

GROUP CHALLENGES

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING

Being able and willing to cooperate, communicate, trust, and problem solve with a group of people is a life skill and needs to be practiced.

ASSESSMENT

Do students improve in their ability to work as a team? Are there specific leaders that stand out in the group? Do the leaders change depending on the situation?

OUTLINE

Materials

Class Procedures

- I. Set-up
- II. Introduction
- III. Warm-up
- IV. Log line up
- V. All aboard
- VI. Norwegian skis
- VII. Alligator swamp
- VIII. Electric fence
- IX. Spider web
- X. Trust fall
- XI. Conclusion

Safety

Clean-up

Additional Information

Resources

Course map

MATERIALS

- spider web
- Norwegian skis
- alligator swamp boards
- electric fence ropes
- blindfolds
- rubber chicken
- hula hoops

CLASS PROCEDURES

I. Set-up

All facilitating adults need to be trained in the use of the challenge course. This should be done with the School Forest Coordinator before your trip.

Before your visit, please let the School Forest Coordinator know that you will be using the challenge course, so that it is set-up for you. Read the lesson plan and decide what activities you would like to facilitate.

During the challenges, take note of what is going on to discuss with the group afterwards. Watch for safety problems and stop an activity if any exist.

II. Introduction

During this class, the group of students will be given challenges, which they must solve as a team. It is not a race and the adults are not a part of the team. The adults will need to help with the students' safety at all times but they are not there to solve the problem. If at any time you feel that safety is a problem or that the group needs to be refocused, you should step in to help the group.

As a team, this group of students will need to practice trust, communication, cooperation, and problem solving. Discuss with the students other times they have worked with a team to accomplish a goal. Talk about what works well.

III. Warm-ups

A. Hoop pass

Stand in a large circle and join hands. Now pick a pair to put their hands through a hula-hoop. The goal is to get the hula-hoop all the way around the circle. You may want to use more than one hula-hoop going different directions.

(Hoops can be found in the Greene Cabin storage area and on the girl's chaperone side of the Ehlert Lodge.)

B. Skin the snake

Have the group line up in a straight line one behind the other. Now spread out a little bit. Now everyone should reach between their legs with their left hand. Everyone should reach forward with their right hand to hold the hand of the person in front of them. Now the team needs to find a way to get everyone standing up in a straight line, holding hands. You may not lift your legs up and simply pull your hands out from under you.

(Instead of having kids hold hands, there is a set of short ropes with knots in the group challenge equipment in the Greene Cabin. These can be used if there is a concern with kids twisting their wrists.)

C. Human Knot

The group should stand in a circle, shoulder-to-shoulder, and place your hands in the center. Have everyone grab a couple of hands. Make sure that you do not grab both hands of one person or with the person directly next to you. Hands must remain joined during this activity. Now the group needs to try to untie the knot. As the teacher, monitor safety. You may want to split into smaller groups to do this activity.

(Instead of having kids hold hands, there is a set of short ropes with knots in the group challenge equipment in the Greene Cabin. These can be used if there is a concern with kids twisting their wrists.)

IV. Challenges

A. Log line up

Tell the entire group to stand on the log and wait for instructions. Explain that they cannot touch the ground. Their feet need to stay on the log. Now ask them to line up by ... height, birthday, alphabetically by first name. You can add variations in like: no speaking, blindfold a few students, or the silent stick (you hand sticks out to the students that cannot talk during the activity—works great when you have a couple of students that are always leading the group).

(Any log large enough in the forest can be used. Patty recommended the log under the power lines by the alligator swamp.)

B. All aboard

Start this activity by giving the instructions before the students touch the box. The instructions are: everyone must have both feet off of the ground and at least one foot touching the box long enough to sing “Row-row-row your boat.” Give students the opportunity to ask questions if they have them. The solution may be that all of the students sit on the ground with their feet off of the ground and at least one touching the box. Watch for lifting and stress safety during this activity.

(The boxes can be found along the trail leading to the North Star Trail just north of the Krejarek building, past the volleyball court, the trail starts near the labeled Oak Tree. As you head down the lane you will first see one box, a little farther down the trail 3 boxes next to each other.)

