



Build it, tell it, then imagine it better

KINESTHETIC IDEATION A FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Kids ages 4 to 12 build with bricks, tell the story of what they made, work out how the pieces connect, and design something better. Grown-ups build too.



THE BASICS

What happens here

A table full of bricks. A question with no right answer. Ten minutes later everybody has built something nobody else would have built, and each person tells the story of it while the room listens.



Everyone gets heard

Everybody builds at the same time, then everybody shares. The quiet kid and the loud kid get the same ninety seconds.



Kids see how things connect

When twenty people build one neighborhood, the good question stops being "what did you make" and becomes "what happens if this moves."



A first idea becomes a draft

They build it, show it to somebody, watch that person's face, and get four more minutes to change it. Nobody has to explain revision.

Underneath the fun, three good things happen on their own. You do not have to make them happen.



WHY BRICKS

Ask a question with **no right answer** and watch what a kid builds.

Nobody in the room has to be good at drawing, spelling, or speaking up first. Everybody can push two bricks together, and that turns out to be enough to say almost anything.

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One loop, over and over

Every activity is these same three steps, whether the group is building a tower or redesigning a street corner.



1 CHALLENGE

You ask one clear building question. You say how long. You say go.

2 BUILD

Everybody builds at once, quietly. Silence means each person thinks their own thought instead of borrowing the first one spoken.

3 SHARE

One at a time, each person tells the story of what they built. You ask a question or two about the model.

Running behind? Cut a build. Never cut a share.

Building is where somebody works a thing out with their hands. Sharing is where it turns into words they keep.

READ THESE OUT LOUD AT THE START OF EVERY SESSION

Our four rules



Your build is your answer.

There is no wrong build.

Takes away the fear of getting it wrong, which is what stops people from starting.



Only YOU know what your build means.

So only you get to say.

The moment an adult says "oh, is that a dog?" the model stops belonging to the kid.



Ask about the BUILD, not the builder.

Say "what is that part?" instead of "why did you do that?"

A kid can talk about a model comfortably. Being asked to defend themselves shuts them down.



Everybody builds. Everybody talks. Everybody listens.

No exceptions, including grown-ups.

This is why the quiet kids talk. The model carries the exposure instead of the person.

These four rules are the machinery of the room. A kid who trusts them will say things out loud that they would never volunteer in a classroom.

Your three jobs



Say the question exactly as written

Every activity slide gives you the words in quotation marks. Say those words. Small changes to the wording change what people build. Improvise everything else you like.



Hold the clock out loud

Call the start, the halfway mark, and thirty seconds. People build right up to the buzzer and that is good. A build that drifts past its time loses energy.



Ask, then wait five seconds

After you ask a question, count to five in your head before you say anything else. Kids fill silence more slowly than adults, and the answer worth hearing is on the far side of the pause.

TALK LESS THAN

1/3

of the time

If you are talking more than that, the room has quietly turned into a class. Step back and let the builds do the work.

THE FIVE THINGS THAT GO WRONG MOST



Do not guess what a model is. Ask.



Do not touch anyone's model, ever.



Do not rescue someone stuck. Say "just start building."



Do not say "that's so good." It turns the room into a contest.



Do not announce the lesson. It drains the next hour.

How the room is laid out

Tables of four to six, never rows. One big shared surface everyone can reach. The pool in the middle so no table owns it.



Wall, in big letters

The four rules, poster size. Read aloud every single session.



A quiet corner

One small table with pre-sorted trays for anyone who finds the bin noise hard. No sign on it. Just there.



A clock you can see

And the kids cannot. Timing is your job to hold.



The story wall

The kids own words, written down verbatim. Costs almost nothing and it is what brings families back.

THE ROOM

Every person gets a tray

The tray lives on the table and never leaves it. Nobody should ever wait for a piece. Most activities run out of the tray alone with no trip to the pool.

30 to 40

basic bricks, mixed sizes and colors

6 to 8

flat plates and one small baseplate

2 to 3

minifigures or small figures

1 to 2

animals

1 pair

wheels

3 to 5

clear or see-through pieces

2 to 3

bendy things: hose, tube, ladder

1 or more

odd piece: propeller, flower, telescope



The last six rows matter more than the bricks.

Figures, animals, clear pieces, bendy pieces and odd pieces are what let somebody build an idea instead of a box. A tray of nothing but rectangles is frustrating, and it quietly caps every activity from Level Two onward. When you refill trays between sessions, refill these first.

The pool, and the four pool rules

The pool is your open cases, dumped into wide shallow bins in the middle of the room. It is where a build grows past what the tray holds. Without rules it becomes the whole workshop.

THE FOUR POOL RULES

- 1 One person per table at the pool at a time. Send one runner. A crowd stalls the room.
- 2 Two hands, one trip. Take what you need for this build. The rest stays in the bin.
- 3 If you have not used it in two minutes, walk it back.
- 4 The pool closes during share time. Nobody wanders while somebody is talking.



THE ODDS BOX

Pull every figure, animal, wheel, clear piece, bendy piece and weird piece into its own shallow bin. This one bin is the difference between a room building houses and a room building ideas.

POOL OPENS AT LEVEL 3

Levels 1 and 2 run tray-only. Level 3 opens it. Levels 4 and 5 run wide open, with string and yarn out.

THE ROOM

Give everybody a job

An adult with nothing to do becomes an audience, and an audience changes what children build. Every grown-up and every teenager gets a role, and all of them build too.



LEAD

One per room

Says the challenges, holds the clock, reads the rules. Talks under a third of the time.



TABLE HELPER

One per table of six

Sits down and builds. Asks questions about models. Never interprets, never touches.



STORY WRITER

One or two

Writes down kids own words, exactly as said, on cards for the story wall.



RUNNER

One per table

Great job for a ten-year-old. Makes the pool trip so nobody else has to.

