

TIME

On My Hands

Favorite Free-Time Fillers From Our Subscribers

It never fails. No matter how well you plan, there always seems to be at least one student who finishes ahead of everyone else and inquires, "What do I do now?" We asked our subscribers to send us their tried-and-true suggestions for making good use of students' free time. The result is this invaluable collection of free-time fillers that will forever solve the "What do I do now?" dilemma!

Pick A Poem

I keep a few poetry books in our class library. During free time, a student may select a poem to memorize. Each Friday I set aside a few minutes at the end of the day to let students share poems that they've memorized during the week. I write a postcard of congratulations to each child who recites and mail it immediately after school. The students usually receive their postcards at home on Saturday—just in time to show off to proud parents!

Marsha Goode—Gr. 5, Creekview School, Monroe, OH

Extra! Extra!

Allow students to share the special moments in their lives with this easy display. Mount the title "Extra! Extra!" on a bulletin board or wall space. Near the display, place a basket of small index cards and a few fine-tipped markers. During free time, a student can come to the display, take a card, and label it with any special information about himself that he would like to share with the class (for example, "Rosa is going on a camping trip this weekend" or "Michael scored a goal in last night's soccer game."). He then posts his note on the display. Be sure to add a tidbit about yourself each week too!

Mary L. Allison, Hershey Elementary, Hershey, PA

Free-Time Slates

I keep a set of small slates and a cup of chalk on a back shelf. When a student finishes his work, he finds a partner who has also finished early. They each take a slate and a piece of chalk; then they call out spelling words to each other. Or they can use the slates to review any other skill or subject we are studying. My students love to write on the slates. What a fun way to study!

Cindy Hogsed—Gr. 4, Demorest Elementary, Demorest, GA

Early Bird Folder

My solution to the "What do I do now?" dilemma is the Early Bird Folder. Each child in my class has a pocket folder labeled "Early Bird." Inside the folder are fun, educational activities such as crosswords, word searches, and math puzzles. Students keep the folders in their desks and pull them out when they've finished class assignments. Every four to six weeks I distribute new activities to place in the folders.

Eve Beasley, Lipscomb Elementary, Brentwood, TN

Book Report Games

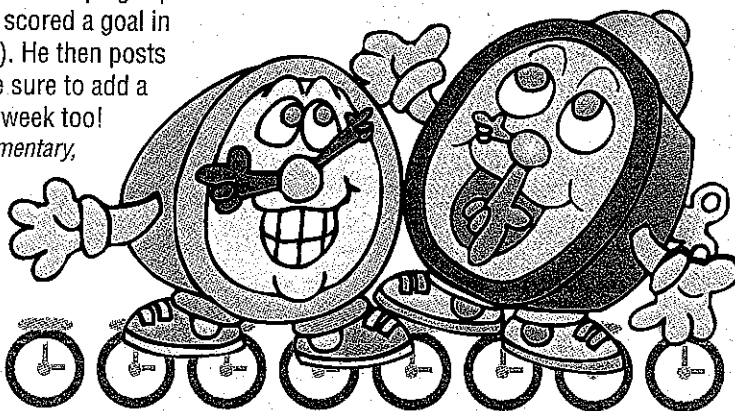
When my students have a few spare minutes, they rush to play games that they've created themselves! Each time I assign a book report, my students have the option of creating games that tell about their books. These completed games are stored at a center that students can visit during free time. Students love to teach each other their games, and I appreciate the reading motivation they generate!

Jenice Koppelo—Gr. 7, St. Pius X School, Portland, OR

Free-Time Trivia Game

With just a little bit of preparation, you can provide hours of free-time learning and fun. Label each of 50–70 small index cards with a review question. Write the question's answer at the bottom of the card. Store the cards at a center. Have the first child to finish early go to the center to be the "reader." As children finish their work, they go to the center and become the "players." The reader reads a question to each player in turn; if the student answers correctly, he keeps the card. At the end of the free period, players record the number of cards collected on a class list posted at the center. Children who collect a predetermined number of cards receive small treats or privileges. Have students add additional cards to the game as new facts are learned.

