

## INITIATIVE GAMES

Initiative games and cooperative games are different from most games that are familiar to us. What's different is the way we play them. These games require lots of strategy and skill. Everyone has fun, and in that sense, everyone wins.

Initiative games are purposeful activities with specific goals and learning processes that are less competitive and less rule oriented. They can best be described as "action-and-reflection" experiences. These games

1. Have a specific objective or objectives, such as cooperation, trust, or imagination, through physical and verbal group activity
2. Are problem solving in nature
3. Must be talked about or reflected upon in order to have the maximum impact on the participants
4. Are fun

### HOW TO USE INITIATIVE GAMES

Consider the following steps in using these games with your troop:

#### BE PREPARED!

- ✓ Familiarize yourself with the activity you have chosen. Know how the game is played, what the objectives are, and how its parts lead to the learning objective.
- ✓ Plan a strategy ahead of time so you can help your Scouts if they get into trouble with the game.
- ✓ Figure out space and equipment requirements. If you're planning an activity for a camporee, try it out ahead of time with your own troop to avoid last-minute snags.
- ✓ Think about some questions to ask during the reflection following the activity. You might want to jot down some notes.

#### PRESENT THE GAME

- ✓ Make the rules clear. Be sure the Scouts understand the problem they must solve or the skill to be learned before they begin. Emphasize that there should be no put-downs or harassment during the activity.
- ✓ Stand back. Let the Scouts solve the problem themselves. Even though you might know a better solution, let them figure it out for themselves. They will learn the most from an experience they have worked through on their own.

#### LEAD THE REFLECTION

- ✓ After the games, lay the ground rules for discussion. Have the Scouts sit so that they can see one another, and ask them to agree not to interrupt or make fun of each other. Let them know that they are free to keep silent if they wish.
- ✓ Facilitate the discussion. Avoid the temptation to talk about your own experiences. Reserve judgment about what the Scouts say to avoid criticizing them. Help the discussion get going, then let the Scouts take over with limited guidance from you. If you describe what you observed during the activity, be sure that your comments don't stop the boys from adding their own thoughts. Above all, be positive. Have fun with the reflecting session!
- ✓ Use thought-provoking questions. The following types of questions are useful in reflecting: Open-ended questions require more thought and result in more information. "What was the purpose of the game?" and "What did you learn about yourself?" Avoid yes-or-no answers.

- ✓ Feeling questions require Scouts to reflect on how they feel about what they did. "How did it feel when you all started to pull together?"
- ✓ Judgment questions ask Scouts to make decisions about things. "What was the best part?" or "Why was it a good idea?"
- ✓ Guiding questions steer your Scouts toward the purpose of the activity and keep the discussion focused. "What got you all going in the right direction?"
- ✓ Closing questions help Scouts draw conclusions and end the discussion. "What did you learn?" or "What would you do differently?"
- ✓ Reflecting on an activity should take no more than 10 minutes. The more you do it, the easier it becomes. Remember that the value of the game (and the values of Scouting) often lie beneath the surface. Reflection helps you ensure that these values come through.

## **SOME INITIATIVE GAMES**

### **AEROBIC TAG**

This is an active game that requires constant movement and little explanation. It's good for any size group. Equipment: Plastic flying disk, hula hoop, beanbag, or similar object; watch with a second hand Object: For a team (any size) to maintain possession of the object of play (flying disk, hula hoop, beanbag, etc.) for 30, 45, or 60 seconds (depending on the size of the playing area and the age and ability of the group) Procedure: The object of play is thrown randomly into the air and onto the field by the timekeeper. A player grabs it and, by using speed, guile, and help from his teammates, attempts to keep the object from the opposing team. If the person who has possession is tagged with two hands by an opponent, he must stop running and get rid of the object immediately. If a team member catches or picks up the object, time continues for that team. If an opposing team member takes possession, the timekeeper yells "Change!" and begins timing once again from zero. Considerations: 1. Make up penalties, if necessary, for infractions such as unnecessary roughness or holding onto the object too long after having been tagged. 2. Limit the playing area, or the game could end up in the next town. 3. This is a fine game for cold weather since it doesn't take long for the players to warm up if the action is spirited. 4. Some kinds of plastic flying disks become brittle and crack or shatter if the temperature falls much below 30 degrees. If the temperature is low, have several disks or an alternative object on hand.

