



New Jersey School of Conservation

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Climbing Wall Lesson Plan

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The act of quitting is generally a destructive pattern to habitually employ. If you hold back or quit when conditions are less than favorable, you may prevent yourself from reaching your full potential. Only by electing to participate in challenging endeavors can one break from this negative cycle. These challenges may be issues related to school, sports, personal or family relationships or any other area that requires effort to function at your highest level. Since we are all unique it is important to realize that we have our own individual limits for what we can achieve in certain areas.

Dr. Kurt Hahn, founder of Outward Bound, believed that few individuals truly live up to their full potential. Hahn believed that through structured programming people can further their self-esteem and then transfer that new found confidence into their everyday lives.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975) developed the idea for the role of flow in a person's life. Flow Theory describes those times at work or play when people experience feelings of enjoyment, concentration, and deep involvement. This theory suggests that any experience will be positive when the participant perceives that the environment incorporates sufficient opportunities for challenge which parallels their own skills. When the challenge and the required skill (relative to participants' abilities) are high, the participant expands his/her capability while learning new skills and increases his/her self-image.

The climbing wall attempts to provide participants the opportunity to push themselves, hopefully a little further than they expected. Both climbing surfaces have three levels of challenge. This allows those climbers who are highly motivated to be challenged by attempting the most difficult routes. Conversely, this arrangement also helps those students who are less able or who need to bolster their self-confidence by providing them with less (more realistic) challenging routes.

OBJECTIVES:

In order to accomplish the goals of increased self-confidence and to experience flow, the program should cause a little trepidation in the participants in order to stimulate them. Too little stimulation or challenge causes boredom, yet too much results in anxiety. Neither of these feelings are desirable. At the School of Conservation, the climbing wall provides the best opportunity for matching the challenge with the required skill, and therefore is the most effective session for building confidence. In the end, the School of Conservation hopes the students will realize that by continually striving to conserve our natural resources, they can make an important difference. We must not quit in our efforts to protect the environment!

“If one advances confidently in the direction of his (her) dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he (she) has imagined, he (she) will meet with a success unexpected in common hours”. - H. D. Thoreau

The effect on participants after climbing the wall, far exceed simple fun. Significant and positive changes in many individuals have been reported to have occurred after climbing the wall at SOC. Additional research on challenge education through climbing also support this belief.

The educational objectives of the wall are primarily two fold:

1. **Individual growth and development.** This is attained by having new experiences and by overcoming stressful situations. These growth areas may include physical, and emotional (increased self-image) growth.
2. **Group interaction and support.** Encouragement from the group can provide the final ingredient which may induce the climber to give maximum effort. Maximum effort provides the best opportunity for individual growth as listed above.

The specific objectives of Climbing Wall are to provide each student (individually) with the opportunity to:

1. **Experience a sense of individual accomplishment.**
2. **Set challenging, yet realistic individual goals.**
3. **Understand that they are responsible for the decisions they make.**
4. **Provide positive encouragement and feedback to group members.**
5. **Experience the sensation of rock climbing.**

SESSION INTRODUCTION:

During the introduction to the class (prior to even seeing the wall) the SOC instructor will spell out some basic information. Safety, group support, and maximum effort will be the general thrust. It is imperative to be thorough during the introduction, since this sets the tone of the class and also forms the basis for the students' expectations. Shortening the introductory period, seems to only slow the process later. It takes more time to continually review previous statements. Also, when the students are fully apprised of the instructor's expectations they are better prepared to deal with the stress of climbing.

During this introduction we strive to form a verbal **contract** between the climbers (students) and the instructor prior to the activity. There are three statements that comprise the contract. Each student must agree to the contract before they are allowed to climb. The statements are; **1)** If you want to climb, you must give a 100 % effort. **2)** When not climbing, each student must help all other students do their best by providing positive support. **3)** No one comes down from the wall until the instructor says they can come down.

If any student does not agree to all three items on the contract, they should not put on a harness. By wearing the harness, the student is demonstrating that s/he agrees to all the terms of the contract. Many students prefer to watch one or more climbers before they commit themselves to climbing. This is understandable. We encourage students to gather as much pertinent data prior to acting as is possible. This allows them to make informed decisions.

The students are then taken to the wall site for discussion and demonstration of belaying, the harness and other equipment. It is explained that the ropes, carabiners and webbing we use are tested to several thousand pounds breaking strength. The analogy is often used that the rope could hold a passenger car with the group in the car! Although climbing a 20' wall may seem

dangerous, by using good equipment and employing simple belaying techniques, the climbing wall is probably the safest activity in the Outdoor Pursuits area at SOC.

A student volunteer (preferably the same gender as the belayer) comes to the front of the group and the instructor assists them in safely securing the harness. When complete the instructor should review for the remaining students the harness check that every climber will receive. This is accomplished by the instructor feeling for tightness in the leg and waist sections. This check must be done on the student's side or hip area. The buckle is also checked to make certain it has been passed through the buckle three times. The student then threads the climbing rope up through the front portion of the harness for themselves. The final step is for the instructor to tie the reverse figure eight knot and back-up knots.

