



The Wisdom of Age and Youth

Welcome your group and explain the theme of the event (Old and Young) and a little of what you plan to do in the time that you have together.

As an ice-breaking exercise, I like to tell the group that **everyone can tell a story**. To prove it, ask all participants in turn to tell the story of how they got their name. Let them know that they shouldn't worry if they don't know who chose their name or why it was chosen, because they can still take part in the exercise by saying something about their name, for example if they like it or not, if they were ever given a nick name or even what name would they choose if they were able to choose their own name.

People can always contribute something to this exercise. It is best for you to start by giving the story of how you came by your name, as an example to the group. I have used this game for twenty years now and it always works well, with young and old alike. (This exercise comes from *Creative Drama in Groupwork* by Sue Jennings).

If you have more than fifteen people in your group, you might want to split the group in two for this game in order to keep it under fifteen minutes.

Now tell one of your stories. You could tell **The Golden Pitcher**, a tale which celebrates the wisdom of age. In order to memorise it more easily you can try summing up the story in seven words, draw a picture of your story and then walk about reading the story out loud over and over, until you can tell it without reading.

You can also record yourself telling the story on a digital voice recorder (most mobile phones have this facility now) and listen to your recording several times while you learn to tell the story.

Also remember that your audience will probably have never heard this story before, so they don't know if you make any mistakes. They will love hearing you tell the story, so relax and enjoy yourself while you tell it. Oh and keep a glass of water handy, in case you get a tickle in your throat!

The Golden Pitcher – a story from Mongolia, retold by Allison Galbraith

After you have told the story give your audience a moment to digest what they have heard, then ask if they enjoyed the story.

Now it is time to move around a little, because the group have been sitting for long enough and you want to get people mixing with each other. I have learned the following game from *Magic Me*, a London based Intergenerational Arts organisation and it works well for moving the young and older members of the group around.

Ask everyone to stand in a circle in alphabetical order, then ask them to get in order of birthday – as group leader you can help by organising where January should be. Be prepared to help out when and where necessary, and always include yourself.

Depending on how your group responds to this exercise and how much time you have, you can add more categories to this game i.e. in order of height, colour of eyes, people wearing blue, etc. A couple of different categories is often enough just to get the group mixing, standing next to new people, and interacting with each other about their differences and similarities.

Now you can organise the participants into small discussion groups with a good mixture of ages in each group (about 5 participants in each depending on the number of people). Tell everyone the theme to be discussed in the small group. At this stage you are still looking at general themes like: 'what was the best time of your life?', or 'what job you did/would like to do?' (For the job theme, participants could mime the different jobs to their groups, for added drama and fun). You will need to give the groups an allotted amount of time for their discussions, and make sure that they give everyone in each group time to speak.

After you have called time and made sure that everyone managed to participate, you can settle everyone back into a big group for the next story.

The Wooden Bowl – A story from many cultures retold by Allison Galbraith

After telling this story you can give everyone a strip of paper and pen, and ask them to write down *the best thing about being young* and *the best thing about getting older*. Younger children might need some help with writing and also being sensitive to older people. You may have time to share everyone's statements in a large group, but if not arrange people back into smaller discussion groups to share what they have written.

To finish the workshop, ask everyone back into a big group (sitting or standing, whatever suits your group best) and ask everyone to hold hands and then pass an energy squeeze around the group. To start this off just squeeze the hand next to you gently and ask them to pass it on; hold your hand up and cheer when the squeeze comes back to you through your other hand. You can watch the squeeze going round the circle and help out if it gets stuck or lost somewhere. If your group are really good at this, you can send the squeeze out in two different directions at the same time, one with each hand, and then watch them cross over somewhere near the middle of the circle.

Then ask the participants to each say what they have enjoyed most about the session, make sure everyone gets their say around the circle. This is always a lovely and positive way to end the session and say cheerio to the group.

Allison Galbraith

al.story@hotmail.co.uk