

Suggestions for Rising Star Teams: Team Building and Instant Challenges

Team Building:

Look for a game in the toy store called Cranium Caribo - it is a fun game for this group. Or find another game they like to play.

It can be as simple as bringing out a beach ball or Koosh ball and passing it until the music stops or rolling it on the floor to each other. Promise them they can play their "favorite" for the last 15 minutes of the meeting or whenever you think they've "earned" a break.

Ask them to come up with a list of possible team names. Take a vote and try to find one everyone, or almost everyone, will like. Name your team and do a little cheer at the end of every meeting. It can be as simple as 2,4,6,8, who do we appreciate? "Dinos! " Dinos!"- or whatever team name is-- go "Dinos" go!

Do you have access to any costumes for dress up? If so, bring them to a meeting. Ask the other parents if they have any old shirts, hats, vests, jewelry, fabric, etc. they would donate. Put them out for the group. How would they dress up if they could? What do you need to "dress up?" How do you put together a costume? Let them give you answers, and make a list. Then, when it is time to think about costumes go back to this list.

Ask them if they've ever been to a play or a live stage show. How did the actors/actresses put on the show? What was on the stage? What did they hear when they were part of the audience? How did they know when the show was going to start or end? How did the entertainers know what to do and say? Again, let them give you answers, and make a list. Save the list. If they aren't sure you can tell them what a script, lines, rehearsal are, etc.

Kindergarten teams:

But here's an instant challenge/icebreaker idea that will get them laughing.

Write down the names of food items on slips of paper. (I got this idea from Sam Wilson, so it may sound familiar to some). lollipop, a watermelon slice, spaghetti, an ice cream cone, a hamburger, a steak, a milkshake, an apple, a banana, a bowl of soup, a nut, chips and dip, a cup of hot coffee, a ear of corn on the cob, a stalk of celery, a pizza, bubble gum, taco, hot dog, popcorn, and so on. Add to this list with any foods that you think can be guessed by gestures and no words. (If the kids are VERY young, you can use pictures instead of words, or write the word under pictures.)

A child draws a slip of paper from the bag and must act out what food is being eaten. The team must guess what it is. If it is not easily guessed, you can choose another child to come up, see the picture/word and the two - as a team - continue to pantomime what they are eating until it is guessed. You can keep adding kids until they are ALL pantomiming lollipops if they don't get it.

For fun, or motivation, you can give EVERYONE an M&M candy if they guess in one minute, that's a variation that you can use or not use as you wish.

Remember that little attention spans are just that, little! Plan on breaking the focus to a new activity fairly often. Perhaps do an instant challenge for 15 or 20 minutes (from introduction to their working to their presentation) then shift to something else.

Include some physical activity games every so often - they needed to get their ya-ya's out every once in a while, so play Statues or something when you sense they've been in their seats too long. (An easy way to

play statues is to have them move about to music, and when it stops they have to freeze positions, then have everybody make up a story about what has just happened.)

A fun, and fairly quiet game is to have them stationed in the room about 10 feet or more apart. Have them play a game of keeping a balloon in the air - the balloon is imaginary, but they must act as though it cannot hit the floor. Play with them so they can see just how slow the balloon floats toward their teammates; they might have to get below it and blow air to keep it aloft, and so on. Have snacks handy to break up the meeting - small quantities often are better than taking a long break to eat a large amount.

You can use snacks for ICs, too. Give each child a fruit-flavored lifesaver with the instructions that they cannot eat it yet. Before popping in the mouth, they must tell a quick story sentence about something that color. (My big red firetruck needed to get washed.) The next child must add to the story with his color. (When the big red firetruck went to the carwash, a yellow dog jumped inside.) You can be part of the story telling if they need you to keep it going.

Get a three-ring notebook. Divide it up into sections such as Story Ideas, Characters, Ideas to Solve problems, Settings and Props, (or any other categories the kids think up) and have the kids write down a couple ideas every so often. Might as well put a copy of the long-term challenge in the book for reference.

For primary teams, It's okay to have an adult faithfully write down what they said if the kids have trouble writing quickly or use invented spelling they can't read later. Just keep what you write as simple and true as what they said. Now ... you've done the instant challenge, they must write (or offer verbally) three (or five - whatever you think the team can manage) possible ideas for the 3-ring book before you give them the next instant challenge or activity. No editing out good and bad ideas: just write what they say. As soon as the team offers any story idea, character idea, setting idea, they can move on.

Do a simple activity, like pass around an improv item and have each kid say something about it. (You know the drift: If it's a hairbrush, they can use it as a microphone, or a spaceship, or x-ray sunglasses, anything but a hairbrush.) If, by the second meeting, they are using the same suggestions for everything you give them (Hey, it's a cellphone again! Imagine that!), then reward them with a sticker, tiny candy, like a Tic-Tac or mini M&M if they do something nobody has done before. (With older teams, we simply make them come up with new ideas, but with the primaries, I think if they get stuck, they feel more comfortable if they can use a previous idea just to keep the group moving.) One option, rather than starting with the quick handing the object around the circle, you may want to have them look at the object in the center of a circle and think about it for one minute to come up with a unique idea or ideas before you start.

Back to the 3-ring notebook. Read the ideas back to them. Have them pull 3-5 words out of the notebook reading and write an instant challenge skit using those ideas. (Maybe: Grandma, Blue and Lightning - it doesn't matter.) This will help them transform brainstorming ideas into their long-term challenge. If your challenge involves a certain element that must be included, have them invent and pantomime the element. It doesn't matter if they invent an imaginary thing you think they can't build, it does matter that they start thinking about the required elements.

Give each child 5 slips of paper. On the first one, they must write any color. Fold the paper and put it in a paper bag.

On the second slip, write the name of any toy. Put in a different paper bag.

On the third slip is the name of any animal or a pet's name. Either one is fine. Put slip in another bag.

On the fourth slip is the name of any street or the name of the street they live on. Put slip in another bag.

On the fifth slip is the name of any food. Put slip in another bag.

Now, have them each draw three slips of paper out of any three different bags. They must create a character based on the three words they have. Two words will become the name and the third word has something to do with the person's job. Have each child read their 3 words and have the TEAM discuss what the person's name and job should be. (It's a bit hard for one kid to do on his/her own.) They must write and present a skit as a group, using all the different characters. It may help if you give them a scenario, such as, all these people are waiting for a bus when they discover there is a kitten caught in a tree. How will they rescue it? Or, they are all in a park and someone finds a cardboard box with something valuable in it. What is in the box and what do they do with it?

The purpose of this is simply to get the kids slowly into thinking about how they write characters and how they might interact.

So... write down the names of all the characters they drew in your 3-ring notebook. The next time you meet, read them back and ask them to vote on their favorite character from that exercise. As the team to recall the skit and select the top one or two characters and have them in the next skit, but everybody else draws new names and jobs. Ask the kids if people in any of these jobs would know how to solve the required element, if so, what would it be? Slowly, but surely, it keeps the long-term challenge in the back of their mind.

Stickers, even the simple gold stars, can be given liberally for any contribution. The more excited and positive you react to their ideas, the more comfortable the kids get with free-thinking and being naturally creative. I would give gold stars for every suggestion at first - "An elephant? - Gold star for Emily." And a sticker for everything that makes it into the 3-ring binder.