

Literacy Games

Amy Elliott Zelmer and A.C. Lynn Zelmer

These "games" are intended to provide the participants with some of the same type of experience they would have if they were living in a society with a low print literacy. These exercises can provide a learning experience for participants in themselves, but the learning about literacy can be enhanced if the exercises are followed by a discussion of the experience. Questions for discussion follow each exercise.

I ORAL COMMUNICATION

Goal - To illustrate the difficulties in communicating information in a purely oral form through several individuals.

Group Size - Five participants; unlimited number of observers.

Time Required - Approximately 30 minutes.

Materials Required - message  
- observation forms  
- tape recorder (optional)

Space Required - Meeting room for total group  
- Nearby area where participants can be isolated

Process

1. The leader selects five members from the group to be the participants.
2. The five participants are asked to go into the isolation room.
3. Leader discusses purpose of the exercise with the observers, distributes observation sheets and starts tape recorder (if he plans to replay the exercise afterwards for clues to distortion).
4. The leader calls one of the participants back into the room and reads the message to him/her.
5. The leader asks the second participant to return to the room.
6. The first participant repeats what he heard from the leader to the second participant. He must do this in his own way, without using any kind of written message or help from the observers.

7. The third participant is asked to return, and the second participant repeats what he heard from the first participant.
8. The process is repeated until the fifth participant has had the message transmitted to him.
9. The fifth person repeats his "message" to the entire group.

#### Questions for Discussion

- What happened to the information as it passed from person to person?
- How might the ability to write have helped?
- What other means might the participants have used to help communication?
- What is the maximum length of an effective oral message?
- How do pre-literate societies pass on their history and skills to younger generation's? (eg. storyteller).

#### Variations

Any suitable message may be substituted for the "accident report."

Observation Form

Message: - Accident Report

"I can't wait to report to the police what happened in this accident - I must get to the hospital as soon as possible."

"The semi-trailer truck, heading south, was turning right at the intersection when the sports car, heading north, attempted to turn left. When they saw that they were turning into the same lane, they both honked their horns but proceeded to turn without slowing down. In fact, the sports car seemed to be speeding up just before the crash."

| Participant | Deletions | Additions | Distortions |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| 1           |           |           |             |
| 2           |           |           |             |
| 3           |           |           |             |
| 4           |           |           |             |
| 5           |           |           |             |

II GIVING DIRECTIONS

Goals - To illustrate the handicaps faced by illiterate people.

Group Size - Minimum of two - no upper limit.

Time Required - About 20 minutes.

Materials Utilized - Chalkboard and chalk, or overhead projector and pen; plus pencil and paper for each participant.

Physical Setting - Place for each participant to draw.

Process

- A. The leader selects a demonstrator and one or two observers. The other participants are given a pencil and sheet of paper. The demonstrator verbally describes one of the figures shown below and participants try to show the figure to the participants but may answer any questions). The observers will report their observations during the discussion.
  
- B. The leader selects a demonstrator and one or two observers. The demonstrator shows the group one of the figures shown below for about 15 sec. (use the blackboard, flip chart or an overhead projector). Then remove the drawing, hand out pencils and paper, and ask the participants to reproduce the drawing from memory. The observers will report their observations during the discussion.

Suggestions for Discussion

- We depend on notes, calendars etc. to remind us of activities; what means can an illiterate person use?
  
- We depend on written instructions (recipes, directions for operating equipment etc.) What means can an illiterate person use?
  
- How would you get along if you didn't have ready access to pen, pencil or paper?
  
- How did the observers "record" their observations?



Diagram I

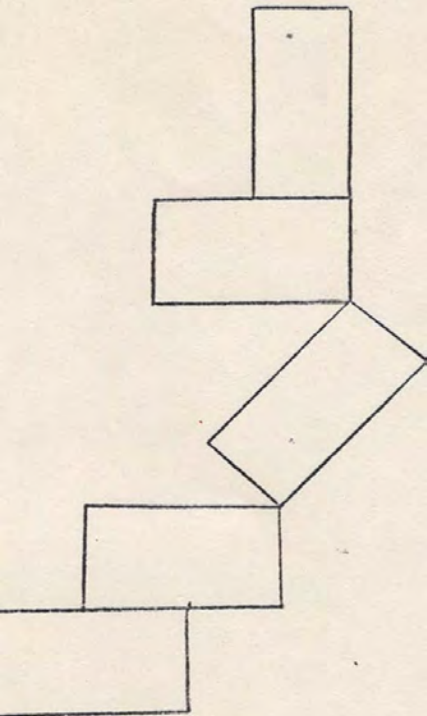
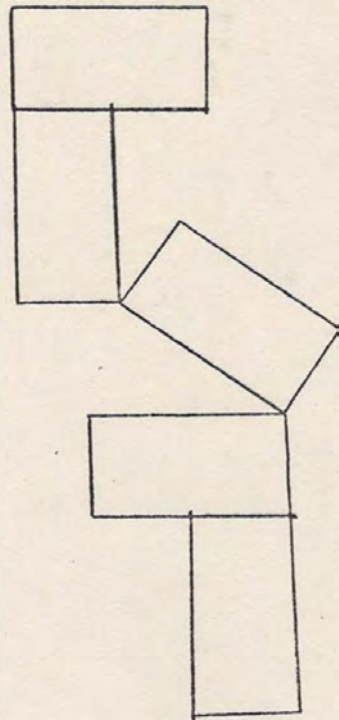


Diagram II



### III USING A SCRIBE

Goal - To illustrate the difficulty in communicating information when the services of a scribe must be used.

