

Instructional Presentation

Note: The master of ceremonies acts as instructor for this portion of the campfire.

Why Have a Campfire?

Good evening, and welcome to the Wood Badge staff campfire.

Why do we have campfires? An easy answer is, “Because Scouts have always had them.” And they’ve always had them because they can contribute so much to an outdoor experience.

To be truly successful, a campfire must be more than just random presentations occurring around a leaping fire. A good campfire program has purpose and direction—a definite idea of where it is going and what it is trying to accomplish.

And what does a campfire try to accomplish? A Scout will tell you that campfires are “for fun,” and there’s a lot to be said for that. In addition, campfires can offer entertainment, fellowship, and education. Young people involved in presenting campfire programs are practicing leadership skills. The setting of a campfire, the evening darkness that envelops it, and the fact that it is part of a larger outdoor adventure can also make it an ideal time to offer a message of inspiration.

A successful campfire program is built on four S’s:

- Showmanship
- Stunts
- Songs
- Stories

That said, there is one element that doesn’t begin with S but is more important than anything else. That element is *planning*.

Planning

For a campfire program to be effective, it must be planned well in advance. It should involve young people to the fullest extent possible.

In your participant notebooks are copies of a Campfire Program Planner that lays out one approach to an effective and varied gathering. It may be just what you need; if not, you can develop your own campfire planner. The important thing, though, is to put together the program early—decide what will be presented, who will do it, and how long each piece will take. Presenters should practice their roles so that they can make the most of the opportunity.

PROGRAM PLANNING SKIT

To explore this idea a little more, may I introduce the Wood Badge Players. I'll begin with myself, the Campfire Planner.

Note: As the campfire instructor introduces the rest of the cast, members come on stage one by one, acting in ways that express the roles they represent.

CAMPFIRE STARTER (Carries a candle and matches or a lighter.)

PATRIOTIC SONG (Hums "God Bless America" or some other patriotic song.)

SCOUTING SONG (Hums "Scouting Spirit" or some other Scouting song.)

STUNT FEATURING TARZAN (Says, "Me Tarzan! You Jane? You Cheetah?" Beats chest and gives the Tarzan yell.)

SKIT STARRING FLEAS (Goes about chasing imaginary fleas, picking them up and herding them together.)

GHOST STORY (Repeats classic ghost story lines—"It was a dark and stormy night!" "Quoth the raven, Nevermore!")

HEROIC TALE (Repeats hero-tale story lines—"Well, then Dan'l Boone seen this big ol' bar a-comin' at him and a-gruntin' and a-growlin' and, Dan'l looks him in the eye and")

SCOUTMASTER'S MINUTE (Carries a large clock, real or cardboard.)

CAMPFIRE EXTINGUISHER (Lugs an empty bucket, carrying it as if it is full of water.)

THE ACTION

All of the players except the Campfire Planner wander randomly about the stage, quietly humming or emoting according to their identities, as noted above. They are not identified. The audience should see a general state of confusion and should hear a confused undercurrent of talking and humming. The actor representing the Scoutmaster's Minute walks around staring intently at the watch and scratching his head as though puzzled. The Campfire Starter walks about with arms extended, the candle in one hand, the lighter or match in the other. The Campfire Extinguisher lugs the seemingly heavy bucket here and there, and so forth.

CAMPFIRE PLANNER: "I want to plan a campfire! Lots of good pieces here, but what's what?"

One by one he stops each player and asks, "Who are you?" One by one, they answer: "A patriotic song!" "The campfire extinguisher!" "A Tarzan stunt!" etc.

(The only exception is the Scoutmaster's Minute, who keeps staring at the clock and scratching his head. He doesn't answer when the Campfire Planner asks him who he is. As a result, the audience still does not know exactly what role he is playing.)

As the players identify themselves, the Campfire Planner shuffles them around to get them in line. He can adjust the row several times until he is pleased with the arrangement. The players continue to hum, chase fleas, or do whatever identifies them, but quietly.

