



RIVER CROSSING CHALLENGE

Students participate in a group activity that require skills such as collaboration, support, problem solving, flexibility, and trust.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will utilize various SEL skills.
- Students will evaluate personal and group behaviors.

MATERIALS

- “River Stones” such as paper or vinyl spots.
- Boundary markers such as tape or rope.

TIME

30 min

LESSON INTRO

This activity pairs well with most of the other lessons. If you are looking to extend time on any lesson, or get students up and practicing skills, this is your ticket!

The objective of this activity is for students to complete a mildly difficult task (crossing an open space using only a few “stepping stones”). In order for students to complete it successfully, they will need to utilize skills such as creative problem-solving, communication, group organization, seeking to understand others, and moments of support.

Students should be allowed to work through the activity without teacher intervention in order for student skills to emerge and struggle to naturally occur. The reflection time of this activity is where the facilitator can guide student learning.

If your student group seems to believe that a “leader” is the one with the loudest voice and in charge, consider changing some language here. Either frontload this activity with an emphasis on leadership skills such as listening, followership, and support—OR—instead of bringing up leadership at all, discuss 1) what roles are needed to help make this successful, or 2) what skills will the group need to employ.

LESSON STEP BY STEP

1. In advance, randomly distribute enough “river stones” between two lines spaced about 20 feet apart.
2. Place “river stones” close enough so that people can step from one to another easily. If you are on a slippery floor, consider taping down the spots.
3. Gather the group behind a line identified as the Start zone.
4. Explain that this activity is meant for students to practice the leadership skills that they have been discussing and/or researching (if you are not focusing on leadership for this activity, change the language to include the skill you ARE focusing on, such as collaboration, communication, or creativity).
5. Spend a few moments reviewing the class list of the SEL skills you have been discussing, or create a list of skills that students imagine they will need to use during this activity. Ask students to pay attention to the behaviors that they observe.
6. Challenge students to traverse the area between the two lines by stepping only on the marshmallows.
7. Invite individuals to traverse the area first, using any path they choose.
8. If a person happens to touch the area outside of the marshmallows, invite them to restart.
9. Next, invite two people to cross together while keeping physical contact at all times.
10. Again, if someone touches the ‘no-go’ zone, invite the pair to restart.
11. Finally, form small teams of 4 to 6 people.
12. Challenge these teams to cross the area together while keeping constant physical contact.

VARIATIONS

1. Limited Steps: Invite individuals, pairs and small teams to traverse the area in as few steps as successfully and as quickly as possible. Allow ample time for people to plan, experiment and accomplish this task.
2. Crossing Paths: Divide your group into two, and ask each half to start from opposing start zones. The goal is the same, to safely get every person to the other safe zone, but note the propensity of one half or both to assist the other, or not.

FACILITATOR TIPS AND NOTES

1. Watch for slipping “stones” which can be a safety concern. Tape paper to the floor or move to a carpeted or grassy surface.
2. As noted earlier, the theme if this activity can be altered to fit a variety of themes. See the Variations and Reflection tabs for suggestions about how to modify.

REFLECTION & WRAP UP

1. Invite students to reflect on their experience using some or all of the questions below that best fit the student experience:
 - What did you notice about yourself and the group during this experience?
 - In what ways did you offer, or were you offered **support** during the traverse?
 - What effective **communication** skills were used?
 - What **role** did you take? What role did you notice others took?
 - What **leadership** skills were needed? Which were used? Give examples.
 - Did you always admit to touching the 'no-go' zone? Why or why not?
 - What does **integrity** mean? What does **trust** mean? How did you see these related?
 - How do we know when **integrity** is compromised? Can you provide examples?
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NOTES

Source: <https://www.playmeo.com/activities/team-building-problem-solving-activities/marshmallow-river/>

Educational Standards: CASEL: Self Awareness, CASEL: Social Awareness, CASEL: Relationship Skills, CASEL: Responsible Decision-Making, P21: Creativity and Innovation, P21: Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, P21: Communication and Collaboration, P21: Flexibility and Adaptability, P21: Initiative and Self Direction, P21: Social and Cross-Cultural Skills, P21: Leadership and Responsibility, CCRS:SL1 Have Diverse Conversations



