

Spring 2008

Rock Eagle 4-H Center, Environmental Education Program



Under the Rock

From the Coordinator's Desk:



Challenge Course is one of the most requested classes at Rock Eagle. There are days that we will have six groups on the course at any given time. Teachers love the idea of bringing their group together as a team. Students love the competition and physical nature of the class. Instructors spend more time training to teach this program than any other class they will lead. Taking a group through the course can be amazingly rewarding or incredibly challenging, but not in the way everyone had hoped or planned. What can you do to assist in making the Challenge Course a terrific experience for the students, the chaperones, the teachers, and instructor?

First, realistic expectations set the tone for a positive experience. Challenge Course is offered to fifth grade and up. However, fifth graders often do not have the cognitive skills to really work as a team. There will be many 'who goes first' arguments and the concept of planning ahead may not exist. Sometimes decisions are made by who yells the loudest. Rock Eagle staff must decide how much assistance to provide and how long to allow shouting matches to continue before stepping in to debrief the conflict. Debriefing is a vital part of a good Challenge Course, but what seems obvious to an adult or high school student is often lost on a fifth grader. Does this mean you should not Choose Challenge course for your fifth graders? Of course not, but be realistic on what they can really accomplish. Groups differ greatly in their ability to work together and problem solve.

Second, explain the program to your chaperones so that they know their role in the experience. Rock Eagle welcomes chaperones to join in the fun, but

only as silent participants. The point of the class is for the students to work through the challenges without too many directions provided by adults.

Third, understand that Challenge Course does not involve group members needing a harness or leaving the ground, but safety is still our number one concern. Accidents happen when the group is not focused. We always start with field activities and team initiatives to get the group thinking and working together before we tackle the elements.

If team building is one of your major goals sign up for Team Initiatives and Challenge Course. This provides four hours of programming which should challenge your group to the point of more advanced elements. Your group will be assigned the same instructor for both classes. A four-hour team building works best for middle and high school students. Younger students (second to fourth grade) find the Team Initiative class very exciting. Team skills are stressed with lots of time for running around and having fun. It is amazing how many life lessons can be learned playing tag!

We hope your school or youth group will consider adding a Challenge Course or Team Initiative class to your next visit to Rock Eagle. The challenges presented, both intended and unintended can provide a platform of discussion for the entire school year.

See you soon!

Donna Stewart
EE program Coordinator

Meet the Staff

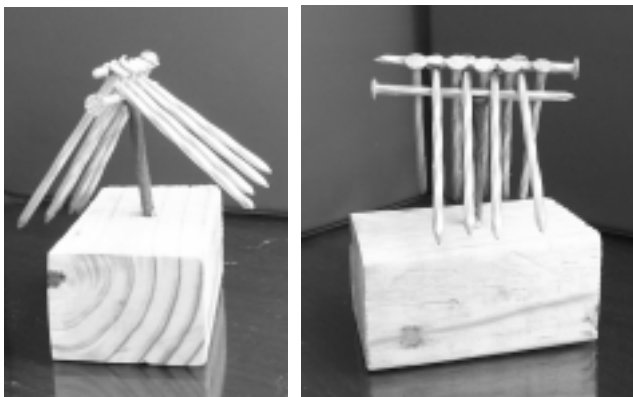


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A Balancing Act

by Ashley Balcum

Have your students try their luck with this creative puzzle. Separate the students into small groups and hand each group a small block of wood with a nail partially through the top. Can your students find a way to balance 11 nails on the head of the nail? It's a challenging puzzle, and to the right is a picture to show you how it's done..just don't spoil the secret for your students!



Just Imagine

Rock Eagle's Environmental Education Program would not be here if it wasn't for the hard work of the entire crew at the Rock Eagle 4-H Center. Just imagine your stay without housekeeping to disinfect the cabins, maintenance to fix those leaking sinks, the dining hall fixing great meals for over 400 kids at a time, and the administration for making sure EE is not overbooked and well supplied. We (EE) would like to thank all the departments at The Rock for supporting us and allowing us to provide the best program possible for you and your students.

