

Coopera-wrestle

Overview

In this activity, students will explore the concept of cooperation, learning how being cooperative can make things easier in the classroom and in life, as well as better ensure success for everyone.

Grades

Any

Activity Type

Partners

Materials

- Small prizes, such as miniature candies

Duration

20 minutes

Instructions

1. As students enter, have them form pairs and tell them that they are going to be playing a game. Explain that in this game, the goal is to win as many points as possible, since for every three points a student earns, they will receive a prize.
2. Instruct students to place their desks together and tell them that from this point on, they must be silent or they will be disqualified from the competition. Next, tell each student to place their elbow on the desk and clasp their partner's hand. (Teachers should model this position, which is the same stance for taking before arm wrestling. If any student points this out, do not acknowledge the similarity or mention the words "arm wrestling.") Share the following rules and instructions:
 - First, remember that you must remain silent or you will be disqualified. You cannot speak to your partner or anyone else.
 - Your goal is to win as many points as possible. You will receive a point each time the back of your partner's hand touches the desk; likewise, your partner will win a point each time the back of your hand touches the desk. For every three points you get, you will win a prize (i.e. a chocolate.)
 - Once the competition begins, you must continue to be silent, your hands must remain clasped at all times, and your elbows must remain on the desk. Failure to follow these rules will result in a disqualification. You will have 15 seconds to earn as many points as possible.
 - Each of you is responsible for counting your own points, so each time you get the back of your partner's hand to touch the desk, keep count of your number out loud.
 - While the goal is to get your partner's hand to touch the desk, make sure you do not harm your partner's hand.

If students do not have any questions, instruct them to begin and time 15 seconds on the clock. (Teachers can choose to extend this time if they see fit, but only a short amount of time is needed for the essence of the activity to be later conveyed.)

3. Once time is up, have students report their score to the class. Discuss:
 - How did you manage to earn so many points?
 - Have students scoring the highest respond to this question. Ideally, at least one pair of students will have had the foresight to recognize that the way to earn the most points is to not struggle with one another, but rather to cooperate. If students allow one another to touch their hand to the desk quickly and effortlessly, more points can be earned. If no partnership realized this, ask students if they now have any ideas on how they could have earned more points (teachers should try to facilitate the realization coming from students.)
 - How many people thought this was a competition? Why do we automatically assume the way to win is to work against one another?
 - The “trick” to the game is to not resist and peacefully allow each hand to touch as many times as possible, either going back and forth, or by having one person’s hand tap the table over and over and then dividing the prize. Yet, for many of us, this response didn’t come naturally. Why do you think this is?
 - Why did some of us automatically look out for ourselves, thinking of the prize we can win, rather than also thinking of our partner? (Discuss with students how while they were somewhat set up to have the response they had, it is worth talking about some people’s natural inclination towards competition or self-preservation.)
 - (Write the word cooperation on the board.) What does this word mean to you? (Allow students to call out responses.) How could cooperation have helped you in this exercise?
 - Why is it important to be cooperative with classmates? (Facilitate a discussion of how as illustrated in this exercise, cooperation can make things easier and can ensure success for everyone. Teachers can also use this as an opportunity to discuss the importance of cooperating with everyone, not just classmates who are friends. Sometimes, students will resist being partnered up with people they don’t consider themselves close to; discuss how mutual respect and willingness to cooperate with everyone is important to being successful in the classroom, and in the “real world.”)
 - What other examples in society can you relate to this exercise (meaning, examples of when people lose because they don’t work in cooperation)?
4. An extension activity for grades 6-12 is available for this activity. See “The Cold Within” in the Consortium’s Database of Civic Resources.