Creative Small Groups

Ready-To-Use Lessons For Grades K-5

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Written By
Karen Gannon Griffith

Karen Gannon Griffith, Ed.S.

Karen Griffith has been an educator since 1977. She began teaching fifth grade following graduation from Samford University in Alabama. After earning a master's degree in special education from the University of Tennessee, she began teaching children with behavior disorders. She earned additional degrees in school counseling at Georgia State University and began work as a school counselor in 1986. She considers counseling to be the best job in the school and is passionate about her work. She is actively involved in professional organizations and is a frequent presenter at professional conferences and staff-development workshops.

Dedication

I am always grateful for the people in my life: My parents Truett and Margaret Gannon, my husband Mike, and my brother Kenny, for providing a loving home base and the belief in me that makes anything seem possible. My sons Nathan and Patrick and my daughter-in-law Evelyn, who tease me and laugh with me and always make me prove everything I claim. My colleagues Kelly Cowart, Laura Marantz, Bonnie O'Neil, and John Poidevant, who are always there to encourage and support me and are forever nudging me to try something more. Thank you.

CREATIVE SMALL GROUPS: READY-TO-USE LESSONS FOR GRADES K-5

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-57543-158-1 **eBook ISBN: 978-1-57543-251-9**

REPRINTED 2012
COPYRIGHT © 2008 MAR*CO PRODUCTS, INC.
Published by Mar*co Products, Inc.
1443 Old York Road
Warminster, PA 18974
1-800-448-2197
www.marcoproducts.com

Graphic Design: Cameon Funk Children's Illustrations: Harry Norcross

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Introduction

I love small groups. I believe they are the most effective way for a counselor to facilitate change for a student and the best way to establish a meaningful bond with the children who need us most. A small group is an opportunity for the counselor and students to get to know each other in a personal way. Each student discovers an adult in the school who genuinely cares about helping with whatever change the student needs or wants to make. The counselor discovers who the student could become. These discoveries create a sense of normalcy for children whose individual needs, situations, or problems create a sense of being isolated and different from their peers. Learning that others are experiencing similar circumstances can result in a virtual sigh of relief that perhaps one's problems are not so unusual after all. Once a problem seems less daunting, learning can begin. In small groups, significant lessons can be introduced, discussed, and implemented. New skills can be acquired and practiced.

If you want your groups to be meaningful and effective, it's important to know *why* you're doing what you choose to do with each group. If you're facilitating a group on grief or loss, for example, know the phases of grieving and plan a session for each one. Classroom time is precious, and you must be prepared to define and defend your reasons for taking students out of class. Know what you're doing and why and explain your plans and your motivation to the students, their teachers and parents, and the school administrators.

Early in my career, I had many days of panic and frustration when I realized I had another small group meeting in just 15 minutes. What could I do in group sessions? Did I have what I needed to conduct the group? Would the meeting make a difference? This book represents lessons I have put together over 20 years as a school counselor and the organizational system that enables me to teach any of the lessons at a moment's notice.

GRIFFITH'S RULE:

The more you do ahead of time, the less you have to do in the moment.

It's all about being prepared. A little preparation can make a significant difference in your school year. It helps you stay sane, increases your effectiveness, and makes you look like a genius. How can you be prepared? You must know what you need, have it, and know where find it. Collections can be accumulated over time. Begin by collecting games, books, and lessons that relate to one topic. Gather art supplies, specialty items, puppets, stuffed animals, and whatever else you need to support those activities. Then find a way to organize it all. It doesn't do much good to have what you need if you can't find it when you need it.

Master Supply List
For Small Group On Anger

Collect these supplies prior to presenting the group.
Place all special supplies in the same box as the lessons copied on cardstock.

GENERAL SUPPLIES:
- ☐ Chart paper and marker
- ☐ Stapler and staples
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Pencils
- ☐ Pens

ART SUPPLIES:
- ☐ Crayons or markers
- ☐ Light-colored construction paper
- ☐ Drawing paper or sketch book
- ☐ Glue/Glue sticks
- ☐ Clay
- ☐ Pipe cleaners
- ☐ Beads

MISCELLANEOUS SUPPLIES:
- ☐ Optional: Collection of stuffed animals or puppets
- ☐ Bags or boxes
- ☐ Inexpensive timers
- ☐ Resealable plastic bags
- ☐ Balloons
- ☐ 2 pitchers
- ☐ Food coloring
- ☐ Eye dropper
- ☐ Oil
- ☐ Small plastic bottles with lids
- ☐ Liquid soap
- ☐ Trash can
- ☐ Index cards
- ☐ Small round balloons
- ☐ Several scoops and funnels
- ☐ Flour
- ☐ Short story or student book that includes problems

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Understanding My Anger

Materials:

For The Leader:

- ☐ *Animal Cards:* several sets reproduced on white cardstock and cut apart (pages 41-44).
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Chart paper and marker or chalkboard and chalk

Activity:

▶ Ask each student to select an *Animal Card* that represents his/her anger. For example, a chimpanzee or gorilla might jump around, yell, and beat its chest. An angry dog might growl, show its teeth, bark, and even bite.