As the audience views them, the players should finally be lined up, left to right, in this order:

1. Campfire Starter
2. Patriotic Song
3. Scouting Song
4. Stunt Featuring Tarzan
5. Skit Starring Fleas
6. Ghost Story
7. Heroic Tale
8. Scoutmaster's Minute
9. Campfire Extinguisher

CAMPFIRE PLANNER: "I like it!" (All the players are quiet, awaiting their cues.) "Let the program begin. Campfire Starter, do your duty!"

CAMPFIRE STARTER: (Strikes the match or flicks the lighter, then dramatically lights the candle.)

CAMPFIRE PLANNER: "Cheers from everyone! Hurray! And now on with the show!"

PATRIOTIC SONG: (Steps forward.) "I'm a patriotic song to get things started right!"
(Sings a bar or two.)

SCOUTING SONG: (Steps forward.) "I'm a cheerful Scouting song to brighten up the night!" (Sings a bar or two.)

STUNT FEATURING TARZAN: (Steps forward.) "I'm a stunt that features Tarzan swinging through the trees!" (Swings around the stage making Tarzan noises.)

SKIT STARRING FLEAS: (Steps forward.) "And I'm a skit that stars a bunch of little tiny fleas!" (Engages in much scratching.)

GHOST STORY: (Steps forward.) "I'm a tale of ghostly deeds to give you such a fright!" (Floats around the stage making ghostly noises—"Whoooooooooo!")

HEROIC TALE: (Steps forward.) "And I'm a story of heroes past who made the noble fight!" (Leads imaginary followers across the stage—"Follow me! Onward! To arms!")

Note: The Scoutmaster's Minute continues to study his clock. The Campfire Extinguisher continues to hold the "heavy" bucket. The Campfire Starter continues to hold the lighted candle.

CAMPFIRE PLANNER: (Delivers lines poetically.) "There's more of those where these came from to fill out your campfire./Just don't let things go on so long the audience starts to expire./The only thing that dies away should be the campfire embers./And as the darkness gathers in, each person long remembers/The final story that they hear, and the message that is in it—/I'm speaking now of course about the big Scoutmaster's Minute."

SCOUTMASTER'S MINUTE: (The Scoutmaster's Minute player absentmindedly continues to stare at the clock, scratching his head. After a moment several of the other players nudge him and remind him that he's on. Or, the clock's alarm goes off, jolting him out of his reverie. The Scoutmaster's Minute steps forward and delivers his lines in a deep, serious voice.) "Scouts, when I was your age, Baden-Powell and Dan Beard and Ernest Seton and I used to hike five miles through snowdrifts in our kneesocks just to get to a campfire like this, doing Good Turns all along the way, and, well, you get the message . . ."

CAMPFIRE PLANNER: (Delivers lines poetically.) "Good planning makes a campfire great with Scouting lore and fun./But don't forget the final chore before the evening's done./That's to put the fire out in a way that's in good taste./The extinguisher will now do that without a moment's waste."

CAMPFIRE EXTINGUISHER: (Lugging the bucket, the extinguisher very slowly makes his way across the stage to the staff member holding the lighted candle. The Campfire Extinguisher makes as if to hurl a bucket of water at the candle, perhaps swinging the bucket back and forth several times, but then instead leans over and gently blows out the flame.)

CAMPFIRE PLANNER: (Leads a cheer for the Wood Badge players as they leave the stage.)

What Have We Learned?

Note: At the conclusion of the skit, the Campfire Planner returns to the role of instructor, building on the ideas presented in the skit to illustrate the principles of an effective campfire program.

There's a lot to learn from that little skit. A good rule for planning campfire programs is to *follow the fire*. Early in the evening when the flames are lively, the program can be lively, too, involving everyone in songs, cheers, and skits. As the fire dies down, the program can also become quieter and deeper, with the most important messages coming near the end.

The skit also illustrates the four most important parts of a campfire:

- Showmanship
- Stunts
- Songs
- Stories

These four ingredients, properly mixed and blended, will make your campfire program an outstanding success. Let's take a look at each of the "Four S's."

Showmanship

Showmanship is the art of attractive presentation. It puts sparkle and life into a gathering. Without a touch of showmanship, a campfire program can fall flat.

