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high school students can lose interest easily, and if your lessons are not fun and engaging, it can be difficult to get students to focus. But don't worry! There are lots of fun and energizing classroom games you can use to keep high school students engaged. Below you'll find our favorite fun games for high school students. Fun Games For High School Students 1. Thumbs Up Game This first activity is a classic classroom game that high school students love to play! To play, first, choose three students to come up to the front of the class. These students are the "walkers." Next, tell all other students to put their heads on their desks, close their eyes, and put their thumbs up. Now the game can begin. The three "walkers" will then walk around the class and choose one student each by touching their thumbs. If a student's thumb is touched, that student should put their thumb down. Once all three "walkers" have chosen one student, they should return to the front of the class, and then the teacher should tell all students to "Wake up!" (i.e., open their eyes and sit up). The three students whose thumbs were touched should stand up, and then they must guess which of the "walkers" touched their thumb. If they guess correctly, they get to swap places with the "walker." If they guess wrong, they sit back down. Tips: To make this game more fun for high school students, you can try giving each of the "walkers" a funny name. This can be something silly or names from their favorite pop group, TV series, etc. Another thing you can do to make it even more fun is to get the "walkers" to make a silly sound or to say something with a different voice when they touch another student's thumb. 2. The Liar Game This next activity is very versatile and can be used for many different purposes. To play, first, choose a topic. Then, tell all students to write down a statement about the topic. The statements should be true or false. Then, tell all students to read their statements aloud. The next step is to have each student guess which of the statements is a lie. The student who guesses correctly gets a point. The student who guesses incorrectly loses a point. The game continues until all students have made their statements and all students have guessed which statement is a lie. The student with the most points wins. Tips: To make this game more fun for high school students, you can try giving each student a different topic. For example, you could have one student write about a favorite food, another student write about a favorite movie, and another student write about a favorite sport. 3. The Chain Game This next activity is similar to the above word association game but with a fun twist. To start, one student would say a word, and then the next student must say a word that starts with the last letter of the previous word. This "chain" continues until a student can't think of a word or repeats a word that has already been said. If your high school students have a particularly large vocabulary, this game might be too easy. However, a great way to make it more challenging is to make a rule that each word must be from a particular category. For example, "things that are blue," "girl's names," "famous people," etc. 4. The Chain Game This next activity is similar to the above word association game but with a fun twist. To start, one student would say a word, and then the next student must say a word that starts with the last letter of the previous word. This "chain" continues until a student can't think of a word or repeats a word that has already been said. If your high school students have a particularly large vocabulary, this game might be too easy. However, a great way to make it more challenging is to make a rule that each word must be from a particular category. For example, "things that are blue," "girl's names," "famous people," etc. 5. The Hula Skirt Game This game is superfun and a great way to get your high school students out of their seats, speaking, and having fun. To prepare for this activity, you'll need to prepare some questions to create the "hula skirt." You can use any questions, but if you're stuck for ideas, these 30 Ice-Breaker Questions work great with this activity. Once you have your questions, type them up, one question per line, and print them on an A4 piece of paper. Next, with a pair of scissors, cut a line between each question to make strips. Don't cut all the way to the end of the page so that the strips are still all connected. This is our "hula skirt." Finally, take the "hula skirt" securely on the board and place a trash can about 5-10 feet from the board. Now the game can begin. Make two teams and have them line up at the far end of the classroom. When the teacher says "Go!", one student from each team must race to the board and tear off one of the strips of paper. At which point they must read the question that is on the paper out loud and answer the question as quickly as they can. After answering the question, a student must roll up the strip of paper into a ball and throw it to the other team. The student who catches the ball must then answer the question. The game continues until all strips of paper have been used. The team with the most points wins. Tips: To make this game more fun for high school students, you can try giving each team a different color of paper. For example, one team could have red paper and the other team could have blue paper. 6. The Chain Game This next activity is similar to the above word association game but with a fun twist. 