

Building Environmental Youth Leadership

A High-School Service-learning Curriculum



Crossing Polluted Waters

TOPIC:

Team-building,
Mission-building

OBJECTIVES:

- Through small risks, students will begin to trust each other.
- Students will cooperate to solve a group challenge.

LENGTH:

20 to 30 minutes

ENVIRONMENT:

Outdoors. Need a place soft place to absorb potential falls where students can spread out.

MATERIALS:

- 4 to 8 traffic cones or other obvious marking signs.
- A pizza box.
- A timer.
- Possibly 4 to 8 wood boxes, cinder blocks or other sturdy blocks that will hold student weight, and 4 boards (4"X4"X8') that can be safely used as bridges between the boxes.

Background:

In this activity, team members are faced with the challenge of crossing "polluted waters" without a boat. In one variation, students must help each other to cross a marked area in a limited number of steps. In more challenging variation, the group formulates a plan to place bridges that carry the group across blocks in the game area. Either challenge provides an effective forum for trust-building, cooperation, and development of team problem-solving skills.

Activity Outline:*Beforehand:*

Choose the variation that works best for the activity setting, and available resources. For either, use the cones to mark a space fifteen 15 to 40 feet wide (larger for *Variation 2*) as the play space. In the bridge-building variation, place blocks in a random pattern throughout the space. Spend time to ensure that blocks are in a functional pattern that allows passage across the area. Also make sure that students can access the blocks by bridge on either side. Then, stack the bridge boards on one side of the play space—the starting point for the activity.

Crossing the Waters—Variation 1:

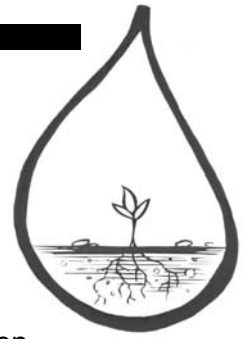
Students gather for instructions. Begin with an overview of the objectives of the activity. Then, explain that a horrible chemical spill has polluted the water running through the marked play area. While there was once a bridge spanning the area, the chemicals corroded the supports, causing it to crash into the water. Students are members of an elite pizza delivery team, called to get pies to hungry townsfolk across the polluted waters. They can't let the fallen span stop them. However, any student who spends more than ten minutes or takes more than three steps in the stream will die from chemical poisoning. The entire team must reach the other side of the stream with the pizza box in hand. On top of that, team members will lose a fat tip if the trip takes them longer than ten minutes. Take a moment to clarify any vague rules. Set a timer for ten minutes, and set the team to work.

Crossing the Waters—Variation 2:

Introduce the story related in *Variation 1*. In this case, however, a flash fire shortly after the spill set the bridge ablaze. Fortunately, firefighters were able to douse the fire before it destroyed the supports. While there is no longer a complete span, timbers strewn along the edge of the stream should provide enough strength to cross the polluted stream. Again, students are a part of an elite pizza delivery team, who must reach hungry townsfolk on the other side. All must cross in ten minutes or less. In this case, however, a single dip in the stream, even for a second is enough to poison a person. If a student touches the stream, the entire

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team must restart the activity. Clarify vague rules. Set a timer for ten minutes, and set the group to work.

Celebration and Synthesis:

Team members cheer each other through the process. Maintain a positive outlook, even if there is a setback. Once all have crossed the play space, take a time for congratulations. Pat each other on the back, etc. Then the team gathers to debrief the experience. Ask team members to describe how they solved the challenge. Were there leaders? How were these chosen? Was everyone able to share ideas? Did they feel a sense of mission? At what point did they know success was imminent? Then, ask for lessons learned from the experience. Have students for ways these apply to their framework as *Environmental Youth Leadership Team* members.

References:

This lesson is adapted from *The Meuse* in:
Rohnke, K. (1989). *Cowstails and Cobras II: A Guide to Games, Initiatives, Ropes Courses, & Adventure Curriculum*.
Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.