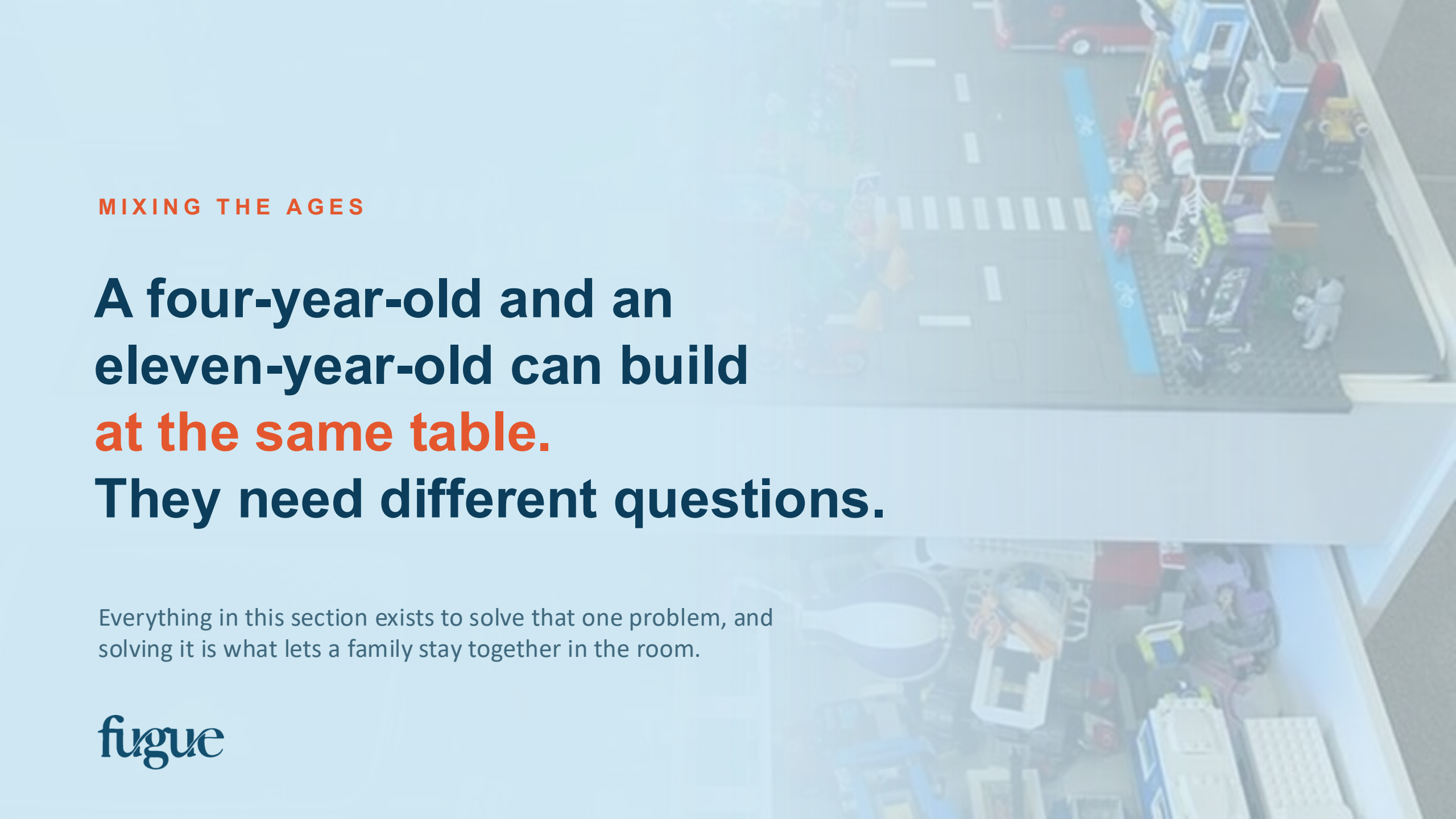


TIMEKEEPER

Anybody

Calls halfway and thirty seconds. A teenager with a phone timer is perfect.

Ask two of your ten-to-twelve-year-olds to be table helpers by their second session. It changes their standing in the room, and it solves the problem of the twelve-year-old who has decided this is for little kids.



MIXING THE AGES

**A four-year-old and an
eleven-year-old can build
at the same table.
They need different questions.**

Everything in this section exists to solve that one problem, and solving it is what lets a family stay together in the room.

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MIXING THE AGES

Three sizes of question

Same table. Same bricks. Same clock. Three versions of the question, sized to who is holding it. Nobody is separated and nobody notices the questions differ.



SPROUTS

ages 4 to 6

Build a THING

Real objects, real places, real creatures. Ask for something they can point at. "Build the place your family is happiest."

A question like "build what teamwork feels like" gets a blank look. Feelings-as-objects is a skill that shows up later, and that is fine.



BUILDERS

ages 7 to 9

Build a thing that SHOWS something

One step of meaning. Give them a running start and they will take it. "Build what a Monday morning feels like at your house."

This is the group every standard version of every activity is written for. When in doubt, use the middle question.



ARCHITECTS

ages 10 and up

Build an IDEA

Full metaphor, and a job. "Build the best or worst leader you can imagine." Then ask them to help a Sprout.

Give them the harder question AND a role. The role matters more than the question for keeping them in the room.

Every activity carries all three versions already written out, so you never have to invent one while eight kids wait.

Split, then bridge, then merge

A session opens wide apart by age and closes with everyone building one thing. That shape is deliberate, and it is what makes a four-year-old and an eleven-year-old both leave happy.



SPLIT

Levels 1 and 2

**Three sizes of question,
everyone on their own**

Each person builds their own answer at their own size. This protects the youngest from being lost and the oldest from being bored. Every voice already exists before anyone builds together.



BRIDGE

Level 3, first half

**Pair one younger with one
older**

Build Buddies. The younger person's model is the seed. The older person adds to it using Yes, And. Suddenly the eleven-year-old has a reason to care about the six-year-old's dragon.



MERGE

Levels 3 to 5

**The whole table builds one
thing**

Every person's piece has to be in it. Not the average, not a vote. By now everyone has something to contribute and the habit of adding rather than replacing.

Never merge before you split. If the shared build comes first, the loudest voice decides what gets built and everyone else just assembles it.

MIXING THE AGES

Build Buddies

The single move that makes a wide age range work. Set it up once at the start of Level 3 and it carries through the rest of the session.

HOW TO PAIR THEM

- 1 Count your Sprouts. That number is how many pairs you can make.
- 2 Ask for Architect volunteers first. Say "I need buddies." Do not assign.
- 3 Pair across tables if you have to. Siblings can pair, and often should not.
- 4 Leftover Builders pair with each other. That works fine.
- 5 Say out loud: "Buddies, your job is to make theirs bigger, not to fix it."



