PRE-OPENING GATHERING PERIOD ACTIVITIES

Gathering period activities are planned and prepared to give Scouts something to do that is fun and engaging prior to the meeting’s opening ceremony. Designed so that other Scouts can readily join in as they arrive, these kinds of involving activities are set out in such a way that a smooth transition can take place from the activity to the official start of the troop meeting.

“wide” = large indoor or outdoor setting for those activities requiring a greater amount of space
“small” = small area for those activities that do not require as much space, or can be carried out in close quarters, or with a smaller number of Scouts
“in” = indoor activity
“out” = outdoor activity

FOUR SQUARE (small, in or out)
- Materials: playground ball, 16-foot x 16-foot playing area on wood, tile, or concrete.
- Method: This game can be played by four Scouts, four patrols, or four teams. Four 8-foot squares are marked out inside the playing area. The squares can be numbered 1 to 4. Each of four patrol or troop teams are assigned a square. One Scout from each team starts inside their square with the rest of the team lined up single file at their corner. The Scout in square 1 serves the ball in volleyball fashion so that it bounces in square 3. He then runs to the rear of his patrol’s line. The Scout in square 3 hits the ball on the first bounce to either square 2 or square 4. The game continues with each Scout hitting the ball so that it bounces into either of the two opposite squares. He cannot return it to the square it came from. After each hit, the Scout goes to the end of his patrol line, and the next in line becomes the Scout for his team. When a shot is missed, the last Scout who successfully played the ball resumes the game by serving the ball to the Scout diagonally across from him.
- Scoring: Score one point against a team that fails to return a shot properly. The team with the fewest points wins.

GUESS THAT HEIGHT (wide, out)
- Materials: a stick for every two Scouts, a tree, flagpole, or some other object the height of which is to be determined
- Method: As Scouts arrive, invite them to determine the height of the object in question, using either the stick or felling method. (Refer to page 330 in the Boy Scout Handbook.)
- Scoring: The Scout that guesses the closest wins a prize.

**GUESS THAT WIDTH** (wide, out)
- Materials: a stick or a compass for each Scout, a distance the width of which is to be measured, e.g. a marked out area on a field, a large ditch, a stream, etc.
- Method: As Scouts arrive, invite them to determine the width of the area in question, either using a stick or compass. (Refer to pages 330 or 331 in the Boy Scout Handbook.)
- Scoring: The Scout that guesses the closest wins a prize.

**HIT THE BUCKET** (wide, in or out)  View Video
- Materials: 5 gallon bucket, 1 Scout stave, 1 large rubber playground ball
- Method: Scouts form a large circle with one Scout standing on the bucket in middle of the circle with stave in hand. The ball is passed around and thrown at the can, while the Scout guards the bucket with the Scout stave. If the bucket is hit, the thrower replaces the Scout with the stave.

**HITCHING CHALLENGE** (small, in or out)  View Video
- Materials: 15-foot braided nylon or polyester cords attached at the bottom of one or more 4-foot upright poles
- Method: Scouts apply a succession of over-an-end half hitches over the upright pole(s).
- Scoring: The most half hitches applied in a set amount of seconds is the winner.

**HULA HOOP HORSESHOES** (wide, in or out)  View Video
- Materials: large open space, hula hoops, socks filled with coarse sand
- Method: Use hula hoops as targets and sand-filled socks as horseshoes, and play regulation “Horseshoes” rules. A sock inside the hoop is a ringer. As an informal, gathering period activity, take turns. (This activity may also be adapted and played as a patrol game.)

**HUNKER DOWN** (small, in or out)  View Video
- Materials: 20-foot length of 1/2-inch soft, synthetic rope, two platforms 6 to 8-inches tall (two halves of a cinder block or two cuts from a downed tree, 8-inches in diameter)
- Method: Two Scouts stand facing each other 12 to 15 feet away on the platforms. On signal, each tries to unbalance the other by either pulling or letting up the tension on the rope. Both must hold onto the rope at all times while trying to unbalance the other. The Scout left standing the longest on his platform while still holding onto his rope wins. If a Scout lets go of the rope, he’s out, even if he’s still standing on his platform. Scouts can take turns challenging the winner.

