

Subject: Campfire Leadership

Course: Program

Time Frame

1 hour 30 minutes

Instructional Objectives

At the end of this session, each participant will be able to

- Tell why we have campfires.
- Describe the basic elements of a campfire.
- Share examples of campfire elements.
- Plan a campfire that is appealing and meaningful to youth.

Training Aids and Equipment Required

- Campfire Program Planner, No. 33696
- *Boy Scout Songbook*, No. 33224
- *Group Meeting Sparklers*, No. 33122

- *Cub Scout Leader How-To Book*, No. 33832
- Flip chart and markers

Materials for Distribution

- Copy of this lesson plan, one per participant

Methods and Overview

- Minilecture and group discussion: Why Have a Campfire
- Minilecture: Elements of a Campfire
- Minilecture: Types of Campfires
- Minilecture: Campfire Planning
- Minilecture and group discussion: Campfire Standards
- Group discussion and project: Putting It All Together

LESSON PLAN: Campfire Leadership

This fun instruction period includes sharing examples of campfire material. Careful planning to involve staff members and course participants will make the session more fun and memorable for all.

Why Have a Campfire

Begin this session by singing a rousing song or cheer. Ask the participants: Why do we have campfires? List their responses on a flip chart. Guide the group to include the following:

- **Fun**—Enjoyment for all participants.
- **Entertainment**—The best kind of entertainment in the forest or camp setting.
- **Fellowship**—Deeper than just “fun”; here we bring the group closer together.
- **Action**—A time to let off some steam in a constructive, enjoyable way.
- **Adventure**—A well-performed campfire can be a memorable experience.
- **Education**—Teaching new skills and learning new things.
- **Inspiration**—A great opportunity to build the character of our Scouts.
- **Leadership Development**—An opportunity for a Scout to perform before a group.

Elements of a Campfire

During this portion of the session, use a chef's outfit and a big pot for a great visual aid. As you discuss each element, have another staff member or a participant demonstrate a short example of each.

A campfire program is like a great stew. Each ingredient is good by itself. Each ingredient adds and complements the others. The stew is best when each ingredient is added in the proper amount and in the proper order. Campfire programs are created the same way.

Opening Ceremonies

The opening ceremony sets the tone of your campfire program. Whether your evening is to be serious or silly, the opening still must be sharp and incisive. It must arrest and then hold the attention of the audience.

Of course, the type of campfire will determine the type of opening ceremony. Yours may reflect humor, mystery, or an American Indian setting, which, properly done, can be excellent and fit into Scouting very well. The lighting of the fire is usually considered a part of the opening ceremony.

Get your program under way fast and with plenty of enthusiasm. Use lively songs and cheers. You may want to include introductions early in the evening and certainly, if you have new campers present, you will want to recognize them. Have each one lay a stick of wood on the fire to symbolize joining the group.

Short Takes

Stunts and **skits** are the main event of the campfire. They should be planned and well-rehearsed.

Stunts are games or magic (sleight of hand, “mental telepathy”) acts. They must have enough action and be visible to keep the audience’s attention.

Ideally, a skit should last three to five minutes; longer than that and the crowd loses interest regardless of what the punch line is. Skits can be action-oriented, contests, humorous, or educational (how to, woodcraft).

Tell participants about the following resources, which makes campfire planning easier.

- *Scouting* magazine
- *Boys’ Life* magazine—especially “Think & Grin”
- *Junior Leader Handbook*
- *Scoutmaster Handbook*
- *Boy Scout Songbook*

These resources are all good, but the best one is imagination and the *original* stunts concocted more or less spontaneously. Since original stunts are often tailor-made to fit local situations, with some thought they can be extremely entertaining.

Cheers can be lots of fun and build a friendly atmosphere. Use cheers during the opening ceremony to set the tone of your campfire.

Applause can provide a variety of action such as the Round of Applause, Big Hand, etc.

Run-ons are very short skits ideal for filling in the seconds between acts. They keep the pace moving and can be planned in the program or impromptu. Every staff member should have two or three run-ons ready to go so that at the first sign of delay, one can be performed.

There are many good resources for skits, such as the jokes in *Boys’ Life* magazine, which can help get you started.

Songs

Songs help build enthusiasm and excitement at the beginning of the campfire program or help to slow the tempo at the end to set the right atmosphere for the Scoutmaster’s Minute.