**WHAT THE OLDER BUDDY IS
ACTUALLY LEARNING**
**It looks like you are asking the
eleven-year-old to babysit.**
You are not.

Adding to somebody else's idea without taking it over is harder than building your own. It is the skill most adults never get. A ten-year-old who can do it has something real, and they know it.

Watch for the buddy who takes over. Say once, warmly: "Ask them what it is first."

MIXING THE AGES

Yes, And

Teach this in twenty seconds, right before Pass It Right in Level 3. Then use the words all day.

YES

Leave what they built alone.



You do not move it, fix it, improve it, or explain it. It stays exactly as they made it.

AND

Add one thing that makes it more.



One thing. Attached to theirs. Something that answers a question their build made you ask.

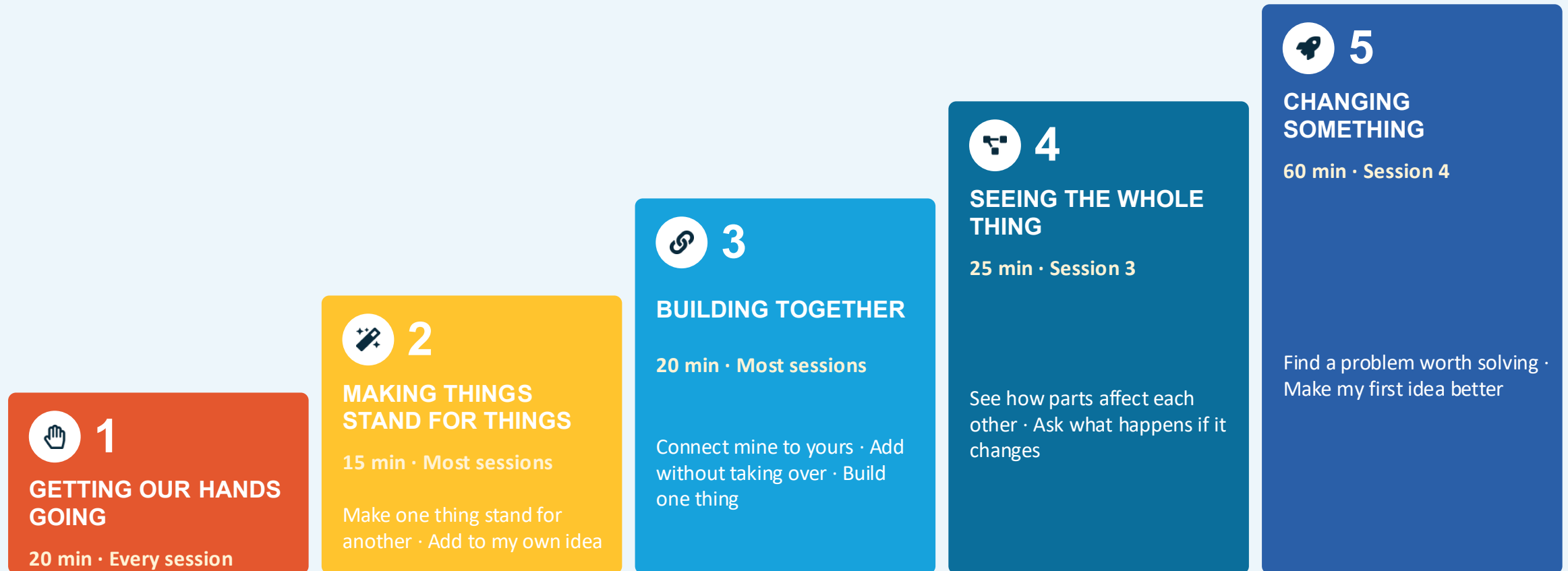
SAY IT LIKE THIS, WORD FOR WORD

"You never take away. You never rebuild it. You add one thing, and then you ask them what they think it is now."

That last clause is the whole thing. The builder always gets the first word back about their own model.

The ladder, and where you are on it

Each level adds skills to what the room can already do. Nobody is ever asked to make two jumps at once. A first-time group always starts at Level 1, even a room of eleven-year-olds.



Nobody has to finish the ladder. A family that comes once and has a great time at Level 2 got the whole point.



LEVEL 1

GETTING OUR HANDS GOING

Adds: I can build with no instructions. I can tell the story of it. I can listen all the way through. I can ask about a build without judging it.

20 minutes · Runs at the top of every single session, including sessions where everyone has done it before



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1.1 The Tower

WHO

Everyone, all ages

HOW MANY

On your own

TIME

2 min build · 3 min share

BRICKS

Tray only. Pool closed.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Build a tower. Any tower you want. Make it as tall as you can. It can be any colour, any shape. Two minutes. Go."

BUILDERS

"Build a tower. Any tower you want. It can be tall, or wide, or strange. You decide what makes it a tower. Two minutes. Go."

ARCHITECTS

"Build a tower that can hold a figure on top. How you get it up there is your call. Tall is one way. It is not the only way. Two minutes. Go."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Start the clock out loud. "Two minutes. Go."
- 2 Call "one minute left," then "thirty seconds."
- 3 At time, walk around and give every tower one gentle push with one finger.
- 4 Some will fall. Say nothing about it and do not apologize.
- 5 Go around the table: "Tell us one thing about your tower." Youngest first.



1.2 The Creature

WHO

Everyone, all ages

HOW MANY

On your own

TIME

3 min build

BRICKS

Tray only. Pool closed.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Build a creature. A real one or a made-up one. Anything that could be alive. Three minutes."

BUILDERS

"Build a creature that lives somewhere strange. You decide where it lives and what that place does to it. Three minutes."

ARCHITECTS

"Build a creature nobody has ever seen before. It should have at least one part that does a job. Three minutes."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Say the challenge and start the clock immediately.
- 2 Somebody will ask "what kind?" Answer "any kind" and nothing more.
- 3 Call thirty seconds.
- 4 Hold the sharing. The next slide is how you run it.



1.3 Going Around

WHO

Everyone, all ages

HOW MANY

Whole table

TIME

4 to 6 min

BRICKS

None. Models already built.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Tell us about your creature. What is it, and what does it like? You go first, and then we will all ask you one question."