▶ Have each student describe why he/she chose a particular animal. The following questions may help you elicit appropriate responses. Emphasize any positives or negatives associated with a specific animal and anger.

- How is your anger like something this animal does?
- Which of your angry actions or attitudes might make others think of this animal?
- What might happen when this animal is angry?
- What usually happens when you act like this animal?
- What other animal would you prefer to be like when you are angry?

▶ On the chart paper/chalkboard, list all the behaviors and actions the students mention. Review the list after everyone has had a turn to add to it. Use the following questions to discuss which behaviors might cause the most or fewest problems.

- Which behavior is hardest for you to control?
- Which behavior gets you into the most trouble?
- Does anyone else in your family behave this way when angry? What usually happens? How do you feel when your family member does this?

▶ Remind the students that they'll work as a group to learn how to control angry behaviors.

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SMALL-GROUP LESSONS

Behavior

Students may be referred because of aggression, passivity, inappropriate language, anxiety, and a host of other behaviors. Students may be grouped with others who behave the same way, and sometimes there's a mixture of behaviors. No matter what the configuration, behavior groups are extremely challenging for the counselor. Too many passive or shy students will challenge the counselor to elicit contributions, while too many over-active students can be difficult to settle down. Regardless of participants' ages or group composition, the counselor should have a reason for choosing any activity.

The following goals should be addressed for each grade level:

Grades K/1
Identifying trouble-causing behaviors and their consequences
The need for rules
Sharing
Words and phrases that calm inappropriate behaviors

Grades 2/3
Identifying positive behaviors
The need for rules
Behavior-related feelings
Problem-solving situations

Grades 4/5
Positive behaviors from students' perspectives
Positive behaviors from adults' perspectives
Behavior-related feelings
Actions that trigger negative behaviors
Problem-solving situations

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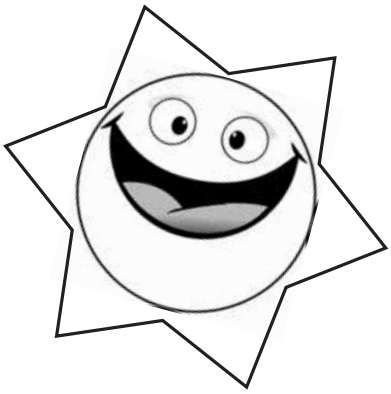
Gonna' Shine!



Materials:

For The Leader:

- ☐ Chart paper and marker or chalkboard and chalk

For Each Student:

- ☐ *Sun* reproduced on yellow copy paper (page 93)
- ☐ *Rays* reproduced on yellow copy paper (page 94)
- ☐ Large piece of light blue construction paper
- ☐ Glue stick
- ☐ Pencil
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Gold glitter (optional)

Activity:

- ▶ Encourage the students to name things about behavior that the group experience has taught them. List the students' responses on the chart paper/chalkboard.
- ▶ Give each student a copy of *Sun* and *Rays*, a piece of light blue construction paper, a pencil, scissors, a glue stick, and gold glitter (optional).
- ▶ Instruct the students to cut out the sun and rays, glue the rays in the center of the blue construction paper, then glue the sun in the center of the rays.
- ▶ Tell the students to write one idea about good behavior on each ray. They may select from the ideas listed on the chart paper/chalkboard or write their own.
- ▶ Ask the students to add "STUDENT'S NAME Is Gonna' Shine!" to the blue paper.
- ▶ If time permits, the students may add glitter outlines to the rays.
- ▶ Have each student share his/her completed sun with the group, telling what good behaviors he/she plans to use.

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Then And Now

Materials:

For Each Student:

- ☐ Drawing paper
- ☐ Crayons or markers

Activity:

- ▶ Give each student a piece of drawing paper and crayons or markers.
- ▶ Instruct the students to fold the paper in half, then unfold it. On one side of the paper, the students should draw a picture of their family before cancer. On the other side of the paper, they should draw a picture of their family since the onset of cancer.
- ▶ Allow time for the students to complete their pictures. Offer encouragement as necessary.
- ▶ Allow time for the students to share and talk about the completed pictures.
- ▶ It's important to be prepared for the students' expression of angry and negative feelings during this activity. This process can elicit feelings they haven't yet expressed or even acknowledged.

