

Yurt Circle

Focus: Risk taking, physical/emotional trust, trustworthiness

Materials: None

Levels: Grades 4 and higher

Sources: See *More New Games* by Fluegelman (1981), *Adventures in Peacemaking* by Kreidler & Furlong (1996), *Changing the Message* by Albin (2004), and *Journey Toward the Caring Classroom* by Frank (2004). Also named "Hang Together to Hang Extreme" in *Adventure Education for the Classroom Community* by Frank & Panico (2007).

Suggested Procedure

1. Find a space that is big enough for the whole class standing in a circle, with some room to spare. Have everyone then take a step back so that the circle isn't too close.
2. There must be an even number of people in the group. If there isn't, then you should step out to make the number even.
3. Determine what your state bird and state flower are. (In Wisconsin they are the robin and the wood violet.)
4. Every other person is labeled the bird (a robin); all the others are the flowers (wood violets).
5. The object for this activity is for all of the birds to lean in one direction while all the flowers lean in the other direction. You will determine which group leans in and which group leans out.
6. When people lean, they should keep their bodies as stiff as possible, trying not to bend at the waist.
7. Ask everyone to hold hands so that they have a good grip. Remind everyone to not let go during the activity.
8. Count to three, and then have people slowly lean in their given direction – either in or out.
9. Try this a couple of times, then have them reverse directions. When people get really good at this, they can start leaning in one direction, then switch to the other direction seamlessly.

Sample Processing Questions

- What made this work?
- What would happen if someone let go?
- Was it easier for you to lean in or out? Why?
- How might a community work in this way – where everyone is connected, even when it might not be obvious?
- How did you work with the people around you to make sure no one was pulling too hard? What adjustments did you make?
- What kind of adjustments (give and take) do we make with members of our class to make sure they are taken care of?
- How did you prove you were trustworthy in this activity?

Variations/Modifications:

- For younger students, or large classes: Have them get into smaller groups of 8 to 12 for this. Once they have mastered small groups, try getting everyone together for the ultimate cooperation challenge.
- Try this first with one group (the birds, for example) all turned around so that their backs are facing the middle of the circle. In this way, everyone leans back – the birds leaning back toward the middle of the circle, and the flowers leaning away from the middle of the circle.

Facilitation Notes

It may be necessary to address the issue of squeezing hands. Students are often embarrassed to hold one another's hands, so you must first determine if they are ready to do so. Another outcome is for someone to squeeze his or her partners' hands too tightly, causing them to cringe. Ask students, or remind them, about trust. You might also suggest that they try holding each others' wrists which gives a better grip. As with the Dream Catcher activity, this one demonstrates how people are connected even when they do not think they are. If one person moves too fast, or is not in sync, then everyone feels it. It usually takes a few tries to get the Yurt Circle to work well. Once people get it, then it seems almost easy.