

“Tear It Up!”

Overview

Students will discuss the attributes of successful group work and be introduced to classroom expectations and procedures for working in groups. Students will observe both positive and negative examples of students working in groups and reflect upon what they witnessed. Students will then begin to practice group work procedures and expectations by participating in a non-verbal, cooperative learning activity. Finally, students will reflect on what they learned, what they did well with in regards to working in groups, and what they can improve upon for next time.

Grades

6-8

Materials

- Partner & Group Work Expectations, example attached
- Image for replication, such as the attached American Flag or World Map
- Colored bulletin board paper

Duration

45 minutes (this activity can also be broken up over two days if preferred)

Teacher Preparation

Group work should not be introduced to the class until general classroom procedures are established and an atmosphere of respect built.

Procedure

Introduction to Group Work Expectations & Procedures

1. Ask students to discuss as a class:
 - Why do you often prefer group work over working individually? Why is working with your classmates more interesting at times?
2. After students share their thoughts, explain that you appreciate their desire for working in groups, and working with others is often when we learn best. Tell students that many lessons you hope to share with them involve interactive group work, but there are certain expectations and procedures that must be followed when to doing so to ensure productivity and success.
3. Ask students to consider the traits and characteristics of effective group work by discussing the following, noting student responses on chart paper:
 - In order for group work to be effective (for us to be productive and learn) what traits do we need to encompass?
 - What behaviors and attitudes should we exhibit as group participants?
 - If a group is cooperating and being productive and successful, what might it look like? What might you hear from group members? How would you/should you feel being a part of an effective group?
 - Teachers are seeking answers such as: *cooperative, active listeners, respectful, willing to participate and pitch in, willing to try new things, friendly, willing to work with anyone, encouraging, etc., get straight to work, no fighting or teasing, encourage one another, helpful,*

appropriate volume, etc. You should see: people working hard, on-task, cooperation, assignments getting completed correctly, positive body language, smiles, etc. You should hear whispers/inside voices, respectful encouragement of one another, the participation of every group member, compliments, laughter, etc. You should feel welcome, that your ideas will be heard and respected, smart, successful, etc.

- Encourage students to consider all attributes of successful group work. If there is an area they have missed, ask a guided question to illicit the desired response, but ensure answers come from the students. For example, “I don’t see anything about moving into a group. Does anyone have any thoughts on that?” Students might respond, “We should move quickly and quietly; don’t mess with anyone’s belongings as you move to your new group; move the desks quietly so that you are all part of the group and can see one another; get straight to work,” etc.
 - What particular jobs and careers do you think involve group work?
4. After a substantial list has been created, tell students that you want to ensure they get the positive group experiences that they just described, and that part of today’s class will be focused on learning how to be effective, successful, and cooperative in a group. This will ensure that partner and group work can occur in which all students are participating and learning. Also, let students know that they are simultaneously practicing important life skills when working cooperatively in groups. Discuss with students how just about all careers, from doctors to professional basketball players, require the ability to work well with others. Learning how to cooperate and accomplish tasks as a team is thus not only important for class, but for college, future careers, and life in general!
5. Hand out a copy of your *Partner Work/Group Work Expectations* (an example is attached) and review the handout with students. Step by step, have a student volunteer read the expectation and then discuss with the class why each step is important for effective group work. Allow students to ask clarifying questions when needed to ensure all students are on the same page.
- **Optional Variation:** Teachers can also break up this exploration and introduction of group work expectations over two days so that some of the thoughts provided by students throughout steps 1-3 can be added into the list of expectations provided to students. It is likely students’ thoughts will be similar to the teacher’s, in which case teachers can also simply note this and continue on with their previously prepared list.

