



## CAMPFIRE CEREMONIES



### Some Simple Troop Campfire Guidelines

As they do for a larger, more formal campfire, these guidelines can also apply to the intimate troop campfire as well:

- No flashlights. Let the light of the fire stand alone and light the way.
- During the campfire festivities, absolutely no booing, ever.
- No Talking, unless you're involved in an activity. Talking can spoil the mood and distracts from what's going on.

### Lighting the Fire

Everyone loves to see the fire lit. *How* it's lit is an opportunity to start things off in really good form. A word to the wise: always have a backup plan in place, just in case a prepared approach or technique fails to work. *As always, have readily accessible fire extinguishing materials on hand.*

#### Torch Lighting

It's easy to fashion a simple torch from a wadded ball of dry tinder tied to a stick with binder twine. You can also surround the end of a stick with a large ball of cotton smothered in petroleum jelly and secured with light wire. Prior to the campfire, test a duplicate of the torch to make sure it will suffice. When the time comes, the assigned torch bearer ignites the torch nearby and ceremoniously walks to the fire lay. Then, he holds the flaming end on top of or into the fire lay, depending on the type constructed. *Always have a filled fire*

*bucket safely on hand, whenever using a torch.*

### **Magic Fire Lighting**

- The basic notion behind “magically” lighting a fire is to get the fire started, apparently, without actually touching it, but instead, calling upon the Great Spirit to light it. Over the years, many methods have been employed, some of which consist of mechanical contrivances that, depending on how they’re put together and set up, can be complicated to build and potentially difficult to pull off.
- One such method, consisting of a battery with wires attached to a spring impregnated with numerous match heads, has been used with varying degrees of success. Another, method utilizing (for example) a six volt battery that puts out 5 amps, with 15 feet of wire connected to Grade #0000 steel wool wrapped in cotton and surrounded by light tinder is also, to varying degrees, reliable. When lighting a fire in this fashion, it’s crucial that the tinder is fluffy and dry, and is placed strategically with enough air space to ignite the surrounding material.
- “Magically” lighting a fire is a grand experience. When it works, Scouts get a big kick out of it. If it doesn’t, have a backup plan in place (like a Scouter in a bear costume ready to make the scene with a lighter or torch).

### **Flaming Arrow**

- This technique requires the right conditions, planning, and lots of necessary preparation, but the results can be outstanding! The fire lay must be configured as a teepee or pyramid.
- Drive a stake into the ground and build up the tinder, kindling, and fuel around it. As these materials are put in place, leave an opening where a line will be extending out from the stake inside the fire lay. If desired, strew a large quantity of matches in that vicinity.
- Securely tie one end of a length of monofilament fishing line to the stake. Reeve the other end through the holes of two same-sized sewing thread spools. Tightly tie a target arrow or arrow-lengthed dowel to the spools. Surround the tip of the arrow with a large, compressed wad of cotton and attach it securely in place with light wire. Saturate the cotton with petroleum jelly.
- From the stake, run the fishing line up to a nearby high point, (a tall, stable ladder, or natural berm) that will be obscured from the troop’s view when it’s time to light the fire. Tie the other end tightly to the high point so the line is completely taut. The angle from the high point to the fire should be sufficient to ensure the arrow will slide rapidly and smoothly down to, and through, the prepared opening in the fire lay to the stake.
- Test the arrow’s ability to slide to it’s mark and add weight and/or make adjustments as necessary to assure an impressive flight after it’s lit.
- Before the ceremony, a leader needs to be safely perched at the high point with the arrow and a lighter, and ready to send the flaming arrow on its path to the fire at the appropriate time.
- *Always have a filled fire bucket safely on hand, both at the high point and down by the fire, whenever presenting this fire lighting procedure.*

### **Enhancing the lighting of the Campfire**

*Recited expressively, just before the fire is lit:*

Near our campfire circle stand the wigwams of our campers.

Dark behind them stands the forest, stands the chestnut, oak and hemlock,  
Stand the pines with cones upon them.  
Many things we learn and do here:  
How the Great Spirit cares for all his faithful children,  
Cares for all the forest people.  
Learn they of the stars in heaven,  
Of the birds that fly and nest here,  
Learns the language of all creatures  
Call them friends whene'er they meet them.  
Oh, Great Spirit, then, in Heaven,  
Send us flame to light our campfire  
That we may for this be grateful.  
Oh, Great Spirit, this we ask Thee,  
Send us fire, and we shall praise Thee.  
*This may be recited just before the fire is lit by a Scout (or other character) carrying a flaming torch, or a flaming arrow sent from a high point. It also can be slowly recited while using the [battery and steel wool firelighting technique](#).*

### **Gifts from the Scout Oath**

– **Leader:** *(standing in front of the fire lay, carrying a simple torch and a lighter.)* Tonight, to ensure our campfire burns true, we will bestow upon it three gifts.

