Icebreakers

Providing Resources to Support Units, Chapters, and Lodges

The Order of the Arrow provides ample opportunities for groups of Arrowmen to meet each other and serve in various capacities. Sometimes Arrowmen might meet in a small committee to publish a newsletter. Other times Arrowmen meet in much larger groups to build a trail. Regardless of the size of group or the purpose for meeting, the group’s capabilities are multiplied when the individuals are familiar with each other. Think about a time that you have worked on a small project with someone you did not know. It takes a bit of time to figure out one another’s strengths, weaknesses, and personalities.

One way to accelerate the process of getting to know each other is to step outside the bounds of what is normally comfortable for the group’s participants. A short, fun activity geared toward bringing out the personalities of individuals helps “break the ice” and prepare the group for a productive task. Attached to this best practice are several icebreakers that lodges have used successfully. Try one out at your next meeting or activity where participants are unfamiliar with each other. See how quickly they become productive!

This best practice was submitted by a member of Woapen Sisilija Lodge, Susquehanna Council, based in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. The accompanying icebreakers are adapted and reprinted with permission from http://www.icebreakers.ws/. That website includes icebreakers for groups of all size and activities of various kinds. Submit your lodge’s best practice to ChapterResources@oa-bsa.org.
**Candy Introductions**

Candy Introductions is a get-to-know-you game that helps people learn new facts about each other in an easy way. They select various pieces of candy from a bag, and each candy variety is associated with a fact about themselves, which they will introduce to the others. This game also goes by other names, including the M&M Game, Candy Confessions, the Skittles Game, the Gum Drop game, among others.

Candy Introductions can work with any group size. The icebreaker works best when the group size is limited to twelve, so if you have more than twelve participants, divide the larger group and run the icebreaker within the smaller sized groups. This icebreaker works best indoors, and is well suited for classrooms or meeting rooms. Materials required are: candy with about five different variations (color or candy type) and an optional chalkboard/whiteboard.

**Setup for Candy Introductions**

Purchase several variety packs of candy, enough for each person to be able to have at least five pieces. They can be any candy type, but not too many choices (limit it to around five or six different varieties). Alternatively, you can buy gummy bears, lifesavers, gumdrops, skittles, M&Ms, or any other candy that already has a variety of colors.

**Instructions for How to Play**

Pass the candy around and tell each participant to choose anywhere from one to five pieces of anything that they want. Instruct them not to eat it yet, though. After they have chosen their candy, you will tell them what each candy type/color represents.

If there is a whiteboard or chalkboard present, write on the board the following:

- Red – Favorite hobbies
- Green – Favorite place on earth
- Blue – Favorite memory
- Yellow – Dream job
- Orange – Wildcard (tell us anything about yourself!)

If you don’t have the above colors, change the above to match the candy types that you have. Each person takes turns introducing him or herself, beginning with their name and then saying one fact for each candy type that they have. This easy introduction game should go relatively quickly (assuming the participants weren’t greedy and that they didn’t take too many pieces of candy!).
Bigger and Better

Bigger and Better is a team-building activity in which teams compete by trading ordinary objects. The winner is the team that ends up with the biggest and best items when time expires.

This active teambuilding exercise requires six people at minimum, and can support very large groups if the teams are divided evenly. Teams should be about three to six people in size. This game involves interacting with lots of strangers in a public place such as a school campus. Props required include small objects such as paper clips or pens (one for each team). Recommended age is eighteen and up. When playing with younger people, please be sure to provide proper supervision when necessary.

Setup for Bigger and Better

To prepare for Bigger and Better, get several paper clips or some small objects that are low in value. Be sure to have enough to provide one per team.

Playing Bigger and Better

Explain the rules to everyone: You will give each team a small object, and their job is to keep trading and upgrading their team’s object to obtain the largest and most valuable item possible. They may not offer anything other than the item they have, and they must stick together as a group. Set a time limit, such as one or two hours, and tell everyone that they must be back in time or else they will be disqualified. Announce that each team’s item will be judged in three categories: size, value, and creativity.

