

Guide to Planning Odyssey of the Mind Practices

(adapted from Georgia's Odyssey of the Mind Coach Handbook)

Primary Teams (kindergarten through grade 2)

- Young children have little attention spans, so plan meetings from the moment they begin, have fun activities so that there is little or no “down” time.
- Plan for 10 to 15 minutes per activity. (Remember their attention span.)
- Start with Brainstorming, and wait until they're warmed up before you work on the Long-Term problem.
- Keep the meetings short, especially at the beginning.
- End each meeting with a silly, fun spontaneous problem.

Division I Teams (up through grade 5)

- The difference between Primary Teams and Division I Teams is the “Competition Factor.” Competition + Deadlines + Judges = BIG TIME STRESS for some kids.
- The key with these kids is Perspective. As a coach, your job is to help the kids keep their perspective. After all, this is supposed to be FUN. If you have ever worked with perfectionists (and there are a lot of them in Odyssey), you know that they are never satisfied with their creations.
- Your job is to help them maintain the playfulness and fun that is so important in Odyssey. Deemphasize the competitive aspect of the program, and don't forget the fun.
- Work on team building.
- Teach them how to set goals and reasonable deadlines.
- Bring in individuals to teach the students the skills they need to solve the problems (sewing, drilling, etc...)
- As the tournament approaches, display confidence that everything will be done in time, etc.
- Communicate with the parents and tell them what you need.
- Meetings should be tightly structured so that time is not wasted.
- Make a special effort to draw out the strengths of the quiet kids and insist that all are involved/mutually respected.
- The last two weeks before the Regional tournament can be very intense. Help them relax by holding a Family and Friend Night for their parents. Tell them they're wonderful. Let the inconsequential stuff go as it is not important.
- Celebrate the success!

Division II Teams (grades 6-8)

- Take all the above, add a liberal dose of hormones, a couple of broken hearts, and you have Division II in a nutshell.
- The key term to keep in mind that applies to nearly all Division II teams is lack of focus.
- These kids tend to “take the long way” to the tournament, but they do get there eventually. No matter how well you plan your meetings, they probably won’t accomplish anywhere near what you have planned.
- To keep conflicts to a minimum, consider dividing the team into specialized work groups for some meetings. These “subgroups” meet to work on one specific thing, such as costumes or script development.
- Team building is a must, get away from the usual meeting place occasionally and go somewhere different.

Division III Teams (grades 9-12)

- When dealing with Division III teams, the coach’s role is far less evident than with younger teams.
- At this age, the kids are certainly capable of problem solving themselves, but organizing the team into a cohesive unit is another matter. Learning when to lead, follow, delegate, and accept the authority of a peer is difficult work adult work. This is where you, the coach, come in. Your job is to facilitate the team’s efforts.
- The idea is to intervene in the process as little as feasible, leaving every possible decision up to the team.
- Remember how very different a ninth grader is from a twelfth grader. Don’t expect the same level of ability and commitment from all members of the team. It’s called “diversity” and it really does make the team more interesting.
- These kids simply do not have the same amount of time to devote to Odyssey that they did when they were younger.
- Things that are important in a job like being on time, being prepared, etc. are things you should gently emphasize.
- Odyssey is helping to prepare them for the real world, let’s get them used to the real world’s expectations.
- Be a good role model. There are far too few of these around. Any adult who is willing to spend this much time working with kids sets a wonderful example.
- Have them set their own agenda for meeting deadlines and delegating tasks. Just sit back and see how they handle it. Avoid the temptation to make their problems your problems. Marvel at their intelligence, wit, maturity and unlimited potential.