*Three Scouts approach the fire lay. Each carries within his cupped hands a compacted bundle of very dry tinder mixed with light kindling. One at a time, they step up to the fire site, and before placing their bundle into the log cabin fire lay, they deliver the following lines, loud and clear:*

- **First Scout:** Duty to God and Country and to obey the Scout Law
- **Second Scout:** Duty to help other people at all times
- **Third Scout:** Duty to keep ourselves physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight

*After each has placed his bundle into the fire lay, the leader proceeds to set the fire ablaze with the torch.*

## **Openings**

When a troop campfire is a more formal event with some purpose and structure, a simple opening is appropriate.

### **Poetic Opening 1**

*The following lines are recited by a junior or adult leader, with clarity and solemnity, as the fire is being lit:*

In this green and leafy campground,  
Scouts together in the wood,  
We circle round to tell our stories,  
Scouting for the greater good.  
Here we're thankful for Your bounty,  
For our friends who gather near,  
Help us now to light this fire,  
Help us now to kindle cheer.

### **Poetic Opening 2**

*The following lines are recited by a junior or adult leader, with clarity and solemnity, after the fire is lit and starts to grow:*

As glow the hearts of the logs upon this fire,

So may our hearts glow, and our thoughts be kind,  
As glow the hearts of the logs upon this fire,  
May peace and deep contentment fill every mind.

### **Poetic Opening 3**

*The following lines are recited by a junior or adult leader, with clarity and solemnity, after the fire is lit and starts to grow:*

As the flames point upwards, so be our aims.

As the red logs glow, so be our sympathies.

As the grey ash fades, so be our errors.

And as the good fire warms our circle, so may our ideals warm the world.

*Variation – these sentences may be delivered separately, to punctuate the fire's various stages:*

As the flames point upwards, so be our aims. *(opening)*

As the red logs glow, so be our sympathies. *(as the flames start to subside)*

As the grey ash fades, so be our errors. And as the good fire has warmed our circle, so may our ideals warm the world. *(towards the end or as part of the closing)*

### **Words to Set the Mood 1**

*The following lines are recited by a junior or adult leader, with clarity and solemnity, after the fire is lit and starts to grow:*

– As our campfire grows and grows, let the smoke from its flames rise to carry all our bad thoughts away, never to be seen again.

– Let the heat of this fire's flames warm us all, and as we share its warmth, let us share the peace and contentment that grows inside us all.

### **Words to Set the Mood 2**

*The following lines are recited by a junior or adult leader, with clarity and solemnity, after the fire is lit and starts to grow:*

As our campfire smoke curls upward, may all that is mean and unkind be carried away from our midst.

And in the friendly glow of our fire, may peace and contentment wash over us all.

### **Opening Applause**

MC: I'm going to teach you all a neat trick. Place your two hands parallel to each other, palms facing, about 10 inches apart. Now, press your hands together real hard. So that your eyeballs are bulging out! Press harder! The veins are sticking out of your neck! Harder! Now relax and hold them apart as before. Now push them together again, now apart, now together, now apart ...faster!" *(Soon everyone will be clapping their hands loudly. Thank you for such a nice round of applause! (The campfire program begins.)*

## **Closings**

Something quieting, comforting, and maybe even thought-provoking is appropriate to close out the troop campfire. After the closing, troop members normally head quietly to their tents and hit the sack.

### **Thorns and Roses**

A constructive conclusion to the day's activities can be a moment

when each Scout in the campfire circle is given an opportunity to share a serious comment about what he least enjoyed (his thorn), what he most most enjoyed (his rose), and what he most looks forward to tomorrow (his bud).

### **Closing Wish**

Thorns and roses can be followed by a closing wish presented by the Scoutmaster or SPL. "As the grey ash fades, so be our errors. And as the good fire has warmed our circle, so may our ideals warm the world."

### **Troop Circle – Scout Benediction**

It's special to perform this troop meeting closing in an outdoor, campfire setting. The troop forms a circle around the fading fire with each Scout making the Scout sign. With his left hand, each grasps the lifted right wrist of his neighbor on the left. The troop then gives the [Scout Benediction](#) or Scout Law.

### **Taps**

Before ever singing the words, it's certain Scouts have heard the familiar melody played on a bugle. The first verse of Taps is an appropriate campfire closing and easy to sing. Scouts can remember the words because the three "places" the sun has gone from, proceed from lowest to highest: "the lake," "the hills," "the sky."

- Day is done.
- Gone the sun
- From the lake, from the hills, from the sky.
- All is well. Safely rest.
- God is nigh.

### **Scout Vespers**

As with any song, the more it's sung, the easier it is to remember the words. First verse (sung to the tune of "O' Christmas Tree"):

- Softly falls the light of day
- As our campfire fades away.
- Silently each Scout should ask:
- Have I done my daily task?
- Have I kept my honor bright?
- Can I guiltless sleep tonight?
- Have I done and have I dared
- Everything to be prepared?

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