### **ALL ABOARD**

Object: To have 12 to 20 Scouts aboard a 2-foot-square platform without anyone touching the ground around it. Combine patrols to make a group. Rules: 1. Each person must have both feet off the ground. 2. Everyone must remain on the platform for at least 10 seconds. This exercise stimulates discussion about team effort, group and individual commitment, leadership, compassion, and group problem-solving dynamics.

### **THE AMAZON**

Equipment: Rope, 1/2 inch in diameter; pole or tree limb, at least 1 1/2 inches in diameter; plank, at least 6 inches wide, 2 inches thick; stick of any diameter; container with a handle Object: Using the plank, pole, stick, and length of rope, the patrol must retrieve the container, which is placed some distance from the "riverbank." Rules: 1. The Scouts may use only the assigned materials and their bodies. 2. If a Scout steps into the "river," he must go back and try again. 3. Time penalties may be given when a player or any of the equipment touches the ground. Scoring: The first patrol to retrieve the container wins.

## **BIKE GAMES**

**Bull's-Eye.** For each patrol, set out four empty 1-pound coffee cans, open end up, about 8 feet apart in a straight line. Give each Scout four marbles. The object of the game is to drop one marble into each can while riding down the line at any speed. Score 1 point for each hit; deduct 1 point if the rider touches his foot to the ground.

**Slalom Relay.** For each patrol, remove the top halves of four empty plastic milk jugs. Set them out about 6 feet apart in a straight line. The rider must weave in and out without touching the jugs and without his feet touching the ground. If he touches a jug or the ground, he must return to the starting line and begin over. Run the game as a relay. The fastest patrol wins.

**Snail Race Relay.** Mark a 3-foot-wide lane about 50 feet long with string or chalk for each patrol. Half of the patrol lines up at either end of the lane. The object is to ride as slowly as possible without touching the ground or allowing a bike tire to touch the line. The race starts with the first rider at one end riding to the other end of the lane; there the first Scout in that line rides the other way, and so on until all patrol members have ridden the course. The slowest patrol time wins.

## **BLINDFOLD SOCCER**

Equipment: Blindfolds for half the Scouts, two soccer balls Object: Each team tries to kick the ball past the opponent's end zone as many times as possible. Procedure: Divide the Scouts into two teams, or use patrols. Each team then divides into pairs. One member of each pair is blindfolded. The game starts when the referee throws or kicks two soccer balls into the middle of the soccer field or playing area. Rules: 1. Only the blindfolded Scout may kick the ball; the sighted Scout can only offer verbal directions to his partner. 2. Team members may not intentionally touch one another. Normal game contact is allowed as long as the touching is not used to direct a blindfolded participant. 3. There are no goalies. 4. If a ball is kicked out of bounds, the referee will throw the ball into the middle of the field and play resumes. 5. Any additional rules are at the discretion of the referee. Scoring: Each successful kick earns 1 point for the team. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

## **THE BOY SCOUT SHUFFLE**

Equipment: A 30-foot telephone pole lying on a flat area Procedure: Ask a group of about 20 Scouts to split into two teams, or use two patrols. The two groups stand balanced on opposite ends of the pole so that they are facing each other in single file. Now ask the two groups to exchange ends of the pole without any team members touching the ground. Time the action and give a 15-second penalty for every touch on the ground. After a completed attempt, encourage the group to talk it over and try again. As in all timed initiative activities, it is important to attempt the problem more than once. The first attempt establishes a time to beat. Additional attempts invariably result in a faster time because of greater cooperation, planning, individual effort, etc. Exceeding a personal "best" is the best kind of competition.

## **CROSSING THE ALLIGATOR PIT**

Equipment: For each patrol, three spars, 6 to 8 feet long; three 6-foot lashing ropes; four guylines Procedure: Mark the "alligator pit" on the ground; it should be 20 feet across and as wide as necessary to accommodate your patrols. The patrols line up on one side of the pit. On signal, they lash together a triangular "walker," using a shear lashing at the top and diagonal lashings for the crossbar. Near the top, they attach the four guylines, using two half hitches. The patrol then stands the walker upright and one member climbs on the crossbar. One or two Scouts control each guyline and "walk" the walker across the pit by tipping it from side to side and moving it forward. Scoring: The first patrol to finish wins. Note: This can be a timed contest if there aren't enough spars for all patrols.

