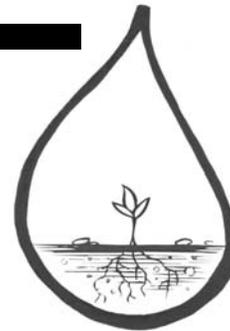


Building Environmental Youth Leadership

A High-School Service-learning Curriculum



TOPIC:

Team-building,
Mission-building

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will get acquainted with their co-participants.
- Students will focus on communication and cooperation to accomplish a group challenge

LENGTH:

20 to 30 minutes

ENVIRONMENT:

Indoors or Outdoors.
Need a place for students to spread out in a large circle.

MATERIALS:

- A length of sturdy rope that measures 4' to 5' per student involved.
- Blindfolds for each student.

A Tangled Predicament

Background:

In this activity, students are tied to a tangled problem. With one hand of each student fixed to a length of rope, the team must figure out how to untie a number of knots. Then, they must silently maneuver the rope into various shapes while blindfolded. This activity stresses cooperation and communication among team members.

Activity Outline:

Beforehand:

Loosely knot the length of rope every 4' to 8'. Lay the rope in a circle where students will have plenty of room to spread out.

Untangling the Team:

Team members gather for the activity. Take a moment to overview the objectives of the challenge. Then, ask students to spread out along the length of rope. They should then reach out and grasp the rope with one hand—whichever feels more comfortable to them. Inform them that an odorless, invisible glue on the rope has completely fixed their hands. Now, all are committed to this tangled predicament. The only way to free their palms is to successfully untie all of the knots in the rope. Clarify any questions, and remind the team that their hands cannot leave the rope or move along its length. Begin the activity.

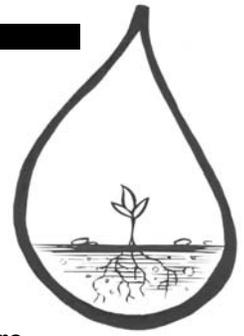
After succeeding the challenge, students let go of the rope. Celebrate the success. Then, debrief the activity. Ask students to describe the process of solving this problem. Was there one clear leader? How did they communicate the solution throughout the team? Often, students will begin this activity in small groups focused on a single knot. These groups work independently of others until a viable solution is discovered. They then communicate this to other members nearby. All members tend to help and encourage students working out the final knots. Have students describe teamwork lessons learned from this experience. How do these apply to real-life problem solving?

Shaping in Silence:

Lay out the unknotted rope in a straight line. Have students spread out along its length. Hand each a blindfold. They should place these on their heads, preserving visibility for the time-being. Then, request that students again grab the rope with one hand. They are glued again. However, the new challenge is for team members to pull the rope into a requested shape while blindfolded. Clarify any questions without revealing the shape they are to form. Students should also formulate a process for solving the problem prior to beginning the activity. Ask them to blindfold themselves. Then call out *square*.

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Try this activity a couple times with different shapes (more sides are usually harder), celebrating each success. Then, make the challenge a bit tougher. This time, team members must form the shape while blindfolded and silent. No talking. Allow them to refine their process. Then try the game a few more times.

Gather blindfolds and the rope, and place these to the side of the space. Then, debrief the activity. Have students describe how the teamwork process was different for this activity. Why was it similar or different? Which required more cooperation? How were conflicts solved in planning? Discuss the importance of both verbal and non-verbal communication among team members. Have students describe any other teamwork lessons learned from this experience. How do these apply to real-life problem solving?

References:

This activity is adapted from:

Blind Polygon in:

Rohnke, K. (1989). *Cowstails and Cobras II: A Guide to Games, Initiatives, Ropes Courses, & Adventure Curriculum*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.