KEYPUNCH CHALLENGE

Students reflect on strategies to overcome challenges based on their experience with the Keypunch activity.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will practice strategies to work through a group challenge
- Students will develop successful strategies to use when they encounter a challenge

MATERIALS

- Rope or tape to mark a circle on the ground
- 25 “spots” with numbers 1 – 25 written on them (cut paper, paper plates, foam spots, etc...)
- Stopwatch

TIME

30 min

LESSON INTRO

Students work to solve a group challenge with incremental performance goals. You’ll see students employ many skills to achieve this challenge. To ensure that the activity meets the objectives, keep the framing and reflection time focused on the skills and attitudes students used to work through the challenging task.

LESSON STEP BY STEP

1. Randomly lay out up to 25 numbered spots within a circled off area. This forms the “keypad”.
2. Students should circle up around the keypad outside of the boundary.
3. Next, share the objective of this session: students will develop successful strategies to use when they encounter a challenge.
4. Discuss the many ways things can be challenging: physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, spiritually. Share that this particular challenge may feel challenging in any of those areas for particular students.
5. Frame the activity by asking to students to share *positive* feelings or thoughts that come up when they hear that they will be challenged. You may hear: courageous, excited, I’ve got this.

6. Next, ask students what *negative* feelings or thoughts that come up when they hear that they will be challenged. You may hear: nervous, bored, afraid.
7. The objective of the activity is for the group to touch all the numbered spots as fast as they can.
8. Here are the rules:
 - The numbers must be touched in order 1 to 25. They can be touched with the foot or hand or however.
 - Every person in the group must be involved in the activity by touching at least one number.
 - Only one person is allowed into the circle at a time—if two or more people are in the circle, the group will get 5 seconds added to their time.
9. Allow for any questions and clarifications, and allow for some planning time if students would like it.
10. When the group is ready, say “go” to begin the time.
11. Observe carefully for mistakes and group behaviors.
12. Once the team completes this initial round, stop the time and record it. Celebrate the success!
13. Next, share that the group will given two additional attempts to improve their time. They must complete each successive attempt in less time than the previous attempt.
14. Allow time for students to strategize and plan. Once they are ready, say “go” to begin the time.
15. Continue to observe for mistakes and group behaviors. After each round, note the time.

VARIATIONS

1. Lay the number spots face-down randomly on the ground within the specified perimeter. The group will stand on the outside perimeter. Challenge students to pick up all of the cards in sequence from 1 through 25, flipping one card at a time, as quickly as possible.

Rules:

- The group is permitted to have one person inside the perimeter at any point in time.
- When a card is picked up, if it is not the next card in the sequence, it must be placed back down. Otherwise, the person inside the perimeter will collect and keep the card.
- Team members should assist their peer inside the perimeter, eg point, talk, etc.

The task continues until all cards have been picked-up in order.

Repeat the task several times aiming to record the fastest possible time.

FACILITATOR TIPS AND NOTES

1. Be okay with the messy group process of learning. Allow students to struggle through, self-correct, and then reflect back on their responses. Try not to manage the process, but let students learn as they go, the goal being to provide moments of self-reflection and growth afterwards.

REFLECTION & WRAP UP

1. Circle up the group for a reflection on the activity. Begin with basic questions such as:
 - What was fun?
 - What was frustrating?
 - How did you feel during that activity?
 - What role did you take?
2. Ask students to recall what the objective of this lesson was: *students will develop successful strategies to use as they encounter a challenge.*
3. Shift the reflection towards challenge:
 - What was challenging about this activity?
 - What was hard/frustrating/difficult?
 - Finish the sentence: I noticed that when things got hard I/we _____.
 - What strategies did you notice the group used to get through the challenge?
 - What strategies did you notice YOU used personally to help you through the challenge?
 - Finish the sentence: something I use to overcome difficulty is _____.
4. Depending on where the conversation takes root, wrap up the activity by asking students to look for other times during the week they can use the same strategies that they discussed, or, times they are prone to use unhelpful strategies.

