

Instructions for Movement Activities during The Opening

We started our school day with a series of activities which we called The Opening. The first thing we did, of course, was to say our morning prayers which included O Heavenly King, the Lord's Prayer, Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos, and the troparion of the day.

Next, we would practice the Psalm we were learning, sing some songs, and read (or recite) a few poems. Finally we would pick one of our movement activities. When our movement activities were finished, we would recite the Prayer Before Instruction.

After giving instructions for these various activities, we would like to offer our rationale for the activities.

These activities require either balls, wooden dowel rods, or bean bags. The following is a "parts list".

Standard 4 Square balls, about 8.5 in diameter -	one per student
Balls of various size, texture and weight	several
Wooden dowel rods, 3/4 inch in diameter and 3 feet long (perhaps decorated with ribbons)	one per student
Wooden dowel rods, 1 foot long, perhaps colored	about a dozen
Wooden dowel rods, thinner than 3/4, and 4 ft long.	one per student
Bean bags	two per student

ACTIVITIES WITH BEAN BAGS

For most these activities, you will need enough bean bags for each children to have one. For throwing into the basket, two bean bags per child is best.

I) Counting out multiplication tables

This activity requires that each child has one bean bag. The children form two lines, facing each other, so that each child is facing a partner in the other line. The bean bag is held in the right hand. In this activity the children pass their bean bag to their partner in a rhythm consistent with one of the times tables.

Let us say that we are practicing the three times tables. The children start by holding the bean bag in their right hand. They then count "one" and lightly toss the bean bag into their left hand, then they count "two" and toss the bean bag back into their right hand. Finally, they count "three" and toss, **underhand**, the bean bag to their partner. The counting and the tossing happens at the same time.

Each child tossed the bean bag with the right hand, and should catch the bean bag coming to them with the left hand. Once the bean bag is caught, it should stay in the hand in which it was caught, until the counting continues. For the three times tables, the bean bags will now be in the left hand. The counting continues with "four" and each child tosses the bean bag to their own

right hand. On “five” the bean bag is tossed back to the left hand. On “six”, the bean bag is tossed, **underhand**, to the partner. This time the bean bag is tossed with the left hand and caught with the right hand.

This pattern continues until the children have counted to thirty-six, that is, twelve times three. Notice that the bean bag is tossed to the partner only on the multiples of three - 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 24, 27, 30, 36. Do not be concerned if it takes some practice before all the children are able to throw and catch well enough to keep a rhythm.

The pattern of movements is the same with other times tables. The bean bag is tossed back and forth between a child’s hands until one of the multiples is reached. Then the bean bag is tossed to the partner. For the five times tables, the bean bag would be tossed to the other hand until “five” is counted when it is tossed to the partner.

Variations

1) Once the children are proficient enough, increase the tempo, counting faster. See how fast the children can move without confusion.

2) Complete one of the tables times to $12 \times n$, then immediately start counting backwards. For example, if the children are going to count backwards after completing the forward pattern for the three times tables, then after tossing the bean bag to their partner on “36”, they would toss to themselves on “35”, and “34”, then toss to their partner again on “33”. Continue backward to “0”.

3) Count aloud only the multiples of the times table being practiced. This variation emphasizes the multiples because the children are saying only them aloud while tossing the bean bag to their partner. All other number (the ones on which the children toss to themselves) are said very quietly, or not at all.

II) Scrambled Eggs

This game requires one less bean bag than the number of children playing. The children form a circle. (If many children are playing and the diameter of the circle is too large, it may be beset to form more than one circle and have two separate games.) The child leading the game counts “one”, then the child on the left of “one” counts “two”, and next child counts “three”, etc. until each child has a number. Once the game is started, child number “one” will be throwing to child number “two”, who will be throwing to child number “three”, who will be throwing to child number “four”, etc. The child with the highest number will be throwing to child number “one”.

Next, the leader asks, “Does everyone know to whom they are throwing?” Everyone then looks at the person to whom they will be throwing the bean bags. Then the leader asks, “Does everyone know from whom they are receiving?” Everyone turns to look at the person from whom they will be receiving the bean bags. The leader then calls out, “Scramble!” All the players move around, mixing themselves out of numerical order. The leader then calls out, “Stop!” Then the players reassemble themselves into a circle. The idea is that the children will no longer be in numerical order in the circle.

The players move in or out so that the circle is of a size suitable for tossing the bean bags. Then child number "one", who is holding a few bean bags, throws one to child number "two" who throws it to child number "three", etc. until the bean bag returns to child number "one". This is done so that everyone knows the position of the player to whom they are throwing and the position of the player from whom they are receiving.