Examples of Effective and Ineffective Group Work

6. Ask five student volunteers to act out an example of a group NOT following the expectations discussed thus far (do not let the remainder of class hear what you tell the students to do). Students should try and act out breaking as many of the expectations as possible. Tell the remainder of class to carefully observe the acting students. Once the students have provided their example, discuss with the class:
- What did you see happen here? Evaluate how this group did meeting group work expectations.
 - What did this group do specifically that did not follow group work expectations?
 - Have you seen these types of behaviors occur when you have worked in groups in past classes? Explain.
 - Why is learning less likely to take place in a group like this? Why would working in a group like this be less fun?
 - Why will your teacher be less likely to plan group activities if this is how students work in their groups?
 - Let’s imagine that this group was in high school, and one of the students had applied for a college scholarship, or perhaps one of them was seeking a spot on a famous NBA team. If a member of the selection committee for the scholarship, or a scout for the NBA team, witnessed this behavior, do you think they would be likely to choose the student for their scholarship or team? Explain.

7. Ask for five more student volunteers, this time telling them to show an example of a group doing a great job following the expectations discussed. Again, tell the remainder of class to carefully observe. After their example, again discuss:
- What did you see happen in this scene? Evaluate how this group did meeting expectations.
 - What did they do well with specifically?
 - Why would this group likely be successful in completing their assignments? Why would they likely enjoy themselves more while following expectations in this way, rather than if they were misbehaving and fighting among themselves? Why might they be likely to make a higher grade?
 - Which group seemed older and more mature?
 - Is there anything they could have improved upon? Explain.

Practicing Group Work Expectations with “Tear It Up”

8. Thank the class for sharing all of their great ideas regarding group work. Tell them that their participation has been so incredible (assuming it has) that you are going to trust them to participate in their first group activity today. Explain to students that the purpose of the activity is to actually practice the group work expectations they have been discussing. This will ensure everyone is clear about what is expected and is on the same page.
- **Teacher Note:** “Tear it Up” can also be led during the next class period. If teachers choose this option, the next class period should open with a review of the material covered above.
9. Count students off into small groups using the numbers 1-5. (Tell students to remember their number; they can write it down on a piece of scrap paper or hold up that many fingers to remind themselves.) Remind students to stay seated and listen carefully to instructions until told to move to their groups. Let students know what area of the room each number will meet. Finally, project a simple image at the front of the room, such as the attached world or flag image.
(Based on the image you choose, each group will need colored paper to recreate that image - i.e. green and blue paper for the world; blue and black paper for the calculator; red, white, and blue paper if a flag image was projected, etc.) Draw students’ attention to the image and give the following instructions:
- Once I tell you to begin, move to your group quickly, without talking.
 - Teacher note: During typical group assignments occurring at the beginning of the year (where talking is allowed) teachers should have students introduce themselves to their group. Since allowing students to get to know one another is important for forming the basis of a classroom community, teachers may also want to have each group member quickly share something about themselves – i.e. favorite food, place you’d most like to travel, etc.
 - Using cooperation, teamwork, and the colored paper I have given you, recreate the image projected at the front of the room.
 - You cannot talk or use any other supplies other than the paper provided and yourselves. You will need to figure out how to organize yourselves so that everyone is participating and recreating the image by tearing the paper you were given into appropriate shapes.
 - Your goal is to follow all group work expectations while working together to recreate the image. I will be monitoring each of you to assess how well you follow group work expectations.
 - When your group has finished recreating the image have a seat and high-five each group member in congratulations. This will signal me that you are done.
 - Sit silently and observe the other groups as they finish.
10. Allow students to ask any questions they may have and then tell them to begin. As they work, ensure that no one speaks, that each group member is participating, and that members are treating one another

respectfully (even though not being able to speak can be frustrating). Students should work together to rip the colored sheets of paper provided to recreate the image in any size they choose.

Class Reflection

11. Allow as much time as you deem appropriate before calling the activity to a close. Facilitate student reflection (teachers can project these questions for students to first discuss within their groups and then report back, or discuss with the class as a whole):
 - Evaluate your group’s performance in that activity. What did you do well with? What could be improved?
 - Evaluate your productivity. How did your recreated image turn out?
 - How effective was your group’s ability to communicate? Why is communication a crucial part of group work?
 - What was most challenging about this task? What did your group do to overcome the challenge?
 - Why is it important to encourage and congratulate one another during and after group work?
 - Why is it important to follow group work expectations? (Discuss specific expectations, such as low volume, willingness to work with everyone, safe movement, etc.)
 - Why is learning how to effectively work in a group an important skill to have not only now, but also for college and your career?
 - Why do we need to have group work expectations that we all agree to follow? Why can’t we just assume we already know how to do this?

12. Let students know what role group work will play throughout the class. For example:

“As long as you meet our agreed upon expectations, you will be divided into groups many times throughout this year. Please note that the size of the group will be based upon the task. Sometimes, you may work with a small group of 3; other times, you may be working in a group of 5 or 6. This also means that who you work with will change. It is thus important that you be willing to work with any classmate; but also understand that this means you will likewise have the chance to work with the people you most enjoy working with. How long you will work with your group each time will also vary, again based on the activity assigned. Remember, not only is successful group work enjoyable, but by learning to work cooperatively with your classmates, you are developing important life and career skills.”

What If...?

13. Tell the class that even though you know they will all do their best to follow group expectations, everyone has a bad day once in awhile. Take a few moments to also talk to your students about the “What ifs?” so that they are prepared with appropriate responses should someone in their group exhibit unproductive behavior. Discuss:
 - We’ve talked about some negative group work behavior today. What do you do if someone in your group is exhibiting such a behavior, such as talking too loud, teasing another group member, not participating, etc?

Discuss with students how anyone can have a bad day. If someone in a group isn’t participating, it could be that something upsetting happened at home, or perhaps they don’t feel well. So, the best initial response is likely to ask a question of the group member with the issue:

- Are you OK today?
- Is there anything I can do to help you?
- Are you having a bad day?
- Can you please help us? We need your input also.

Explain to students that if they alternatively respond with an accusation (i.e. “You aren’t participating! Stop being lazy!”) rather than a question, the situation can escalate and a problem can ensue. Sometimes, a question might be all it takes. Obviously at other times, the teacher’s involvement might be needed. Let students know how you prefer that they involve you in a situation (i.e. raise their hand and calmly explain that a group mate needs assistance.) Have the class agree to this method, which will proactively alleviate the accusation of “tattletale” when someone does have to request an intervention from the teacher. Explain to students that the important thing is to remain mature and calm so that the remainder of the group can continue working.

14. Before moving into your next class activity, congratulate students on their hard work and let them know that you will continue practicing all of these expectations in future lessons and activities.

Individual Written Reflection

15. For homework, or class work the following day, tell students to answer the following questions in writing:
 - Consider your classes from last year. What are some common behaviors that you have witnessed in past group activities that made a group unsuccessful? What behaviors or circumstances can lead you to have a bad experience in a group? What do you imagine may be most challenging for you personally when working in groups? Be honest! How can we assist one another with these challenges?
16. Allow students to share their thoughts out loud once their writing is complete. Create a list of the negative behaviors and circumstances they note on a piece of chart paper. (i.e. “It really bothers me when someone makes fun of me during group work” or “I hate it when someone doesn’t do their share of the work and I have to work even harder.”) Likely, most of the behaviors students note that bother them are the same behaviors the class expectations are trying to alleviate. Compare the student list back to the expectations students received noting the similarities.

Teacher Tips Regarding Group Work:

- Carolina K-12 recommends that group work not be introduced to the class until the second week of school or later. General classroom procedures must first be established and an atmosphere of respect built before students are trained to work in groups.
- For the first several times students get into groups, make sure that students take turns introducing themselves to the group at the beginning of the activity. Since it is important students get to know one another at the start of the year to further relationship building in the classroom community, teachers may also want to have students share one quick thing about themselves (such as an interesting fact, likes/dislikes, hobbies, etc.)
- Every school, every teacher, every class, and every student is different. Brainstorm everything you can think of that can make group work challenging for your students and proactively address it with students during the discussions or practice section of this activity. The more specifically you can teach students what to do and what not to do, the more likely your group activities will be successful.
- It is very important that teachers predetermine a way to divide students into their groups. Telling students to group themselves can result in chaos. Structured options for grouping include:
 - Use a deck of cards and give each student a playing card as they enter the room, or leave one on their desk. Students can then be grouped by their card’s sign (hearts, clubs, diamonds, spades) or they can gather in groups of four different suits.
 - Have pieces of paper with various symbols in a hat or box. Based on your number of students and how large you want each group to be, you should ensure the number of groups you want formed and the number of symbol types available are the same. Also ensure there are an equal number of each different symbol. Have students draw for a symbol then meet with like symbols in a

particular area of the room. (i.e. hearts will meet in this corner, stars in this corner, peace signs will meet in that corner, circles in the back of the room, and squares in the front of the room.)

- Purchase a package of colored dot stickers at a local office supply store. Place a sticker on the hand or desk of each student. Instruct students to gather with others who have the same color, or to create mixed groups representing one of each color.
- Numbering students off and then telling all of the same numbers to meet in a specific area of the room is always an easy way to form groups. Make sure to remind students to remember their number.
- Some teachers choose to assign groups (ideally mixed-ability groups) that remain the same for the entire semester, allowing each group to first engage in team-building so that a sense of group cohesion and identity is formed. By allowing students time to get to know one another and build a sense of team, students learn to interact more successfully and complete curricular activities effectively. Teachers can have students:
 - determine a group name
 - create a group “call” or slogan (this might be used by the group to show they are finished with an assignment or read to provide an answer)
 - design a group sign (students might be instructed to hold this up as a silent sign when they are finished with a task)
 - devote a few minutes during the first few times a group meets for “get to know you” and “team-building” type exercises (see Carolina K-12’s “Quick Get to Know You Activities” for ideas.)
- Often times, the movement of students into and out of their groups can be the most challenging aspect of group work – lots of desks or chairs scraping the floor at once...lots of personal belongings being transported to new places – it can be more than a teacher’s ears can bare. If you find your students have trouble moving into their new groups, practice this particular aspect of group movement by creating a competition: The Desk Derby! Assign groups, then tell students that the group that arrives at their meeting spot the quickest, the most quiet, and the first to be ready to work, will win points towards a prize. Create different rounds of the derby. Divide students into teams of six. Explain that in round one, students will get into their groups of 6; round two they should split into groups of three; round three they should split further into partners; etc. Keep score and the team who does the best after all rounds of the Desk Derby wins a prize! The students will have fun with this and you are conditioning them to move into groups fast and quiet.
- Beyond student preparation, for group work to be successful, directions must be clear and supplies must be prearranged for simple distribution and access. Teachers must also monitor students while they work in groups, checking in with each group and asking questions regarding their process. While group work time may seem like a great opportunity for grading or catching up on other administrative duties, it is important teachers are still involved in coaching students while they work, particularly in the beginning of the year.
- Do NOT let students move to their groups until they have been given detailed instructions. Trying to speak to students once they are moving is exhausting, and it is likely directions will not be heard. It is also important that students get straight to work once in their groups; if they don’t already know what their instructions are, they won’t be able to do this.
- Continually assess the class as they work in groups. If you notice particular group work skills they need improvement on, address this and find activities that will allow students to practice and improve.
- If you feel your students struggle taking individual responsibility during group work (i.e. allowing 1 or 2 students to do the majority of the work), assign individual responsibilities within the group. Often times, if a student does not have a specific task, they don’t know what to do other than copy from someone else. Consider the number of students needed to accomplish the group activity you have in mind, divide students accordingly, and assign individual responsibilities within the groups. For example, create role cards that give each student particular responsibilities and explain what those responsibilities are. Depending on the group activity, roles may include:
 - Note taker

