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April's Book of Games

creative exercises for classes, camps, and communities



by April Cotte

new edition by Reclaiming Quarterly

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RQ and its predecessor Reclaiming Newsletter were printed quarterly from 1980 through about 2005, then occasionally till 2011. Our website was launched around 1999. You can find all of our back issues as free PDFs at:

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Once a large Bay Area cell that met in person, RQ is now an online group that maintains archives and assists in publishing and recording projects. If you want to help or have inspirations, contact us.

Recent projects have included assisting with the Teen Earth Magic Workbook and Campfire Chants, an album created by Redwood Magic and Witchlets family campers. This book is our latest "assist."

ReclaimingQuarterly.org is still online, but our active site (resizes for all devices) is WeaveAndSpin.org

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Reclaiming Quarterly

part of
Reclaiming Collective
San Francisco



Our Founder

This book is produced and published by Reclaiming Quarterly, part of Reclaiming Collective.

Reclaiming Quarterly and Newsletter were published in print from 1980 to 2011, totaling more than 100 issues.

Today we publish online as well as books and recordings.

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Reclaiming Quarterly (1997-2011) was descended from Reclaiming Newsletter (1980-1997), itself a distant offshoot of *Ye Olde Gazetteer & Reclaymer* (1613-1776). The latter traced its roots to neolithic petroglyphs in western Anatolia, before which RQ's past is shrouded in mystery.

Views expressed in articles, graphics, interviews, advertisements, and miscellaneous marginalia belong to the authors, not to the Reclaiming community or the RQ production cell. Some of us don't even like some of the stuff we print.

RQ is a volunteer effort. You don't need to be in the Bay Area to help! Contact us at:

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April

by Rosa De Anda

It isn't Spring
But the shrill of winter winds calm
The blue-green grass overstuffs rolling hills
Monarchs still on lace of yellow yarrow
April's smiles stay more than a lifetime

It isn't Spring
But days hold light a little longer
The super blooms patch valley floors and mountainsides
With orange poppies, and red paintbrush
And April's rain may bring us joy or sorrow

It isn't Spring
But the lupine thick adorns the ground a deep-blue sky
Dense velvet quilts smear in daffodils
Wild orchids reason and purple iris roar, and
April's laughter echoes at Hidden Coves

It isn't Spring
But the chamomile carpets spread a scented glow
Greens burst courageous hope
Milk Thistle veins bulge with healing
April's lessons restore newfound meaning

It isn't Spring
But the Buddha smile our April holds
Sends silent waves of fireworks in every season



Teaching with April

by George Franklin

This book reproduces and expands a workbook created by April Cotte, our inspiring co-organizer. April was also a beloved child, sister, mother, partner, and friend.

April was part of several grassroots communities who come together to offer this new version of Fun in the Classroom: A Sourcebook of Games and Initiatives, which she created as part of her work with the Rafael Hernandez School in Boston.

When we co-taught teens paths at Reclaiming's Witchlets in the Woods and Redwood Magic Family Camps, April shared a xeroxed version of the book, which became part of our toolkit.

We found it so useful that it inspired other teachers to collect our notes and experiences and create the Teen Earth Magic Workbook (free at TeenEarthMagic.org/workbook/), in the credits of which she is honored.

* * * *

This is what I remember about April – how strong and competent she helped everyone around her feel.

The photo on this page captures this spirit – April teaching young folks how to make fire. Some learned, some didn't.

But I bet that any kid who truly tried got a flame. And walked away feeling smart and talented.

* * * *

We offer this expanded version of her book, as well as her writings and our memories of our time with her.

May it inspire readers to continue the spirit of April's work.

What is remembered lives!



Introduction

by April Cotte – from the original edition

“I get it now,” said Carmen Rivas, a kindergarten teacher. “An initiative is any time you give a group of students a problem that they will be capable of resolving on their own and you give them a safe space to do that in.”

She was right, and went on to create some great initiatives.*

The potential and wonders of cooperative games and initiatives were brought to us long ago in the works of such masters as Karl Rohnke, Jack Pearse, Andrew Fluegelman, Art Kamiya, Terry Orlick, Benjy Simpson and all of the folks at Project Adventure.

Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center has been coaching Boston’s Hernandez School

teachers in their incorporation of games and initiatives in kindergarten through eighth grade classrooms for three years. Teachers now include these activities in their everyday practice. This source book is a collection of our experiences and a guide to creating your own experiential activities. With



Three generations: Barry, April, and Kathi.

* - April uses “initiative” along with game, exercise, working, etc.

some imagination, you could make any curriculum into an initiative.

Imagine... Create... Experience! Any moment in the day could be experiential. From lining up for lunch to planning a project, to cleaning up the classroom. Each of these chapters provides frameworks to play within: Time, Repetition, Finding Things, Making Things, Getting Somewhere. Fill in any content you want to these frameworks. I warn you of pitfalls so that you can feel more freedom to change everything else.

At the end of the book are tricks Outward Bound Instructors use in the field. These are your party favors for reading the book. Have fun with them. There are indexes so you can look initiatives up by grade, by application, and by alphabetical order.

Sometimes it surprises me that Hernandez students of all ages continue to be highly enthused to play these games and do these initiatives which I see as a means to dynamic and impactful learning. But then I remember the common thread running through these activities which explains the children's excited smiles. These games and initiatives are fun.

Thank you to Arlene Aguste who asked for this book and to all of the teachers, administrators and students at the Hernandez School for doing these activities with me and your dedication to making the Hernandez School a caring, engaging and fun place for all.

The original April's Book of Games begins on page 49.



Brian, Barry, and April at Shelter Cove.

April's Lessons

Storytelling is needed for healing and unity – without trust and safety, games divide

by Margo Tamez

“Healing begins where the wound was made.” Alice Walker¹

April Cotte was my close friend. We journeyed for twelve years on treks to west and south Texas, Arizona, California and British Columbia, aligning our commitments to justice, anti-racism, and decolonization for and with Jumano Apache and Lipan Apache peoples in customary territory. Friendship and trust grew steadily between us, as we so often took on difficult situations in which we were positioned – economically, racially, and structurally – vastly different from each other.

April – with familial roots in settler colonialism in New England and in the U.S. South – approached her responsibility to examine her privilege and entitlement with Indigenous peoples of/from Texas with deep care, never-faulting attention to daily unlearning and introspection.

The journeys we became entangled in, on the path of decolonizing our respective lenses, hearts, and minds wasn't easy. It was hard. It was triggering. It felt awful at times. Times that sometimes lasted for days, months, seasons. With each new layer we pulled back on this collective his-



tory between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, April never lost sight of her individual journey of healing – her body, mind, spirit, emotions, and memories – from buried colonial trauma. A trauma which she learned to give voice to through gender, sexual, racial, social justice; through solidarity alliances with Jumano Apache and Lipan Apache Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Women, Youth, Girls, and a community of activists and proponents working to protect our planet.

In every layer of our journey, whenever there was a chance to create unity between us and with community, April introduced storytelling, listening, whole-body observing, and soulful thought as learning; through April's eyes and spirit, walking on the land was a chance to renew meaning and connection to each step; she shared her knowledge, imparted to her from Jumano, Raramuri, and Klamath Elders, with humility and with a child's wonder.



With April alongside me on many difficult actions we undertook in the militarized border zone, she brought an imaginative, playful, intimate, and joyful spirit on each long drive; asking intuitive and tactful questions, making stories a favorite activity of every road trip, and each trip strengthening our bond of unity, friendship, and humility for the way historical violence shreds apart the human spirit for generations. Through stories and family histories, we learned that the damage carries through on the side of the colonized and the colonizer.

She had a broad education. One thing which built trust between us was our mutual respect and sense of kin with Alice Walker's writing. Though we didn't speak of Walker's work, it was deep within us both. Just knowing that created a special synergy between us. I honor that "branch" which gave our friendship a strong spiritual foundation in racial justice.

"Activism is the rent I pay for living on this planet." Alice Walker²

By the fifth year of our friendship, April and I made a shift and we entered deeper depths. It's been clear to me for decades that American's connections to militarism goes deep in family histories, and it would be difficult not to tie most intergenerational military families, somewhere, to U.S. military "Indian Wars." Our ties grew more taut each year, and through each new justice struggle in the Jumano

and Lipan freedom movements. Our ties were like two inter-entwined trees growing alongside one another; there is an intimate relational interdependence, a kind of awareness of the other's space, and a deep responsibility for and with each other in that space we co-inhabited. It became time for story-telling again, for people, lands, knowledge systems, and justice struggles to liberate the ones we loved from destruction, and to do so through confronting family history once again.

April would take part in major ceremonial revitalization processes with our unity building between the Jumano and Lipan Apache peoples through the return of sacred coming of age ceremonies for two of my daughters (April was planning to join us for the third revitalized ceremony for my youngest daughter, had it not been for her untimely passing to spirit world.). She felt it was time to shed another layer. We both knew the importance of how we can always shape a more vital future through facing the truth, and letting go of self-hate, self-repression, or self-loathing.

We went there! We held the hidden historical knowing together! We held each other through her need to share difficult knowledge. In doing so, it was like she was ushering in decolonization for settler Americans everywhere, and it felt like she knew too; it was that monumental. She had the monumental contained within her, the monumental New England history; the monumental Southern history; and the monumental Indian Wars history; as well, she had the Carlisle Industrial School monumental story in her family history. A full circle traced, owned, and told. She claimed it.

I won't nullify the memory of this colossal transition to truthing by alluding that in any way that heal-

ing was immediate, because it wasn't. It was messy. And it was a crucial act of embodying decolonization which Jumano and Lipan Apaches needed for two centuries from a White settler.

In time, this story began to become more robust and grew our branches together; our branches – still distinct – yet becoming braided around each other.

In this way, sisterhood grew between us like a responsibility and a sacred gift.

I believe our ancestors, hers and mine, who came from distinctly different places on the spectrum of U.S. colonialism, racism, and oppression, may have passed forward an agenda – to



deal with, tend, and make activities which moved us out of our comfort zones and pushed us into spaces of incredible danger. We met in those spaces, under serious circumstances, where terrible things happened to people we both felt enormously bonded to, in different ways. Each year, I would never be sure if April and I would see each other again. Each year, the seasons brought new life, new growth, death, and renewal. The oppressive actions of the government and society never abated; we found ourselves in each other's embrace with new ceremonies, new battles to defend against, new life transitions to share and celebrate, and new activities to expand our awareness of the spaces we inhabit and share with each other and other non-human sentient beings – our teachers.

“People who work hard often work too hard.... May we learn to honor the hammock, the siesta, the nap, and the pause in all its forms.” Alice Walker³

My first memory of April: she arrived in a white linen floor length dress, with the traditional tire-sole, leather thonged sandals of the high desert Raramuri from the “Copper Canyon” highlands of Chihuahua.

Where: the El Paso, Texas airport.

When: Indigenous Peoples' Day, October 12, 2006.

Occasion: At the suggestion of my relative, Enrique Madrid. He asked me to connect with April because of her years of relationship building with the Jumano Apache peoples of Redford, Presidio, Ojinaga, Terlingua, Canejo, Marfa, Alpine, Fort Stockton, the Chinati Peaks, Van Horn... out to San Angelo, Ozona... and beyond.

April flew in from San Francisco, and we agreed that this would be an important opportunity for a reunion between Gabriel Carrasco, a relative linked to my father's maternal Carrasco clans living predominantly around Premont, Kingsville, Alice, Falfurrias, Raymondville... and relative parts of South Texas.

Enrique made phone calls to April's place in Shelter Cove, and encouraged her to make this journey to meet me (a meeting which forever changed all our lives), in order to be the “taysha” (ally), or what the Elder Teresa Leal (Opata-Mayo) called a “seres puente,” or “human bridge.”

Her deep inner focus, to be aware of herself, those around her, and deep attention to small details, spoken, gestured, intimated, unspoken, made an unforgettable impact on peace building in all our spaces of building respectful dialogues between Jumano, Lipan, and relative Indigenous peoples, with diverse non-Indigenous peoples of many life experiences. April created and imagined alongside and with us/me, in a difficult time and in a beautiful resurgence while our peoples' efforts to mend the fractured memory, knowledge, and history of our peoples was breaking through a hard encasement imposed on us for generations.

“She was so quiet. So reflective. And she could erase herself, her spirit, with a swiftness that truly

startled, when she knew the people around her could not respect it.” Alice Walker⁴

April studied the chaos and offered to contribute to an order within the rhythms, spirit, and ways of those of us reuniting and reconnecting to our lands, ancestral knowing, and our rights after a long time of despair. April's dreaming, her close relationship to the Indigenous ways of being, doing, and belonging close to Mother, to land, to water, and to our clans, was a loving and generous study of healing and remaking herself as a whole human through joyful acts of simplicity – high consciousness, awareness of transporting her way back home to herself, to love, through laying on the land with the rattlesnakes, sleeping on earth and observing the hammock's warp and weft swaying in high desert air... the pause... so necessary for being home in her process of decolonizing, deep, clarifying, truthing in order to commit to my healing as well.

April offered me important stories while she made safe space for me to reclaim my own space among the rattlers, ravens, steel wall posts, and trauma and to be my witness.

We shared healing game activities which permanently fused our witnessing of the extensive and destructive intergenerational soul wounds that humans experienced in the historical process of settler colonialism in the state of taysha*/tejas/Texas.

***“If I could live as a tree, as a river, as the moon, as the sun, as a star, as the earth, as a rock, I would.”
Alice Walker⁵***

I forever hold the healing games sacred to me and her, for the next journey ahead. I'm certain she'll be up ahead, that beautiful wide grin goof-ball smile, eyes clear and sparking, deeply tanned skin, bare-foot, furry legs, with arms outstretched and extended, for another road trip.

Notes

* - taysha means “friend”, or “ally” in the Caddo Indigenous language. Source: “Tejas: Life and Times of the Caddo.” Texas Beyond History, at: www.texasbeyondhistory.net/tejas/index.html, accessed September 1, 2020.

1 - Alice Walker (2001), *The Way Forward is with a Broken Heart*, Ballantine Books.

2 - Alice Walker (2013), from the film “Beauty in Truth.”

3 - Alice Walker (2013). “The Cushion in the Road: Meditation and Wandering as the Whole World Awakens to Being in Harm's Way”, p.146, The New Press.

4 - Alice Walker (2013). “The Alice Walker Collection: Fiction”, p.397, Hachette UK.

5 - Alice Walker (2013). “The World Has Changed: Conversations with Alice Walker”, p.85, The New Press.

Memories of April

by Starhawk

I can't remember when I first met April, as she had been part of our extended Reclaiming community and networks for some time before we really connected. But I remember the day I knew we would become friends. We were at some large climate change demonstration that included a march across the city of Richmond out to the Chevron plant. The march was spirited, and went on for miles and miles. We were with our group of Reclaiming friends and fellow Pagans, drumming, chanting, and singing our way through the streets. But many of us were older, and after many miles, we were tiring. We were also realizing that our cars were left far, far away, and we weren't too sure how we were going to get back to them.

As we were discussing this, April popped up.

"I'll run back and get the car," she offered.

I stared at her. She was young and fit and still full of energy. My feet hurt. I didn't know her well. Could I trust her with my car keys? And did she say "run"?

I handed them over. In a shorter time than I could imagine, she was back with the car.



It's a small incident, but to me it is so characteristic of April. She was so strong and fit and full of life. Living down in the cove, with the only way in and out being a long flight of over 200 steps, she went up and down daily, even pregnant, even carrying a young child. She was always willing to put that strength to the service of others. I can't even begin to count the times she reached out to help me organize a ritual or a political action. She worked so hard with the communities on the Tejas border that she met through her work with Outward Bound, to help them resist the build-

ing of the Border Wall that would rip their lands and communities apart. She gave so much to every community she touched.

But April also had an edgy side. One day she announced to me that she had a disguise. She got herself up in a wig and dress and became Patricia – a sort of prim suburban matron. I think this had something to do with the training she and Brian were doing with Jon Young and the tracking folks – about honing observational skills. But I might be wrong about that. She told me that she and Brian liked to sneak up on each other when they would meet someplace like an airport – a game my partner also liked to play whenever he was picking me up. One time, she said, Brian was coming to get her and she changed into Patricia. Brian didn't recognize her. She let him go all the way home, and down those 200 or more steps, before she called him to come back and get her.

April student taught one year at our Earth Activist Training program, and the month before she died she came to observe the EAT program and plan how to offer a children's program that would run alongside it. Her partner Brian took the course, and April came with Barry many times. One of my dearest memories is seeing the two of them perform a funny little skit in our closing night talent show.

April was devoted to children, to nature, to community, and to life. I still can't believe she is gone – and I miss her more than I can ever say.



April, Brian, & Barry

Barry

Falling

I was at Riekes Nature Center in Santa Cruz Arboretum. I was four years old, and in the group Nest to Fledge (this is the two- to six-year-olds). My best friend Finch and I started climbing a fifty-foot redwood tree. I was twenty feet up trying to catch up with Finch, and accidentally stepped on a dead branch. Finch cried, “No!” when he saw me step on the broken branch.

But it was too late. I started falling face-first to the ground. I felt like I had peregrine falcon powers, but it turned out that I didn’t.

Bravely, my Mom ran to the bottom of the tree, jumped right below me, and caught me.

Two years later, I went to the arboretum to visit friends there. And every time I go to the arboretum, I always climb the tree I fell from. I remember exactly where it is. It’s the one by the fence covered with cow skulls.

Sadly, my mother died, and she cannot catch me if I fall. I am now extra careful when I climb. I am super good. Unafraid, I climb up a fifty-foot redwood tree all the way to the top. I miss my Mom.

Fire

I was playing in front of my house at Shelter Cove, that’s in Pacifica, California. It was



around noon. Between our house and the beach waves there is a wide sandy path. I usually hang out there with my friends, but they were all at school, and I was alone.

I looked up and saw smoke coming out of one of the windows of my house. I ran in. No one was inside, and a bundle of sage was on fire! I picked up the abalone shell with the burning sage from the kitchen table and ran out the door. I tripped on the rug outside the front door, the flaming sage bundle fell, and instantly lit the straw bristle rug on fire. A giant flame roared.

I ran and got the hose, turned it on, ran back, and watered the fire and the doorway. I thought my Mom would be mad because I got water everywhere. My Mom was visiting with one of our neighbors, and when she came back, she said, "Barry you probably saved the house from burning down! I am so proud of you for being so brave and thinking so fast!" My Mom wasn't mad at all!

Brian

I wrangled with myself about what would be a good story to share about April and wrote several. They were all much too long – better suited for sharing around a campfire. So many stories. The First Kiss Story – that one got her fired from her job because the executive director didn't appreciate a great practical joke. Or maybe the one where she tricked two high-school biology teachers into following a glow-in-the-dark trail she laid, saying it was from a sea creature during a period of bioluminescence in the surf. Or, or, or....



In almost 18 years together, I have many visions of her that I bring up to revisit from time to time.

Finally, I found something – short, sweet, and all April.

We were in El Paso returning from a desert trip early in our relationship. We were wild, happy, and looking forward to a long, enjoyable drive home. The thing was, I needed to buy a watch. My watch broke in the desert, and I needed one for work

immediately upon our return. We decided to experience some culture shock and go to a mall in El Paso and find me a watch.

We were struck upon entry – cold air, bright lights, flashy reflections, and loud voices. People. Lots of people. It seems when one goes to a mall in El Paso, one dresses up. Dark clothes. Dresses. No shorts, sandals, or T-shirts.

April and I were in the wrong place. This didn't seem to bother her, but I just wanted to find a Timex and get gone.

The mall had two levels. We cruised the lower one and found nothing. As I was climbing the stairs to the upper level, April told me she would stay on the ground level and wander.

Finally, at the last store, I found what I wanted. Leaving the store, I was attracted to a viewing area where one could observe the shoppers' promenade down below. My peripheral vision caught quick movement from below.

It was April. She was skipping and dancing, a bare-legged, bare-armed fairy-being floating through a dark mass of plodders. When she reached the water fountain directly below me, she began to dance with her arms in the air around and around the water. Her joy was radiant. My joy at seeing it and remembering it and sharing it will always light my day.

April was the essence of *degagé* – look it up: free, light, unencumbered.

Memories of April

by Gayatri Gopinath

I first met April in college at Wesleyan, in 1987 or 1988. We stayed close friends for the next 30 years. I still miss her every day. We got to know each other because we were both Latin American Studies



majors, and were in all the same seminars. We loved listening to Silvio Rodriguez together.

April would come to class in workout gear, always coming from or going to crew practice. She was so strong and fit. I remember her doing crazy strength poses on the seminar table, like balancing her entire body on her hands while keeping her body parallel to the table. We'd go for long runs or bike rides together and jump in lakes at the end of them.

We backpacked together in Venezuela in 1993, camping on a gorgeous little island that was our home for the next couple of weeks. We realized by the end of our time there that we were moving re-a-l-l-y s-l-o-w-ly because the pace of life was so different. All we did was watch silver fish fly by in the water and listen to the waves beat down on the shore. She radiated sunshine – my memory of her in those years was always with that big beautiful beaming smile on her face.

We backpacked together in Venezuela in 1993, camping on a

Protecting Our Culture

by Enrique R. Madrid

Enrique R. Madrid is an archaeological steward with the Texas Historical Commission and a tribal historian for the Jumano Apache Nation.

RQ: How did you meet April?

She was an instructor with Outward Bound here in Texas. I work as a volunteer historian with the Texas Historical Commission. My job was to work with citizens and teach about archaeology and culture and how to protect the archaeological resources.

This is one of the poorest areas in the US – Americans have tried to keep it poor for cheap labor!

A lot of the people here are Native American, Apaches who have been here for twenty thousand years, and will still be here after Europe and the US disappear. They'll be doing things for the life of the universe.

This is innate in children, in human beings. The reality is all around, in nature, in relations.

RQ: What did your work with April look like?

April and Outward Bound agreed with our principles, protecting the sites and plants and cultures. She came to our land here and brought her skills. Outward Bound was hiking and backpacking, which would have impacted the sites. So they



Exploring native plants.

needed to learn what the importance of protecting history – their history, human history.

So my wife and I got involved with Outward Bound, teaching them history lessons and cultural lessons and archaeology. We would teach them about the culture of the border, using plants from the desert, and how to cook Native American food, Tex-Mex food. This is part of our traditions – the best part is the food.

April wanted to help prevent the destruction of culture. She got to know a lot of the people here, and helped organize a school for the children in the summer, where we taught them about their own traditions. If we don't keep them alive, they will be lost.

She came here and took this philosophy and tried to live and teach it on our land. She became part of our community. In this part of Texas and Mexico, people have worked together for thousands of years to survive – April became part of this.

RQ: She was involved in border activism as well?

Yes. When they tried to build a wall, she helped talk to city and local officials. She and Outward Bound worked to protect the land and people and the planet. They have been excellent protectors of the land and the people here on the border.

Americans have never gotten over their philosophy of conquering and killing. April worked to end the racial inequity that people have always denied, to teach principles of peace and responsibility. She always lived this.

When she died, her ashes were brought here by her partner and son and buried in our cemetery. The motto on the stone reads: "Paz y Responsabilidad. Peace and Responsibility." Maybe someday that will be carved in the Capitol, instead of "In God We Trust."

RQ: How will this book continue April's work?

I saw how she reared her child. I saw some of the games she used, teaching cooperation instead of competition, how to share a goal and work together to reach it.

April was ahead of her time. Her spirit is still alive. This book will spread that spirit and keep it alive.

Hopefully others will help make it real!

*For more on April's work at the border, see her article
"Resisting the Wall," page 44.*



Adventures with April

by Rock

These are a few memories of adventures with April that show her strength, her mind, her spirit, and her valor. What is remembered lives.

When I first met April in 1998, she was working for an organization that took urban, adolescent girls on wilderness trips. One of the trips was in Point Reyes National Seashore. The system for bringing food in so the kids didn't have to carry it was that adult volunteers, "Food Fairies", would take in the food while the group was away from camp. The campers would return to find a full food cabinet.

She asked me if I would go with her to be a Food Fairy. The problem was that I had a back injury and couldn't carry much weight. April said that she would carry all the heavy stuff herself. I could carry the crackers. We had a great time hiking in from the southernmost entrance to the park out of the town of Bolinas. The challenge was to time our arrival during the window that the group would be away from their campsite on an evening adventure.

It must've taken us at least three hours to get there. We had to arrive after dinner and then hike back in the dark. We had such a good time! We cooled off briefly in a lake. We sang a lot. We accomplished our "Food Fairy" mission. Walking in the dark was especially fun. We stopped about two a.m. for a brief sleep before getting up in



the morning and heading back to the trail head. The pack she carried that day was really heavy. April was so strong.

Another time April's strength came in handy was when we went to see the new animated Tarzan movie in a San Francisco multiplex. We were with my sisters and my niece and nephew from New York. The kids were maybe seven and five years old at the time. It was a special occasion to be altogether. We were late so we missed the beginning of the movie and planned to stay through the next showing. The movie was very exciting. We viewers got the sense that we were running along the branches of trees.

At the intermission, my niece and my sister Katie, who was a professional dancer, were running through the theater like Tarzan – down the stairs, across the front of the bleachers, up the stairs on the other side and across the aisle. Around and around they ran in Tarzan-inspired action.

Suddenly Katie heard a pop. She couldn't hold any weight at all on her leg. We put ice on it during the second show but afterwards she still wasn't able to walk. When she tried to stand on it, her leg would collapse. April carried Katie on her back down six floors of double escalators! She carried her to the car and then out of the car and up into the house!

I was visiting April in Texas where she worked for Outward Bound. We liked to pause at sunset and watch the shadows lengthen right before dark. We were camping and really engaged making a lot of noise when we heard coyote sounds close to our campsite. In the dark I crept toward a row of bushes at the edge of our campsite and peeked over the edge. Right there was a group of coyotes, maybe

seven or eight of them, rolling around biting each other playfully, yipping and howling and having a party! Now you know coyotes have a really good sense of smell. They surely knew we were there. We were honored the coyotes



would come and party so close to us.

