

Team Challenges

170+ Group Activities

to Build Cooperation, Communication, and Creativity

Great Ideas
for Teachers,
Facilitators, and
Counselors



Kris Bordessa

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Contents

Acknowledgments

Introduction

1 Creativity, Cooperation, and Communication

What Are They Good For?

2 Get It Together

Gather Your Group and Prepare for Some Fun

3 Everything but the Kitchen Sink

Commonly Used Materials and Their Uncommon Uses

4 Tiny Tasks

Warm Up with These Quick Activities

5 Talk It Up 37

Discuss Options, Share Ideas, and Make Connections

6 Construction for the Whole Crew 65

Building Towers, Bridges, Roads, and More

7 Move It!

Physical Activities

8 Show Me the Funny

Improv Hilarity at Its Best

9 Trouble with Tasks?

Working Through Some Difficult Spots

Resources

Creative-Problem-Solving Programs for Youth

Acknowledgments

As a DestiNation Imagination team manager, I had trouble finding suitable team-building activities for my groups; as a writer, I was brash enough to take on the project of creating them. The folks at Zephyr Press took me seriously, and in an amazingly smooth process, made it happen.

My fabulous teams—Double Trouble, The Time Raiders, The Black Knights, The Windboards, and CPWS (Cheezy People Wearing Speedos)—have inspired me, tested my limits, and made me laugh until I cried again and again. No matter how I envisioned each task presented to them, they always surprised me with their clever and unorthodox solutions.

I'm ever grateful to the friends and family who have cheered me on, proofread pages, and talked me through many frustrations—you rock!

But most importantly, I've had the support of my husband and two boys. They have become accustomed to scattered, precariously stacked piles of materials that will some day—some day—become an eight-minute-long presentation that will test the limits of imagination as can openers pull Trojan Horses to victory, foam pads become armor for the devious Red Knights, and Ayers Rock is transformed into the Golden Gate Bridge. My guys have been patient as I completed this book, graciously (well, most of the time) accepting countless dinners of cold cereal, days without clean socks, and many, many bad hair days. I love you guys.

Introduction

Working with children can be one of life's most rewarding experiences. It's also quite a lot like herding cats. Just when you think you've got everyone's attention, you find that a stray has wandered off in chase of a butterfly.

As a group leader for several youth organizations, I've experienced the difficulty of encouraging a group of children to move in the same direction while still respecting each individual's needs. I've watched as the simple act of compromise has reduced a frustrated child to tears. And I've seen how, with a bit of guidance, support, and an introduction to creative problem solving, kids can learn to work as a group toward a common goal.

In my role as group leader, I used to find myself constantly in need of new material. I searched my memory for the activities—campfire skits, relay races, challenges to see who could build the tallest tower or longest bridge, competitions for the most creative cabin decoration, blindfolded lipstick application—that I had loved during my own participation in 4-H and other youth programs, and I shared the childhood favorites with my teams. But, while those activities from long ago were a good start, I needed more.

Those fun childhood activities, as well as others that I've learned more recently, have compelled me to expand on those ideas and develop a resource of easy-to-implement activities that will keep kids laughing, having fun, and learning the benefits of teamwork, all at the same time.

Team challenges offer parents and teachers an easy way to share the concept of creative problem solving with children. Through these simple, hands-on activities, kids can experiment with building new methods, discover new uses for everyday items, try on new personas, and learn to express some unusual ideas as they work toward solving a problem as a team. Your group will learn to work together on projects such as creating a bridge out of marshmallows, straws, and paper or building as tall a tower as possible from toothpicks, raisins, cardboard, and balloons.

Sure, you say. My group could do that. But could they do it in just five minutes? And will the structure hold weight? The tasks found in this book will challenge the minds of the young and the young at heart to come up with a creative solution within specific guidelines and time limits.

Team challenges offer kids a chance to see firsthand how crucial teamwork is to success. By working together on short tasks during each class meeting or team session, participants will begin to understand what it means to work cooperatively with other people.

Grammar school students, high school bands, student council members, pep squads, and even siblings—all of these kids will learn valuable lessons through their participation in team challenges. Whether your group is a team working to solve a long-term problem in an organized competition, a casual youth group, or a group of students, family, and friends, utilizing *Team Challenges* will encourage cooperation and provide ideas for jump-starting creativity and fostering cooperation.

The early chapters of *Team Challenges* offer a look at team building and how best to implement the activities in this book with your group. Chapter 1 gives a brief introduction to cooperation, communication, and creativity and how learning these skills will benefit kids, both now and later in life. Chapter 2 will help teachers and team leaders determine the best way to utilize the tasks with their groups. Most of the materials used in *Team Challenges* are simple household items or cast-offs;

chapter 3 you'll find a list of good materials to keep on hand for last-minute activities as well as potential substitutes.

With this information, you'll be ready to start introducing team challenges to your group. Chapter 4 is a good place to start: Tiny Tasks are simple challenges that require a minimum of materials and have very simple instructions.

