

Crossing the Toxic Swamp: Teamwork

In this lesson, students will learn about inclusiveness through the lens of teamwork. They will see a story of a unique friendship where, though both friends have unique physical limitations, they are still able to do great things together. This segues into a game where students must work together to get from one end of the classroom to the other as a team. Ultimately, the lesson shows students that everyone brings value to the team and that the team cannot experience success without the contributions and participation of everyone.

Inclusiveness Sub-Concept(s)

Kindness

Lesson Timeframe

45 minutes

Required Materials

- Boards for the toxic swamp game; can be paper plates or pieces of construction paper

Standards Map

This lesson aligns with CASEL Competencies, National Health Education Standards, and Common Core State Standards. Please refer to the [Standards Map](#) for more information.



**DESIGNATED BY CASEL
AS A RECOMMENDED PROGRAM
FOR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING.**
See last page for details.

Lesson Objective

Students will:

- Recognize that teamwork requires inclusiveness.
- Practice teamwork through a game situation.

Teacher Connection/Self-Care

The skill of working together on a team is one that is utilized throughout our adult lives. Your teaching partner, your grade specific teaching group, your school, and even your district are all run by structured teams that must find common ground to accomplish a shared goal. However, your assigned team doesn't necessarily correlate with your desired team. The skills you use in your classroom every day can and should be applied to the various teams, committees, and boards you sit on both at school and beyond. Don't expect to be perfect. We all have our faults. It is easier to look outwards than to personally reflect. Before you start complaining or struggling with your group, ask yourself these three questions: How can I help? How might I be a problem for others? How can I help things go right? We all have strengths and weaknesses. Being open about them can help you in any team situation. Be up front about both what you can offer and where you may struggle!

Tips for Diverse Learners

- Students who are not physically able to play in the game can still be included as strategists; they can draw out or explain to their team how to best get everyone across. The team could also work to help the physically-limited student still get across per game rules (if this option is safe for the student).
- Students may have a hard time keeping up with the subtitles in the video clip; consider reading these out loud for the benefit of everyone.
- Point out the area of China where the two friends were from to help give students additional cultural context. (video below)



Share

3-5 minutes

Let's start by reviewing some of the main ideas of this unit. We are talking about inclusiveness in this unit. How did we see inclusiveness in our first lesson about Dante and Soung?

How have you experienced inclusiveness since our last lesson?

Have any of you experienced not being included in something?

We are going to talk today about what it means to be included in a team and how teams work together to achieve a goal.



Inspire

7-10 minutes

How many of you have been on a team before?

Invite student response.

What are some qualities that make a good, successful team?

Invite student response.

Do you ever decide, before giving someone a chance, that he or she would not be good on your team? That you don't want to include them? How might excluding, or not including, others from joining a team hurt the team?

We are going to watch a short video clip of two friends who live in China; one of the men cannot see and the other has no arms. Together, though, they have planted over 10,000 trees around their village. How did they do it? Teamwork!

Watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2cqQA_zsKY



Empower

25 minutes

What did you learn about teamwork and inclusiveness from the video clip we just watched?

Invite student response.

We are going to play a game now that requires teamwork. The game is called, "Crossing the Toxic Swamp".

Take time to have students prepare the room by moving tables, chairs, and desks (if you have not already prepped the room). Put students in groups and explain the rules of the game as follows. Do not tell them how to cross, though strategies are listed below; let them work out their own strategies.

Divide students into teams of 7 to 10. Once all the players are assigned to a team, have the teams stand at one end of the swamp and explain that the goal of the game is to cross the "Toxic Swamp" as a team.

Explain the following rules:

Each team will be given "Toxic Swamp Boards". Each team should receive a board for each player, minus one. For example, if there are eight people on a team, then they should receive seven boards. These are the only boards a team will get. If they lose any during the game, they don't get any more boards.

The "Toxic Swamp Boards" keep players safe from the swamp only if a player is touching them with a hand, foot, toe, or finger. If no one is touching the board, the board will dissolve into the swamp (i.e., the teacher will take it). If a player steps outside of the swamp boundaries then the entire team must go back to the beginning and start over.

The entire team must cross the swamp and no one may be left behind. If one person is left behind or stranded, the entire team must go back to the beginning and start over. However, the students can move in groups. Ask if players have questions. Then give them their swamp boards and allow two minutes to talk together and develop a strategy for crossing the Toxic Swamp.

There is more than one way to cross the swamp. While teams may come up with a new and creative solution, here are some ways it can be done:

- Have a few players cross at a time setting down a certain number of boards (keeping physical contact with each board), stepping across (step-stone fashion), and get "the few" to the other side. One person would then cross back to the other side of the swamp (using the boards as they go) and get a few more teammates. This new group would cross the swamp as the first group did. The team could continue until everyone has crossed the swamp.
- Have the first player in line put a board in front of themselves and stand on it. The team would then pass another board to the first player who would put the new board out in front of themselves (continually maintaining contact with the board) and straddle both boards. The next player in line would put one foot on the second board in the swamp, sharing the space with the first player until the first player takes their foot off the first board and stands on the

second board. The first player would continue to take the boards, position them along the crossing (standing and straddling boards along the way) while their teammates mimic their stepping stone movements and the entire team crosses the swamp.

- If there are different teams, all of the teams may decide to share boards and create a straight pathway that stretches the length of the swamp (careful to stand, straddle, or touch the boards). There is nothing in the rules that prevents sharing boards among teams. The teacher may prompt the teams to consider this option by either asking the question, “Is this a race?” or by stating, “The world would be a much better place if people learned to share their materials.”



Reflect

5 minutes

If the activity fails, take enough time to talk about the challenges and issues that arose. Be prepared to give players time to talk through any struggles, especially if there was a conflict during the activity.

After the activity, discuss any of the following questions:

- *Was this activity easy or difficult? Why? (You could also ask students to rate difficulty on a scale of 1-10.)*
- *What are some “toxic” or damaging things that teams might have to get through in order to be successful?*
- *Did you experience any conflict on your team and how did you work through it?*
- *How well did you work as a team?*
- *Did you show care and respect to each other while you were playing the game?*
- *How can you work to be inclusive when working with others on a team?*



Extension Ideas

- Have kids teach this game to their family/friends and play it at home!



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AND EMOTIONAL
LEARNING.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (**CASEL**) has been reviewing evidence-based SEL programs since 2003. Kindness in the Classroom® meets CASEL’s SElect Program and is included in the [CASEL Guide to Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs](#).

Kindness in the Classroom® met or exceeded all of CASEL’s criteria for high-quality SEL programming. Kindness in the Classroom® received CASEL’s highest designation for high-quality SEL programming.

<https://casel.org/guide/kindness-in-the-classroom/>

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