

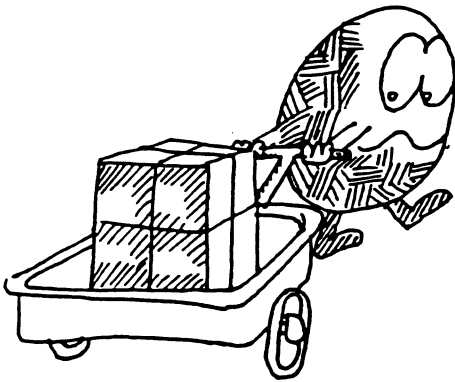
SPUNJZ

Language Activities for Self-Awareness

Teacher's Guide

Introduction and Guidelines

SPUNJZ, useful with years 2 to 6, aim at unfolding student greatness. Expect them to bring out the best that students have within them. *SPUNJZ* get students reading, writing, and speaking in ways that are steadily empowering. The activities stretch student intelligence, encourage and train self-management, deepen feelings of dignity, and promote a respectful class community. They serve literacy by teaching students the art of using language to understand themselves and each other.



You can use *SPUNJZ* to foster students' self-esteem—not merely self-esteem based on praise from adults, peer approval, or accomplishment. The activities will help build self-esteem from inside out. Students will gain confidence in their own thinking and management abilities, and in their innate worth.

SPUNJZ can do all this while they advance language abilities. Specifically, students will learn to:

- ◆ read and make sense of what they read;
- ◆ write well enough so others can make sense of what they intend; and
- ◆ engage in conversations comfortably, respectfully, and with an open mind.

Elements

Look over a few of the activities and notice the three common elements:

Challenge. Each activity begins with a challenge that is designed to provoke thought.

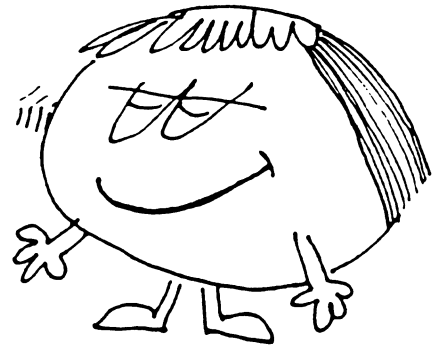
Conversation. Most activities ask students to write notes about their thoughts. This step invites intelligent conversation with oneself. There usually follows an invitation to enter into conversation with others. A student might share thinking with one or two peers or write thoughts on paper and put that work where others can read it.

Option. For those interested in doing more, most activities offer an extra challenge or two.

Varieties of Uses

As time fillers or enrichment lessons. Most activities can be turned into effective mini-lessons, ideal whenever extra time arises or when a class needs a special boost. A winning sequence:

1. The teacher reads aloud the activity to the students.
2. Students are asked to work alone for a few minutes and write personal thoughts.
3. When students are satisfied with their notes, each should find a partner and then share thoughts for perhaps 3 to 6 minutes.
4. Before interest lags, the class is called together for wholeclass discussion.



To help parents advance language skills and personal maturity. Parents interested in helping their children may wish to use these activities at home. The activities work well both as enrichment for children who can do more and encouragement for those who are slower. The activities could lead to students keeping personal journals at home.

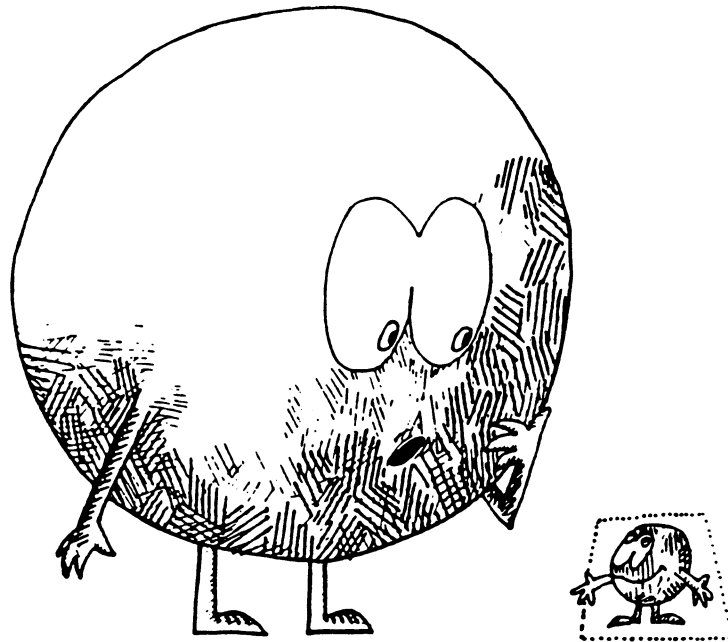
To motivate interest in an academic lesson. The activities can readily add depth and interest to lessons. An activity dealing with courage, for example, might precede study of a courageous historic figure or lead into a story. Almost any activity can be used to stimulate writing.

