

Games and Activities for ES and JHS

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General Notes

- There is some overlap between games and activities that work well for ES and JHS, but not all games that work for ES will work for JHS and vice-versa.
 - Generally speaking, it's easier to adapt elementary games to work for JHS than the other way around as many JHS games require a base level of reading and writing.
- Always slowly explain and model a game or activity and check comprehension before starting. This will avoid a lot of confusion and wasted time!

- Be conscious about the teaching points you are targeting with a game or activity (e.g. specific vocab, grammar, sentence structure).
- It's useful to have 2 or 3 games you can pull out of your hat with no prep and just a blackboard and chalk in case you're asked at the last minute to fill time, a planned game isn't working, or there's a tech problem.
- Stickers are often a good motivator for both ES and JHS (but not all students will be interested).
 - If you're allowed to give small prizes (erasers, pencils, etc.), you can use a prize box to motivate students to gather stickers. (A certain number of stickers = prize!)
- Don't hesitate to use online resources such as [Altopedia](#) and [ALTwiki](#), but make sure to modify games and activities to fit your students and specific teaching point(s).
- Try to communicate your game/activity plans to your co-teacher(s) ahead of time. This will help them to more easily assist during the lesson, as well as give them the chance to provide feedback on the game itself.

Elementary Games and Activities Examples

With some exceptions, the games listed here will generally also work at JHS with adjustments to difficulty level. Most of the games are designed to be used with medium to large classes (20-45 students), so adjust as necessary for smaller classes.

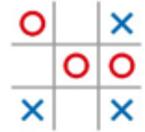
No prep

Row Race Game (Any grade)



- Required materials: None
- Used for practicing question and answer sentence patterns.
- All the students stand up. The first student of each row asks the student behind them a question. Student 2 answers, then asks Student 3 a question, and so on until the last student in the row answers.
- Once the last student in the row answers, they then ask the student in *front* of them a question. The pattern of asking questions to the student in front continues until Student 1 answers. The entire row then sits down. First row to sit down wins!
- Good for question/answer patterns of any difficulty.
 - E.g. "What ___ do you like? I like ____." "What did you eat last night? I ate ____." Etc
- Works well with large classes, but may not work with especially small classes.

Low prep



Maru-Batsu Game (a.k.a Tic-Tac-Toe/Noughts & Crosses) (3rd grade and up)

- Required materials: Prepared maru-batsu worksheet, chips as markers (optional)
- This game is good for teaching a grammar point along with its matching vocabulary. The sheet should be a grid with a grammar point running one direction with the vocabulary running the other direction.
 - Alternatively, one direction can be one grammar pattern + a vocabulary word, with a different pattern + vocabulary set going the other way.
 - You can adjust the size of the grid to make it more or less difficult.
- Students will work together in pairs. They play rock-paper-scissors; winner goes first.
- The winner will say a sentence according to the coordinates on the grid where they want to place their marker.
- The students will then take turns saying sentences and putting down markers until they either run out of spaces or there is a winner.
 - The winner will be whomever can get 4 markers in a row.
- This activity requires students to be able to use the target language without any help.

Guessing Game (3rd grade and up, JHS tested & approved)



- Required materials: Prepared worksheet
- The students get a worksheet with a grid of characters and their likes/dislikes. They each secretly choose one character they will be.
- Students then go around the classroom and find a partner. They must ask each other, “Do you like ___?” and try to guess each other’s characters based on their responses. If they can guess correctly, they get a point.
- This basic format can be used for any number of question patterns.
 - Do you like ___? Can you ___? Are you good at ___?” etc
- Another variation uses a grid of slightly different rooms instead of characters. It can be used to practice the phrase, “Where is the ___?”

King of the Hill (Any grade)



- Required materials: tape to mark levels on the ground, a large open area like a gym (can be played in the classroom with small classes if desks are moved)
- Mark three “levels” on the ground with tape. One student is chosen as the “king”, who will stand at the front. All the other students will all start at level 1. The goal of the game is to become the new “king”.
- Students will find a partner on the same level and initiate a conversation using the assigned sentence pattern. (e.g. What ___ do you like? I like ___.)
- After both students have talked, they play rock-paper-scissors. The winner will go up a level. This pattern will continue until one student advances from level 3 to challenge the “king”.
 - If the challenger loses, they must return to level 1.

- If the challenge wins, they become the new king and the game starts over from the beginning with everyone at level 1.

Hot Potato (Any grade)

- Required materials: 1-4 object(s) that can be passed around, picture cards (optional), “Hot Potato” by *The Wiggles* (optional; on Spotify and YouTube)
- The students are given a “hot potato” that they must pass around before either the music stops or a timer set by the teacher goes off.
- In order to pass the potato, the students must say a word within a given category or use a given grammar point. (e.g. if the grammar is “I like”, the students must say something like “I like potatoes.” before they can pass the object to the next student)
- When the music stops/timer goes off, the student holding the object must stand up and say the target sentence or answer a question.
- If you have a large class, use multiple objects so that students do not have as much down time. Multiple objects also allow for students to ask each other the target questions rather than the teacher. (For example, Student A asks Student B, “What food do you like?” and Student B answers, “I like potatoes.”)
 - I like to give a potato to each row and have them pass it back and forward.