The rest of the tasks in this book include several different types of challenges. In chapter 5, your group will "talk it up" with verbal tasks. By exploring simple, thought-provoking questions, participants will learn to brainstorm and share answers beyond the norm. In chapter 6 your team's construction skills will be tested as participants utilize an assortment of household and recycled items to build structures or models to fit within certain criteria. While some structures must hold weight, others may need to span a certain distance. The tasks in chapter 7 get teams moving with activities that instill a feeling of trust and encourage clear communication. Participants will work together to accomplish specific goals, depending upon their teammates to help them through a sticky situation. Many of the tasks in chapter 8 incorporate a bit of role-playing and acting, as participants utilize props and their creativity to develop a short production, portray a scene, or create a solution to a hypothetical problem.

With practice, your teams will excel at solving these challenges creatively, but in the beginning, they may have some difficulties in learning to work together. Chapter 9 addresses potential trouble spots and offers ideas for smoothing the way.

While the tasks differ in nature, they all have one thing in common: the solutions must come quickly. Teammates often have only a few minutes to discuss their plan and several more to implement it. This teaches them to communicate quickly, effectively, and without conflict. Discussions following the completion of the tasks allow team members to analyze what worked, what didn't, and how they could improve their performance next time. With regular use of these tasks, participants will stretch their knowledge and abilities, learning how to solve a variety of problems.

Every task included in this book requires participants to think creatively, cooperate with one another, and communicate clearly in order to complete the given task. Young people with skills such as these are an asset to their peers, easy to work with, and impressive to watch in action. The ability to work with a team and think outside the box will serve these kids well, not only with their team, but also in the future. Working together creatively to solve the tasks in this book will help provide kids with many of the tools they need to succeed in life.

Creativity, Cooperation, and Communication

What Are They Good For?

Creativity

What makes a person creative? Is it the ability to wield a paintbrush, bringing an image to life on canvas? Is it the ability to sculpt clay into a breathtaking likeness of a living being? Is it composing music? Is it a gardener's ability to landscape in colors that flow through the garden like a vivid sunset?

People will readily give Monet, Beethoven, and Van Gogh credit for being creative souls, but likening one's own creativity to that of such revered figures is usually unthinkable. In fact, many people will deny having any creative ability at all. *Artistic* creativity is what most people think of when they hear the word *creative*, and the artistic genius of Monet, Beethoven, and Van Gogh is indeed rare. But creativity isn't just about art. What, then, *is* it about?

Creativity is a thought process that allows for much experimentation. It's a fresh way of looking at old situations. It's a unique perspective. It's the ability to perceive situations or our surroundings in a new and unusual manner. Our world is filled with creative individuals—sometimes where we'd least expect them. When Charles Menches ran out of dishes in which to serve his ice cream at the 1904 World's Fair, he didn't panic: he created the ice cream cone. And when Bette Nesmith Graham, a single mother, went to work as a typist to support her children in 1951, she found she wasn't always accurate. To remedy the situation, she created what she called Mistake Out. Twenty-eight years later she sold her invention—renamed White Out—to the Gillette Corporation for \$47.5 million.

Think about other innovations that shape our daily lives. Thomas Edison was thinking outside the box, way before the term was cool, when he lit up our nights. The world we live in would look quite different today without Bill Gates and Henry Ford. And without creativity, we would never have known the Chia Pet, the Swiffer, or the Clapper. Creative people thought of many of the items we take for granted today. They imagined an entirely new invention or expanded on an old one to create a completely new idea.

Creative thinkers of the future will have the opportunity to solve many problems—and there are plenty to go around. The search for a cure to the common cold has been fruitless. The coils on refrigerators get dusty, toilet seats are left up, and diapers still need to be changed. When some creative soul comes along with a solution for these problems, our world will indeed change for the better.

"Why didn't I think of that?" How many times have you said that to yourself upon seeing a new product or clever idea? People just like you dreamed up these innovations, but they had something else going for them: they were creative problem solvers.

Creative thinking isn't only about inventing products, though. Attacking a problem from a different angle and coming up with a solution can also result in successful plans and ideas that will benefit all involved. For years, our nation has struggled with difficult problems that won't be solved until someone thinks of a new solution. The energy crisis comes and goes without ever reaching a suitable conclusion. Our waste continues to overwhelm us, filling up landfills in spite of our recycling efforts. Poverty levels

are high, and homelessness is much more common than it should be in our wealthy nation. Just imagine the problems that future generations could overcome if parents and teachers learned to guide children and young adults toward creative thinking skills!

If there's any doubt in your mind about the desirability of a creative mind, consider this: classified ads are rife with employers seeking "creative self-starters" and prospective college students are encouraged to show creativity in their enrollment applications. Kids well versed in the art of creative thinking will have a jump start in life.

Teaching a group of kids to problem solve creatively is a task well worth undertaking. It is also a job that takes patience, tenacity, and some creativity of your own. If you've picked up this book, it is likely that you understand the need for adults to encourage creativity in young people. But how do you go about teaching kids to think creatively?