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Friendship Candy Game

Begin Or End Every Group With This Game

Materials:

For The Leader:
- ☐ Colorful candy-coated chocolates or similar small candies
- ☐ Serving spoon

For Each Student:
- ☐ *Candy Game* reproduced on white copy paper (page 151)
- ☐ Crayons of colors that match the candies to be used

(***Note:*** Be sure the use of candy is appropriate for use in your school district and for each group member. If you cannot use candy, you may substitute something suitable such as pieces of colored paper punched out with a hole punch. Or omit the *Candy Game* from your lessons.)

Activity:

- ▶ Give each student one copy of the *Candy Game* and crayons that match the colors of the candies. Instruct the students to color each circle a different color. They may select which color to use for each circle and should not try to match anyone else's choices.

- ▶ When everyone has finished coloring the circles, give each student a spoonful of candy. Ask the students to line up the candy with the colored circles so all the red candies are with the red circle, the green candies are with the green circle, etc. If some circles don't match candy, you may give that student a candy of a different color. Have everyone count their candies. Give more to those who have fewer.

- ▶ Follow the worksheet instructions by giving each student the chance to respond to each statement. For example, the first statement asks students to tell one good way to have more friends for each piece of candy. A student who has four pieces of matching-colored candy for this first statement must tell four good ways to have more friends.

- ▶ It is usually best if the students eat the candy as they respond to the statements so all the candy is gone by the end of group.

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Wall of Support
(Identifying Support Systems)

Materials:

For The Leader:
- ☐ *Bricks:* several copies reproduced on different shades of red cardstock and cut apart (page 207)
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Black marker

For Each Student:
- ☐ *Body Shape* reproduced on white copy paper (page 206)
- ☐ Piece of blue construction paper
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Glue stick
- ☐ Crayons or markers
- ☐ Memory Boxes from Session 4

Have Available For The Group:
- ☐ Optional: Various art/craft supplies

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Activity:

It is important for children to be aware of their support systems. This activity helps them identify friends, family, and other adults who may be helpful throughout the grief process.

- ▶ Begin the session by having the students describe one item they have chosen to put in their Memory Box.
- ▶ Give each student a copy of *Body Shape,* scissors, a piece of blue construction paper, a glue stick, and crayons or markers.
- ▶ Have each student color the body shape to represent him/herself. You may also have other art supplies available for the students to use to decorate the body shape.
- ▶ Have the students cut out the body shape and glue it from the center to the top of the construction paper.
- ▶ Discuss how the picture looks as though the student is floating in the sky. Explain that this is impossible. Without support, he/she would fall.

Me Mobile

Materials:

For Each Student:

- ☐ Sheet of paper
- ☐ Pencil
- ☐ *Clouds* reproduced on white cardstock (page 260)
- ☐ *Hot Air Balloons* reproduced on white cardstock (page 261)
- ☐ *Rainbow* reproduced on white cardstock (page 262)
- ☐ Crayons or markers
- ☐ Scissors

Have Available For The Group:

- ☐ Hole punches
- ☐ String

Activity:

▶ Tell the students they will be identifying individual strengths and positive characteristics and will use these strengths and characteristics to create a *Me Mobile*.

▶ Give each student a copy of *Clouds, Hot Air Balloons,* and *Rainbow;* one sheet of paper; a pencil; scissors; and crayons or markers. On the piece of paper, have the students write their responses to these prompts:

- Write one skill you possess—one thing you do well.
- Write a word or phrase that someone who loves you would use to describe you.
- Write a word or phrase a friend would use to describe you.
- Write one thing you enjoy doing when you are not in school.
- Write one thing you enjoy doing in school.
- Write one word you would use to describe yourself.
- Write one word your teacher would use to describe you.

▶ After everyone has finished writing, let the students read aloud what they wrote for the first prompt and, perhaps, make a brief statement regarding it. Be sure they use only positive responses. Then continue the process with the second prompt.

▶ Tell the students to write each of their listed responses on one of the hot air balloons or clouds. Then tell the students to write their names on the rainbows.

▶ Have the students cut out the balloons, rainbow, and clouds, then color the balloons and rainbow. Have the students punch a hole in each balloon and cloud, punch seven holes in the rainbow, then string the balloons and clouds from the rainbow.