BUILDERS

"Tell us about your creature. While somebody is talking, everybody else just listens. Then you can ask two questions about the creature. You cannot say what you think it is. Only the builder knows that."

ARCHITECTS

"You are going last, and your job is to ask the best question in the room. A good question is about the build, not the builder. Listen for something nobody else asked about."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Ask one good question yourself on the first person: "What is that part for?"
- 2 Youngest goes first. Always. It protects them from copying.
- 3 Ninety seconds each, no more. Keep it moving.
- 4 Thank each person by name before the next one starts.



1.4 Same Bricks, New Thing

WHO

Everyone, all ages

HOW MANY

On your own

TIME

3 min build · 2 min share

BRICKS

Tray only. Pool closed.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Do not start over. Take your creature and change it into a different animal. Same bricks. Three minutes."

BUILDERS

"Do not start over. Take your creature and change it into something completely different. Same bricks, no new pieces. Three minutes."

ARCHITECTS

"Do not start over. Change your creature into something that is not alive. Same bricks. Keep at least one part exactly where it is. Three minutes."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Say "same bricks, no new pieces" twice. It will not land the first time.
- 2 Start the clock.
- 3 Share: "What did you have to move? What did you keep?"



LEVEL 2

MAKING THINGS STAND FOR THINGS

Adds: I can make one thing stand for another. I can add to my own idea instead of starting over.

15 minutes · Needs Level 1 underneath it · This is the level people remember



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2.1 The Turn

WHO

Ages 7 and up

HOW MANY

On your own

TIME

4 min build · 5 min share

BRICKS

Tray only. Pool closed.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Now make your creature the HAPPIEST creature in the whole world. What does it need to be happy? Add it on. Three minutes."

BUILDERS

"You have four minutes to turn your creature into the BEST or the WORST coach you can possibly imagine. Not a picture of a coach. Your creature, changed, so it shows us best or worst. Four minutes. Go."

ARCHITECTS

"Turn your creature into the BEST or the WORST leader you can imagine. Not a picture of a leader. Your creature, changed, so it shows us. Then be ready to say which part shows it. Four minutes. Go."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Say the whole thing without shortening it. The length is doing work.
- 2 Do not explain what a metaphor is. Do not use the word.
- 3 Call two minutes, then thirty seconds.
- 4 Share: "Which part shows us? What did you add? What did you take away?"



2.1a The Turn, for Sprouts

WHO

Ages 4 to 6

HOW MANY

On your own

TIME

3 min build · 3 min share

BRICKS

Tray only. Pool closed.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Now make your creature the HAPPIEST creature in the whole world. What does it need to be happy? Add it on. Three minutes."

BUILDERS

"Make your creature the happiest creature in the whole world. What does it need? Add it on, and be ready to say why that thing does it. Three minutes."

ARCHITECTS

"You are the buddy here. Ask them what their creature needs, then ask why that makes it happy. Do not touch the build and do not suggest anything."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Say this quietly at their end of the table while the older kids start 2.1.
- 2 Use the same clock as 2.1 so the whole room finishes together.
- 3 Share: "What did you give it? Why does that make it happy?"



2.2 What I Am Good At

WHO

Everyone, all ages

HOW MANY

On your own

TIME

5 min build · 6 min share

BRICKS

Tray only. Pool closed.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Build something you are good at doing. Anything at all. Then you will show us how it works. Five minutes."

BUILDERS

"Build the thing you are best at. Not the thing you wish you were best at. The thing you actually are. Five minutes."

ARCHITECTS

"Build the thing you are best at. The real one, not the impressive one. Then be ready to tell us when somebody needs this from you. Five minutes."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Everybody builds. If somebody freezes, say "build a machine that does it."
- 2 Share in this order: "What are the parts?" then "Show us how it works."
- 3 For Architects add a third: "When does somebody need this from you?"
- 4 Keep these models on the table. Level 3 uses them.



2.3 Add One More Thing

WHO

Everyone, all ages

HOW MANY

On your own

TIME

3 min · hard stop

BRICKS

Tray only. Pool closed.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD**SPROUTS**

"Look at what you built. Add one more thing to it. Anything you want. Three minutes."

BUILDERS

"Look at what you built. Add one thing that says something you left out. Three minutes."

ARCHITECTS

"Look at what you built. Add the part nobody would guess. Then we will see if we can guess it anyway. Three minutes."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Short clock. Three minutes and no extension, even if they ask.
- 2 Do not let anybody start over. Adding is the entire exercise.
- 3 Ask one thing: "What did you add, and what does it say?"



LEVEL 3

3

BUILDING TOGETHER

Adds: I can connect mine to yours. I can add to yours without taking it over. We can build one thing together.

20 minutes · Set up Build Buddies before you start · Open the pool



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3.1 The Bridge

WHO

Everyone, in Build Buddy pairs

HOW MANY

Pairs

TIME

6 min build · 4 min share

BRICKS

Tray plus pool. Pool opens here.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"You two are building a bridge between your two creatures. Build your half however you want. No talking while you build. Six minutes."

BUILDERS

"You two are going to build a bridge between your two creatures. Each of you builds half. You cannot talk while you build. Six minutes."

ARCHITECTS

"Build your half of the bridge, and try to match their half without looking at it. You are guessing what they are doing. No talking. Six minutes."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Set up Build Buddies first. Pair one younger with one older.
- 2 Put the two creatures about a hand-width apart on the table.
- 3 Enforce the silence. The silence is the whole joke.
- 4 At time: "Now talk. Do they meet in the middle?"
- 5 Ask: "What did you THINK your partner was building?"



3.2 Where Do I Stand

WHO

Ages 7 and up

HOW MANY

Whole table

TIME

4 min place · 6 min share

BRICKS

None. Needs the models from 2.2.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Here is the middle of our table. Put your model wherever you want it. Then tell us about where you put it."

BUILDERS

"Here is the middle of our table. Take your own model and put it where it belongs in relation to everybody else. Close, far, high, low, turned away, whatever is true for you. Then we will hear about it."

