FREEING THE IMAGINATION

**Unrelated Words**, for one or more players. *Unrelated Words* is helpful for freeing up thinking, encouraging right brain thinking and making new associations. Before playing unrelated words, it is best to start with related words! The sequence might run like this:

“Fish… ocean… wave… hello… goodbye… ending… happy… sad…”

Once players start to get good at related words, it is time to try unrelated words. An unrelated sequence might run like this:

“The piano… elephant… cheese… sitting… picnic… gigantic… unfamiliar…”

This is much more difficult than relating words. Even in this sequence, one might argue that *picnic* and *sitting* have similarities! Mixing different types of words, like nouns, verbs and adjectives helps.

**Speak Together**, for two or more players. This game is about teamwork and really listening to one another. It is a great game for training people to pay more attention to their colleagues and to allow the unexpected to happen. Pairs of players must enter the space and speak together. When speaking together, players must open their mouths at the same time, watch each other closely and try not to plan. They must copy the sounds that come from their partner’s mouth and try to turn these into complete words without leading too much. A facilitator might start them off with a question like, “What is your name?” The players must act and speak as if they are one being. If sounds ever end up as gibberish, then the facilitator should ask the players to repeat the sound and make it complete, for instance:

PLAYERS: “My name is Warrrrhaaaarrr…”
FACILITATOR: “Excuse me?”
PLAYERS: “My name is Warrrr…en”

It is possible to have whole teams of ten or more speaking together, or even whole audiences of delegates at a conference!

**I Am A Fish**, for three or more players. *I Am A Fish* is also about teamwork and making unrelated and related connections. It is helpful to play *Unrelated Words* first. The first person steps in and declares “I am a…” The second person repeats, and make their declaration related, first time round. The third person steps in and chooses which person to take, leaving one person in the middle who must begin the next round. The dialogue might run like this:

PERSON ONE: I am a fish
PERSON TWO: I am a net
PERSON THREE: I choose the net!

(PERSONS TWO AND THREE LEAVE, AND PERSON ONE CONTINUES.)
PERSON ONE: I am a tablecloth… etc

Once players are happy with the game using related words, try using unrelated words next. It is interesting to reflect on why the third person chooses a particular person. A variation on this is to play in pairs and repeat the process but speak together! Be sure to play *Speak Together* first. Get players into pairs or threes.
Lateral Thinking Problems are fantastic mysteries for getting the creative juices flowing. There are many on the net, so I won’t list them all here, but one famous example is this:

“A man has committed suicide by hanging, but police are puzzled as to how he did it. The body is hanging by the neck, from a rope tied to a beam above his head. Below the body is a pool of water. There are no chairs or furniture in the room. How did the man hang himself?”

The conventional answer to this one is that he stood on a block of ice until it melted. However, much more important that the right answer is the thinking it encourages. When introducing lateral thinking problems, always praise any efforts to creatively solve the problem. It is the thinking style we want, not the ‘right’ answer.

Moral Dilemmas are also excellent for encouraging creative thinking, as they introduce a problem that must be solved. Here is one popular philosophical problem:

“You are a vegetarian now but previously enjoyed the taste of meat. You do not eat meat for ethical and compassionate reasons. One day, a talking pig says to you, ‘I don’t mind if you eat me. I want to die so that you can be fed.’ What will you do?”

These dilemmas can be very interesting to discuss but be warned: participants can become very passionate! This game requires careful management from a facilitator as the merits here are in how it encourages the brain to work. Move on before people actually fight as adrenaline will impede creative discussion afterwards.

What Can You See? for one or more players. It has often been said that creativity is about making the usual unusual, and this game definitely encourages that. Draw a squiggle or a dot or a very simple shape. Ask the participants what they can see.

Here are some answers for a dot:

“A dot… a bullet point… a circle… a ball… a pizza… an eyeball… a sun…”

It is very usual for answers to migrate from the commonplace to the more unusual as the game progresses. By the way, children are usually much better at this game than adults.

Use the Prop, for one or more players. This game has links with What Can You See? and calls for unusual links to be made with commonplace objects.

Pass around a simple everyday object, like a spatula, or a traffic cone. Every player must use the prop in an inventive way, which makes sense of the object. Traffic cones might become wizard’s hats, or adornments on Madonna’s bustier. It is best if the player demonstrates the objects use silently and the others guess, or they play the character using the item and speak a line of dialogue. Players should not say “Er… this is a hat.” They should say something like “Hi, do you like my new hat!”.

It is fun to play in pairs or groups, where players can participate passively if they don’t have an idea immediately. You can also allow players to say ‘Pass” if they are really stuck.

Use the Person, for two or more players. This is a variation on Use the Prop and calls for a volunteer to create an unusual shape with their body for others to use as a prop. The volunteer should pick a pose that does not give you backache or ask you to balance precariously. Other players then attempt to come in and use the shape as something, for example, an outstretched arm might become a soda fountain, and the
user might pour themselves an imaginary drink and drink it, to demonstrate. Again, play silently and encourage guessing, or ask players to be characters. They should not simply state their idea. After a while, swap players and encourage each volunteer to make their pose very different.

**Metaphors and Similes**, for one or more players. Metaphors and similes call for huge leaps of imagination. The most imaginative artists we have are experts at making connections between things in a meaningful way. Shakespeare, for example, was a master of metaphor.

One way to create lots of lovely metaphors and similes is to leap through a collection of nature photography and really study each picture. Encourage similes… “the grass looks like the waves on the sea”

**Who’s The Character?** for two or more players. Place three random objects in a box. Tell participants that you found this box and that it belongs to someone. Let them open the box, discover the items, pass them around and ask them, “Who do you think they belong to? What kind of person is this?” You can encourage group discussion, or put people in smaller groups and ask them to sketch the character or make notes.

**Craft making sessions** are excellent for encouraging the alpha brain wave patterns that relax the body and improve creative thinking. Why not give people ten minutes to make something out of plasticine, or a box of assorted craft materials? You could make it a focused task, e.g. “Make me a model of a wonder of the world” or “Make me a miniature raft that will hold a candle and float”.

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Bibliography: