15 ideas to motivate students using Blendspace

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INTRODUCTION

Technology gives teachers many choices when it comes to creating lessons and activities for students. But, not all technology is created equal. Some of it promises great things but then fails to deliver. Some of it can even end up getting in the way of teaching and learning.

In the world of edtech, Blendspace stands out. This platform gives teachers like you a space to be creative and to access, modify, develop and adapt online content – all while engaging students. Its unique features can even help teachers reach demotivated or distracted learners, inspiring them to reconnect and reengage.

In this guide, we’ll show you 15 different ways you can take advantage Blendspace for all age groups and grades. Blendspace also works just as well in situations where technology is limited as it does in technology-rich classrooms.

You’ll also be able to see each of these 15 ideas in action because we’ve created an example Blendspace for each one. These examples show what is possible and strive to give you a starting point for creating your own brilliant Blendspaces.

15 IDEAS

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1 Class Jukebox

Sometimes, you just need music to stay motivated.

Tell your class that you want to create a Blendspace jukebox with one song choice from everybody. You can use it as a reward for when they’re working really well. You’ll load it up and play it at a low (but audible!) volume, meaning students can listen to some of their favorite songs while they work.

To start, give every student a piece of paper and ask them all to write down a song they want included. Specify any rules at this point. For example, you may want to censor song lyrics. Collect the slips and use them to create a class jukebox in Blendspace. You’ll almost certainly be able to find every song on YouTube.

You can use the Blendspace jukebox as a reward, as a tool to motivate students, and as a way to rouse a class who may be getting burned out towards the end of the day.

2 Image Bank

A picture is worth a thousand words — and questions.

You can use Blendspace to spark discussion. First, select a topic and decide how many images you want students to view in the Blendspaces.

For example, you may pick plate tectonics and twelve images based on the amount of time you plan to spend on the activity. You may begin with some obvious ones – a volcano, a fault line, a map of the earth’s crust – before picking some more challenging ones – an image of the Earth’s surface in the Jurassic Period or a picture of the Galapagos Islands.

Once you’re happy with the order, you can add questions to each image to get students thinking about key ideas. For example, in the comment box for the Galapagos Islands, you may write: “What do the Galapagos Islands have to do with plate tectonics?”

You can have students work through the Blendspace in pairs, or use it as the basis of a teacher-led lesson. Before sharing, consider how your questions will work for the class as a whole, what extra information might be needed, and whether different students can select the images to discuss.
3 TED Playlists

Tune up a playlist of your favorite TED talks.

Create a new Blendspace and populate the tiles with the webpages of TED talks that you want your students to watch. For example, you could create a themed playlist of talks on recent developments in Science and Technology. Once completed, decide how you want to use your playlist. You can:

- Display it on the board at the start of lessons and ask students to vote on which TED talk they want to watch.
- If students have internet access at home, you can share your Blendspace and set homework around different talks on your playlist. Students can watch these on their own time and then discuss them with you in the next lesson.
- If you have a number of computers available, share your Blendspace and invite students to take a look at it in pairs or individually. Either let them choose a talk to watch, or highlight a couple that are most relevant to your current lesson.

4 Power of Video

Put the power of video at the center of your lessons.

Videos capture the imagination at every age -- just think about the first time you watched your favorite Disney movie.

Here are two examples of how Blendspace lets you incorporate videos:

- Identify three videos connected to your topic that will cause students to rethink any assumptions they may have had about the topic. These videos act like “stingray” questions. That is to say, they pack a jolt that shocks students into thinking critically and that energizes student learning. Place these videos at strategic points in your Blendspace, so students see them at the precise moments when they need a little extra motivation to stay engaged.
- Create a Blendspace that has a bank of videos connected to a specific subject. Whenever motivation dips, bring up the Blendspace and make a deal with your students. If they stay motivated and keep focused, then you will let them select one video from the bank to watch, discuss, and analyze. This Blendspace can act like an intellectual time-out and can give students a short-term goal to work towards.
5 Juxtaposition

Challenge student expectations by juxtaposing ideas.