Tips for Song Leading

Song leading can be very easy, even for the beginner, with a little practice. Successful song leaders

- Know that singing boosts morale and that songs can build spirit and enthusiasm.
- Know the song well and can sing it alone and teach it confidently.
- Practice the song in advance, regardless how well they know it. (Practicing in front of a mirror is good, or with a few supportive staff members.)
- Project energy and enthusiasm.
- Take charge, keep the introduction short, and stay in charge during the song.
- Teach a new song a few lines at a time, and keep it short.
- Give the pitch for the song.
- Lead with their entire body if it's an action song, just with their hands if it's a slow song. They keep the audience at the same tempo using their actions.
- Sing the songs and do the actions during the songs, but avoid meaningless arm waving.
- Stand for action songs, and have the audience stay seated for slow songs.
- Rehearse with other campfire participants, if possible, by determining who will do and say what parts. They don't start out poorly prepared because they know they will lose the audience.
- Start off on the right foot by announcing the song they plan to sing. Don't ask, "Do you know this song?" or "Do you want to sing this song?" because invariably there will be negative feedback from the audience.
- Move their head in time to the syllables of the words as they are sung. They regulate the volume by raising or lowering the hands.
- Put their whole body and enthusiasm into leading, get into the swing and rhythm of the time. They never stand there like a bump on a log.
- After singing, tell audience members what a great job they did. That encourages them to sing.
- Hum the song or sing the first few words to establish the right pitch for the group.
- Avoid yelling, even with an enthusiastic group that will tend to sing more loudly.
- Avoid teaching new songs at the campfire, since teaching at the campfire mars the mystical effect and makes the audience harder to control.
- Keep the coaching period brief and repeat the words several times. They have everyone read the song the first time or two at a slower pace, speeding up to full tempo only after the group becomes more familiar with it.
- Use song sheets or a songbook so the participants have a copy of the words.

Of the many resources for songs to sing at camp, the best one is the *Boy Scout Songbook*.

Stories

Stories can be a real treat in any campfire with the right storyteller. Stories can come from a variety of sources. The best ones have at least some truth in them. Scouts like stories of adventure and action. Serious stories can be used as a Scoutmaster's Minute to help teach or illustrate a moral point.

Telling a story well requires reading it several times and then several times more out loud. When the teller has the basic points down and feels comfortable with the plot, the story should be told out loud several more times for practice. New stories can be learned by reading them or hearing them from other storytellers. The best storytellers make their stories come to life by using imagination and personality.

Tell participants about the variety of storytelling.

- **Ghost Stories.** These are the most-requested type of campfire story, but one that **must** be handled with care. A good scare can be fun, but **never try to frighten your Scouts** with a ghost story. In Scouting we try to make Scouts feel at home in the woods. A ghastly story can spoil months of work, so don't make your ghost stories too tough—and always explain away the “supernatural” parts.
- **Adventure Stories.** Your own imagination is your only limitation here. This is the best choice for campfire stories. The adventure can be true, fictional, historical, and involve Scouting, nature, American Indian, pioneers—even things that have happened in camp. A leader can tell about war experiences, or a Scout can describe the troop's last overnight adventure. Poems such as “The Cremation of Sam McGee” by Roger Service, or “The Shooting of Dan McGrew” will work, too.
- **Humorous Stories.** American folklore with its tall tales and impossible exaggeration falls almost automatically into this category. There are fine humorous stories in some of Mark Twain's books.
- **Hero Stories (Inspirational).** The Bible is an outstanding source of hero stories. Sometimes stories of legendary or Native American Indian heroes can be used. War heroes, particularly those with a Scouting background, make fine story subjects. Great explorers and pioneers furnish wonderful material for stories of heroes.
- **Miscellaneous Stories.** Included in this category are stories by the Scouts themselves such as “Things I never knew 'til now” and reports of the day on various camp or troop activities. The moral-tipped short stories used in the Scoutmaster's Minute come under this heading, as well as the “look-at-this” stories by the naturalist or hike master.

Showmanship

Showmanship is the real gravy of the campfire stew. All campfire acts must be practiced so that they can be performed well. Plan the order of acts so the pace of the campfire flows smoothly.

Costumes can be used to help the audience visualize roles in skits, run-ons, etc. *Simple* costumes work best since they allow performers to quickly slip in and out of characters. Costumes must be tasteful, too.

Keep these tips in mind when planning your campfire.

