The all-around best practice I used this year was an activity called "Jumpy Dolls". I adapted this activity from one that I found online. In the original activity, students make a puppet out of cardboard to model the skeletal system and it had literally no guidelines or instructions. To adapt the activity for my class, I laid out a variety of materials such as craft sticks, yarn, metal fasteners or brads, rubber bands, and other craft supplies. I gave my students the task of creating a puppet that could perform at least five jumping jacks by pulling a single string above the head. The objective for my students was to understand how the muscular system and skeletal system work together to move the body. I was amazed at the creativity my students demonstrated with this activity. This was a cooperative learning activity in which students had to work in teams to accomplish the task. By not giving my students instructions, they have to use creative problem solving skills to get their doll to do jumping jacks. To assess student learning, I had students complete a self assessment in which they analyze their own strengths and weaknesses when it came to working with their team to solve the problem. They also completed a peer assessment to analyze teammate strengths and weaknesses. Each student also had to write and essay explaining the similarities between their jumpy doll and the human body. In the essay they had to include an explanation of what each part of their jumpy doll represented in the human body. It was wonderful to see my students make connections between, for example, craft sticks and bones or metal fasteners and joints or rubber bands and muscles. It was also incredible to read their explanations of movement in the human and how they had to connect string or rubber bands to joints in order to make their dolls be able to move arms and legs simultaneously in a jumping jack.

I even had a couple of teams that used a drinking straw along the "spine" of their doll and threaded string through it. In their essay they explained that the string was the spinal cord that sent the message for muscles to move, which was an excellent lead in to my next lesson on the nervous system.

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