

## **AROUND THE RIVER**

Recently created (May, 2016), now in super beta testing mode. Please help test this activity and send me your feedback! Thanks.

### **FACILITATED OBJECTIVES:**

Explore behaviors related to group communication, leadership, planning, and patience. Explore concepts of strategy, group multi-tasking, and success and failure.

### **NEEDS & NUMBERS:**

For a group of eight to 15 participants, you'll need one deck of standard playing cards (no Jokers) – you can choose from a variety of deck sizes these days depending on the program goals (search “playing cards” in Amazon for some variety). I've been using the super jumbo size for most of my card activities lately (visual engagement).

If you have access to tables and chairs, Around the River is a good sit-down activity. You can also sit on the floor with the groups that are comfortable with the idea. I don't recommend running this one outside – cards can be challenging to manage in the grass and in windy situations. However, if an outside opportunity looks good to you, go for it.

### **TIME:**

15 to 30 minutes per attempt.

### **PROCEDURE:**

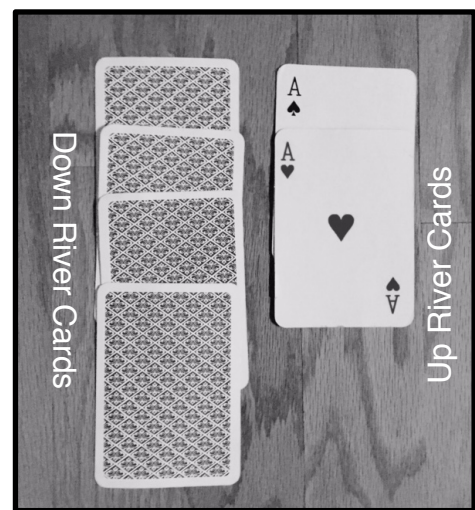
When working with 13 participants (if you're lucky), hand out four cards to each person – simply make sure the deck is good and shuffled, then hand out four cards off the top of the deck to everyone (or, split up the deck among a few people in the group and have them help you hand out four-card sets). Ask your participants not to look at the faces of their cards.

If there are less than 13 participants, ask for volunteers to take one additional set of four cards – these players will be responsible for working two Down River card sets (more below).

## **Cooperation/Communication**

### Activity Objective

Move playing cards around a pre-set circle of cards in order to place liked rank cards together so that, in the end all sets of four-of-a-kind are in sequential order around the circle.



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If I have 14 or 15 participants I will hand each person three cards and then ask for volunteers to take one additional card until all the cards are gone.

Let's say we have a long dining table we can all sit around (if you work at a camp you know the ones I'm talking about). Have everyone sit down so that each person is able to high-five the person to his/her left and right (basically, they need to be close enough to each other to pass cards – but, high fives can be given out for morale as they all get set up).

Once participants are sitting ask them to set their cards down on the table like the “Down River Cards” in the picture above – a vertical column of (three or) four cards. You can demonstrate this by setting down someone's cards for everyone to see. The group has just created the “River” of cards for the activity. Okay, you're ready to play.

Tell your group each person has a Down River set of cards in front of them (either three or four cards) – these cards are always face down (just being sure you get that part). During the activity each person (or 13 people if there are more than 13 in the group) will be making Up River sets of cards to the right of the Down River sets – Up River cards will be placed on the table face up (see picture). **The overall objective (following the Rules below) is to make 13 Up River card columns where each column is the same rank (four-of-a-kind if you're a poker player), and the ranks progress in sequence from Ace to King around the circle in clockwise or counterclockwise order.**

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## Rules:

- Each person is allowed to pick up, and look at, one card at a time from his/her Down River column(s). You may not be holding up two or more cards at any time.
- After you pick up a Down River card it must be passed off to the left or right – you may not place down a card you pick up from your Down River column.
- Down River columns can have up to four cards.
- Up River columns can have up to four cards.
- When an Up River card is placed down (face up) to the right of a Down River column it can no longer be moved.
- When a card is held up in someone's hand it may not be passed over (under or around) another card that is being held up by another player – in other words, cards may not pass each other if they are held up above the river.
- Cards held up over the river may not pass over (under or around) an Up River column containing four cards.

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## **SAFETY:**

So far I haven't experienced any safety issues with this cognitive challenge.

## **FACILITATION:**

Based on the low-level (physical) intensity of Around the River and the fact that the group stays in a circle(ish) formation I have chosen to actually be an active participant during the few times that I've presented this one. The rule I add in this situation is that someone needs to tell me specifically what to do – what play to make. If I'm not making a move I quietly observe the group develop and implement their process. (On only one occasion so far I have stopped my group in order to go through a little mid-view processing – there was a good opportunity for some learning in the moment.)

So far I've run this activity as a pass/fail goal – they either successfully complete the task or not within the time allowed. Under certain circumstances two or three attempts at Around the River could be played where the group is going for their best possible time to completion – this might fall under a process improvement type of program goal.