C. Norwegian skis

The object of this initiative problem is to move your group from one area to another without touching the ground by using the Norwegian skis. If someone touches the ground, the group will get a five or ten second penalty. You may want to add on variations like, no recognizable language can be spoken (each small group comes up with their own language), no talking at all, or maybe you would like to put blindfolds on a few members of the teams to make it more challenging. Tell the groups how it is not a race and that, as always, safety is the number one priority. When finished, discuss the activity. What is difficult? Was there a leader that stood out? What would have made it better for your group?

(Norwegian skis can be found in the basement of the Greene Cabin at the bottom of the stairs in the cubby immediately to your right. The skis have ropes attached to them for the kids feet.)

D. Alligator swamp

To accomplish the Alligator Swamp challenge, the group needs to get everyone across the alligator swamp without touching the ground. You may not jump between the “rocks.” You will use two planks to get between the three “rocks” in the “swamp.” The boards cannot touch the ground either. Any body part that touches the ground will be lost to the “alligators.” Discuss safety. After this activity, talk with the group about what they accomplished. Discuss communication, cooperation, problem solving, and trust. Which one was most important for this challenge?

(Alligator swamp boards can be found in the basement of the Greene Cabin at the bottom of the stairs in the cubby immediately to your right. They are just plain boards.)

E. Electric fence

The goal of this activity is to transport the group over the “electric” fence using only themselves. They may touch the trees but they may not touch the fence. Anyone that touches the fence and anyone touching them will need to go back inside the fence area. To help with spotting, only one person should go over the fence at a time. After the activity, discuss what happened? What did the group do really well on (trust, communication, cooperation, or problem solving)? What does the group still need to work on?

(Electric fence rope can be found in the basement of the Greene Cabin at the bottom of the stairs in the cubby immediately to your right.)

F. Spider web

For the spider web, the group must get everyone through the web without touching it. Anyone that touches the web will go back to the starting side. After a hole in the web is used, no one else can use it. Do not allow diving through the web or going above the web. To allow for adequate supervision and spotters, only one person can go through the web at a time. Discuss safety and spotting techniques before beginning. When you are finished, discuss the activity. Was it easy or difficult for your group? Do you wish you had done it differently?

(Spider web rope can be found in the basement of the Greene Cabin at the bottom of the stairs in the cubby immediately to your right. Can use the stakes also found in this area to help keep the web up. In the Greene Cabin office in the group challenge equipment are clothespins and bandannas you can use to mark the holes the group has already gone through.)

G. Trust fall

This activity is the most advanced challenge currently at the School Forest. Do not attempt this activity if you do not feel that the group has showed maturity and a priority for safety. This is an activity to work up to, not start with.

For this activity, a student will stand on the platform and fall into the arms of the prepared group of spotters. There should be at least 10 – 12 individuals standing on the ground to act as catchers. Go over the entire process with the group before starting. Make sure everyone understands all of the roles, the commands, and that this is a “challenge- by- choice” activity.

The two straight lines of catchers or spotters should stand shoulder-to-shoulder facing each other. Their arms should be bent at the elbows and held with their palms up. (No grabbing wrists or arms together.) Feet should be shoulder width apart and one in front of the other with the front leg bent. The group should “zipper up” by placing hands alternating from a person in one line to a person in the other (like a zipper).

The person falling should cross their arms, lock their fingers, and bring their fist under into chest. They should remain flat with a rigid body while falling (some people’s reaction is to bend at the waist, avoid this). The falling person should be placed with their back to the group. The teacher should make sure the faller is aligned with the group. Now before the faller falls, go through these commands:

Faller: “My name is ____ and I am prepared to fall. Are you prepared to catch me?”

**Check to make sure the lines are completely ready with hands up, heads back, and watching the faller

Spotters (together): “Yes, we will catch you.”

Faller: “falling”

Spotters (together): “fall away”

** After the person falls, the spotters should slowly lower their feet to the ground and help them stand up.

Talk about what it felt like to be in the different roles. What was needed? What was challenging?

(The trust fall platform can be found along the trail near the volleyball court by the Krejarek building. The trail starts near where the White Pine tree is labeled.)

H. Conclusion

Talk about what the group learned in crucial. Discuss what went well and did not go well. Discuss leadership. Talk about what the group improved on the most. Discuss how the students can bring what they learned here into their everyday lives.

NOTE: There is also a bag of blindfolds in the group challenge equipment that can used for any manner of blindfold activity. Trust walks, sensory hikes ect. These are used by many grades.