The next morning, April went off for a run through the desert. I stayed at camp. A while later, I saw her waving her arms at me from far away. I waved back. She waved again and again until I realized she was signaling me to come.

I got over there pretty quickly. April had been bounding through these long spiked cacti in her running shorts. While jumping over one, a piece of the cactus had gotten embedded high up in the inside of her thigh. The cactus piece was like a ball with long spikes coming out all over it. We couldn't grab it with our hands and pull it out because it would get stuck in our fingers. Three or four spikes were sunk in the tender inner thigh area. They were embedded about a half an inch each! We could tell by the length of the other spikes. This was intense!

April was very calm. She asked me to go back to camp and get her knife. I ran back, dodging the cactus, and returned with her heavy Leatherman with a ton of tools on it. We looked at the choice of tools. We didn't want to push the spikes any farther in. April cut the spikes, which were thick and not easy to cut, using the knife's cutting tool. As she was cutting each one, more of the weight of the ball was hanging out of her leg from the remaining spikes. I tried, not so successfully, to hold the weight of the cactus ball up with two round sticks. After she cut all the spikes and the ball fell to the ground, April pulled each spike straight out of her thigh with the pliers! April was tough.

I just remembered another tough inner thigh adventure! It was a San Francisco Reclaiming Beltane ritual. It was being held in Dolores Park. We were there early to help set up. While the wooden Maypole was laying on the ground, we attached a lamp shade frame, with enough ribbons for about a hundred people tied evenly around its circumference. Then the pole was walked up hand over hand into its vertical position with the ribbons on top. It was placed into a metal sleeve that had been pounded into the ground and secured.

As the ribbons were let down and pulled out like a skirt for people to weave around the maypole, one side was pulled more than the other and the whole lamp shade tipped sideways. All the ribbons fell to one side. The May pole could not be woven like this! Now this pole was at least 20 feet long. It had been a great effort to get it standing. We all brainstormed what to do. April suggested that she could climb straight up the pole and fix the lampshade. So she did. She shimmed up the pole holding the pole tight between her legs and pulling up with her strong arms. She did a great job straightening the lampshade device and securing it. On her way down, gravity pulled her too fast and she ended up sliding down the wooden pole. She got splinters all along the inside of her thighs. Happy May, April!

April and I also hosted Solstice singing at my house for many years. I made three ring binders of traditional Christmas carols rewritten with pagan words. Things like, "God Rest Ye Merry Pagan Folk," "The 13 Days of Solstice" and "Dancing in a Wiccan Wonderland!"

There was one song April loved, "Oh Solstice Night." She had a favorite part. The line that was originally, "Fall on your knees!", we'd been singing as, "Rise from your knees!" joyfully rejecting supplica-

tion. But that wasn't enough for April. At her insistence, we began singing, "Call out your dreams!" April would act it out. She would get down on one knee and with arms stretched out in front of her and upwards to the sky, she would rise up belting out, "*Ca-a-a-ll out your dreams!*" The enthusiasm would spread, and many of us would join her, rising from our knees, reaching to the sky, raising our voices together singing, "Oh, feel the new life coursing! Oh ni-ight of hope, O-oh night when light returns, Oh night, Oh Solstice night, O-oh night of winter's hope."

* * *

April was thoughtful and looked at everything from a million angles. She was a process queen. When Barry was about to be born, the doctor was saying that they thought Barry needed to be born in the hospital. April had planned a homebirth, at her house in Shelter Cove by the ocean, down 260 steps. Now the doctor (the midwife and her partner Brian and I were there too) was saying, "Hospital."

To put it mildly, April was not keen on this idea. Outside of the hospital, we took time to discuss the situation. We met. We walked. We talked. Waiting for more consultation, we danced up and down the halls in the hospital to induce labor. We danced and danced. Every once in a while she looked at me in the eyes and said, "We could just walk out of here right now."

We ended up having the birth in the hospital. April called her team together and announced, "There's been a change of plan...." She laid it all out. "We are going to be in the hospital. We are going to use Pitocin." And she told us what she wanted including having her mother, who had just driven all the way across the country from Boston hoping to make it, to come into the room in time for the birth.

During April's long night of labor, it occurred to me that we were living the Winter Solstice ritual of waiting all night for the earth to give birth to the sun. I shared a line we had heard on so many Solstices: "April, we are awake in the night!" She nodded. "Yes, we are."

Adventures with April were adventures I was completely unlikely to have with anyone else. Her strength, her "We-can-do-it" attitude, and her leaning into the task opened doors for possibilities to unfold. I remember us swinging from the ceiling beams of the witchcamp dining hall, "I think we could roll on top of the beams." Or laying her map and compass out on the rocks: "I want to get really good at orienteering without trails." Or for Rosa's birthday ritual: "I want us to write new chants in Spanish." "I want to work on rites of passage rituals for girls and women."

April was always striving to help others, to understand herself, and to promote community.

With all her strength and all her skills, April was quite modest. She believed in the healing power of games, the healing power of ritual, the healing power of sharing food and of counseling each other, of friendship and of love. She is greatly missed this side of the veil.

Love to you, April, and to everyone missing you. April, you were definitely a healing force in my life and the lives of many others. You are a gift that keeps on giving. Let's play some games.

Memories

from many who love April

Amy Kohut

April always carried herself in a delightful way. I remember observing her in the Connecting with Courage program at Thompson Island Outward Bound – how she always delighted in the Creative Adventure days. I remember her searching around our basement offices gathering craft supplies to find fun and interesting things for the lucky girls who were in her groups. I see her now, walking with a bounce of delight and anticipation to her girls, excited to see what might be created when given the time and intention for them to sink into their own inner artist. She was like that with so many things – a weaver of anticipation, delight, and wonder.

Beth Girshman

my favorite (of many) memories of April are of the weekend we met – she had come out to Vermont one snowy winter weekend to facilitate a consensus training weekend with Charles.

they both slept outside! in the snow! under the stars! in very good sleeping bags, of course.

when i got up in the morning to start making breakfast, i glanced out the farmhouse window just in time to see April emerge from underneath a pile of snow.

when she saw me she smiled – that amazing bright April smile – the blue clear winter sky, the fresh white snow and April's beautiful eyes, face and smile.

ahhhh.

Brook

On our first Reclaiming Elements of Magic class backpacking trip, which we called “Elements in



the Elements,” we had been hiking, trancing, studying, experiencing, laughing, camping for days. Because the hiking and camping were foundational to every other experience, plus our safety depended upon correct execution, we had become somewhat blasé about that part of the experience. We came to a river that had to be crossed. I went across first. Jim (6’+ height, 200 lbs of muscle) threw each person’s pack to me so that the owner could then cross the river safely. We did not think of the difference between Jim’s size and mine (me: 5’9”,

148 lbs ringing wet). We had coalesced into a highly functioning team. At the end, for Jim to cross, he tossed me his 80 lb pack as though it were a book to be placed on a shelf. On catching it, I stumbled back, but managed not to fall, then managed to put the pack down successfully. April, whose back country skills were so very wide and deep, came last, to ensure that everyone else had already crossed safely. Jim tossed me her pack. It had to be at least 90 lbs, perhaps more? I stumbled and fumbled to stay upright, since 100 lbs was two-thirds of my total mass. April had been loping along for days with the pack on her back as if out for a stroll! Jim, of course, could throw the pack over the river’s ford. But I shouldn’t really have been catching it. Luckily, no injuries ensued and a good laugh was had all round. But I will never forget realizing that April had been hauling that much weight for that long, yet hardly breaking a sweat. April carrying 90, maybe 100 lbs on her back. Amazing.

Carol S. James

April & Brian’s wedding day started on the beach with people meeting each other and mingling. For some wedding mornings this might have sufficed. Ever the intentional and playful one, April had a plan! She wanted to play get-to-know-you games. We circled up the families, friends, kids, welcoming them to the ocean side, hearing their names, passing the pulse, dashing around in the sand for a name tag game, partnering up to hear more about each other. We witnessed the delight in April’s smile. It was working, people were meeting and making genuine connections. She was thrilled.

Cypress

I also met April on the first Reclaiming Elements of Magic backpacking trip. She was one of three

teachers, I was a participant. Her skills from being an Outward Bound guide as well as her physical strength were super impressive, but it was clear that these skills were matched with her empathy, compassion, and mysticism. I remember her priestessing a spell with the group at a wilderness lake – she was bringing water to each participant. She had a way of making eye contact that was powerful, empowering, supportive, but not intrusive. A fine art. Our friendship grew over the years based upon our mutual love of nature and witchcraft. I miss her in my life.

Delight

Thoughtful, careful, intelligent, fun, open-minded, and intentional are words descriptive of April. I first met April during the 2003 Sacramento protests when she was locking down to protect a neighborhood garden.

Over the years the topics and lengths of our conversations grew. April Cotte was an excellent listener and had a great memory. When we would meet for tea at her home, she gathered the tea, made the treats, and sent a mason jar filled with a special tea home with me for my husband. She was high touch.

Her facilitation work was gentle and acupuncturally precise. She was willing to do the heavy work. Once when talks that she was working on seemed likely to break down, she traveled cross-country, rented a car, picked up the parties and drove folks deep into the mountains of Mexico so that inter-generational discussion and healing of almost a century of pain and misunderstanding might clear and alliance could take root and grow. Somewhere in all those days and nights of challenging work she bought me earrings as a memento.

April was aware of uncertainty in some areas of her life. She worked to untangle and understand

these, so she could make clear choices and do no harm.



Shortly before her death she lent a book to our friend Donna. It was *Braiding Sweetgrass*, a book about plants from scientific and Indigenous perspectives. Donna read it and passed it to me.

It seems very April, celebrating plants and different ways of understanding. When I finish the book, I will pass it on. This is April, too.

Hearty

One day we were playing on the bed with the kids at April's house when Kai jumped on me without warning. He knocked the mug I was holding into their big front window. As glass rained down on Barry, Kai, and me, April instantly moved in to shield Barry. When I looked at April I could feel her grounded calmness and when we were sure that everybody was okay she somehow inspired a much needed group laugh.

Jonathan

April Drums Up a Turkey

Back in 2003 or so, April and I co-taught a new class called "Nature Awareness for Witches." Such a joy planning, teaching, and playing with her – still one of my favorite classes ever. In typical April planning fashion, we left the closing ritual in the hands of Spirit. Our group fox-walked into a beautiful meadow, lined with coyote brush on three sides. We were all going to just quietly go out there, observe, and be open to what nature had to offer.

Except... April brought a drum.

I didn't know what April planned to do – I don't think she did either. I don't even know where she got the drum, since April wasn't much of a drummer. But with typical April enthusiasm, she didn't let lack of knowledge stop her. April starts banging on the drum in a way I felt certain would drive all the other wildlife far away.



Except... A turkey popped their head out of the bushes to see what was going on.

Slowly it emerged. Head, then neck, then body and tail. Circled around our group. Approached. Cocked its head and looked at us. Walked closer. Closer. We all held our breaths... Or did we sing? I can't remember. All I know is that April never wavered in her drumming. The turkey came to within feet of us, listening. Paused.

Then slowly walked away, disappearing back into the brush.

I have never before or since been in a group ritual where I felt more blessed. Thank you, April!

Juniper

In Spring 2008 April, Brian, and I hiked the Chihuahuan desert. On the third day of a two day trip, we'd stretched yesterday's lunch into dinner and breakfast. Our water bags were nearly empty. High above Bofecillos wash, we followed a ridge toward Brian's truck. Sage perfume had burned off in the dry mid-day. Sand beneath our boots had not tasted rain since September. Yet we sucked nectar from ocotillo's orange blossoms. Chollo flashed purple. Claret cup cactus flaunted tender blooms. Under West Texas' blazing sun, I walked in the presence of the bold, the brave, the beautiful.

Kai Heartlife

At this point I don't remember too many specifics about the time April and I spent together but I do remember a few things. When I was 8, I got a knife for my birthday. April's birthday present to me was to help me use it. She taught me to carve the wood, and to make a hand-and-bow drill kit that I still have today. We spent a long time getting them just right so we could start a fire.

I used to go boogie boarding with Barry and April out in the ocean. We would ride the waves and race.

On the day before she died I had just gotten back from school and all of the other kids and her were having a water fight. It was so unexpected. May she rest in peace.

Lila

Nuestra Veladora

To say that April did important work is an understatement. April was a candle holder, a justice seeker, a believer in holding traditions as law. A pilot of heart expansion, a councilor, a cultural defender, a unifier, a barefoot wave rider, a mother, a best friend, a sister, a daughter, a communicator, a neighbor, a magical being that worked on the earth with one fist to the sky and the other on her heart.

To me, April was many things. One of my favorite was the contributions she made working with me during the Day of the Dead Festival of Altars. She became a true Comadre. Together we honored the thin veils during this time of year.

April always honored the sanctity of rituals and traditions associated with this ancient tradition. We met every November 2nd in San Francisco's Mission District; we created altars for the Ancestors and

walked the Procession. In this sacred space, we held the light of our Ancestors, acknowledging them as active participants in our life, knowing that many hands contributed to paving our paths. Knowing many hands helped us hold those candles.

We sang, danced, celebrated, mourned, ate, and built altars for our Ancestors year after year. We reflected on what was and how what is – is a testament to the past. We called on our guides and celebrated our own mortality. This was April – Alive, a Spiritual Musician, a Giver, a Wonderful Human Being.

We continue to hold up the light, only now, from the same candle, we honor you, our Ancestor April.

Te Amo y Te Extraño Hermana

Lissin Lev Chaya

Like all of the communities she was part of, April loved playing with the kids here at Shelter Cove. My last animated memory is April engaging our kids, ages 2-11, in a water fight behind the houses, shrieks of laughter radiating into the office where I was working.

Marcy Brown

In 2004 I was walking down the stairs near our houses in Shelter Cove, very distraught. My son and his girlfriend were going through a very traumatic situation. I shared the drama with April and Brian, and they listened with compassion and kindness. I felt nurtured and cared for. My son, his girlfriend, and I are loved and important to my neighbors. That act of kindness has always stayed with me.

Max Ventura

My enduring memories of April are of her laughing and dancing at Magic Meadow at Golden Gate Park, Witchlets in the Woods, and other rituals, followed by a gaggle of witchlets streaming along ribbons and flowers as they ran to a kids' circle. Also, dancing around the fire with little Barry in her arms.



Nicola

The most enduring memory of April that I have is from Witchlets, pre-2010 I'm pretty sure. I don't even remember the context, but to guess, I'd say we were invoking elements or entities/deities.

April appeared fully embodied, naked and covered in mud. She crept on all fours into the circle/ritual, eyes wide, and we were all absolutely transfixed. She was completely absorbed in her aspecting and the rest of us were stunned into full attention.

I will always remember that moment – she fully owned her aspecting and brought such power and respect to her presence.

Nina

In one game, me and Barry would always be the same animal together. April would call out something like, "If you have four legs, run!" If your animal did, you would run. If she tagged you, you were a tree and you could pivot but not run and try to tag other kids. We were the trees and she was the fire because she could run. Sometimes she would yell, "Fire in the Forest!" and we all had to run.

Noel Floyd

I remember April at her beach house, where she had her young son Barry lead a ritual which became wildly and wordlessly energetic. April was in wonder of Barry's capabilities. Her love for and pride in her son enveloped him.

I remember April so sweetly earnest in describing the plight of Indigenous people with whom she was close, who lived on the U.S. side of the border with Mexico. She persuaded me to join forces to combat the injustices those people were suffering. April died too soon for those people, and too soon for us all.

Pegasus

When I met April she was a wilderness guide for Outward Bound. Her passion for wild nature was contagious. I admired her gift to share this passion with girls and young women through her work. April could make the wild a safer place to be.

Years later, I joined her (and a group of witches) on an Elements of Magic backpacking trip. She was inspirational in her gentle support, helping me as I struggled with the pack and the terrain. April opened up for me (and so many others) a way of being in nature, with respect and stewardship the norm. She left us too soon. I like to sing to April when I'm in the woods and call to her as our ancestor.

Peter Cotte

In 1993 our family took a trip to Prague over the holidays. At one point April and I were exploring the wonderful old town. When we turned a corner we spotted our parents who were completely unaware of our presence.

Within a split second, April's eyes lit up and she suggested a game. Her idea was to see how close we could get to our parents without them noticing. So step by step we closed in behind them until we could hear them talking about the beauty of Prague, equity, and other things that parents seemed to enjoy talking about.

We followed in their footsteps for a couple of blocks until we both looked at each other and broke out in jolly laughter. This caused our Mom and Dad quite a fright, but once they saw it was us we all had a great laugh together.

Rodrigo Xavier Caldera

Before April was a mother, her entire being longed for a child to care for. April also loved the land as much as the thought of becoming a mother, and ritual. In an afternoon hike beginning at her home at Shelter Cove, we decided to head to the eucalyptus grove where the mountain bikers fly down the hill side, hurling their bicycles through the forest, thrilled to feel alive and exhilarated by nature and their ability to wind through turns that may yield unexpected surprises, knowing the way, trusting their abilities. We walked through the neighborhood, across Highway 1, braving the traffic coming around the bend, passing the local hardware store, down a two lane bike trail, delighting in the scents before masks were a necessity. We wound our way through the rural parts of a dead end road, where people go for healing, past the horse ranch, apartment buildings, and finally up a residential street, leading to a barrier and then a trail only accessible to humans and animals on foot, or bikes.

Instead of reaching that end, we decided to make a right turn, heading straight into the eucalyptus grove; an enchanted forest full of magic and splendor. Ivy crawled up the trees, as if taking over their trunks, as if to blanket them, a symbiosis of sorts. Suddenly we came to an arch, stretching over the trail, a portal. "Let's set an intention", I said, "not simply walk into the forest as the two people who made it this far, a friend, and a woman wishing to become a mother.

"Let's make this the beginning of you, as what you long to be, no longer the you who longs, but the mother who is!"

April wrapped herself around the invitation, like ivy to the trees. And so it was, we stepped through the gates. She, no longer a childless woman, me, a witness, to who she was to become. And so we entered the gates of creation. The rest is history. And not my tale to tell. April came out a different woman, a creator of life, a giver of breath; a mother to her beautiful child.

Ryka

April would sit and put toys around her in a circle, and she was blindfolded and she would have a foam noodle. We would try to sneak under her to get the toys and if she felt us or heard us she would whack us with a noodle and we would have to put the toy back, and all the kids were on a team. I thought it was really, really fun. She was really good at that game. She was really fun to play with.

When I was three, on Halloween, we were at the fire pit, and I saw a witch with green skin come out of April's house. I had this feeling that I knew it was real but I knew it was not and I had a bigger imagination because I was a little kid. I never knew it was April but I wasn't sure if it was a real witch. She had a weird pot thingie and she had us pick weeds and she had a few spices.

I thought we were going to eat the stew. And I didn't know why everyone was smiling. Barry was acting the most weirdest because he knew it was his mom. Now I know because I'm much older (7).

I also like Fire in the Forest. We would pick an animal to be and

don't tell anyone and April would call a movement or what your animal does like slither, and if your animal did that thing, you would have to run across the big sand area, and she would run and try to catch you.



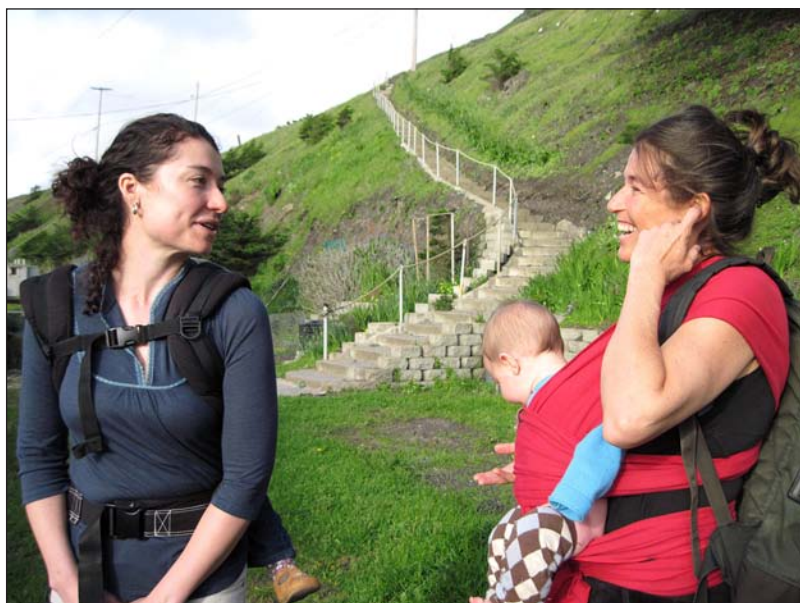
Elizabeth McLeod (Wave)

Playful and Deep

When people tell stories about April, they often begin with "The first time I saw April...." That's because she made a big impression. The first time I saw her, I was at an Outward Bound staff training in Boston, and April arrived in hiking boots and a skirt (her signature trail outfit). She was vibrant and fun and intense, and I knew I wanted to know her. We led Connecting with Courage courses with 12- and 13-year-old girls that summer, and then I got to work and play with her and an amazing group of girls in an after school program at the Hernandez School. We took those girls on the ferry to Thomp-

son Island on weekends and had many fun adventures exploring the island. I believe that girls' group is where this games book originated.

At that time I was getting my Masters at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, studying girls development, with an interest in how group experiences in nature woven with creative expression could support girls to grow into courageous women. I learned as much about these topics with/from April. We had many deep philosophical conversations and applied theory to practice.



A couple of years later I co-founded a non-profit in San Francisco and April came cross-country to run the programs. She stayed on my couch at Shelter Cove which is where she met Brian and then lived off and on for the next two decades (Shelter Cove, not my couch!). It was 1998 and also the first time we went to Witchcamp, where April found a new community that summer. We instantly felt the parallels between the experience at Witchcamp with the magic we felt playing, living, singing and creating with girl groups in the wilderness.

Many girls who are now powerful women thank April for the important role she played in their lives, moving from survival to thriving. She was way more than a role model. April was at different times a teacher, warrior, visionary, healer. She was Luna. Playful and deep. And while the games we played were joyful, they were also much more. The framing and reflection questions, the co-creation of intentional containers came together in the perfect alchemy for healing and growth.

Woven throughout all of the experiences and connections was April's deep love of spirit and beauty – Spirit as it is expressed in nature when we feel the aliveness of water, fire, air and earth; the cycles of the moon, the seasons. These energies inspired new games. She always loved a good peek-a-boo game, hiding in a tree, dancing under the moonlight. April shared this love with her beloved son Barry and all those who knew her.

April had a talent for seeing right into the spirit of each human she met, bringing out the best in people. I know that her spirit lives on in the work we do to heal the world. I feel her presence when I am tuned into nature and especially when I look up at the night sky.

May we all keep April's memory and contributions alive by playing these games!

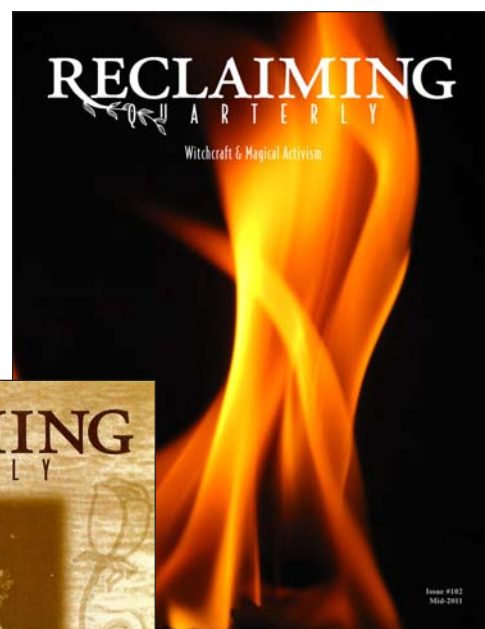
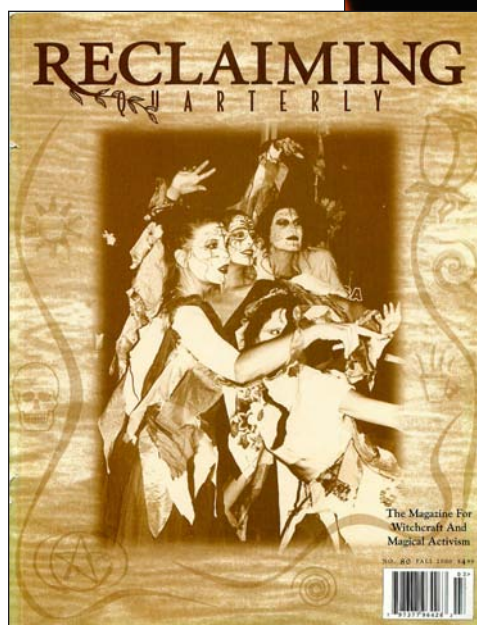
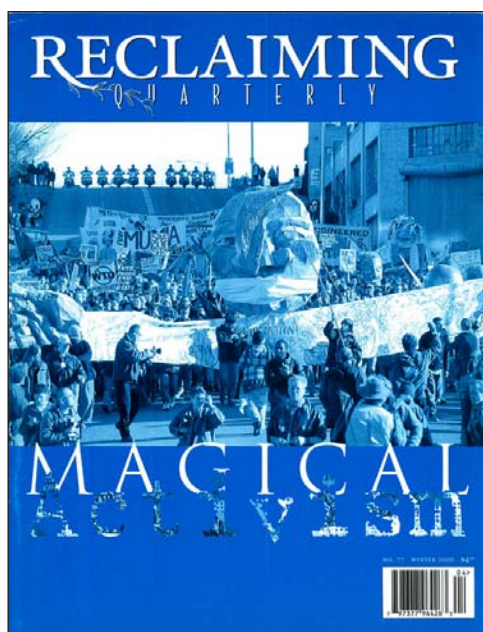
April's Writings for RQ

April wrote several feature articles for Reclaiming Quarterly magazine in the early 2000s. Each piece shows sides of April's life and personality:

- Descending Bruja Canyon: An Initiatory Journey
- Resisting the Wall: Working for a World Without Borders
- Mosquito News Network: Frontline Reporting!

