

The Teach-Back Game

GAME

SKILL: ACTIVE THINKING

45 MINUTES

RECOMMENDED AGE RANGE

Ages 8–14. Kids this age are actively using AI for school and are at the exact stage where deliberate practice habits make the biggest difference in whether skills keep forming or quietly fade.

WHAT YOU NEED

A device with AI access

Paper and a pen for each player

A timer (phone works fine)

ACTIVITY STEPS

- 01 Pick Your Topic.** Each player picks one topic they are genuinely curious about. It works better when it is not a current school assignment. Pick something you actually want to know more about: an animal, a sport, how something is made, a historical event, a food, or a technology. Write your topic on paper. (3 min)
- 02 Explore With AI, But Only Ask Questions.** Set a timer for 10 minutes. Each player opens AI and explores their topic, with one rule: every prompt must be phrased as a genuine question. No "tell me about" or "explain this." Ask things like "why does this happen?" or "what makes this different from similar things?" The constraint forces your brain to direct the search instead of just receiving from it. (10 min)
- 03 Write It in Your Own Words.** While exploring, each player writes down 3 things they actually understood, in their own words, on paper. No copy-pasting from AI. If you cannot put something in your own words yet, ask the AI another question until you can. Writing is where the understanding forms. (During Step 2)
- 04 Teach It Back, No Notes.** Devices go away. Notes go face-down. Each player teaches their topic to the rest of the family for 3 minutes from memory only. The family listens, then asks any question they genuinely want answered. If the teacher gets stuck, they can look up that one specific thing, explain it in their own words, and continue. (5 min per player)
- 05 Score and Reflect.** After everyone has taught, each player answers two questions: What is the most interesting thing you actually understood, not just remembered reading? And what is one thing you still want to know that you could not explain yet? Award points for questions answered from memory, and for honest "I do not know"

moments followed by a real look-up. The player who teaches most clearly and identifies the most honest gaps wins. (10 min)

THE DEEPER LESSON

A Wharton study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences found that students who received complete answers from AI got worse at the skill it was helping with, while students who received hints actually improved. The difference was whether the brain stayed in the work. The Teach-Back Game builds that habit: by requiring genuine questions, handwritten notes, and memory-only teaching, it keeps the cognitive work where it belongs.

CONVERSATION STARTER

If you had to explain what you learned today to someone who had never used AI, could you do it, and does your answer tell you whether you actually understood it or just watched the AI explain it?

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