Mary L. Allison

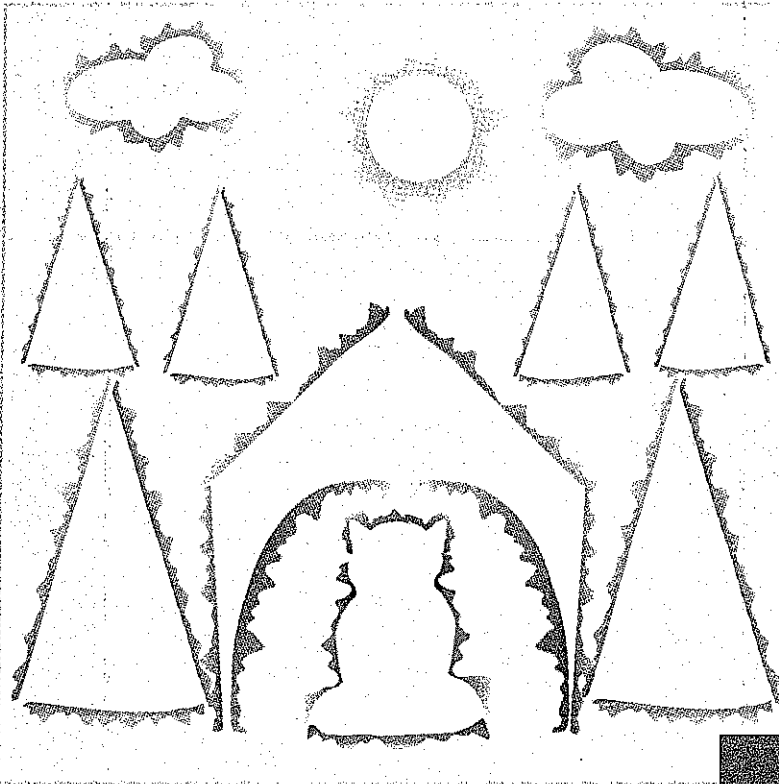


Fancy Fireworks!

This creative writing/art project is a wonderful summer school activity or anytime-of-the-year project. First have students write descriptive paragraphs about fireworks, including their personal experiences and feelings, as well as descriptions about the sounds and colors of fireworks. After talking and writing about fireworks, have students create their own! Follow these steps:

1. Trim a sheet of white paper so that it will fit in the bottom of a gift box. (A shirt box is a good size.)
2. Put two or three drops of different colors of paint on the paper.
3. Place two or three marbles in the box.
4. Put the lid on the box.
5. Shake and slide the box back and forth.
6. Take the lid off the box and sprinkle the paint with glitter.
7. Remove the sheet of paper and let it dry.
8. Attach the writing to the bottom of the picture.

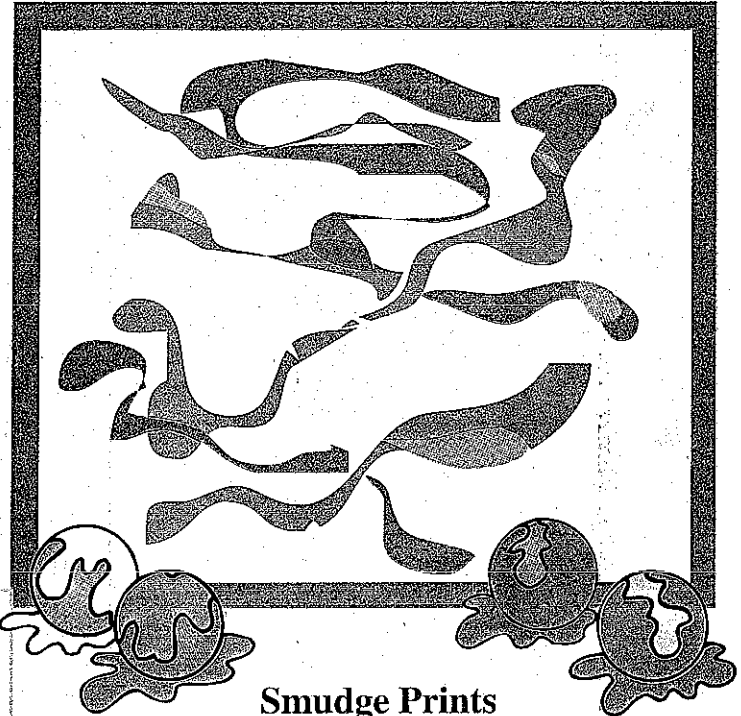
Pam Simerson—Grs. 1-6
E. W. Luther School
South Milwaukee, WI