Complete back issues of RQ as free PDFs can be found at:

WeaveAndSpin.org/back-issues



Reclaiming resources, archives, music, and more – free at:

WeaveAndSpin.org

Descending Bruja

WHEN IT RAINS in the Chihuahuan desert, the water slides over the dry land seeking paths. The paths it finds, "arroyos," are wide and welcoming, carved by waters before. Arroyos lead down to bigger arroyos, to rivers and the sea. Sand and smoothed rock line the bottom. Plants and rocks filter the debris (sticks, rocks and plants) from the water. As the water descends the mesa, the arroyo constricts. The wideness of traveling on the sandy surface is over. To go down, which is the natural course of water, the water has to go through rock.

Water pours out of the canyon mouths down to the lower level of the mesa. Five canyons pour into the biggest arroyo along its curvy path to the canyon we call Bruja. Bruja Canyon, the witch, bewitching...What is not pure water is constricted by tunnels of rock. There are many paths; each with its own obstacles.

To descend Bruja Canyon, one must first journey through the desert. Much of what you know and have been taught has no meaning here. What is

important here is respect — for the sun, water, plants, animals and air. Your life depends on it. Pack light. Bring nothing but the essentials, for you will carry all that you bring.

It is first light when you begin to hike. That is the rule of the sun. You carry a gallon of water for one day. Your destination is a pool of water in Raña Canyon, Tinaja Raña. As you begin walking, you can see where you will ascend the mesa, a saddle with a gradual upward slope.

It is the hot part of the day when you finally reach Rana where there is water. You climb down into her shady hold and check for water before you eat lunch and doze off for a good long nap. Only when the sun is low in the sky do you emerge with extra water for the night and head away from the sun towards Bruja. The whole rocky desert world is on fire with the sunset. Blooming cactus glow pink, yellow, green and purple.

You choose a flat spot to camp, encircled by a prickly pear, lechuguilla, creosote and century plant. The cool night air awakens your appetite. After you eat, you lie down and watch the stars come out one at a time. Now you





by April Cotte

Canyon

can see the near-full moon beyond the rise. It is night in the desert. You can rest well because you are healthy, safe, hydrated, sunburn free, warm for the night and where you should be. But can you sleep? The silence and hugeness of this place surrounds you. All is seen. You lie naked next to the earth. There is no place to hide here. You are seen physically, emotionally, spiritually, in every way. Are you ready to be seen?

Seeing you, the desert also holds you. Her dark spaciousness embraces you in a loving fold. Let the scares and any regrets flow away. Do what this land constantly does: cleansing, re-shaping and renewing. Allow yourself to be loved and held. Then you will find home in this vast, silent place. A wind rustles through the creosote. The smoky scent cheers you on. An ocotillo creaks its welcome. You are home in the Chiuauan desert.

YOU WAKE WITH first light and can hear the coyotes howling in the distance, running to a rest spot after an active night. Again today you will walk to water: a big pool at the top of Bruja. You will not sleep there in the cave of the ancient ones, colored with their pictographs. You must leave the water

clear so the animals can approach it at night. You will sleep in an already-used area to keep the human impact contained.

The hotness of the day draws you into the shady top of a canyon where you eat and sleep. Later you awaken energized, peaceful. Shadows on the canyon tell you that the sun is low in the sky. You climb out of the canyon and walk along its rim to the edge of the mesa. From here you can see Bruja and her wide arroyo, into which four of the five canyons (including the one you slept in) pour. You imagine the water flowing across the mesa into her gentle folds. From here you greet Bruja. She calls you.

That night you dream of the ancient ones who slept here and drew pictographs in the cave 10,000 years ago. A howling wind wakens you in the night, swirling dust from Bruja's wash into the sky. It is cold and you naturally cover your head and bundle up to keep warm. Fortunately, you do not see clouds in the sky beyond Bruja's

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Bruja Canyon

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could not descend Bruja today. Hours later you wake when the warm sun reaches over the land formations around you. You lie and soak in the warmth for a while after that cold night. There is shade in the canyon, so you do not need to race the sun today.

BRUJA. YOU BEGIN by comfortably walking down her wash so wide and full of plants. When you reach the boulders at the start of the canyon, you ground and ask permission to enter and descend. You feel her permission. You honor the ancient ones whose cave you pass, then stop to find a path down the boulders. It is a steep climb down, so you face the rock, finding places first for your feet, then for your hands. This is a humble position, you think: an appropriate way to enter such a canyon. Now you are surrounded by rock walls, with the blue sky above you, as you will be the rest of the day. The main course of the water is right; you can tell by debris and pebbles stacked on big rocks. But to the left is a shaded area which could mean a tinaja (a shallow pool of water that survives the dry months). A tinaja it is. You bless Bruja's waters and drip some on your forehead before filling one of your bottles. You will wait to take more water from a tinaja in the center of the canyon which the animals can't reach.

Now to the canyon.... a plant grabs your shirt and pants and you find yourself tangled in its thorns. With patience, because that is what this requires, you disconnect yourself one thorn at a time. That was an "un momento" plant. "Un momento señora, ¿Porque te andas con tanto prisa?" "One moment, Mz. Why are you walking with so much haste?" You walk a little more slowly now.

You come to a cliff. To your left and down four feet is a gradual rock chute filled with cool water. It rounds the corner and becomes a steep smooth slide. In front of you is a smooth gradual cliff with the slide as its left side.

Down below is a deep pool of water. You climb above this spot to scope it out. It seems there is no way around. To get down to the pool, you'll have to climb down the cliff next to it. It looks like there are some undercut ledges on the bottom.

You have come prepared with helmet,

harness, rope, caribiner, rappel device, extra webbing, rappel rings, knife, lighter... You attach a rope through your pack straps and lower it into the water. Kerplunk! And down you climb. It is intimidating to step onto the ledge at the bottom and give up your good handhold, but the ledge works. You are able to control your climb the rest of the way into the pool. The cold water comes up to your waist. Ahh, the adventure continues. You push your pack to the edge of the pool, up onto dry rock and then climb out yourself looking at where you came from. You have committed. It would be nearly impossible to turn back now.

The sun is shining on the canyon wall above the pool. You look to your left to discover what lays ahead next. It is another chute, slanted down only slightly. And at least twenty feet below, a deep, dark pool of water. Behind you and above you there is flat smooth wall with no cracks, holes or boulders; no places to anchor for a rappel. This is the pool one has to jump into. Others have tested it to make sure it was safe to jump. The distance down is perhaps thirty feet, but it looks even further. Ack. You move out to the edge to check. It is a nice spot to jump from, though a little off center with the rock hanging diagonally over the chute. You will have to jump out at an angle.

You undress. You are naked before her. You prepare to drop your pack into the pool, which means full commitment. You breathe in, feeling the circle of stone around you. You heave the pack over the lip and watch it fall into the pool, sending waves of water which create darkened images on the walls. You stretch your arms and move your body to the lip. The pack drifts to the edge, so it is safe to jump.

Now you sit on the lip ready to jump. Breathe.... jump... But you are stuck to the rock. Something has filled you, like a liquid pouring through your body to every edge, every pore. It is fear. Deep, heavy fear. Fear of jumping, of hitting the wall hanging diagonally above, of landing on the side where it is shallow, of falling through air, of cold water, of tangling with your pack, of forgetting something. Fear that you don't know enough, that you shouldn't be here, that this is the wrong pool. Fear of doing this alone, of risks, of death, of life... It is a fear full of every fear you have experienced in the past two days, the past month, the past year, in your life.

You are crying on the lip of this canyon, afraid to enter the watery, rounded chamber of conception. You are scared and so alone, crying. You have moved back into the chute where rock walls encircle your body. You will never jump. You are stuck here in the canyon. Sadness overwhelms you. All the sadness you have ever felt pours in.

As your crying sounds diminish, you notice the silence around you. You are witnessed by the silence of Bruja canyon. It is a silence so loving and old. A silence big enough for all. A silence that witnesses so deeply it turns your multiple sounds of confusions and fears into one song. Your song is so deeply held and allowed to be that it blends into the witness, the stillness, silence and love.

Having been present to your fears, vulnerability, tenderness and tears, you are fully present in this place. Present in this canyon and feeling her comfort all around, it feels only natural to jump into the pool. You envision yourself jumping with the perfect angle, landing calmly in the deepest center, swimming comfortably in the cold water and climbing calmly out over the lip on the other side. Without a thought, you move back to your spot on the lip. You thank the rock around you and leap off into Bruja's deep womb.

"Whooo-Eeeh!" A sound comes out of you as you land in the cold water. You thrash for a moment with the shock of the cold then gracefully swim to your pack, pushing it up and out of the water before you. Sitting on the dry rock edge of the pool, soaking in the sun and looking up to where you jumped, you know now there is no going back. The waters have broken. The labor has begun. The pool from down here looks womblike with white and gray mother stone making a dome above, broken only by the slide and lip from which you just jumped.

LEAVING THE POOL, you find a sunny spot to dry out, warm up and have some lunch. When you wake from a brief siesta, you follow the canyon around a slight bend and before you there is nowhere else to go. A big boulder sits wedged between the canyon wall with a barely climbable slide and then a big drop into the next pool. Here you must use a rope and your mind to be safe.

You find a hole in the rock that you can tie webbing on as an anchor. The rope you will hang from will go through a rappel ring

on that webbing. The webbing and rappel ring ensure that you can pull the rope down. You run the webbing through the hole, slip a rappel ring on and tie a perfect water knot. This will serve you well for your rappel, but you will have to leave it tied here to the rock. You contemplate the impact you create by leaving this webbing and rappel ring in the canyon.

Though the Chihuahuan desert has held you well in her beautiful essence on this journey, she is old and tired. She has been abused and poisoned by the colonists, and her people are impoverished by restrictions to their traditional ways of life. Where the Rio Grande once refused to play the role of border between her people and shifted her banks in the annual floods, she was bound in concrete and forced to comply. The earth and air are also colonized here. In Sierra Blanca, manipulation by an East Coast corporation and local politicians results in 500 tons of New York City's sewage arriving weekly by train. The corporation claims that the poop and toxins from the New Yorker's toilets will fertilize this forlorn dessert land. You have seen the native plant life in this desert surviving well without New York City's excrement. In Sierra Blanca's fragile, arid ecosystem which takes thousands of years to incorporate new materials, the only fertilization we have seen to date is the fertilization of diseases and illnesses the people are contracting from the airborne pathogens which arrived along with New York City's waste.

You check the system once more; the knot on the webbing, the rope through the rappel ring, your harness, the carabiner. All is secure. You are ready to go. The first part of the descent is easy. Facing upstream, you climb over a boulder, then walk along the vagina-like slide to the lip. The lip marks where the gradual slide ends and the canyon becomes steep for a long stretch. Rock bulges out so you still can't see where you will land. Back to the edge you begin to let out the rope. It is time. You lean back out over the edge, over nothing for 40 feet. You breathe deep.

You descend by walking your feet down smooth rock, one before the other. Now you can see that at the bottom there is a pool. Your feet submerge first, your legs, your belly, "Water, please cleanse me of whatever else remains before my rebirth," your chest. You gasp at the coldness of this water and wonder how much deeper it goes. Your pack pulls

you downward, the rappel device is sticky and holds you up. You work with both hands to glide the rope. You are shoulder deep in water, neck deep and you can still barely touch the bottom with your toes. Finally you are able to slip the pack off into the water and tread water to unclip the rope. Pulling the rope down while treading in the freezing water takes some time and focus. You swim away as it falls and then swim back to retrieve it. Now you can swim to the edge.

Out of the water there is just a small space for moving. A hallway of rock to another small chamber. Before you a huge boulder is wedged in the main passageway. You can only imagine what it was like when water moved that rock here.

There are small holes under the boulder with long drops to the rock below. Where do you go now? There, off to the right is another opening; a hole in the ground just the width of a body. The birth canal. You pull the rope from the water and wrap it around a pinch for a controlled lowering of your pack. You then coil the rope and drop it. You must trust the birth canal as every being must at its time of birth.

A tear falls from your eye as you think about leaving her soft rocky hold. Out into what? You hesitate but wind pours through, ruffling the ocotillo above with a creak. You must focus. The wind whispers, "What are you birthing into?" The earthen birth canal will squeeze any last remnants of the old from your body. What new life awaits you?

Your feet must go into the hole first. They land on nothing. You must trust the birth canal. You slide through to your waist

raising your hands above your head to fit. She squeezes you. Still, your feet hang as you start to slide. You squeeze through past your waist and hips. You must tilt your body here to fit, so snug is the hole around your middle. Positioning is everything. Still you are hanging, sliding through now at your chest with your hands in the air, trusting that you will be held. Uncertainty, trust. Your armpits

and neck slide through. You take one last look at the womb-like pool you just came from. Goodbye, thank you. Bless you, beautiful canyon.

Your head slides through into the darkness. And finally, your feet touch something. They stand on solid rock. You slide until firmly grounded on your feet as your arms come through. Now, standing in the cave you can see a long tunnel to the light. You crawl at an angle, popping out of



the opening onto your feet. You retrieve your pack and climb down the rock.

The grayness that concerned you before was just nightfall so you don't need to rush. You will camp on Bruja's shoulder with the full moon and hike out in the morning. Tonight you still have a lot of boulders to climb over to leave Bruja's arroyo. But before you go, take a moment to lie down in the circular pile of earth, plants and rocks where the waters leave the constriction of the canyon to pour out into the arroyo. Take a moment to soak in this new feeling of opening, abundance and birth. Breathe deep. You have descended Bruja Canyon.

April Cotte brought groups on outdoor journeys in California, Aztlan, and New England, and was blessed to descend Bruja Canyon many times.

From Reclaiming Quarterly #81, Winter 2000.

Resisting the Wall

Working for a world without borders

by April Cotte

Originally appeared in RQ #99, 2008.

At a child's birthday party in Redford, Texas, where I have lived for parts of the past twelve winters, men were sharing ideas for fixing the roof of the *jacal* (the traditional earthen structure) that I rented.

They explained how to use a traditional method of weaving "palma" through river cane and then covering it with adobe made from river mud. They showed me an elder's roof built this way thirty years ago.

I asked if there was enough river cane. One said "sure," full of support and enthusiasm for the project.

Then his eyes dropped and more quietly he said, "if the border patrol lets us."

10,000 YEARS OF PERMACULTURE

Redford and the river valley it follows are on the U.S./Mexico border. For thousands of years people here, as in many communities along the Rio Grande, have interacted with the river ecosystem.

Traditional cultural practices make survival possible within the limited-money economies of some of the poorest counties in the United States:

- Along the river people gather plants for animal and human food and medicine. The river environment is an abundant corridor for fishing and hunting.
- River cane and river mud is the lowest-cost roofing and building material in this region for human and animal shelters and shade structures.
- Farmers still depend on the 2000-year-old tradition of diverted river water irrigation. Formerly gravity-fed, irrigation now depends on pumps that must be checked multiple times during

the day and night when running.

- Planting on the flood plains is common, and livestock depend on the river to drink.
- Elders are passing on traditions of using river clay to make pottery, and using river limestone to whitewash walls and for sweat lodges.
- Walking along the levy and the river, fishing, boating, wading in the river, swimming during the heat of the summer, picnicking on the banks and enjoying the cool shade by the river are traditional pastimes essential for health and physical exercise.
- Children here are taught to be connected to their whole environment, understanding nature better than many adult naturalists and biologists. They learn the specific relationships between the plants, ecosystems, animals, insects, birds, fish, and humans. They learn to tell when it will rain by the behavior of certain ants or the calls of migrating birds.

BROKEN BONDS, DYING TOWNS

Over the past half-dozen years, the U.S. government has attempted to alter Indigenous, tribal, and familial migration routes that are thousands of years old.

In rural Texas/Mexico, families on both sides of the border are related. Up until the events of September 11, 2001, there were many Class B Informal river crossings where people in remote towns between El Paso and Brownsville could legally cross the border to visit with each other, herd their cattle, bring milk to grandma, etc. These crossings were lifelines for the remote, predominately Indigenous communities on both sides of the Rio Grande.

Following September 11, a Redford woman looked out her window to see a truck dumping cement blocks in front of

the traditional crossing.

She went outside and asked, "What are you doing?"

A Border Patrol Agent replied, "Protecting the United States from terrorists."

The recent documentary "Mexiphobia"¹ addresses the devastation the closures of these informal border crossings caused.

"You took almost a hundred years' worth of history, of supporting families from this interaction across the border," says Linda Walker, a business owner. "You took that away, and so what do you think those folks are doing for a living? You think they're going to let their kids starve? They're not. No, they've gone back to the things that we didn't want them doing. They're making a living, [and] they're not making it selling tacos anymore."

Another business owner says, "It's making criminals out of everyday people, the tourists and the Mexicans alike."

Due to these changes, many small Mexican towns are dying. "Everything's quiet," says Danielle Gallo of Boquillas, a small town in Northern Mexico. "No one plays music anymore. There's really nothing to buy and nothing to do. Everything has a feeling of destitution and despair, and it's not a happy place anymore. It's depressing."

GLOBAL INEQUITIES

Behind the border tensions are unjust and ineffective global economic policies, which cause mass migration of dislocated people seeking to survive.

When the 1990s North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) opened the door for subsidized farm products from the United States to enter the Mexican market, rural semi-subsistence farmers – predominately Indigenous

people – lost their capacity to survive. Many became displaced, moving from their land to find work in cities and in the U.S.

NAFTA encouraged *Maquiladoras* (U.S.-owned factories near Mexico's border with the U.S.), but these could hire only some of those workers. Others have had to seek work in the U.S.

World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations provided another blow to Indigenous subsistence farmers by forcing an end to communal land systems. The Mexican *Ejido* system was dismantled and for the first time since the Mexican revolution, rural people could sell their land and move.

Arnoldo Garcia, of the National Network for Immigrant Rights (NNIR) in Oakland, California, explained: "The [border] wall is part of a policy of militarization that was formulated in the 90s when NAFTA was planned. The government knew that with NAFTA there would be

displacement, so they planned a strategy of militarization that was piloted in El Paso and spread to the whole border.

"[Militarization] is beginning on the border with the most vulnerable communities, but is intended to spread throughout the United States as our acceptance increases."

Garcia also described "Operation End Game," designed to end the backlog in deportations by detaining people in Hutto Residential Center (formally a prison) in Taylor, Texas.²

POLITICAL FALLOUT

For communities right on the border, the intense presence, militarization, and enforcement by border patrol agents also affects local elections and economies.

Border Patrol agents and their families have a substantial percentage of the votes in Presidio County even though many are only stationed there for two years.

A local landowner explained that prior to 1985, Presidio was famous for its onion and cantaloupe crops. Farmworkers were local people that lived in Mexico, crossed the border to work in the U.S. fields, and went home on weekends to their own small farms.

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act made farm owners

through deviousness and corruption.

In February 2008, Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff shared with the Daily News: "I don't see any imminent threat" of terrorists infiltrating from Mexico.⁴

So why all this effort to depict the "dangerous illegal immigrant" who crosses the U.S./Mexico border?

According to a friend, "This racist ideology around immigration provides a scapegoat for the U.S. government as people deal with a failing U.S. economy and momentous losses of services."

I have heard people from across the political and economic spectrum who live on the U.S./Mexico border ask, "Why are they closing our border and not Canada's? What do they have against brown people?"

Enrique Madrid, Jumano Apache Historian from Redford, Texas, explains that in order to have militarization you have to have an enemy.

Propaganda and psychological warfare create that enemy. For at least a century, academic and journalistic references have transformed people on the border from farmers, goat herders, parents and home-makers to bandits, murderers, drug smugglers, human traffickers – and now terrorists.

Once you have an enemy, Madrid says, you can commit acts of war on that enemy. In 1997, Marine Joint Task Force Six (after being told by superiors that 75% of the people in the small town of Redford were dangerous) shot a high school student, Esequiel Hernandez, Jr., who was herding his goats near the border.

And since 2001, the government has added the new "War on Terror"



Cattle graze in the foothills of the Bofecillos Mountains, near the U.S./Mexico border.
Photo by David J. Owen.

liable if they hired illegal workers. This had an immediate and drastic effect. In 1985 the payroll for farm work in the Presidio region was six million dollars (1985 dollars). In 2007 the payroll for farm workers in the region was thirty thousand dollars.

But are farm workers and other residents of the border areas the problem?

According to Ted Robbins on "All Things Considered," nearly half of all illegal immigrants in the United States enter legally through tourists visas and overstay.³

At Texas schools where I worked in the 1990s, I heard Border Patrol Agents state that 80% of illegal human and drug trafficking happens at *legal* ports of entry

Resisting the Border Wall

continued from preceding page

to “War on Drugs” and the “War on Immigrants” – all of which target Mexican immigrants.

NO BORDER WALL – NO MILITARIZATION

The struggle to stop the wall on the border is part of the bigger struggle to stop militarization on the border and to ensure the human rights of border residents and immigrants.

The Department of Homeland Security’s own environmental assessments show that plans for the border wall disproportionately affect low-income, “minority” communities.

In addition, Executive Orders signed by Clinton in 1994 (Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations and EO13045, Protection of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks) would be reason to halt progress on the wall, as would many environmental and historical protection laws.

At this moment in the United States, however, section 102 of the Real ID Act gives Secretary Chertoff and the Department of Homeland Security the right to waive any laws that get in the way of protecting US Citizens from Terrorism.

The area within a hundred miles of the border is essentially becoming a de-constitutionalized zone. “It is not just the physical wall,” said one local resident, “it is the psychological wall that stretches 50 miles to the checkpoint on the road. All of our activities are monitored. We are constantly watched and checked.”

People living in this zone do not have the same rights as people in the rest of the country. Physical violence, verbal violence, and the violence of being oppressed and surveyed by Border Patrol Agents and the FBI are a normal part of life.

Talking with local residents recently, I realized that we were talking for hours about injustices and violence in front

of a three-year-old. There is no way to shelter the children when their sibling, friend, or uncle gets shot by marines on a covert operation. Or when the border patrol watches you from high points around your house, can enter your space at any time, asking you to prove your citizenship and that of your children (any age), or speeds through your neighborhood.

You might be thinking: Why don’t people move from the border, move from those towns?

In Redford, many of the people have ancestral ties dating back thousands of years. They do not know of any other place that their people came from. This is their place.

One of the boys in Redford said, “We want a safe place. We don’t want too much accidents. We want people to drive slow for other kids to ride their bikes safe. That there is not too much violence like in other towns and not too many accidents happen. For people not to fight. Redford is fun. We can go on field trips and do whatever we want to. That there is not too many Border Patrols.”

Other Redford children said, “We want to be able to go to the river like we always do and do things like fish and hunt.” They were excited to rebuild the *jacal* that I rented, and helped collect the river cane and mud – which ended in a mud fight.

A WORLD WITHOUT BORDERS

What would Redford be like without borders?

Redford could be like it was for thousands of years, an abundant farming town with families and friends spending time together, growing food, having barbecues, building things, tending animals, hunting, playing by the river.

Perhaps the bi-national dances in the schoolyard would be revived. The farms could grow labor-intensive crops again because there would be enough people to work in the fields. The children could play by the river and would not have to worry about their parents being arrested, or Border Patrol vehicles with no lights racing by them when they ride their bikes around town.

What would a world without borders be like?

I envision a just global economic system. My neighbor Enrique speaks of trade agreements with “conviviality,” a North American Union like the European Union between the US, Mexico, and Canada.

Without barriers to migration, the US and other dominator countries would need to support the well being of every community and economy on earth. The diversity of all ecosystems and their particular benefits to humans would be honored, and resources would be available in all places so that people would not need to migrate to pockets of richness. Goods and resources would be equally distributed, not hoarded by one country at the expense of another.

The idea that a wall is needed shows failure in the way global capitalism is set up.

NO BORDER WALL MOVEMENT

The No Border Wall movement stems from many branches across the border. For low-income, Indigenous, and Mexican American communities on the border, a border wall, virtual wall, or militarization of any kind is not acceptable. Any discussion that fails to include that perspective adds to these peoples’ vulnerability.

The 500-year-old genocide on the U.S./Mexico border must be stopped. Arnoldo Garcia says, “This crisis is not ours. It is being imposed on us. We need to create long-term relationships and long-term plans between border communities and inland communities.”

We need inland allies – people living further from the border – to fight fiercely against the border wall, because it is risky for those on the front line, along the militarized zone of the border, to do so. Repercussions occur especially in the sparsely-populated rural communities.

RESOURCES AND ACTIONS

How can you learn more and get involved? Here are some activities and groups you can contact:

• Ophelia Rivas, a Tohono O’odham

woman, boldly took a stance against the wall in 2004 despite differing opinions among tribal leadership. She started O'dham Voice Against the Wall Project. Visit www.solidarityproject.org

- In early 2008, the Southwest Workers' Union organized a meeting to bring together people who were working to stop the border wall and who might be allies in this work. Visit www.swunion.org

- Border Social Forum was organized by Ruben Solis of the Southwest Workers Union and other groups in Juarez in 2006. Groups from all across the U.S. and Mexico attended. Visit www.narconews.com/Issue43/article2195.html

- Eloisa Tamez, a Lipan Apache landowner in South Texas, and others calling themselves Lipan Apache Women's Defense, have taken a strong stand against the Border Wall in the media and the courthouse. Lawsuits filed on her behalf by the Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law in Los Angeles show that the Consultation Process of the Department of Homeland Security is illegal. Articles can be found at www.nnirr.org. Financial and other support is needed. Please contact Margo at Sumalhepa.nde.defense@gmail.com, or April at acotte@igc.org

- No Border Wall website, elist, and blogs began in South Texas with Sierra Club organizers, and now have a broad base including birders and citrus growers, conservatives and liberals. The elist is

being used by the 2008 No Border Wall conference community. Visit www.notexasborderwall.org

- Groups in San Diego are doing actions and filing lawsuits to stop illegal ICE (Immigration, Customs Enforcement) raids on city buses in which agents enter public local buses, ask people for



The Rio Grande, a few miles West of Presidio, Texas, where it meets the Rio Conchos. It was straightened and controlled by a levy that was forced on landowners in 1972. The road appears to have been smoothed by Border Patrol Agents so they can look for tracks. Photo courtesy of April Cotte.

citizenship, and pull people who admit they have no paperwork off the bus to waiting prison vans.