Creativity can't be taught in the same manner that math, for example, can be taught. There are no facts to memorize, no right or wrong answers. Creativity is difficult to quantify. In a classroom setting students who correctly answer questions or solve problems are rewarded with high marks. But, in life, once we leave the confines of the school setting, very few of the decisions we make have a single, correct answer. Life offers plenty of options along the way, minus an instruction manual or answer key. As in life, with creative thinking there is seldom a *right* answer. Creativity is a thought process that can be encouraged through open-ended learning activities, discussions, and challenges. Enter *Team Challenges*. Each task in this book provides the opportunity to expand the mind and solve problems in multiple ways, all while having fun.

Fostering creativity among children and young adults is something that should be a priority for every parent, teacher, and group leader. Kids will grow into creative adults only if we provide opportunities for exploring a variety of possibilities and allow them to express their ideas in a setting free of judgment, ridicule, or comparison. Creative thinking is a skill that can be encouraged in every person on earth. And well it should be. Creative thinkers are able to freely express unique ideas, solve problems, and act in a resourceful manner, all of which are assets to society.

Cooperation

Remember back in grade school, when report cards happily proclaimed, "Works well with others?" Getting along with our peers was an important part of our day. As adults, we no longer depend on such a proclamation; however, our interactions with others do earn us a reputation that often precedes us. The adult version of "works well with others" is a glowing recommendation from a friend or coworker. People who are easy to get along with, dependable, and considerate of others' ideas will naturally gain the respect of the people they deal with.

Teaching kids to work together as a group maximizes their understanding of teamwork, creates a feeling of belonging and trust, and encourages creative problem solving. Students have the opportunity to learn as part of a group when they work together toward a common goal. Working as a team, they learn that each participant has strengths and weaknesses. Recognizing each person's limitations and abilities, as well as their own, encourages participants to depend upon and trust one another.

Regardless of your team's makeup, eliminating dissension among groups is a key element of these challenges. Without creativity, cooperation, and communication, problems can seem bigger than they really are. Differences of opinion are to be expected, but by utilizing the communication aspect of team challenges, teammates will learn to calmly and respectfully share their ideas and move toward actual solving the problem at hand.

Of course, this isn't always as simple as it sounds. Two confident team members can butt heads ~~they both think their solution is the only correct solution.~~ With regular engagement in team challenges, participants will learn to see that each task presents a number of different possibilities for a solution. There is no such thing as a correct answer, since the problems presented can be solved any number of ways.

Just as that vocal, natural-born leader can wreak havoc on team tranquility, an overly quiet child can hinder the team's success as well; if ideas are not verbalized, the team will not have the opportunity to try them. Cooperation requires participation by everyone on the team and consideration of all viewpoints. Working together toward a common goal, groups may toss out some unusual possibilities for solving a task. Team members must be prepared to acknowledge all ideas as potential solutions, even those that might be considered a bit wacky.

A group of middle school boys I recently worked with was searching for a way to make an invention move across the floor. After much discussion and many unsuccessful attempts, the boys came up with the idea of modifying an electric can opener to pull their invention across the floor. It worked. With a little thought and creativity, *every* suggestion has the potential to become a great solution.

Teamwork encourages participants to work on conflict resolution skills as well. There is bound to be some disagreement about the best way to solve some of the tasks presented here. Participants will learn to work quickly through differences of opinion and to accept that all of the members of the team have valuable suggestions.

Have you ever heard the phrase "There's no *I* in *team*"? In order to complete the tasks in this book, teams must collaborate to come up with a solution that is agreeable to the entire group. Teammates will need to learn to trust one another's fairness and to explain their opinions clearly and concisely; with the time limits imposed on each task, there is little room for arguing about the best solution. Students will quickly learn that spending three minutes of their valuable time debating the merits of each idea is ultimately going to interfere with the completion of their task. This is not to say that there won't be differences of opinion initially. Just as with anything else in life, learning to work cooperatively takes practice.

In short order, the group will realize that every member of the team is a valuable part of the final solution and that competition against one's own teammates is counterproductive. Without the efforts of the entire group, the team is working with a handicap. In order for teams to excel, all members must collaborate on an innovative idea to solve the problem creatively.

The fast-paced nature of the tasks in this book requires a bit of risk taking. There isn't time to debate the very best course of action before jumping in to solve the problem. Rather, teams must get immediately to work, problem solve along the way, and incorporate past learning experiences in order to come up with the best possible solution—quickly.

Communication

Smoke signals. War drums. Cave paintings. Runes. Hieroglyphs. Sign language. Newspapers. The Pony Express. Telegraph. Telegrams. Telephone. The postal service. Federal Express. Fax. E-mail. Cell phones. Instant messaging. Chat rooms.

