

Competition Embers

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Theme: Examining competition for prize or glory, and how/why we respond to it.

Age of campers: 8/10+

Time allotted/actual: 45-60 minutes

Location: Anywhere quiet where there is a table to play cards on.

Props/Materials/Symbols: A deck of playing cards, tokens of some sort

Prep done: Set up the area and have some games in mind that you want to play.

Opening/Mood set: Introduce a competitive card game to the group (ANY will do that is simple enough to play many rounds quickly, Waterfall is a good one, as is Spoons) and promise the winners tokens when they take a round. Those with the most tokens at the end will get a "prize."

Questions/Activities:

1st activity: At the end of the rounds, announce that there is no prize and let that settle for a moment. Initiate a discussion about winning vs. losing and ask whether prizes make winning more important. If so, is it more intriguing to win "something" than it is to know a prize ahead of time and gauge how much you want it?

2nd activity: How would the game have been different if the prize was announced upfront as a bag of dehydrated pickles rather than "something?" How would it have been different if everyone had been shown a "good" prize like candy or a toy, and THEN had it withheld? How does the winner feel about what happened given that they do not get what they thought they would?

Closing: Are there any new thoughts that you have about competition in other areas of life? Sports, School?

Were other people involved? None needed.

Thoughts on pacing? Play the card game only as long as you need to. Too much time and it will be harder for the campers to understand that it was metaphor focused rather than about the prize in some greater way.

What would you change next time / what did you learn / how would you enhance it? Try giving the tokens out unevenly (like 1 for the first win, 4 for the second, 2 for the third, etc.) for arbitrarily announced reasons and see what that does to the energy and discussion at the end. Talk about what "fairness" means in competition. What role do referee opinions have in that?
Note, on the Partnering with Parents website, there is a one-page reflection on competition that can be helpful in framing discussions.

Camper feedback: Worked better with 10 year olds than 8 year olds--harder for them to accept the forfeited gain for what it was rather than as a "loss." Still not a failure by any means, just more disappointment in that one area.