- **Follow the fire!** This is rule No. 1. When the fire leaps high, make the program lively and loud. As it dies down, the program becomes quieter and deeper.
- **Plan the program** by putting the “best” stunts or skits last and the next-best first. Put noisy, lively stunts early in the show, and quiet stunts toward the end.
- **Vary the pace.** Scatter stunts or skits among individuals in the crowd who will be leading group stunts for the program.
- **Use a tom-tom off in the distance.** The tom-tom makes an excellent mood-setter for the preopening ceremony.
- **Create a torch-lit trail for the “approach” to the campfire.** Use No. 10 cans filled with kerosene-soaked sand, buried in the ground.
- **Sing during the approach.** Singing sounds wonderful to visitors at the fireside—with the music faint in the distance and then louder as the troops arrive and take their places.
- **Create campfire traditions.** Tradition just naturally clings to a campfire. Here is a good tradition builder: Make a ceremony of saving some of the embers of the season's last big council fire. At the first council fire of the next season, put them in the fire and tell something about the previous season.

- **Maintain crowd control.** This might be easy with a small group, but organizers should control larger crowds *before* they reach the campfire area. Do this by insisting on a silent approach to the council ring—“In our camp, no one ever makes a sound on the council ring trail. It’s an old tradition.” Use Scouts and Scouters from the Order of the Arrow or old-timers as guides. Be sure that there is sufficient light in the campfire area for boys to find their seats easily. If the crowd is really big, the program director and guides should allocate seating areas during daylight. Then the job at night will be easier.
- **Maintain discipline.** The leader must be rather tough about discipline (in a tactful way) right from the start. Explain at the outset that “We just don’t do any razzing or booing here.” If it starts, the leader must squelch it **immediately** and hard. The show-off (and there seems to be one in every crowd) must be stopped fast, too. If a friendly request for cooperation fails to quiet him, then give him more attention than he is bidding for by inviting him up front to lead the event he is disturbing, or to do it better, if he can.
- **Encourage audience participation.** This is vital to almost any successful campfire program. Songs work well.
- **Use recognition during the program.** Either awards or appreciation should have a place on the campfire program.
- **Utilize inspiration.** Successful campfires incorporate inspiration by place, procedure, and program; it contributes mightily to showmanship.
- **Leave campfire quietly.** Don’t allow running or shouting. Have Arrowmen hold torches (railroad fuses) along the trail back to camp.
- **Conduct campfires infrequently.** Don’t have campfires too frequently. (Even steak eaten three times a day becomes old stuff.)

Closing Ceremony

Make the **closing ceremony** quiet and inspirational. Use quiet songs and maybe a thought or Scoutmaster’s Minute. Old-timers and key Scouters can help here. “Call to Quarters” or “Taps” sounded way off on a hilltop or in the distance adds just the right touch.

Types of Campfires

There are a number of campfire types to choose from.

- **General**—Includes some of all the elements of a campfire: songs, skits, run-ons, cheers, stories, and so on. This is the most common type of campfire. Generally, the staff will put on an opening campfire for campers on the first evening. On the last evening, many camps have a campfire that involves selected troops and staff acts to round out the program. This presents a great opportunity for entertaining parents and guests.
 - **Songfest**—A great opportunity to sing favorite songs and learn new ones.
 - **Storytelling**—An opportunity for the great storytellers to spin their yarns.
 - **Educational/Inspirational**—Generally more calm songs set the mood, with the bulk of the time devoted to a motivational, educational, or inspirational speaker.
 - **Award**—An awards ceremony opportunity such as a court of honor or Order of the Arrow recognitions.
 - **Specialty**—You make up your own. One camp had a theme that all the acts (songs, skits, etc.) followed for the program. Other specialty programs start out in the campfire bowl and move around camp as the story is played out. Some of the specialty themes that camps have used include “Come and See,” “Search for the Lost Dutchman’s Gold Mine,” and “Find Black Jack’s Hideout.”
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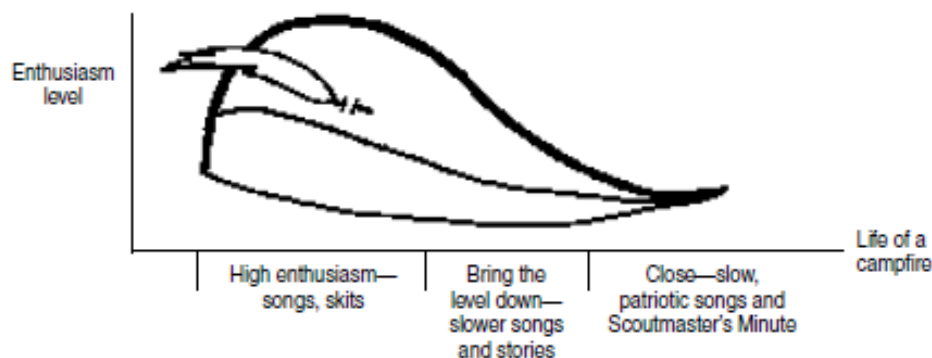
Campfire Planning