## **THE ELECTRIC FENCE**

**Object:** To transport a patrol over an “electrified” wire or fence using only the team members and a “conductive beam” **Construction:** The electric fence is a length of rope tied in a horizontal triangular configuration to three trees or poles. (It can be a single rope between two trees, but a triangular setup is more challenging and safer because Scouts cannot get a running start to try to jump over the rope, and thus are less likely to take a chance.) The height of the rope should match the skill or age level of the Scouts; 5 feet should be the maximum. The conductive beam is an 8-foot-long pole, log, or 2-by-4. Clear the ground of rocks and roots to prevent injury. **Rules:** 1. The only route allowed is over the fence. If a Scout touches the fence (rope), he is “zapped” and must attempt the crossing again. Any Scout touching the hapless victim as he touches the wire must also return for another crossing. 2. If the conductive beam touches the wire, all those in contact with that beam are zapped and must attempt another crossing. 3. An “electric force field” extends from the wire to the ground and cannot be penetrated. 4. The trees or other supports that hold up the wire are “iron woods” (an excellent conductor) and cannot be safely touched. **Cautions:** 1. Be careful not to let the more enthusiastic Scouts literally throw other participants into the air over the ropes. Injury might result. 2. Do not let the last person perform a headfirst dive into a shoulder roll. 3. Trust dives (falls into the arms of other Scouts) are okay, even though such a dive seldom works and can overwhelm some catchers.

## **EVERYBODY UP**

This initiative exercise is a useful way to introduce the idea of group cooperation. Ask two Scouts of about the same size to sit on the ground or floor facing each other with the soles of their feet touching, their knees bent, and their hands tightly grasping each other's. From this position they try to pull themselves into a standing position. If they succeed, ask another Scout to join them and try standing with three Scouts, then four, etc. As the group grows, each player must grasp the hands of another person and must maintain foot contact with the group. An expanding group will find that thinking is required to come up with a solution that allows large numbers (50 or more players) to get everybody up. **Variation:** Ask the Scouts to sit back-to-back and try to stand as a pair, trio, etc. To avoid possible shoulder dislocations, do not allow interlocked arms.

## **FOGGY HARBOR**

The group must maneuver an “oil tanker” (one member of the patrol) through the “harbor” without bumping into the other “ships” (the remaining patrol members). The oil tanker is blindfolded and moves on his hands and knees. He is not to touch any of the other ships, who remain stationary and are distributed throughout the harbor. As the oil tanker nears a ship, the ship must give a warning signal, such as a foghorn. The oil tanker then approaches more cautiously and tries to maneuver through the harbor without colliding.

## **FRANTIC OBJECT**

**Object:** To keep a number of tennis balls in constant motion for as long as possible **Procedure:** Everyone in the group is given a worn-out tennis ball or two. Play on a smooth surface that is bounded by walls. On signal, the group attempts to keep every tennis ball in motion. Referees are used to spot balls that have stopped moving. **Variation:** 1. During the activity, additional tennis balls may be added, increasing the difficulty. 2. The activity may be allowed to continue until the referees have spotted three balls that have stopped moving.

## **HI-LO**

Have patrols stand in line with patrol members shoulder to shoulder. Tell them they are to arrange themselves from high to low, or from most to least. For example, you might tell them to arrange themselves by age, from oldest to youngest. Or, choose from the list:

- Height
- Occurrence of birthday (not age)
- Alphabet—last name
- Distance from home
- Number of brothers and sisters
- Number of merit badges earned
- Number of pets

When they have completed the task, they should give the Scout sign and shout their patrol yell.

## **HUMAN LADDER**

This game will help Scouts develop trust and learn to be responsible for each other's safety. Equipment: Six to 10 smooth hardwood dowels about 3 feet long and 1/4 inch in diameter Procedure: Pair the Scouts and give each pair one "rung" of the ladder. Several pairs, each holding a rung and standing close together, form the ladder. A climber starts at one end of the ladder and proceeds from one rung to the next. As the climber passes by, the pair holding that rung may leave that position and go to the front end of the ladder, extending the ladder length indefinitely. Note: The direction of the ladder may change at any time (making a right-angle turn, for example). Obstacles may be added, and the height of the rungs may also vary.

## **INCHWORM**

Pair the Scouts, then have them sit on each other's feet and grasp each other's elbows or upper arms. Each pair advances by having the Scout whose back is toward the direction of travel lift his bottom off the other's feet and rock backward. Meanwhile, his partner slides his feet forward about a foot and rocks forward as the other sits down on his feet again. Continue with this rocking-sliding motion to the turning line—but don't turn. For the return trip, Scouts simply reverse roles, with the Scout who had been going backward now going forward. The first pair to return to the start wins.