Classroom Teambuilding: The Importance of Class Initiatives

by Crystal Weaver

Imagine this scene: Groups of fourth graders are arranged at different tables, surrounded by magazines, scissors, glue, and a large piece of poster board. Their task is large, but meant to instigate critical thinking in a fun, non-threatening way. "No, these are mine [magazine clippings] and I'm putting them here [pointing to a separate corner of the poster board]!" "But the lions don't go in the trees! Put them here!" "Noooooo!" Riiiiiiiiipppppp! Two children glared at each other over torn halves of a leopard cut from a magazine. As a new classroom assistant, I watched helplessly as my painstakingly prepared biosphere lesson degenerated into a volatile battle of wills. Luckily, the regular teacher swiftly came to my rescue and, for the sake of progress, separated the children into other groups. Still, I felt like there had to be a method for handling classroom disputes that would produce greater cooperation later on.

This edition of "Under the Rock" provides a handful of innovative techniques to inspire critical thinking, resolve conflicts, improve classroom management, and create a classroom community. One researcher describes experiential education goals as 1) belonging - developing relationships with others, 2) mastery - developing competence in skills, knowledge, and critical thinking, 3) autonomy - developing the power to change attitudes and behavior, and 4) compassion - shown in respect and care for others (Brendtro and Strother, 2007). At Rock Eagle, we see the beginnings of these outcomes in the challenge courses we offer. However, for benefits to persist, "teambuilding" must be continued in the classroom. Teachers can augment this process by presenting activities that allow students to experience concepts directly in a "hands on" environment. Abstract concepts, like cooperation and trust, are easier understood if students have a concrete model to apply and if experiences continue to build upon each other over time. As you may have witnessed, talking to a middle schooler about why it is important to help his classmates is limitedly effective. However, if he is allowed to succeed and fail as part of a group, he may better understand

the consequences of his actions. As Confucius said, "I hear, I know; I see, I remember; I do, I understand."

For your convenience, we've included several explanations of short, effective activities along with their most common outcomes. An activity as simple as a ten minute "Group Juggle" (see page 4) will require students to think critically about the problem proposed, connect with others in the group, clarify the problem, carry out a solution, and restore harmony and respect within the group. With the continued use of these activities, students will hopefully develop a cohesive group of more self directed and supportive individuals. As you work to build your classroom community, we hope the following articles provide resources to help you meet these goals.

Ref: Brendtro, L.K. & Strother, M.A. (2007). Back to Basics Through Challenge and Adventure in Reclaiming Children and Youth. 16:1. 2-6p.

Age (yrs)	Cognitive Expectations	Attention Spans
9-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Adults give directions and have the one 'right' answer. -Concrete thinkers. Believe storylines. Don't generalize lessons from activities without follow up. -Have 'ooties.' -Less aware of how actions effects others which can cause safety issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less tolerance for frustration. -Lots of energy. Need physical movement and 'fun and exciting.' -No extended concentration (i.e. 'in the now'). -Props (e.g. balls) focus attention.
12-14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Question authority and for loopholes in directions -Begin to think "outside the box" and test new strategies. -Understand abstract concepts and applications of lessons. -Define gender roles. But, not opposed to holding hands in a circle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Need continual intellectual and physical challenge. -Maintain interest for end result, despite concentration and frustration. -Enjoy props, but can visualize a problem without them.

A Little Extra Fun!

by Justin Schneider

Looking for some activities to help build teamwork and leadership skills in your students? The Environmental Education staff at Rock Eagle use a wide variety of activities to facilitate the development of teambuilding skills such as communication, planning, leadership and decision making. Listed below are a few of these activities along with their potential solutions for you to try with your classes. Keep in mind that there is no "right" way to accomplish the exercises; your students may surprise you!

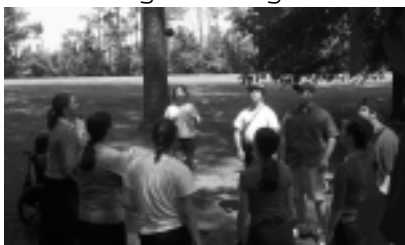
Activity: Group Juggle

Focus Skill: Planning, Communication

Materials: 1 ball

Procedure: Have the students get into a circle and pass the ball between themselves so that each student gets the ball once and only once. Remembering the order in which the ball was passed, have the students repeat the process in the fastest time possible, with the ball starting and ending with the first person.