SAFETY

Safety is the number one priority when doing group challenges. Show students and adults how to properly “spot” when someone is being lifted. If the situation becomes unsafe at any time, stop... and rethink the activity or move on to something different. Not all groups will be able to do all of the activities. Start with the easier and safest activities and then move on to more challenging activities if the group shows maturity and growth in the challenges. Do not feel that you must accomplish all of the activities, do what that particular group’s level is at.

CLEAN-UP

Return supplies to the Greene Cabin and the Lodge. If you will be using the challenge course again soon, leave it up until you are done.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

There are so many different group challenges and games that you can incorporate into these team-building exercises. Please feel free to add in ones that you know or research new ideas. Contact the School Forest Coordinator for books or supplies.

RESOURCES

Fluegelman, Andrew. The New Games Books. Headlands Press, Inc. 1976.

Rohnke, Karl. Silver Bullets. Project Adventure, Inc. 1984.

Rohnke, Karl. Cowstails and Cobras. Project Adventure, Inc. 1977.

Lesson plan written by Patty Brodeen, School Forest Coordinator, August 2003, Updated Kelly Eskew Vorrone, School Forest Coordinator, August 2013.

ADDITIONAL GROUP WARM UP ACTIVITIES

- 1) Shoe scramble: Everyone takes off one shoe and places it in a pile. People then form a circle around the shoes and join hands. With hands joined, each person must pick up one shoe, locate the owner of the shoe and return it to them without breaking joined hands. The owner then attempts to put the shoe back on, still holding hands.

- 2) Prui (Proo-ee): Tell the group that a Prui is a gentle, friendly creature that grows. To begin, everyone closes their eyes and starts milling about. When one bumps into another, they shake hands and ask, "Pru?" If the other responds, "Pru," then the Prui has not been found. Quietly, the leader tells one person that he/she is the Prui, and may open their eyes. Although Prui can see, she/he cannot speak. Therefore, when someone shakes her hand and asks, "Pru?" and gets no response, it is the signal that the Prui has been found! The two clasp hands and Prui has grown. As others shake the hand of Prui and receive no response, they join as well. Prui's hand may only be shaken on either end, so people know if they bump into two clasped hands, Prui is in the middle. Eventually, all will be able to find the end of the Prui line. Game is over when everyone has joined.

ADDITIONAL GROUP CHALLENGES AVAILABLE AT THE SCHOOL FOREST

1) Toxic Waste

Summary: A popular, engaging, moderately difficult small group activity. Equipped with a bungee cord and rope, a group must work out how to transport a bucket of "toxic waste" and tip it into a neutralization bucket. Can be used to highlight almost any aspect of teamwork and leadership. Ideal for groups of 7-9 students but can be done with as few as 4 or as many as 12.

(Full lesson plan and equipment can be found in the Greene Cabin office in the group challenge equipment.)

2) Gutter Ball

Summary: A teambuilding activity where each participant gets on short length of half pipe, and the group must work together to deliver a marble down the pipes from start point to finish. Requires a high level of communication and teamwork.

(Full lesson plan and equipment can be found in the Greene Cabin office in the group challenge equipment.)

3) Porcupine Progression

Summary: Offer the thirteen nails and block of wood to an individual or small group of 4-5. The problem is to balance twelve nails on the head of the thirteenth nail which is set vertically in the hole in the wooden box.

(Full lesson plan and equipment can be found in the Greene Cabin office in the group challenge equipment.)

4) Helium Stick

Summary: A deceptively simple but powerful exercise for learning how to work together and communicate in small to medium sized groups. Form two lines facing each other. Lay a long thin rod on the group's index fingers. Goal: Lower the rod to the ground. Reality: It goes up! Ideal for a group of 8-12 but can be done with 6-14 (the more participants the harder it is.)

(Full lesson plan and equipment can be found in the Greene Cabin office in the group challenge equipment.)

5) Group Juggle

Summary: Can be used as a problem solving or name game. Have your group stand in a circle, including yourself. Instruct them that they need to establish a throwing pattern. Start by throwing the ball to someone across from the circle, that person throws it to someone across the circle who has not received it yet. Continue this process until everyone has received the ball. The last person throws the ball to the person who started the pattern. Can then repeat pattern, add more balls, see how many objects the group can do, set a group goal.

(Full lesson plan and equipment can be found in the Greene Cabin office in the group challenge equipment.)

6) Group Challenge Puzzles

Summary: As a team put the large puzzle together.

(Puzzle can be found on the girl's chaperone side of the Ehlert Lodge.)