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# Nifty Nouns

The activities in this chapter are designed to promote brain-compatible learning. According to brain research, instruction should reflect four major principles: comfort, challenge, choice, and connections. To activate students' prior knowledge about nouns, the pantomime activity uses movement and categorization to discover what students already know.

The noun nature poems, possessive plays, learning centers, and multiple intelligences activities generate enthusiasm, provide choice, and build specific, learner-controlled feedback into each challenge. These novel, stimulating activities not only promote learning but also create a joyful classroom environment.

**Brain Research and Learning** "The key to getting smarter is making more connections between brain cells and not losing existing connections" (Jensen, 1998, p. 15). To forge these connections, link new knowledge to prior knowledge, engage emotions, encourage social interaction, and create hands-on, experiential activities that help students seek patterns.

## Activity 1

# Noun Pantomimes

<b>Objectives</b>	To activate students' prior knowledge about nouns with a bodily-kinesthetic game; to identify and categorize nouns
<b>Time</b>	One 40-minute class period
<b>Materials</b>	● index cards (one per student) with different nouns written on them (include a variety of persons, places, things, and ideas) ● notebook paper ● pencils ● chalk

## Step-by-Step

1. Tell students that they are going to play a game designed to teach them about a concept. (Do not use the word *noun* when introducing the activity.)
2. Place an index card with a noun written on it facedown on each student's desk. After all students receive a card, instruct them to look at the word. Remind them not to share the word with anyone.
3. Explain to students that they are to use gestures, not speech, to physically demonstrate the noun on their cards. Model one or two examples for students. For example, to show the noun *rabbit*, you can hop and wiggle your nose.
4. Call one student at a time to the front of the room to act out his or her noun. Allow students about one minute to convey the word to the class. If the class has not guessed the word,

the student actor tells the class the word. (Coach students who ask for ideas about how to act out their word.)

5. When the correct response is given, write the word on the board, and have all of the students record the word on notebook paper.
6. After students guess all of the words and discover what they have in common, ask them to categorize the nouns on their notebook paper using the following abbreviations:  
PR = person; PL = place; T = thing; I = idea.
7. Review and discuss the correct answers with students.

## Teacher Tip

Expand the noun categories for older students. Include examples of common, proper, abstract, concrete, collective, singular, and plural nouns on the index cards. Then have students work in groups or with a partner to determine which categories fit each word.

### Activity 2

## Noun Nature Poems

### Lesson 1: General vs. Specific Nouns

<b>Objectives</b>	To introduce the concept of specific, exact, or precise nouns; to list specific nature nouns	
<b>Time</b>	One 40-minute class period	
<b>Materials</b>	• paper (1 piece per student)	• pencils (1 per student)
	• coats or appropriate outerwear	

#### Step-by-Step

1. Write a general noun, such as *tree*, *cat*, or *car*, on the board. Ask students to provide more exact or specific word choices for these nouns. For example, instead of *tree*, substitute *oak* or *birch*. Record students' choices on the board.
2. Once students understand the concept of a specific noun, explain that they are going on a nature walk to collect nouns, which they will use
3. After the walk, have student pairs share their lists with each other. During this time, have students eliminate the general nouns recorded and add new specific nouns that were not on their lists.

# Vivid Verbs

Because movement and positive emotions are critical to cognition, the mnemonics presented here use both of these elements to drive learning. One fun-filled strategy teaches students how to sing the helping verbs to the tune of “Jingle Bells.”

To help students eliminate what I call “boo hisser” verbs from their compositions, instructions for writing and performing vivid verbs cheers are provided. There are also examples of assessment activities designed to integrate students’ multiple intelligences and learning styles. In short, the verb strategies in this chapter engage students both physically and emotionally to promote cognition.

## Emotions, Movement, and Cognition

“Emotions drive attention, create meaning, and have their own memory pathways” (Jensen, 1998, p. 72). Consequently, activating and engaging positive emotions is critical to cognition; so is movement. The cerebellum, which processes movement, also processes learning. Numerous studies link the cerebellum to “memory, spatial perception, language, attention, nonverbal cues, and even decision-making” (Jensen, 1998, p. 84).