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but most recently I created a unit around “Spooky Season.” We read “spooky” stories and watched suspenseful short videos to evaluate how authors and storytellers employ devices that heighten the suspense for the audience. In these high school English activities, we analyzed theme and character development and compared different mediums all under the umbrella of Spooky October. As always, what works for my school and grade level may not work for everyone, but some of my students’ favorite spooky short stories were “Lamb to the Slaughter” and “The Landlady.” **FEATURED PICK** If you’re looking for English activities for high school students who are interested in video production, try The Edit, a digital storytelling challenge from NBCU Academy and Adobe. This challenge empowers teens to plan, script, and produce their own 90-second video news reports on wellness topics. It’s free to enter, and winning classrooms earn prizes! Brooke Naumoff After reading from our mentor texts and learning how to create suspense, we write fictional narratives that will haunt your nightmares ... just kidding—I wanted to add a bit of drama. They pull from grab bags I create of different character names, setting ideas, and props they can use to create their own terrifying tale. Try it: Spooky Story Starters at TPT Brooke Naumoff Brooke Naumoff Thanks to Austin Kleon, poetry is cool and accessible. If you haven’t heard of blackout poetry already, it’s created by taking a newspaper or loose book pages that can no longer be repaired and creating a poem using certain words on the page. Then, you black out the rest. I’ve done this every year and have changed my approach each time. Sometimes I give students free rein and let the words speak to them, and sometimes I’ll give them a specific topic I’d like them to create a poem around. I love to see 25 different variations of “courage” through poetry. Try it: Blackout Poetry at We Are Teachers Brooke Naumoff When teaching a complex concept like symbolism, use symbols that are already part of students’ daily life. Assign each small group a word or theme and then have them choose an emoji to symbolize that message. Have kids sketch them out on the board and explain why they chose that symbol, or turn it into a full-on art project and display them around the room. Try it: More Fun Ideas for Teaching With Emojis at We Are Teachers Doing a quick search of these kinds of fails on the internet will provide you with a great deal of content. You can turn those fails into a slideshow while the class finds the errors and corrects them, or you can assign a few to each small group to tackle. Brooke Naumoff Brooke Naumoff The name speaks for itself here. There are so many variations of one-pager assignments that you could do, but the one that I like is to use one-page as a blank canvas for them to demonstrate their understanding of developing theme and symbolism. They sketch out symbols and images that are significant to the book they are reading and include text evidence to support their inferences and takeaways. Try it: One-Pager Template at TPT When I first started teaching and was looking for solidarity, understanding, and inspiration, I found love,teach. In one of her blog posts, she suggested playing reviewisical chairs to prepare for a test. It is like musical chairs, but you review. When the music stops, someone is without a chair and they have to challenge someone else for their chair by answering a review question correctly. This is a fan favorite in middle and high school. I love a fun review game. This one requires you to put up answers around the room (e.g., character names, dates, themes, symbols, storytelling devices, etc.). Then, you divide the class up into two teams. Have them send two representatives up to the front and arm them with flyswatters. I normally tape off a box that they have to stand in while I read the question. Then, the first person to hit the correct answer with their flyswatter wins the point. This game is intense and so fun! Make sure you move any book bags or obstacles that may be tripping hazards (for me this is just air). Not all teenagers are familiar with podcasts, but it’s a great way to introduce lessons in an interesting way. And so far, my students have reported really enjoying them. In fact, I’ve even had students come back and tell me they’ve continued to listen to a podcast series on their own after we’ve concluded our lesson. Podcasts encourage students to be actively engaged, because the information being shared must be processed and visualized by the students as it’s being said. I usually prepare questions for them to answer as they listen, and then facilitate a discussion afterward. In my classroom, this sometimes leads to mildly heated debates, which is a learning experience in and of itself. Try it: List of Educational Podcasts at We Are Teachers Brooke Naumoff My students love being in charge of leading “chapter chats” in small groups. By encouraging them to be leaders in discussing specific book chapters, they take ownership in a whole new way. I’ve really enjoyed watching my kids come up with thoughtful questions, bring food to connect to something that happened in the text, and even create fun games that encourage their classmates to recall information from the chapter. Chapter chats are great high school English activities to assess those speaking and listening standards while also making them read critically because they are in charge of facilitating the discussion. Try it: Chapter Chats at TPT Brooke Naumoff Last year, I finally decided to let my students create their own podcasts. I’ve wanted to do this for years but logistically was not sure how to execute. It took a lot of planning on the front end of the assignment and organizing where to find places for them to record (makeshift sound booths), but we did it! They had to pitch their topics and get a red, green, or yellow light. Then, they had to research, cite evidence, write a script, and finally produce their own podcasts. We listened to the episodes and answered questions on the “listening guide” that they created. I loved this assignment and will definitely do it again. We just finished reading The Great Gatsby, and since throwing lavish parties was Gatsby’s thing, we threw our own 1920s soiree. I divided my students into small groups to do research on their assigned topic (historically accurate fashions, refreshments, ambiance, guest list, etc.) and then deliver presentations. The students were responsible for assigning each other parts, complete with instructions on how to dress and what food or beverage to bring. They even provided each participant with a lexicon (specific vocabulary) to use at the party. This assignment was fun, and it also covered many standards, which is a win-win for me! Brooke Naumoff After watching a number of TED Talks and studying what contributed to an effective performance, my students wrote and delivered speeches of their own. They drew prompts for characters with different occupations giving different types of speeches (e.g., Beyoncé giving a Grammy acceptance speech). I found that my students were much more confident and