Puzzle Designs

Picture a puzzle with the pieces not quite fitting together, and you've got the idea of this easy technique. First have each student cut a simple silhouette from a sheet of construction paper. He then cuts the silhouette into pieces, placing them on his desk in the correct order. The student then reassembles the pieces on a contrasting color of paper, forming the same basic shape as the original silhouette. The pieces are glued to the paper, leaving a space between each piece.

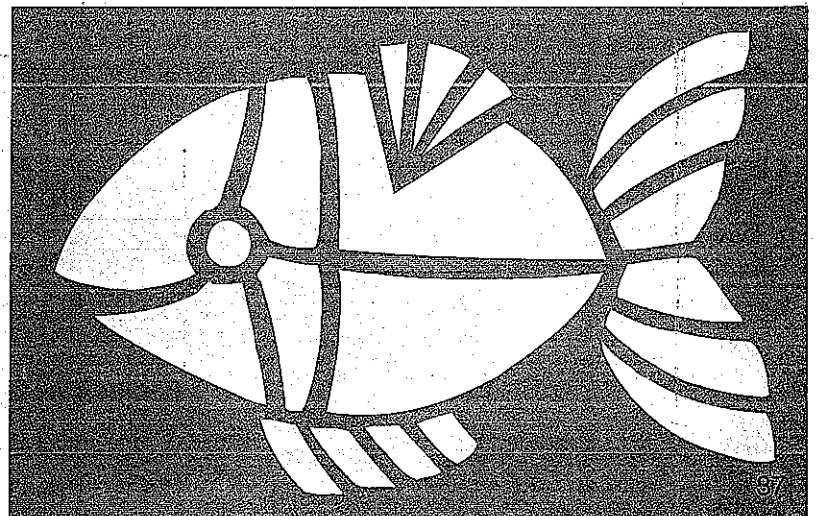
This technique is both simple and attractive—the perfect project for those days near the end of the school year!