ARCHITECTS

"Put your model where it belongs in relation to everybody else. You are going last, so you will have seen where everyone else put theirs. Notice whether that changes what you do."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Put one shared model or one plain object in the center of the table.
- 2 Everybody places at the same time. No order, no turns.
- 3 Ask one thing only: "Tell us about where you put it."
- 4 Then stop talking and wait five full seconds.



3.3 Pass It Right

WHO

Everyone, all ages

HOW MANY

Rotating around the table

TIME

3 min · hard stop

BRICKS

Tray only for the addition.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Slide your build to the person on your right. Add one thing that makes it better. One piece is plenty. You cannot take anything away."

BUILDERS

"Slide your build to the person on your right. Three minutes to ADD one thing that makes their build better. You cannot take anything away."

ARCHITECTS

"Add one thing that answers a question their build made you ask. You cannot take anything away, and you cannot rebuild it."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Teach Yes, And first. Twenty seconds. Leave what they built alone, add one thing.
- 2 Everybody slides right at the same moment.
- 3 Three minutes, hard stop, no extension.
- 4 Slide back to the original builder.
- 5 The builder always speaks first: "Tell us what they added."



3.4 One Model, Everybody In It

WHO

Whole table, Sprouts with a buddy

HOW MANY

Table of 4 to 6

TIME

10 min build · 5 min share

BRICKS

Tray plus pool, wide open.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Now we build ONE model together. Your buddy makes sure your piece gets in. Ten minutes."

BUILDERS

"Now build ONE model together. Every person's thing has to be in it somewhere. Not the average, not a vote. Ten minutes."

ARCHITECTS

"Build ONE model together. Your job is that nobody gets left out, and that matters more than whether it looks good."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Everybody must have an individual build first. No exceptions, ever.
- 2 Stay at that table the whole ten minutes. This one needs you.
- 3 Watch for one person's contribution quietly getting dropped.
- 4 Ask calmly, with no blame: "Where did Maya's part go?"
- 5 Share: "Point to your part. Now point to somebody else's that you like."



LEVEL 4

4

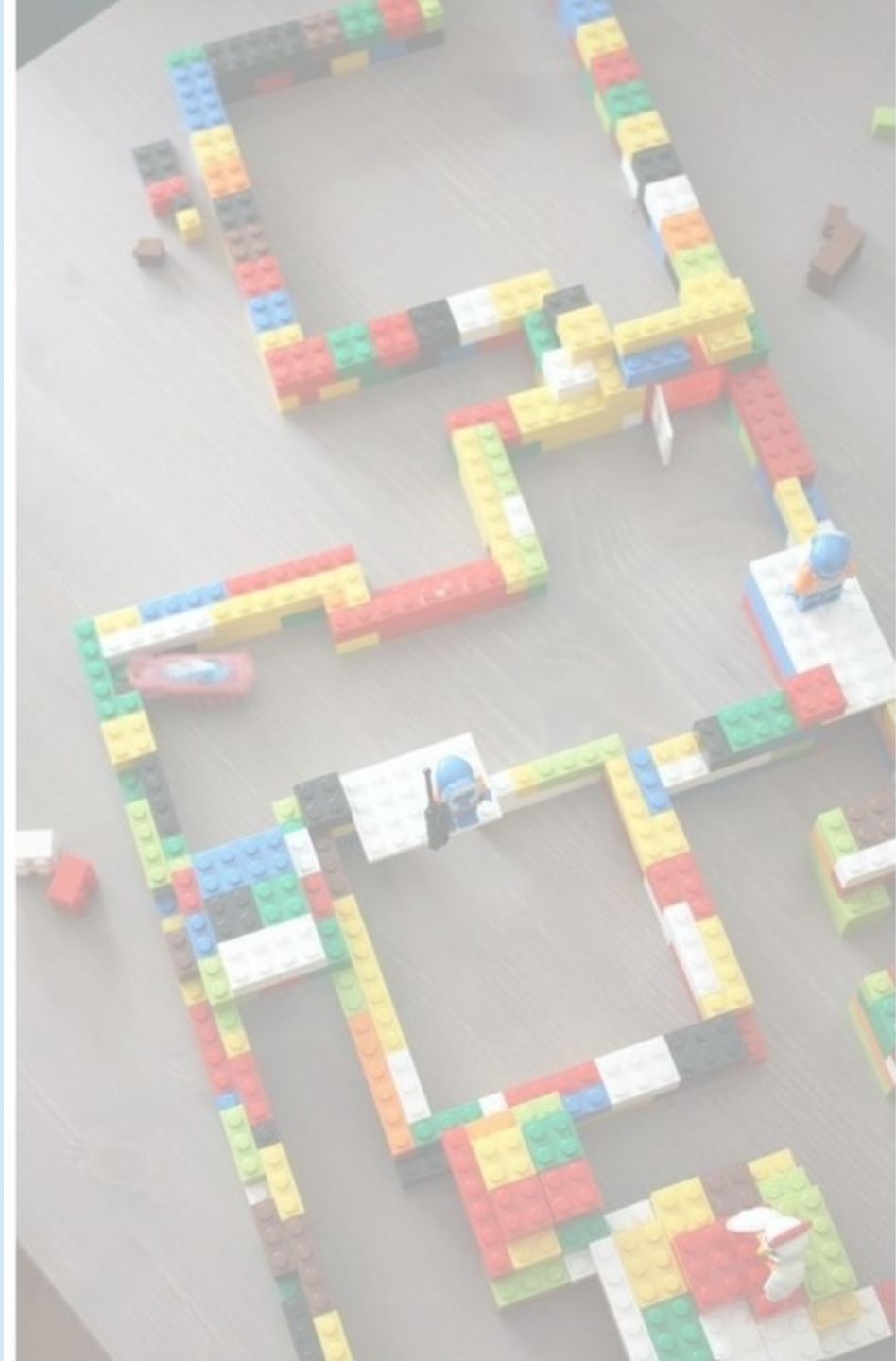
SEEING THE WHOLE THING

Adds: I can see how the parts affect each other. I can ask what happens if something changes.

25 minutes · Needs the big board · Pool open the whole time



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4.1 Our Neighborhood

WHO

Everyone, all ages

HOW MANY

Whole group, one big board

TIME

8 min build · 10 min place

BRICKS

Tray plus pool, wide open.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Build your favourite place. The place you like going most. Then we will put it on the big board with everyone else's. Eight minutes."

