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The
Robert
Bowne
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15 MINUTE webinar series

ENGAGING YOUTH IN LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Building Community and English Language Skills in Out-of-School Time

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Community building activities are a central feature of out-of-school time programs. They are done to help young people get to know each other and to create a comfortable and safe learning environment. Community building activities, because they are low-stress and low-stakes, are a perfect opportunity to engage youth in learning and practicing English. Community building activities support the development of social emotional learning and 21st Century Skills and support the English Language Arts Common Core and other state standards.

Following are five simple community building activities that support English language development during out-of-school time.

What's Your Favorite Sport?¹

LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Youth will:

- collaborate
- engage in comparing and contrasting
- use English grammar structures (e.g. “*My favorite sport is... because...*”)
- practice interpersonal and intrapersonal skills

PREPARATION

- Source photos of people playing sports.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Large sheets of paper & markers
- Photos of people playing sports
- Index card sized pieces of paper
- Writing tools

ACTIVITY

- Show pictures of people playing sports. Ask youth to share the words and actions they see in the photos.
- Write the youth generated words on a large sheet of paper, add any additional words and clarify or introduce vocabulary as necessary.
- Have youth write down their favorite sport on a small piece of paper.
- Invite youth to move around the room and group themselves according to their favorite sports.
- List each sport and the number of youth in each group on a chart.
- Ask youth to select a partner or use a cooperative learning group former to divide youth into pairs. Encourage pairs to discuss why they like the sport.
- Once conversation dies down, bring the group back together.
- Ask the group to share similarities and then differences among the sports. Compare and contrast each sport by creating Venn diagrams or by charting similarities in one column and differences in the other.
- Ask youth what they learned during the activity and what they notice about the similarities and differences.
- Adapt activity for future use with other favorites such as food, games, books, etc.

¹Developed by David Galvan, Liberal Arts Instructor, San Benito, TX CISD afterschool program, david@orbitbroadband.com.

Find Someone Who

LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Youth will:

- practice question forms
- practice interpersonal skills
- learn information to help build relationships

PREPARATION

- Create a chart with the following words:
 - ▶ Chocolate
 - ▶ Dogs
 - ▶ Reading
 - ▶ Sports

MATERIALS

- Large sheet of paper & marker
- Paper
- Writing tools

ACTIVITY

- Explain that the group is going to do an activity to get to know each other better.
- Review the grammatical transformation required for making questions from object names. For example, dogs might become, “Do you like dogs?”
- Provide youth with paper and writing tools.
- Ask youth to fold the paper into quadrants and write one word from the chart in each quadrant.
- **Explain:**
 - ▶ There will be five minutes to go around the room asking as many people as possible questions about the words in each quadrant.
 - ▶ As people answer yes their names should be recorded in corresponding quadrant in order to keep track of who likes what.
- After five minutes have the group gather again and reflect on the activity.
Consider using the following questions:
 - ▶ What did you learn about the other youth?
 - ▶ If we were going to play again, what words would you use?
- Repeat with the youth-generated word list.

Tell Me a Story?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Youth will:

- learn and practice vocabulary from everyday life objects
- be able to use the name of the object in a descriptive story
- listen and ask questions to gain additional information
- learn information to help build relationships

PREPARATION

- Source household items or collections such as soup spoons, shells, rocks, CDs, books, etc.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Household items or collections
- Paper
- Writing tools

ACTIVITY

- Have the group form a circle.
- Set the household items out in front of the group.
- Ask each youth to pick an item.
- Invite youth to share why they picked the item and the “story” it has for them. For example, someone may pick a ladle because they enjoy cooking. I picked the _____ because _____.
- Have youth ask questions about each story to gain additional information.
- Encourage youth to tell more elaborate stories or to write stories about their selected objects.

Have You Ever?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Youth will:

- practice oral language skills
- learn and practice question forms
- gather information to help build relationships

PREPARATION

None

MATERIALS

- Large sheet of paper & markers

ACTIVITY

- Have the group generate a list of questions using the question forms, “Have you ever?” For example, “Have you ever owned a dog?” or “Have you ever eaten spinach?”
- Write and number the questions on a large sheet of paper.
- Have youth form a circle.
- Explain that that where they are currently standing will represent the answer no and the inside of the circle will represent the answer yes.
- Ask for volunteers to read each question aloud and invite the youth to step inside or outside the circle depending on their answers to the questions.
- Lead a group reflection on the activity. **Consider using the following questions:**
 - ▶ What did you learn about someone else during the activity?
 - ▶ How did you feel during the activity?
 - ▶ If we were going to play again, what other questions would you add?
- Encourage youth to ask each other questions about what was learned during the activity.
- Repeat game with new questions.

Cooperative Storytelling

LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Youth will:

- collaborate
- practice oral language skills and speaking in front of a group

PREPARATION

None

ACTIVITY

- Have youth gather in a group.
- Share a story starter such as “I looked down and saw a tiny door..“
- Encourage each youth to take a turn adding one sentence to the story.
- Continue until each youth has had an opportunity to provide a sentence or the story comes to an obvious conclusion.
- Lead a reflection on the activity:
 - ▶ How did you feel about the activity?
 - ▶ What was easy? What was hard?
 - ▶ What would you change?
- Invite youth to start the story and repeat.

Notes & Additional Resources

VARIATIONS

- Expand activities from oral language to writing.

GENERAL

- Akiva, T. & McGovern, G. (2011) **Building Community**. Weikart Center for Youth program Quality www.cypq.org/sites/cypq.org/files/Building_Community_GuidebookSample.pdf
- Cole, K. (2004). **Acts of Invention: The Afterschool Program as a Site for Building Community**. *Afterschool Matters*, National Institute on Out of School Time www.niost.org/Afterschool-Matters-Spring-2004/acts-of-invention-the-afterschool-program-as-a-site-for-building-community
- Hromek, R & Roffey, S. (2009) **Promoting social and emotional learning with games: “It’s fun and we learn things.”** *Simulation & Gaming*
- Ramaswami, R, Gersh, A., McGovern, G., & Akiva, T. (2011) **Cooperative Learning**. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. www.cypq.org/sites/cypq.org/files/Cooperative_Learning_GuidebookSample.pdf

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