comfortable speaking when given permission to act like someone else. This activity was a hands-down favorite event for my eighth grade students. Those speaking and listening standards can be tough to master, and high school English activities like this helped us get there. Brooke Naumoff Brooke Naumoff My students in both middle and high school love true crime. I’ve created murder mystery activities for high school English that fit really well with literature units and that focus on making inferences, writing, and using textual evidence. Once the premise of the mystery is determined, students create their own case files, evidence, and clues for their classmates to solve. I’ve had them pull from bags of evidence, locations, and possible suspects to add another element of fun and challenge. It’s simple, but they really like pulling things from mystery bags. This activity is also an excellent support for students who struggle with finding a starting point. I know many high school and middle school teachers who use children’s literature in their classrooms to introduce literary devices. Inspired by Ludacris, I once rapped Llama Llama Red Pajama in my creative writing class before I had students write children’s books of their own. I am sure there is footage of this out there living sneakily on someone’s camera roll, but thankfully, it hasn’t surfaced. Try it: Famous Children’s Books at We Are Teachers Brooke Naumoff Give students some scissors and a stack of magazines, newspapers, or books to look through. Have them cut out words and phrases they like and then arrange them into their own unique work of poetry. Just this week, one of my sophomore students asked me what we were going to be reading next. We just finished 12 Angry Men. She said she wanted to do another play. Then, another student chimed in and agreed. Plays are appealing for many reasons. Plays allow us to study literature without having to tackle the entire length of a novel. Plays allow students to become characters and perform. Plays invite students to let out their inner thespian. My students take on roles and commit to them. Brooke Naumoff It may seem uncomfortable reading aloud to your secondary students, but I am telling you, they still enjoy it! Read an exciting first chapter from books that you hope they pick up and read on their own. First Chapter Fridays are especially great activities for high school English if you have an expansive library of books for them to choose from. Try it: First Chapter Fridays at We Are Teachers Brooke Naumoff When I teach my students satire and parody, I show them examples of school-appropriate satire. Then, we discuss why it is satire. After we get the hang of it, I have them write and perform them. I also happen to have a weird collection of wigs and costumes in my room that may help them get into character. Funny wigs are always an asset! Brooke Naumoff My juniors are reading The Crucible and the language can be tricky for them. After a long weekend, I was worried they would forget what we read so I decided at 1 a.m. to write a Gen-Z summary of Acts 1 & 2. They may have called me cringey and told me to burn my paper but it made them laugh and they understood it so it was a W (as the kids say.) Afterwards, I thought it would be a fun assignment to have them write the same style of summary for Acts 3 & 4. It forces them to go through and truly understand the dynamic relationships in the play and how the events are unfolding. Then, they get to flex on everyone with a summary that slaps. Try it: Teen Slang Every Teacher Should Know at We Are Teachers Brooke Naumoff At the beginning of a short story or a novel, give your students the background knowledge they need by setting up stations for them to visit. When I had planned for my students to read Cask of Amontillado by Edgar Allan Poe, we had some ground to cover before diving in. I set up stations that gave background information on who Poe was, what Carnival was, information about the Catacombs, vocabulary that they’d encounter and need to know, and finally questions that focused on heavy topics they’d see dealt with in the story. Some of these stations were videos they watched that were posted as QR codes, some were articles they had to read, and some were discussion questions they chatted about and then wrote down their consensus. To make it vibey, I added dollar-store battery-operated candles, scattered plastic skulls around, and turned down the lights with a spooky playlist playing. Brooke Naumoff An easy way to get your students excited about the next story you’re going to read is to have them complete an anticipation guide. This is a great way to preview the topics that will point to themes in the story they’re about to read. It’s also a great way to start some good discussions before getting into the text. They’ll have a better idea of what they’re supposed to be taking away from the literature if you guide them in a way that’s engaging before reading. My favorite anticipation guide is from The Most Dangerous Game. I teach at a school where hunting is very popular so when we go over the questions, I’ll have them sit or stand if they agree and then each side will share their explanations as to why they chose what they did. Brooke Naumoff When my students struggle with figurative language, I put them into groups of three or four. Then I throw weird things in a bag, and one member of their group chooses an object from the bag. Once they pull out their fake mouse or rubber duck or whatever item they’ve selected, they have to write a few sentences using personification that is inspired by the object they grab. Then, they choose their favorite sentence and write it on the board for the class to see. We’ll then go through everyone’s sentences to check to make sure we’re using personification correctly and to inspire creativity! If they can write incredible sentences using personification about an Expo Marker, they can definitely challenge themselves in their own writing. Brooke Naumoff Will there be haters? Yes. Be prepared to shut them down swiftly. In my poetry unit, we analyzed “All Too Well.” Taylor Swift is an incredible songwriter. Her songs are an English teacher’s dream. I’m sorry, I shouldn’t speak for all English teachers but any and all Swifty English teachers will agree. You can choose other music too! We’ve also analyzed Sam Cooke’s “A Change Is Gonna Come.”