Once this is done, the leader again throws a bean bag to player number "two", who throws it to player number "three", etc. However, this time the leader does not wait until the first bean bag returns, but, after a moment, throws another bean bag to player "two", who throws it to "three". etc. After a moment, the leader throws in a third bean bag, then a fourth and fifth, etc.

The number of bean bags which can be used at once will vary with the number of players and their skill at the game. After many years of practice and experimentation, we have determined that the maximum number of bean bags that can be in play at once is $n-1$, if n stands for the number of players.

Variation

Once the bean bags are smoothly moving among the players, the leader calls out, "Ready?" and then after a moment, "Reverse!" At this command, the players toss the bean bag they just received back to the player who threw it to them. This causes the bean bags to move in the opposite direction. The players are throwing to the one who used to be throwing to them and receiving from the one to whom they used to be throwing.

Bean Bags in the Basket

Getting Ready to Play

This game involves tossing bean bags into small basket. Generally we used a rectangular basket about 12" by 6"; use whatever size is most suitable. For this game, there should be enough bean bags for each player to have two.

The basket is placed at the end of an open space. Then short dowel rods are placed at increasing distances from the basket. Once the game starts the players will be choosing how far away they want to be from the basket. Successful throws are worth more points at greater distances.

The first rod is placed at a distance at which even the youngest player can be successful. The other rods are then placed equidistant from each other, further and further away from the basket. We placed ours about 18 to 24 inches apart.

Then two, or three, teams are made. We would often randomly assign the children numbers - 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2 - and then the ones would be on one team and the twos on the other. How the teams are made is up to the teachers.

Once the teams are decided, each team decides on the order of throwing - who goes first, second, etc. and a name for themselves. A flip of a coin determines which team throws first. Someone, or the teacher, is chosen as scorekeeper and the score is kept on the blackboard or some other place that is visible to all.

Scoring

The teams, or the teacher, decides the value of successful throws. We used this as a type of math lesson and used several variations. One method is to use one of the times tables in calculating the value of a successful throw. A successful throw from the first rod might be worth 5 points; a successful throw from the second rod might be worth 10 points; from the third rod, 15 points, etc. If using the 6 times table, the throws would be worth 6, 12, 18, etc. depending upon the distance of the throw.

A step above this method is to use distance times some fraction. For example, a good throw from the first rod might be worth $2\frac{1}{2}$ points, from the second rod, 5 points, from the third rod $7\frac{1}{2}$ points, etc. The same could be done with decimals - perhaps distance times 2.25 or 3.2, or perhaps using the formula $P = 2x + 4$, where P is the number of points and x is the distance. The method of calculation can be as simple or as complicated as the teacher deems helpful and reasonable.

Play

Once all these decisions are made, the first player of team #1 throws one bean bag. If successful, the score is noted on the blackboard, or someplace where all can see. Then the first thrower of team #2 throws one bean. Throwing alternates between teams until all on each team has thrown. Then all throw their second bean bag, in the same order. When all players have thrown two beans bags, Round One is completed and the scores are added. Then Round Two begins, following the same pattern. The number of rounds is determined by the teacher. At the end of the last round, the scores are added to see which team wins.

Variations

We have played the game while standing on balance boards, using our non-dominant arm to throw, while standing on one leg, etc.

ACTIVITIES WITH BALLS

For these games, we used the balls used in Four Square. These balls are available online at several outlets.

I) Ricochet ball

Ricochet ball, (or “Wreck a Shade” ball as the children named it after we broke a lamp shade while playing), starts with two rows of players, facing each other, in pairs. The player at the end of one of the lines needs quick access to a few balls, as he will be the one starting the play.

For the sake of clarity, let us call the lines #1 and #2. The first player in line #1 bounces the ball to the first player in line #2, who bounces the ball to the second player in line #1, who bounces the ball to the second player in line #2, who bounces the ball to the third player in line #1, who bounces the ball to the third player in line #2, etc. Once the ball has reached the last

player in line #2, that player bounces the ball back, with one bounce, to the first player in line #1, i.e. the one who started the whole ricochet action.

If there is an odd number of players, the last player can stand as the third point of a triangle with the last players of lines #1 and #2. This player has to be in a position to bounce the ball back to the first player in line #1.

When all the players are clear on “to whom they are throwing” and “from whom they are receiving”, more balls are introduced. The first player in line #1 bounces a ball to the first player in line #2, waits a moment, then bounces a second ball to the first player in line #2, then a third ball, etc. The number of balls that can be in play at one time depends upon the number of players and their skill.