- Regular demonstrations have been held in Taylor and Austin, Texas against Hutto Residential Center (formerly a prison), where families caught "illegally" in the United States are being detained and maltreated.

- Organizers are connecting No Border Wall with May 1st immigration rallies across the country.

- Plans are underway for direct actions in South Texas to literally stop the building of the wall on private property. Contact Stephenie at No Border Wall (srherweck@hotmail.com)

- You can also comment about this issue on the Reclaiming Pagan Cluster organizing list, LivRiv@yahoogroups.com

- Please write letters to Senators, Congress people, DHS, and the President expressing your opinion about the border wall and all forms of militarization on the border.

- Support showings of "The Ballad of Esequiel Hernandez," a documentary showing the fatal outcome of militaristic propaganda in the small border town of Redford, Texas. It is scheduled to run on PBS in September 2008.

April Cotte teaches Earth-awareness skills. In Reclaiming circles, she has co-taught Earth Activist Trainings as well as Witchlets in the Woods paths. She lives much of the year near the border in Texas.

SOURCES

¹ Mexiphobia, a film directed by Nevie Owens, has played at film festivals in the West and Southwest. A trailer is on

YouTube.

² National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights. Visit www.nnirr.org

Over-Raided, Under Siege: U.S. Immigration Laws Destroy the Lives of Immigrants (Executive Summary)

³ "Nearly Half of Illegal Immigrants Overstay Visas," All Things Considered, Ted Robbins, June 14, 2006. Online at www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5485917

⁴ Michael Chertoff's Deepest Fears, Terrorists Entering U.S. from Canada, Daily News, Washington Bureau, James Gordon Meek, Sunday, February 10th 2008, at www.nydailynews.com/news/us_world/2008/02/10/2008-02-10_michael_chertoffs_deepest_fears_terroris.html

Six months later they emerged from the woods carrying nothing but an empty can of Bug-Away® and a nearly-inaudible cassette tape, which RQ's editorial team painstakingly transcribed for this issue.

“This is Malaria Valevium wishing you good morning from the Minisculosus Vamperia (Mosquito) headquarters outside the G8 meeting in Kanaskis. Despite our best efforts here, the human world leaders did not seem to pay heed to our petition to reduce the international large scale spraying of anti-malaria mosquito elimination chemicals. They kept swatting us away from the meeting table. In the same vein, a halt to the

We'll come back to the Alsivia Encephalitis clan with the local news after this.

CAN'T GET it up? Here's an exciting new product for all of you with tiny probisci or poor sucking powers: "Blood-EeeZ." Developed through careful breeding with some of the Big Probiscus and Master Sucker clans, this product will quickly increase your probiscus length so you can reach that vital human blood, as well as make sucking it up easier. And it naturally and effectively acts as a lubricant to help you "slip it in" quickly. I personally

That's it for the news. Good night to all. For those of you dying tonight, may your crossing be peaceful and may you rise again.

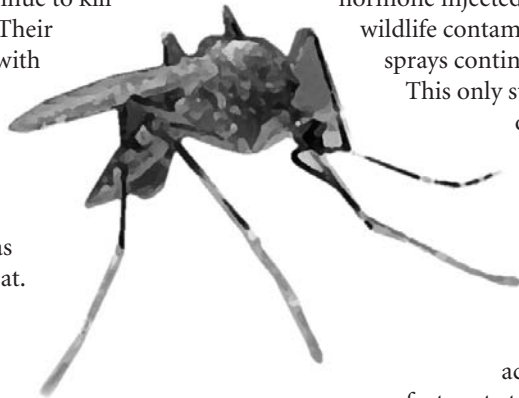


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Introduction

by April Cotte

"I get it now," said Carmen Rivas, a kindergarten teacher, "an initiative is any time you give a group of students a problem that they will be capable of resolving on their own and you give them a safe space to do that in."

She was right, and went on to create some great "initiatives" for her class.

The potential and wonders of cooperative games and initiatives* were brought to us long ago in the works of such masters as Karl Rohnke, Jack Pearse, Andrew Fluegelman, Art Kamiya, Terry Orlick, Benjy Simpson, and all of the folks at Project Adventure.

Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center in Boston has been coaching Hernandez School teachers in their incorporation of games and initiatives in kindergarten through eighth grade classrooms for three years. Teachers now include these activities in their everyday practice. This source book is a collection of our experiences and a guide to creating your own experiential activities. With some imagination, you could make any curriculum into an initiative.

Imagine... Create... Experience! Any moment in the day could be experiential. From lining up for lunch to planning a project, to cleaning up the classroom. Each of these chapters provides frameworks to play within: Time, Repetition, Finding Things, Making Things, Getting Somewhere. Fill in any content you want to these frameworks. I warn you of pitfalls so that you can feel more freedom to change everything else.

At the end of the book are tricks Outward Bound Instructors use in the field. These are your party favors for reading the book. Have fun with them. There are indexes so you can look initiatives up by grade, by application, and by alphabetical order.

Sometimes it surprises me that Hernandez students of all ages continue to be highly enthused to play these games and do these initiatives which I see as means to dynamic and impactful learning. But

* - April uses "initiative" along with game, exercise, working, etc.

then I remember the common thread running through these activities which explains the children's excited smiles. These games and initiatives are fun.

Thank you to Arlene Aguste who asked for this book and to all of the teachers, administrators and students at the Hernandez School for doing these activities with me and your dedication to making the Hernandez School a caring, engaging, and fun place for all.

How to Use This Book

The following sections for each exercise gives more information on working with games and initiatives and some general ideas about the way I describe each type of initiative. If you feel really comfortable doing initiatives and just want to learn some new ones, go to the activity pages. If you want more support, read this section and the introductions to each chapter. If you want to create something new, read "To Create One" in the chapter headings.

Materials

These are all activities that can be done in any school. Most can be done in the classroom but I have indicated when a larger space is preferable. The materials needed should be available in your school as well. Feel free to improvise if they are not.

Application

This section lists different things each initiative will highlight. Some initiatives will naturally cause groups to practice or experience the listed applications, while other initiatives will only work if the group figures out that they need some of what is listed here, such as listening.

In general, games and initiatives are fun. They are something different to do, but they also can be used to reinforce things you are trying to teach through experience. For example, if you are going to teach the scientific method, let the group experience a situation where it is needed through an initiative. When the group gets



stuck, you can introduce the scientific method as a tool. You can also present a concept or subject first, then give the class an initiative where they will need to use it.

While doing these activities all kinds of issues and group dynamics will develop and participants will be invested in addressing them. These provide great opportunities for the class, with some teacher facilitation, to define how they want to act towards each other, create behavioral norms, and hold one another to them. These also may lead to intense conversations about all manner of subjects. We call situations in which issues arise during activities “teachable moments” or “learning opportunities.”



Rather than trying to get past these, we embrace them and let the group learn the lesson they teach.

Initiatives provide isolated situations for addressing behaviors. Someone can work on a specific behavior during the initiative (planned in advance with the teacher). Because it is short and different, they might have success. This is a good time for goal setting.

You can adjust the social intensity of the initiatives and games

through your presentation, guidelines, and the group size (smaller groups are usually easier to solve problems with). Before the activity you can make verbal or written contracts or behavioral plans with students who you think will be particularly challenged.

This provides an opportunity for participants to define what some of their cognitive strengths and challenges are. Wouldn't you love to hear your students talk about their cognitive abilities: "Wow, I did well in that initiative because it involved listening. The King Frog game where you have to watch really carefully is much harder for me."

Procedure

Any of these games and initiatives can be adapted for any grade. Before starting, imagine how the activity might turn out differently due to the abilities and natural tendencies of the group you work with. Trouble shoot. Make sure the way you decide to use it will be safe. Make good guidelines, and of course, have fun.

During games, play and have lots of fun. Your enthusiasm will enhance the group's experience.

During initiatives, explain that you, the facilitator, will not be involved in resolving the initiative (you will stand back and be quiet unless something is unsafe). You will make safety calls. Remember: hold back, be quiet. You have great solution ideas but so do the participants. Let the groups figure it out their way.

I call you the facilitator in this book because people running initiatives do not “teach” anything. You will just support the participants in acting and realizing what their actions have been. Your contribution will come after the activity when your observation of the whole and the parts helps the group realize the impact of the activity, and your neutral stance helps participants resolve and learn from tensions or conflicts that arose.

During initiatives the facilitator may be the banks of the river while the group flows.

Facilitator Framing

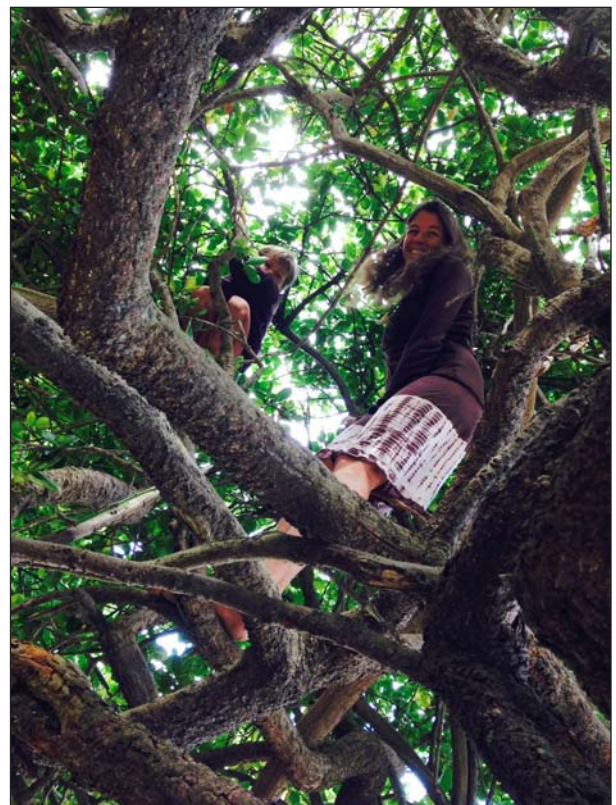
When the wording of the framing is very important for the activity to be safe and successful, I explain it verbatim in this section. Sometimes I do not include a framing because the exigencies of the activity are straightforward and the use of different framings will not change the experience.

Rules and Precautions

The rules and precautions we list are for your reference. We provide ways to avoid the problems that we have encountered in the past but we may or may not address the safety hazards which will come up for your particular group. Create your own guidelines and boundaries to make the activities safe.

After you have explained the activity, before presenting any guidelines, let the group try to come up with their own guidelines. They usually cover what we came up with and will be more invested in following guidelines they created. You can add important guidelines if they do not name them.

Once you are out there doing activities, use your judgment. If a situation does not feel safe to you, *stop action*. “Stopping Action” should not feel like a punishment to the group but a process that must occur in order to continue. You are not doing something to the group by stopping – something



that was occurring caused the stopping. Ask the group why they think things do not feel safe to the facilitator and let them figure out a way to make it feel safe. Your comfort zone for safety may be small, so you may feel you are overprotective. But you also have experience and judgment, and in the end you are responsible for the young people's safety.

Nothing inherent in these games and initiatives needs to be unsafe. At times initiatives and games feel unsafe to participants because of perceived danger. But you, the facilitator, are responsible to make sure that real danger does not exist. This is also in regards to emotional safety, which we consider as important as physical safety when doing these impactful activities.

Initiatives and games provide great opportunities to reinforce the behavior standards set up in your classroom and the vocabulary you are teaching around behavior.

They also create situations where participants must take more responsibility for their own actions. When behaviors arise which do not fit into the controlled environment you have set up for the game or initiative, these are learning opportunities for the participants. We can be happy the activity caused the inappropriate behavior to come out so we could address it, help participants see it, and relate it to their lives.

Possible Debrief Questions

The debrief questions listed for each activity are for your reference. There is no set debrief question or activity you should use for a game or initiative. Use what you think will help your group reflect on and express verbally or creatively what happened to participants individually and as a group during the initiative. If you do use the questions in the source book, use only a few. Focus on one question or theme at a time.

Depending on how you use some of the activities, on a given day you may not want to debrief. For example, you might play a game just for fun.

Creative debriefs using nonverbal mediums for expression are as valuable if not more than verbal discussions. Please see the section on Debriefing at the end of the book for examples.

Our Experience

There is always another way to do an initiative. What I say usually happens is not a prescription. These are models so you will have a sense of the possibilities.



I do not recommend reading them to the group. It is great when a group comes up with a new approach to solving something or to playing a game. It shows that they are really empowered.

If you change the framing directions or rules (consciously or otherwise), you may create a wholly new initiative which the group will accomplish in a wholly new way. Make sure it is still safe. But let them

section 1

Cooperative Games

Birds Fly, Dogs Fly, Cats Fly

Circle Poems

Feelings

Flowers and the Wind

Giants, Wizards, and Elves

How Do You Feel?

King Frog

Quick Lineup

Smile If You Love Me

Touch Your Head

Overall Description for Cooperative Games

There are no winners. Some form of cooperation is required and although there will sometimes be competition there are never winners or losers.

Application

These games provide opportunities to have fun, warm-up, get to know each other better, model desir-

able behaviors, act in ways participants normally may not act, and work hard together at something. The impact from doing cooperative games may not be as deep as during initiatives, but it is there and you can play them over and over again so the impact becomes reinforced. They usually have a flow which, once learned, is repeated so the class can run them.

What Usually Happens

Groups are easily engaged in these activities at all ages. The more the facilitator acts silly, energetic, or whatever the game requires, the more the group will.

Ways to Use Them

Play a cooperative game as a break during a hard project. Play one to emphasize something that will help the group with other things they are doing. There is nothing better (in the world of games) than when a participant comes to the facilitator after an activity and connects what happened in the game to their life.

To Create One

Notice things that engage your class and make a game out of them. Create a flow so they follow a repetitive pattern.

Think of competitive games that you know and create ways to play them cooperatively.

Consider the following:

1. Reflect on when the targeted participants laugh the most during the day and consider how you can reproduce a similar situation which occurs over and over in your game.
2. How will this activity encourage cooperation while being really fun?
3. Troubleshoot what the playing will look like to make sure the rules are sufficient to ensure cooperation and safety.

Birds Fly, Dogs Fly, Cats Fly

Materials

None.

Application

Listening, observation, fun, birds, learning vocabulary in a second language, peer pressure.

Procedure

Participants stand in a circle or wander around the room flapping their wings while the facilitator names different animals, saying the word “fly” after their names. If those animals do fly, participants, flap their “wings.”

Facilitator Framing

“I am going to name creatures and say ‘fly’ after them. If that animal flies, flap your wings. If it does not fly, stand still with your hands at your side.”

Rules and Precautions

Make sure participants have room so their flapping wings do not hit anyone.

Variations

Fish Swim.

For grades 4-8, say names of animals in another language the class is learning for practice.

Possible Debriefing Questions

How did you know when to use your wings? What did it feel like to make a mistake? Did you still take risks after that?

Our Experience

This is best for younger grades, K-3.

Kindergarten 1: This was a wonderful fun game for the group. We played this outside and the class went wild. If I named an animal that did not fly such as “kangaroo flies,” they all imitated its movement by jumping.

3rd Grade: We did this as a fun warm-up before another activity and they all wanted to name something. Since they were studying mammals, they had a great variety for non-flying creatures. We stood in a circle so the group was able to be quieter so they could hear each other, but this allowed them to copy each other rather than risking mistakes.

Circle Poems

Materials

None.

Application

Poetry expedition, rhyming, fun, seeing poetry in a new way, creating something together.

Procedure

Participants stand in a circle. The facilitator says one word, then each person around the circle says a word which rhymes with it. When someone cannot think of a rhyming word, the group can help. If no one in the group can think of a rhyme, the person it stopped on can start a new rhyme.

Facilitator Framing

"I am going to say a word. We will then take turns around the circle saying a word that rhymes with the first word. Do not repeat any words. You can make a sentence with the rhyming word at the end. If a participant cannot think of a word, they can ask the group to help them with words. If no word can be thought of by any one, the person whose turn it is can begin a new rhyme with a new word."

Rules and Precautions

Make sure that helpful participants give the person whose turn it is time to think before giving them ideas.

Variations

ABC poems. Each participant creates the next line of the poem starting with the next letter of the alphabet. These do not have to rhyme. You can pick a theme which all words must fit into. There can be a time limit of 20 seconds for people to think of their word.

Give the group a theme and let them go around the circle associating words to the theme.

Possible Debriefing Questions

Did we just create a poem? Why was that a poem? What did it feel like when people helped you?

Our Experience

8th grade: The class got really into this. They were more interested in standing by the rules than we were. It felt good that helping each other was emphasized rather than someone getting out. This was most fun when the rhyming word ended a sentence which reacted to the sentence before it.

For example, person one said, "Her hair is red." Person two said, "Like that of Fred?" Person three said, "Aren't they wed?"

Feelings

Materials

Make or buy about 50 cards with the names of different feelings on them.

Application

Developing tools, expressing feelings, learning about feelings other than anger, learning about feelings and working with anger.

Procedure

Participants sit in a circle. The facilitator selects a card then makes a face for that particular feeling. The participants imitate it without saying anything. Then, one at a time, participants guess what feeling it was.

Give each participant a card with a feeling on it. One at a time people act out the feeling on their card and the other participants guess what it was.

Facilitator Framing

“Without saying it out loud, see if you can guess what feeling I am expressing with my face. Once you think you know, pretend you feel that way too and make a face to show you feel that way.”

Variations

Participants can pair up with a feeling card and act out a situation that might make someone feel that way. The class can then guess the feeling. In smaller groups, you can say something while expressing a particular emotion with your voice and pass it around the circle like in the game “Telephone” and then share what feeling people thought it was. For example, you might say, “Let’s go to school today.” Each time you pass it around the circle, you can say it with a different emotion such as happiness, sadness, anger.... After everyone has passed the word with a given emotion, participants can guess what the emotion was.

Give participants paper and crayons and tell them stories where someone was treated unfairly. Ask participants to draw out how those people might have felt.

Possible Debriefing Question

What feeling do you think you have the most? Is it important to tell people what you are feeling?
What do you do when you get angry?

Our Experience

2nd Grade: In the days right before December vacation, which is a hard time for a lot of children, the teacher's goal was to do something to help her class express how they feel in different situations and to learn some tools (such as drawing) for expressing their emotions. We started by imitating the teacher's face so the participants would think about a lot of different feelings. We did drawings showing how people were feeling and talked about them.

We ended our discussion by asking each participant to share the different things they do to deal with anger. We encouraged those who had no coping mechanisms of their own to try out something that someone else had shared next time they were angry. The second graders seemed very receptive to all of this. The teacher felt like she achieved her goal.

2nd Grade: Participants selected cards with feelings and acted out a situation that might make you feel that way one at a time in front of the group while other participants raised their hands to guess what the feeling was. They loved acting and guessing. It got them to really think through some feelings other than anger (and in a way experience them while they were acting them out). It was hard for them to sit while everyone took a turn so this may work best in smaller groups.

Flowers and the Wind

Materials

Big space for running.

Mark a center line across the play area and two base lines about 25 feet from the center in opposite directions.

Application

Learning flower names, fun, small group decisions.

Procedure

The class is divided into two teams, the “flowers” and the “wind.” The groups plan at their safety lines (the lines marked 25 feet from the center line) without letting each other hear. The flowers choose an original flower that they will be and the wind players think of three flower names for guessing. The groups then line up facing each other on either side of the center line. The wind players make three guesses of which flower all the flower players are. If the correct flower is named, the flower players run back to their safety line. If a wind player tags a flower player, the flower player joins the wind players. If the winds cannot think of the correct flower name, the flowers chase the winds back to the wind starting line. After each round, switch which team will be winds and which will be flowers.

Facilitator Framing

“For the first round, this half of the group will be flowers and the other half will be the wind. Both groups will go to their base line and plan. The flowers will plan which flower to be and the wind will plan which three flowers to guess.

“Once both groups are ready, they will meet at the center line. When I say, ‘flowers,’ the flowers will listen while the wind makes three guesses as to what the flowers are. If the wind correctly guesses what the flowers are, the flowers must say their name. Once they have said it, the wind chases the flowers to the flower’s base line. Any flowers the wind tags join the wind side for the next round.

If the wind does not guess what the flowers are after three tries, the flowers chase the wind to the wind's base line. Any winds they tag join the flower's side.

"This sequence will be repeated indefinitely until everyone is on one side or there is no more time."

Variations

Replace the Flower and Wind theme with your own themes. For example: Bugs and Dirt, Neighbors and Dogs.

Possible Debriefing Questions

How did you include everyone in the decision of what flower to be or which to guess? Was it important to include everyone in the decision? Who won?

Our Experience

6th Grade: We played this using occupations which one group acted out while the other group made their guess. The participants loved the flow.

Giants, Wizards, and Elves

Materials

Big space for running.

Mark a center line across the play area and two base lines about 25 feet from the center in opposite directions.

Application

Fun, being silly, quick group decisions, positive non-threatening interactions, nonverbal expression.

Procedure

The class is divided into two teams. The groups go to their safety lines (the lines marked 25 feet from the center line) and plan which one of three imaginary characters they will be without letting each other hear. Each team also makes a back-up plan which they will be if both groups are the same thing.

The groups then line up facing each other on either side of the center line. At the count of three, both sides make the motion for their character. The side with the dominant character then chases the other side back to their base line. Anyone the participants on the dominant side tag joins their side for the next round until everyone is on the same side.

Facilitator Framing

“There are three characters you must learn about in order to play this game. Please copy what I do so you learn them. Giants do this (raise your arms above you head, hands pointing forward and say grrr). Wizards do this (bend your knees, one leg forward, one leg back, stick one arm out pointing your

finger and say zzzzzzz). Elves do this (squat down, put your hands next to your ears and wiggle your fingers saying de de de de).

“Giants beat wizards by stepping on them, wizards beat elves by casting spells on them, and elves beat giants by tripping them.

“Each side will plan what character they will be and a back-up character to be if both groups choose the same character. We will then meet at the middle line and count to three. At three, both sides will do the motion of their character.

“The side with the dominant creature will then chase the other side to their base line. Anyone they tag along the way will join their side. If both sides demonstrate the same character, they will immediately make the motion of their back-up character and play according to those.”

Possible Debriefing Questions

Was there any reason why one side was dominant and the other side was not?

How important was it which side you were on?

Our Experience

4th Grade: We played this on Halloween in costume and despite the wildness generally exhibited among school children on this day, this game remained safe emotionally and physically and the participants were entirely engaged playing together. There were no wanderers and people were respectful of each other when deciding what to be. I credit this to this most simple trait, quoted from a student: “This game is fun.”

Another student said, “I like the way we think of different strategies. I like how we keep running around and sometimes we can’t figure out what’s what.”

8th Grade: The teacher made it okay to be silly so the main outcome of this game was fun. Normally-hostile classmates accustomed to dissing one another were being silly together and not putting each other down. Everyone participated although when strategizing about what to be, the boys dominated the decisions. In general, the fun helped them all work together and gave them an avenue to relate to each other in a positive, fun way.

How Do You Feel?

Materials

Make or buy about 50 cards with the names of different feelings on them. Write out some scenarios of situations that would be familiar to your students which result in strong feelings of different types. (See the following page for our examples.)

Application

Familiarity with feelings other than anger, connecting feelings to situations, expressing and naming a range of emotions.

Procedure

Split the class into two teams, each with their own space. Each team gets half of the feelings cards and lays them all out on some desks. About ten feet away from these desks each team should have a presentation desk. The facilitator reads a scenario and the two teams search for cards which explain how they might feel in that scenario. The first team to find their cards and put them on their presentation desk gets one point, then both teams get one point for each card they found. The facilitator keeps a tally of points on the board.

Rules and Precautions

The facilitator reserves the right to deny them a point if a feeling is totally out of place but only after the group has explained why they might feel that way. This is a competitive game but it is effective in getting folks to think about feelings. You can address the fact that this is competitive by having one of the scenarios be about losing this competitive game and how that feels.

Variations

Have students each develop a scenario to trade with the other teams. Small groups act out the scenarios and the other groups guess what the characters in the role plays felt like.

Discuss what the characters in the scenarios could have done to express their feelings in productive ways.

Possible Debriefing Questions

What do you think you feel the most? Is it easier to say you feel some things than other things? When you say you are angry, what else are you feeling?

Our Experience

6th Grade: Both classes loved this game. I made up role plays based on incidents I saw happening in the school and other situations I thought might be familiar. I ran out of role plays because they wanted to keep going on and on. I think it was worth doing something competitive to get 6th graders to think about different feelings. This supported our discussion the next week on feedback.

How Do You Feel: Sample Scenarios

A teacher is giving a boring lecture. It bores you because you don't understand what they are talking about. You have 30 minutes more to sit through this. How do you feel?

Jorge has a crush on Maria. Looking for any opportunity to talk with her, he aggressively steals her book bag, pushes her away, and switches his beat-up book with her good one. How does Maria feel?

It is your turn to speak in class. You like speaking because you want to be on TV someday. In the middle of your sentence, everyone else starts talking and playing keep-away with someone's shoe. How do you feel?

You usually horse around in class but today you are interested in the subject so you want to pay attention. Your friends will not leave you alone to listen. How do you feel?