BUILDERS

"We are building our neighborhood together on this big board. Everybody builds ONE place that matters to you. Your house, the park, the store, the place you always go. Eight minutes."

ARCHITECTS

"Build a place that matters that nobody else will think of. Then be ready to argue for where it goes on the board. Eight minutes."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Everybody builds at their own table first. The board stays empty.
- 2 Then: "Bring it up. Where does it go? Next to what? Why there?"
- 3 Let them argue about placement. The argument is the activity.
- 4 Run the four questions with the whole group. They are on the following page.
- 5 Photograph the board before anybody touches it.

4.1+ The Four Questions

Ask these out loud to the whole group, standing over the finished board. Take them in order. This is where the neighborhood stops being a pile of buildings and turns into a system, and it takes about eight minutes.

1

What are the parts, and what do they do?

Easy warm-up. Everybody can answer. Let several people name things.

2

Who are the people, and what do they do?

This is the turn. The board stops being buildings and starts being lives.

3

How do the parts and the people work together?

Point at two things and ask how they need each other. Wait.

4

What would happen if a part or a person went missing?

The big one. Ask it slowly and let the room chew on it.

Question 4 is the one that teaches. Everything before it is warm-up.

THREE SIZES

SPROUTS

Stop after question 3. They will still have got it.

BUILDERS

All four. Question 4 is where they light up.

ARCHITECTS

All four, then: "what comes back around?"

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

These four are a thinking routine called Parts, People, Interactions, from Project Zero at Harvard. It is free, and it works best used exactly as written. Print the card and read from it.

4.2 What Travels Between

WHO

Ages 7 and up

HOW MANY

Whole group, on the board

TIME

6 min · 8 min share

BRICKS

String, yarn and bendy pieces.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Use the string to show us who you go and visit. Then tell us what you do when you get there."

BUILDERS

"Some of these places are connected. Use the string to show us a connection. Then tell us what travels along it. People? Food? Money? A feeling? Six minutes."

ARCHITECTS

"Find a connection nobody else has noticed. Show it with string, then tell us what travels along it, which direction it goes, and whether anything comes back."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Hand out string, yarn and every bendy piece you have.
- 2 One connection each to start, then more if there is time.
- 3 Ask each: "What travels on this? Which direction? Does anything come back?"
- 4 Stop the whole room the moment somebody says it comes back.



4.3 What If

WHO

Everyone, all ages

HOW MANY

Whole group, on the board

TIME

5 min build · 5 min share

BRICKS

Tray plus pool.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"That is gone now. What happens? You can just tell me. You do not have to build it."

BUILDERS

"That is gone now. What happens? Do not tell me. Build it. Five minutes."

ARCHITECTS

"That is gone now. Build what changes that nobody would predict. Not the obvious thing. The second thing. Five minutes."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Ask a builder's permission, then remove one model or cut one string.
- 2 Pick something central. Removing something trivial teaches nothing.
- 3 Five minutes to build the consequence, not to describe it.
- 4 Ask: "What changed that you did not expect?"



4.4 The Shake Test

WHO

Everyone, all ages

HOW MANY

On your own or in pairs

TIME

6 min · then 4 min

BRICKS

Tray plus pool.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Build something really strong. I am going to shake the table and we will see what happens. Six minutes."

BUILDERS

"Build something that can survive a shake. I am going to shake the table. Six minutes." Then: "Now build it again so it survives. Four minutes."

ARCHITECTS

"Build something that bends instead of breaking. Six minutes." Then: "Rebuild it so it survives, and be ready to say what you changed."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Six minutes to build. Then shake the table once, for real, firmly.
- 2 Let things come apart. Do not soften the shake and do not apologize.
- 3 "Now rebuild it so it survives. Four minutes."
- 4 Shake again, the same way.
- 5 Ask: "What did you change? Why did that change work?"



4.5 Break the Rule

LEVEL 4

WHO

Ages 7 and up

HOW MANY

On your own or in pairs

TIME

5 min build · 6 min talk

BRICKS

Tray only, plus one restriction.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"What rule would you change? Any rule, anywhere. And what would happen if you changed it?"

BUILDERS

"Who wanted to break the rule? What rule did you want to break? Why was that rule there? Who made it? Should it still be there?"

ARCHITECTS

"Who wanted to break the rule? What rule did you want to break? Why was it there? Who made it? Should it still be there? Argue that last one with somebody who disagrees."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Run any short build under a made-up restriction. Only red bricks, or nothing taller than four bricks.
- 2 Do not explain the restriction. Just impose it and start the clock.
- 3 Build for five minutes.
- 4 Then ask the five questions above, in order, slowly, with real pauses.
- 5 Land it with the line in the box on the right.



LEVEL 5

5

CHANGING SOMETHING

Adds: I can find a problem worth solving. I can make my first idea better.

60 minutes · Works best with a group that has met before · The problem must come from the kids



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5.1 The Thing That Bugs Me

WHO

Ages 7 and up

HOW MANY

On your own

TIME

5 min build · 6 min share

BRICKS

Tray only.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Build something that makes you go UGH. Something you do not like. It can be small. Five minutes."

BUILDERS

"Build something that bugs you. Something annoying or unfair or that just does not work right. It can be small. Five minutes."

ARCHITECTS

"Build something that bugs you that you think you could actually fix. Small and real beats big and impossible. Five minutes."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Five minutes. Do not offer examples. Examples narrow what you get.
- 2 Share, then ask each person: "Who else does this bug?"
- 3 Write down every single problem that comes up.
- 4 These become the material for your next design session.



5.2 Saw It, Decided It

WHO

Ages 7 and up

HOW MANY

In pairs

TIME

8 min · protect all of it

BRICKS

Tray only. Two small builds.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Two questions, and you can just say the answers. What did you actually see? And what did you think it meant?"

BUILDERS

"Two questions. First, what did you actually SEE? Just what your eyes saw. Second, what did you DECIDE it meant? Those are two different things. Build both."

ARCHITECTS

"Build what you saw and what you decided it meant, side by side. Then answer this: could the thing you saw have meant something else?"