Solution: The students should realize that they don't have to continue standing in a circle instead, they may rearrange to stand in the correct order. See what other solutions they think of within the given parameters!



Activity: Human Knot

Focus Skill: Communication, Leadership

Materials: none

Procedure: Have the students form in a tight circle, facing one another. Using their right hand, each student should grasp the right hand of another student, like they are shaking hands, then repeat with the left hand so they are holding hands with two other people (not next to them). Have the students attempt to untangle themselves while remaining interlocked.

Solution: Students will need to work together to untangle their bodies without releasing their hands. Eventually, a circle will be formed (or two to three interlocking ones).

Activity: Everybody's Up

Focus Skill: Communication, Planning, Leadership

Materials: none

Procedure: The goal is to have the entire class stand up off the floor while sitting in a circle, holding hands, and touching feet with the person next to them. You may start with a pair of students, and continue to add a pair until the entire class is participating.

Solution: The group has to find a way to get everyone to stand without letting go of their neighbors (usually this involves stepping on the feet of the person rising, moving people around, etc.). If anyone in the group lets go, have them start over!

The Dos and Don'ts of Running Initiatives

by Ashley Balcum

Do:

- Ask open-ended questions.
- Call out participants for safety.
- Find creative ways to limit leaders (ex: no speaking, only say yes or no, say banana after every word, etc.).
- Hold a debrief after every activity to discuss what happened and how the group did.
- Stop the activity for a moment when participants continually yell. Have them figure out a way to brainstorm solution together.

Don'ts:

- Give away the solution.
- Ignore safety hazards.
- Silence all leaders in the group; they will become bored and frustrated, causing misbehavior.
- Move onto a new element without first discussing the problems that the group encountered.
- Call on students who have ideas; they have to find a way to call on each other (great topic for debrief).

Brain Teasers

Try your luck at deciphering the brain teasers below! You may be surprised at the answer!

C l o u
3

**head
lo ve
heels**

**1. Glance
2.
3. Glance**
7

That
5

CAR JACK TON
6

Momanon
8

**ca se
case**
9

**S
K
I
I
N
G**
10

Thinking Outside the Box

by Ashley Balcum

I know you've heard of the concept, and perhaps you use it in the classroom. The question is, why is it so important to teach children how think outside the box? Most lessons taught in schools provide children with one way of thinking. Two plus two will always equal four, and H₂O will always be the chemical compound for water. Thinking outside the box requires that participants look beyond the obvious for solutions and try something new. Here are some fun activities that kids of all ages will have fun trying to figure out:

~ **Green Glass Door:** Trees do, and so do apples, but flowers and oranges don't. There's the color yellow, but not the color blue. I can eat pizza, but I can't have a sandwich. Are you catching on? You can have a lot of fun and play for as long as it takes kids to figure out the right solution: any word with double letters can go through the Green Glass Door.

~ **I'm riding on a spaceship and I'm taking...** Ask kids what they're taking with them on the spaceship. The trick is that the items they take must go in order so that the first letter of each item spells out SPACESHIP. For example, the first person can bring a Sweatshirt, the next can take a Pencil, and the third may decide to bring an Apple. It may take time to get the kids to catch on, but it helps to stress the order of items. If you get to the end of Spaceship, the kids just have to repeat the spelling again.

~ **The Teapot Game:** To begin this game, point to an object and say "this is a teapot." Then point to another and say, "this is not-a-teapot." Randomly, keep pointing at different objects and labeling them teapots or not-teapots. Finally, point to one last object and have the participants guess whether or not it's a teapot. This object would not be a teapot because you did not say the words "listen carefully" at the beginning of the sequence. If these words are spoken at the beginning, then that last object will be a teapot, if not, the last object will not be a teapot.

~ **Polar Bears Around the Ice Hole:** In this activity, you'll need some dice. Simply roll the dice and ask how many polar bears are around the ice hole. The ice hole is the dot in the center of each die, and not all numbers have them. For instance, if you roll a one, there's an ice hole, but there are no polar bears around it. There are no ice holes on twos, fours, and sixes. Fives have four polar bears, and threes have two. Therefore, if you're rolling five dice and you get a three, a one, a four, and two fives, then the answer is there are ten polar bears around the ice hole - four around each of the ice holes on the five, and two around the ice hole on the three.

