

# Group Initiatives Lesson Plan

## Overview

Group Initiatives are a series of mental and physical challenges which simulate the scientific method of developing a hypothesis, experimenting with variables, then evaluating the process. The challenges will be presented to the group and will require collaboration among all the members for the most effective approach. This provides opportunities for creative problem solving, communication of critical ideas, insights or observations, and leadership development. Just as scientists and researchers begin investigating new questions with gathering information from colleagues, then analyze data for innovative applications, the group must follow a similar paradigm in Group Initiatives.

## Background Information

The excitement generated from student discoveries is a dynamic and powerful tool that could be better used in our teaching. Discovering something will lead to more intrinsically motivated learning than by lecturing.

Intrinsic learning is self-motivating, students learn because they themselves want to know more about the subject. While extrinsic learners just want to get a better grade or to please another person. Intrinsic learners better understand concepts and are more able to apply them to new and unusual situations. Conversely, extrinsic learners often simply memorize the material for the test then forget it. Knowledge retention is also improved when the learners discover the information rather than are told it.

The basic concepts of group cooperation, communication, and creative thinking in order to solve physical and mental challenges are practiced and reinforced. However the level of challenge increase with each succeeding obstacle. In this way the learning is cumulative and allows for all group members to contribute to the group's success. A debrief is conducted following each activity. This is a time to process the things the group learned during the activity and also to identify areas where the group could improve. The debrief is critical because it creates educational experiences out of activities that on the surface may seem to be merely recreational in nature.

## Logistical Considerations

It will be at the discretion of the School of Conservation staff which specific activities the group will be confronted with. This allows the staff member to best use their experience and judgement to offer those challenges which best fit the needs of each group.

One of the major benefits of facilitating a Group Initiatives class is that the leaders have the opportunity to observe the total group interaction. The leaders have the opportunity to observe how the dynamics of the group evolve during the class. This perspective allows facilitation for even greater learning. For example, if an "autocratic" leader emerges, then the SOC teacher may want to silence him/her by "muting" them. The debrief following the activity may focus on the effect of "muting" on both the group and the muted individual.

Other types of "handicapping" include blindfolding or even restricting the use of an arm or leg. If the strongest person is no longer able to lift others at a station, the group may then realize that no individual

is indispensable, and that the group contains the necessary strength. Another topic for debrief following a task which involved "handicapping", might be to relate how it felt to be restricted. Then empathy (not sympathy) for situationally disadvantaged people might be discussed and promoted. This is a good example of how the lessons learned in the Adventure/Challenge program at SOC should be "transferred" back to the "real" world.

The specific objectives of Group or Team Initiatives are to provide each student (within the context of a group) with the opportunity to:

1. Be confronted with physically and mentally challenging activities.
2. Be creative in developing a plan or strategy.
3. Communicate their ideas to the group.
4. Develop and practice leadership skills.
5. Show consideration for the abilities and limitations of all group members.