### Activity 1

## Movin’ and Groovin’ With Verbs

<b>Objectives</b>	To activate students’ prior knowledge of verbs by using a combination of movement and brainstorming
<b>Time</b>	One 40-minute class period
<b>Materials</b>	● index cards containing overused verbs (one per group)

### Step-by-Step

1. Ask students to brainstorm words that complete this sentence: “The sleepy, ancient dragon \_\_\_\_ down the road.” After you create a grand list of verbs on the board, ask, “What part of speech have you just created?” Students respond, “Verbs.”

2. To help define the word *verb*, teach students this chant:

**A verb is something you can do.**

**It makes you want to move.**

**It makes you want to groo-oo-ooove.**

As you chant together, move to the beat, shaking your upper bodies and shoulders forward on the first line and backward on the second. On the word *groo-oo-ooove*, do the twist until you are close to the floor. Move and chant several times to perfect the beat and rhythm.

3. Ask students, “Which of verbs we listed do you think are lively and exciting?” Check off the words students suggest. Inevitably, the verb *walks* appears on the board, which can lead to a discussion of the difference between a tired,

overused verb and a “vivid verb.” Emphasize that vivid verbs paint glorious, descriptive pictures in writing.

4. To demonstrate how the different verbs on the board change the meaning of the sentence, have students stand up and physically act out the meanings of words such as *shuffles*, *limps*, *waddles*, and *stumbles*.
5. Give groups of four students an index card containing an overused verb such as *eat*, *look*, *come*, or *run*. Have students brainstorm as many vivid verbs as they can to replace it. Groups should record and share their lists with the class.
6. Collect and type the lists to produce a student-generated vivid verb bank for the class.

## Activity 2

# Vivid Verb Cheers

**Objectives** To motivate students to use vivid action verbs in their writing by incorporating the verbal-linguistic, musical-rhythmic, and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences into the production of vivid verb cheers; to use five or more vivid verbs in a cheer; to develop writing, speaking, and performing skills by composing and presenting cheers

**Time** Two to three forty-minute class periods

**Materials** ● overhead transparency of the model cheer (page 36) ● copies (one per student) of the Vivid Verb Cheer Rubric (page 43) ● props: stuffed dragon, football, pom-poms (optional) ● video camera and player (optional)

## Step-by-Step

1. Divide students into small groups of 2 to 4 and explain that they are going to write and perform cheers that include at least five vivid verbs.
2. Model and physically demonstrate the cheer on the next page or a similar one. Ham it up by using pom-poms, a football, and a stuffed dragon as props. Remember to act out the verbs as well.
3. Next, ask students to select a team name and the sport about which they will write. Students should brainstorm lists of vivid verbs that rhyme and that fit the sport selected. If students choose football, for example, their list might include the following verbs:  
**crackle, tackle, shackle; bumble, fumble, rumble, stumble, tumble; hike, spike; bash crash, dash, smash**
4. After they brainstorm, have students compose their rough drafts. Because the cheers must be memorized, every group member writes.

## Teacher Tips

To introduce the vivid verb cheers, I give students a copy of the rubric, which we collectively review. Then I have the class use it to evaluate two cheers I videotaped from the previous year. We critique one good example and one that is not as well done. This activity deepens students' understanding of the project and appears to improve their performance.

Photograph the cheerleaders on performance day. Use the pictures and cheers to create a hall or bulletin board display. Make simple awards to celebrate student successes, such as Most Vivacious Verbs, Most Hilarious, or Awesome Action.



5. Have groups edit the drafts, write legible final copies with the vivid verbs underlined, add illustrations, make a list of props to bring, and practice their performances.
6. Set up a video camera and organize groups for a whole-class performance.
7. Pair groups together and have peers use the Vivid Verb Cheer Rubric to evaluate each other's performance. Then collect the rubrics.
8. The next day, show students the videotape. Ask them to focus on the speaking and performing skills, then discuss their observations. Ask students to write a paragraph describing two things they did well, two things they can improve, and two things they learned from the experience.

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Model Vivid Verb Cheer:

### The Dragon Slayers

We're the Dragon Slayers.

We chant and cheer

'Cause we're the best

Team of the year.

We tackle, rumble,

Then nail the ball

'Cause we're the best

Team of them all.

We always beat

The other players.

That's why we're called

The Dragon Slayers.

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