You can surprise students by placing opposing pieces of content next to each other in a Blendspace. When you confront your students with conflicting viewpoints (whether that’s through text, image, or video), you encourage your students to reengage with the lesson to make sense of the content. Filmmakers often use this technique. For example, they may cut away from a scene of a family enjoying a lavish Christmas dinner to a homeless man wandering the street.

When creating your Blendspace, carefully plan your students’ journey. Juxtapose content that snaps their attention back to the lesson. For example, a math lesson may start with a video about fractions, only to be followed by an image of construction workers eating lunch on a steel girder hanging off the top of an unfinished Empire State Building.

‘What’s going on?!’ say the students. ‘Ah,’ replies the teacher ‘I bet you didn’t think the Empire State Building was built using fractions, did you?’ That’s the power of juxtaposition!

6 Smorgasbord

Give your lessons incredible variety by creating a smorgasbord of content, questions, and activities.

Choose a topic and decide how many Blendspace tiles you want to include. For example: persuasive writing and nine tiles. For this activity, you want to draw in a wide variety of ideas and information. For example, start with a video, move on to an audio file, then have a question, follow up with a piece of text, then an image, next an activity, and so on. Voila! You’ve created a themed Blendspace that gives students a whole range of ways to engage with the topic.

You can teach the whole class with this technique by displaying the Blendspace on the board and inviting students to choose the tile to look at next. This approach encourages students to be actively involved in the learning process. After all, you can go through a Blendspace in any order you like; it doesn’t have to be linear. If you have enough computers, you can have students explore the Blendspace individually, in pairs, or small groups, before bringing the class together for a follow-up discussion.

Blendspace Example

Blendspace Example
7 Competition Time

Bring a competitive element into your lessons.

Divide the class into teams of three. Introduce the topic and give 30-40 minutes for teams to create a Blendspace about it. Provide success criteria that students have to meet and indicate that you’ll judge which Blendspace is the best when the time is up!

You can also divide the class into two teams. For example, bring up a Blendspace containing twelve tiles. Each tile should contain a different resource connected to the topic. You also need a set of complementary questions, one per tile. Invite team one to choose a tile. Display the resource on the board and ask your question. If team one gets the question right, give the team two points. Continue until every tile has been chosen, making sure you keep track of points along the way.

The first idea is great if you have a set of computers. The second idea only needs one computer and one projector to make it work.

8 Museum Curator

Take students through a topic museum-style.

First, decide on a topic. Second, create a new Blendspace. Third, populate this Blendspace with a range of exhibits. For example, if your topic is rivers, you may include an image of the Nile from space, a video of the Hoover Dam, a picture of the Grand Canyon, a video of the Ganges, and so on.

Fourth, curate your content. Rearrange your objects into an order that has a clear purpose and interest. Afterwards, you can add notes, questions, and context.

Finally, create a worksheet with questions that students answer as they go through the Blendspace to capture key points connected to each “exhibit.” Also make sure to give your class opportunities to discuss the different exhibits that you show them.

Blendspace Example


Blendspace Example

9 **Beginning, Middle, End**

**Turn your lesson into a story.**

Divide a new Blendspace into three sections: Beginning, Middle, and End. You might give equal weight to each section. Or, if your lesson is fairly long, you might decide to make the middle double the length of the other sections.

Next, start planning relevant content and suitable activities for your lesson. As you do, remember you are telling a story. The first section should introduce students to the topic. The second should help them explore it in detail, and the third should draw the lesson to a conclusion — by pulling everything together and summing things up, or by asking students to think again about what they've studied.

You can share your Blendspace with students and have them work through it individually, or you can use it to lead your whole class. In either case, draw students’ attention to the story driving the learning. You might like to start and end the lesson by briefly summarizing that story, reinforcing it in students’ minds as you do.

10 **A Model Approach**

**Students imitate, internalize, and extend expert thinking.**

Begin by deciding what you want to model for your students. For example, a history teacher might want to model effective source analysis. To do this, make a Blendspace containing a series of sources about World War II, followed by a clip of a historian talking about how to analyze sources, then a webpage explaining what good source analysis involves.