Divide the group into teams of three to six. Pass out the paper clip (or other small object) to the each group and send them off. When time expires, the judging process begins. Each team presents their item before the entire group. They explain why their item is biggest and best. At the end, choose winners for each of the three categories, or judge the items in any other way you wish. This activity involves good teamwork and creativity as each team coordinates their efforts and decides what strategies they will approach when playing. Camaraderie will be built, and surprises will come out of the activity. Who knows, a group might be able to turn a paper clip into a car! Well, maybe a toy car.
**Fear in a Hat**

A good activity to run at the beginning of a group gathering, Fear in a Hat (also known as Worries in a Hat) is a teambuilding exercise that promotes unity and group cohesion. Individuals write their personal fears (anonymously) on sheets of paper which is then collected in a hat and read aloud. Each person tries to describe his or her understanding of the person’s fear. This leads to good discussion centered around the fears.

This teambuilding exercise requires writing utensils, sheets of paper, and a hat. Allow about five minutes of writing time, plus one to two minutes per participant. The recommended group size is at least eight, but no larger than twenty. It’s possible to run this activity with a large group, if the group is divided into smaller groups and if there are enough facilitators. This activity is for people ages fourteen and up.

**Setup for Fear in a Hat**

Distribute a sheet of paper and a writing utensil to each person. Instruct them to anonymously write a fear or worry that they have. Tell them to be as specific and as honest as possible, but not in such a way that they could be easily identified. After everyone is done writing a fear/worry (including the group leaders), collect each sheet into a large hat.

**Running the Fear in a Hat Teambuilding Activity**

Shuffle the sheets and pass out one per person. Take turns reading one fear aloud, and each reader should attempt to explain what the person who wrote the fear means. Do not allow any sort of comments on what the reader said. Simply listen and go on to the next reader.

After all fears have been read and elaborated, discuss as a whole group what some of the common fears were. This teambuilding exercise can easily lead to a discussion of a team contract, or goals that the group wishes to achieve. This activity also helps build trust and unity, as people come to realize that everyone has similar fears.
Here’s another good icebreaker for the beginning of a group gathering or as a fun way for people to get to know each other better. Four Corners (also known as Four Squares) is a simple activity in which Scouts share who they are through the use of hand-drawn pictures. This icebreaker is for all ages, and works well with small and medium groups. It usually takes about fifteen minutes, depending on how much time you want to allow for sharing the pictures. You’ll need sheets of paper and writing utensils. Don’t worry, no artistic skills are required for this icebreaker activity—just have fun and encourage everyone to enjoy being creative while illustrating who they are!

**Setup for Four Corners**

Distribute a pen and sheet of paper for each player. Each person divides the sheet into four boxes/squares either by folding the paper in half twice (vertically and horizontally) or simply by drawing a horizontal and vertical line that crosses in the middle. For each square, each person will describe themselves in the form of drawings. Choose these four topics in advance. For example, in the top left square, everyone could draw “favorite hobbies,” while in the top right, people could illustrate “favorite place on earth for vacation,” the bottom left could be something like “if you were an animal, which one would you be?” and the bottom right could be something like “what are the most important things in your life?” Feel free to be as creative, hypothetical, or deep as you like.

Allow five to ten minutes to draw. When everyone is finished, gather them together and share the drawings as a group. This icebreaker is an excellent way for students to show-and-tell what makes them unique!
Fabulous Flags

Fabulous Flags (also known as the Personal Flags Activity) is a useful icebreaker activity to help Scouts convey what represents them or what is important to them. Each person draws a flag that contains some symbols or objects that symbolizes who they are or what they enjoy.

This get-to-know-you activity is best done indoors. Any number of Scouts can participate. Materials required are: several sheets of paper, pens, and colored pencils/crayons/markers.

Instructions for Fabulous Flags Activity

Pass out a sheet of paper, pens, and colored pencils, crayons, and/or markers to each person. Explain the activity: “We’re now going to draw flags that represent or symbolize us. Please design your own flag of you—include some symbols or objects that symbolize who you are or what you find enjoyable or important.” You can show your own sample flag if you like. For example, you could draw:

- a guitar (representing your passion for music)
- a tennis racket (someone who enjoys sports)
- a country like India (representing your affiliation with a country)

Give everyone a set amount of time to draw (e.g. fifteen to twenty minutes or so) and then reconvene. Ask for volunteers to share their flags and explain the meaning of what they drew. If it is a large group, you can divide everyone into smaller groups and ask them to share their flags with each other, or you can just ask a small number of volunteers to share.

