



Brain Breaks

What is a Brain Break?

A brain break is a short period of time in which students stop classroom work and engage in an activity—perhaps yoga, a brief game, dance, or other physical exercise—meant to energize or shift the focus of the learners. These breaks, usually lasting 1-3 minutes (and no longer than 5) have been shown to increase productivity and to relieve stress. Research also suggests that young learners benefit from taking these types of breaks every 25-30 minutes.

Though brain breaks such as word games or meditation can be accomplished while seated at one's desk, they are more effective if they involve kinesthetic activity.

Tips

Don't Get Too Academic

It's natural to want to infuse every moment of the classroom day with meaningful content. Especially supplementary school teachers worry about the limited amount of time they have to cover a great deal of material. Below, you will find ideas for both Hebrew and Judaically-themed brain breaks. You should also feel free to experiment with activities which are not content-focused such as jumping jacks or a quick game of catch. Remember: These moments away from instructional time will allow your students the break they need to reenergize and refocus so that they are better able to learn when the break is over.

Vary the activity

Games and songs that students find engaging may become rote—and even annoying—if repeated too often. Switch the mode of break you take every few days.

You can choose the brain break you'll use in a few different ways:

- Students' Choice (this is better after they've participated in brain breaks for several weeks and have a bank of experience from which to choose)
 - Put each student's name on a card or popsicle stick. Pick a card or stick and have that student choose the break.
 - Put a series of cards with brain breaks on them in an envelope or face down on a table. Have a student choose at random.
- Teacher's Choice
 - You can always just choose the activity yourself. This is especially helpful if you are just introducing brain breaks, have an activity that needs advance preparation (like a video), or want to add something to your brain-break repertoire.



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- You might choose from a series of cards instead of choosing a student to do so. Just make sure to do this in front of the students.

Whether you choose the activity or have students do so, if using cards, only use the cards you are prepared to do at that moment. For example, if you don't have access to music or a speaker, don't put a dance card in the deck that you or students choose from.

Play Along

You can participate! Students love to see their teacher doing something unexpected. Go ahead, dance!

Materials

You do not need any materials for some brain breaks, such as physical exercise or songs with movement.

You might choose to use a video-supported brain-break program (outlined below) or to use audio. If so, you'll need to have the appropriate technology available.

If you'd like to give students the opportunity to choose the brain breaks, you'll need a set of cards. There are some provided as a separate download with this resource. They are color coded thematically. Some cards in each category have intentionally been left blank so that you can add your students' favorite activities. Consider storing them in a special, decorative box that will be easily identifiable by your students.

General Brain Breaks

- Push-ups or sit-ups
- Walk from one end of the room to the other with a book on your head
- Follow-the-leader
- Dance party. You can find kid-safe music videos here: <http://kidzbop.com/videos/> and here: <http://www.nick.com/nick-radio/>

If you have access to a whiteboard or a device to play videos that everyone can see, the following sites have great videos which students can follow easily.

- Gonoodle.com is free but requires sign up. It has many short brain break videos. Though some are quite silly, even middle school children enjoy playing along.



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- Cosmickids.com is a free site with a series of yoga videos. You can choose the length and the energy level.

Hebrew Language Brain Breaks

- Shimon Omer—Simon Says, in Hebrew
- Rosh, C'nafaim, Birkaim, Raglaim -Head Shoulders Knees and Toes.
- I Spy with Colors—The leader says "I see something *cachol* (blue) or any other color. Participants rush around the room until they are near something that matches. The game does not require one correct answer.
- Hokey Pokey with names of body parts in Hebrew: *rosh, yad, regel, guf, etc.*
- Sing an alef-bet song
- Practice the alef-bet backwards!
- Hebrew letter yoga—have students form the shapes of Hebrew letters with their bodies.
- Any repetitive exercise, if you count in Hebrew

Prayer-focused Brain Breaks

- There are many versions of *Adon Olam*. You can have *Adon Olam* sing off using as many melodies as you know or challenge students to sing the refrain in one breath.
- Some synagogues have the tradition of singing *Mi Chamocha* to a tune that will be used on an upcoming holiday to signal its arrival. Challenge your students to sing the prayer to a non-traditional melody
- Reset with a niggun. Teach your students the melody of a prayer they have not yet learned
- Lead students through a guided meditation meant to relax or focus their bodies

Judaic Brain Breaks

- Have students make movements that correspond with upcoming holidays. For example:
 - Shake the lulav
 - Lift the Torah
 - Parade with the Torah



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- Build a Sukkah
 - Build a Pyramid
 - Dip an Apple in Honey
 - Light a candle
- Israeli Folk Dancing. There are videos available on Youtube.com at IFD - Israeli Folk Dancing for Beginners
 - Nigun Atik
 - Mayim Mayim (spelled Maim, Maim here)
- Sing David Melech Yisrael. Start slow and build up speed
- Take an imaginary trip through Israel
 - Swim in the Mediterranean
 - Ski down Mt. Hermon
 - Hike Masada