**MOON BALL** (wide, in or out)
- Materials: inflated beach ball for the whole troop or one beach ball
for each patrol
– Method: As a team building activity, the object is for a patrol to keep the beach ball aloft as long as possible. Scouts are not allowed to hit the ball twice in a row. This activity becomes exciting as the Scouts count out loud the number of hits and attempt to surpass their personal best.

NAME THAT PLANT *(small, in or out)*
– Materials: a collection of locally grown leaves from various plants and trees each assigned a number displayed on a table, paper and pencils
– Method: On a piece of paper, Scouts write their name and the name of the plant corresponding to each numbered leaf displayed on the table. After identifying the leaves the best they can, they record their answers on their paper and turn it in.
– Scoring: Some kind of prize is presented for the most correct identifications.

NAME THE MERIT BADGE *(small, in)*
– Materials: a picture of each merit badge, each picture numbered but not identified by title, one sheet of paper and a pencil for each Scout
– Method: The numbered merit badge pictures are spread out on one or more tables. As each Scout arrives at the meeting, they are given a sheet of paper and a pencil and asked to number their paper from one to whatever the highest-numbered merit badge is. Just before the opening ceremony, all papers are collected, and the correct answers tallied. Later the winner(s) are announced and can presented with a small prize.

PRISONER’S ESCAPE *(small, in or out)*  View Video
– Materials: 3-foot length of cord with a small fixed loop on each end for each Scout
– Method: Each length of cord forms a pair of “handcuffs” by slipping a bight through the loop. Scouts form buddies, and one slips a hand through the sliding loop on each end of the cord, and the other slips one hand through one sliding loop, passes the free end behind his buddy’s cord and then slips his other hand through the other sliding loop of his own cord. In this way, both Scouts are “handcuffed” together. They must escape, but cannot untie the knots or slip either hand out of a loop.
– Solution: The trick to escaping is for one Scout to bend the middle of his cord and pass the bend behind one of his buddy’s sliding loops and over his buddy’s hand.

PUZZLING *(small, in)*
– Materials: large, unassembled jigsaw puzzle with pieces set out in a jumbled pile on a table.
– Method: Scouts work as a team to put the puzzle together. In the event the puzzle cannot be completed before it’s time for the opening ceremony, their progress should be carefully stored for continuation at a later date.

RING BALL *(wide, in or out)*
– Materials: playground ball
– Method: Scouts form a circle with one Scout who is "It" in the
middle. Play is begun by passing the ball to a Scout other than "It". The ball is passed around or across the circle from Scout to Scout, while the Scout who is "It" tries to intercept the ball and force it to touch the floor. If "It" can make the ball touch the floor, the Scout who last touched the ball before "It" did goes to the center and the game continues. It's not enough to just touch the ball as it's being passed around. "It" must actually make the ball hit the ground.

**ROPE TOSS** (wide, in or out)
- **Materials:** 40-50-foot lengths of 1/4-inch to 3/8-inch rope, sticks or other item to mark distances
- **Method:** As Scouts arrive, they take turns coiling and throwing the rope. A marker is placed on the ground to keep track of the longest tosses.
- **Scoring:** Some kind of prize is presented for the longest toss.

