

RETREAT: Back to School

by Sean Cramer

Off-Site Retreat Schedule

Friday

2:00 - 5:00 pm Meet, Check-In, and Drive to Location
5:30pm Potluck Picnic (Stop along route)
6:30 pm Check-In at Location/Unpack/Set-Up
7:30pm Icebreakers
8:30pm Break/Free-time/Transition
9:00pm Devotion 1 – Evening Snack

Saturday

7:45 am Devotion 2
8:00 am Breakfast
9:00 am Large group activity
10:00 am Bible Study 1
11:00 am Team Building Activities
12:00 pm Lunch
1:00 pm Team Building activities
3:00 pm Free time
5:30 pm Dinner
6:30 pm Large group game
7:00 pm Bible Study 2
8:00 pm Evening Activity
9:00 pm Devotion 3 – Evening Snack

Sunday

8:00 am Breakfast (consider a cook-out)
9:00 am Pack up
9:30 am Worship
10:30 am Load up and depart

Activity Ideas

Friday:

Potluck Picnic

Somewhere along the route, stop for dinner. Encourage individuals to bring a “brown bag” with something to share. Ideas could include chips, salads, sandwiches, cookies, etc. Encourage all items to be in disposable containers and with disposable table service. Lay out the portable potluck, and enjoy.

Along the Route

Look at the Game Guru blog from May 2011 for travel game ideas. One additional idea:

Hand It To You!!

Supplies: Deck of Cards

Play:

- Pass around a deck of cards. One at a time, a player draws a card, and must share a piece of information based on that card:
 - Each suit corresponds to a category
 - Spades - TV/Movies
 - Hearts - History/Geography
 - Diamonds - Literature
 - Clubs - Music
- They are to name something that has that cards' number/designation in it and connect to the category. Example: First participant draws Three of Diamonds, and says “Three Musketeers”, Next participant draws Seven of Hearts, and says “Seven wonders of the world”
- Play continues until deck is gone or until excitement peaks.

- Variations could include changing the numbers to corresponding letters of the alphabet (1=A&B, 2=C&D, etc. Ace=Y&Z); eliminating players who can't answer within a certain time frame; changing categories to your choosing; etc.

Ice Breakers

When choosing ice breakers, go with some that you're familiar with, and remember to plan plenty in case some don't connect. Below are two ideas. For extra ideas, check out Minute Games (Game Guru, September 2011), Dominoes, Revisted (Game Guru, October 2010), and Just a Couple of Games (Game Guru, February 2011).

Sock Swap

Supplies: One different pair of socks for every two participants (make them varied: a blue pair, red pair, short pair, draw symbols on them, etc. The goal is to make each pair unique.)

Set-Up: Arrange the group into a circle, and hand each person one sock, mixing them up as you hand them out.

Play: Ask each participant to put the sock on their hand.

- On go, each player is to quickly find their sock partner. Once they've done so, have them share their name and favorite cereal.
- Next, have players reform the circle, take off their sock, throw it across the circle, and grab and wear a new sock.
- On go, the player finds their new buddy, and again introduces, and shares another fact (hometown, favorite dessert, hobby, etc.)
- Continue play for a few rounds.
- Variations could include:
 - Preparing ahead of time so that the groups slowly grow each round. Example:
 - The first round, each participant is looking for their matching buddy.
 - The second round, each buddy pair is looking for another pair that has a certain number on it
 - The third round, each numbered group is looking for another group with the same shape on it, etc...
 - After a participant finds their buddy, they quickly take off their sock, grab another one, don it, and head back to the circle.

Wardrobe assumption

Supplies: nothing

Set-Up: None

Play:

- Break the group into 2-4 small groups, depending on size. Each group is to move away from the other groups, and 2 participants are to quickly swap an article of clothing. NOTE: Remind participants to remain appropriate (no pants swapping, etc.). Glasses, watches, shoes, and bracelets are great examples.
- Encourage groups to keep heads down when finished, and make their way back to starting point.
- On go, teams are to look at other teams to see if they can see what swaps other teams did.
- Once an individual thinks they can ID one, they are to raise their hand and guess.
- Each time a team guesses correctly, they are awarded 5 points. They are deducted 2 for each incorrect guess. Continue until all teams have had their swap identified.
- Have them regroup for Round 2, etc. Continue a few more rounds, or until play has peaked.

Evening snack ideas:

- S'mores buffet - including flavored marshmallows, and different topping combinations
- Make your own granola
- Sundaes
- Cook on a fire
- Etc.