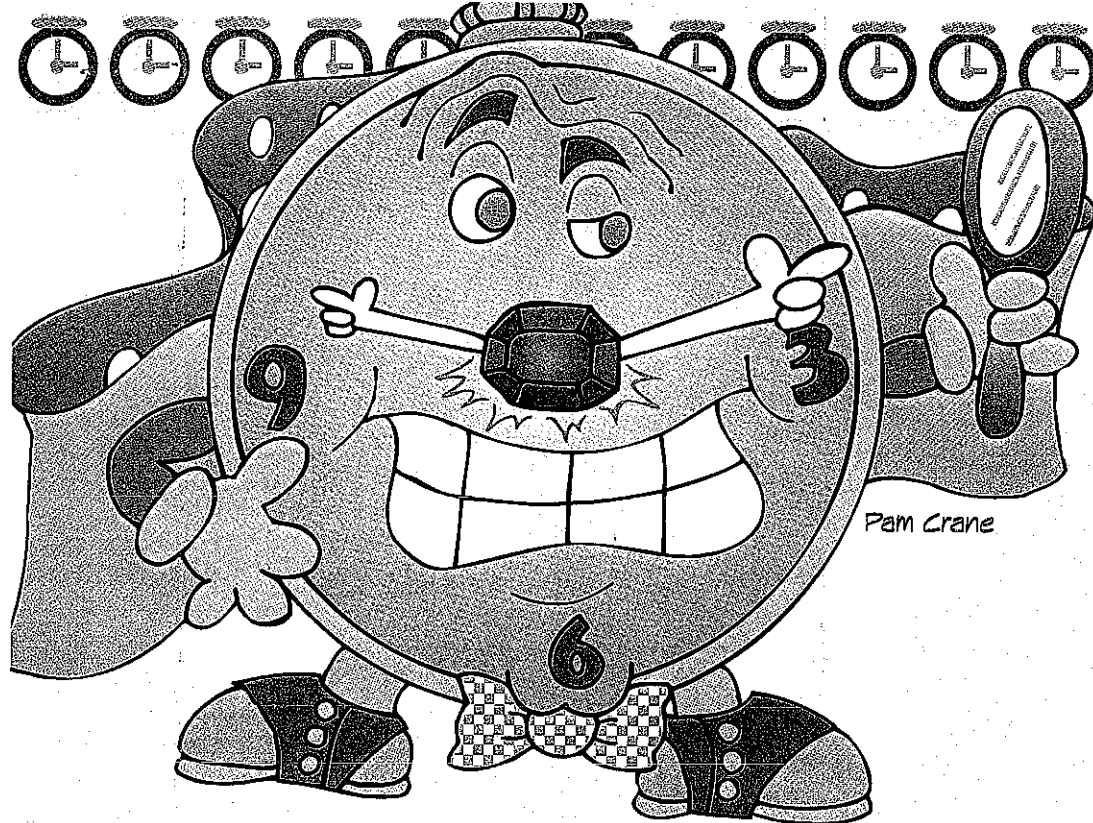


Smudge Prints

Try this new trick with old crayons, a perfect time-filler during the last few days of school:

1. Sketch and cut out several different sizes and shapes of silhouettes from sturdy paper or tagboard. Houses, trees, cars, pets, and toys are easy. Remember: silhouettes only; no other details are needed.
2. Color the border of each silhouette stencil, covering it darkly. Use a different color on each stencil.
3. Place a stencil on white paper.
4. Holding the stencil firmly with one hand, use the eraser end of a pencil to smudge the crayon onto the white paper. Do this around the entire border of the stencil.
5. When you lift the stencil, you'll see its fuzzy shape outlined on the paper.
6. Use other stencils to create a scene on your paper. For an interesting effect, overlap the stencils when making smudges. Also try coloring the border of a stencil with more than one color. Hint: Rub the eraser on a piece of scratch paper to remove the crayon.





Pam Crane

Map Of The Month

To challenge students who finish work early, I place a small portable bulletin board at a center. Each month I post a new map on the board along with a list of 25 questions pertaining to the map. Early finishers may visit the center and work on answering the questions. If a student answers all 25 questions correctly, he receives a button labeled "World's Greatest Map Master." This center is a real boost to my students' geography skills.

Linda Maxwell—Gr. 4, Edgewood School, Birmingham, AL

Estimation Stations

What kid doesn't like to guess? I take advantage of that interest by setting up several "Estimation Stations" in my classroom. One station may have students estimating the number of M&Ms in a jar. Another may have them estimating the weight of a brick, the number of *Smiths* in our local phone book, or the number of corn chips in a bag. Give small prizes (or the station treats themselves) to students who come closest to the correct answer.

Linda Maxwell—Gr. 4

New Knowledge

When my students finish classwork, many of them reach for their "New Knowledge" notebooks. In the notebooks, students record at least one new bit of knowledge they have learned during the day. The item can be from a class discussion or lesson, or a fact gleaned from one of the educational posters displayed in the classroom. Students may also find new information in an encyclopedia or reference book. Every week we share our new knowledge with each other. What a super way to multiply learning!

Joyce Anne Munn—Gr. 4, Southside Elementary, Siloam Springs, AR

Student Helper List

On my desk, I keep a list of tasks that need to be done around the classroom. Posters always seem to need new tape, errands to the office must be run, bulletin boards must be changed, etc. When a student finishes early, he may ask me if I have a job for him. With my handy list, it's easy to match the right task to the right student!

