

# The Group Game

## Goals:

- To focus attention
- To increase student participation
- To require silent reading
- To provide positive reinforcement

Often when a group of students reads orally (an essential exercise), the student who is reading is paying attention while many of the others are not. These students, who are supposed to be listening, daydream or become otherwise distracted. Playing The Group Game involves everyone in the process of reading each sentence on a page or each word in a word list. The student reading aloud also reads more carefully.

## Materials:

- Reading books
- Play money (or objects used as a reward system)

You can use any play money bills that you have available. You may wish to use one dollar or ten dollar bills for younger students and hundred dollar bills with older ones. You can also choose other objects as a reward, although, in the author's experience, play money seems to be most effective.

## Directions:

Distribute five toy bills to each student and keep ten or twenty bills for yourself (depending on group size). Tell the student who reads aloud that he or she can earn another bill from the teacher by reading his assigned sentence or word perfectly. (Judge students primarily on accuracy, not fluency.) Explain that the reader must pay a bill to anyone who catches him or her making a mistake. If nobody catches an error, however, all students pay the reader. **Change readers at any time, even in the middle of a sentence.** If a student loses his or her place, he or she pays the teacher.

Students who catch the reader making a mistake must raise their hands appropriately and not speak out. Students who blurt out the word before the reader decodes it, or who extend their arms frantically and make a commotion, lose a bill.

Be flexible with the rules while working within them. Positive reinforcement is very important. Reward a student with a bill for trying hard, even though he or she made several mistakes. If a student struggles, deduct only one bill per sentence, rather than one per mistake. Give the student making the mistake a chance to correct himself, and then reward both the reader and any pupils who noticed the mistake.

Quickly discourage negative behavior. If other students interrupt a particular pupil who is nervous and having difficulty, make them pay the reader rather than the teacher. Students who speak disparagingly about others should pay. Students who distract others (whether they are reading or not) should also pay. You will be surprised at how quickly you can focus your students' attention when you use The Group Game. If students are daydreaming, immediately make them readers.

After they lose a few bills, their focus stays on the reading material. It is important to give everyone ample opportunity for success and reward. Some pupils may need a reward even though they make mistakes, so that they will keep trying hard. Other students may need to feel their gains and losses in order to practice control. Everyone needs to succeed. If students stay focused and follow the reading steps, they will. You know the game is going well when everyone ends the game with more money than when he or she began and each student has about an equal amount. Of course, this isn't going to happen every time, but it will start to happen naturally as you play The Group Game more frequently.

**Please Note:** In addition to reading, the game can be used to teach significant values such as common courtesy, consideration of other students' feelings, trying hard and paying attention. Some may be concerned about the use of play money as a reward because they feel it promotes a degree of materialism and status seeking. Others are bothered by the competitive aspect of the game because they feel that learning should be cooperative in nature. If you take advantage of the flexibility of the rules, you can get the benefits of competition without the drawbacks. Similarly, you can avoid promoting materialism. In the author's experience the play money is the most effective reward mechanism. Of course, other rewards can be used.