Moderate to High Prep

Snakes & Ladders (3rd grade and up, JHS tested & approved)

- Required materials: Sets of question cards for each group, Snakes and Ladders board for all students, dice (1 die per group), game pieces (optional; you can have the students use their own erasers as game pieces)
- If you’ve ever played Snakes and Ladders, then you basically know how this game works.
- The game is played with a board that has numbered spaces. One student will draw a question card, which they will ask to the next student. That student must answer the question.
- If they answer correctly, they can roll a die and move forward. If they land on a space that has a ladder, they can climb the ladder. If they land on a snake, they must go down the snake. However, if the student can answer a question correctly, they can save themselves from going down the snake. The first student to reach the end of the board is the winner.
- Alternate way to play: Put the questions/target vocabulary on the board itself.
 - This will significantly lessen the amount of prep time, but you will have to make a new board every time you play.
- You can adjust this game however you’d like to make it harder, etc.



Crash Game (Any grade, JHS tested & approved)

- Required materials: Vocabulary mini-card sets (1 per 2 teams)
- This game is played in teams, 1 team vs. 1 team, so you will need an even number of teams with no more than 6-7 kids per team. Once the class is broken into pairs of teams, have the pairs form lines facing each other on opposite ends of the classroom. Between the teams, have a line of desks. Place the vocabulary mini cards on the desks, spaced evenly from one end to the other.
- The first students in the line will then start making their way towards each other, pointing and reading each card as fast as they can.
- When the two students meet each other, they “crash” and have to play rock-paper-scissors.
 - The winner keeps their place in the line of cards, while the loser must return to the back of their team’s line and the next student on their team will go.
- A team can get a point if they are able to successfully reach the end of the line. The team with the most points when time is up wins the game!
- For smaller classes, break the entire class into two teams and play the game on the board using picture cards instead.



Trashket Ball (Any grade, JHS tested & approved) [Review activity]

- Required materials: Prepared questions, a mini basketball (crumpled paper can be subbed in a pinch), a small trash bin or basket
- Split the students into teams. (Splitting according to row is easiest, but what is best will depend on your class.)
- Have the students within each group assign an order for them to take turns answering questions or go according to row order.
- The teacher will ask the students a question. The first team to raise a hand gets to answer the question.
 - If they answer incorrectly, another team can raise their hand to try to steal the point.
- If they answer correctly, their team gets a point. The team can then get a bonus point if the student is able to shoot a basket using the trash bin and mini basketball.
- Continue until all students have had a turn to answer a question.
- When playing with little ones, do not make it a competition or there will be tears.



Castle Game (3rd grade and up, JHS tested & approved) [Review activity]

- This is a review game and can be used for just about anything. It’s my go-to lazy review game at both JHS and ES.
- Required materials: Print-out castles (1 set for each team), prepared questions
- There are several variations of this game, each with slightly different rules. I recommend Googling around to see which version you like best.
- Split the students into teams of 3-5. Each team is assigned a castle on the board.
- Each round, a representative from each team will stand up and the teacher will ask a question. The first student to raise their hand is able to answer.



- If they answer correctly, they can either “build” their own castle (adding a layer under their print-out castle) or “destroy” a layer from another student’s castle. The team with the tallest castle in the end is the winner!
- If you have a small class, you can also let each team choose a team name. You can also assign mascot characters to each team, such as Pikachu or Doraemon.

Fruits Basket (3rd grade and under)



- Required materials: Mini-cards (at least 3 of each vocabulary word)
- Requires a minimum of 12-15 students.
- Your students probably already know Fruits Basket; it is somewhat similar to Musical Chairs.
- The students should push their desks out of the way and make a large circle with their chairs. Each student receives a mini-card with a vocabulary word on it. One student is chosen to stand in the middle and be the leader; their chair is taken away so that there is one less chair than players.
- The leader will then say one of the vocabulary words. The students with the matching card must then find a new chair. The student left standing is the next leader.
 - The students can also say “Fruits basket!”, which makes it so everyone has to find a new chair.
- While Fruits Basket is very fun, it can get dangerous with older kids or very large classes, so play cautiously. Best for preschool to 2nd grade.