## **THE MAZE**

The patrol forms a circle. Next, each patrol member reaches across with his right hand and takes someone else's right hand. Then each group member does the same with his left hand, but it must be the left hand of a different person. On signal, two players (appointed beforehand) let go of their right hands only. No one else may let go. These two "loose ends" will attempt to straighten out the maze of hands into a straight line.

## **MOONBALL**

Equipment: For each patrol, a well-inflated beach ball Object: To hit the ball aloft as many times as possible before it hits the ground Rules: 1. A player may not hit the ball twice in succession. 2. Count 1 point for each hit. Have the patrols gather in different areas of the field or gym and begin playing. Tension and expectation may build as each "world record" is approached. Variation: Have a different-colored ball for each patrol. Start the game with all patrols in the same area, and allow patrol members to hit the ball of other patrols as well as their own. Do not permit pushing and shoving to get at another patrol's ball.

## **NIGHT CROSSING**

This game will give a good assessment of the verbal communication skills of a patrol leader and the listening skills of the patrol. Equipment: Enough blindfolds for everyone except the patrol leaders; about a dozen 4-inch-diameter cardboard cylinders, 18 to 24 inches long (such as the tubes that come inside rolls of carpet or in PVC pipe) Procedure: Blindfold the entire patrol, except the patrol leader. Set up the cylinders at irregular intervals across the course. It is the patrol leader's job to coach his patrol across

the course without bumping over a cylinder. The patrol leader cannot get on the course. If a cylinder is bumped over, that Scout must start over. Once a Scout has successfully navigated the course, allow him to take off his blindfold. All members can be on the course at once, or one at a time. This can be a timed event or it can serve as a team-building exercise. Rearrange the course for each new patrol.

### **NITRO**

Three members of the patrol join hands. They are the “nitro” and must be transported as carefully as possible to a designated spot without touching the ground. The rest of the patrol must move them without breaking the grip or changing the position of the three players’ hands.

### **NITRO CROSSING**

Object: To transport a patrol and a container that is almost full of “nitro” (water) across an open area using a swing rope  
Rules: 1. Participants must swing with a hanging rope over a “trip wire” at the beginning and end of the open area without touching either wire. If a trip wire is touched, the entire group must go back and start again. 2. No knots may be tied in the swing rope, although a loop or a large knot may be tied in the bottom of the rope if less adept players need help. This knot may be held tightly between the legs to help support the player. 3. The nitro must be transported in such a way that none is spilled. If any of the nitro spills, the entire patrol must start over. The container must be refilled after each spill. 4. The swing rope must be obtained initially without stepping into the open area between the two trip wires. 5. Participants may use only themselves and their clothing to reach the swing rope. 6. Participants may not touch the ground while swinging between trip wires, and must attempt the crossing again if they do so. Variation: The nitro scenario can be accomplished indoors by using a gym climbing rope as the swing rope. Set up the trip wires using empty tennis ball cans as supports and a section of bamboo as the top crosspiece. Fill the No. 10 nitro can with confetti to avoid a wet gym floor.

### **NITRO TRANSPORT**

The patrol must move a can of radioactive nitro (an orange juice can full of water) from point A to point B (a distance of about 25 to 30 feet) by lifting the can on a small board (12 inches square) with eight 6-foot ropes. (It will look a lot like an octopus.) All Scouts must pick it up at the same time without spilling the liquid.

### **PUNCTURED DRUM**

This is a summertime game, best suited near a swimming pool. The object is to see which patrol can fill a large plastic garbage can with water until it overflows, by using either a bucket, if dipping from a lake or pool, or a garden hose. Oh, yes. The can has a few holes in it. Before the event, drill 50 to 60 holes at various points around the sides with a small drill bit. The patrol must plug the holes as the can fills. No foreign objects are allowed. The patrol with the best time wins.

### **REACTOR TRANSPORTER**

Equipment: For each patrol, six Scout staves or saplings about 6 feet long, four 6-foot lengths of cord, 20 feet of binder twine or light cord, one No. 10 can, and one nut for a 1/2-inch bolt  
Procedure: On signal, each patrol builds a transporter by lashing a three-sided frame with three staves and then lashing on a tripod from the three corners of the frame. The tin can is suspended from the top of the tripod. The nut is also hung from the top of the tripod. It hangs down into the can but does not touch the bottom or the sides. When finished, three patrol members pick the transporter up by its three corners and carry it to a finish line at least 100 feet away. If the nut swings and hits the side of the

can, the patrol must return to the starting line and start the carry again. The object is to transport the reactor so gently and evenly that it is not jarred. Scoring: The first patrol across the finish line wins. **Informal      Knots      Patrol teams**

### **SCOUT PACE CONTEST**

Equipment: Watch with a second hand Object: To complete 1 mile in exactly 12 minutes  
Procedure: The Scouts travel a 1-mile course, by pairs, using the Scout pace (50 steps running, 50 steps walking). Measure a point that is 1/2 mile from the meeting place, or as many times around the block as needed to make a mile. Space the pairs apart at two-minute intervals. Scoring: The Scout who finishes closest to 12 minutes (more or less) wins.

