

Sponge Activities

Introduce students to the idea that at certain times of the day or week, everyone will be working at a different pace on varied assignments. Students may complete this work independently or cooperatively at classroom centers. Subject-specific assignments or ongoing stations provide an opportunity for co-teachers and instructional assistants to offer students additional guidance, modeling, practice, review, reinforcement, or enrichment as they circulate around the classroom. The following table provides suggestions for sponge activities throughout the school year.

August–September	<p>These back-to-school months are a wonderful time for establishing students’ prior and baseline knowledge across disciplines through informal interactive quizzes and fun activities such as crossword puzzles, computer games, bingo, and more. This is also an excellent opportunity for students to share their favorite summer activities with pictures, poems, journals, essays, songs, plays, discussions, meetings, dioramas, and bulletin boards.</p> <p>Establish research centers with online curriculum-related websites, WebQuests, performance centers, artists’ corners, writing centers, and mathematics-related activities. Distribute interest inventories and people finders to get to know students and help students get to know one another. Students circulate around the classroom to find peers to sign academic or personal descriptors about something they can do or about something they have or know (for example, “Find someone who can name three words that begin with the consonant blend <i>br</i>,” or “Find someone who speaks a different language at home or has two dogs.” Encourage students to share their strengths and preferred learning styles. Celebrate Labor Day, autumn, grandparents, Johnny Appleseed, and Native Americans with fun centers and activities.</p>
October–December	<p>Review lessons with cooperative and collaborative open-book quizzes that honor cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills. Center questions could ask students to retell a story in another genre or from another character’s point of view; write a letter to a character; create a soliloquy for a protagonist; pretend to be a scientist who made a recent discovery pertaining to a lesson unit; perform a play set in a historical time frame or on another continent; or create a clay sculpture or collage.</p> <p>This is also a time of giving thanks, celebrating holidays with families and friends, and sharing with those less fortunate. Students could write letters to soldiers overseas or seniors in local assisted-living facilities, or gather community donations, such as PTA-sponsored food drives to send to various charities. Celebrate firefighters, literacy, the Statue of Liberty, veterans, the harvest, and the close of the calendar year with assignments that value visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements.</p>
January–February	<p>This is the time to make resolutions and honor people such as George Washington, Martin Luther King Jr., and Abraham Lincoln. Sir Isaac Newton, Susan B. Anthony, Elvis Presley, Garth Brooks, and John Steinbeck are just a few famous people who were born in these two months. Students can investigate these individuals by writing biographies, dressing in costume, and giving oral presentations. Remember groundhog and leap-year activities too! Celebrate Dental Health Day and Valentine’s Day, along with the Chinese New Year, African American history, and the civil rights movement.</p>

March–April	<p>Students may be thinking school is almost over, but now is the perfect time to involve them in different sponge activities. March is a month to honor women, music, crafts, and the American Red Cross. Students could help one another with community projects and figure out ways to better their own school environment. Students could create a dance and song for a musical comedy, drama, mystery, or operatic performance with a cast of characters, instruments, scenery, and backdrops that relate to the curriculum. Students delve into higher-order thinking while reading, writing, and researching. They could perform for families or for students in younger grades.</p> <p>Collaborate with other classes about ways to use music, dance, world languages, physical education, and art. Celebrate spring, good nutrition, and women’s history and accomplishments. Honor Dr. Seuss’s birthday on March 2 by reading or critiquing a few of his books or by having students emulate his style by creating some of their own stories, either independently or in cooperative writing groups.</p>
May–July	<p>Things are warming up as students in some regions think about diving into swimming pools and visiting beaches. Create class environments that encourage students to investigate the seashore with mathematics, science, social studies, reading, and writing connections. Allow learners to cooperatively review and jigsaw topics in textbook tables of contents, and then teach the concepts to the rest of the class. Lessons can include student-created tests, digital slides, videos, songs, dances, plays, collages, class debates, and more.</p> <p>Honor moms on the second Sunday of May and dads on the third Sunday of June. The first week of May is Teacher Appreciation Week. Flag Day is on June 14, and June is National Safety Month. The first full week in June is also about appreciating your pets. Celebrate Cinco de Mayo, Memorial Day, summer, and the Fourth of July. Appropriate age-level projects and activities correlate curriculum topics with students’ interests to develop literacy and numeracy skills and strengthen peer relationships.</p>

Source: Adapted from Karten, T. J. (2012). Inclusion lesson plan book for the 21st century: Teacher training edition. Naples, FL: National Professional Resources.