

Segment: Competition v. Collaboration

Lesson Title: Lesson 2: Toothpick Tower

Grade Band: 6-12

Approximate Time to Complete: 30 minutes plus 15 minute extension

Objectives: Students will be able to identify cooperative and competitive behaviors while completing a group task.

Materials/Set up:

- 2 toothpicks for each student
- One empty, small-necked plastic bottle (8 oz. juice bottles are ideal) for each group

Optional Resource:

- Online Video Clip - [James Baker: The Man Who Made Washington Work](#) (Watch 1:00-9:30)

Overview

Competitive and collaborative personalities emerge in group settings. Talking about the impact of competitive and collaborative actions is different than experiencing them. This exercise puts students in a position to work together, or fail to accomplish a goal.

The students will experience cooperative and competitive behaviors while completing a fun group task. Through class discussion the students will be able to explain how one person's actions affect the actions of others.

Instructional Plan

1. Ask the students to form groups of 6-8 and sit in a circle.
2. Give each person in the group two toothpicks.
3. Hand one bottle to one person in each group.
4. Direct the person with the bottle to place one toothpick across the opening of the bottle and then pass the bottle to the next person.
5. Have the next person repeat the procedure using one toothpick.

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6. Continue passing the bottle around the circle, adding one toothpick at a time until all of the toothpicks have been successfully placed across the opening of the bottle.
7. Tell the students that if any toothpicks drop (even one) they must start the entire exercise over.
8. Note on the board how long it takes each group to complete the task.
9. The teacher may want to walk around the room making note of specific statements or actions observed by the groups.
10. When all of the groups have finished, lead a discussion focusing on cooperative versus competitive behaviors. Avoid discussing who “wins.”
11. Some discussion questions:
 - a) How did you feel when it was your turn to put a toothpick on the bottle?
 - b) What did you think about when you decided how to place your toothpick?
 - c) How did your behavior affect the person who came after you? *This may lead into a discussion of how one person’s behavior influences others’ behavior. If you are cooperative then the next person is likely to be cooperative, if you are competitive the next person is likely to be competitive.*
 - d) How would you have placed your toothpick if you had wanted the next person to fail?
 - e) How would you pass the bottle if you wanted the next person to success? Fail?
12. Transition the discussion to the types of cooperative and competitive behaviors.
 - a) Ask, “What competitive behaviors did you see in this activity?” *Examples of competitive behaviors: you need to do this, that’s not right--do it this way, we aren’t doing it fast enough/hurry up.*
 - b) Ask, “What cooperative behaviors did you see in this activity?” *Examples of cooperative behaviors: let me help you with that, let’s all figure out what we need to do, what would be helpful to you, offering assistance (but not ordering/directing).*
 - c) Ask, “Which type of behavior helped your group complete the task?”
 - d) Ask, “What did you learn from this activity about cooperating with others?”

Extending the Lesson (15 minutes)

If time allows, permit the students to try the activity again. Note whether prior experience and discussion aided or detracted from the outcome. Did new leaders emerge? Did behaviors change? Why?

Play Online Video Clip - [James Baker: The Man Who Made Washington Work](#) (Watch 1:00-9:30). In this clip, Baker helps George W. Bush become President in 2000. At the end of the 2000 Presidential election the voting tallies in several Florida counties remained unclear. The close Presidential election depended on the results in Florida. Gore, Bush's opponent, wanted a partial re-count, echoed by his supporters in Florida. Baker orchestrated protests by Bush's supporters; ultimately succeeding in having the issue decided by the Supreme Court of the United States.

Discuss from the perspective of competition and collaboration.

Tell students to look for cooperative and competitive strategies when watching the video. Possible questions, "Why is James Baker described as 'playing chess' in guiding George W. Bush's strategy in Bush v. Gore? Why did he choose to find a path to the Supreme Court? What was the ultimate goal? Was integrative bargaining (win-win) possible for Baker to reach his ultimate goal of getting Bush elected president?"