Variation

Once the balls are smoothly bouncing among the players, the leader calls out, “Ready?” and then after a moment, “Reverse!” At this command, the players bounce the ball they just received back to the player who bounced it to them. This causes the balls to move in the opposite direction. The players are bouncing to the one who used to be bouncing to them.

II) Scrambled Egg with Balls

This game is played in the same way as the game with bean bags, except that the balls are bounced rather than tossed. As you can imagine, it is more challenging, as the ball often collide. The players are challenged to time their bounces so that balls do not collide. One solution is to limit the number of balls.

III) Passing Balls in a Circle

This activity is simple, but can be made more challenging by increasing the number, the size, and the variety of sizes of balls. We have used Four Square balls, soft foam balls, small wooden balls, etc. for this game.

The players form a circle in which they are close enough together to easily pass the balls. There needs to be another player, or a teacher, outside the circle. This person supplies the balls, gradually increasing the number and providing some variety of size and texture.

One of the players is chosen to start the passing and is given a ball by the one outside the circle. This player passes the ball to the person on the left (or right) and then gets another ball from the person outside the circle. This continues until there are a sufficient number of balls to make the play a challenge. Increasing the speed at which the balls are passed also increases the challenge. As with the other games, switching the direction of the balls, by calling out, “Reverse” is a good challenge.

ACTIVITIES WITH RODS

For some of these activities, we used dowel rods about three feet long and 3/4 inch in diameter. For other activities we used thinner and longer rods.

I) Counting out the multiplication tables

This game is played in the same way as counting out the multiplication tables with bean bags, except that it is played with wooden dowel rods. As you can imagine, using the dowel rods makes the game more challenging, especially since we do not want anyone hurt with the rods. The thicker, 3/4 inch diameter, rods are best for this game, these rods being more easily handled than the thinner rods.

It is important to instruct the students on how to toss the rods. The student need to hold the rods with the fingertips, not with the whole hand. In this way, the rod will stay vertical when tossed, rather than traveling in a horizontal position toward the student receiving the rod. Before using the rods in a game. Have the students practice tossing the rods until they are adept at keeping them vertical.

Once the students can handle the rods correctly, play the game just as it is played with bean bags.

II) Passing the rods in a circle

Each students holds a rod in his right hand. The students then form a circle so that each student is holding his rod in the right hand and the rod of the person on the left in the left hand. This is done so that the players are the correct distance apart. Once the circle is formed the players let go of the rod on their left.

The game starts with each student holding a rod in their right hand and proceeds much like "Counting out the Multiplication Tables". In fact, you do count out the multiplication tables. Let us assume that the students are counting out the three times tables. When counting "1", the rod would be transferred from the right hand to the left hand. On "2" the rod would be transferred back to the right hand. On "3" the rod would be extended to the right, so that the student on the right can take it. So on "3", each student is passing the rod in their right hand to the person on their right, and also receiving a rod from a person on the left. Since we can not look both directions at once, instruct the students to look in the direction where they are receiving a rod.

After the rod is passed the first time, each student will have a rod in the left hand. On "4", the rod is transferred to the right hand, on "5" the rod is transferred back to the left hand, and on "6" the rod is passed, this time to the person on the left. This time students need to look to the right to receive a rod from the person on their right.

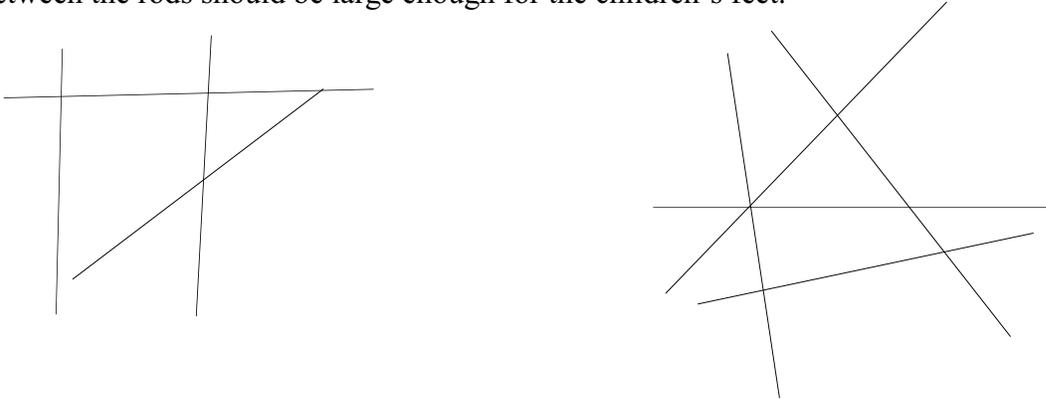
Notice how now everyone has the rod they had in the beginning of the game. (This is one advantage to decorating the rods in some way to make them distinguishable.) As the game of counting by threes continues, the rods will move back and forth rather than around the circle.