The methods we use to communicate may have changed over the years, but the basic principles remain the same. We talk, others listen, and vice-versa. In modern-day life, we have countless avenues for conveying our needs, desires, or dreams. We communicate with other people every day. From our good morning nod to ordering lunch; from greeting the bus driver to waving hello; from asking for

directions to saying good night, communication is an inevitable part of our day. Honing our communication skills can help us avoid conflicts, improve relationships, and increase understanding between groups of people. In spite of the ever-increasing means of communication, there is no guarantee that these methods are effective. In these days of modern technology, it is still a *human* obligation to communicate clearly.

True communication involves listening, comprehension, and the ability to convey an idea clearly. While we all have some basic communication skills, this doesn't necessarily mean that we are good at it. Sure, we talk to one another; however, if our ideas aren't articulated clearly, there is potential for miscommunication.

Speaking is only one half of successful communication. Listening—and comprehending the words we hear—completes the communication cycle. In order to make certain we hear pertinent information, it is crucial to listen as people speak. Adults in the midst of an exciting conversation have a tendency to get caught up in the moment. How many times have you participated in a conversation that felt more like a competition to finish a thought than a calm exchange of ideas? Instead of focusing on what to say next, we need to learn to turn off the dictation in our heads and simply listen. While the average person speaks at about 130 words per minute, our thinking speed is about 500 words per minute, meaning that our brains are often jumping ahead of the conversation.

The language skills of humans improve over time: babies evolve from crying for attention to grunting and pointing and finally to individual words. Stringing together words to form sentences is the culmination of long months of listening and practice. But as we gain the ability to communicate verbally, should we stop learning how to improve our communication skills?

Clear communication is crucial in every aspect of our lives, from relationships to careers. Effective communication allows us to confidently express our opinions, understand another point of view, and give accurate instructions.

The only way to learn to communicate more clearly is to practice. Team challenges provide the opportunity to practice communication skills in a nonthreatening setting and to assess within minutes what worked and what didn't. As teammates regularly work through each task, they will begin to see how effective communication skills can aid in successfully tackling problems.

Working within a group to solve a problem or come up with alternative ideas enhances the creative process, encourages cooperation, and fosters clear communication. The life skills learned through team challenges will benefit children and young adults, now and in the future. The divergent thinking skills learned through team challenges are invaluable for students. Creativity, cooperation, and communication are assets that will help our children thrive not only in a competitive work environment but also in their daily lives.

Get It Together

Gather Your Group and Prepare for Some Fun

T*eam Challenges* requires a willingness to step beyond the regular realm of learning activities and into the world of creative problem solving. The activities in this book encourage participants to explore the possibilities for solving challenging problems. Exactly what *is* the best way to build a tower out of newspaper and tape? Or the best way to portray a movie character with only a paper bag for a prop? Adults and the kids they work with will appreciate that, with this type of task, there *isn't* one correct way to solve the problem. The opportunity to solve these problems in countless ways makes these activities fun for all involved.

With the regular use of team challenges, your group will learn to use creative problem-solving skills, work together, and overcome communication difficulties in order to solve some interesting dilemmas. Kids will also learn successful building methods, increase divergent thinking skills, and gain insight into the skillful use of some unusual materials. There is an amazing amount of flexibility in each task, but some general guidelines will help you facilitate a successful experience for your entire group or classroom.

Who Can Use *Team Challenges*?

The short answer is *anyone*. Regardless of age or ability, team challenges are a fun way to expose kids to the concept that together, we're better.

Whether you are a team leader of an organized group that will ultimately participate in a competition, a leader of a youth organization, or a teacher trying to encourage cooperation among your students, the tasks within the covers of this book will provide ideas for jump-starting creativity and fostering cooperation among your group.

Assembling a Team

So, what exactly is a *team*? For this book, I've used the term to indicate any small group of people that wants to learn to think creatively, work together toward a common goal, and have fun. Most of the tasks in this book work best with groups of three to eight, though many of them will work with larger groups as well.

If you are conducting team challenges in a classroom setting and dividing students into several smaller groups, I would recommend maintaining the same groups for a number of sessions. Participants will find that coming up with a creative solution is easier as they begin to recognize and rely on the teammates' strengths.

Teams working toward a long-term goal, such as those with *DestiNation Imagination* or *Odyssey of the Mind*, will work together for an extended amount of time, sometimes coming together year after year. After a while, as these groups begin to anticipate one another's moves and to understand the different strengths and personalities of each team member, they will find that the solution to each task comes more easily. One team member, for instance, may be especially suited to guiding the team through

a difficult building task, but may find improvisational tasks to be more of a challenge. Learning to recognize each team member's strengths will allow teams to come up with the best solution possible based on all of the team members' ideas.

Newly formed groups or groups that change on a regular basis may not move in such a fluid manner. However, one benefit of rotating groups is that kids will learn to be flexible about how to solve each task with a variety of teammates.

At first, the concept of working as a team to solve each problem may feel foreign, and kids will need time to learn that each idea has merit. But with a little practice, they will be able to quickly sort through the numerous ideas offered and choose a plan of action that will lead the group as a whole on to success.

