

GOOD YEAR BOOKS

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BEYOND THE EASY ANSWER

DISCOVERING NEW PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES THROUGH
COMMUNICATION GAMES, STORIES, AND DREAMS

RICHARD WEINTRAUB

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TERESA LAKIER

SECOND EDITION

 **GOOD YEAR BOOKS**

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to Jessica and Brandon, Jana and David, Larry and Denise and to my biggest fan and favorite artist, my wife, Nina.

A special thanks to Teresa Lakier for her creative and whimsical illustrations and to my mentors and friends, Dr. David Bidna, Dr. Leroy Baca, Richard Krieger, Sandy Giffis, and to my oldest friends Stan Cooper, Jerry Persky, Elliot Kerzner, Norm Tuch, and to so many others who are too many to mention.

My gratitude also goes to David Weiner, Dr. Aaron Willis, Lindsey Drager, Naomi Sweo, and Roberta Dempsey of Good Year Books.



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Good Year Books
A Division of Social Studies School Service
10200 Jefferson Boulevard
Culver City, CA 90232-0802

(800) 421-4246

Cover design: Mark F. Gutierrez
Illustrations: Teresa Lakier
Book design: A.R. Harter
Editor: Naomi Sweo

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ISBN-13: 978-1-59647-429-1

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P R E F A C E

The real secret to happiness is not found in the mastery of formal theories or dogmas but in a search for balance between mind and body, words and deeds, rational and intuitive powers, and pragmatic and dreaming states of being. I have designed the activities in *Beyond the Easy Answer* to help students/teachers improve their creativity and communication skills and to enhance decision-making and problem-solving abilities. As students/teachers move through the activities, they will discover that creative thinking serves as a real challenge to the way we all normally do things. Students/teachers will discover new insights into how they perceive the world both inside and outside their body, leading them to be less fearful, more open to change, and more loving of themselves and of those around them.

Above all, students/teachers must be aware, stretch their mind, use their imagination, allow themselves the experience of really seeing and feeling things, listening carefully, questioning everything, traveling light, and remembering what they find.

Richard Weintraub

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INTRODUCTION

The collective process of deciding on an answer is an exciting test of a group's creative potential. The intent goes beyond merely providing students with rainy day entertainment, and into the realms of truly creative thinking. The words we use every day; the names we are given and the labels we give to others; the sights, sounds, and smells around us; the roles we play; our body language; the obvious and the things we take for granted; the anxiety and rejection we face daily; and the power of the mind are facets of life with which these creative problem-solving exercises deal. The different types of problems provided represent the different sides of our community, our society, and ourselves.

Why is it so essential to foster creative thinking? Look around you. Personal problems and social ills abound—problems that do not easily yield to conventional, linear problem-solving approaches. What is needed are new ways of looking at the old problems and novel ways of resolving old conflicts. Our educational institutions generally do not prepare students in this regard. Creative thinking is not found on most class syllabi. Instead, rote learning with answers “at the back of the book” dominates almost every class offered in our elementary, middle, and high schools.

Chapter 1 of this book includes challenging, problem-solving exercises designed to help effect change in the normal classroom routine.

Chapter 2 contains self-awareness games to improve social interaction skills, which are essential to creative problem solving. They are designed to help provide insight into one's self from an internal and external perspective. This chapter also includes stories of people with whom I have personally interacted.

Chapter 3 is about a new approach to communication called *communisynthesis*, which combines creativity and spirituality to present a new hierarchy of questions and a new way of listening and observing human behavior. This chapter now includes a section on communication and learning, including information about retention and test taking.

Chapter 4 is about the most overlooked form of communication: dreams. The activities therein demonstrate the power of the unconscious mind and the purpose and importance of dream interpretation, which can significantly affect the way we lead our lives.

Chapter 5 provides students with background information on brainstorming, as well as an interesting example of how to apply the creative problem-solving process to everyday personal

2 ■ INTRODUCTION

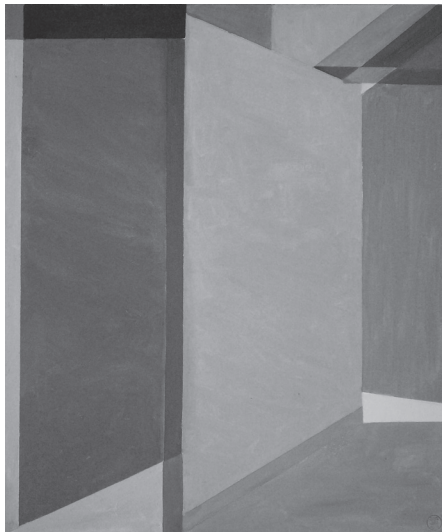
problems and social issues. After students have tackled the issue of the “TV Watchers’ Syndrome,” they will be better prepared to deal with other personal and social problems.

The final chapter of the book includes quotes from famous people and an explanation for how students can use them to motivate themselves and inspire others.