You can conclude the Blendspace with an activity that asks students to analyze the WWII sources, using the techniques and strategies outlined in the video clip and webpage.

You can share your Blendspace with students and ask them to go through it individually, or, if you don’t have a set of computers, you can display it at the front of the room and walk the class through each step.

[Blendspace Example](http://bit.ly/beginningexample)

[Blendspace Example](http://bit.ly/modelexample)
11 Knowledge Hunt

Get students motivated on a quest for knowledge.

Start a new Blendspace and decide how many pieces of knowledge your hunt will involve. Come up with a sheet of questions, one for each, that will send students in the right direction. Then, find relevant sources of content to populate your Blendspace.

Share the Blendspace with your learners. Their mission is to work in pairs to hunt down the knowledge that answers your questions, using the Blendspace content as a starting point. You can also turn it into a competition – the winners are the first pair to answer all the questions correctly and therefore complete their knowledge hunt!

If you don’t have access to a class set of computers, tweak the activity by displaying the Blendspace on the board, giving each pair a question sheet, and providing additional materials such as textbooks for students to use.

12 A Dozen Dilemmas

Weave a game into your lesson.

Start a new Blendspace with a dozen tiles. Decide if you want to use subject-specific or general dilemmas or problems. For example, a biology class may select the lesson’s dilemma as how to deliver clean water to rural villages in developing countries. For each one, find a relevant image, web page, or video. Add this content to your tiles and write the dilemmas out in the comment boxes.

Begin your next lesson by displaying your Blendspace on the board. Invite one student to select a dilemma that the whole class will try to solve. Reveal the one they choose, explain it, and give students a moment to write it down.

Finally, indicate that you want students thinking about this dilemma throughout the course of the lesson, as well as the other materials you’ve prepared. Explain that you’ll take the whole class back to the dilemma at the very end, giving all students a chance to share their thoughts and to see whether a successful solution has emerged.
13 If This Is the Answer...

...what might the question be?

You can easily create brilliant lessons around this idea.

Start a new Blendspace and identify a set of answers for which you want students to work out questions. Populate the tiles with text, images, video clips or web pages representing each answer.

At the start of your lesson, display the Blendspace on the board. Invite a student to select a tile. Reveal the content, and if necessary, explain what the answer is. Next, pose students the question: ‘If this is the answer, what might the question be?’ Give them time to discuss in pairs and then follow up with a whole-class discussion.

At this point, there are two options open to you. First, you can go through more of the answers with your students, getting them to discuss possible questions on each occasion. Second, you can settle on one of the questions students have put forward and then challenge everybody to write a detailed answer to this – using the answer you provided as a simple starting point.

Blendspace Example

14 Crowdsource Your Lesson

Get your students to help create a lesson.

Create a Blendspace with a title reflecting the topic of your intended lesson and the same number of tiles as students in your class. For homework, ask students to research the topic and then add a piece of content to one of the tiles in the Blendspace. The content they add should reflect something they would like the lesson to include. You also can have your students write a comment, explaining why their contribution is interesting or important.

There are two ways you can use your crowd-sourced Blendspace. First, you can present the original version. That means that you can leave it as it is and take your class through it, choosing different tiles at random and asking the students who added them to explain their choices.

Second, you can refine the Blendspace. You then can turn what students have included in a lesson to suit your aims and at the same time reflect their interests. As a result, your Blendspace will be sure to be both motivating and engaging.

Blendspace Example
15  Vlog Yourself!

Surprise your students by using a video-based lesson with you as the star.

For example, a math teacher decides to create a Blendspace using video logs (vlogs) of herself. She takes her smartphone and records three videos of herself explaining a key idea, setting up a challenge and posing a question. Next, she builds a Blendspace for her lesson. It includes content from across the web, alongside the three videos.

She makes sure to keep all this a secret, so students are surprised when they see her on screen.

If you’re unsure about creating multiple videos, you can just create one intro video covering the learning objectives and how to use the Blendspace. This video will be enough of a surprise to motivate most students.

You can further develop this idea by setting students the challenge of creating their own vlog-based Blendspaces. Let the fun begin!

Blendspace Example