

INTRODUCTION

This is an unusual book. It is inventive and full of surprises. Each of the activities in “Play by the Rules” is highly original—designed specifically for the purpose of sharpening listening and direction-following skills. You’ll find no silly instructions to color bunny ears pink or squirrel tails brown here. Rather, you will encounter all sorts of unexpected challenges, ranging from instructions that will produce extremely sophisticated designs to listening games guaranteed to keep children on the edges of their seats

Although the spirit of fun—of play—sets the personality of this book, there is a serious purpose. Good listening and direction-following skills are vital to a child’s success in the classroom. As our society becomes more complex, they are becoming increasingly vital to success in adult life, also. This is particularly true in terms of spoken (as opposed to written) directions. It is a fact of modern life that we are receiving more and more of our information through electronically-transmitted speech ... be it cell phones, computers, radio, or TV.

You will notice that we have made an attempt to vary both the length and the level of difficulty of the activities. The book begins with a series of three “warm-up” exercises designed to provide some practice in the various types of instructions children will be encountering. It then continues with a number of relatively simple challenges. But the simplicity does not last for long, for very quickly children will be producing some highly complex responses as they follow your directions.

Since all of the activities involve information that you will be presenting orally, we have provided what amounts to a script for you to follow. Of course, there will be times when your own words and style will be better. However, the instructions have been so carefully structured that very little “ad libbing” should be necessary.

Speaking of structure, it is very important that you set up some firm guidelines regarding children’s behavior during these exercises. Stress that although the activities will be a lot of fun, they must be done according to your rules. For example, don’t allow children to ask for instructions to be repeated over and over again. Let them know from the start that it is their responsibility to listen carefully if they want to “play.” To make sure you are firmly in charge, it would probably be a good idea for you to run through each of these activities yourself ahead of time. Or you might wish to try them out on a friend or colleague.

You will notice that we have provided a number of typical solutions to the challenges you will be presenting. Be sure to take a glance at them before you launch in. You will also note that most of the activities require very little advance preparation. In some instances we ask you to provide a simple worksheet that you will need to draw and duplicate, but keep in mind that your squares, rectangles and circles don't have to be perfect. Also, you will occasionally need some props, such as soda crackers, bread slices, paper clips, etc. The youngsters themselves will require nothing more than a pencil and occasionally crayons, a ruler or scissors. We have tried to keep things simple!

One word of caution. It will always be very important to emphasize to students that they are to react only after you have spoken the entire direction. Students who jump into an activity too soon will be sorry!

So there is some serious work ahead. But the fun of this book—the play—should not be minimized. We think there is enough of that to make these activities highly motivational. The students we worked with as we were developing "Play by the Rules" had great fun with challenges such as "The Triangle-ope," in which they were asked to draw an imaginary animal in response to a make-believe explorer's written account. But we expected that. What surprised us was the amount of fun they had with the tougher activities, such as "Build a Message." They seemed to take genuine delight in the realization that they were capable of meeting some very complex challenges simply by listening carefully and taking one step at a time.

In short, we feel this book offers a fresh and effective approach to the teaching of listening and direction-following skills. We know it contains activities you will not find anywhere else ... of that much we're sure, because we had the fun of inventing them!

We hope you will find this book enjoyable to use and that your students will benefit as they learn to ... **PLAY BY THE RULES!**