As a self-paced, self-managed, ongoing classroom activity. This is my favorite use of *SPUNJZ*, partly because it best develops students' thinking skills and self-management powers. You might, for example, ask students to do a *SPUNJZ* activity each day in a language learning centre. Or ask students to select one activity whenever other work is done early. When the *SPUNJZ* activities are used regularly, especially when students are responsible for the activity, benefits multiply beyond those of language practice.

Introducing SPUNJZ as a New Activity

I recommend introducing the activities with care to minimize confusion and frustration (which are especially likely in students unaccustomed to self-responsible work). One scenario for introducing *SPUNJZ* might occur as follows:

Today I'm going to walk you through a new procedure based on activities called SPUNJZ. The activities are designed to help you sponge up extra confidence and good feelings. Look at the three words on the blackboard.



Some Questions and Answers

Following are a number of questions I have heard from teachers, along with replies I have given. They are presented in no particular order.

Should the teacher read and comment on all work completed?

I recommend against it. *SPUNJZ* activities are meant to promote language skills by natural practice, by reading and writing meaningfully, much like people naturally learn to dress themselves or to learn about their environment. You might do better just to let the process flow.

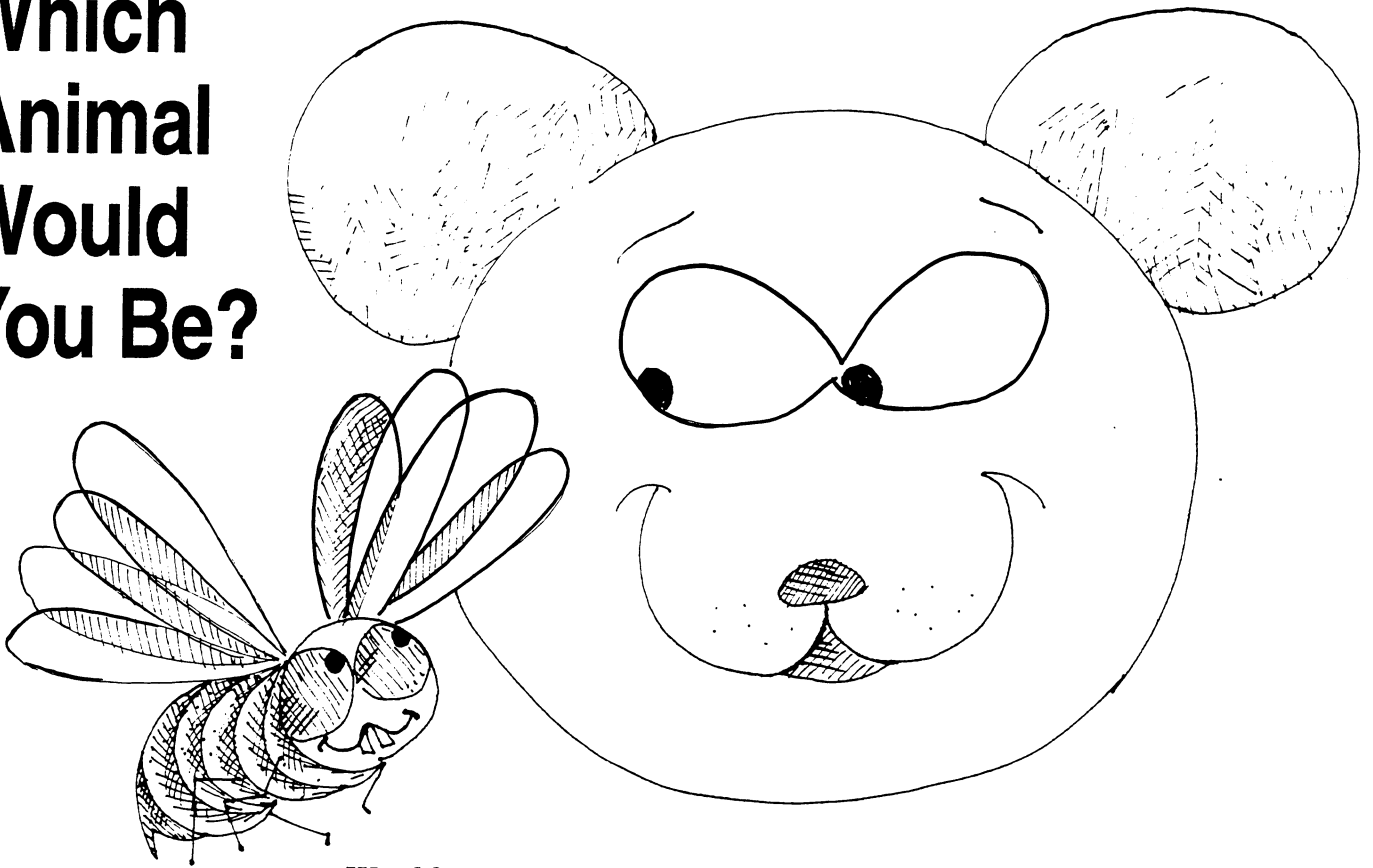
Furthermore, I prefer that students not look to teacher comments on *SPUNJZ* work for either personal validation or correct language usage. From time to time, I would look over some work to see what errors are common, which would then guide me in presenting language lessons to the class or to groups of students. But I would keep the observations to myself. The focus I prefer for these materials is on generating self-motivated, self-regulated reading, writing, and speaking.