~ **Name "Uh" State:** This is possibly the simplest brain teaser to facilitate. Simply ask participants to name a state. What they have to do is say "uh" before naming it. Many times they will hesitate and be quite confused when they realize that they're right. Still, they will have no idea why. It's a fun game that can be caught on quickly.

Add some "Zip" to your Program

Rock Eagle will be offering schools the opportunity to utilize the climbing wall or the zip line on a limited basis. There is an additional \$10.00 charge for each element.

This class is open to fifth grade and up. The option of high ropes increases if you book in Feb. or in late Nov. and Dec. High ropes require more staff and time and is not available during peak months. The size of the group and the amount of time you are staying are also a factor. Please ask about this fun opportunity and we can provide details.



Need more Information!

by John Dalupang

Here some good initial readings for you to look into for further experiential education-based team building activities.

Silver Bullets: A Guide to Initiative Problems, Adventure Games and Trust Activities

by Karl Rohnke- This book features 165 adventure activities that have been used by teachers, counselors, therapists, camp personnel, church leaders and others who want an effective and engaging means of bringing people together and building trust. ISBN Number: 0-8403-5682-X

Funn 'N Games by Karl Rohnke- this represents a one book compilation of the material represented in the four volumes previously entitled Funn Stuff,

and as such, delivers over 300 pages of adventure games, initiatives, trust activities, miscellaneous funn, and seeds of serendipity. ISBN: 0-7575-0846-4

The Association for Experiential Education and Journal of Experiential Education

The AEE publishes the Journal of Experiential Education three times a year. It is a professional journal that publishes a diverse range of articles in subject areas such as outdoor adventure programming, service learning, environmental education, therapeutic applications, research and theory, creative arts, and much more. More information is on their website: www.aee.org.

Debriefing 101

by Ashley Balcum

In order for participants to consider the teambuilding concepts provided by an initiative, it's imperative that the facilitator debrief the activity after it is completed. What does debrief mean? Debriefing is simply asking why the activity was done, what happened, who was a leader, what problems occurred, what was learned, how the group would do it differently now, etc. Any open-ended questions can be used to fuel discussion and help participants understand the importance of that activity. Additionally, if other activities are set to follow, the concepts discussed from the debrief can be carried into those activities. For instance, if students agree that yelling didn't work in their activity, the facilitator can remind the participants of this if they yell again in their next initiative. That debrief can also connect to the previous one for better reflection. And with any luck, the students will apply these concepts (with the teacher's help) to their everyday lives. There are many alternative methods to running a debrief. Here are a few ideas:

~ **Play Doh Sculptures:** Give each participant a small piece of play dough and have them sculpt how they felt about the previous activity.

~ **Chiji Cards:** You can purchase these from various online retailers, or make your own. They're various cards with a random picture on each one - a tree, a dragon, a lock, etc. Have each participant pick up a card that stands out to them and relate it

to the activity. This requires some deep thinking so it works best with older participants. Additionally, you can have each person give a card to someone else based upon what they did in the last activity.

~ **One Word Debrief:** In this simple debrief, every participant must say one word to describe how they felt about the activity.

~ **Beach Ball Toss:** In this debrief, you'll need a beach ball with various questions on it. Begin by tossing the ball across the circle. The person who catches it must read the question below their right index finger and answer it accordingly. Questions should be varied so that different answers can be given. Example: "What did you learn about yourself in the last activity?"

~ **Stop Light:** This is a great debrief if the group will be doing another activity. Ask students to describe what group actions fit within the red, yellow, and green descriptions. Red lights are things they need to stop doing (such as yelling), yellow lights are things to be cautious about or remember to do (listening to others' ideas), and green lights are things the group should continue doing (like trying every idea).

~ **Fist to Five:** In this debrief, ask participants how they felt their group did working together. A fist means that it was horrible, and all five fingers means that the activity went great. Encourage them to rate in-between and discuss the results.

Visit a 4-H Center Near You!

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Brain Teasers Answers

- 1) Play on Words, 2) Better Late than Never, 3) Partly Cloudy, 4) Head over Heels in Love, 5) Fancy That,
- 6) Jack-in-a-Box, 7) Without a Second Glance, 8) Man in the Moon, 9) Open and Shut Case,
- 10) Downhill Skiing

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