This book will provide you with an alternative, a creative supplement to add to more typical classroom fare. The exercises are designed to free students from the restraints of conventional thinking, as well as to improve their questioning skills and their listening abilities. By working through this book, students will be on their way to getting beyond the easy answer into the realm of the creative.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM-SOLVING EXERCISES



Approach the easy as though it were difficult and the difficult as though it were easy.

—Baltasar Gracian

METHODOLOGY

The following problem-solving exercises may be used in the following ways:

1. As a springboard to motivate a group,
2. As a way of introducing analytical and creative thinking in the classroom, or
3. As a way of setting the stage for the humanization of school and social relationships.

These exercises have been collected from many people. They have been successfully pre-tested with elementary school children as young as seven years of age, junior high and senior high school students, delinquent youths, lawyers, law students, teachers, and law enforcement and justice agency personnel. Exercises marked by an asterisk are especially appropriate for younger children. The average guessing time per problem for elementary school students is approximately thirty minutes; for junior high school students, twenty minutes per problem; for most senior high school students and adults, fifteen to twenty minutes per problem. The time required to come up with a solution may also vary, depending on the number of people working together on the problem. You can use all of the exercises with large groups, small groups, or with individuals. The answers on these pages are not the only acceptable answers; other solutions may prove to be equally valid.

Because the exercises require creative thinking skills, listening skills, and observational skills, each participant has the opportunity to participate equally, regardless of academic ability, previous school record, academic achievement, or cultural background. You may discover, in fact, that some youths and adults who are steeped in traditional thinking and accustomed to solving problems in a very logical manner may have a great deal of difficulty with some of these exercises. Many of the questions encourage, if not actually require, “far-out thinking” and nontraditional problem-solving approaches.

INSTRUCTIONS

Follow these steps for each of the following problem-solving exercises:

1. The teacher should have the student select a leader. This can be the teacher or a student.
2. Tell the group they will be given a problem and must come up with an answer for that problem. Remind them that words often have multiple meanings and therefore may not always have the meaning we normally attribute to them.
3. Inform participants that their task is to ask questions of the leader until they solve the problem. Remind participants that the questions they ask may be more important than the answers.
4. Advise participants to listen to all clues and answers and to be patient and perseverant in order to be effective problem solvers.
5. Provide positive reinforcement for all answers, but continue to play out the exercise until the solution provided in the answer section is reached or until another acceptable solution is reached.
6. When presenting the problem, do not mention the name of the exercise (e.g., Gender Bender) as this may give away the answer.
7. Provide leads or hints to the group depending on their age and maturity. Do not give too many hints, for it is important that the group experiences some frustration and that cooperation results from this effort.
8. Use the exercises frequently. Do not, however, attempt too many at one time. See if the players can apply what they have learned on one occasion to a different problem, using the same creative thinking process.
9. Engage the group in a discussion following each exercise. Students will then more fully appreciate the significance of the creative thinking experience.
10. Refer to the answer and reflection questions for each exercise. It is also important that students go beyond these exercises and begin to apply the creative thinking process to actual personal and social problems.

EXERCISES

WORD PLAY

1. A man is afraid to go home because a masked man is waiting for him there.

Question: Why is he afraid to go home?

Answer: The man is a baseball player attempting to score a run. He is afraid to go home (home plate) because the catcher is waiting to put him out.

2. A man is found dead outside a bar surrounded by fifty-three bicycles.

Question: What did the fifty-three bicycles have to do with his death?

Answer: The man was killed for cheating at cards. His body was surrounded by pictures of bicycles, which are found on the reverse side of a deck of playing cards. The fifty-third card was the one he had added to win the game dishonestly.

3. A man goes on a job interview and is asked the following questions:

Would you be willing to learn how to drive an automobile with a stick shift? Would you be willing to own a dog? Would you be willing to bring your dog to work with you?

Question: To successfully acquire the job, how would you answer these questions?¹

Answer: If you answered “yes” to all three questions, you would have gotten the job. What does each of the questions represent?

Automobile with a stick shift: This represents your willingness to learn something new, to be able to multitask and take charge of the job.

Dog: The dog represents your willingness to take responsibility for something or someone other than yourself—your ability to demonstrate empathetic and caring behaviors.

Bring your dog to work: This represents your willingness to break the rules and take risks and your desire to bring your passion to the workplace.

Reflective Questions

1. Can you think of a time when you were afraid to go home?
2. Describe the different masks you wear each day. Under what conditions do you wear them?
3. Have you ever cheated at anything? Explain.
4. What settings do you connect most frequently with physical violence? Home? Restaurant? Airplane? School? Why?
5. When are you willing to take risks to improve yourself?
6. Why are empathy and kindness such important values?

¹ This is a true story of a job interview conducted by Peter Norton at a philanthropic foundation. The position was that of executive director of the foundation.