Group Size - Clusters of 5; (any number of clusters may be used).  
Players are identified by the color of cards distributed within the group.

Time Required - About 40 minutes.

Materials Required - Two sets of colored cards prepared as described.  
- Notepaper and pencil for each participant.

Space Required - Space for each group to work; participants should be seated in such a way that they cannot see the cards held by other players.

#### Process

- A. 1. The leader distributes one colored card from set A to each of the five players. The group's task is to determine which of six possible symbols is common to all of the cards distributed. The leader should record the time taken by each group to correctly complete the task.
2. Players may address written messages to any other player, but in the first round they must give their messages to the person who has the "red" card. "Red" will pass messages on to the other players only after he/she has read them and rewritten the message on a new piece of paper. ("Red" simulates the function of a scribe.)
- B. 1. The leader distributes one card from set B to each of the five players. The group's task is to determine which of six possible symbols is common to all of the cards.
2. In this second round players may send written messages directly to any other player in the group. The leader should record the time taken by each group to correctly complete the task.

#### Suggestions for Discussion

Although written messages are used throughout this exercise it simulates a situation in which a scribe ("red") must be used for written communication (as in a low-literacy society) versus a literate society.

- When is the task completed most quickly?

- What are the feelings of group members during the two parts of the exercise?
- How would you maintain privacy when using a scribe to write a letter to a member of your family?
- How does "red" see his role differently in the two parts?

SYMBOL CARDS - Set A (Set must be on colored card stock)

- White:** Each person in your group has a card with five symbols out of a possible six (□, ◇, +, 0, △, \* ). Your task is to determine which symbol is common to all cards in your group. YOU MAY NOT TALK but should write messages to the other players. You may "address" your message to any other player, but you must give the message only to "Red" who will read it, transcribe it and pass it on. Your symbols are ◇, \*, +, □, 0
- Brown:** Each person in your group has a card with five symbols out of a possible six (□, ◇, +, 0, △, \* ). Your task is to determine which symbol is common to all cards in your group. YOU MAY NOT TALK but should write messages to the other players. You may "address" your message to any other player, but you must give the message only to "Red" who will read it, transcribe it and pass it on. Your symbols are △, ◇, 0, □, +
- Yellow:** Each person in your group has a card with five symbols out of a possible six (□, ◇, +, 0, △, \* ). Your task is to determine which symbol is common to all cards in your group. YOU MAY NOT TALK but should write messages to the other players. You may "address" your message to any other player, but you must give the message only to "Red" who will read it, transcribe it and pass it on. Your symbols are △, ◇, \*, □, +
- Blue:** Each person in your group has a card with five symbols out of a possible six (□, ◇, +, 0, △, \* ). Your task is to determine which symbol is common to all cards in your group. YOU MAY NOT TALK but should write messages to the other players. You may "address" your message to any other player, but you must give the message only to "Red" who will read it, transcribe it and pass it on. Your symbols are △, ◇, +, 0, \*
- Red:** Each person in your group has a card with five symbols out of a possible six (□, ◇, +, 0, △, \* ). Your task is to determine which symbol is common to all cards in your group. YOU MAY NOT TALK but should write messages to the other players. You may give your messages directly to any other player. The other players MUST give their messages to you, and you will read them and REWRITE THE MESSAGE on a new piece of paper before passing it on. Your symbols are △, +, 0, □, \*



SYMBOL CARDS - Set B (Set must be on colored card stock)

- White:** Each person in your group has a card with five symbols out of a possible six (□, 0, ◆, \*, +, △). Your task is to determine which symbol is common to all cards in your group. You may not talk, but should write messages to the other players. You may hand your message directly to any other player. Your symbols are △, 0, □, \*, +
- Red:** Each person in your group has a card with five symbols out of a possible six (□, 0, ◇, \*, +, △). Your task is to determine which symbol is common to all cards in your group. You may not talk, but should write messages to the other players. You may hand your message directly to any other player. Your symbols are ◇, △, □, \*, +
- Brown:** Each person in your group has a card with five symbols out of a possible six (□, 0, ◇, \*, +, △). Your task is to determine which symbol is common to all cards in your group. You may not talk, but should write messages to the other players. You may hand your message directly to any other player. Your symbols are ◇, 0, \*, +, △
- Yellow:** Each person in your group has a card with five symbols out of a possible six (□, 0, ◇, \*, +, △). Your task is to determine which symbol is common to all cards in your group. You may not talk, but should write messages to the other players. You may hand your message directly to any other player. Your symbols are ◇, 0, △, □, +
- Blue:** Each person in your group has a card with five symbols out of a possible six ( , 0, , \*, +, ). Your task is to determine which symbol is common to all cards in your group. You may not talk, but should write messages to the other players. You may hand your message directly to any other player. Your symbols are ◇, 0, □, △, \*