Once a student has committed to climbing, it is the facilitator's responsibility to maximize the benefit of the activity for each of the participants. Some students climb effortlessly to the top, while other students struggle to get halfway up. You may want to get the natural climbers to "risk" more by asking them to do additional challenges such as a "jumping jack" on top of the 2"x 6" platform. **No climbers should ever be lowered upside down.** If any student rebels, remind them of the contract. They stated they would give 100% and they also knew they would not come down until the instructor said they could. Some students may attempt to get out of their contract by; (a) simply sitting in their harness, (b) having a temper tantrum, or (c) manipulating the belayer by crying. It can be a difficult judgment decision by the belayer to know how hard to push an individual student. Some crying for example is an attempt to manipulate the belayer as stated above and other times is a sign that a student is at the end of his/her emotional endurance. If this is the case the student should be applauded for her/his effort and lowered to the ground. Remember, self-esteem is the primary objective of this session, and all decisions should be directed to this end.

The hand and foot holds are coded by degree of difficulty. Use of all holds is the least difficult route to the top. Using only the blue colored holds is more difficult, and using only orange holds is the most difficult challenge. Of course numerous variations exist which can serve to further challenge the climber, such as using hands on the orange only and the feet only on the blue colored holds. Students should state which level they will strive for. If a student is finding it easy going, the instructor should try to get them to attempt the next higher level of difficulty. The students will only get one chance to climb and they should make it their best effort.

No student should ever be coerced into climbing! **Challenge by choice** is the standard operating procedure when it comes to these types of adventure/challenge activities at SOC. If any student(s) elects not to climb, they must still support the others.

LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

It should be understood that not all students will have an opportunity to climb the wall while at SOC due to scheduling constraints. Sometimes misguided teachers/parents bring groups by the wall site as a way to appease the students that were not scheduled to climb. Please do not stop by unexpectedly with non-climbers. It is generally better for them not to know what they are missing. All classes at SOC are valuable experiences, and no session should be promoted as "the most important". All alternatives can also be fun and challenging. Maybe leaders could put the extra effort into making the class that is scheduled even better.

Visiting teachers and parents should help the students with adjusting the harnesses, and by providing positive support for the students. Teachers can become trained to assist at the climbing wall by participating in a training session prior to the group's arrival. This can help more students have a fulfilling experience at the wall.

During the cold winters it is probably best to have a back-up plan in the event that the temperature drops below 10 degrees Fahrenheit. Since only two students are climbing at a time, anything below this temperature it is just too difficult to maintain class interest for those waiting. The back-up class should also not be dependent on other weather or snow conditions. I would probably recommend Confidence Course or Group Initiatives as alternatives which replicate the excitement of the wall, but encourages more continuous activity from the entire group. These activities also help to keep the students warmer.

The first wall at SOC was constructed in 1977 by Dr. James Merritt. At that time very few climbing walls existed in the United States. The current wall was constructed in 1992 using a design which allows for two simultaneous climbers who are unable to see one another. This minimizes distractions and helps the climber to focus on the challenge at hand.

SUMMATION:

Following the activity, the wrap-up session should include- What difference does climbing the wall make in a person's life? Why do we have climbing at SOC ? Students generally come up with a wide variety of answers, ranging from fun, to the need to work hard if we hope to solve our difficult environmental problems. Since students now choose the level of difficulty of their climb, appropriate goal setting may also be brought into the debrief. Fulfilling your commitments or responsibilities is also frequently brought up. The question can then be asked, whose responsibility is it to conserve natural resources? Conserving natural resources is the responsibility of everyone who lives upon the earth. Protecting the earth's resources will require a tremendous effort and commitment from a great many people.

When students elect not to participate, it is important to bring out the positive aspects from their non-participation during the debrief period. This is easily done by making the connection with peer pressure at school. It takes considerable courage to say "this is not for me". Ask the class, in what way does it take courage to say "no"? It can be difficult to stand up for your beliefs. Especially when the adults and peers want you to try something. Ascertain from the students what other instances might a similar situation occur? Things like smoking, drugs, alcohol use, etc. should arise.

The value of the climbing wall experience may be best summed up by the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes, "A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions." Hopefully the climbers will remember the effort they gave as well as the feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction that came with it. Future obstacles and challenges are also achievable with concerted effort and fortitude.