You don't need to be a trained actor to lead a good campfire, or to help Scouting youth serve as masters of ceremonies. Just be yourself—enthused about the program and ready to do whatever you can to make it a success.

Campfire Location

An important part of showmanship is the location of the campfire. A campfire setting is ideal for this kind of program. However, it can be conducted in any group setting large enough to accommodate everyone comfortably. Where fire building is appropriate, a wood fire can provide atmosphere for the occasion. But a lantern works too, or a candle. Indoors, it can be a fire in a dining hall fireplace, or an artificial campfire in a meeting room. Wherever the gathering occurs, there needs to be sufficient lighting so that the action up front is easy to see.

Use your imagination in dressing up the area and creating atmosphere.

Opening Ceremony

Showmanship continues with the way in which the program opens. Often it includes a dramatic way of lighting the fire. That might be done with fire by friction, or flint and steel.

Get a program under way fast and with plenty of pep. Use lively songs and cheers. Perhaps you will want to include introductions early in the evening and certainly, if you have new campers present, you will want to recognize them. You might have each of them lay a stick of wood on the fire to symbolize joining the group.

The opening ceremony sets the tone of the whole program, so it must be good! Whether your evening is to be serious or silly, make the opening sharp and incisive. It must arrest and hold the attention of the audience.

Closing Ceremony

The end of a campfire is usually quiet and inspirational. The most important messages come as the embers of the fire are dying down.

In between the opening and the closing, there will be plenty of other opportunities for showmanship to add sparkle to the program—to the songs, stunts, and stories.

Songs

Many different types of songs are appropriate for campfires—Scout songs, quiet songs, inspirational songs, songs that require audience action.

Samples of Different Kinds of Campfire Songs

Scout Songs	"On My Honor"
Peppy Songs	"Miss O'Leary," "John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt"
Action Songs	"Head and Shoulders, Knees and Toes" "One Finger, One Thumb"
Special Occasion Songs	"Happy Birthday"
Novelty Songs	"Hey Ho," "Little Rabbit," "Da Da Da"
Quiet Songs	"Scout Vesper"
Inspirational Songs	"Trail the Eagle," "Hail Scouting Spirit"

The master of ceremonies may be the one who leads songs, or it may be youth who have been given that assignment.

Stunts

For most young people, campfire stunts and skits have just one purpose—fun! But we must not forget that stunts can also train or inspire.

Sources of Stunts

There are plenty of ideas for skits and stunts in *Scouting* and *Boys' Life* magazines, in other Boy Scout literature, and in many books of campfire skills.

While these sources are good, even better are the imaginations of Scouts. Original stunts can be tailor-made to fit local situations and recent events, and can be extremely entertaining.

All stunts must be rehearsed by the participants and double-checked by a Scout leader.

Appropriateness

Although skits and stunts can have a wide range of subjects and treatments, they must always be appropriate. A good test is to hold them up against the Scout Law's *friendly, courteous, and kind*. Any skit or stunt that does not meet that test has no place in a campfire program. Skits and stunts should never embarrass or demean anyone or any group of people.

There are several gray areas that are best simply to avoid:

- Religion
- Underwear
- Toilet paper
- Water
- Politics
- Inside jokes
- Use of alcohol, drugs, or tobacco
- Cross-gender impersonation

Though skits and stunts should be practiced ahead of time and approved by a Scout leader, an inappropriate presentation may make it onto the stage. If that happens, the master of ceremonies should step in. Here's one way to handle the situation.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES: "Excuse me for interrupting, but we need to ask you to stop this skit. The material you are using is not suitable for our campfire. Participants, please return to your places."

The master of ceremonies then addresses the audience: "A Scout's character is most often influenced by the subtle impact of what he sees and hears. We have a responsibility to help our Scouts evaluate their choices and determine their overall contribution towards Scouting's ideals and values. This skit had the potential of offending people and would not have contributed to building character or citizenship.

"In Scouting we offer plenty of freedom for our members to express themselves. However, if through lack of wisdom or understanding, they do something that is not wise, Scouting also offers guidance to help everyone understand what is appropriate.

"We can all gain from this experience tonight in a positive and constructive manner. And now, on with the program."

The master of ceremonies then can lead a song to get everyone back into the mood of the campfire or can simply introduce the next performance.