NOTES

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ALL CATCH CHALLENGE

Group activity gets students using strategies to respond to challenge.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will practice strategies to work through a group challenge
- Students will develop successful strategies to use when they encounter a challenge

MATERIALS

- Lots of balls (plan for about two per person)

TIME

30 min

LESSON INTRO

This challenging activity will get students considering both how they respond personally to a challenge, and also what group behaviors, skills, and strategies can help a group be successful. You may see the group grapple with frustration, collaboration, communication, sharing ideas, taking direction, etc...

LESSON STEP BY STEP

1. In advance, collect a large number of balls, or soft tossable items. Possibly the hardest task for you will be to get your hands on a large number of balls, or soft tossable items. Balloons won't work because they must have toss-ability. Ask your PE teacher for tennis balls, or students can create "tossables" from bunched up plastic grocery bags wrapped in duct tape.
2. Explain to the students that the activity they are about to do is a challenging one! Ask students to notice what the group does—and what they do personally—to get through a challenging situation.
3. Give one ball to your group.
4. Instruct your group that every time you say "GO," whoever is holding a ball must toss it in the air at least a foot above the head of the tallest person.

5. All balls must be caught by a person other than the one who tossed it.
6. The initial rounds are always very quick and simply performed. But, as soon as the group possesses more than one ball for every two people, things start to get more interesting.
7. For every successful round (every ball tossed is caught,) give your group one new ball.
8. Whenever one or more balls are dropped during an attempt, the task will resume from one ball again. This is a tough penalty, but this parameter quickly galvanizes the group to focus carefully, and avoid 'risky' solutions. To be honest, however, it's very hard for a group that just failed at an attempt of 25 balls, to start over at one. So, in these circumstances, I typically return them to an agreed challenging mid-point in the activity.
9. Challenge your group to perform the task with as many balls as possible.
10. Encourage your group to plan, collaborate and focus.
11. Remind them of the rules as needed:
 - Every ball (held by the group) must be tossed simultaneously when you say "GO"
 - The balls must travel at least one foot above the head of the tallest person in the group
 - Every ball must be caught by someone other than the person who tossed it.

VARIATIONS

1. Multiple Work Stations: If you've got a large group, divide into smaller groups of 8 to 12 people. Challenge each small group (workstations) to develop a strategy that can successfully catch the most number of balls.
2. Long Distance All Catch: Increase the distance over which the balls must travel before caught.
3. Hands-On Challenge: For a greater challenge, suggest that only people's hands (as distinct from any other part of their body) are allowed to touch the balls (this will prevent the creative use of clothing, legs, etc.)
4. Soft Tossables: Substitute balls with a variety of soft tossable items, eg rubber chickens, koosh-balls, beach balls, beanie-babies, ping-pong balls, etc. The challenge will be equal to the level of diversity you introduce with these items.
5. Limited Time: Place a time limit on the group, but remove the need to return to the start (one ball) with each unsuccessful attempt.

FACILITATOR TIPS AND NOTES

1. For some people, catching a ball can be an intimidating task, especially if they have to perform it in front of others. Well, this task will involve a lot of catching in front of others, but this will not be your group's focus...
2. Be okay with the messy group process of learning. Allow students to struggle through, self-correct, and then reflect back on their responses. Try not to manage the process, but let students learn as they go, the goal being to provide moments of self-reflection and growth afterwards.

REFLECTION & WRAP UP

1. As students progress through the activity, pause occasionally to reflect on how students are responding personally and collectively to the challenge. Use the prompts below, and/or point out what you are noticing.

To scaffold this reflection, during the first number of rounds ask students to begin by reflecting on their personal responses. Use the later rounds to begin reflecting on group behaviors.

2. Spend time drawing out learning on the skills and behaviors that students used productively, or unproductively.
 - At what point did the task become challenging for you? The group?
 - What was the most challenging part of this activity for you? (catching the ball, frustration that people weren't trying, the group not agreeing on a plan, etc...)
 - What was your own personal strategy to work through this frustration or challenge?
 - What did the group do to solve these challenges? What *could* you have done?
 - Did your skills improve with practice, or by something else?
 - Did your group decide something that was critical to your success?
 - What else contributed to your success?
 - What strategies did you find helpful that would apply elsewhere?
3. Keep a list of skills and behaviors that helped the group succeed. Pull this out for future challenges so that students can be reminded to use these strategies again.

NOTES

Source: www.playmeo.com/activities/team-building-problem-solving-activities/all-catch/

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