Campwide campfires are planned, well-rehearsed productions staged by staff members. Everyone has a role to play. Usually, it is the same show each week with little change. Troop campfires, however, allow patrols to put on songs, cheers, stunts, and skits. Note the difference and don't try to make a troop campfire like a campwide campfire.

When staff members are invited to troop campfires, they should be ready to lead a song, tell a story, or provide a stunt. This is an opportunity for staff members to be model leaders.

While planning the campwide campfire, remember that Scouts are used to instant excitement and entertainment because of the fast pace of television. (Television commercials are placed an average of every 7.5 minutes to break up the pace of programming and to keep the viewer's attention to the program. Even the best skits, stories, etc., have difficulty holding the audience for more than 7.5 minutes.)

- **Opening.** Use a rousing song or cheer to build audience enthusiasm and participation, followed by a fire lighting (or have the fire prelit).
- **Closing.** Use a Scoutmaster's Minute to train, inspire, and motivate.
- **Length.** Campfires must move along at a quick pace and last approximately 45 minutes but not longer than 1 hour 15 minutes. The ideal length is one hour. Keep the television model in mind: Sit-coms last 30 minutes, dramas last an hour.
- **Written Agenda.** It is very important that the campfire program agenda be written and shared. Computers and copy machines make sharing copies of the program with all participants easy. Everyone will know when to go on and when to be ready so that there are no pauses between acts. This works well in most situations. When it is not possible to share a written agenda, the master of ceremonies should announce who is up and who is on deck (next) to keep the pace moving.
- **Three-Second Rule.** At no time should there be a pause in the campfire program of more than three seconds. To keep the enthusiasm at the desired level in a campwide campfire, staff members should perform run-ons or cheers if a unit or staff act is not prepared.
- **Follow the Flames.** The pace and level of enthusiasm should follow the flames of the campfire. At the beginning of the fire the flames leap high. The fire burns brightly for a time and begins to fade until only the coals are left. Visually, the campfire pace can be shown as a "Robin Hood hat." The fire and the program build quickly but after a time the flames and the enthusiasm fade until the end.



Campfire Standards

It is important that camp and program directors take the lead, with support from staff members by not allowing unacceptable program material to be performed at a campfire. The unit leader or master-of-campfire should screen all acts prior to performance at a campwide campfire. In Scouting we teach positive moral values. Campfire programs should be the place where the positive example is set. The list of don'ts include:

- Toilet humor—anything that involves bodily functions, toilet paper, etc.
- Water—where the audience or participants get wet
- Embarrassing an audience member
- Racial put-downs, making fun of mental or physical disabilities, religious groups, and others
- Portraying violent behavior
- Anything with sexual overtones
- Anything that is not in keeping with the ideals of the Boy Scouts of America

Ask participants how the don'ts can be controlled. State that in parts of our society the don'ts have become pervasive and, to some, acceptable. But in Scouting, we have standards and can and must rise above "gutter entertainment." If any of these unacceptable items do slip into the campfire program, as the leader, stop them mid-act and move on to the next act.

If an unacceptable act does get "on stage," it is important for the camp or program director to stop the act before it gets too far. One camp uses a "tree check" to take care of the situation. When a senior staff member recognizes an unacceptable act, they yell, "Tree check." All the staff members yell "tree check" and start checking the trees around the campfire bowl. This creates enough confusion in a humorous way that the camp or program director can go to the stage and quietly explain that the skit is not appropriate and move the group off stage. Ask participants for other positive suggestions to handle this unfortunate situation.