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Show a photo, or describe a scene where somebody is struggling with something ordinary.
- 2 Two small builds, side by side. Eight minutes total for both.
- 3 Share both, in that order: the seen one, then the decided one.
- 4 Ask: "Could the thing you saw have meant something else?"



5.3 Whose Problem

WHO

Ages 7 and up

HOW MANY

On your own

TIME

6 min build · 6 min share

BRICKS

Tray plus figures from the Odds Box.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Build the person it happens to. Not the problem, the person. Then tell us what they need. Six minutes."

BUILDERS

"Build the PERSON who has this problem. Not the problem. The person. Six minutes." Then: "Finish this out loud. This person needs _____ because _____."

ARCHITECTS

"Build somebody this happens to who is not you. Six minutes." Then: "This person needs _____ because _____." Say it out loud.

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Pick one problem from 5.1 and say it out loud so everyone is on the same one.
- 2 Six minutes to build the person.
- 3 Then the sentence, out loud, one person at a time.
- 4 Write every sentence up where the whole room can see it.



5.4 Ten Fast Ideas

WHO

Ages 7 and up

HOW MANY

On your own

TIME

10 min · 60 sec each

BRICKS

Tray plus pool. Speed matters.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Five ideas. Ninety seconds each. They are allowed to be silly. Silly is good. Just keep going."

BUILDERS

"Ten ideas. One minute each. They are allowed to be terrible. Terrible is encouraged. Just keep going and do not stop to make anything nice."

ARCHITECTS

"Ten ideas, one minute each, and at least two of them have to be impossible. Terrible is encouraged. Do not stop to make anything nice."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Call time out loud every sixty seconds. Every single one, no exceptions.
- 2 Ten small throwaway builds in a row. They stay on the table.
- 3 Do not let anybody perfect one.
- 4 At the end ask: "Which one surprised you?"



5.5 Show It, Do Not Say It

WHO

Ages 7 and up

HOW MANY

In pairs

TIME

10 min build · 10 min test

BRICKS

Tray plus pool, wide open.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Build your favourite idea properly. Then your buddy will show it to somebody with you, and you will both watch their face."

BUILDERS

"Pick your favorite idea. Build it properly. Ten minutes. Then show it to somebody who is NOT in your group and watch their face. Then you get four more minutes to change it."

ARCHITECTS

"Build it properly, then show it to somebody outside your group. You may not say a single word while they look. Then four minutes to change it."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Ten minutes to build it properly. Speed is beside the point here.
- 2 Send them to another table, or to a parent waiting at the side.
- 3 They show it. They may not explain it. They watch the person's face.
- 4 Four minutes to change it. Protect this window above everything else.
- 5 Ask: "What did you change? What made you change it?"



THE BIG BUILD

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD AFLOAT

One enormous question, cut into three stages. Our community is moving onto the water. What comes with us, how does it hold together, and what happens when the weather arrives.

About 50 minutes across three stages · Needs Level 4 underneath it · Best with a group that has met before



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STAGE 1 What Has To Come With Us

STAGE 1 OF 3

WHO

Everyone, all ages

HOW MANY

On your own

TIME

8 min build · 6 min share

BRICKS

Tray plus pool, wide open.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Our neighborhood is moving onto the water. Build the one place you would not want to leave behind, and tell us why. Eight minutes."

BUILDERS

"Our neighborhood is going to float. Build the ONE place that has to come with us, and build the part of it that has to change to survive on water. Eight minutes."

ARCHITECTS

"Build the one place that has to come with us, and one thing it needs that nobody has thought of yet. Fresh water, food, power. You decide the hard part. Eight minutes."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Say the whole setup out loud, slowly. "Our community is moving onto the water."
- 2 Let them ask questions about the water for about a minute. Answer none of them.
- 3 Say: "You decide. That is what the building is for."
- 4 One place each. If somebody builds three, ask which one has to come.
- 5 Share: "Why that one?" Youngest first, as always.



STAGE 2 Make It Float, Make It Hold

STAGE 2 OF 3

WHO

Whole group, Sprouts with a buddy

HOW MANY

One big board

TIME

10 min build · 10 min place

BRICKS

Tray plus pool. String and yarn out.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"Put your place onto the big board with everybody else's. Then build one thing that joins yours to the place next to it. Ten minutes."

BUILDERS

"Join all of our places into one floating city. Everything has to be connected and nothing may sit on its own. Then show us what travels along each connection. Ten minutes."

ARCHITECTS

"Join the city together, then decide what is underneath it. What holds it up, and what happens to the parts nobody built? Be ready to argue for where your piece goes. Ten minutes."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Board stays empty until every place is built. Bring them up one at a time.
- 2 Ask each one: "Where does it go? Next to what? Why there?"
- 3 Let them argue about placement. The argument is the activity.
- 4 Hand out string and yarn once about half the places are down.
- 5 Stop the room the moment somebody says "and then it comes back to here."



STAGE 3 The Storm

STAGE 3 OF 3

WHO

Whole group

HOW MANY

One big board

TIME

6 min ready · 4 min rebuild

BRICKS

Tray plus pool, wide open.

SAY THIS, WORD FOR WORD

SPROUTS

"A big storm is coming to our city. Make your part strong enough to stay. Then we will find out together. Six minutes."

BUILDERS

"A storm is coming and I am going to move the board. Whatever falls off is gone. Six minutes to get ready, and four minutes afterwards to rebuild what we lost."

ARCHITECTS

"Get ready for the storm, and build one thing that protects a part that is not yours. Afterwards you get four minutes, and you may not rebuild what you had. You have to change it."

DO THIS, IN ORDER

- 1 Six minutes. Say the clock out loud at three minutes and at thirty seconds.
- 2 Move the board once, firmly, for real. Do not soften it and do not apologize.
- 3 Leave whatever fell on the table. Say: "That is gone now."
- 4 "Four minutes. You cannot rebuild what you had. Build what we need now."
- 5 Close with: "What did we decide to let go, and what did we decide to keep?"

The sixty-minute drop-in

For a block party, a first taste, or a room where people come and go. Do not try to fit more than this into an hour.