Free Times

This can be as free or as structured as both you and your location are comfortable with. This is one of those times that really depends on the maturity of the group. Questions you may need to ask include

- Does each free time group need chaperones/does our location require it?
- Are there projects/activities to set up for completion over the weekend (service projects, crafts for the church, etc.)?
- Is there enough to do at the location (game room) or do we need activities?

Saturday:

Large Group Game Times

For the evening large group game, I would suggest continuing or starting a tradition within your group. Find a game your group loves playing, and start the custom of playing it every year. Suggestions include: Ultimate Frisbee, a tag game of some sort, Capture the Flag, etc. For an idea, try Tri-Level Baseball (Game Guru, April 2011).

For the morning, consider a few shorter-length games to get the juices flowing. Take a look at Summer Games (Game Guru, June 2011), Serve it Up and Other Games (Game Guru, May 2012), and a Hodgepodge of Games (Game Guru, August 2011). Or check out these:

Your Number's Up

Supplies: 2 or more markers, one Spot for each player.

Set-up:

- Break the group up into at least two groups (maybe 3 or 4 if a large group). Give each participant a spot, and instruct them to get into a circle and stand on their spot.
- With the marker, write a number in order on the hand of each participant in the circle (first person gets a 1, then a 2, 3, etc.)
- Instruct the group to get into a random order within that circle (you may have them get in order by alphabetical order of middle name, shoe size, etc.).
- Play:
- Once the group is in a random order, they are to complete each of the following tasks. As soon as they have done so, that group may quickly raise their hands and give a "Whoop!" At the end of each activity, reset the group into a random order.
 - Circle the group in numerical order (Person with the "1" runs clockwise around circle until they get to person "2", with whom they switch places. Person "2" runs to person "3", etc. until they get through the whole order.
 - Same thing, but now hopping on one leg.
 - Do the same thing, but in backwards order (person "10" goes first).
 - Same order, but walking backwards, etc.
- You may consider awarding random points to a team finishing first.
- Continue play for a few rounds or until play has peaked.

Team Switch

Supplies:

- headband/sweatband for each participant.
- Supplies for a normal two team game (soccer, ultimate frisbee, tag football, etc.)

Set-Up:

- Divide the group into 2 teams. Instruct one team to put the headband on their heads, and the other to put it on their wrists or in their pocket.

Play:

- Begin to play whichever game you have prepared, but with this one twist.
- At random times throughout the game, make a statement (i.e. if you're wearing blue). If any player finds this to be true for them (they have on blue socks), they switch their headband, and automatically change sides of the team they were on.
- Continue play for about 5-10 minutes or until play peaks.

Team Building Activities:

This time is another one of those times that will really depend on what you want to do with it. The goal is to provide options for the group to spend some time and grow together. Ideas may include:

- Depending on the location you choose for the retreat, you may have staff at the site who can facilitate team building and challenge course activities.
- Group Service Projects
- Group Hike
- Creating artwork for the youth room
- Small group discussion time

Evening Activity:

Group Encouragement Night Hike

Go on a night hike, walking around the facility and through trails. Instruct participants to not talk, but to think and process through the weekend as they are walking. Provide flashlights to leaders to use as necessary. At intervals during the walk, pause and name one of the participants – allowing time for other group members to shout out strengths and words of encouragement for that individual. After the words die down, pray over that individual asking for blessings throughout their school year.

For larger groups, you may consider breaking into smaller groups for the hike.

Sunday:

Worship

Do this however your congregation/group is comfortable with, whether a Pastor is present to lead, or be it group led.

Bible Study/Devotional Ideas

Devotion Friday Night: Bent Out of Shape

Supplies: Bible, Round of Bread Dough

- Ask if anyone has every made bread from scratch, and ask about the importance of kneading the bread:
 - Kneading develops gluten in the bread, which strengthens it, and allows it to have a consistent structure, to keep the dough from falling apart while cooking.
 - Kneading also creates air pockets, giving it more opportunity to rise and build a good shape.
 - Kneading typically takes between 8-10 minutes (all references for kneading taken from <http://www.wisegeek.com/why-do-you-need-to-knead-bread-dough.htm>)
- This process of being shaped and formed, and needing time to do it, is also true for us.
- This is true for you as you to return to school
 - You need to continue to be shaped and pressed throughout your education.
- Read Jeremiah 18:1-11.
 - In this passage, God is talking to His people, and using the image of a potter shaping a vessel to talk about our rebellion.
 - Due to our sinful nature, we are constantly shaping ourselves against God's will.
 - God needs to press into us, and shape us as His own.
 - Being redeemed, we are called to press onward toward what He is calling us to.
- Read Ephesians 2:1-10.
 - Paul continues this idea of our rebellion against God, talking about how we were born "dead" in sin.
 - Through God's mercy and grace, Christ Himself died and rose to redeem us.
 - Reread verse 10: We are God's workmanship, He has shaped us to His image, He has redeemed us, and He continues to shape and use us.

