

Activity 7 - WhatsIts?

Grades: 1 - 5

Instructional Materials

- packing peanuts
- toothpicks
- copies of Attachment 6
- Optional: rewards for all students

Background Information

Learning what motivates students is a valuable activity. This activity demonstrates intrinsic and extrinsic motivators as well as positive and negative reinforcement.

Introduction

Place students in teams of 4-5. Tell students they will be competing against each other in an assembly line competition. You may need to explain the concept of an assembly line to younger children. There will be a reward for the winning team. Avoid telling students what the reward will be. Be sure the teams are separated as you will be giving a different set of instructions to each team.

A. Give each team a set of building materials and a copy of Attachment 6. Tell all teams each student must participate in the building of each WhatsIt. Each WhatsIt is worth 5 points.

B. Tell half of the teams (Motivator A) they need to build as many WhatsIts as they can in the time allotted. They can use the materials in any way they choose as long as the basic shape of the WhatsIt is the same.

C. Tell the other teams (Motivator B) they need to build as many WhatsIts as they can in the time allotted. They will be penalized 2 points for every broken toothpick. Make sure that these teams do not have enough toothpicks to use all of the packing peanuts. They will have to decide whether breaking the toothpicks is worth losing points. (It takes 5 packing peanuts and 8 toothpicks to make 1 WhatsIt.)

D. Give students 8-10 minutes to build the WhatsIts.

E. Provide positive reinforcement to the first teams (Motivator A) by praising their efforts and encouraging them to keep working together. Provide less positive comments such as, "You better hurry up." or "Be careful you don't break anything." to the Motivator B teams.

Enduring Understanding

Successful people exhibit the traits of creativity, goal setting, intelligence, courage, and kindness.

Guiding Question

How are you motivated?
Intrinsically or extrinsically?

F. Students will ask what to do when they run out of materials. Restate that they can only use the materials they were given. Let them problem solve. Often students will begin to disagree on what to do, so let them try to figure it out together. You can discuss observed behavior after the activity.

G. At the end of the preset time, ask each team how many complete WhatsIts they made. You may need to check the WhatsIts of younger children for accuracy. Make sure the Motivator B teams deduct 2 points for each toothpick they break.

H. Place all scores on the board keeping the Motivator A teams separate from the Motivator B teams. Generally the Motivator A teams that received positive reinforcement and were told they could break the tooth picks without penalty work more cooperatively and have more WhatsIts. Motivator B teams will feel it was unfair that they were penalized for breaking toothpicks.

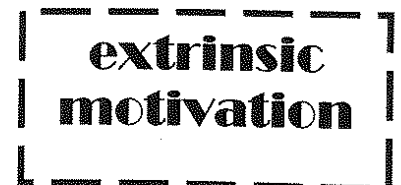
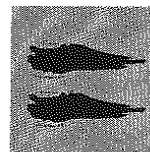
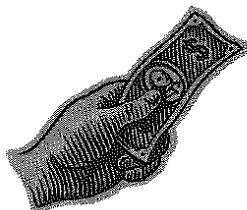
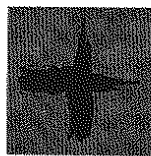
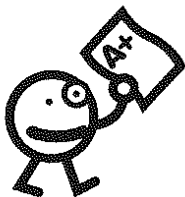
I. Ask students in the different teams how they felt during the activity. Discuss why they felt stressed or anxious about not getting the most WhatsIts. Students who were stressed because they wanted to win the reward are extrinsically motivated. Students who are stressed because they just wanted to build the most WhatsIts and feel successful are intrinsically motivated.

J. Ask students why they try to get good grades. Discuss the answers in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Explain to students how intrinsic motivation will carry you throughout life, when stickers and candy rewards are no longer offered. Ask students to list extrinsic rewards adults receive. (bonus pay, thank you cards, promotions, etc.)

K. Discuss how well teams worked together. Ask: Did the teams with the positive motivation work more cooperatively than the teams with negative motivation? Why or Why not?

Assessment

Have students either write or express orally why they would help you clean up the room. Have them determine if this is a positive or negative motivator and if they were looking for an extrinsic or intrinsic reward. Older students may be able to relate this to how they are parented. For example, being paid for grades versus being praised.



Each WhatsIt is made of 5 foam packing peanuts and 8 toothpicks.