Matching Game a.k.a. Memory (Any grade, JHS tested & approved)



- Required materials: Mini-cards (comprised of pairs of matching cards)
 - Students will work in small groups (no more than 5 or 6 students per group). Each group will receive a set of mini-cards which they will mix up and lay face down on their desks.
 - The students will take turns trying to find the matching cards. Each time they flip a card, they must say the vocabulary word on it.
 - When a student finds a matching pair, they get to take them. The student with the most cards at the end wins.
 - One variation for 5th + 6th grade using the phrase, “(person) can (verb)”: Make a set of cards with both famous people and verbs that match them. Each round, instead of just saying each vocabulary word, the students make the sentence, “(person) can (verb).”
 - ○ Ex: Yuzuru Hanyu + skate = “Yuzuru Hanyu can skate.”
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Junior High Games and Activities Examples

In general, all of these examples work for all JHS grade levels. I usually just adjust the difficulty level of the questions/vocabulary to fit the class.

No Prep

- Wordle
 - If you've ever played [the online game](#), it's basically the same concept.
 - Explain the game before you start with an example.
 - Think of a word (usually I'll choose one from a recent unit) and draw spaces on the board equal to the number of letters (like hangman).
 - Have the students suggest words. If a student suggests a word with an incorrect number of letters, I'll usually write it on the board and count the number of letters out loud.
 - If your students are shy at first, make sure to clearly encourage any guesses, even if they're the wrong number of letters or don't have any correct letters in them.
 - Write the guess in the blanks you've drawn, **circle** any letters that are in the correct place, and **underline** any letters that are in the word but not in the right place.
 - For example, if my word was *bread* and a student guessed *birds* I would circle *b* and underline *r* and *d*.
 - Continue until a student guesses the correct word.
- Shiritori / the Alphabet Game
 - Most students already know the idea of shiritori.
 - Create space on the board for each front-to-back row of students, give each team a piece of chalk, and write a "starting word" on the board.
 - Set a timer (usually between 3-5 minutes depending on the level of English) and when you say "go!" the first student in each row will go to the board and write a word starting with the last letter of the "starting word."
 - They will then go back to their seat and pass the chalk to the student behind them, who will write a word on the board starting with the last letter of the word the first student wrote.
 - This continues until time is up. Then, check the words for spelling errors and incorrect starting letters and write each team's points on the board.
 - Ex: The starting word is "English." The first student writes "hello," the second student writes "octopus," etc...

Some Prep

- What am I? / Heads-up
 - Have students form pairs or groups
 - Write or print out cards with relevant vocab on them and give one to each pair/group
 - One student puts the card on their forehead without looking at it and their pair/group has to describe it or act it out until they guess it

- Can also be used to practice grammar points by having the describer or guesser use a specific sentence structure
- Can also give pairs/groups a stack of cards and have them race to see who can finish all the words first
- Also works in elementary school.
- Taboo
 - Write or print out cards with relevant vocab and “taboo” words (related words that you think students might try to use to easily describe the target word)
 - Similar to “What am I?” but the describer holds the card and has to tell the guesser(s) about the word without using the “taboo” words, actions, noises, or Japanese
- Sit-down elimination
 - You'll need a list of review questions, a way to randomly choose a student, and a die (ideally a large foam one; these can sometimes be found at Daiso)
 - For randomly choosing students, I've used an online random number generator, sticks with student numbers written on them, or just asking my JTE to choose a number between [1 - max student number]
 - On the board, assign directions to each side of the die (e.g. 1 = row, 2 = column, 3 = left diagonal, 4 = right diagonal, 5 = x shape, 6 = just you)
 - Have all the students stand up
 - Get a random student number and ask that student a review question. If they answer correctly, have them roll the die. Based on what they roll, have those students sit down (e.g. they answer correctly and roll a 2, so they and their entire column sit down)
 - Continue until all students are sitting down
 - Alternate version (that tends to take up less time): when a student answers a question correctly, have them choose “row” or “column” to sit down. Students may know this game as *tate-yoko*
 - Also works well in elementary school.
- Telephone
 - I usually play this with each row or column as a team
 - Give the first student a word or phrase (or have them choose one and tell you) without any other students hearing or seeing
 - The idea is for this word or phrase to be passed to the end of the row or column as accurately as possible
 - This can either be done with just speaking (maybe play some music loudly to avoid the other students hearing) or with writing and drawing pictures (e.g. first student passes a note to the next student with the word/phrase written down, the second student draws a picture of the word/phrase on a separate piece of paper and passes that to the next student, who writes their guess of what the word/phrase might be, etc)
 - Alternate version: have students pass along a sentence and translate it from Japanese to English to Japanese, etc

- Also works in elementary school.

More Prep

- Snake Janken
 - Same as Crash Game described in ES section above
- Jeopardy-style and Typhoon-style games
 - Many different variations
 - Students answer questions in teams
 - Answering a question correctly leads to an effect (e.g. losing / gaining points, choosing a treasure chest, taking points away from another team, etc)
 - Answering a question incorrectly may give another team the chance to answer
 - Many examples available online at sites such as Altopedia
 - Also works in elementary school.
- [Kahoot!](#)