Campfire Discipline

This is a good time to talk about campfire discipline in general. Campfire leaders must be rather tough about it, in a tactful way, right from the start. They should explain at the outset that "We just don't do any razzing or booing here." If it starts, it must be squelched immediately. Likewise, show-offs and hecklers must be stopped fast, too. When a friendly request for cooperation fails to quiet them, then give them more attention than they are bidding for by inviting them up front to lead the event they're disturbing, or do it better if they can!

The different roles campfire leaders play are important, and the Scouts must see adult leaders having fun and contributing. We do not have a choice in whether we are setting the example; we only have a choice of the kind of example we set.

Cheers

In Scouting we are trying to instill self-worth and self-esteem in our youth participants. Because of that we do not boo, hiss, or jeer campfire performers. More important than recognizing the quality of the performance is the encouragement to youth getting up in front of an audience and trying to entertain or inspire us.

Stories

Storytelling is an art, but an art that almost anyone can acquire with practice. All you need is a good imagination, an appreciation of good stories, a little knack for showmanship, and some experience. As long as the story hangs together, the audience will not be critical of the storyteller's dramatic ability. It's the story they're interested in, not the storyteller.

Types of Stories

The campfire stories that boys ask for fall into five general classifications:

- Ghost
- Hero (inspirational)
- Humorous
- Miscellaneous (general interest)
- Adventure

Ghost Stories. This is the most-asked-for type of campfire story, but one that must be handled with care. Never try to scare an audience too badly with a ghost story. We want young people to feel at home in the woods. A ghostly story or disturbing descriptions can mar that experience for Scouts.

Adventure Stories. Perhaps the best of all campfire stories are adventure tales that stir the imagination. The adventure can be true or fictional, or perhaps a "tall tale" somewhere in between. A Scout can describe an overnight adventure; a leader can relate some event of importance from his past; a storyteller can retell the tales of explorers, heroes, scoundrels, or other real and imaginary characters.

Humorous Stories. American folklore is filled with fine and funny stories that lend themselves to being told or read around a campfire. Mark Twain's books and the stories of O. Henry, Robert Service, Bret Harte, and dozens of other American writers provide plenty of material.

Inspirational Stories. A story that inspires young people can be a very effective addition to a campfire program. There is no reason that an inspirational story cannot also have humorous elements or be an adventure tale. Look to the magazines published by the Boy Scouts of America for stories, past and present, about inspiring individuals who have had a Scouting background.

The High-Point Story. A campfire program should build toward a climax, an event that will top off the evening and make it a thing to remember. The high point of the program need not be elaborate, but it must be good. Among the possibilities are

- An old-timer telling of adventure in far-off places
- A Scout telling of a jamboree experience, or tales of the Philmont trails

- A storyteller spinning a ghostly yarn
- The Scout leader speaking for a quiet minute
- Someone telling the Baden-Powell Story or the story of another important figure in Scouting or in local history

Note: This concludes the instructional presentation of the campfire program.

Entertainment

MASTER OF CEREMONIES: I'm going to take off my instructor's hat now and replace it with that of the campfire's master of ceremonies. For the rest of the evening, I'm going to invite various members of the Wood Badge staff to illustrate the points of campfire program planning with songs, stunts, and stories. First up, let's have a song!

(A staff member or group of staff members leads the group in a song such as "The Quartermaster Song;" "Head and Shoulders, Knees and Toes;" or "One Finger, One Thumb." This is an opportunity for team building among the staff and for the participants to see a different side of the staff.)

Note: Most of the remainder of the program is devoted to songs, stunts, and stories prepared and presented by members of the Wood Badge staff. Each portion of this part of the campfire should follow the guidelines set forth in the instructional presentation, and the entertainment as a whole should be enjoyable, fast-paced, and not too long.

The selection of presentations should include an entertaining mix of songs, stunts, and stories. The final presentation of this section should be the Baden-Powell Story.

STAFF CAMPFIRE

LIGHT FIRE

READING - 'REMEMBER ME'

SONG - GOD BLESS AMERICA

TROOP GUIDES – IF I WERE NOT A