Make It a Positive Environment

Successful collaboration comes in a positive setting. A nonjudgmental group is essential to seeking out the most creative solutions, whether during team challenges or in the future challenges that life has a tendency to present.

Creating a positive environment in which teammates can share their silliest ideas is crucial to successful creative thinking. We've all seen kids who are ridiculed for their every move. A child in that situation tends to stop participating in discussions simply to avoid the teasing. With team challenges and some adult guidance—hesitant children will learn to voice their ideas without the fear of ridicule. Other participants will come to discover that everybody has something to offer. The wonderful thing about kids working as a team to problem solve is that, over time, they will learn that the only way to be successful is to work with one another rather than to compete for recognition.

When a participant offers an idea that seems silly or impossible, as a leader you can help diffuse the situation. Call a time-out during the task or wait until the task is complete, but be sure to lead the team back to that silly suggestion and encourage the kids to think about how it could have been part of the solution. Could the idea have been altered somehow? Would a portion of the idea have worked? Maybe the first version of the idea was ludicrous, but with a little further thought, it could have been a creative solution.

Team Tip

Keep a pen and notebook handy to jot down comments as the group works. This way, you can provide the team with feedback once the task is completed.

To help your team members understand what is expected of them and what makes a positive setting, give them some guidelines. I've listed a few of my own rules for a positive environment below. It is important to note that these rules apply to all adults involved as well. Creating a positive environment is impossible if the adults refuse to follow the same guidelines as the team.

Team Players Do

- Use encouraging words, such as "Great idea!" "How could we make that work?" and "Let me help you"
- Remind the group of the necessity to be positive, without putting anyone down
- Listen to all ideas offered
- Work toward the most creative solution

Team Players Don't

- Ridicule teammates or their ideas
- Exclude other people or their ideas
- Use judgmental statements, such as “That’s stupid!” or “That will never work”
- Grab materials from teammates
- Insist that their solution is the best
- Place blame on other participants when something goes wrong

Every team member is a valuable addition to the final solution. If one participant is excluded from solving the problem, the team is essentially short one member. As a leader, you can gently remind the team after the task that a team effort means the *entire* team. Ask the teammates what they could have done to encourage participation from everyone and gently ask hesitant team members what would make them more likely to help with the group’s solution.

The Role of Team Leader

Your role in presenting the tasks is that of a facilitator. You must make sure you understand the activity, assemble the materials, provide an ideal working area, and present the tasks to the team. You *must not* get involved in the team’s solution in any way. Giving suggestions, sharing ideas, and leading the team to a solution will interfere with the kids’ ability to solve the task themselves. If your group is going to learn from the completion of each task, the lesson should be one of discovery.

The most important aspect of implementing team challenges is that teachers and team leaders must allow participants to solve the problem in their own manner, without adult criticism or suggestions. At first, doing so will challenge the comfort level of many adults, as they learn to step back and allow the group to make mistakes and learn from them. Watching as kids struggle to understand a concept that is basic to most adults is difficult, but giving advice during a task is absolutely not allowed.

Things can and will go wrong. You can certainly restart your team members if something happens that sends them into a tailspin. However, learning to cope with tough situations is important, so make sure you aren’t rescuing your team every time things get a little dicey.

During one of my teams’ attempts to solve a task outdoors, the wind picked up and materials began to blow away. One of the parents began to interrupt the participants in the middle of their solution to move them inside and out of the wind. I stopped her, explaining that the wind was simply creating a bit more of a challenge for the team. Ultimately, the team figured out how to overcome windswept materials and solved the task in the face of adversity.

There will be tasks that teams are unable to solve successfully. Allow them to wrestle with these difficult problems. They will discover what works and what doesn’t and will learn from their mistakes and frustrations.

Presenting the tasks:

1. Read the task to make sure you understand it.
2. Assemble the necessary materials.
3. Set up the task according to the instructions.
4. Gather your team.
5. Read the list of construction materials (when relevant) and team instructions aloud.
6. Ask if there are any questions.
7. Read the task (minus the materials list) a second time for clarification purposes.
8. Set a timer and give a start signal.

Once the team begins a task, step back and observe. The most important part of your job now is to be quiet. You'll need to watch the team's performance and provide feedback for the team following the completion of the task. It's helpful to take notes about what you see, so that you can remember to share it with the team following the task. You'll read more about follow-up later in the chapter.

How Often Should I Present These Tasks?

Teams should have the opportunity to try out new tasks on a regular basis. Doing one task is like doing one push-up. Sure, you completed the activity, but there isn't much room for improvement when you only make one attempt. The more regularly you include team challenges in your schedule, the more comfortable your team will become with creative problem solving. At the very minimum, complete one task a week. If you can manage several per week or one task per day, all the better.

The Solutions

While team challenges are simple to use with a wide variety of groups and assorted ages, the tasks differ from many familiar activities in that there isn't one *correct* answer to a single task in this book.