Billy and Joselina are horsing around in the classroom. Laughing, Joselina runs out of the room knocking Billy's books off his desk on purpose. This causes Billy's young author's book to rip. Billy had put a lot of time into perfecting the drawing on the cover and now his book was ruined. How does Billy feel? Billy yells at Joselina, "You always go too far. You have no respect for anyone, stupid." He then dumps Joselina's books on the floor in revenge. How does Joselina feel?

Lissette and Ricki are taking turns shooting hoops trying to one-up each other with better shots. Lissette comes running in for a one-handed hook shot and Ricki trips her to be funny. Ricki has done this before but this time she falls and rips her shirt sleeve just as the rest of the class walks into the gym. The class laughs at her and teases her. Lissette makes a face at Ricki, throws the ball to the other side of the gym, and stomps away saying, "I'm not going to play this stupid game anymore." What is Lissette feeling?

Three friends are in the girls' room talking: Carolina, Katie, and Rosemary. Rosemary walks out and Carolina begins talking about her to Katie. Carolina tells secrets about Rosemary and insults her behind her back. Katie likes Rosemary but she bad-mouths Rosemary anyway because she is afraid Carolina will not like her if she doesn't. Rosemary can hear them talking about her from outside the door. How does Rosemary feel?

King Frog

Materials

None.

Application

Observation, memory, creativity, fun, focus, nonverbal expression.

Procedure

The group stands in a circle. Each participant creates a hand signal for themselves. One person is appointed the King Frog, a role which comes with special privileges. (Usually we begin with the facilitator as King Frog to set the tone until the group is familiar with the game and rules).

The King Frog begins the game by making their hand signal followed by someone else's. The person whose hand signal the King Frog made, then makes their own signal followed by someone else's. This continues until someone makes a mistake or cannot think of a signal to make. Only the King Frog can judge whether someone is out. Other participants cannot make a comment about whether someone is out, or the King Frog can make them out. The group can make a decision only when it is the King Frog who made the mistake.

The group's goal is to get the King Frog out.

When someone makes a mistake or cannot think of a signal to make, they go to the outside of the circle and try to distract the other participants without touching them. The King Frog then begins the game again. The last player to remain in the circle without messing up becomes the new King Frog.

Rules and Precautions

You may want to discuss appropriate hand signals with your group before beginning. Fortunately, we have not had a problem with this in the past.

Possible Debriefing Questions

What skills did you use to play these games (e.g., listening, memory, motor skills...)? How did it feel to get out? What did it feel like to be King Frog? Why?

Our Experience

Our middle school students love this game. It is very calming for the facilitator to ensure safety on this game as the flow is good, it is quick-moving and contained.

6th Grade: The 6th graders liked making up signs for themselves. They all wanted to be the King Frog. Playing in the playground was more interesting to the people who were out than distracting the remaining participants but as soon as the new King Frog gained power, they all ran back to the circle to play the next round.

7th Grade: A teacher said, “It’s a blast. It works on visual skills. You have to pay attention. It’s quite amazing how focused they get. They tend to forget about getting King Frog out. Plus, the class can take over and run the game.”

8th Grade: The 8th grade had a lot of fun with this game. They just loved getting picked by each other. I do not recall anyone ever getting out – they were having so much fun they just ignored mistakes and continued the game.

Quick Lineup

Materials

None.

Application

Fun, working together, observation.

Procedure

The group makes a square around the facilitator. The facilitator turns around in the same spot and say, "Square Lineup." At this command, the group must move and reorient themselves to their original positions, facing the same part of the facilitator and standing in the exact sequence (i.e., same partners on left and right). Once a side is together, they will grasp hands and yell a prearranged call to show they are done.

After a few rounds in which the facilitator has turned in the same spot, they can move out of the square and turn in a new spot before yelling, "Square Lineup." The whole group will run to the new spot to make the square around the facilitator there. If the facilitator can stand on their head without injuring themselves, it provides a good challenge for the group.

Facilitator Framing

"Make a square around me. Observe the order of the line you are standing in – who is standing on your left and on your right. Observe which part of the facilitator you are facing – my front, my back, my left or right. I am going to move. When I say, 'Square Lineup,' make the same square around me so that you are each facing the same side of me as you are now and you are standing next to the same people. Once a side is in the right place, they should grasp hands, raise them and yell 'oohey!'" (Use a form of cheer that is familiar to your group. The louder and sillier you are demonstrating the cheer, the better).

Rules and Precautions

Be prepared for some pushing to occur. If you think it may be a problem with your group, talk about it before you begin. The sides can become competitive but there is no consequence for finishing first or last unless you make one. I often forget to acknowledge who finished first but they do like to be acknowledged.

Variations

This can be framed so that all sides must be sequenced for the whole group to yell “oohey.” Thus it becomes much more of a group initiative.

Possible Debriefing Questions

What made this easier? What was a strategy you used to maintain your line?

Our Experience

For the first couple of rounds, individuals run around and get madly mixed up. At some point, the sides realize that they can move together and be more efficient. Sometimes the whole square decides to move together and help other sides to be quicker. If you frame this so that the whole square must be complete before “oohey” is yelled, it will probably take a few rounds before the whole group gets it together and people start trying to help each other get in place.

4th Grade: A fourth grader went into the center and the class liked that a lot. A student said, “It was fun. It was a running around game which was a good game for us.” Another said, “It was hard because we had to stay on one side of you and people were getting mixed up.”

6th Grade: The class had fun with this and did not push excessively.

Smile If You Love Me

Application

Fun, positive non-threatening communication.

Procedure

Stand in a circle with one participant in middle. The middle person goes up to others one at a time and says, “Smile if you love me.” The person they select must say, “Honey, I love you, but I just can’t smile,” without smiling. If they smile, they go into the center. If they do not smile, the person in the center attempts with a new person and some better antics to cause smiles.

Rules and Precautions

A no-touching rule or discussion about respectful touch should be in place before beginning.

Possible Debriefing Questions

How did it feel when you smiled and had to go to the center? Did the group support individuals?

Our Experience

I have felt groups support each other a lot playing this game both by helping the person in the center and by laughing with those who are trying not to smile. Since smiling gets you out, getting out is laughable so people are not made fun of for it.

8th Grade: This class really loved this game. They did not do inappropriate things but simply had fun getting each other to smile. I think it allowed them a closeness such as having eye contact with each other which many of them felt but could not always express in the social order of the class.

Touch Your Head

Materials

None.

Application

Fun, listening, naming body parts, making mistakes gracefully, accepting other peoples mistakes, helping each other, learning vocabulary words in a second language.

Procedure

The group stands in a circle. The facilitator says (in Spanish or English): “Touch your _____,” naming different parts of the body one at a time while touching either the parts being named or other parts which were not named.

Facilitator Framing

“Copy what I say, not what I do.”

Rules and Precautions

The participants may want people to “get out” if they make a mistake so plan in advance what you will do with this. You can set it up so when participants make a mistake it is okay and everyone continues. Or, those who have erred form a separate circle and start a second game of “Touch Your Head.” You can also ask participants to help each other so the whole class gets it right.

Variations

You can use this to practice observing instead by saying, “Copy what I do, not what I say.”

For grades 4-8, you can say the scientific names of the body parts to practice anatomy. You could also name body parts in a foreign language.

Possible Debriefing Questions

Which did you pay more attention to, what I said, or what I did?

Our Experience

This is best for grades K-3. This can help participants determine whether they are visual learners or verbal learners although it also shows what they have been most trained in.

Kindergarten 1: They were really into this and had fun. They definitely looked more than listened because they were still learning the names of body parts, but classmates helped each other touch the right thing. We named the body parts both in English and Spanish.

Kindergarten 2: They enjoyed this for about five minutes.

section 2

Repetition Games

All My Neighbors

Circle Up

Find the Leader (page 98)

Group Juggle

I See

Moment in the Spotlight

Song and Motion

Zoe's Game

Application

A sequence once learned is done over and over.

These activities are calming even when they involve running around because once participants learn them, they know what to expect and they can fall into the rhythm. They are calming for teachers because little facilitation is required for the group to play them.

These are good games to start out with because they are comfortable. Everyone is automatically included by the set-up of the game. The group practices going a bit out of control then regaining control.

What Usually Happens

Groups at all ages want to play these endlessly. Participants have fun even when there is little creativity. Everyone wants to be the leader. It feels good for the leaders when everyone responds to them.

Ways to Use Them

Use these early on and then do them regularly. Once the group knows them, they are a calming treat to go back to. One teacher found a sequence that centered and calmed her group so they did it at the start of every day. Word repetition like that in the game “I See” can bring the class into focus at any time.

How to Create One

Make a game of repetition with anything that your class engages in that can be done over and over with a slight difference each time. Repetition or learning and reproducing a sequence can itself be the challenge as in “Group Juggle” (see page 84).

Consider the following

1. What arrangement should people be in to play? Some examples include: wandering around, sitting in a group, or standing in a circle.
2. Is the repetition sequence simple enough? Engaging enough?
3. At what point is there room for creativity?

Young people love rituals, especially fun ones. I have heard teachers set up catch phrases that participants respond to. Some classes have songs for cleaning, songs for lining up, etc.

All My Neighbors

Materials

Mark a spot for each participant to stand in a circle with chalk, tape, or ripped up pieces of paper. Remove one spot.

Application

Getting to know each other, fun, big group game.

Procedure

One participant stands in the center of the circle and tells people who meet a particular qualification to move to a new spot in the circle. For example, they say, “All my neighbors who are wearing brown.” Everyone who is wearing brown plus the person in the middle of the circle must find a new spot in the circle. There is one spot too few, so someone new will end up in the center of the circle and name a new qualification for their neighbors. You can also name qualities and talk about how participants are feeling. For example, “All my neighbors who are nervous about this school year.”

Facilitator Framing

Stand in the middle of the circle and say something like, “I am going to name which people need to find a new spot in the circle: ‘All my neighbors who....’ If you meet the criteria you must quickly move to a new spot in the circle.

“The person who does not find a spot stands in the middle and starts a new round. You cannot physically push someone out of your spot nor can you move to the spot next to you.”

Rules and Precautions

You cannot physically move someone out of your spot nor can you move to a spot next to you.

Variations

This can be called “Who would you like to meet?” In this version the participant in the middle of the circle would say, “I would like to meet everyone who....” Participants can sit on chairs.

Possible Debriefing Questions

How did it feel to get stuck in the middle? Was it easier to share things about yourself while playing this or while having discussions? Why?

Our Experience

I have yet to meet anyone who does not enjoy this game. It is really easy to play and provides a comfortable way to get to know people. We have played in classrooms and outside.

6th Grade: The 6th graders really enjoyed this game even though they already knew each other. The longer we played (and we played for nearly an hour), the more intense the questions got. They found this to be an outlet for sharing all kinds of things with each other. One student said, “It was fun. We got to call people and when they got up, we got to run around.”

Circle Up

Materials

Big space for running.

Application

Setting safety standards, defining boundaries, listening, big group challenge, fun.

Procedure

The facilitator shows the designated places where the group can wander and where the group will stand in a circle for a “Circle up” and demonstrates how to take a “Time out” by freezing. The group then wanders around the designated area. When the facilitator calls out, “Circle up,” participants make a circle in the designated place. When the facilitator says, “Time out,” all participants freeze silently where they are standing. When the facilitator says “Break,” participants wander around in the designated area.

Facilitator Framing

“When I say, ‘Circle up,’ quickly make a circle in this same spot and be silent until you hear me say, ‘Circle break.’ When I say ‘Circle break,’ you can wander in this designated area (I run around and show them the designated area). When I say, ‘Time out,’ immediately stop where you are and freeze silently. Try to be the best statue you can be. When I say ‘Break,’ you can wander again. Look at the other participants as well as listening to my instructions. You may not hear me say it, but as soon as you see others circling or freezing, join them.”

Rules and Precautions

Make sure that you designate an area that you are totally comfortable with people wandering in and hold the group to this area.

Variations

Participants can be told instructions at each “Circle up” or “Time out” for how they will wander, for example; “wander like you are in peanut butter, wander like you are really light like a balloon, wander around like you are your favorite animal.” Add precautions when necessary such as “Without touching anyone else....”

Possible Debriefing Questions

How well did you follow instructions individually? How well did you follow instructions as a group? When might a teacher want you to “circle up” or take a “time out?”

Our Experience

Quick transitions are more fun.

2nd Grade: We invented this game to develop the children’s ability to transition from chaos to control in the playground. Knowing that the group would excitedly “circle up” upon command made it safe to play less-controlled games.

The class loved this. It became a game in itself. They had the greatest time just wandering around and yelling. Despite their yelling, they were very good at following instructions quickly, which showed us that they were observing each other.

4th Grade: The 4th graders loved this. We played it in the gym, combining it with “I See.” They were very loud but when it was time to circle up, they made a perfect circle immediately. We did all kinds of creative things during the wandering times such as yelling, imitating trees in the wind, birds, and a buffalo herd. I always found the biggest conglomeration of people and stood near them when I said circle up so their momentum would influence the rest of the group into the circle.

Group Juggling

Materials

Numerous balls or soft objects for throwing (objects you could use include: sponges, clean erasers, rolled up socks, or crumpled paper).

Application

Observation, listening skills, focus, learning names, fun.

Procedure

The group stands in a circle. The facilitator says, “Here, _____,” naming a participant and tossing a ball to them underhand. The participant then thanks the facilitator by name, names a participant who has not yet received the ball, and tosses it to them. Once everyone in the group has received and tossed the ball, we throw it around the circle again in the same order saying names and thanks.

Once the group has the sequence of throwing the ball to each other down, the facilitator can introduce new objects into play by tossing them in order as well. It is fun for people to

deal with the surprise of having numerous objects thrown at them. You can end after that, or the group can further challenge themselves to see how many objects they can juggle simultaneously while being polite by naming and thanking each other.

Facilitator Framing

“Let’s go around the circle and introduce ourselves the way we would like to be called. Now, I am going to say someone’s name and toss this ball underhand to them. Being very polite, they will thank me and say my name, then they will repeat the sequence with someone else. Remember who you throw the ball to because we are going to repeat this. Help each other out with your names.”

I do not say anything when I start adding objects. Once the initial surprise and excitement of juggling numerous objects has passed, I collect all of the objects again. I then say, “How many objects do you

think we can juggle at the same time?” Once the group has set a goal, I ask them, “What are some things that will help us meet our goal to juggle ____ objects?”

Rules and Precautions

Throw the objects underhand. Use objects that won't injure people if they get out of control.

Possible Debriefing Questions

How did you feel when I started adding the extra objects and they were all being thrown around together? What did you do to help the group juggle successfully? Were you able to remain polite? Which do you think was more important, being polite or juggling quickly? Why?

Our Experience

Groups get a kick out of this as a “Get to Know You” game. They all get very engaged when new objects enter the sequence which they are focusing so hard to maintain. Name learning usually becomes secondary to speed. Groups also find it exciting when they are challenged to juggle as many balls in the air as possible.

Kindergarten 1: We only used one ball at a time and had participants name the person they were throwing to first. The concept of remembering who you threw to was too difficult for these folks but the teacher felt it was good practice for them to throw one ball to each other (as they always want to throw with a teacher not with each other). The circle was a nice controlled place for them to practice in.

I See

Materials

None.

Application

Listening, following, observing, creating.

Procedure

Participants wander around the room. Whenever the facilitator says, “I see,” the participants answer with, “What do you see?” The Facilitator names some activity the group will do such as, “children hopping on one foot around the room.” This is repeated over with new activities each time. You can also tell the group that if you say “Circle up,” it means they should get into a circle in the center of the room as quickly as possible.

The following are some sample activities

Dancing like ballerinas

Walking like they are in peanut butter

Joining together to make a whale

Skipping around the room singing

Acting like they are crying

Making a circle with three other people

Facilitator Framing

“When I say, ‘I see,’ you respond by asking, ‘What do you see?’ I will then name an action for you to do. We will repeat this with new actions every time. If I say, ‘Circle up,’ you should get into a circle in

the center of the room as quickly as possible and listen.”

Rules and Precautions

Practice the verbal (“I see,” “What do you see?”) sequence and “Circle up” before asking the group to do a really wild action. If any unsafe behaviors come up, you can call a circle and address them.

Variations

Teach the group that you will say, “April Fools” or another word instead of saying, “Circle up.”

Create any command action sequence that you will include intermittently by saying, “I see.” For example, “When I say ‘Biff,’ you all must run and touch a wall, then come back and make a circle while I try to tag you. Anyone I tag helps me tag the other people the next time I say ‘Biff.’”

Possible Debriefing Questions

How did you know what to do – through observation or listening? When everyone said together, “What do you see?” and then listened quietly, it was easy to give and receive instructions. What could we do in class like this?

Our Experience

2nd Grade: A sure way to engage second graders. It was a great way to get some energy out before starting more complex games. They loved to be animals. This did not stand on its own for the 2nd graders because after a few rounds they sought out more structured activities.

4th Grade: This enthralled the 4th graders. We did it in combination with “Circle Up” in the gym and had a wonderful time. The flow and repetition made it really easy for the facilitator and fun for the group. The group was able to really get silly and then get themselves under control again without the facilitator having to do anything more than say, “I see.” I always went to the biggest conglomeration of people to say, “I see,” so the sound of their response, “What do you see?” drew the attention of the rest of the group. They want to play every day.

Moment in the Spotlight

Materials

None.

Application

Learning names, observing others, giving others attention, awareness of others, creativity, copying, feeling special, receiving attention.

Procedure

The group stands in a circle. One at a time, participants say their name and do a motion. The rest of the group will then say their name and imitate their motion together.

Facilitator Framing

"Today is your day to have a moment in the spotlight. Select a movement or motion to present to the group. You will say your name, then perform your motion. The whole group will then say your name and imitate or copy your motion."

Rules and Precautions

Make sure the motions participants choose are something everyone in the group is physically capable of doing.

Variations

The group repeats all the motions they have learned in order before doing the new one. This helps reinforce names and makes people feel special over and over.

Instead of using names you can attach sounds to the motions. This helps people practice verbal expression without language getting in the way. See Zoe's Game.

Describe a theme that people's motions should express such as "your favorite activity" or "something that makes you special."

Possible Debriefing Questions

How did you decide what motion to do? What did you need to do in order to copy the motion correctly?

Our Experience

Kindergarten 1: We did this in the cafeteria early in the school year and it went well. This class was very good at paying attention to each other and copying. They had trouble coming up with their own unique motions. It was important to demonstrate a number of possible motions first. There were also a lot of cases of shyness which were overcome in one class but not in another. The teachers had to actively keep all individuals connected to the activity.

One teacher emphasized paying attention in order to imitate the action. Later in the year, participants' motions were more creative. The teachers felt that by doing this before and after, it was a good assessment tool. They liked the way it got the students to give each other the attention and that it gave them experience expressing themselves in front of the group.

Kindergarten 2: We did this on a rug in the classroom and it went well. The teacher said it was useful to see her class do this activity because she saw things about the students she does not usually get to see. She realized that they were not very able to think of their own motions, so expressing themselves creatively with their bodies was an important thing for them to practice. She also noticed that one child who always puts himself out there negatively in class was too shy to do it during the big group initiative. This gave her insight into his behavior.

First Grade: They were much more creative than the kindergarten in terms of the motions they chose. We realized they would have more fun with motions in a bigger space or outside. The classroom confined them.

6th Grade: We had fun with this as an opener. Students were comfortable after the first few participants had their "moment" and were creative and expressive.

Song and Motion

Materials

None.

Application

Creativity, observation, paying attention to others, centering, focus, ritual.

Procedure

Sit in a circle and sing a song. The last line of the song involves a hand motion. The participants take turns around the circle creating a new hand motion at the end of the song which the others imitate. Do this every day so all know the flow and nothing needs to be spoken.

Facilitator Framing

"You will each have a turn to create a hand motion at the end of the song which we will all copy."

Our Experience

Kindergarten 2: One teacher did this activity daily with her class. She says, "It calms them down. It helps them work better the rest of the day. It starts them together rather than in separate pods."

Zoe's Game

Materials

None.

Application

Fun, observation, copying, verbal expression.

Procedure

Participants stand in a circle. One person stands in the middle and makes a motion with their whole body and a loud sound. The rest of the group imitates them. The person in the center walks up to another participant. The chosen participant goes into the center doing the original motion then begins a new motion and a new noise. The group continues to do the original motion and noise until the new participant begins the new one.

Facilitator Framing

Stand in the center of the circle and demonstrate making a very silly motion and a really loud sound. Encourage the whole group to join you by motioning to them. Then explain the following:

"The person in the center of the circle will do a very silly motion and make a very loud sound. Once the group starts imitating it, the person in the center will move over to someone else still doing their motion and select them, without touching them, to be in the center and begin a new motion and sound." (I demonstrate this.) "The group must keep making the old motion and sound until the new one is begun by the center person."

Rules and Precautions

I do not force people to go in the center but I encourage them to, telling them that any motion and sound they make will be fine. I do not let people stand around in the circle and not participate as this can discourage silliness. You may need to warn participants to do motions that everyone can do.

Variations

This is similar to *Moment in the Spotlight* but it has more flow and does not involve memorization.

Possible Debriefing Questions

How did it feel to be in the center? What did the group do that made you feel comfortable to make a loud sound and a silly motion?

Our Experience

Kindergarten 1: We all stood in a circle with no one in the center. I did not explain the activity but just said, “copy me” and started by making about 20 different sounds and motions which they all copied. They really liked this. They all wanted to make their own sounds so we took turns going around the circle.

This was interesting because they were all too shy to take turns when we played “*Moment in the Spotlight*,” but in “*Zoe’s Game*,” they all begged to take turns. I think it helped them to start by following and making funny sounds. They loved to imitate animals on the floor for their motions. They could not get enough of this game. We started with it each time I worked with them throughout the year.

6th Grade: The 6th grade really liked this. They jumped right into it with no shame. It allowed them to be silly and let energy out and it was similar enough to dancing that it was “cool.”

Teachers: The teachers had a lot of fun playing this game. It was an excellent “Welcome Back to School” game to rekindle camaraderie.



section 3

Finding Things

Barnyard

Find the Leader

Shapes

Words and Definitions

Description

Participants are challenged to look for an object or for other people while following guidelines.

Application

Many of these exercises bring people into contact with others whom they may not get together with otherwise. They are fun because of the excitement of “the hunt.” Keeping these activities flowing is important but can be a challenge.

Understanding the concepts of “like things” such as colors, shapes, animals and the concept of words and definitions.

Ways to Use Them

Use the framework of finding things with anything you are studying. Scavenger hunts are fun. A teacher sets up a mystery. Participants have to find all the clues, then piece together the solution. Surveys and statistics are engaging when set up as something to find.

How to Create Them

The finding can be so difficult it can last for weeks and involve lots of research or be quick and simple. Consider the following:

1. Think of a theme you want the group to become familiar with or themes you think the group will have fun with.
2. Keep some key information secret or not apparent so real excitement of finding is possible and is realized.
3. Think of a flow that will keep participants engaged.
4. Make sure the number of clues matches the number of participants so no one will be left out.

What Usually Happens

Participants get very excited about “the hunt.” As soon as you give out the clues they will be ready to start – make sure you are.

Be aware that people may switch clues around to be with friends. You can allow this to happen and discuss it later or create guidelines which will prevent it.

Barnyard

Materials

Write the names of animals which make good sounds on cards in sets of four so there is one card for each participant . For example, write pig on four cards, cow on four cards, etc. The number of cards should equal the number of people in the class.

Application

Fun, helping each other, verbal expression, being silly.

Procedure

Hand an animal card to each student. They will then wander around the room seeking the other animals like them but they can not use words or show their cards to anyone. They can only make the sound their animal makes. Once they find animals like them, they should all get into a small circle.

Facilitator Framing

“Do not tell anyone what animal you are. When I say, “farmhouse,” you can only make your animal sound. You can not speak human. Your task is to find all of the other animals like you by listening.

“Once you have found an animal like you, stay together. Find the rest like you and come back to the circle as a group. If I say, ‘farmhouse quiet,’ everyone must freeze and be silent.”

Rules and Precautions

Some participants may be more interested in wandering around and making animal sounds than in finding their matches. Set good boundaries and emphasize finding matches before starting.

Variations

Make the cards with only pairs matching rather than groups of four or five.

Use sounds other than animals such as a fire engine, a faucet, the wind....

Blindfold participants or have them close their eyes. Make sure they will be safe wandering blindfolded in the area you are playing in. Set up consequences such as removal from the game for people who do not keep themselves or others safe.

Possible Debriefing Questions

What did you do when you found the animals like you? How did it feel to become part of a group?

Our Experience

Kindergarten 1: We sat in a circle. They all closed their eyes. I made animal sounds and they guessed which animal it was. Then I closed my eyes, they made animal sounds, and I guessed. They were really into that. Without teacher guidance, they basically all made one animal sound without anyone planning it or saying what they would do.

3rd Grade: One class enjoyed playing make-believe more than finding the like animals. Making the sounds of their own animals led to imitating the animals which was much more important for these folks than finding the group of people making the same sounds. I think they could have played animals all day. Some people did get in groups and tried to pull in the stray animals but it was quite a challenge for them to negotiate these convergent interests. We decided to give them many more opportunities to play make-believe animals.

4th Grade: We went outside and played this. Participants started in a circle and closed their eyes. Two facilitators kept them in the area of the group. They really enjoyed the challenge of finding like animals.

Find the Leader

Materials

None.

Application

Working together, observation, copying.

Procedure

Participants sit in a circle. One participant is selected to be the Guesser and leaves the room to wait outside. The rest of the group chooses a Leader and tries to follow the movements and gestures of the designated Leader.

For example, if the Leader claps, the rest of the group claps. The Leader may then start snapping or touching their head. The rest of the group copies the new motion.

The Guesser returns to the room and stands in the center of the group while the Leader continues making movements and the group copies them. The Guesser has three chances to guess who the Leader is. When the Guesser guesses who the Leader is or makes three wrong guesses, the Leader becomes the Guesser and a new Leader is picked.

