements. Then we will stand very still and count to five.”
3. Then, say: “When we are done counting and I say ‘GO,’ I want you to repeat the same movements, in the same order.”
4. Example 1: Point to two body parts, count to five, then say ‘GO,’ and have students do the movements in the same sequence.
5. Example 2: List a series of movement instructions (e.g., “touch your head, stand on one foot, squat down”), then wait, and have students carry out those movements in that order.

»» **MUST DO:** Must require students to remember a series of movements and wait for a specific word before carrying out the movements.

↪ **CAN ADAPT:** Change the movements and the number of movements in the series.

MATERIALS

None required.

**IF WE...**

practice slowing down and thinking before we act...

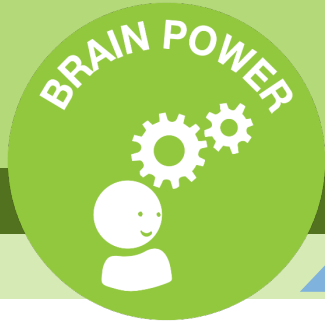
WAIT FOR IT

**THEN WE...**

will be in charge of what we say and do...

**SO WE...**

can engage deeply in learning with each other.



## AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF...

- Was it easy or hard to wait when playing this game? Why?
- What strategies or skills did you use to help you wait to begin?
- What skills or strategies did you use to remember the movements/instructions?
- Are there other times during the school day that you have to wait? To listen/remember directions? What about at home or at school?

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS



For students who may need more support, start with two movements. As they become comfortable with two movements, gradually increase the number of movements.



Play background music with a beat as you play to help everyone do the moves at the same time.

## ADAPTATIONS

- To make things more challenging: increase the number of instructions in each sequence, increase the wait time, or add intentional distractions (e.g., other students singing a song or doing jumping jacks in view of the students trying to remember the sequence).
- To make the game more challenging, incorporate “rules” associated with each movement. In the “opposites” game, students must remember the rule and complete the opposite movement when they see it (e.g., “Look tall” and students squat down). “Rules” can also be specific to each game, such as “When I touch my elbow in the sequence, you have to touch your head when you replicate the same sequence.” For added challenges, add multiple rules per sequence.
- Another advanced option with a “rule”: Students assign a movement to numbers (touching your head is 1, fist in the air is 2, smiling is 3). The leader carries out a series of those movements in front of the class, and students must then report out (or write down) which number sequence matches the movement sequence they observed (e.g., “You did a 3, 2, 3, 3, 1.”).