For example, in one of the tasks in chapter 8, the team is instructed to create a superhero. Nothing in the instructions tells the team what form the superhero must take. So, while some teams may whip up a miniature superhero from the materials provided, others may use the materials to create a costume and transform one member of the group into a superhero. Two different solutions to the same problem!

When you first implement these tasks, students accustomed to grades and assessments may express concern about how well they did. They will quickly come to understand that the team is really the best judge of that. Discussing their solution after each session, along with various ways they could have improved their communication and teamwork, will allow kids to gain an understanding of how best to tackle future problems.

Children just learning the concept of creative problem solving and working as a team will at first come up with a very basic solution. As they continue to learn through actively solving the problems presented here, their solutions will begin to reflect bolder ideas, more daring characters, and more successful collaborations.

What About Timing?

The time limit given with each challenge is included to teach teams to solve problems quickly and cooperatively, and decisively. If your team is young or struggling with the short time frame given with each task, feel free to add a minute or two to the allotted time until the kids begin to grasp the concept of working together quickly to solve a task.

Sometimes, a team's task is still incomplete when time expires. This is OK! As teammates continue to improve their ability to assess the problem and communicate about possible solutions, their time management skills will improve as well.

Aren't the Tasks a Little Vague?

The tasks in this book *are* a little bit vague, but that's not an error, it's intentional. In addition to requiring teams to work together toward solving a solution, the tasks also require participants to listen carefully to instructions and to interpret them in a creative way. Tell your team members that, if the instructions don't say that they *can't* do something, then they can—as long as it is safe! For kids accustomed to following rules and doing work that must look a certain way, whether it's a report or

science fair project, this might be a difficult concept to grasp. But the whole idea is that with team challenges, kids will learn to think creatively and come up with a unique solution to each challenge.

Assessment

At the completion of each task, have the kids assess their solution. Ask each participant to note one positive thing that happened or worked well and to share one thing that could stand improvement next time.

For your part, you are obligated to observe the way they handled the situation or problem and to be prepared to offer some thoughts after they have completed the challenge. Did they totally forget one part of the instructions? A reminder to listen carefully before they proceed might be in order. Did one participant stand by and watch, without participating at all? Let the team know that one person not participating means one less person contributing—and everyone has something to contribute!

Make your discussion brief; a few quick comments or questions will serve the group better than a long and boring dialogue. Ask the kids some questions to get them thinking about what worked for them and what didn't. Remind the participants that team players work together toward an agreeable solution. Present one or two questions from the following list after each task to get the teammates thinking about how to improve their performance:

- Did everyone on the team contribute to the solution?
- What can you do to encourage every team member to participate?
- Was there anything that you forgot to do?
- Did everyone on the team share at least one idea for solving the problem?
- Did you have any problems with communication?
- How could you have improved your solution?
- What would you do the same way next time?
- Is there another way you could have done it?
- How well do you think you solved this problem?

This is a good opportunity to teach kids to share how they feel about a situation, rather than making accusations. Instead of “He keeps grabbing things from me!” they can try, “It’s frustrating when somebody takes something from me before I get a chance to try my idea.”

Once the participants have had a chance to assess their solution, you can share your own feedback with them from the Team Tally (see below).

Scoring

Most of the activities in this book include a Team Tally. With this scoring system, teachers and team leaders can provide feedback for the teammates on their creativity, cooperation, and communication. It is important to note that the scores will not be based on the accuracy of a solution. Remember, with team challenges there is no such thing as a correct answer! Rather, the scores are completely subjective. Your job is to observe the kids as they attempt to solve the task and to take notes on both positive and negative aspects of their path to a solution. Take all of these things into consideration as you choose an appropriate score, from one to ten, ten being the best score possible.

In addition to the Team Tallies presented with the individual tasks, you'll also find reproducible scoring sheets at the end of this chapter (page 19) that can be used to assess each team's solution. These reproducible sheets include spaces to record scores for creativity, cooperation, and communication, along with a blank space for noting bonus points. You'll need to write in the appropriate bonus score, as they vary by challenge. Use these reproducible tallies as a way to track your team's progress over time.

When assessing your team's success, your judgment should be fair and address amazing effort, difficulties, or exceptionally creative solutions. While it's not going to serve the team members well to always achieve a high score, neither will it serve them to be harshly critiqued. The Team Tally with each task is simply meant as a measuring stick for the team members. If they are consistently getting low marks for their creativity, they may wish to address this. One way is to have the team repeat the same challenge a number of times, each time coming up with new uses for the same materials.

Bonus points are possible for many of the challenges and are meant to encourage teams to push for the best possible solution. It's easy enough to build a tower, but if the kids know that they can earn bonus points for every inch of height, they will do their best to make the tower as tall as possible. Solving team challenges shouldn't be about coming up with the easy solution—anybody can do that! Kids who use team challenges regularly will learn to test the limits of their abilities and to, on occasion, risk a low score in an attempt to achieve an exceptionally high score.

