

Team Building

By Shelley Lyon June 2002

I believe that classrooms are healthier places for learning if the children work together as a team. So I do a lot of things to build that team spirit throughout the year. My favorite procedure is set to work within our small group instructional time when I teach reading.

LEADERSHIP

I divide my 4th graders into groups for reading instruction based on their skill development. Each day the leader of that group rotates. In other words, in a group of 5 children, my largest group, each child will have a turn being leader once a week.

The leader is responsible for answering questions during independent activity time, as I'm busy instructing another group and growl if I'm interrupted. They also keep the other children in their group focused, solve problems, and send potty calls off one at a time. It's a big job, especially knowing that they must also get their work done.

BOOT-UP

To begin with, I explain all independent activities to the group at the beginning of each reading time. I call this Boot-up. I check with each leader to see if they understand what is expected. All fine points understood, children go off to their assigned activities with their leaders in charge. I go off to teach reading to everyone, one group at a time. When all this is done, one hour and 15 minutes later (I allocate 15 minutes per group.), we have Debriefing.

DEBRIEFING

At Debriefing each leader stands up and explains how their group worked together that day. They tell about what went well, and where there were problems. They explain how they solved or didn't solve the problem that may have come up. If they need help from other class members with solutions to problems, that is the time they ask for it. If they come up with a better idea for a solution, they write a plan on a sticky note and post it to be read the next day at Boot-up.

REWARDS

If groups cooperate, if they solve problems by themselves, if they get all their work done, then they earn a BLOB. . Each leader gets to put one blob in the jar if their group earns it. Blobs are little melted marbles that shine like jewels. They have great appeal to the students, because though they don't get to keep them, once the jar is full, we get to have a picnic together in the park at lunchtime.

There are many ways to build a team. I like this way because it allows students to learn and build a team at the same time. This is a rich way to begin real life learning at school.