Rules and Precautions

Some participants will not be able to figure out who the leader is. Be aware when this happens and encourage the Leader to change motions more quickly. Give the Guesser tips on how to observe more effectively or let a frustrated Guesser choose someone to replace themselves.

Variations

Play this with singing instead of hand motions.

Possible Debriefing Questions

What skills did participants and Leaders use in order to trick the Guesser? What skills did the Guessers use to figure out who was leading? Are there things you might notice in your everyday life if you listened and observed that carefully? What?

Our Experience

Encourage participants not to look directly at the Leader as this will easily give the Guesser clues or let participants figure out for themselves that looking at the Leader gives them away. I have seen groups develop strategies to make it harder to guess the Leader.

4th Grade: This game was well liked. All participants wanted to have turns as Leaders and Guessers. They were very focused and ran the game without my input. They warned each other not to look at the Leader, planned the flow of the game, and decided and resolved conflicts about whose turn was next.

Shapes

Materials

Music if possible (not necessary). Colored paper cut into several shapes.

Application

Learning shapes and colors, working together, observation, following instructions, helping each other, group awareness.

Procedure

Hand out one shape to each child. Explain that when the music stops they are to find one person or everyone with the same shape. Start the music. Stop the music. The next time the music stops, you can have them find the people with the same color, then the same shape and color. Or you can have them switch shapes when the music starts again and find people with the same shape as theirs over and over, but they will always have new shapes. Set it up so participants will help those who cannot find their matches.

Facilitator Framing

“I am giving you each a shape. When I say, ‘shape,’ find the person or people who have the same shape as you and stay together. Once everyone has found their matches, stand together and I will name a new thing for you to find.”

The second directions might be, “This time find people with the same color card.”

Rules and Precautions

You will want to designate what groups or pairs should do once they find each other in order to ensure a flow in the game. I always count the shapes and colors we are using very carefully to make sure everyone will have a match.

Variations

Place the shapes on the floor scattered around the room. When the music stops, participants will pick up a shape and find the other participants with the same shape cards. When the music starts, they put their cards down and wander to the music again. The second time it stops, they pick up a card and find the people with the same color cards. Switching between shapes and colors every time ensures that the cards will be mixed up.

Hold up written instructions each time the music stops such as, “Find the people with the same shape,” or, “Find the person with the same shape and color as you have and make a bridge with them.”

Put different numbers of dots on the shapes so some match and have them find the other participants with the same number of dots for counting practice.

Put letters on the shapes with capitals and lower case letters and have participants find the same letter in the other case or have all the vowels find each other and all the consonants find each other. This may motivate them to learn those concepts and teach them to each other.

Practice vocabulary this way in Spanish, English, etc. Instruct participants as a group to match all pairs so they will work together: “The class is finished once all pairs are matched.”

Possible Debriefing Questions

How did you know when you had found the right partner? Did you help anyone find their matches?

Our Experience

Kindergarten 1: This game was well liked by these folks. They were all very engaged. At first everyone fended for themselves and found their own groups but then as groups formed, they told those still wandering where to go, calling them over. It was good to see them helping each other with directions and taking care of each other (we had not even told them to help each other).

We found that we had to stop the music for a long time while people helped others to the right place. It was best when the teachers did not hold shapes but facilitated as outsiders with encouragement like, “Maria, can you help Joey find his group?”

Between each round, one teacher asked for the different shapes and colors: “Who has squares?” Those who had what she asked for would hold them up. There was not a good flow to this game but the teacher felt like the learning was great so it was very worth doing a number of times. She liked to see the participants working with shapes, colors, and numbers in a new way. It was a treat to see four-year-olds helping others count their dots.

Kindergarten 2: The shapes game was too easy for them so they made it more of a challenge by try-

ing to trade or conceal shapes so each clique would have the same shape or color, etc. This left some people out and did not demonstrate their ability to follow teacher instructions but rather their peer clique leaders' instructions. It helped us to see what was most important to the participants and to get them discussing that in the debrief.

Kindergarten 2: They were given lower case and upper case letters and instructed to find people with the same letter in the other case. They then switched letters and did this again. Most participants quickly found their partners. It was a jump for individuals to help the others who could not find their pairs, but they did this on their own after we told them help was needed. This was a challenge but they still had lots of fun.

1st Grade: This class took shapes very seriously. They found their matches quickly and asked to do it again with new shapes.

Words and Definitions

Materials

Cards with the names of sea creatures on them and matching cards with descriptions of that sea creature. Reference books where descriptions of the sea creatures can be found.

Application

Fun, learning vocabulary, helping each other, emphasizing the importance of using your resources.

Procedure

Give participants cards which have either the names of sea creatures or the descriptions of them and their reference sources. They then find their matches, help others find their matches using all the available resources, and make a circle with the pairs together to present their names and descriptions.

Collect all the cards, put them in a hat, and let participants choose another for a second round.

Facilitator Framing

“When I say ‘Sea Creature,’ find the person with the description of your sea creature or the name of the sea creature which fits the description that you have. Use all the resources available to you. The class is finished when they are all in a circle with people holding matching sea creature names and descriptions standing next to each other.”

Rules and Precautions

You may have pairs do something once they find each other, so they do not wander around aimlessly.

Variations

Make matches so hard that participants must look things up. This really emphasizes to them how im-

portant it is to use resources such as guidebooks. Present new vocabulary words to the class this way. Make this a group time challenge. “See how quickly all the pairs in the group can come together.” Pairs may not help other pairs the first round but given their slow time could discuss how to speed up the second round.

For each sea creature, have five separate descriptive characteristics so that six people will have to come together. The characteristics could be unique to one sea creature or shared by other sea creatures described in the room, so people with descriptions will have to shuffle around between groups until all the groups are accurate.

A few participants have classification categories for sea creatures and the rest have the names of sea creatures and must find which category they belong in.

What Usually Happens

3rd Grade: This bordered on being fun for participants. It was a lot for them to listen while each match shared their sea creature and definition so it felt like a bit of a let-down for them (they had been so excited to play the game). I don’t think I would have them share next time. Instead I would have them play many rounds.

Participants did ask to play this again. It got them moving around, interacting with each other, working together and understanding the concept of matching words and definitions. The relationship between words and definitions was further brought to life for them when they went to the beach and found the sea creatures they had learned about.

It was great to see 3rd graders excitedly researching and helping each other.



section 4

Making Things

Animals

Birthday Lineup

Body Shapes

Count Off

Egg Drop

Mirage

Application

A group of people create something using themselves and other selected resources. These initiatives are easy ways to get people to work together. Tasks are clear and involve “hands-on” work which often calms down the intensity of group processing. The outcomes of these games and initiatives are more immediate or tangible than in time-trial initiatives and participants can evaluate their own product.

Also, as participants’ hands and focus become tied to the product, there is time for facilitators to work one-on-one with folks who need it.

What Usually Happens

After participants are divided into small groups, given tasks, and made to feel that the product is really in their hands (that the instructor will not tell them how to do it or judge their product), they become very engaged in completing the task. Each group will have moments of disagreement and

struggle, which they may work out on their own and leave behind.

If a group cannot get past their struggles, the first thing the group in conflict may try is to separate – some participants may go back to their desks or over to their friends in other groups. It is important that facilitators are aware of strife in the small groups, letting the participants resolve conflicts when possible but when they cannot, facilitating their resolution.

There also may be some wanderers who the group may not be able to keep engaged. After the group has tried sufficiently to work with a wanderer and it is clear that the problem is the wanderer, not the group, you can work individually with the wanderer.

Ways to Use Them

Do a “Making Things” exercise or have small groups make something simple, then debrief this and allow the group to create performance and project standards for a bigger or more complex project. Before starting exercises resulting in extensive small group projects, many teachers assign small projects or “Making Things” initiatives.

The facilitator can create greater or lesser challenges by defining more complex or simpler products for participants to produce, depending on what the group is capable of and will benefit from. The only guideline other than the specifications of the product is that everyone in each small group must be involved in making the product.

A small group can find a challenge and fun in making anything over any length of time. Projects can be as simple as making a name for the group and a song, or as complicated as making a blueprint and proposal on how to use an empty lot.

To Create One

Assign a group a product to make and let participants find the materials. Before you assign a product, clarify the quality of the product you are looking for and how it will be evaluated.

Conversely, you can assign the materials and let participants create what the product looks like. Limit the materials the groups can use such as only allowing them to use themselves (no props), only paper, or only straws and tape.

Consider the Following

1. Is the challenge sufficient?
2. Is there no simple way to make this, given your guidelines?
3. Do the guidelines make this easier for some groups than other groups (e.g., do some have particular materials or skills)?

Animals

Materials

None.

Application

Learning about animals together, mammal expedition, nonverbal expression, paying attention to other students, observation.

Procedure

Sit in a circle with one student in the middle. Without talking, the middle student imitates an animal with motion, sound and how the animal eats. They then spin around with their eyes closed and point. The person they point at guesses what animal they were.

Facilitator Framing

“The person in the middle of the circle is going to imitate an animal’s sound, motion and how the animal eats. Each one of you needs to do a different animal. Once you imitate your animal, close your eyes, point your hand and spin around three times (the group can count for you). The person you point at can ask one more question about the animal, then guess which animal it is and explain why they think that. The person in the center then names their animal and the person picked goes in the center. If you get picked, but you have already been into the center, the next person on your left who has not been picked yet goes in the center.”

Rules and Precautions

Find a way to make the flow work for your class and decide how much you want to hold them to reality in their imitations and guesses.

Variations

Instead of spinning and pointing, the person in the center could draw the name of another participant from a hat which has all the names in the group in it.

All participants can write down the names of all the performing participants and their animal-guesses to keep everyone engaged. One student stands in the center and speaks as though they are the animal describing themselves. Then they ask the group: “Who am I?” The group tries to guess. For example, the person in the center might say, “I am orange with black spots. I am a vegetarian. I have short hair. Who am I?”

Possible Debriefing Questions

How did it feel to act in front of the whole class? What things did the class do that made it easier for you to act? How did you figure out which animal it was?

Our Experience

3rd Grade: The class really enjoyed this. There was no fear about acting in front of the group. People made some really educated guesses. It would be better to do this in two small groups so participants would have more turns and would not have to focus for so long. Miriam Diaz, the para-professional, said:

“Los niños han aprendido con mas facilidad a reconocer y diferenciar las diferentes clases de animales. Tambien les ha dado la oportunidad de compartir y trabajar en conjunto con sus companeros de clase. En mi opinion, los niños del tercer grado han disfrutado y aprendido con muchísimo entusiasmo por medio de estos juegos y adivinanzas.”

“The children learned more easily to recognize and differentiate the different kinds of animals. It also gave them the opportunity to share and work together with their classmates. In my opinion, the third graders enjoyed and enthusiastically learned through these games and initiatives.”

Birthday Lineup

Materials

None.

Application

Big group, nonverbal expression, working together, taking responsibility for selves, everyone needs to contribute, problem solving, sequential ordering, following instructions.

Procedure

The group lines up according to the dates they were born without the facilitator's involvement.

If they complete this initiative and their line is inaccurate, let them discuss what happened and attempt it again.

Facilitator Framing

"When I say 'go,' your task will be to line up the group in the order of your birthdays. Once I say 'go,' there will be no talking except to state birthdays until this initiative is completed.

Or for younger folks: "When I say 'Birthday,' you will line up according to the dates of your birthdays starting with people who have birthdays in January here (show them the spot where they should stand) and ending with people who have birthdays in December here."

Rules and Precautions

Give participants of different ages the amount of information they need in order to do this on their own successfully.

We allowed the kindergartners, 1st graders, and 2nd graders to speak since the sequences of dates and alphabet were new to them so they needed to combine their resources verbally. We also wrote the or-

der of the months on the board and gave participants cards with their birth dates on them to hold up. Rules will depend on what participants need in order to work physically and verbally together on their own safely. You may want to talk about pushing or keeping to your own space and monitoring volume.

Variations

Alphabet Lineup, Animal Lineup, Food Chain Lineup... (See the “Our Experience” section below for descriptions of these).

Do a lineup alphabetically by last names, middle names, mothers’ names, favorite ice creams, numerically by shoe size, by eye color....

You can give the group more information by explaining where in the room the line will begin.

Choose whether to tell the group how to notify you when the task is completed. Not giving the group a set ending adds another element of chaos the group must figure out. Some ways participants could end this initiative are by holding hands and raising them into the air and saying, “Happy Birthday,” or you could ask one representative to tell you when the group has completed the task. The latter method will draw that individual into the initiative.

The group could be allowed to speak and race against the clock.

Possible Debriefing Questions

How did you communicate? Who was the leader? How did you know where to stand? If the line is not in order, let participants make a verbal plan and try again.

Our Experience

We gave younger participants extra information.

Kindergarten 2: We did this after matching upper case and lower case letters in a variation on the Shapes game. We handed out cards with the letters of the alphabet on them and told participants, “Hold up your letters and line up according to the alphabet without our help.”

This was a treat for the teacher to observe. With no further instructions or involvement from us, the group started singing the alphabet song to remember the next letter. Some children took leadership roles and found the people with the different letters and helped them to their places in line. One teacher said, “We met my goal of developing the students’ focus from their own ideas and needs to the understanding that it will not work unless everyone helps.”

2nd Grade: In one class, we wrote the participants birthdays on cards and the order of the months

on the blackboard before they lined themselves up. They were very capable of following each others' leadership.

In a different class we did the same but focused on participants taking responsibility for themselves. This was an issue they were struggling with. After they lined up with this theme in mind, we had them judge themselves on paper and then verbally on how well they each took responsibility for themselves ("well," "okay," or "not well"). They had a lot to say and they did a better job than usual taking responsibility with the goal in mind. Those who needed to work on something knew who they were.

In another class we had participants write their names on paper and line up according to the first letter of their first names. There were a lot of concepts to grasp, so different people understood different goals. Some participants used any letter from their names to line up in alphabetical order with no gaps in the sequence. While it was interesting to see their innovation at following complicated instructions, I would simplify this next time by giving each participant a letter.

3rd Grade: They lined up in the order of the size of an endangered mammal they were studying whose name they drew out of a hat. At first we asked them to do this silently, but acting like animals was too much for them to handle. The challenge of working together to line up was sufficient even with talking. This increased the class's familiarity with the animals as participants looked up the animals they were unfamiliar with.

We then split the 3rd graders into groups of five with a teacher in each group and gave them cards with the names of creatures (Flea, Worm, Bird, Cat, Coyote) which were part of a food chain. Then we had them line up in the order of who eats whom. These groups were smaller, so working together was easier for the participants. This created self-led discussions and a deeper understanding of the animals and food chains.

Another class lined up according to the size of the animals they had each chosen to study in class. They did this very quickly and asked their teachers questions about which animals were bigger.

They also lined up according to the first letter of their last names which they found to be complicated since some students have multiple last names and there was competition to be first in line so people were invested in controlling which names they and other participants used. They ended up having an intense discussion about whether their mother's name or their father's was more valid.

Body Shapes

Materials

Space for the class to split into small groups and spread out on the ground.

Application

Working together, creating something together, touching safely, learning shapes and letters, nonverbal expression, self-evaluation.

Procedure

Break the class into small groups of three to five and give each group a particular area to work in which is big enough for them to spread out on the ground if necessary. Have each facilitator work with just one or two groups so they can give special attention to these groups.

The facilitator will tell each of their groups a shape or a letter to make with the bodies, and then will let the group plan it and make it on their own. When they are finished, they tell the facilitator and the facilitator can give them a new, more complicated shape or letter. Some examples are the letter “C,” a triangle, the letter “N.” After a couple of rounds, the participants can create a shape, letter, or number which the facilitator has to guess.

Facilitator Framing

“I am going to name a shape or letter which you will make as a group. You can only use yourselves to make the form and everyone in your small group must be part of the form for it to be finished. Tell me when you are finished so I can see.” I model this in the air with my arms and on the ground by lying down and bending different ways.

Rules and Precautions

Each small group will need lots of coaching and attention to get the most out of this activity. It works

well to have each facilitator work with just one or two small groups so the groups can go at their own pace and have support in working together.

Variations

Have each group try one round silently. Make mammals and their environments, scenes from the neighborhood, or some other theme from an expedition.

Possible Debriefing Questions

Debriefs may be done in the small groups or with the whole class. “What role did you play in deciding how to make the form? How did you know when the form was done?”

Our Experience

This is a focused way to give young people experiences working with each other. Conflicts do arise, but if you spread the facilitators around, you can use these as learning opportunities and facilitate groups resolving their conflicts, learning how to compromise, and learning to work together.

It is fascinating to see what strategies different groups come up with to make good shapes. I have seen one person direct the others on how to position themselves. I have seen groups negotiate verbally on the best way to make the form, and I have seen groups negotiate nonverbally by lying down and moving themselves into the right places. Often people draw the letters before making them.

Kindergarten 1: We gave them shapes to use as a guide. They could not do it when we just verbally named shapes. The idea of working on their own was a big leap for them but it happened a bit. The teacher liked to see them talking to each other and doing something together on their own.

Kindergarten 2: This class enjoyed making shapes and letters but needed a lot of teacher attention to keep the flow going. They wanted someone to look at them whenever they finished a form. Teachers felt like it was a good way to practice the alphabet and working together.

2nd Grade: I worked with a group of four. One girl was left out until the group said they were finished. I asked, “Are you finished?” The group tried to figure out what they were missing then realized the girl was not included so they found a place for her in the letter. From then on the girl was very involved. She drew the letters first on paper with diagrams of where people would go. The group then discussed who would go in each spot. I said nothing the whole time except, “Are you finished?”

The teacher was very excited to see the students from her class work together. She said: “I didn’t know they could do that much on their own. Plus it was much easier for them to work in small groups. I want to do more activities like this.”

Some participants said: “It was funny. I liked the letters. I liked making different letters.”

3rd Grade: Instead of naming letters we asked participants to form animals and the environment they live in. We named a few animals which groups formed. Then each group invented an animal without telling other groups what it was and presented it to the class one at a time so we could guess which animal it was. Teachers could hold their classes to a lot of detail in this by letting the groups look up information on their animal first or by asking questions like, “Do giraffes really live in mountains?”

It was great to see the students discussing a topic they had been studying with each other, and they really got into the acting. They were very creative. I think it was good for them to experience their bodies as mediums and to capitalize on their seven- and eight-year-old year old imaginations.

For some groups the teachers needed to facilitate the group processes of sharing ideas and trying them out.

Count Off

Materials

None.

Application

Listening, observing, big group challenge.

Procedure

Participants stand in a circle. At random, people try to count as high as they can by saying numbers one at a time. If anyone interrupts or two people speak at once, the whole group begins again at number one. You can set it up so that everyone says one number before people say a second number, but you can let the group decide this later on too.

Facilitator Framing

“Try to count as high as you can by taking turns saying numbers. If anyone interrupts or if two people speak at once, the whole group begins again at number one.”

Rules and Precautions

If you are standing in a circle, you may want to say the group cannot just count by going around the circle. You can also leave counting in a circle as an option that the group might figure out later.

Variations

Start this when the group is not in a circle. They may learn the value of the circle.

Replace the number seven with the word, “Buzz.” Every time there should be a number seven the person whose turn it is says “Buzz.” This makes the count off even more confusing.

Possible Debriefing Questions

What strategies did you use to decide when to speak? How did you decide what order you would count in?

Our Experience

This is hard but groups seem to really enjoy it. It is convenient to use when you are standing around waiting for something. Often the people who sabotage the count off are the same people who interrupt others in class. This game provides a casual environment for the group to address interrupting.

6th Grade: We were waiting to go somewhere and the group was very restless. I challenged them with this and it focused them. Instead of complaining and arguing, they put their energies into the game and found it to be quite a challenge and fun. Unfortunately, when I stepped away for a minute, the game ended and they all returned to restless waiting. They needed facilitator support to keep engaged.

Egg Drop

Materials for each group of four

One egg.

Masking tape (about two feet).

About fifteen paper straws or short, thin strips of cardboard (each about the size of a straw).

Application

Working together, group decision-making, learning about structures.

Procedure

Each group of four is given the equipment listed above and a specified amount of time to make a structure which will protect their egg from breaking. When time is up, structures will be tested by being dropped from a height of about eight feet to the hard ground. You can lay newspaper down where the eggs will be dropped to reduce the mess.

Facilitator Framing

“Using the given materials, make a structure to protect your egg from breaking when dropped eight feet to the ground. You will have ten minutes to design and construct your breakage protection before the official drop will occur. The following rules apply (see below).”

Rules and Precautions

Only the materials provided can be employed to protect the egg.

Tape cannot be used for lowering.

Eggs broken in the process of designing or protecting will not be replaced.

Possible Debriefing Questions

Was there a plan made before construction began? Was there any conflict over how to accomplish the goal of protecting the egg? If so, how was it resolved? How did it feel to succeed? To fail? How could your final product have been improved? How were you affected by time pressure? By the sense of competition with other groups? Was it wasteful to use eggs this way?

Our Experience

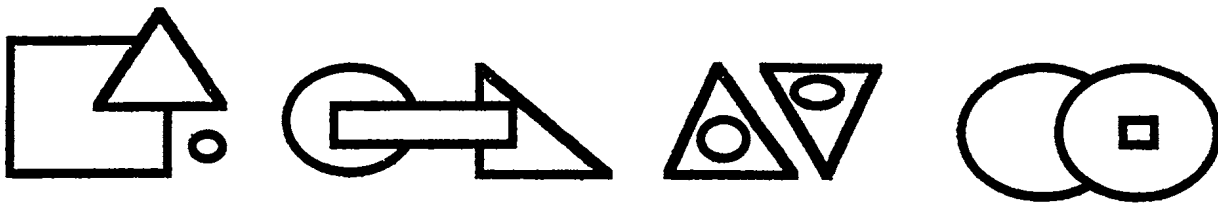
6th Grade: Participants were so engaged in this activity that groups did not seem to copy each other or compete. It was extremely fun and exciting for these folks to have a test of their products. I think they enjoyed the immediate, straightforward feedback the eggs provided. The whole class was surprised and impressed when the one egg they thought would break did not and all other eggs broke. One participant said it made him realize that you cannot judge something from the outside when you have not tested it and know very little about it.

7th Grade: The teacher used this project to introduce an exercise on structures. The participants used their experience with the Egg Drop to create an assessment tool for later projects.

Mirage

Materials

Pencils or pens and paper for all participants. Refer to the diagram below for the four illustrations. Copy each illustration onto a separate piece of paper.



Application

Listening to peers, audio-visual spatial thinking, learning about cognitive abilities and communication challenges.

Procedure

The class is split into small groups of approximately five students. One member of the group has an illustration in their hand (the presenter). The other people in the group have pencils and paper. Give the presenter one drawing and assign them one of the four methods below for presenting that drawing. The presenter does not show the others the illustration but expresses what that drawing is, while the others each try to draw it as accurately as they can.

1. The presenter describes the illustration verbally with their back to the group and using no gestures.
2. The presenter describes the illustration verbally while facing the audience, using no gestures but answering questions.
3. The presenter faces the audience and uses gestures only. The presenter cannot talk or make any sounds (except laughter which is hard to stifle at this point).

4. The presenter faces the audience, gesticulating and responding to the group's questions.

After each attempt, allow the group to compare their separate drawings with one another and with the master abstraction. You can then choose a new drawing and manner of presenting it.

Facilitator Framing

"You are to silently draw the figure that is being described to you by the presenter. Do not look at other people's interpretations until you are finished. The presenter will tell you whether you can ask questions or not."

Rules and Precautions

It is really tempting for people to look at the facilitator's drawings so be careful to conceal them.

This activity will not show exactly what someone's cognitive challenges are, since language, listening, memory, visual, and fine motor skills are all necessary. However, it can make people aware that all of those phenomena play a role in their learning.

Variations

Put an object in a paper bag. The presenter describes what is in the bag. Everyone else attempts to draw it. Compare the drawings with each other and the object.

Possible Debriefing Questions

Compare your interpretations of the first illustration. Why do you think they are so different? What makes communication between people clearer? Why?

Which of the drawings is the most like the presenter's original illustration? Why do you think so?

Our Experience

It is very enlightening for participants to share their drawings with each other since often there is a wide variety of shapes drawn from the same set of instructions. This can show how a group of people can hear or see the same thing very differently. It gets people thinking about communication.

4th Grade: We split the class into two groups. They liked this challenge. They all wanted to be the presenter so they took turns.

section 5

Diminishing Resources

All My Neighbors (page 80)

Chocolate River (page 140)

Flying Saucers

M&M Wrestling

Application

The group is involved in a task and something they need is scarce and running out.

These are fun but can become very intense. The excitement of having something the group needs disappear causes people to get invested in the activity. This usually causes people to realize the importance of thinking about the whole group. These exercises provide an exciting challenge or stress for groups to respond to. Resources can diminish as part of a story line or as a consequence of something participants do. Participants may or may not know in advance that this is going to happen.

What Usually Happens

An excitement and frenzy comes over people as necessary resources diminish around them. This makes them feel high and have fun, but it can also cause them to forget other important things, like other people or the goal of the activity. Participants can get very obstinate about trying again once they understand the consequences of their actions. The sense of material loss gives participants a drive not unlike that caused by competition. How they finish is determined solely by their own actions and the consequences that follow.

Ways to Use Them

Do not warn older groups that they might go into a frenzy. Let them. Then stop the frenzy and debrief it. Older groups will be surprised at what they came to when resources disappeared. It is rare for them to experience themselves out of control in a class setting.

Younger groups may need some guidelines about pushing before diving into the frenzy state which many of them love. They may not see resorting to frenzy as a bad thing. For children, we usually briefed and debriefed these as a place to practice keeping each other and themselves safe even at times when things feel frenzied.