Putting It All Together

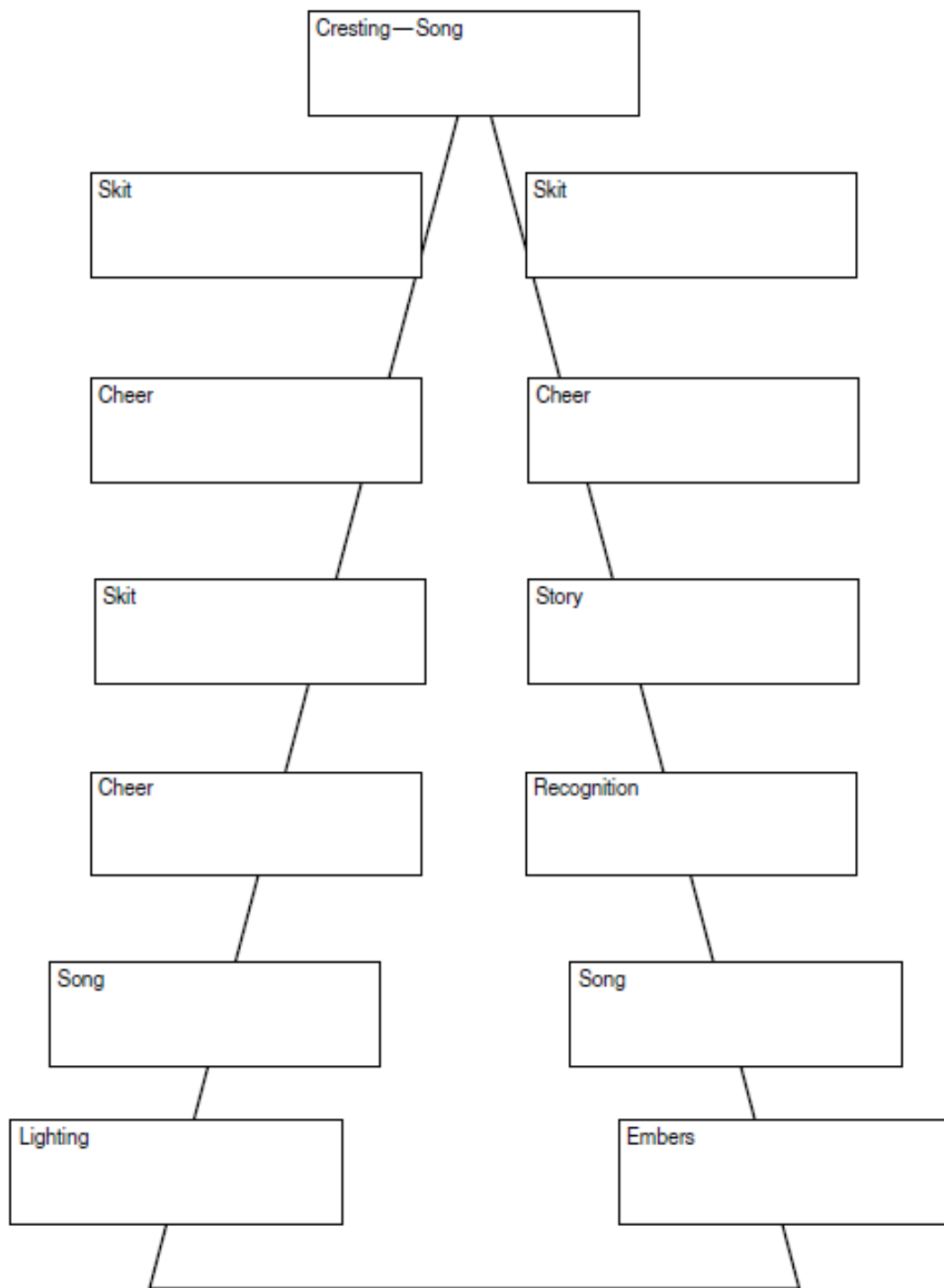
Now that participants have reviewed the basics, put into practice what they have learned by staging a make-believe campfire.

- Use a triangular 2-by-4-by-8-foot-long form to represent the campfire. In the lower left is the lighting of the campfire, the apex is the cresting of the fire, and dropping down the right-hand side represents the fire fading to embers.

In advance, the instructor will need to nail the 2-by-4-by-8-foot piece to a base. Then attach the prepared signs—*Lighting*, *Crest*, and *Embers*—in each corner of the triangle with pushpins.