Counting by fours is done the same way, but the rods will move around the circle rather than back and forth between two players.

III) Imitation Rods

This game is not a counting game but a game of observation and imitation. If available, the longer, perhaps four foot long, rods work better than the three foot rods. Since the rods are not being tossed, they can be thinner than 3/4 inch.

The teacher, or one of the students takes some rods (no more than five) and arranges them on the floor in some pattern. The patterns can be regular or more complicated, but the spaces between the rods should be large enough for the children's feet.



The teacher or student starting the game jumps, hops, or simply walks through the shape. The other students watch carefully, then, one by one, attempt to replicate the movements of the one who started the game. Initially, the movements should be few and simple because it is important is that the students duplicate the movements as faithfully as possible. If the movements start with the left foot, the students must start with the left foot; if the movements involve a spin to the right, then the students must spin to the right. A spin to the left would be incorrect.

It will be tempting for the one starting the movements to make them very complicated, so complicated that they could not duplicate them himself. Four, but no more than six, movements is plenty in the beginning. We want the students to strengthen their powers of observation, but this must be done slowly. It is very good and helpful for those watching to position themselves so that they can imagine themselves doing the movements while the movements are being made for the first time.

IV) Jack Be Nimble

The next activity with rods is based on the nursery rhyme, "Jack Be Nimble." The whole rhyme, as we use it, is

Jack be nimble, Jack be quick, Jack jump over the candle stick.
Jack be nimble, Jack be quick, Jack jump over the candle stick.
One foot in and one foot out, clap your hands a turn about.
One foot out and one foot in, clap your hands and around we spin.

The number of students who can participate in this activity, at one time, depends on the space available and the number of rods available. The rods are laid out end-to-end to form a long, straight line. A certain number of students line up behind the rods, with enough room between each, to perform the movements. A few trial runs will make clear how much room is needed, and, therefore, how many students can be involved at once.

The students recite the rhyme one section at a time and, at the same time, perform certain movements relative to the rods. They say, “Jack” and, at the same time, step over the rod with their right foot. They say, “be quick” and, at the same time, return their right foot back to its original position. They say, “Jack”, and at the same time, step over the rod with their left foot. They say, “be quick”, and at the same time, return their left foot to its original position. Then they say, “Jack jump over the candle stick” and, at the same time, jump, with both feet, over the rod. The goal is that the children never touch the rods with their feet during any of these movements. Their movements must be precise.

Now the students are standing in front of the rods. They repeat the same section of the rhyme, but this time, while saying, “Jack”, they step back over the rod with the right foot, then on “be quick” returning the right foot. The same sequence is repeated with the left foot, back over the rod on “Jack”, and returning on “be quick.” When they say, “Jack jump over the candle stick”, they jump, with both feet, backwards over the rods.

Now the students are behind the rods again. They say “One foot in and one foot out” and, at the same time, jump, in a quarter circle to the right, so that one foot is on one side of the rods and the other foot is on the other side of the rods. Then, they clap their hands once as they say, “clap your hands”; then as they say, “and turn about”, they jump with both feet, spin in the air, and turn 180° to the right. Now they should be facing the opposite direction.

Next, they say, “One foot out and one foot in, clap your hands”, clapping their hands once as they say, “clap your hands”; then as they say, “and around we spin”, they jump with both feet, spin in the air, and turn 180° to the right. Many of our students wanted to spin 360° on this last spin. This is a very acceptable option.

When the children are familiar with the movements and can perform them with some precision, we increase the tempo of the activity by reciting the rhyme more quickly. The question is, “How quickly can they move with precision?”

V) Balancing Rods

One of our students came up with this simple and enjoyable activity. Either the longer, thinner rods, or the shorter, thicker rods work for this activity. The students attempt to balance a rod on their fingers or palms for as long as possible. The student must not touch, or support, the rod at any time, and the rod must not touch anything at any time. The student who balances the rod the longest wins. We have added a challenge to this simple activity by reciting a poem, or singing a song while balancing the rods.

Walking in a Circle and Counting to Twelve

This activity does not require any equipment. The students simply form a circle, then they all turn to the right. They should then arrange the distance between them so that they can walk without stepping on one another's heels - although if anyone is inattentive, this may happen.