**SIGNALING** (wide, in or out)
- **Materials:** for each patrol: small flag to be used as a signal flag, two morse code references, paper and pencil
- **Method:** Two Scouts from each patrol, serving as the senders, are stationed a fair distance away from the rest of the patrol, so they and the patrol are out of ear shot. The senders are given a short message to send that can be already written in morse code, or can be written in letters of the alphabet along with a morse code reference. The patrol has a blank paper, a pencil, and there own morse code reference for recording the message that will be sent.
  - When all are in position and ready, one sender uses the flag to send each letter of the message in morse code by wig-wagging. The flag held up straight and tall = the start of a letter. A swipe to the right = a dot. A swipe to the left = a dash. The flag swished downward = the end of the word. The other sender dictates to the Scout with the flag. They obviously need to communicate and cooperate with one another.
  - The patrol needs record on their paper the dots and dashes being sent. Afterwards, they can refer to their reference sheet to decipher the message.
- **Scoring:** The first patrol to correctly decipher the message, wins.
- **Variation** Send the message in the dark using flashlights.

**THREE-LEG COMPASS WALK** (wide, out)
- **Materials:** for each Scout, a compass, an individually wrapped piece of candy
- **Method:** In a large outdoor area, the piece of candy is placed on the ground. Standing where the candy lies, the Scout sets his compass at 360º, faces north, and walks for 50 paces following that bearing. Next, he sets his compass for 120º, faces that bearing and takes another 50 paces. Finally, he sets his compass for 240º, faces that bearing, and again takes 50 paces. When he's done, if he's five feet from the piece of candy, he can pick it up, put it in his pocket, or eat it.
  - **Note:** Ideally, the candy will be placed on grass or other terrain so the Scout can't spot it until he's finished the last leg of the triangle.
- **Variation:** The Scout chooses his own bearings, adding 120º to the first and second as he goes.

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TROOP LEADER RESOURCE LINKS

- Advancement Resources
- Awards Central
- Boy Scouts
- Guide to Safe Scouting
- SCOUTBOOK
- Scouting Forms from the National Council
- ScoutCast
- Scouting Magazine
- ScoutStuff.org (Retail Site)
- SCOUTINGWIRE
- Sign into MyScouting.org
- Take Youth Protection Training
- The Outdoor Adventure Planning Guide
- Troop Leader Guidebook Appendix
- Uniforms

TROOP MEETING CHALLENGE VIDEOS

- 50-Foot Rescue Relay Video
- A-Frame Chariot Race Video
- All Aboard Video
- Bandage Relay Video
- Blind Train Video
- Bow Saw Relay Video
- Bowline Sheet Bend Draw Video
- Catch the Snapper Video
- Crossing the Alligator Pit Video
- Everyone on the Tripod Video
- First Aid Carry Relay Video
- Flagpole Race Demo Video
Fuzz Stick Relay Video
Handicap Obstacle Course Video
Helium Stick Video
Hitching Challenge Video
Horizontal Half Hitching Race Video
Hot Isotope Transport Video
Ladder Building Video
Lassoing the Steer Video
Lift Seat Procession Video
Nitro Transport Video
Rescue Relay Video
Rope Tackle Tug of War Video
Scout Stave Launcher Video
Self Standing Flagpole Video
Snake Race Video
Split the Match Relay Video
Stretcher Relay Video
Water Boiling Race Video
Zulu Toss Video

TROOP MEETING GAME VIDEOS

Blindfolded Steal the Bacon Video
Can It! Video
Hit the Bucket Video
Hit the Can Video
Hula Hoop Horseshoes Video
Hunker Down Video
Identifying Sounds Video
Jump the Shot Video
Prisoners Escape Video
Stand By Sixes Video
Standing Jump Relay Video
Standing Staves Video
Steal the Bacon Video
Time Bomb Video
True or False Steal the Bacon Video
CEREMONIES & LEADER MINUTE VIDEOS

Sample Troop Court of Honor Video
An Eagle Court of Honor Opening Ceremony Video
Four Winds Eagle Ceremony Video
Trail of the Eagle Court of Honor Ceremony Video
Sample Troop Meeting Opening Ceremony Video
Posting the Colors Troop Meeting Opening Ceremony Video
Scoutmaster’s Minute Video
Troop Circles Closing Ceremony Video

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