Diane Whiton—Gr. 6, Mechanicsburg Area Intermediate School, Mechanicsburg, PA

Typewriter Tip

Two manual typewriters help me to handle my early finishers. When a student finishes her work early, she may type out her spelling words, a letter to a friend, or anything else she chooses. Not only do my students love this activity, but they also get great practice with keyboard skills.

Dawn Lindsey—Gr. 5, Head Elementary, Montgomery, AL

Monthly Research Folders

In my classroom I have a box with a folder for each month. In each monthly folder, I list special dates and items of importance pertaining to that particular month. I decorate each folder and laminate it for durability. During free time, a student may look in the "folder of the month" and choose a topic on which to write a brief report. My students always have something interesting to investigate during free time, and they love the extra credit points that the reports earn them.

Cindy S. Miller—Gr. 5, Troy Elementary, Troy, AL



They Work For Me!

I have several suggestions for guiding students who have free time on their hands:

- Have students cut out letters for bulletin boards, take down bulletin boards, or put up new displays.
- Let a student listen to a taped story using your Walkman.
- Stock a center with paper and books on origami. Let students use the books to make lovely origami figures.
- Provide an almanac or other reference book that lists the names and addresses of celebrities or authors. Let students write, proofread, and mail letters to their favorites.
- Have students repair and organize paperbacks in your class library.
- Have a student prepare a poem, riddle, or famous fact to be read over the school's public-address system.

Patricia E. Dancho—Gr. 6 Language Arts, Apollo-Ridge Middle School, Spring Church, PA

Mapping It Out

One of my most popular free-time centers is stocked with blank U.S. maps and wipe-off markers. Each map is mounted on construction paper and laminated. When a student finishes early, he may take a map and use a marker to fill in the names of the states. When he's done, he wipes the map clean. Also great for reviewing state abbreviations, capitals, or other map skills!

Sonya Franklin, Ladonia Elementary, Auburn, AL, and Cheryl Johns—Gr. 4, Princeton Elementary, St. Clair Shores, MI



"Tic-Tac-Know"

Here's a great way to make good use of your students' free time. On a sheet of poster board draw a large tic-tac-toe board. Inside each square write the name of a subject. Prepare a list of questions corresponding with the subjects on the board (several questions per subject). Be sure to include the answer to each question. Also make a set of X and O cards.

Students compete individually or in teams, depending on the number of children who have finished their work. (If only one person finishes early, have her add new questions to the list.) To begin, Player A chooses a square. Player B asks him a question from that category. If correct, Player A places either an X or an O on the square. The first player to earn three in a row wins.

Gina Crooks—Grs. 5 and 6, Annunciation School, Brazil, IN

Extra Helpings

I've labeled a plastic bucket "Extra Helpings." Inside the bucket I place cards labeled with questions or projects, each of which takes only a few minutes to research and complete. When a student finishes an "extra helping" successfully, I write an S in a corner of her paper. The student tears off the S; then she either trades it in for a sticker or saves it for a more desirable award requiring more than one S. My students always ask for extra helpings when they finish their work!

Kim Pittser—Gr. 4, Mannford Elementary, Mannford, OK

I've Got You Covered!

Students with time on their hands help to fill my room with attractive reading motivators. I enlarge the cover of a favorite book to bulletin board size; then I hang it on a wall. During free time, students may quietly color the cover. Not only does this give my students an outlet for their energies, but it also introduces them to new books. When the picture is completed, I laminate it to use next year in a Book Week display!