Variations

After everyone has finished sharing the individual flags, as a big group you can ask everyone to brainstorm ideas on what to draw for a large class-wide flag. Proceed to delegate individuals to draw certain parts of the class-wide flag. Alternatively, you can collect the individual flags and paste them onto a board to create a “quilt” of individual flags, representing unity.
React and Act Game

React and Act is a funny icebreaker in which players randomly select a sheet of paper that has an occurrence on it (for example, winning a million dollars in the lottery) and they must react to the occurrence using animated expressions, gestures, and words. After a set amount of time, other players try to guess what happened that caused those reactions and actions. React and Act is an active icebreaker game that can work with a variety of group sizes. It can work for small groups of five people, or adapted for very large groups by selecting volunteers. This game is best played indoors. Materials required include paper, pens, and a bag. React and Act works with all ages, including adults.

Setup for React and Act

React and Act involves some preparation; however, this is part of the fun! Pass out sheets of paper and pens to the players. Have each person write an event. Tell them to be creative! Examples of events can include:

- Being surprised by a large, aggressive bear in the woods
- You just won the lottery
- You have just been proposed for marriage with an engagement ring
- You just got fired by an incompetent boss
- Making the game winning pass to win the Super bowl
- You just fell in love

Once everyone writes an event, fold the paper once and place it into the bag. Divide the group into two teams (or select five volunteers if it is a very large group).

Instructions for How to Play

Ask five people on each team to randomly select an event from the bag. Instruct them to react to this event, without explicitly giving away what the event is. Choose a time limit (usually thirty seconds to a minute works well) and when you say “Go!”, have all five people to simultaneously react to their event using exaggerated gestures, facial expressions, and their voice.

For example, the person who has just won the lottery could raise his or her arms and scream excitedly, jumping up and down. The person who has just confronted a bear might make a terrified look, shake in fear, and call for help. And so on. Each of the five actors can interact with each other, but they must stay “in character” and continue reacting and acting based upon what their sheet said.
After time expires, the other members of the team try to guess what happened for each person. If you wish to keep score, each team gets a point for each correct guess. This game is a great way to break the ice, while watching people act out silly (and usually hilarious) things.

**Variations to Try**

There are many variations to React and Act that changes the way the game is played. Try experimenting with these and see whether you like them.

- No talking allowed, but noises are okay. This increases the difficulty of the game by a lot, but it can be more hilarious.
- Narrator explains the event before each person acts.
Unique and Shared

Unique and Shared is a get-to-know-you game as well as a team-building activity. The game helps people see that they have more in common with their peers than they might initially realize, while highlighting their own individual strengths that they can contribute to the group.

An indoor setting is preferable. Participants will split into groups of about five people, so this activity works fine with medium, large, and even some extra-large groups. Each group of five needs paper and a pen. This activity is for all ages.

Instructions for Unique and Shared

Ask participants to form groups of five people with the people around them. Pass out sheets of paper and writing utensil. The first half of the activity is the Shared part. Instruct a note taker for each group to create a list of many common traits or qualities that members of the group have in common. Avoid writing things that are immediately obvious (e.g. don’t write down something like “everyone has hair” or “we are all wearing clothes”). The goal is for everyone to dig deeper than the superficial. Allow about five or six minutes and then have a spokesperson from each subgroup read their list. If there are too many groups, ask for a few volunteers to read their list.

The second half is the unique part. Keep the same groups or, optionally, you can ask everyone to rearrange themselves into new groups. On a second sheet of paper have them record unique traits and qualities; that is, items that only apply to one person in the group. Instruct the group to find at least two unique qualities and strengths per person. Again, strive for qualities and strengths beyond the superficial and past the obvious things anyone can readily see. Allow another five or six minutes. When time is up, share the unique qualities in one of the following ways: (1) each person can share one of their unique qualities themselves; (2) have each person read the qualities of the person to their right; or (3) have a spokesperson read a quality one at a time, and have the others guess who it was.

Unique and Shared is a valuable team-building activity because it promotes unity as it gets people to realize that they have more common ground with their peers than they first might realize. As people become aware of their own unique characteristics, they can also help people feel empowered to offer the group something unique.