The students walk in a circle, counting out loud, saying a number with each step. It is important that saying the number and stepping happen at the same time. Count to twelve. Then count to twelve again, this time taking a step backward with each number.

Walk in a circle again, counting as before, but this time, when saying twelve, take a step backward. Start again, counting as before, but this time take a step backward on eleven and twelve. Start again, counting as before, but this time take a step backward on ten, eleven and twelve. The pattern should be clear. Each time the students count to twelve, they start stepping backward one number earlier. At the end, they are walking backward for all twelve numbers.

The idea of the game is simple, but it requires a lot of concentrate. If someone steps backward too early, or if someone steps backward too late, there will be collisions. This is part of the fun and also a reminder of the attention required.

There is a tendency for the children to gradually make the circle smaller, so it may be helpful to use some objects, perhaps some chairs, as points of reference. Being required to walk around the chairs will help keep the circle the correct size.

Why We Spend Time This Way Every Morning

It is important to realize that, while the children regard The Opening as a time of games, play and simple enjoyment, the teachers see it as a very serious class. As with any of the academic classes, we have particular objectives in mind. We appreciate the wisdom of the ages and realize that it is no mistake that the Latin word for school, *ludus*, is also the word for game. Play is serious work for children. It is we adults who wrongly think that games and learning are opposites, that is, that one is either playing or learning. We conclude that if children are playing, then they are not learning.

Our pedagogy, or educational philosophy, is based on the idea that the time children spend in school is far more than a time to learn facts and academic skills. These things are obviously taught, but they are taught in a larger framework. As an Orthodox Christian school, we believe that the time children spend in school should contribute to their salvation. Bishop THOMAS (Joseph), of the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America, has used the term "sanctified schooling" to express this idea.

One of the principles we have tried to follow is "from the whole to the part." In academic matters, this is seen in our attempt to give the students an experience in a subject before presenting too much information. In The Opening incorporates this idea because we start the day together before dividing into various ages and classes. This time together provides many benefits.

Doing activities together helps to build healthy relationships among the students. They get to know each other in a light-hearted, but disciplined environment. Since students of all ages are together, the older students have an opportunity to help the younger ones and the younger ones have an opportunity to learn from the older ones. The younger students draw out the best in the older students, and in turn come to know that they are loved and cared for by them. We have consistently found these opportunities to be of great benefit to all.

As much as possible, the teachers participate in many of these activities. This strengthens the bond between the adults and the children. Children are very touched when adults are willing to play with them. They know that they are loved and they respond in kind.

Another, perhaps more subtle, benefit of this time together is that the teachers have a chance to observe the students in a relaxed setting. Sometimes children come to school still struggling with something that happened the evening before and in the morning before school. Perhaps a pet is sick, or the child lost a favorite toy. Maybe they had been disobedient and are suffering the consequences. Many things happen that can weigh on a child's heart and a child with a heavy heart will have trouble learning. It is good for the teachers to have an opportunity to see this before the normal classes begin.

We have also seen that the play and joy of the Opening tends to help children regain the internal equilibrium that is necessary for learning. The activities calm the heart so the mind can be receptive.

The rationale behind the Opening can also be examined from a neurological perspective. Sometimes children come to school after a hurried morning of waking up, washing up, a quick breakfast and an attempt to be on time for school. The activities of the Opening give opportunities for the brain to wake up and focus. The movement gets more blood and oxygen to the brain, getting it prepared for the academic challenges to be presented later in the day.

Anyone who has taught for any length of time has experienced the fact that children who are happy learn far more easily than children who are troubled about something. This relationship between the emotions and the ability to learn is seen in the structure of the brain. Those structures of the brain which are concerned with the making of new memories are directly next to the structures concerned with the emotions. There are millions of neural connections between these two areas. The playful approach to the math and language arts tends to whet the appetite for the rest of the day, much like the function of an appetizer before the main meal.

Finally, we can look at the Opening in terms of the powers of the soul. As with all our classes, we try to engage all three powers. Again and again, we have seen that when we are able to do this, the children learn more quickly, more deeply, and develop a love for learning.

How the power of will is engaged is rather obvious. There is plenty of opportunity for physical discipline and control. We expect the students to be as precise as possible. In order to play correctly, the students must be observant. This is very clear in Imitation Rods, is true for all the games.

The affective power, what St. Theophan calls the heart, is engaged through the joy of the relationship among the students, the beauty of the Psalms, of poetry, and of the songs. The mind is challenged by the requirement of learning the Psalms, poems and songs by heart.