To Create One

Consider the following:

1. Give the participants a task.
2. Something the participants need in order to complete the task will diminish a little at a time as a consequence of something the group does or due to outside forces the group has no control over.
3. The description of the activity should include a group goal such as, “taking care of each other,” “sharing all that you have,” “welcoming others into your home,” or “getting everyone in the group across safely.”
4. The rules and consequences must be very clear and strictly enforced as participants will be driven to challenge them.

Flying Saucers

Materials

This is fun outside or in a big room with space to run, but it can be done in the classroom.

Five to ten ropes between four and ten feet long.

Application

Big group challenge, helping each other, taking responsibility for selves, problem-solving, values clarification, fun.

Procedure

Place the ropes in circles two to five feet in diameter throughout the room. The participants wander around. When you call out “Asteroid Shower,” all the participants must put both of their feet in a circle. After each asteroid shower, the facilitator removes some of the circles until in the end, there is only one circle left which is just big enough for all of the participants’ feet to fit into. The participants will try various methods to fit into the last remaining circle but the trick is that only their feet need to fit into the circle. (Do not emphasize the feet too much because the value of this initiative is that the group will spend a lot of time problem-solving before realizing that only their feet need to fit in the circle).

Facilitator Framing

“You are flying saucers in space. You are flying around. Whenever there is an asteroid shower, everyone in the group must have both feet on a planet (inside one of these circles). Once I see that everyone in the group is safe, I will say ‘asteroid shower over,’ and you can all wander in space again.”

Rules and Precautions

The wording on these instructions is very important. Discuss physical space and keeping each other safe in close quarters before beginning. Make a rule in advance that you can not get on peoples shoulders.

ders. (This serves to sidetrack the group in their planning because it makes them forget that it is only feet that have to be in the circles, but this also keeps them safer).

This is a challenging initiative which feels like a fun game at first then turns to a problem which requires leadership and creativity. It is best not to use this as the first activity of the year but to do it after the group has success in some other experiential activities.

Variations

Change the story to a different metaphor – something relating to the environment where animals' habitats are destroyed, the ocean, the neighborhood...

Possible Debriefing Questions

What was important to understand about the instructions or rules for this initiative? How did it feel when people made room for you in a circle? What did it feel like when planets got taken away? How did you decide what to do in the end?

Our Experience

What usually happens during this initiative is that everything goes really well and people help each other until they can no longer fit standing in the planets. Some people are left out in space so the facilitator cannot say, "asteroid shower over." The group may not help everyone fit into the planets as they may not see how this is possible. There may be some panic in the group. Sometimes someone in the group will think of lying down with just their feet in the saucers and eventually everyone will do it and they will feel very successful.

For some groups, it is too much to follow the instructions and realize that they have to work as a group, so you can say in the framing, "If you see someone wandering during an asteroid shower you should welcome them into your home." Other groups will figure this out on their own.

If no one solves this puzzle, it is up to you to say "time out," "stop action," or "circle up," before anyone is injured or completely devastated by being left out for too long. You can then point out to the group what is not safe, and that they need to make a plan of how they can safely get everyone's feet in the circle. If they are still not successful, you can facilitate them through making that plan by showing them how to circle up and take turns sharing ideas, deciding on a plan, and trying it out.

If you made the unfortunate mistake of saying, "Everyone in the group must be in a circle during an asteroid shower," instead of saying, "Everyone's feet," good luck!! You may have to acknowledge your mistake in order to keep the group safe before they start climbing all over each other. Or you may want to end early with a few circles remaining which participants can all fit into safely.

In any case, groups will consider all manner of lifting each other, piggybacking, or leaning out to fit

into the circle if they do not think of lying down. Just remember– if it is not safe, *stop action*. If it is safe and participants succeed in fitting the group in another way than the one described above, they have succeeded and the initiative is over. They do not have to lie down to succeed.

It is great to see groups spend time trying to figure out how to squeeze their entire bodies into a tiny circle and then realize that they only need to include their feet. If you let them digest this on their own without saying, “I told you so,” their natural reaction is to listen to the facilitators every word from that point on.

2nd Grade: We played this in the classroom. The game part got pretty wild with pushing. It was hard for the participants to negotiate the excitement of diminishing resources and safe touching. After we “stopped action” and asked them what was unsafe and what they could do to make it safe, everything improved. Standing in a circle, participants started sharing ideas to resolve the problem and listening to each other very well.

At one point it became a contest to say the name of the idea you liked best as loud as you could. I stopped this and asked the group to find a better way to decide. With some facilitation, they made a compromise between two people’s ideas. They seemed to understand the concept. The teacher emphasized how the idea of compromise could help them when resolving conflicts in class. She suggested that when resolving conflicts, rather than hitting, they could talk it out and compromise.

5th Grade: We played this outside with the whole 5th grade as an introduction to a day of team-building initiatives. The group had a lot of fun and handled the transition from playing a game to solving a problem well. We led them through the resolution as a model for solving more complicated initiatives later in the day. With great excitement and commitment, they even got their clothes dirty once they realized that it was necessary. We let them experience this, then used what happened as an introduction to the day.

M&M Wrestling

Materials

About 30 pieces of desirable food for each pair of participants – M&Ms (or pretzels, berries...).

Enough surfaces so that all pairs can arm wrestle. Desks work fine.

Application

Cooperating rather than competing.

Procedure

Divide the class into pairs at desks. Frame the activity then give each pair a cup of M&Ms. The activity will last three minutes. During the activity, each time someone in a pair wins an arm wrestling match, the pair can have one M&M from their cup. At the end of three minutes, take the cups with the remaining M&Ms away from all the groups and put these away. Each pair can share the M&Ms that were won. The trick is that the more competitive pairs were, the fewer M&Ms they ended up with, because pairs who let each other win gained more collective M&Ms.

Facilitator Framing

“You are going to arm wrestle for three minutes with the partner I gave you. Each time one of you wins, the pair can take one M&M from the cup and put it aside. I will tell you when time is up.”

Rules and Precautions

If people just take the M&Ms without following the rules, the lesson will not be learned, so watch the pairs. Take the M&Ms from a pair that is cheating and tell them, “You will get M&Ms for every win so note on paper each time one of your pair wins.” I would leave it at that and let them decide whether to waste time writing names down or not.

Possible Debriefing Questions

What could you have done to get more M&Ms? How important was winning?

Our Experience

What usually happens is that groups start having very competitive arm wrestling matches so they do not get very many M&Ms. When you take the M&Ms away, they usually realize that they could have gotten more M&Ms by cooperating. They may also need to debrief to realize this.



section 6

Playing With Time

Pass the Orange

Pass the Pulse

Rope Race

Application

The group does an activity, then attempts to repeat it more quickly.

These initiatives necessitate decision-making. When the facilitator asks how the group can do something more quickly, there are usually many ideas and the group must decide which ones to try or how to combine ideas.

These provide practice in methods of decision-making by consensus, voting, evaluating pros and cons, using the scientific method, trial and error, etc. They can show that many different ways of attempting an activity can have the same result (equal times). These provide a good example of how easy it is to sacrifice quality when you rush.

What Usually Happens

The focus on doing the initiative often gives way to a focus on strategizing about time. Your debrief may change to a discussion on how the group planned – rather than how they executed the plan. Older groups can get very competitive in racing the clock. All else may be put aside.

The facilitator's biggest challenge is to avoid letting their own competitiveness with time cause them to take sides in the decision-making process. Their focus is on debriefing the decision-making process

afterwards, not on being engaged in it.

Facilitators are often surprised when an idea that seems like it might be the slowest turns out to be the quickest. It is important that the facilitator does not assume that you know the best way.

With younger groups, time may not be very important unless you build it up as a big exciting thing to be faster. Participants may be more interested in doing the activity and playing rather than talking about how to make it faster.

Ways to Use Them

Focus on how the group executes their plan and what effects rushing has. Time something done aloud and then do the same task silently and compare. Start an initiative and if it is too easy for the group, ask them to do it again faster than the original time.

To Create One

Take any task, time it, and challenge people to beat that time. If you choose something for which quality is as important as time, make sure you emphasize this from the start and that your standards of quality are clear. Consider the following:

1. Is the task something that can be done many different ways?
2. What will happen to this activity when the group does it more quickly? Will the quality and safety of what they are doing be so challenged by speed as to be impossible?
3. Time will redirect from the challenge of performing the activity to the challenge of beating their own time. Is this desirable?

Pass the Orange

Materials

Orange or tennis ball.

Application

Everyone needs to contribute, problem solving, planning, group decision-making, prioritizing, communication, conflict resolution, culture of revision.

Procedure

Participants stand in a circle and pass a ball around as quickly as possible while ensuring that everyone touches it and says their name. They may move out of the circle formation.

Facilitator Framing

“Let’s see how quickly we can pass this orange around so that each participant touches it while saying their name. It cannot be passed to a person next to you.”

Rules and Precautions

Creative solutions to the challenge pivot on the fact that every participant must say their name while touching the object. You can hold them to this more or less depending on what type of challenge they need. They may eventually go so fast that names and touches are blurred and that is okay.

Variations

Start this with “Group Juggle” (see page 84). This confuses the group and causes them to think that they have to go in an order. It makes the initiative more of a challenge because participants restrict themselves to an order.

Possible Debriefing Questions

Who had an idea of how to solve this initiative? How did the group decide which idea to use? How did you support each others' ideas? What does this teach us about revision?

Our Experience

Groups usually attempt this without discussing it, but no matter how fast they move, going around the circle takes a while. If they really think through their options, they can do it in about a quarter of the original time. They may make a line of hands which slopes downward or a vertical tunnel of hands which one participant drops the orange through.

2nd Grade: We sat in a circle and began by a controlled passing of the ball to each person. After saying their name they clasped their hands to show that they had already gotten the ball. They were very successful at this, so we gave them a time challenge. This was too much for them partly because we had started in a "Group Juggle" format (see page 84) but also because they just wanted to have fun. A time challenge meant nothing to them, compared to the fun of passing the ball. They may have remained more interested in a "Group Juggle" variation – keeping the pattern but adding more balls.

3rd Grade: They had lots of enthusiasm to participate and to offer ideas but had a really hard time listening to each others' ideas and agreeing on a plan. It was necessary in this case that an adult facilitate the participants through the decision-making process for this initiative.

4th Grade: This brought out many of the group's challenges around listening to each other and the instructors. Participants would say their ideas without digesting each others'. It helped us understand more what their listening challenges were, but it was hard for me as a facilitator to remember to let participants struggle through the process of deciding on a plan together before they tried the initiative again.

5th Grade: They were able to value each others' ideas and take on the process of deciding which idea to use. They were ready to take turns facilitating the circle, so that could be set up in advance the next time. This was very difficult with a whole class and much more successful when we split into two groups. Participants were able to name things that were holding them back in the initiative, which were some of the same things holding them back in class.

6th Grade: The group whipped through this almost instantly. Their planning seemed very respectful and effective. There was incredible focus and coordination of the attempt by all participants.

Pass the Pulse

Application

Big group challenge, safe touch, everyone participates.

Procedure

Stand in a circle holding hands, including facilitator. The group will pass a pulse (or squeeze) from hand to hand starting with facilitator, around the whole circle, and ending with facilitator. They can attempt to do this faster after the first attempt or with their eyes closed.

Facilitator Framing

“We are going to pass a pulse around this circle. The pulse will be a gentle squeeze of the hand next to yours. When one of your hands is squeezed by the person next to you, gently squeeze the hand holding your other hand. Let’s see if we can pass the pulse all the way around the circle.”

Rules and Precautions

Warn people not to squeeze others too hard, and if needed set up a consequence for this behavior. I recommend that the facilitator stands in the circle because the concept of the pulse is hard to grasp and the facilitator can ensure that it happens.

Variations

Pass a verbal “Zoom” around the circle as quickly as you can.

Possible Debriefing Questions

What sense was the most important for doing this initiative? Was the group more efficient with their eyes opened or closed?

Pass the Knot

Materials

Rope tied in a circle (length dependent on the number of players – at least ten feet).

Watch or clock with a second hand (or tenths of a second).

Application

Working together, everyone participates, safe touch, group decision-making.

Procedure

The group forms a circle around the rope and picks it up. Sliding it through their hands, participants race the rope around the circle until the knot returns to the beginning. Clock the speed and have the group repeat the activity, trying to beat their first time.

Facilitator Framing

“How quickly can you pass the rope around so the knot returns to who it started with?”

Variations

Race the rope around until the knot returns to the starting point, reverse the direction of its travel, and end when it returns to the starting point from the new direction. Clock the double revolution.

Try this silently or with eyes closed.

Possible Debriefing Questions

What strategies could you use to decrease the time it takes to pass the rope? Was it important for everyone to help? Why do you move more quickly/slowly with your eyes closed?

section 7

Getting Somewhere

Activist Quest

Chocolate River

Public Transportation Quest

Traffic Jam

Description

The group is given some tools and/or boundaries and must get safely, as a whole group, from point A to point B.

Application

These initiatives necessitate planning, execution of a plan, and thus many issues related to leading and following. The arrival to point B is the least important part. The way the group gets to point B is much more important. Decision-making is necessary.

These provide a place for the group to figure out how they “move” together.

These feel more real-life than other initiatives because the journey is real. Movement happens.

What Usually Happens

Often the group will be rearing to go, to get to the destination and they lose sight of “how” they get there and leave half the group behind or break rules. This provides a good learning opportunity on the

importance of process.

I usually let groups “fail” these the first time. When it becomes clear to them that the whole group or half the group is not going to make it to point B, I let them digest their “failure” to accomplish the given task. If they ask to do it again, I have them look at what they want to do differently. If they do not ask to do the initiative again, I ask them to think about why “failure” stopped them.

Ways to Use Them

It is best to do these initiatives in groups of eight to twelve participants per facilitator. In larger groups, group processing can be very difficult. When I give a large group a complicated problem to solve, I feel that I have given them an unfair challenge.

These are great initiatives for beginnings. They can be framed as metaphors for something you are doing that has a start and a finish. How can you support each other to get successfully from the first day of this semester to the last?

Planning time is something you can give or let the group take on its own. Add the condition that the group must tell the facilitator the plan before executing it. This forces the group to plan in advance and can help ensure safety.

Ask one person (who the group chooses or who you choose) to tell you the plan before the group executes it. This practices leadership or can draw out someone who usually does not play a big role in the group.

Or you can say nothing about planning and let the group fail to get to point B and realize themselves that they should have planned.

Ask a group which has left people behind, “Are you finished?” Then debrief on their answer. (This only works if the facilitator was clear in the beginning that the whole group must finish).

To Create One

Use any situation where a group must get from one place to another. Consider the following:

1. Where will they go?
2. What obstacles must they surpass?
3. Will the obstacles challenge people to work as a group?
4. Troubleshoot whether the group will be able to successfully get from point A to point B and whether they will be able to keep each other safe doing it.
5. Did you leave any big loopholes that will make this too easy for the group?
6. Emphasize that the whole group must get to point B for the group to succeed.

Activist Quest

Materials for each group of four to twelve

Money for transportation for all participants.

Street and public transportation maps of the city.

Smart phones only for brief web searches or emergencies.

A copy of the “Activist Quest” for each group, which is a sheet of paper with the names of activist organizations and questions to find out about, displayed in no particular order.

Application

Learning about activists, interviewing skills, group decision-making, problem solving skills, map skills, phone skills, learning how to get around the city.

Procedure

Give each group their equipment. One set of maps is for the group and the other for the facilitators. Participants decide where to go and in what order. Instructors follow, observing their process, making safety calls when necessary, and facilitating a debrief afterwards.

Facilitator Framing

“Using the resources listed above, visit the activist organizations on your sheet and ask them to answer the corresponding questions.”

Rules and Precautions

There should be an appropriate ratio of staff to participants in each small group. Outward Bound uses a ratio of two facilitators for twelve participants.

Set up safety guidelines for city travel and a plan in case someone gets lost on streets or public trans-

portation. Give each participant clear instructions to follow if they get lost. Facilitators track where the group is and where they are going at all times.

Teach and practice interviewing skills before sending the group on this quest. Consider which mistakes the group might make and whether you (the facilitator) feel comfortable going where they may get lost. If you do not feel comfortable with the group getting lost in certain areas, give them enough clues so they will not go to places out of your comfort zone. You can make certain areas off limits before the group begins.

Participants will be surrounded by food in the city, so plan how you will address this. Will you bring snacks and not allow participants to buy food, or allow participants to buy food only at certain times or at any times they choose?

Set guidelines for the number of people that can visit an organization at a time. We allowed two participants to visit an organization at one time (with one facilitator) while the rest of the group waited outside and planned the route they would take to the next destination.

Variations

Create an architecture quest, an urban parks quest, an arts quest, a mall quest, a quest within a museum.... Any destination could work to get the group involved in finding a place and getting there safely. Give the group a question to answer that requires going to various places.

Possible Debriefing Questions

How did you decide what order you would visit organizations in? How efficient was the group at getting to our destination? Did you keep each other safe as you made decisions and traveled? What information did you find out about the organization that you interviewed?

Our Experience

8th Grade: We split a class of 22 into two groups of eleven with two facilitators each. Each group was given a different “Activist Quest” which took place in a different area of the city.

We saw wonderful uses of resources as participants chose organizations, looked up addresses, found streets on the maps, followed the maps to the organizations, and took turns conducting interviews. This was extremely successful in getting the group to use their resources and work together. The participants were very engaged in this fun challenge.

The theme of “activism,” loosely defined as “making a difference in society,” served as a great framework for discussing group dynamics. The participants drew the connections between what they were investigating, and facilitators did not have to say a word.

Chocolate River

Materials for each group of four to twelve

Ten pieces of letter paper, or 20-inch squares of wood or carpet. These are “marshmallows.”

Boundary lines drawn with chalk or marked with rope or notebooks. About ten to fifteen feet between the two boundary lines, which should extend for about ten feet.

Application

Listening, following instructions, analytical thinking, revision, thinking of the whole group, problem solving.

Procedure

Participants work in groups of four to twelve. They must get the whole group across the river, marked off by the boundaries, without touching it. The only tools they can use are the ten pieces of paper or boards, the “marshmallows.”

Facilitator Framing

“You are a group of bold explorers traveling in a fantasy world when all of the sudden you come across a river of hot chocolate. The river stretches for miles in either direction so in order to go on, the whole group must get across it without falling into it (because it is so hot).

“Fortunately you have found some marshmallows on the bank which float as long as someone is touching them. You must obey the following guidelines:” (Read the rules below to the group).

Rules and Precautions

If anyone falls into the river or touches it in any way, they must return to the starting bank.

If a marshmallow is in the river unattended by some participant’s body part, it sinks (i.e., the facilitator takes it) Marshmallows cannot be dragged across the river underfoot, nor can they be thrown.

Jumping is not allowed. (This rule keeps the initiative from becoming a traumatic situation for participants who cannot jump well).

Variations

The river is called the Soda River and the marshmallows are ice cubes.

The river is the school year ahead of you. One bank is the beginning of the school year and the other is the end. The marshmallows are resources or things that will help everyone get through the year successfully (participants name what those things are).

A teacher suggested a variation in which there are no marshmallows but you are only safe to cross the river if you are touching people. The river is much longer, and people can touch it, lie in it, etc.

For grades kindergarten through three, the marshmallows do not have to be touched at all times. The challenge is for participants to put the marshmallows down and help each other cross the river safely without touching it.

Possible Debriefing Questions

If we circle up after a failure, ask participants what worked and what did not work or what they want to do the same next time and what differently.

How did you decide how to get everyone across the river? Who made the plan? Who had an idea that did not get heard? When did you realize that not everyone would be able to cross the river? What did it feel like to be deserted by the people who crossed the river first? What did it feel like for those who crossed first? How could the group have helped the individuals from losing the marshmallow?

Our Experience

Groups from grades four through adult love this initiative. I have had 4th and 6th grade classes ask to do it over and over again even after they have succeeded. One class asked to repeat it numerous times with fewer marshmallows each time. One class asked to do it as a whole class after doing it in two groups of ten.

Groups dive into this initiative so whole-heartedly that they rarely succeed on the first try. But they are so eager to continue, they commit themselves to processing it before starting again. Usually the first participants to finish rush over the boundary and leave marshmallows unattended so the rest of the group is left deserted in the middle of the river. After that occurrence has been digested by the group, it is good to circle up and give the deserted people an opportunity to share how they felt.

Handing out marshmallows one at a time to individuals in the group can lead participants to spend a lot of time attempting to cross the river independently using their own marshmallows. You can then

ask questions about the efficiency of thinking individually first and why the group finally decided to cross as a whole group (they will ultimately cross as a whole group if you set the “no dragging marshmallows” guideline).

If the group completes this without any troubles, challenge them to cross a wider river or to use as few marshmallows as possible.

4th Grade: A participant said, “It was fun. It was also a little hard to do because we had to work as a group together.” Another said, “I learned how to work with other people because in my other school, we usually did everything separate.”

6th Grade: They had extremely high motivation to do this initiative. They lost so many squares that they had to start over twice but they were very motivated to try again. They were even calling each other on following the rules.

With another class we did this in a tiny room. We gave the group fewer marshmallows since the river was shorter and we emphasized the “no jumping” rule so no one landed on a desk. This group was so motivated by the river that they did the exercise over and over until eight of them could cross with two marshmallows (a challenge they gave themselves).

Participants then wrote down things that made them successful and shared these thoughts the next class before doing a different initiative. One participant said, “We listened to other people’s opinions. All of us did something to help with the game. Eight heads were better than one.”

Chocolate River thus provided a comfortable starting point from which the group experienced a success which they built later when they did harder initiatives.

Public Transportation Quest

Materials for each group of four to twelve

Money for transportation for all participants.

Street and public transportation maps of the city.

Smart phones only for brief web searches or emergencies.

Application

Group decision-making, analytical thinking, map reading, basic math, learning how to use money, learning how to get around the city, fun, problem solving.

Procedure

Give each group their equipment (the second set of maps is for the facilitators). Each group will then get a street name or the name of a place or a clue for a destination. Give them minimal information so they will have to use their resources to figure out how to get to the designated location. Make sure it is a unique place or street, or tell the group the neighborhood as well.

Participants will lead the group to the destination while the instructors follow along observing their process, making safety calls when necessary, and facilitating a debrief afterwards.

Allow the group to lead the way even if they go to the wrong place. Let them realize their own mistakes to the degree that it is valuable for them. Remember, the process is more important than arriving somewhere.

Facilitator Framing

“Use only the resources given to you to get the whole group safely and efficiently to the statue on Walnut Street.”

Rules and Precautions

There should be an appropriate ratio of staff to participants in each small group. Outward Bound uses a ratio of two facilitators to 12 participants.

Set up safety guidelines for city travel and a plan in case someone gets lost on streets or public transportation. Give each participant clear instructions to follow if they get lost. Facilitators track where the group is and where they are going at all times.

Consider which mistakes the group might make and whether you (the facilitator) feel comfortable going where they may get lost. If you do not feel comfortable with the group getting lost in certain areas, give them enough clues so they will not go to places out of your comfort zone. You can make certain areas off limits before the group begins.

Participants will be surrounded by food in the city, so plan how you will address this. Will you bring snacks and not allow participants to buy food, or allow participants to buy food only at certain times or at any times they choose?

Variations

Instead of giving the street name, give only the statue name or the history of the street. Let participants go to the library to figure it out. Set this up like a treasure hunt where participants must find a clue at each place. Give the group questions, some of which must be answered at each location before going to the next one.

Give the group only a limited amount of money for transportation so they have to calculate costs and include that extra variable in their decisions about efficient travel. If you do this, you must make sure participants do not use their own money to supplement group money. You also must calculate a sufficient amount to give the group beforehand.

Use this as a method for traveling on a field trip when it is okay to arrive late or not arrive at all. It does not work if you do not have much time to get there or if you have to be there at a certain time. If arrival is important by a certain time such as noon, leave much earlier than that and give the group a time challenge to get there by ten. At ten, if you aren't there yet, you can debrief their efforts and then give them the necessary new information so they can make a plan that will get you there by noon.

Possible Debriefing Questions

Who decided which way to go? How efficient was the group in getting to our destination? Did you keep each other safe as you made decisions and traveled?

Our Experience

Participants enjoy and become engaged in this very real challenge. It is convenient to make the “everyday” activity of getting somewhere into a group challenge or adventure. Before doing this, I was concerned that middle school students would already know their way around the city, but this did not take away from the challenge. Depending on the clues you give, you can make a challenge for even the most street-wise participants.

8th Grade: We made getting places an experiential activity during our two-day urban expedition, whenever the group seemed ready for a challenge. At other times, when the group was needing to not be challenged, or when we needed to be somewhere on time we showed them exactly where to go and told them the quickest way to get there.

When we did a challenge, the group spent lots of time standing on street corners looking at the maps. Some people took personal social risks and asked people passing by for directions. They learned that trusting strangers’ directions got them even more lost, so they gained new respect for their maps. One participant even thought of calling a place for directions but then realized they did not know where they were to begin with. Thus they learned that you have to find where you are on the map first before you can figure out how to get where you are going.

It was important to debrief after we arrived at the first destination to get the group thinking about how many of the participants were included in decisions and how they would include everyone in the future. I also borrowed the maps to check things and then handed them back to different people to circulate that responsibility a bit. It can be set up that the group has a new leader or “voice” or pair of leaders to get them to each destination.

Traffic Jam

For every eight participants, create this diagram of nine equally sized squares on the floor of a room. You can draw it in chalk or tape paper onto the ground.



Application

Problem solving, sequential ordering, patience, observation, following a leader, following instructions, individual decision-making.

Procedure

Four participants stand on the places to the left of the middle square and the other four stand on the places to the right.

Have both groups of four face the middle unoccupied square. The group on the left side attempts to end up on the right side and vice versa, moving according to the rules.

Facilitator Framing

“The group’s goal is to get the people on the left side of the empty space to the right side and vice versa. You must keep to the following rules (read the following).”