### **SOCCER FLYING DISK**

Equipment: A plastic flying disk; a field marked for soccer with a semicircular penalty area surrounding the goal Object: To send the disk across the opponent's goal line (sliding on the ground or sailing through the air) as many times as possible  
Procedure: Divide the troop into two teams or use patrols. Position a team on each half of the soccer field. Have each team choose a goalie, who stands in the penalty area. Rules: 1. Play begins when anyone throws the disk high into the air. 2. After catching or picking up the disk, a player may run toward the opponent's goal. If he is tagged above the waist with two hands, the tagged player must drop or throw the disk within three seconds. 3. A throw at the goal can be made from anywhere on the field except within the penalty area. The only person allowed in this area is the goalie. The goalie may leave or enter the penalty area at any time. 4. If two or more players grab the disk simultaneously, a "jump" ball is called. A leader stops the action and throws the disk into the air at the point where play was stopped. 5. The only penalty is for excessive roughness. The first infraction results in a two-minute penalty: one player is removed from the field. The second infraction means removal from the game. Body contact is inevitable, but purposeful roughness is unnecessary. Scoring: Each goal scores 1 point for the team. The team with the highest score wins.

### **SPORTS TOURNEY**

This can be held either indoors in a gym or outdoors, depending on the climate. Have an interpatrol competition in two or more team sports, such as basketball, volleyball, team handball, indoor soccer. Play patrol against patrol in abbreviated games (two five-minute halves of basketball, for example). If possible, have every patrol play all other patrols. If the patrol leaders' council desires a full-scale tourney with regulation games, schedule one that covers two or three Saturdays.

### **STEPPING STONES**

This game is a good team-building exercise. Give everyone in the patrol, except the patrol leader, a "life-support capsule" (a 6-inch-square block of wood). Each life-support capsule must be in contact with at least one human at all times. (The capsules can be touched by more than one human.) If a capsule loses contact with a human, it is taken away. The patrol must get from point A to point B, about 15 to 20 feet, without touching the ground, using the life-support capsules as stepping stones. If anyone touches the ground, the patrol must start over.

### **TANGLE KNOT**

Procedure: Ask a group of 10 to 16 Scouts to form a tight circle. Have everyone close their eyes and extend their hands toward the center of the circle. Ask each person to grasp someone else's hands in both of his hands, keeping his eyes closed. When every hand is grasping another hand, tell the participants to open their eyes and listen to their

objective. Object: Without letting go of hands, the group is to unwind, freeing themselves from the seemingly impossible knot and forming a circle. Rules: 1. Hand-to-hand contact may not be broken when unwinding the knot. Grips may change and palms may pivot on one another, but contact must be maintained. 2. When the group is finally arranged in a circle, the arms of some individuals might be crossed. This is part of an acceptable solution. 3. If time is running out, the problem can be simplified by breaking one grip and asking the group to form a single line instead of a circle.

### **TWO-BY-FOUR**

Object: To get all members of patrol A on one end of the line and all members of patrol B on the other end by moving in pairs Procedure: This noncompetitive game is usually played with red and black checkers. We will substitute Scouts—four from each of two patrols. The eight Scouts line up shoulder to shoulder, alternating patrols (Scout from patrol A, then B, A, B, etc.). Rules: 1. All moves must be made as pairs. (Members of different patrols may move together.) One pair moves at a time. 2. As a pair moves, the empty space left in the line must remain open until it is closed by another pair. 3. Pairs may not pivot or turn around. 4. The final line must be solid—no gaps. 5. No more than four moves are allowed, but don't announce this until the group has made a first try. If the group is frustrated, give them the first correct move. This will increase the group's confidence that the solution is imminent. If you forget the solution or neglect to draw the above solution on your palm, don't panic, just appear slightly amused at their attempts. Couple that with an occasional smile or slight affirmative nod of the head until the Scouts eventually hit on the right combination. If two or three hours have gone by and your nod is more weary than it is reinforcing, you might have to postpone the solution by suggesting that they "sleep on it."