

Countdown

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Overview

Countdown is a game designed to utilize parts of speech and word context. Two teams are shown a "clue word" which in some way relates to a "mystery word" known only by the conductor ("monitor") of the game. The monitor does not try to assist the teams but supplements each clue word with an abbreviation telling what part of speech is the proper context (The word "brush," for example, can be either a noun or a verb.). Having seen the initial clue word, the team going first has thirty seconds to discuss possible answers, and a person designated "captain" has the job of considering the various guesses of teammates, saying "TIME" (thus stopping the clock), and giving the response for the team. A correct answer to the first clue word is worth five points. If, as will usually happen, the first response is incorrect, the monitor reveals a second clue word which then decreases the point value to four, and it is the opposing team's turn to answer. Thus the "countdown" continues until a team either does or does not ascertain the mystery word of the particular round (series of five clue words). The monitor

then begins another round, and, at the end of a prescribed time period (thirty to forty-five minutes works best), the team with the higher point total wins the game.

Specifics

What follows is a more detailed procedure designed to provide the monitor with a complete understanding of the rationale behind the game. Although the rules to Countdown are few and simple, the game is most enjoyed by players who have been made to understand the more complex thinking required to meet the challenge of each round.

1. Select two captains and choose sides. Captains should be aware that they have the job of considering all teammates' guesses, keeping the discussion at a whisper to prevent the other team from overhearing, saying "TIME" to stop the clock, and giving the team's response loudly and clearly.

2. Flip a coin to determine which team goes first. Remember, only that team may guess at the first clue word.

To illustrate how a round should be presented, the following sample is offered:

5- chair(n.)

4- Street

3- difficult(adj.)

2- come(v.)

1- go(v.)

mystery word-(easy)

Seeing the first clue word, the teams would then proceed to discuss what word can be associated with "chair," the noun. Obviously, there are many possibilities; in fact, rounds are purposely designed so that teams seldom score on the first clue, but, rather, they are forced to think of the key to several seemingly unrelated words. If, as is shown in the above example, a proper noun or adjective is a clue word, the monitor should make the capital letter obvious to both teams. No other qualifier is needed. It is, however, important to note here that only a clue word can be a proper noun or adjective. The answer "easy," though a common word, does relate as a proper noun (Easy Street) to the four point clue. Otherwise, of course, "easy" would not be capitalized. After each clue word is presented, it is advisable for the monitor to warn the guessing team as the thirty seconds decrease to

fifteen, ten, and finally five. Since players are busy discussing possible answers, they tend to lose track of time. To prevent a team from delaying the game, there is a penalty for not responding to a clue word within the allotted thirty seconds. If a captain fails to stop the clock, the team forfeits that particular clue word to the opposing team, which would receive an additional fifteen seconds to give an answer. This penalty seldom has to be enforced if the monitor keeps the teams aware of time.

3. The final item to remember pertains to the answer for each round. A team's response must be the exact form of the word. Although it rarely occurs, a team might, for example, offer "swimming" when the correct answer is "swim." In that situation the monitor would inform the team that they have given a form of the answer, and they would then be granted fifteen additional seconds to try again. If their response is still not the exact form, the monitor reveals the next clue word, and the game resumes in normal fashion.

It is my hope, then, that Countdown motivates its players to think according to specific guidelines, and, in doing so, learn to appreciate the versatility of words and their contextual relationships. Players always ask to hear the remaining clue words even though they may have guessed

the answer on the first or second attempt. These players to whom I have been referring are as diversified in age as they are in academic background. They are seventh through twelfth graders heterogeneously grouped. They are parents and teachers college trained. Nevertheless, all have demonstrated comparable proficiency. I conclude, therefore, what was my contention when I first undertook this project; namely, we keep a working knowledge of our language buried deep in our minds. Countdown, perhaps, is a tool to help us start digging.