

Segment: Building Consensus

Lesson Title: Lesson 1: Shape Up!

Grade Band: 6-12

Approximate Time to Complete: 40 minutes

Objectives: Students will be able use problem solving skills in a cooperative activity.

Materials/Set up:

- Approximately 50 feet of thin rope or thick string
- A room where the desks can be removed or moved aside to allow for an open circle
- A talking piece to use when leading the circle
A talking piece may be any object which can be safely passed around the circle, and serves to focus attention and identify who has permission to speak

Overview

Students engage in a cooperative problem-solving activity. The exercise includes discussion, group activity and movement.

Instructional Plan

1. Take a fifty foot length of rope and tie it end to end. Lay this out on the floor in the shape of a circle.
2. Choose two co- leaders for the activity, a boy and a girl. The co-leaders will assist the group with verbal instructions, stand outside the circle, and move freely about the room. (This may, instead, be an opportunity for students to choose leaders cooperatively.)
3. Ask the class to stand inside the rope and then pick up the rope, holding it behind them at about waist height. Instruct the class that the rope must be held at this height for the entire exercise.
4. Explain, “As a group you will be given a series of tasks you need to accomplish. I will act as line judge and decide if you have accomplished the task. I will be pretty strict, but all I will say is ‘yes’ or ‘no’. If I say ‘no’, I won’t tell you what the

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problem is; that is for the group to figure out. If someone in the group has an idea to share with everyone, call a huddle. For a huddle, the group comes in and stands shoulder to shoulder. This means that no one may stand behind anyone else, and one person shares their ideas at a time.” Ask if there are any questions so far.

5. Tell the class, “The co-leaders may walk around and provide verbal instructions or directions. They may make suggestions, but they may not lead or move the participants holding the rope. Okay? Let’s start.”
 - a) Say, “Make a circle”
 - b) Say, “Make a square.”
 - c) Say, “Make an equilateral triangle.”
 - d) Say, “Make an arrow pointing left.” (You may direct the class as to what direction is left.)
6. As time permits, suggest these shapes: a W, an M, an S, an exclamation point, an I, a Z.
7. For the end of the exercise, “Walk into the circle until you are standing shoulder to shoulder and let go of the rope. Take 3 steps backwards without tripping over the rope.”
8. To debrief the activity, ask the students to sit in a circle. It is ideal that this circle be open and not include desks.
9. Hold the talking piece. Tell the students, “In a circle only the person with the talking piece may speak. If you would like to speak, ask the person holding the talking piece to pass it to you.” Provide a circle prompt for the students to answer, from the list below, and conduct the circle as a “popcorn style” circle where there is no order to the responses. Depending on time, ask for the talking piece back to offer a new question every few responses. Some circle prompts may include:
 - a) “What was easy about this exercise?”
 - b) “What was difficult?”
 - c) “What did you want the line judge to do differently?”
 - d) “What did you want the co-leaders to do differently?”
 - e) “What caused conflict in the group?”

- f) “What would have made it easier?”
- g) “What could you learn from this activity to help you as a problem-solver?”

Teacher Note: Different communication styles may emerge from this exercise, and the following concepts may be elicited in the discussion: in conducting a task where cooperation with others is necessary, effective communication is essential; where there is limited information and guidance, being willing to listen and experiment becomes more important; when communicating we often make assumptions that the words we are using are understood in the same way by everyone; no single person in the group could have accomplished the goal, and even the “leaders” had to rely on the actions of others to reach the goal. Students may also have observations about how conflict was handled, how ideas were generated and by whom, and why some people have been silent.

Extending the Lesson

1. While still in the circle provide the following quote as a circle prompt: “James Baker stated: “Negotiation skills are people skills.” What are your thoughts on this statement?”
2. Depending on time, continue the circle discussion with some follow-up questions, “What are people skills?” and “Why would they be important in solving a group problem?”
3. If time does not allow for a circle, use the quotation and follow-up questions as the topic for a reflection memo.