As far as Rules go, I believe I have included the minimum for the task to be of some challenge (and, for certain groups it might not be that much of a challenge at all – I can think of a really easy and efficient process, but I'm not telling). I have also purposefully left out some specifics that I want my groups to figure out. For example, I don't say that cards *can* be put down onto a Down River column, but there are rules "around" the option (e.g., Down River columns can have up to four cards). Feel free to add specifics if needed (but don't make it too easy for them, or it will no longer be a challenge).

There is one other thing to keep in mind during play. If you have more than 13 participants there might be a time where players are left without any cards in front of them – this is okay. They can still play a passed card (or cards) down in front of them and continue to pass cards around if they come their way. And, it would seem useful to have someone watching the processes without card distractions. There is always something to do if you look for it.

If you don't have one long table for the set-up, consider two rectangle tables placed end-to-end, a large round table, if everyone can fit around it, or play on the floor with participants sitting down crisscross apple sauce.

Finally, consider printing off a few copies of the Rules page (cut away the extras) and put them on the table (or hand them out) for easy access – "What do the Rules say about that?"

## **OBSERVATIONS/QUESTIONS:**

- In what ways did you communicate with your group? Do you think these were effective communication behaviors or ineffective? How do you know? How did your group members respond to your communication behaviors? What would you like to change about your communication behaviors in the future?
- Did you consider yourself a leader (at any time) during the activity? What leadership behaviors to you present/show to the group? Was anyone in the group willing to follow your lead? How do you know? Did you notice other people leading during the

activity? Did you follow their lead? Why or why not? What would you say is the best quality of a leader?

- Who can tell me what the plan was? How many of you believe you were following that plan? If you weren't following the plan, what were you doing? How many of you, if you spoke up or not, had a plan of action you believe would work for solving this challenge? Is there only one plan that will work? How do you know when a plan is effective? When do you discard a plan? What happens then?
- What did patience have to do with this activity? How many of you believe you were being patient during the task? How long, would you say, could you be patient? What does your patience depend upon? How many of you got impatient? Why did you let yourself get impatient? How does impatience impact your everyday life? Is it helpful? Is it un-helpful? When does impatience "matter"? When people are impatient with you how does it feel? What happens when people are impatient with you? How would you like this to change?
- Who can tell me what they know about the idea of "strategy"? Is it the same or different than a plan? Explain your thinking. Did you have a strategy for the task? Was it a group strategy or your own? Explain? When can a strategy be helpful? When can a strategy be unhelpful?
- Many of us know about the idea of "multi-tasking" on a personal level. What do you think group multi-tasking means? Was this happening during the task? When did you see/notice the group multi-tasking? Was it effective or not? Explain your thinking? When can group multi-taking be helpful? When can group multi-taking be unhelpful? How does a group get themselves into multi-tasking? What does it take to set this up for productivity? Share examples of groups (or teams) that are successful multi-taskers?
- In the end, was your group successful with the task? What lead to this success? At any point in time during the task did you experience failure? What did this look like? There are many different ways to define failure. Who can give us examples of failure? Is failure a good or bad thing? Explain your thinking around this? If you were successful, did you feel part of this success? What part did you play in the success? What did or didn't you do, to help your group be successful? What do you hope to be successful at in the future? What are you successful at right now?

### **VARIATIONS:**

- One thing mentioned above is choosing a particular size deck of playing cards. There are really small decks and really large decks. A "tiny" resource might be more challenging to work with than a larger resource (or vice versa).
- If using playing cards will not be appropriate for your group, create a deck of cards that will have four-of-a-kind sets. I would say 10 to 15 sets of four shapes (e.g., red squares) could be created. (And, if you do create this deck, please share it with me so I can pass it along.)

**PHYSICAL EDUCATION GRADE LEVEL OUTCOMES:**

([www.shapeamerica.org/standards/pe/](http://www.shapeamerica.org/standards/pe/))

- Middle School: S4.M1 – Exhibits responsible social behaviors; S4.M5 – Cooperates and problem-solves with a small group of classmates.
- High School: S4.H3 – Uses communication skills and strategies that promote team/group dynamics; S4.H3 – Assumes a leadership role; S4.H4 – Accepts other's ideas.

**21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY LEARNING:**

([www.p21.org](http://www.p21.org))

- Creativity and Innovation: Incorporate group input and feedback into the work; View failure as an opportunity to learn.
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving: Analyze how parts of a whole interact with each other to produce outcomes; Reflect critically on learning experiences; Identify and ask significant questions that clarify various points of view and lead to better solutions.
- Communication and Collaboration: Articulate thoughts and ideas effectively; Demonstrate ability to work effectively and respectfully with diverse teams.
- Flexibility and Adaptability: Incorporate feedback effectively.
- Initiative and Self-Direction: Reflect critically on past experiences in order to inform future progress (if you play multiple rounds).
- Social and Cross-Cultural Skills: Know when it is appropriate to listen and when to speak; Respond open-mindedly to different ideas.
- Productivity and Accountability: Collaborate and cooperate effectively with teams.
- Leadership and Responsibility: Act responsibly with the interest of the larger community in mind.

**ADDITIONAL IDEAS:**