0:00	OPEN	Welcome. Read the four rules out loud. Everyone seated with a tray already in front of them.
0:05	LEVEL 1	1.1 The Tower, with the push and a quick share.
0:10	LEVEL 1	1.2 The Creature.
0:17	LEVEL 1	1.3 Going Around. Youngest first.
0:22	LEVEL 2	2.1 The Turn, with 2.1a running at the Sprouts end of the table.
0:32	BREAK	Stand up, shake out, refill trays.
0:35	LEVEL 4	4.1 Our Neighborhood on the big board.
0:48	LEVEL 4	4.1+ The Four Questions, whole group.
0:55	CLOSE	One word each: something you saw today that you did not build. Photograph the board.

A rushed opening ruins everything after it. If you are behind at 0:22, cut Our Neighborhood down rather than shortening Level 1.

The ninety-minute standard session

The normal unit. Run this shape weekly or monthly, swapping one Level 4 activity each time so returning families see something new.

0:00	OPEN	Four rules. One-brick check-in: "how are you arriving today, in one brick."
0:06	LEVEL 1	All four activities, 1.1 through 1.4, with shares.
0:24	LEVEL 2	2.1 The Turn plus 2.1a, then 2.2 What I Am Good At. Keep those models.
0:38	LEVEL 3	Set up Build Buddies. Then 3.1 The Bridge, or 3.3 Pass It Right.
0:48	BREAK	Real break. Snacks. Ten full minutes. Refill trays and close the pool.
0:58	LEVEL 4	4.1 Our Neighborhood, then 4.2 What Travels Between.
1:18	LEVEL 4	4.3 What If, or 4.5 Break the Rule. Pick one of the two.
1:24	CLOSE	Story cards. Each person gives one sentence, the story writer takes it down word for word.
1:28	CLOSE	Group photo of the board. Thank people by name on the way out.

The ten-minute break is not padding. Ninety minutes of building without one produces a scattered room in the last half hour.

The four-session series

Same ninety-minute shape each time with a different focus. Run a short Level 1 even in sessions two through four. Ten minutes is enough, and it welcomes anybody new.

ONE

ME

Who I am and what I bring. Full Level 1, then 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3.

TWO

US

What we are together. Short Level 1, then 3.1, 3.2 and 3.4. Build Buddies start here.

THREE

OUR WORLD

How things connect. Short Level 1, then 4.1, 4.1+, 4.2 and 4.3.

FOUR

WHAT IF

Changing something. Short Level 1, then 5.1, 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5.

Session four works best when the problem comes out of session one. Keep the list you wrote down during 5.1 and bring it back.

THREE THINGS THAT MAKE A SERIES WORK

Same four rules, every time

Read them aloud in session four exactly the way you read them in session one. Returning kids will start saying them with you, which is the point.

Same Build Buddies, if it worked

Keep a pairing that clicked. A ten-year-old who has already learned how a particular six-year-old builds is worth more than a fresh pairing.

Photograph every board

Put session three's neighborhood on the wall before session four starts. Kids walking in and finding their own work is what brings them back.

Set up in thirty minutes

Two people, half an hour before the doors open. Work down the list in this order and the room will be ready.

TABLES · 15 MIN

- ☐ Tables in clusters of four to six, never rows.
- ☐ One loaded tray at every seat, grown-ups included.
- ☐ One shared bin per table for overflow.
- ☐ Baseplates on the low board table, centered.
- ☐ Chairs pushed in so people sit fast.

THE POOL · 10 MIN

- ☐ Cases open, dumped into wide shallow bins.
- ☐ Bins in the middle of the room where every table reaches them equally.
- ☐ Pull the Odds Box: figures, animals, wheels, clear, bendy, weird.
- ☐ String and yarn in their own bin, set aside until Level 3 or 4.
- ☐ A "put it back" bin so returns do not get mixed in.

THE ROOM · 5 MIN

- ☐ Four rules on the wall, poster size, where everyone can see.
- ☐ Quiet corner set with pre-sorted trays. No sign on it.
- ☐ Story wall cards and a marker on a side table.
- ☐ Clock where you can see it and the kids cannot.
- ☐ Photo consent list in your pocket, checked.

Last job before the doors open: everybody with a role knows what it is, and every grown-up knows they are building too.

When something goes sideways

Six things that will happen, and the move for each. All six are normal and none of them mean the session is going badly.



Somebody will not share

"That is fine. It is your build and your story. Want to tell me later, or not at all?" Both answers are good. Move on right away and make no moment of it.



A kid smashes their own model

Usually fine. Let it happen. Ask afterward what that felt like, with real curiosity and no worry in your voice.



A kid copies their neighbor

Almost always a confidence thing. Do not name it and do not treat it as cheating. Give them a question of their own: "What would YOU add that they do not have?"



A parent answers for their child

The most common one. Say it warmly and once: "I want to hear it from the builder." Better, mention it to the adults before you start.



The room gets loud and scattered

Stop and run a fast individual build with a short timer. Building alone resets a room in about ninety seconds.



An activity lands flat

It happens. Go to 1.2 The Creature, which has never failed, and come back to the hard one another day.

One that is different: a child builds something that worries you. Do not interpret it and do not dig. Say "thank you for showing us," tell the parent privately after, and follow your standing safeguarding process.

How you will know it is working

You will not test anybody. Watch for these across a few sessions instead. Each one is visible from where you are standing.



Stories get longer

The clearest sign that people are getting comfortable. Ninety seconds becomes two minutes and nobody made it happen.



You hear "because" and "so then" and "what if"

That is the systems thinking showing up in ordinary speech, which is the only place it counts.



Kids ask each other questions unprompted

The four rules have become the room's rules instead of yours. This usually shows up around session three.



The quiet kid in session one is not the quiet kid in session four

Track this on purpose. Write down the three quietest names after the first session.



People come back, and they bring somebody

For a voluntary neighborhood workshop this is the honest measure, and it is worth more than any survey.

AND ASK PARENTS ONE QUESTION

"Has your kid said anything at home that seemed to come from this?"

Ask it after three or four sessions, in writing if you can. The answers will tell you more than any form would, and the good ones are worth reading out to your volunteers.

THE ONLY THING TO REMEMBER

The best sessions are the ones where you talked the least and everybody laughed most.

If a room full of neighbors builds a neighborhood and argues cheerfully about where the ice cream place should go, you have run a good workshop, whether or not anybody says the word "system."

Bring snacks. Start on time. Read the four rules out loud.



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