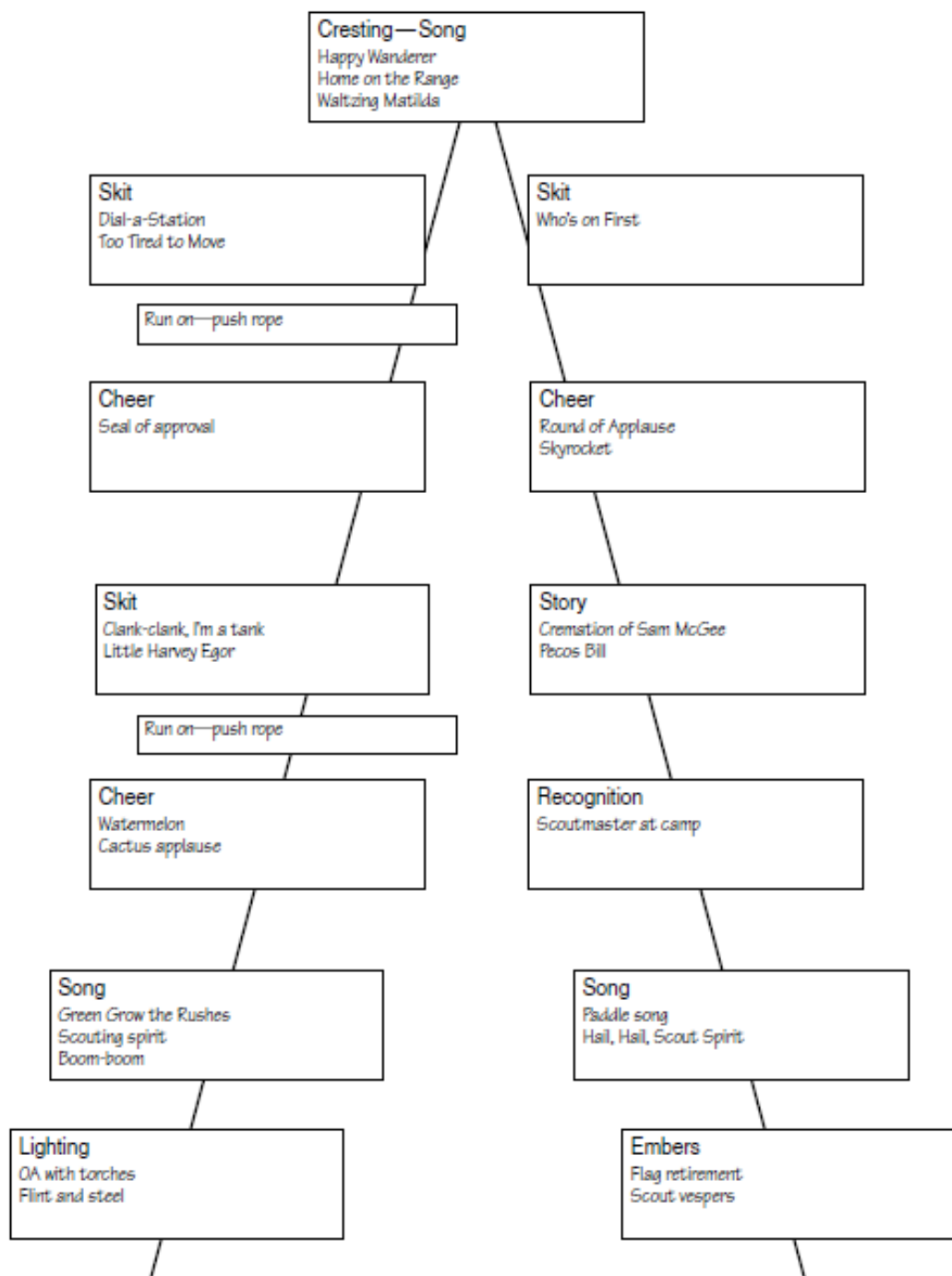
P R O G R A M L E S S O N P L A N

Ask participants to help build a campfire program. Use stiff card stock previously cut into pieces 24 inches wide and 12 inches high. Place suggestions on a 2-by-4-by-8-foot frame at appropriate locations. Tell participants: *Let's just get the order we want for our campfire.* Below is a sample of what it might look like.



PROGRAM LESSON PLAN

Ask participants to suggest specific songs, skits and stunts, cheers, stories, and an opening and closing below each of the headings on the 24-by-12-inch cards. Below is a sample of what it might look like.



Get very specific and quickly select which suggestion to use at the campfire.

- Now transfer this to the Campfire Program Planner.
 - Assign who will do what.
 - Assign times.
 - Go through the mock campfire as practice. (Use sample stunts and skits from the *Cub Scout Leader How-To Book* and *Group Meeting Sparklers*.)