- Time keeper
- Researcher
- Presenter
- Summarizer
- Facilitator
- Questioner
- Designer
- Director
- Actor
- Script Writer
- Stage Manager
- When students complete a group project that is to be presented to the remainder of class, make sure each group has a back-up plan in case a group member is absent. Encourage students to be responsible and communicate with each other, ensuring they inform one another of possible absences. Likewise, make sure students understand the consequences of an unexcused absence.
- Always revisit, review and reflect! Once students have completed “Tear It Up”, review group expectations before each group activity (especially during the beginning of the year, and also throughout the year when students need a refresher.) Give students additional simple and quick activities to practice group work as needed (i.e., see Carolina K-12’s “Artful Teamwork.”) Once you are ready for students to participate in a curriculum related group activity, start with something simple. Also ensure time for reflection after each group activity (especially in the first month of school): “How did we do? What did we do well with? What can we improve on for next time? Would the President of an Advertising Firm in New York City have been pleased with how you contributed and participated today? Would the coach of the NBA team of which you are a star have felt like you lead the team today, or were you dead weight costing them points?”
- Allow students time to individually evaluate themselves and their group members. Instruct students to refer back to the group expectations and for each one, evaluate how well they did or what they might need to improve upon. Teachers can have students free write their responses, or also have them rate themselves on a scale such as “always, most of the time, sometimes, and never.”
- Devise a way to call students to attention when they are working in their groups. Rather than trying to yell over lots of talking when students are engaged in group work, use one of the following options to bring the entire class back to attention:
 - Without raising your voice, keeping it just at the volume you would use to speak, say: “If you can hear me, clap once.” Wait for the sound of a clap and repeat the statement. As more students hear the claps, they will stop what they are doing and join in. Follow-up with, “If you can hear me clap twice.” It should take no more than 2-3 statements for you to have the attention of all students.
 - Teachers alternatively may choose to use a call and response to gain students’ attention. For example, students can be trained that when they hear the teacher say “Sawa Bona” (a common greeting among tribes in northern Natal in South Africa which means ‘I see you’) they will stop what they are doing and reply “Sikhona” (which means, “I am here”).
 - Another option is to identify a silent signal that you will use to let students know it’s time to stop what they are doing and listen. Ask them to also perform the signal when they see you doing it. Such a signal can be as easy as holding an arm straight up in the air. When students notice this, they should stop what they are doing, be silent, and mirror the signal. As students notice the teacher, or one another, holding their arm in the air, the class will grow quiet.

Name: _____



Partner Work/Group Work Expectations & Procedures

1. Listen closely to instructions, then move to your partner or group quickly and quietly when told to do so. Take the items you will need for the assignment with you.
2. Be willing to try new things and work with ANY and ALL class community members. Many times I will assign your partners and groups, but I will also allow you to choose at times if you do well following expectations.
3. Safely and quietly arrange your desks, ensuring all group members are facing one another. Be considerate of other's belongings if they were left behind.
4. Immediately review the instructions and begin working on the assignment given. Use your time wisely throughout the group activity.
5. Remain POSITIVE while working together. Smile, be friendly, and use positive body language. As you work, actively listen to each other. Use eye contact and take turns giving ideas.
6. Support each other. Be patient with group members and help one another when assistance is needed.
7. Remember, it's ok to disagree, just do so in a respectful way.
8. Everyone must participate. Each of us is intelligent and brings something unique to the table, so each group member must try their best.
9. Remember to monitor your volume and stay focused on the task.
10. If someone in your group has a question, work together to find the answer. You must support one another when help is needed. If no one in the group can provide an answer, one group member should raise their hand to signal me that additional help is needed. Wait patiently and do not stop working while waiting.
11. Make sure to respect all items loaned to you for group work. Always help in cleaning up, returning the supplies as you found them, and putting your desk back where it goes. Do a final check for trash on the floor or things out of place.
12. Have fun! Not only are you learning about an important topic together when working in groups, you are practicing mature skills that you will need for college and your future career!

Sample Images for Recreation