You speak about pairs for sharing thoughts. Why not larger groups?

I find that pairs maximize active involvement. With groups of three, and especially four, one student is likely to say little and not get as much language practice—and perhaps feel slighted. With pairs, both are apt to play an active role.

I do allow larger groups for those activities that call for group games. But even then I would prefer groups of no more than four, to keep involvement high. I explain my reasons to students when they request larger groups. When students say they want to share new ideas with more than one person, I suggest they form new pairs after the first one.

Which Animal Would You Be?



Would you like to be a bird that flies? A cat that purrs? A tortoise that carries its own house with it? A lion that roars? A bee? A horse?

Or would you like to be a tall giraffe? A small flea? A long crocodile? An octopus with many arms? Or an elephant? A fish? A jumping kangaroo?

The Challenge

- ◆ What animals would you have fun being?
- ◆ What animals would you not want to be?
- ◆ Can you discover anything about yourself, perhaps about what you like and dislike, from the animals you selected?

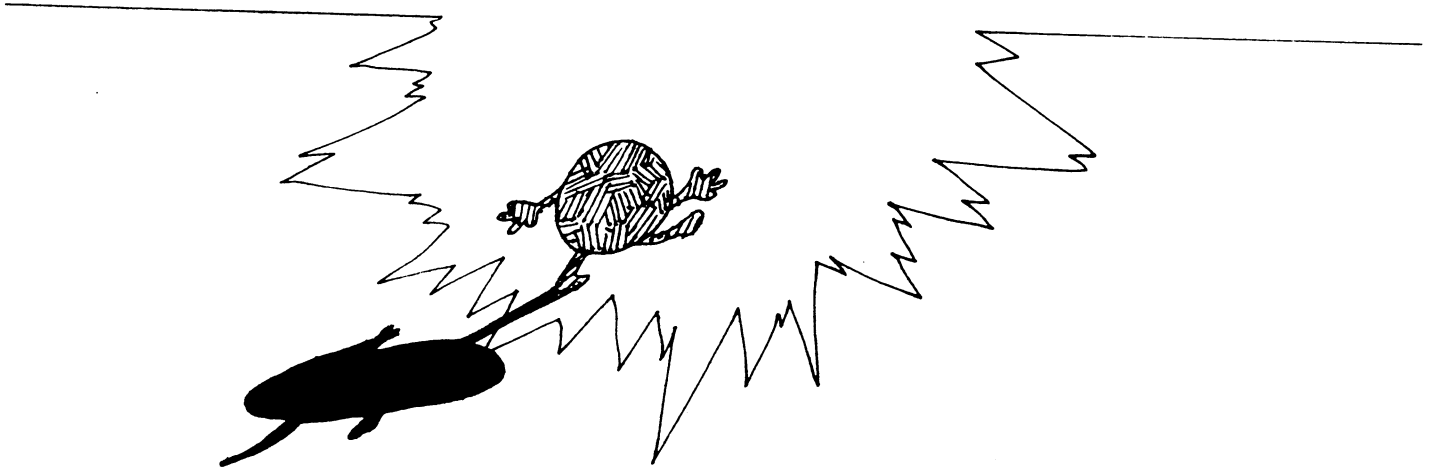
The Conversation

- ◆ Put your work where others can see it. Or share your ideas with one or two others and ask what they think.

The Option

- ◆ Find some time to act like an animal of your choice. See if others can guess what you are. Or maybe everyone can pretend they are animals at the same time just to see how it feels.

Escaping from a Cave



Imagine you are lost in a dark cave. The cave has many tunnels and many dead ends. At first you are frightened. But now you realize that if you are calm and careful you may be able to find your way to the entrance.

The Challenge

- ◆ Make a plan to get out of the cave. What might you do? Use words or art to show your plan.

The Conversation

- ◆ Put it where others can see it or show it to them. See what they think.

The Option

- ◆ Write or tell a story about a boy or girl who became lost in a cave. Describe how it began, how he or she got lost and tried to get out, and how it all ended. Show your work to someone.