

Straw Tower Activity Instructions

Materials needed:

A box of straws
Scotch tape
Plastic cups

Introduction: Tell students you are going to break them into groups for a competitive building exercise. Give the following directions BEFORE you break them into groups:

Directions:

1. The object of the competition is to build the tallest, freestanding structure you can use just straws and tape. You may NOT use the cup, place the structure on a table, or tape any part of the structure to the floor or other surface. You may only tape the straws to each other to create the structure.
2. For the first 3 minutes, each team will be allowed to experiment, practice, discuss—whatever you want to do in that time.
3. After the 3 minutes is up, each team must throw out anything you have already built/done and clear your work area. Only plain straws in a cup and a roll of tape are allowed to remain. (This means no precut tape, etc.)
4. When I say, “go,” you will have ten minutes to build your structure. I will give you a 5-minute warning, a 2-minute warning, and a 1-minute warning. When 20 seconds remain, I will start to count down. When I say “ZERO, step back,” you must let go of your tower and stand back. I will then count to 20 seconds. Any tower that falls in that time is disqualified from the competition.
5. I expect you to speak respectfully to one another at all times.

Directions to teacher:

While students are working, walk around and take notes about how they are interacting. Is one person taking over? Are all participating? Are they using teamwork in any form? What happens once the competition starts? DO they divide up tasks? How are decisions made? Keep careful notes of the nature of the discussion. Don't interfere with the activity unless you hear students being disrespectful to one another—then step in.

After the winners are announced, debrief the activity. Have students fill in **Team Debriefing Questions** sheet before the whole class discussion. Use your notes to show that if we simply break people into groups without assigning specific roles, invariably someone fills the vacuum by taking leadership; others may or may not participate. If some teams did divide up tasks, show how that made things go more smoothly.

Points to emphasize:

Explain there is a difference between a team and a group of people working together. The first 3 minutes they functioned more like a group. The second time they were more of a team. Based on

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research, when teams first work together, they may work slower. However, as they learn to function more effectively as a team, they become more efficient and productive.

In small group work, there are no designated leaders, everybody just kind of does what they think is best. When working as a team or cooperating, each person is given a specific role— facilitator, recorder, timekeeper, summarizer/backtracker, or presenter. Just as in the workplace, each person has a job title. All members of the team participate in the learning/decision-making process instead of just 1 or 2. At the end of the learning, each team reports its findings/decisions to the larger group. Sometimes each group is given the same task; sometimes each is given a different task.

Whether working as a team of two or ten, it is important to utilize the ways of an effective team. This improves relationships and increases the quality and quantity of work.

Team Debriefing Questions

1. What did you learn through this activity about the functioning of a team?

2. Did team members have specific roles? If so, how were these roles determined?

3. In general terms, how was communication used (e.g., positive, negative, neutral)? Give examples of words, phrases, or expressions used and/or heard.

4. Given the team experience, what were your team's strengths and possible areas for improvement? How could you contribute better to your team's effectiveness?

Effective Teamwork Rubric

Evaluate how well your team worked together by circling the best descriptor for your tem in each of the 4 categories. Add up your scores and record on the line above.

Teamwork Questions	Not Effective Teamwork (0)	Somewhat Effective Teamwork (1)	Effective Teamwork We met our goal (2)
Did we Cooperate?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No cooperation 2. Some team members did not want to work with others. 3. There was a lot of arguing. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Some people were cooperating, but others were not. 2. Procedures to get things done were not clear to all. 3. There were a few arguments. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Everyone cooperated. 2. Everyone listened to each other. 3. There was no arguing. 4. A person’s role and responsibilities were known.
Did we Communicate?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nobody talked nor seemed to listen to others if they talked. 2. No one knew what their role or responsibility was. 3. There was no method for making team decisions. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Some people discussed what we were to do. 2. Some people knew their role and responsibilities. 3. The method for making team decisions kept changing. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Everybody shared their ideas and listened to each other. 2. There was constant communication. 3. People knew their role and responsibilities.
Did we concentrate?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Some team members were doing other things and not focused on our task. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sometimes people were working. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All team members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paid attention • were thinking • were working
Were we Respectful?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Some team members were not respectful to other’s ideas. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Some team members need help giving and receiving feedback. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We listened to each other and worked on being positive with our comments to each other.

Teacher Comments: