Information taken from Colorado's Coaches Handbook

SECTION 3: SPONTANEOUS

PRACTICE, practice, practice and practice some more.....and did we say "Practice!"

What is Spontaneous?

Each Odyssey team entering a meet must also solve a Spontaneous problem. One of the purposes of spontaneous competition is to see how well the team members react to new situations. Only 5 of the team members may solve the spontaneous problem at tournament although all 7 team members may go into the room. Spontaneous problems take one of three forms, Verbal, Hands On or Verbal-Hands On. Team members will not know which of the Spontaneous problem until the judge presents the problem to them. Teams competing against each other are required to solve the same Spontaneous problem. All Spontaneous problems require teamwork and points are often awarded for this, regardless of the success of the team's solution.

Team members are not allowed to discuss the problem they were given until the level of tournament is mostly complete throughout the country. The reason being is all states receive the same problems for their Regional Tournaments and the same problems for their State Tournaments. It is up to the State Association to determine which problems will be used for which Long Term & Divisions. So a Division I, Problem 1 team in Colorado may receive the same Spontaneous problem as a Division II, Problem 5 team in Florida. If one team member were to discuss their Spontaneous problem with a cousin in a different state who is also participating in Odyssey of the Mind, it might give the team in a different state an advantage. While it might seem unlikely this could happen, it has and it does. All teams in all states have worked too hard to not advance because one team knew the Spontaneous problem. This secrecy is to make sure all teams have an equal opportunity to solve a problem on the spot, not to keep secrets from parents. Once the tournament level is finished, teams can discuss their Spontaneous problem with their coaches, parents and friends.

Example: This is a verbal problem. There is a brown paper bag on the table. Your problem is to say what the bag may be used for. You have one minute to think and two minutes to respond.

Types of Spontaneous Problems

There are three types of Spontaneous Problems
Verbal – team members generate as many creative verbal answers as they can in a short time period
Hands On – a physical or technical problem must be solved in a short period of time
Hands-on verbal – a physical object is manipulated in turns by the team members as they generate creative verbal answers

These categories are very fluid, however: Odyssey of the Mind is constantly incorporating new and different challenges into the spontaneous problems presented at competition. So while we have delineated them here to help familiarize the beginning coach with general types of problems, it is important to note that you never know what type of problem - or what combinations of types your team may actually face at the meet. The more diverse the problems you use in training, the better!

Practicing Spontaneous

Make sure you schedule time for your team to practice spontaneous on a regular basis. Think of it this way. Imagine that a track team only practices its running events, and not the field events. Remember even if they were the greatest athletes their sports have ever seen, their teams would not do well in the meet overall if they neglected to practice all the required components of their sports. In Odyssey of the Mind it is wonderful to have a terrific Long-Term solution, but if you want your team to be their best all around, they need to practice Spontaneous on a regular basis.

- **Expect the Unexpected.** Don't worry if you have not seen anything resembling this problem before. There's a good chance that nobody else has either.

- **Listen to the Rules.** Formulate questions after the rules are read and not during. How can you listen if you are thinking of a question? Nine times out of ten the question will be answered.
- **Sit or Stand?** Let the team decide. The presence of a table and chairs does not mean teams have to sit down for spontaneous. Some kids literally think better on their feet.
- **Start with Spontaneous.** Begin your practice with a Spontaneous problem to help team members energize their creative minds and as a transition from what they were doing just doing to OM practice.
- **Solve It Again & Again**. Run a spontaneous problem one month, then the same or similar problem again a month later.
- **Problem Ideas from the Long Term**. Use elements of the Long Term problem as a Spontaneous problem.

Tips for Practicing

Verbal

- How many total responses can your team give?
- How much time does each person have for a creative response?
- Are you thinking of multiple creative responses during your thinking time?
- Who do you piggyback well with – sit across from them
- Do you have a common answer in case you get stuck?
- Are you speaking loudly and clearly? Are you not duplicating answers
- Can you go as fast as your baseline response time?
- Do you have more than one response for each number?
- What are your hooks? People? Places? Animals? Cartoons? Sports?