Rules and Precautions

- Legal:**
1. A participant may move into an empty space in front of him or her.
 2. You may move around a member of the other subgroup into an empty space.
- Illegal:**
1. You may not move backwards.
 2. You may not move around a member of the same subgroup as you are.
 3. No move may involve two members of the subgroup moving at the same time.

I sat down with paper and pennies and figured this out before giving it to a group for the first time. It was important for me to know a solution was possible because this was easy to doubt when frustrated people asked me: “Can it really be done?”

Variations

The participants solve the problem individually at their desks using small objects (coins, paper clips, etc). Later they can come together and do it as a whole. This may give a slower thinker a voice in the group decision which they do not always have.

A ninth person not on the diagram can be the leader who organizes the solution and tells everyone where to move. No one can move without permission from this outside “leader.” This brings up issues about leading and following and can lead to discussion on leadership in class.

Possible Debriefing Questions

Did you think this was possible? If not, why did you keep trying to figure it out? Did it help to draw it or think individually about it? What was it like to communicate in a line?

Our Experience

Usually when you ask a group to solve a puzzle standing in a line with their backs to each other there is a lot of confusion, poor communication, and frustration. This is a great example of that phenomena and of the value of circles. You can tell a group they must solve the initiative while standing in their positions. When they give up on that you can let them try solving it in a circle. Finally, when the group gets really frustrated, let them study it on their own at their desks. (This shows the value of individuals thinking through the ideas that they bring to the group.)

8th Grade: They were very engaged in this. They tried many methods. At many points they thought about quitting but some determined individuals worked it through at their desks. After sitting with it the group solved it and played it out with no trouble. We had two separate Traffic Jams in the same room and once the first group got it they helped the second group which led to interesting dynamics of leadership and follow-ship.

section 8

Problem Solving Simulations

Description

These are real or make believe scenarios where participants must imagine they are in a situation, solve the problems that come up in it and discuss it.

Application

These are good for getting people to discuss things, personal issues, moral issues, or academic issues.

What Usually Happens

Many of the simulations have good story lines or seem to be about one thing even though they are getting people to think about something else. Thus they can catch people off guard and engage people very well. Participants may become very emotional and excited by the ensuing discussions, so the set-up you create for emotional safety is very important.

Rules and Precautions

Some standard ground rules which all participants must agree to before you begin are:

Speak one at a time.

Respect what others say. You can disagree with someone else's idea but no "dissing" it.

No point of view is right or wrong, just different.

Hold the group to these standards. If they are not following the standards and it feels like some people are not emotionally safe, *stop action*. Have the group make a new plan for keeping each other emotionally safe before continuing. If a person is not keeping to the standards despite the group's best efforts, work with that person individually if possible.

The question of how the discussion will be facilitated always comes up. There are many options. You can name yourself the facilitator who can choose who speaks next. You should decide whether you are allowed to speak between speakers or if the group rules apply to you as well. The group can use a talking stick or a tally system, where rotating facilitators write down the names of people who want to speak next and cue them to speak in the written order.

Ways to Use Them

Allowing participants time to think about a topic and write about it before meeting to discuss it can enhance the discussions and debates and give more voice to all participants. You can also create a debate which involves topics the students have already researched independently. If right and wrong choices are involved, you can attach scores to them and compare the scores of individuals versus the average of the group and figure out if the group made better choices than individuals. If there were some individuals who scored higher than the group, why didn't they bring the group up to speed? What held the group back?

To Create One

Consider the following:

1. What do you hope to achieve with the ensuing discussion?
2. Troubleshoot what directions the group might go in their discussion and whether you are comfortable going there.
3. Are there any ground rules you need to set for this discussion?
4. Is there anything you could present to participants beforehand that may inform the discussion better? (This could be an hour to a month of advance work.)

(name of exercise)

Materials

Application

Procedure

Facilitator Framing

Rules and Precautions

Possible Debriefing Questions

Creators/Source

section 9

Tools from the Field

Full Value Contract

The group or class creates the standards they want to follow in order for everyone to express their “full value.” Define what it would look like if they followed these and if they did not. We sometimes add non-negotiable parts to it. Everyone signs the contract to show their agreement to follow this. Post this so it is always in sight. When people do not follow it, discuss the full value contract.

I always try to refer to the full value contract soon after it is made when anything related to its content occurs. This helps the group realize that I meant we were going to stick to this contract, so eventually they will hold each other to it.

Recipe for Success

We want to have success this year as a class. What ingredients do we need to make a recipe for success? (Same idea as the Full Value Contract).

Morning Meeting

Sit close in a circle and take a moment each morning to come together and check in. You can set up whatever rituals you want to have during this time. Just be sure to do them every day. For example, we ask, “Any announcements? Any readings, songs, or inspirational words for the day? Let’s take a moment of silence.” At school you may want to do a go-round on how everyone feels each day or sing a song or play a game every day.

Sunflower Goal Setting

Draw a big daisy with the goal in the center of the flower. Fill in the petals with plans of how to reach

the goal. The leaves are supporting people. The grasses are supporting ideas. Weeds are things that will keep you from reaching your goal.

Behavior Contracts

This is a contract a student writes and signs to commit to working on a specific behavior. The student will set a goal of some behavior they want to work on and plan specifically how they will work on it. Include in this plan a few options where the student will try to control their own behavior and then an option where the instructor steps in to remind them that they want to avoid that behavior.

The participant creating a contract will write out what the positive consequences will be if they follow their plan and what the negative consequences will be if they don't. Write out the excuses or ways they may sabotage their plan. Plan an evaluation time with the student written into the contract. At that time, review when the student successfully followed the contract and when they did not follow it and what happened. Have them refer to the positive and negative consequences that they made up.

There are some things to watch out for if you decide to use contracts. The contracted person needs to come up with their contract themselves. You can tell them they need a contract because certain behaviors are unacceptable (hopefully based on the standards set in the "group contract"), but let them decide how they will avoid those unacceptable behaviors. Do not skip on the evaluation time if the contracted person is doing well. That is when you most should discuss their behavior.

Also, it is very important that people evaluate their own behavior. They can tell you step by step each time they were challenged to behave differently than the contracted way and how they handled it.

Circles

When working in groups, set the standard that if someone in the group needs to give an important message to everyone else in the group, they should call a circle and discuss it. When circle-up is called, everyone should stop what they are doing and come immediately.

Set guidelines for circle where one person speaks at a time, and maintain them. Pass a stick or write down who is next so everyone gets a chance to speak and be heard. The group can designate a facilitator to run each meeting. The person who calls a circle-up needs to agree that it is finished before it is finished.

Solos

These can last five minutes or four days. Participants must be in a situation where it will be silent, they can each have their own space, and will not be distracted by others. Solo time is a quiet time when everyone gets the treat of just being with themselves. Ideally during solo time people can think about whatever they want. Solos can also be directed with something for people to think, write, or

draw about. It is very effective to give people alone time to reflect about something intense before sharing about it.

One of the most luxurious “Solos” I had lasted about five minutes. We had gathered in a circle for the debrief, bringing stress from the last activity we had done. The facilitator had us turn around (backs to the circle) and take five minutes of silence. It felt like weeks. We returned rested and able to discuss things calmly.

Duos

Participants have a designated amount of time in pairs in their own spaces. They can be left on their own or assigned something to discuss or create together.

Time Outs

Explain this in advance. When a student is unable to deal appropriately with a situation, they can take a “Time Out,” which means they will separate themselves from the group and take some time alone. They must remain alone and not be involved in the group’s activities (half in and half out). You can set it up so that before someone on a time out can enter the group again, they explain to the instructor or to everyone involved (usually in a circle) why they left and how they will resolve the issue they walked away from.

Feelings Discussions

Get people talking about what they are feeling besides anger.

Conflict Resolution

We use this tool when two or more people are in a conflict and they need the group’s help resolving it. The group will circle up and discuss the following things one at a time.

I ESCAPE (The acronym)

I ssue.

E xplanations from both sides.

S ympathize with both sides.

C onsequences. What happened to people because of the way this issue was handled?

A lternatives. What are some ways to handle this differently next time?

P lan.

E valuation. Make a specific time you will evaluate, even if things are working wonderfully.

It is important for the teacher to show each participant respect, caring, and sympathy for their point of view, and to help them find a mutually agreeable resolution. Show each participant that you really want to hear from both sides.

Listening Exercises

People break off into pairs to answer a question. They will be timed. For the first three or five or ten minutes, one person will speak and the other will listen. Then they will switch. Each listener will report back on what the other said.

Anger Management

There are all kinds of tools for thinking about how to deal with and talk about anger.

Feedback

Teach people how to give others feedback effectively. One way I do this is to teach them this formula:

“When you _____, I feel _____. It would help me if you tried _____.”

Feedback should be done immediately (not about events long past). Focus on how the person’s action made you feel. This encourages the person receiving the feedback to consider your feelings and is less likely to cause defensiveness. You have not told them that they are bad, but that something they did made you feel a certain way.

The person giving feedback should be ready to get some back.

Ways to Form Small Groups

For each small group, cut a picture from magazines into pieces so there will be one piece for each participant. Pass them out randomly and let people make the puzzles. Each picture will be one group.

Appreciation

Take turns going around the circle and thanking the person next to you for something they did or that you appreciate about them.

Self Appreciation

Offer everyone M&Ms or pretzels and let them take as many as they want and hold them without eat-

ing them. Once everyone has some, take turns going around the circle saying one good thing about yourself for every M&M or pretzel that you have.

Hopes and Fears in a Hat

Everyone writes one hope and one fear and puts them in a hat. Participants take turns picking one and reading it as if it were their own hope or fear. This only works if people can take it seriously and not laugh at each others' fears but try to understand them and really pretend that the fear they are reading is their own fear. I often ask them why they fear something they have named, so they have to put themselves in the shoes of the person whose fear they are reading.

Negative and Positive Leaders

This is useful if there are clear negative leaders in the group and the group is ready to confront this but needs a tool.

Have the group line up without talking according to positive leadership. In other words, have those who lead positively the most on one end and least on the other end. Have the participants observe where they and their classmates are standing in the line. You can then discuss: What makes a positive leader? Is this something people aspire to? What are the different ways you can lead? Is it as positive to follow?

Next have the group line up silently according to negative leadership. Afterwards you can discuss: What are the qualities of a negative leader? Is this something people aspire to? Should they aspire to it? What does popularity have to do with leadership?

Leaders

During any problem-solving exercise or initiative, try assigning a leader who facilitates or who is the only person who can speak and make decisions about what to do. Discuss this.

section 10

Debriefing

Do not be intimidated by “debriefing.” You can do it. The best rule is to do whatever comes most naturally for you. The following are ideas, but what happens during the game or initiative will mold the actual questions you ask and discussions that you have.

It is best to get into a circle for the debrief, but you can separate for short solo reflection times before circling to discuss. This often helps participants form their own ideas before hearing other peoples ideas and gives people who need time to think an equal chance. Avoid letting people use catch phrases like “teamwork” and “communication.” Ask participants to expand on what that means and to give an example.

It is most powerful to let groups come to their own conclusions about what they have done. Your original questions should guide participants to realize and discuss the important things about how they worked together. But be ready to let go of your agenda if the group takes the debrief in another direction. Your role is to keep the discussion safe for everyone so that everyone is heard and their ideas are respected. Disagreement is fine but not disrespect. At the end you can make a poignant comment which ties everything together and forwards your agenda, but that has much less meaning than the conclusions drawn by the participants themselves.

Three Points

One format is to touch on the following three points without actually asking these questions. The first point helps make people comfortable to talk before they move into the next two points which are harder to talk about. Be aware – answering “what happened” can continue for a long time if you let it.

Find creative ways to get the group to express these things:

What happened? How did it feel? How does it connect to other aspects of your life or something specific in class?

Questions

Ask participants to go around the circle sharing answers to one of the following questions:

A high and a low from the activity.

Something that was hard for them and what helped.

How the group decided to do the initiative the way they did.

What role did you play in the group?

Who were the leaders and who were the followers?

What is important about each of these roles?

Voting

The group stands in a circle. Tell them you are going to ask a question and they are to answer by voting with their fingers: five for “very much,” and one for “very little.” You can then ask any question about the exercise.

How much do you think the group worked together?

How involved were you in the solution?

How well did you take responsibility for yourself?

After each question, look at the hands and ask for some of the people who voted “five” to explain what they thought. Then ask some of the people who voted “one” to share their thoughts or emphasize a common thread you notice such as: “Most people voted that they did not take responsibility for themselves. Let’s try this again and see if you can give yourself a better vote next time.”

The Car

After doing an initiative, ask participants to write or draw answers to the following questions and then share: “If this class were a car doing that initiative, which part of the car were you and why?”

Substitute “car” for something you have been studying, such as a Taino family unit, a boat, a neighborhood, or an animal.

Nonverbal Debriefs

These are wonderful tools to draw out less-verbal participants and to give everyone an opportunity to express themselves in different ways.

For some people it is very difficult to express themselves nonverbally, especially if it is to be shared

with the group. In those cases, I make it an option to share, but I encourage people that whatever form their creativity takes has value.

It is wonderful to share these creations but have participants take a moment to show them to the group before describing the thoughts behind them. Let the creation speak for itself.

Molding: One participant acts like clay while another acts like a sculptor and molds “the clay” to represent themselves during the activity. The sculptor can mold a high point, a low point, a courageous moment.... Participants take turns sharing their sculptures with the group.

Drawing: You can ask any debrief question and have the answer drawn instead of spoken. The results reach a different level of depth. It is helpful to have drawing supplies available.

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*April and her brother Pete play
“Let’s Get Up and Stretch” –
always a favorite with teachers!*

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Gathering outdoors? Challenge a group to find branches, stones, etc to create a group sculpture. Maybe it will grow each day.

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Chants Albums from Reclaiming

WeaveAndSpin.org/playlists

Chants: Ritual Music – 19 classic chants from the early days, recorded by a chorus and drum.

Second Chants: More Ritual Music – more chants and songs from the early years, recorded by soloists, chorus, and folk accompanists.

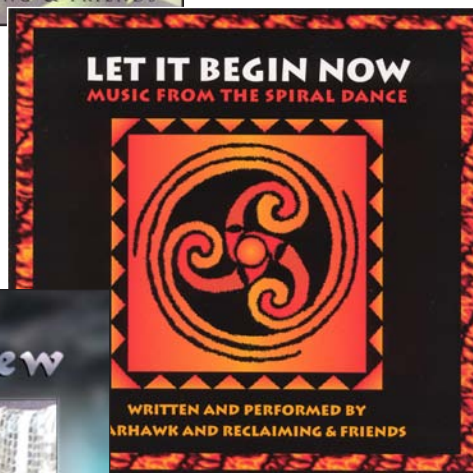
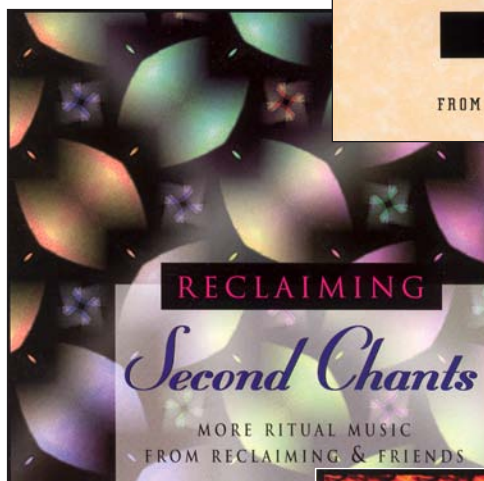
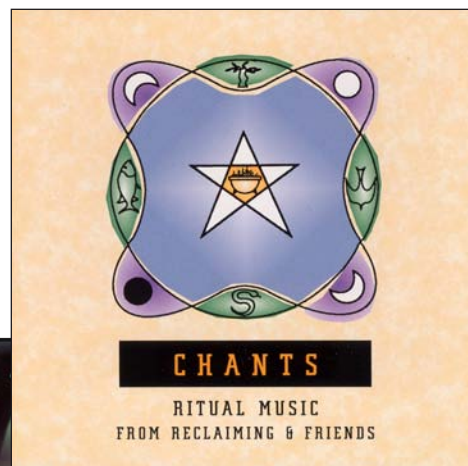
Let It Begin Now: Music from the Spiral Dance – chants and songs from our annual Samhain ritual.

Witches Brew: Songs & Chants from the Reclaiming Cauldron – greatest hits from teachers and musicians around Reclaiming – including Labyrinth Meditation Music.

Campfire Chants: Songs for the Earth – post-2000 Reclaiming hits, recorded by chorus and folk ensemble.

Cantos Sagrados – bilingual Spanish/English versions of our favorite chants (coming soon).

Way to the Well – drum-trance ritual with Starhawk.



Chants stream on all online sources.

Proceeds benefit future recordings.

Resources from our Website

Camp Organizing Manuals & More Resources

Starting a new camp or retreat doesn't have to mean reinventing the logistical wheel. We've learned our craft from others, and gladly pass along our lessons.

Visit our Organizing Resources page, where you'll find manuals, forms, and other stuff we've found useful, including:

Witchlets organizing manual – timeline, tasks and roles, waivers, camp culture guidelines, and more – a complete how-to manual.

Redwood Magic camper packet – the PDF we send

to campers a few weeks before camp – bring-list, camp culture guidelines, info about schedule and kitchen, map and directions....

Promo cards and brochures – samples.

Waivers and forms – liability and medical waiver, photo release, ethics agreement.

Group process resources – consensus, feminism, nonhierarchy, dealing with sexism, racism, homophobia, and more.

Find these and more online at:

WeaveAndSpin.org/resources



April's Book of Games is a favorite resource at Witchlets in the Woods, a Reclaiming Tradition family camp..

WeaveAndSpin.org/freebies

"There is no end to the downloads, no end..."

Once you finish reading April's Book, you'll probably be asking: "Where can I download more free Reclaiming stuff?"

Well, you've come to the right page! Our website has all sorts of freebies, just waiting to be downloaded. Books, back issues and reprints, manuals and handbooks, photo features, music – all gratis.

WeaveAndSpin.org/freebies



What Is Reclaiming Quarterly?

RQ and its predecessor Reclaiming Newsletter were printed quarterly from 1980 through about 2005, then occasionally till 2011. Our website was launched around 1999. You can find all of our back issues as free PDFs at:

WeaveAndSpin.org/back-issues

Once a large Bay Area cell that met in person, RQ is now an online group that maintains archives and assists in publishing and recording projects. If you want to help or have inspirations, contact us.

Recent projects have included assisting with the Teen Earth Magic Workbook and Campfire Chants, an album created by Redwood Magic and Witchlets family campers. This book is our latest "assist."

ReclaimingQuarterly.org is still online, but our active site (resizes for all devices) is WeaveAndSpin.org

WeaveAndSpin.org – Reclaiming archives, fresh posts, music and video links, lots of free downloads, and more!

Contact RQ: ReclaimingQuarterly@gmail.com

Connecting with Reclaiming

Reclaiming Quarterly, which produced this book, is part of the Reclaiming Tradition, an Earth-based spiritual teaching and grassroots organizing collective with local communities, camps, and networks around the Americas, Europe, and Australia.

Reclaiming Websites

Reclaiming.org – portal site with basic info about Reclaiming, links to local groups, online events, etc.

WitchCamp.org – links to WitchCamps and family camps in Europe, North America, and Australia.

BayAreaReclaiming.org – local rituals, classes, and events in the San Francisco Bay Area.

ReclaimingSpiralDance.org – information, tickets, and volunteer opportunities for our biggest annual gathering in the Bay Area, each year around Samhain.

ReclaimingQuarterly.org – archival website of our former magazine (1980-2011) – hundreds of articles, publications, downloadable files, etc.

WeaveAndSpin.org – new Reclaiming Quarterly-sponsored site with current posts, archive highlights, links to music and videos, and much more.

WeaveAndSpin.org/playlists/ – youtube and spotify playlists for chants and other recordings.

DirectAction.org – free downloads of activist handbooks and other resources.

Facebook – many local Reclaiming groups and camps have pages – search “Reclaiming” on FB.

Reclaiming Classes & Retreats local & online

Reclaiming teachers offer classes and workshops in ritual, activism, personal growth, and more. Some are local, some online. Costs are reasonable, and scholarship assistance is often available.

For current offerings, join our elists – see info on this page – and visit our websites:

Reclaiming.org | BayAreaReclaiming.org

Reclaiming Listserves/Elists

Any interested person can ask to join these lists. Email us: ReclaimingQuarterly@gmail.com.

RIDL – Reclaiming International Discussion List – keep up with classes (including online), WitchCamps, activism, and more from around the Reclaiming network.

LivRiv – the Living River is the listserve of the Pagan Cluster – keep up with international activist organizing and how you can take part and/or support.

BARD – Bay Area Reclaiming’s elist, open to all interested. Local rituals, classes (online too), music and nature circles, activist gatherings, and more.

In the Bay Area for Halloween?

The Spiral Dance



First held in 1979 to celebrate the release of Starhawk’s book, the participatory ritual is danced each year around Samhain – the New Year of the witches and the Bay Area’s biggest magical gathering.

In the Bay Area in late October? Join us!

Tickets online. Many volunteers are also needed to create this community ritual.

ReclaimingSpiralDance.org

DANCING THE SPIRAL!

A COMPANION TO THE WRITINGS OF STARHAWK

Welcome to our latest book – here's a few ways to get started!

- **Read** the roundtables and hear directly from Reclaiming teachers and witchcampers.
- **Skim** the Table of Contents or Ye Olde Index for an overview of the book.
- **Play** Reclaiming chants while flipping through the book – playlists for all streaming sites.
- **Jump** to the chapter on Magical Activism for some quick inspiration – and learn how to get involved.
- **Listen** to an online ritual with Starhawk – and find links to more online rituals, trances, and classes.
- **Do Bibliomancy** (divination from a sacred text) – open the book at random and start reading!

Print & free download editions

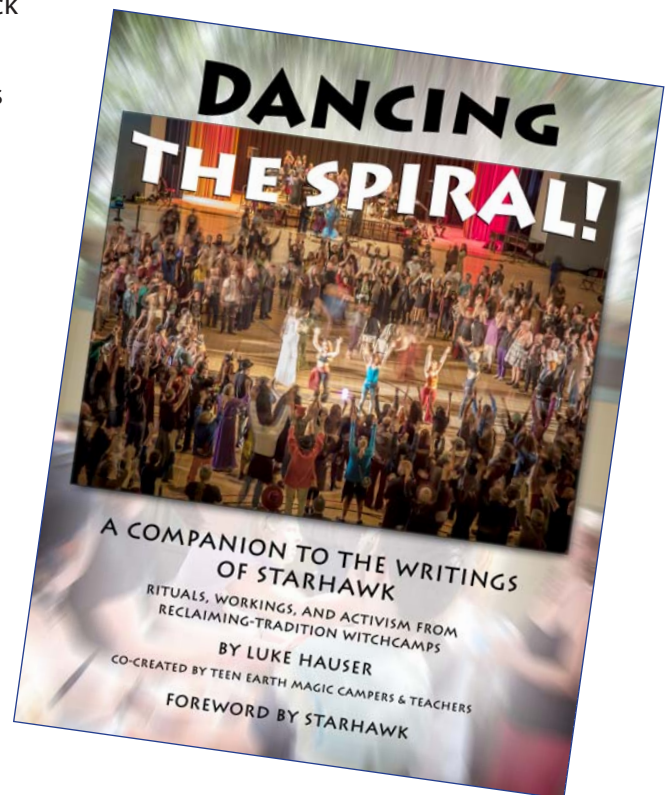
- Free downloadable PDF – 350 nearly-completed pages of magic, activism, rituals – and lots of pictures!
- Print edition available as soon as we finish the book!

Don't wait – visit our website now

- WeaveAndSpin.org/spiral

A word to organizers & teachers

- You can contact us at ReclaimingQuarterly@gmail.com



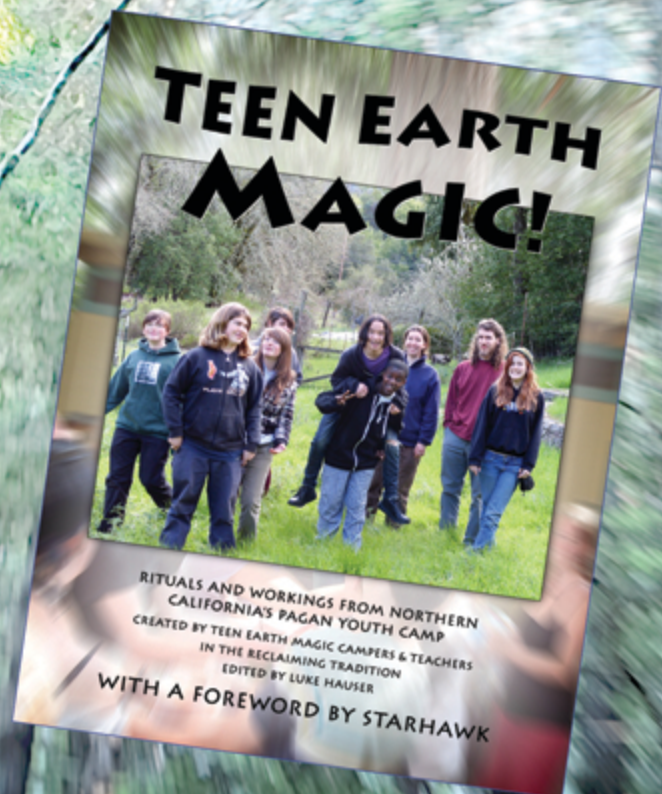
An amazing magical resource for teens – and everyone!

– Starhawk, author of *The Spiral Dance*

TEEN EARTH MAGIC

**Earth-Based Spirituality & Magical Activism
in the Reclaiming Tradition**

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- solitaires & circles
- magical workings
- activism
- tarot & divination
- personal growth
- pentacle workings
- interviews with teens
- world change
- online meditations
- resources & more



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