What if you don't want to give your group a score following the task? No problem. Skip it. The tasks in this book are meant to encourage creativity, cooperation, and communication. If you use the activities with your group regularly, these skills will come with or without the use of the scoring system. I've worked with kids who clamored to find out what their final score was and others who simply didn't care—they were content just to enjoy the activity. The scoring system should inspire your team members to stretch the bounds of their abilities. If you find that the scoring system causes them to worry more about a high score than coming up with a clever solution, then, by all means, leave the scoring out.

Team Tally

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Creativity										
Communication										
Cooperation										

Bonus points:

Total points:

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Team Tally

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Creativity										
Communication										
Cooperation										

Bonus points:

Total points:

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Team Tally

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Creativity										
Communication										
Cooperation										

Bonus points:

Total points:

Everything but the Kitchen Sink

Commonly Used Materials and Their Uncommon Uses

The construction materials used in each team challenge are, for the most part, basic household supplies and castoffs. After assembling a few tasks for your group, you'll begin to think twice before you throw away items such as corks and bottle caps; these items are quickly elevated from trash status to the materials with which your team will excel.

Each team challenge includes a complete list of necessary materials, making it a snap to put together the activities. On occasion, you may find yourself missing some items from the list. Not to worry; in most cases there are some easy substitutions that work just as well.

On the following pages, you'll find listed the more common materials used in team challenges, along with some of their potential uses. Of course, odds are that a creative team will bypass the expected uses and amaze you with unique solutions. Possible substitutions for some of these common materials are also included.

Aluminum Foil

The malleable properties of aluminum foil make it a great material for sculpting. It also works to connect items together or to create a water-safe vessel. In most tasks that call for aluminum foil, only aluminum foil will do.

Possible substitutes: Newspaper, plastic grocery bags, or plastic wrap.

Balloons

Used as precarious tower footings or as flotation devices, balloons can add fun to many tasks. Make certain that you have extras on hand, in case of popped balloons. Avoid oddly shaped balloons, unless you really want to give your team a challenge.

Possible substitutes: Small beach balls, plastic balls, rubber balls, or—for flotation purposes—short lengths cut from a foam swimming pool noodle.

Balls

The tasks in this book use a variety of balls: tennis balls, ping-pong balls, beach balls, and marbles all make an appearance. Take a trip to your nearest sports club or golf course to find out if they sell used balls inexpensively. If you need to substitute, try to find a ball that is roughly the same size and weight as the one called for in the task.

Possible substitutes: Wiffle balls, Super Balls, rubber balls, Styrofoam balls, or golf balls. Balloons make good substitutes for a beach ball.

Bandage Strips

By using bandages as connectors in team challenges, you add the extra element of unwrapping the bandages. Who will do it? What method is the most effective?

Possible substitutes: Masking tape, sticky dots, mailing labels, or sticky notes.

Binder Clips

Stronger than regular paper clips, binder clips are great for holding inventions together. They can also be used as weights or counterweights or as springs to launch an item.

Possible substitutes: Clothespins, paper clips, or hair clips.

Buckets

Commonly used as a place to deposit items that the team must move, buckets can easily be replaced with a number of items. Just take into consideration the size of the item being deposited and the height of the container.

Possible substitutes: Bowls, plastic tubs, or flowerpots.

Cardboard Tubes

Cardboard tubes are easy to come by—save tubes from paper towel rolls or gift wrap. The obvious use for cardboard tubes is as supports, but tubes can also be used to guide moving objects or they can be cut in half lengthwise to create troughs.

Possible substitutes: Short lengths of PVC pipe, paper rolled into tubes, or tissue boxes.

Corks

You'll find corks called for in some of the water-based challenges, in which case their intended use is as a flotation device. They also work as connectors to secure materials together when used in conjunction with toothpicks or paper clips.

Possible substitutes: Styrofoam peanuts, pieces of Styrofoam trays, Styrofoam balls, ping-pong balls, watertight film canisters.

Drinking Straws

Straws are used frequently as materials for team challenges. Straight straws are the best choice for

building, but in a pinch, flexible straws do work. You can give flexible straws to your team as is for a bigger challenge or you can trim off the flexible part before you start. Straws make great supports and are easy to use for spanning a distance. They also work as an axis or for adding length or height. Need connectors? No problem! Straws can be connected end-to-end by cutting a short slit into one end. This allows the cut end of one straw to slip inside the uncut end of another. Again, give your team members some time to discover this solution themselves.

Possible substitutes: Dried spaghetti noodles, toothpicks, Popsicle sticks, or pretzel sticks.

Index Cards

In some tasks, teams must create a structure that holds something. Index cards work well as a platform for holding weights or other required elements. Index cards can also be used as supports or to add length or height.

Possible substitutes: Playing cards, magazine subscription cards, or recycled greeting cards.

Marshmallows

If you've ever toasted marshmallows, you know all about their sticky quality. Oddly enough, it may take kids some time to realize that tearing the marshmallows open provides an alternative type of adhesive. But don't give up the secret too quickly: give them the opportunity to discover this on their own. Marshmallows also work well as connectors when used with straws, paper clips, or spaghetti noodles.