Hands-On

- Does each team member have a role? Reader – Timer – Builders
- What can you do and not do in each part?
- How are points awarded? Are you going for the maximum points?
- Are you asking clarifying, not limiting questions?
- What other ways can you use the materials and where?
- Is each team member focusing on their role? Reader – Timer – Builders?
- Have you allowed enough time to present your solution for score?
- If the problem doesn't say you can't do it, then you can.
- What building principles do you need to apply?
- When is a solution the best it can be? Do you have enough time to improve it?
- Read through problems and discuss solutions without materials

Verbal/Hands-On

- What is the shape, color, texture of the materials?
- Do you have at least 3 responses?
- Can you use items around the room for ideas if you get stuck?
- How can you add meaningful gestures to your response?
- Substitute•Combine•Adapt•Modify•Put to other uses•Eliminate•Rearrange
- What is the problem asking you to do?
- Are you allowed to talk in one part, but not the other? How will you use your talking time?
- How are you piggybacking ideas during Part I?
- How will you use all of your materials?
- How will you modify your materials to use them creatively?
- Discuss first before altering materials

SCAMPER

If the number of ideas levels off, a team member may encourage new ideas by asking additional questions using the SCAMPER TECHNIQUE.

S	**substitute**	To have a person or thing act or serve in place of another "What else instead? Who else? Other place? Other time?
C	**combine**	To bring together, to unite, "How about a blend? assortment? combine purposes, ideas, materials or supplies

A	**adapt**	To adjust for the purpose of suiting a condition or purpose "What else is like this? What other ideas does this suggest
M	**modify, minify, magnify**	To alter, to change the form or quality "Can we change the meaning, color motion, sound, odor taste, form shape? Can we make it bigger, smaller, more of, less of?
P	**put to**	To be used for purposes other than originally intended other uses - "New way to use as is? Other uses if added to or taken away?"
E	**Eliminate**, elaborate	To remove, omit or get rid of a quality, part or whole. "What to cut out?" Decorate it
R	**reverse**	To place opposite or contrary, to turn around"what is the opposite purpose? Can we turn it backward, upside down, inside out? "

Hooks

Teams often will use hooks as a way to get unstuck during a verbal or verbal-hands on problem. Each team member will associate one finger with a category such as cartoon characters, food, places, animals, sports, music, movies, books, television shows, stuffed animals, etc. When a team member is stuck, he or she can look at a finger to think of an answer from that category. It may not be the most creative answer, but it will keep the team moving. It may even spark an idea in another team member.

Using Roles

Just like theatre and sports, good teams have specific roles that capitalize on the strengths of the individuals. Not all are best at being the lead role or the quarterback, and not all are best at being in charge of the lighting or the blocker. Odyssey of the Mind teams are no different, especially in Hands On Spontaneous problems when teams are under exact time frames to solve a problem. **The key is roles!** Teams that use roles are more successful because not everyone is trying to do the same thing or you have competing solutions. The roles that have worked best are Organizer, Builders (2), Reader and Timekeeper. Some use the term Leader in place of Organizer, however, you will have to decide how your team interprets this title. Again, like theatre and sports, not every team member will be successful at all roles. It is important for the coach and the team to figure out who is best suited for which roles. Below is a description of each role and how to best to determine who might be the most successful in the specific role.

Teamwork requires more than just knowing the roles, but actually sticking with them throughout the problem solving process. Often times teams will start off using roles, but then the problem solving process dissolves into activity that is similar to parallel play of toddlers. Everyone is getting along, but no one is working on the same solution and there are 5 different solutions trying to be implemented. As a result one solution, if any is really successful.

Role	Description	Identifying
Organizer/Leader	Their role is to communicate the solution they "see" and organize it into parts for the builders. It is essential they are able to hear other ideas and improvements then incorporate the best ones into the teams' solution. With any creative idea, the first is rarely the end product. In addition, their role is to make sure everyone understands what they are supposed to do and ensures that the tasks are being done. Lastly, they must be willing to build and assist where the team needs them.	This person usually is able to "see" the solution as it is being read. They can visualize what the solution will looks like. Also, they have usually had the most problem solving experience with manipulatives such as blocks, wood, motors, etc.
Builders	Their role is to build the solution with direction from the Organizer. They are also able to interpret the solution communicated by	This person is able to work well with their hands in terms of fine motor coordination as well as have good eye/hand coordination.

	the Organizer/ Leader and offer improvements to it. It is important that these team members can work quickly and efficiently.	They also need to have the ability to hear what the Organizer is "seeing" when s/he is explaining the solution.
Reader	This role reads the problem and quickly identifies critical and specific information to solving the problem. While the Organizer and Builders are discussing ideas, the Reader needs to be hearing what they are saying while understanding the requirements and opportunities of the problem. Often the Reader will interrupt the discussion to explain the details such as how points are awarded, what the problems says you can't do and what the problems does not say at all. The Reader is also the person to ask the best clarifying, but not limiting questions of the judges.	This person is a visual learner and best comprehends material when it is in writing. The Reader is also the person who can remember details well just by reading them and can remember where it is located on the page of the problem. They also have the ability to tune out most of the discussion of how to solve the problem while keeping an ear out for how it is being solved. They usually have one eye on the problem and one hears to the discussion.
Timekeeper	This role keeps time of the different parts of the problem and the time the team wants to devote to each part of the solution. This is one of the most critical roles because Hands On problems are time restricted. It requires the team member to stay focused on the time and not get pulled into solving the problem, thus helping the team stay on track.	This person really needs to not want to be involved with solving the problem. It is helpful for this person to be confident and have a loud voice because s/he will need to interject loudly and assertively how much time has passed and how time much remains.

Solving the Hands-On Problem

Solving a Hands-On problem requires more than just knowing the roles, but actually sticking with the problem solving process. A Hands On Problem is like a Long Term Problem but in 10 minutes or less. Either way, the same principles and steps apply, but only in a much, much shorter time.

1. Read The Problem
2. Brainstorm Possible Solutions
3. Refine And Evaluate Ideas
4. Determine Tasks And Timelines
5. Construct The Solution(s)
6. Do A Practice Run
7. Finish With Flare

It is helpful for teams to determine in advance, how much time they want to devote to each step of the process. Because there is a very short amount of time, some steps may need to be combined or occur simultaneously while others will be delegated to team members through the use of roles while the rest of the team continues with the process. At first glance, some may think the most time needs to be devoted to "Construct the Solution"; however, "Brainstorm Possible Solutions" should not be where time is cut. Teams that do not devote enough time to the brainstorming part inevitably go back and try to refine the solution when it is nearly complete because another idea came to mind and they want to try to implement it. Unfortunately, this takes valuable time away from completing the team decided solution. Taking the time upfront to agree on the amount of time for each step and sticking with it will gain them valuable time in the end.

Use of Materials

The materials given in a Hands-On problem are usually there for a reason. They all represent different uses and understanding how to best use each material will help the team see them from a different perspective.

Base	Connectors	Columns	Adhesives	Extend Reach
Molding clay	Paper clips	Popsicle sticks	Masking tape	Golf clubs
Paper/plastic cups	Toothpicks	Pencils	Molding clay	Yard sticks
Paper/plastic plates	String	Straws	Marshmallows	Balsa wood sticks
Toilet paper roll	Popsicle sticks	Pasta noodles	Mailing labels	Wood moulding
Egg cartons	Pencils	Toilet paper rolls	Sticky notes	Hair dryer
Tin cans	Straws	8½ x 11 paper		Ladles
Plastic containers	Pasta noodles	Corks		
	8½ x 11 paper	Wooden spools		
	Molding clay	Pipe cleaners		
	Elastic bands	Rulers		
	Pipe cleaners	Q-tips		
	Tinfoil	Clothespins		
	Clothespins			

Additional Tips for Coaching Spontaneous

- Always, always, always coach the team to go for the maximum points.
- Read hands on problems without materials to have team members discuss how they would solve it.
- Develop baseline time for flipping cards on verbal problems.
- Give examples of creative or humorous responses to verbal problems, then start thinking time
- Have all team members highlight important points on the hands on problem as you read the problem to see who is the strongest of the team at pulling out only the key points.

Create Your Own Spontaneous Problems

Take one or more items from the first column, choose a type of creation from the second column and choose an objective from the third column

"Using…"	"Create A…"	"That…"
Paper clips	Vehicle	Will move ___ feet
Toothpicks	Container	Will support weight
Masking tape	Tool	Will propel ping pong balls ___ feet
8½ x 11 paper	Device	Will stretch as far as possible
Mailing labels	New product	Every teacher should have
Molding clay	Article of clothing	Every student needs
String	Creature	Every OM coach needs

Popsicle sticks	Toy	Will trap objects
Pencil	Piece of furniture	Will rid your house of pests
Paper/plastic cups	Bridge	Will protect an egg from breaking
Paper/plastic plate	Tower	Will transport an object
Straws	Utensil	Will maneuver an obstacle course
Pasta noodles	Student survival kit	Will hit a target ___ feet away
Marshmallows	Wilderness survival kit	Will do your homework for you
Toilet paper roll	Ancient artifact	Is guaranteed to wake someone up
Egg carton	Cantilever	Will amuse a baby
Ruler/yard stick	Ramp	Will detect intruders
Tin foil	Communication system	Will put blocks in specific containers