Devotion Saturday Morning: Praise His mighty deeds

Supplies: None

- Get some one-word responses for how the participants respond to the morning time (projected responses might include: 'early', 'yuck', and 'wanna-sleep').
- Sometimes life overall can feel like just being awoken: dis-jointed, out of whack, wanna get away from it.
- Read Psalm 150 – Ask for responses to what this psalm makes them think of.
- Highlight v. 2 – that we are to Praise Him for His mighty deeds.
 - For remembering that He was mighty enough to Create us
 - He was mighty enough to send Christ to die for us
 - He was mighty enough to redeem us from our sinfulness and bring us to faith.

Devotion Saturday Night: One Body

Supplies: Older keyboard (for typing) with at least one letter removed.

- Discuss how difficult it might be to type and compose letters or articles with this piece missing. How would you be able to construct what you want. Imagine if it was a less-used letter, a 'z', a 'q'.
 - There would still be times when those pieces would be crucial when typing.
- Sometimes we can view ourselves as letters that 'aren't necessary'.
 - Think about your roles in school this year, how you serve.
 - In what ways are you important?

- Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-30.
- Though we often corrupt ourselves, and though we at times view ourselves with less importance with others, God does not view us that way.
- We are a part of His body, we are a part of His plan to use us.
- Jesus sacrificed His life to redeem ours. Because Jesus died and rose, we are now redeemed, and through Baptism, we are incorporated into the Body of Christ!
- Being baptized and redeemed, God uses us to serve as a part of His Body!

Bible Study 1: Perception in a Homecoming

Open with Prayer

Intro:

(Supplies: Have a copy of this article to use some examples: <http://christianpf.com/10-best-tipping-celebrities/>)

- Imagine being a waiter in a restaurant, and one of your favorite celebrities walks in.
 - How would you imagine their behavior might be? Their tip habits?
 - Read some of the celebrities in the article.
 - Did any of these accounts surprise you? How so? Do any of these change your impression of any of these celebrities?
 - How might your perception change if they were bad tippers?
- What might be some perceptions other people may have of you?
 - Team-mates? Classmates? Family members?
 - Why might they have this perception?

Scripture

- Read Matthew 13:54-58.
 - What about this Scripture surprises you?
 - How might you have reacted?
- What might this Scripture teach about judging others' actions?
 - How might these Scriptures affect your view:
 - Matthew 7:1-5
 - Matthew 25:31-46
 - How might the truth in these Scriptures affect both your perception of others AND others' perception of you:
 - Colossians 3:1-18
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:8-11
- Thinking through everything talked about:
 - How does this affect how you will approach this school year?
 - What will be different for you?
- Finish with 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, reminding participants of what Jesus has done for them, and how the Holy Spirit is with them.

End with Prayer

Bible Study 2: Welcome Back?

Open in prayer

Intro:

- Name 3 things you are looking forward to when you return back to school.
 - Is there any specific event coming up this year? Any season (sports, theater, etc.)?
 - Any classmates/teachers you're excited to see?
 - Is there anything you're not looking forward to? Events? Classmates/Teachers?
- Ask participants to summarize the Story of the Prodigal Son/Lost Son.
 - What happens in the story?
 - What is it about?
 - How many times have you heard this story?

Scripture:

- Read Luke 15:1-10.
 - Describe some of the characteristics of the coin and the sheep.

- What might be the chance of those two items finding their own way back?
- What does the focus of these two parts of the parable tend to be on?
- How might this relate to our condition as sinners?
- Read Luke 15:11-32.
 - Compare and contrast the “younger brother” to the coin and the sheep.
 - Compare and contrast the “older brother” to the coin and the sheep.
 - How might both of these characters be “lost”? How does the father in the story tend to respond in each situation?
 - How/when are we “lost”?
- Read Luke 19:1-10.
 - Looking at v. 10, and thinking through the entire story, how might this connect to the parable in Luke 15?
 - How does Jesus say he responds to the “lost”?
- Who is cut off/ “lost”? (See Numbers 15:30,31 and Romans 3:23.)
- Continue reading Romans 3:24-26 to see what God does about it.
 - How does Jesus “find”/save us?
 - What does it mean to you to know that Jesus has died and risen to justify, to find you in your sinfulness?
 - Being redeemed and found by Christ affect how you approach this coming school year? Does it make a difference?
 - What might you do differently this year?

Close in Prayer