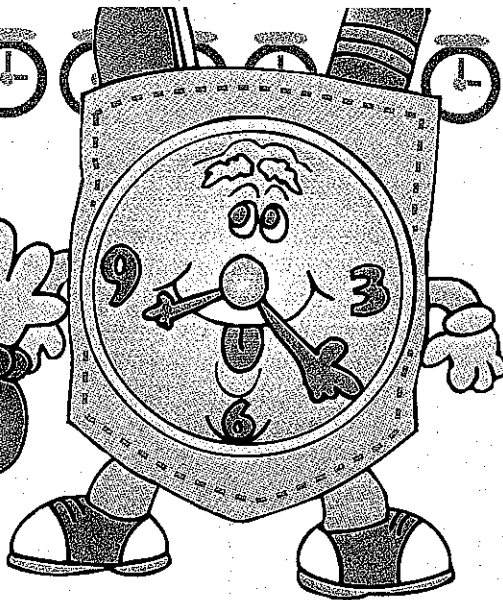
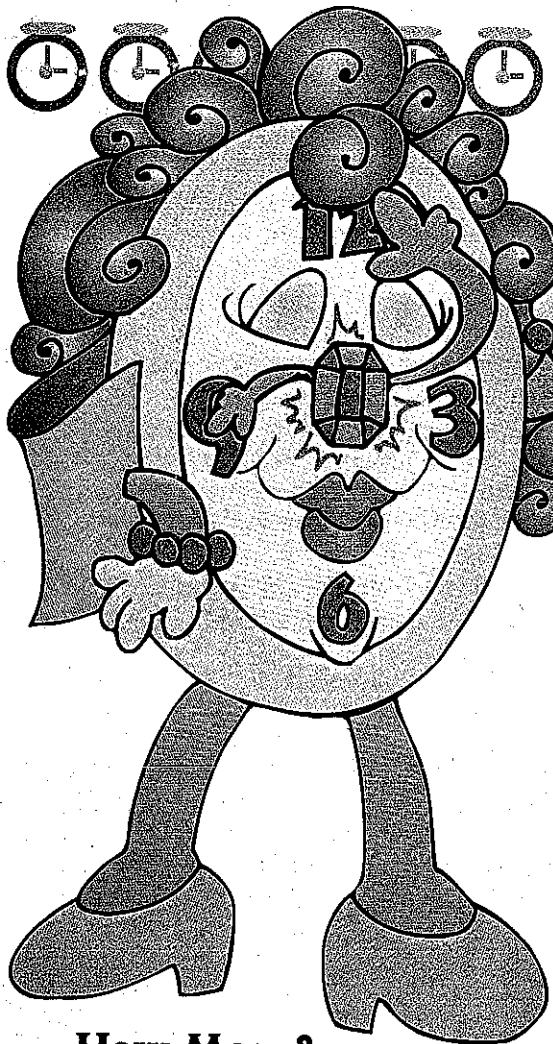
Kristie Tuggle—Gr. 5, White Middle School, Peoria, IL

Biweekly Contracts

My favorite free-time filler kills two birds with one stone! My state requires individualized work for all students. Every two weeks, I find 10 to 15 reproducible activities that pertain to each student's special needs. I staple each child's sheets together behind a page that contains a few fun puzzles. When a student finishes early, he knows to pull out his "contract" and get to work. Completed contracts are placed in student folders so that I can document my efforts at individualization.

Meg Cheshier—Gr. 5, Cannons Elementary, Spartanburg, SC





Free-Time Dominoes

To reinforce basic math concepts and take care of students who finish early, I keep ten sets of dominoes in my classroom. During free time, early finishers may pair up in a corner of the room and play dominoes. I usually spend a Friday early in the year to teach the game to all students; then I allow playing time so that I can be sure that every child understands the rules. At the end of each grading period, I hold a double-elimination domino championship. The winner receives a certificate or button. Oddly enough, the winner is rarely the same person each time!

Deborah Escue—Gr. 6, Sissonville Elementary, Sissonville, WV

Be A Matchmaker!

I encourage my early finishers to make matching games to help them study for upcoming tests. Students are provided with small index cards on which to write vocabulary words/definitions, review questions/answers, and math problems/answers. Advise students to number code the backs of the cards to make their games self-checking.

Ann M. Frech—Gr. 4, Savannah Christian Preparatory School, Savannah, GA

How Many?

To keep students busy during free time and provide practice with multiplication, I challenge them to figure out:

- How many eyes are in the classroom?
- How many knuckles are in the classroom?
- How many toes are in the classroom?
- How many molars are in the classroom?

This activity is great fun and really puts multiplication into action!