NJ Student Learning Standards:

COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

- 2.1.8.PGD.4: Analyze the relationship between healthy behaviors and personal health.
- 2.1.8.SSH.3: Demonstrate communication skills that will support healthy relationships
- 2.1.8.SSH.4: Compare and contrast the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- 2.2.8.MSC.7: Effectively manage emotions during physical activity (e.g., anger, frustration e excitement) in a safe manner to self and others.
- 2.3.8.PS.1: Assess the degree of risk in a variety of situations, and identify strategies needed to reduce deliberate and non-deliberate injuries to self and others
- 2.2.8.PF.2: Recognize and involve others of all ability levels into a physical activity.

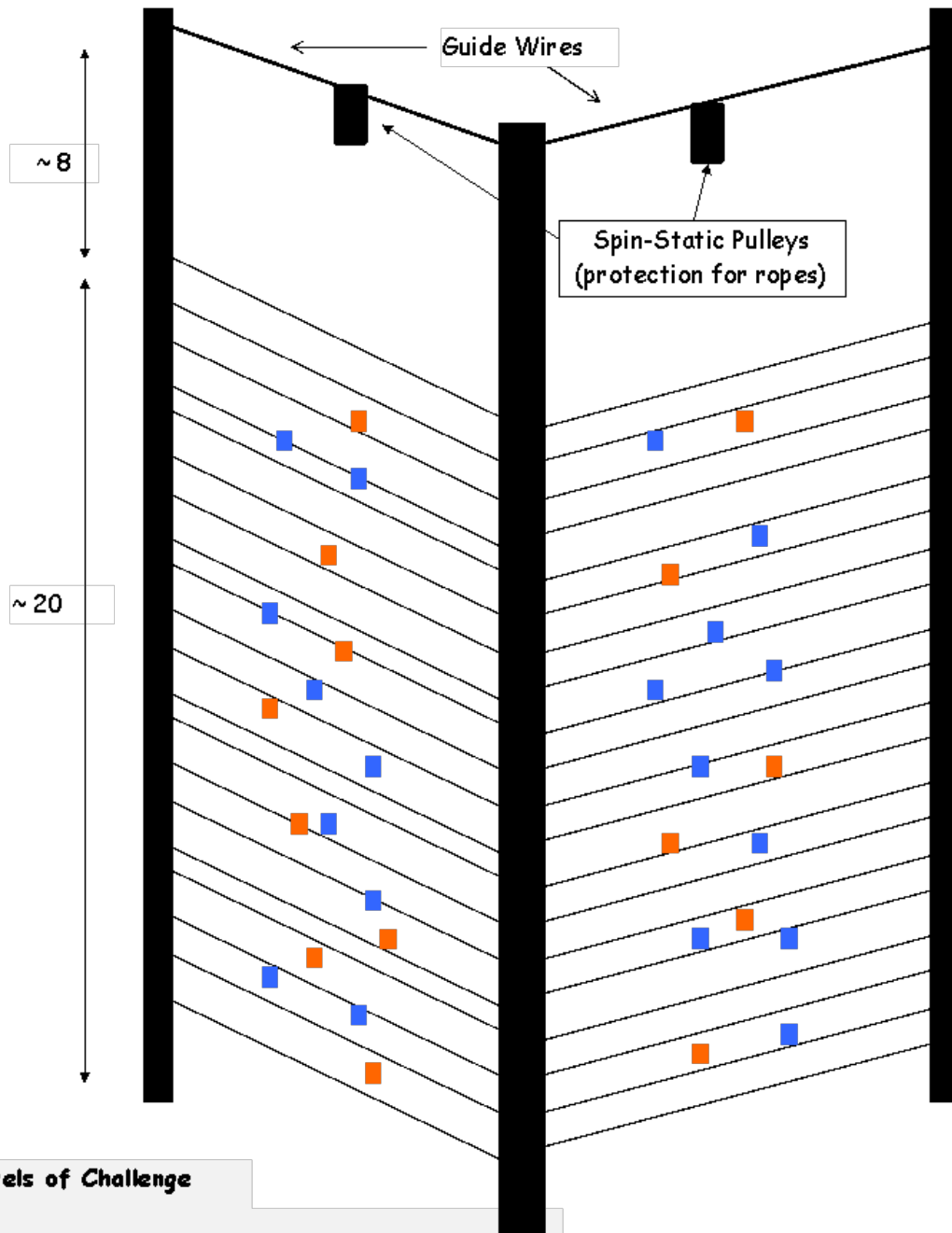
LIFE LITERACY AND KEY SKILLS

- 9.4.5.CT.1: Identify and gather relevant data that will aid in the problem-solving process
- 9.4.5.CT.4: Apply critical thinking and problem-solving strategies to different types of problems such as personal, academic, community and global

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

All of our field lessons integrate the concepts of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills found in the [New Jersey's Core Social and Emotional Learning \(SEL\) Competencies](#).

Climbing Wall Lesson Plan



Three Levels of Challenge

1. Using all holds (■ + ■) is the least difficult path.
2. Using only the blue (■) holds is of moderate difficulty.
3. Using only the orange (■) holds is the most challenging route.

WMM 6/07