Possible substitutes: Raisins, sticky dots, Styrofoam peanuts, or gumdrops.

Masking Tape

Rolls of masking tape are a must-have for your team challenges toolbox. Masking tape is used regularly for marking out lines and limitations and is included as a construction material for many of the tasks as well.

Possible substitutes: When marking a limit line in an outdoor setting, chalk can replace masking tape. For use in the tasks themselves, substitute sticky dots, mailing labels, bandages, or sticky notes.

Newspaper

In abundance in most households, newspaper is a great resource. Easily rolled into tubes for building, the daily paper also makes convincing costumes and hats.

Possible substitutes: Copy paper, binder paper, butcher paper, or old magazines.

Paper

Before *Team Challenges*, your team members likely thought of paper simply as a necessary school supply.

But, after a few attempts to build a tower with a flat piece of binder or copy paper, they will discover that, when rolled into a tube or folded into a triangular shape, paper becomes a great support for towers or bridges. Paper can also be used to span a distance, to draw a plan, or as part of a costume.

Possible substitutes: Magazine pages, envelopes, newspaper, recycled greeting cards, or index cards.

Paper Clips

Paper clips are used extensively in team challenges. Their versatility makes them great for connectors, hooks, and hangers. By using paper clips in conjunction with a stack of drinking straws, teams can create some amazing structures. Paper clips are also great for poking holes and work well as an axle when straightened.

Possible substitutes: Hairpins or binder clips.

Paper Cups

Paper cups are most often included for the purpose of holding something. While any kind of cup will work, paper cups are the best choice, because plastic cups are difficult to poke holes through without cracking and adhesives will not stick to waxed cups.

Possible substitutes: Cardboard tubes (teams will have to invent a bottom), small cardboard boxes, zip-top plastic bags, or egg cartons.

Raisins

This is another snack item claimed in the name of creative construction. Use raisins as sticky connectors, artistic details, or weights.

Possible substitutes: Miniature marshmallows, sticky dots, or gumdrops.

Rubber Bands

Every kid knows how to send a rubber band sailing across the room. It's exactly this attribute that makes rubber bands great for launching items or setting an invention in motion. Rubber bands also work as connectors.

Possible substitutes: Elastic, string, miniature bungee cords, or ponytail holders.

Spaghetti

Skip the angel-hair pasta; it's great for a meal, but it's a bit too flimsy for team challenges. You'll want to use the thicker spaghetti noodles, which work well as tower supports or to span a distance. They also work for adding length and height.

Possible substitutes: Straws, pipe cleaners, Popsicle sticks, or pretzel sticks.

Sticky Dots and Mailing Labels

Common office supplies, sticky dots and mailing labels come in a variety of shapes and sizes; all but the smallest will work. Use these to connect materials or as decorations that serve as a final touch.

Possible substitutes: Tape, sticky notes, raisins, bandages, or marshmallows.

String

Lengths of string work well for tying inventions together and can be used to hang or pull items. Avoid coated string—it is difficult to make a knot with.

Possible substitutes: Yarn, zip ties, twist ties from bread packaging, or ribbon.

Toothpicks

Toothpicks are easy to come by and easy to use, so keep a couple of boxes on hand. But don't go too cheap on these: spring for round toothpicks, as they are sturdier and will hold up better under construction circumstances than their flimsier counterparts. Toothpicks work well as short supports or connectors between items such as marshmallows or raisins, and they can even be used to hold paper together in a pinch.

Possible substitutes: Spaghetti noodles, Popsicle sticks, straws, or paper clips.

Weights

Many of the tasks you'll find in chapter 6 require teams to build structures that will hold weight. A variety of items are specified for use as weights: rubber erasers, marbles, and paper clips top the list. When looking for alternatives to use instead, keep in mind the size and type of structure your team has been asked to build.

Possible substitutes: Dry beans, sticks of gum, nails, pencils, pennies, or corks.

Yardsticks and Rulers

Used regularly by team leaders for measuring and laying out the task site, on occasion kids will also find these items on their construction materials list—either for measuring their structures or for use in creating a solution.

Possible substitutes: Tape measure or a wooden dowel.

Scrap-Box Scramble

After each task, you'll find that there are always a few items that didn't get used in the solution or a few items that were used but salvageable. Collect these materials after each team challenge and save them until you have a substantial amount of leftover items. When you have enough items, challenge your group to a scrap-box

scramble. Simply place all of the materials on a suitable work surface and give the team five minutes to create something from the list below and one minute to test or present the solution:

- A tower as tall as possible
- A bridge that will hold weights
- A tower that will hold as many weights as possible
- A costume for a new football mascot
- An advertisement for a new hair care product
- A vehicle that will move at least 3 feet (0.9 m) across the floor
- A device that will fly as far as possible
- A skit depicting an unnatural disaster
- An award presentation
- A new game

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