Suzie Lewis—Substitute Teacher, Lakeland, FL

Word Challenge

Looking for a quick free-time filler is one of a substitute teacher's major tasks! Here's one I've found useful. At the beginning of the day, write a word or phrase on the board. (Use words or phrases that include many letters.) During free time, have students use the letters in the word to list as many smaller words as possible. Kids savor the challenge of listing the most words!

Suzie Lewis—Substitute Teacher

The Word Corner

If my students have time on their hands, I encourage them to take a trip to the Word Corner. At this center, I've placed a collection of games such as Scrabble, Boggle, and Spill And Spell. I allow students to use the dictionary as much as they want during the games. Check yard sales for good buys on used games. I have five Scrabble games, each of which cost no more than a dollar!

Barb Witteman—Gr. 6, Jim Hill Junior High, Minot, ND

"I'm All Done" List

Each year during the first week of school, my students brainstorm an "I'm All Done" list. I tell students to imagine that everyone else in class is working quietly and they have finished early. What could they do without disturbing others? Each year my students offer a variety of different ideas.

Brenda Myers—Gr. 6, Greenlawn Elementary, Bainbridge, NY

Calculator Corner

For a great free-time activity, I store a collection of calculators in a box. If a student finishes his math work early, he may use one of the calculators to check his work. I also have an assortment of menus from local restaurants and a variety of calculator worksheets. The students may use the calculators to add prices on the menus or to complete a worksheet. It's an easy way to provide lots of calculator practice!

Brenda Myers—Gr. 6





Sticker Fun

Peel-off letters provide my students with plenty of productive free time. I keep the letters and scrap paper at my desk. When a student finishes early, she may use the materials to spell out such items as short-term goals, spelling words, or adjectives to describe herself. It's a favorite with my students!

Linda Humble, Parsons Middle School, Parsons, KS

Treasure Hunt

Each week my students go on a free-time treasure hunt that reinforces social studies, map skills, and measurement. At the beginning of the week, I give students clues to the location of the "treasure." Clues are based on the week's social studies lessons. By following the clues and using a map and the map scale, students discover the whereabouts of the imaginary treasure. (Example: Begin at the capital of Pennsylvania. From there, travel southeast approximately 100 miles to a large, historic city....) Each student who correctly locates the treasure gets to label a paper coin with his name; then he places it in our class treasure chest. At the end of each month, I draw a name from the chest. The winner gets to eat lunch in the classroom with me.

Susan P. Horanic—Gr. 4, Shiremanstown Elementary, Shiremanstown, PA

Draw!

It's a rare kid who doesn't like to draw. I provide an assortment of How To Draw... books for students who finish their classwork early. These books help students learn to draw dogs, cats, cars, people, and a variety of other subjects.

Cheryl Johns—Gr. 4, Princeton Elementary School, St. Clair Shores, MI

Maxine's Marvelous Mind Movers

In one corner of my classroom, I have placed a life-sized cardboard woman whom the class has affectionately named Maxine. Attached to Maxine's hands is a large manila envelope entitled "Maxine's Marvelous Mind Movers." Each day I place several copies of a brainteaser or puzzle in Maxine's envelope. When a student has free time, she may try to solve Maxine's brainteaser. At the end of the day, the class discusses solutions to the puzzle.

Susan P. Horanic—Gr. 4

The Boredom Binder

To solve the "What do I do now?" dilemma, I save all of my extra reproducible worksheets. I punch holes in each one and place it in a three-ring binder that I've entitled "The Boredom Binder." During free time, a student can select a skill sheet to complete, just for fun, with no grading pressure. Provide answer keys for self-checking.

Cindy Chinnis—Gr. 4, Rollings Elementary, Summerville, SC

Monthly Contests

I've put the space on my classroom closet doors to good use. Each month I post on the doors a research question such as "Can you name these famous inventions?" (which is accompanied by descriptions of several inventions) or "Can you name these bones of the body?" (accompanied by pictures of several bones). In addition, I place appropriate resource materials on a nearby table. During free time, students may work on answering these contest questions. This is a terrific way to supplement your science, social studies, fine arts, or math curriculum.

Susan P. Horanic—Gr. 4