▶ Tell the students they may take the mobile with them as a reminder of the lesson.

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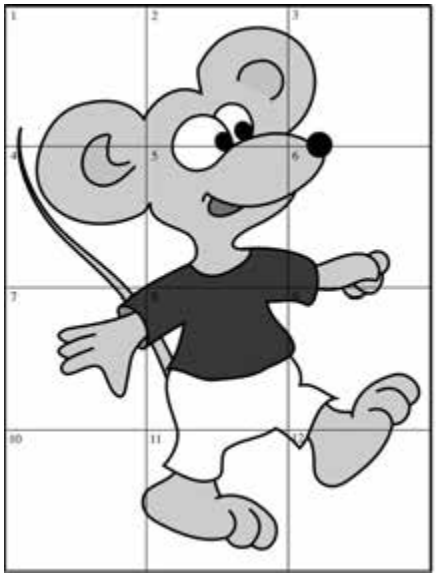
Following Directions

Materials:



For The Leader:

- ☐ *Grid Pattern Pictures* reproduced on white cardstock and cut apart (pages 308-313)
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Chart paper and marker
- ☐ Tape

For Each Student:

- ☐ *Grid Pattern* reproduced on white copy paper (page 307)
- ☐ Pencil

Preparation:

Reproduce and cut apart the *Grid Pattern Pictures*. On the chart paper, draw a grid pattern the exact size as the grid pattern pictures. Put the chart paper in a place it where the students cannot see it.

Activity:

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▶ Discuss the following questions:

- Why should we follow directions and when is following directions important?
- What makes following directions challenging?
- What happens if directions aren't followed?

▶ Give each student a copy of the *Grid Pattern* and a pencil.

▶ Tell the students you're going to show them one section of the grid at a time. Their job is to reproduce that section as closely as they can. Show the picture sections one at a time in random fashion, identifying in which section on their sheet they should reproduce the lines. Then tape that picture to its corresponding square on the chart paper. Remember to keep the chart paper hidden from the students.

▶ After the students have drawn all 12 grid pictures, show them the completed picture on the chart paper. If the students have followed the directions, they should have a mouse (or close to it) when they have completed the activity.

▶ Discuss the importance of following directions exactly.

SMALL-GROUP LESSONS

The Lunch Bunch

Lunch With The Counselor

Sometimes a lunch bunch is the only way to spend time with students without interrupting their academic schedules. A lunch bunch simply involves inviting several children to have lunch with the counselor in the counselor's office. Students get their lunches according to their normal routine, then bring them to the counselor's office. While the students have lunch, the counselor gently leads a discussion in this informal setting.

You can establish a lunch bunch as an on-going lunch date or as a single event. It can also be effective as a periodic check-in with specific students and is especially good for dealing with social skills and friendship issues. It quickly becomes a popular event with students, and you may discover that many students will ask to have a lunch bunch with their friends and you.

You may create the lunch bunch by identifying a group of students with a common interest or concern. You may also decide to invite only one or two students and a friend or two. Because the time is discussion-based, the same materials can be used with any age group. The age of the group will determine the depth and sophistication of the discussion.

Because of the need to actually eat lunch and the amount of discussion that occurs, only one or two discussion starters are necessary. The time goes very quickly.

The goals for this group are to:

- provide an informal guidance setting for students.
- examine friendship and other social issues.
- have contact with students who might not otherwise be available.

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THE FOLLOWING SAMPLES
ARE REPRODUCIBLE/PRINTABLE PAGES
INCLUDED ON THE CD-ROM

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RULES FOR GETTING YOUR ANGER OUT

BREATHE!

Blow your anger out.

AND THINK:

Make a healthy choice.

DO NOT HURT

anything or anyone with your hands, feet, or voice.

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SAY:

I want you to____."

WALK AWAY.

THE GIFT OF GOOD BEHAVIOR

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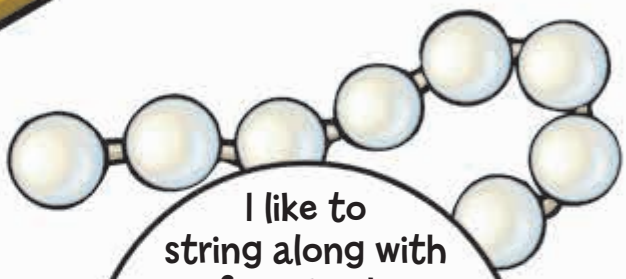
TREASURE CHEST ITEMS



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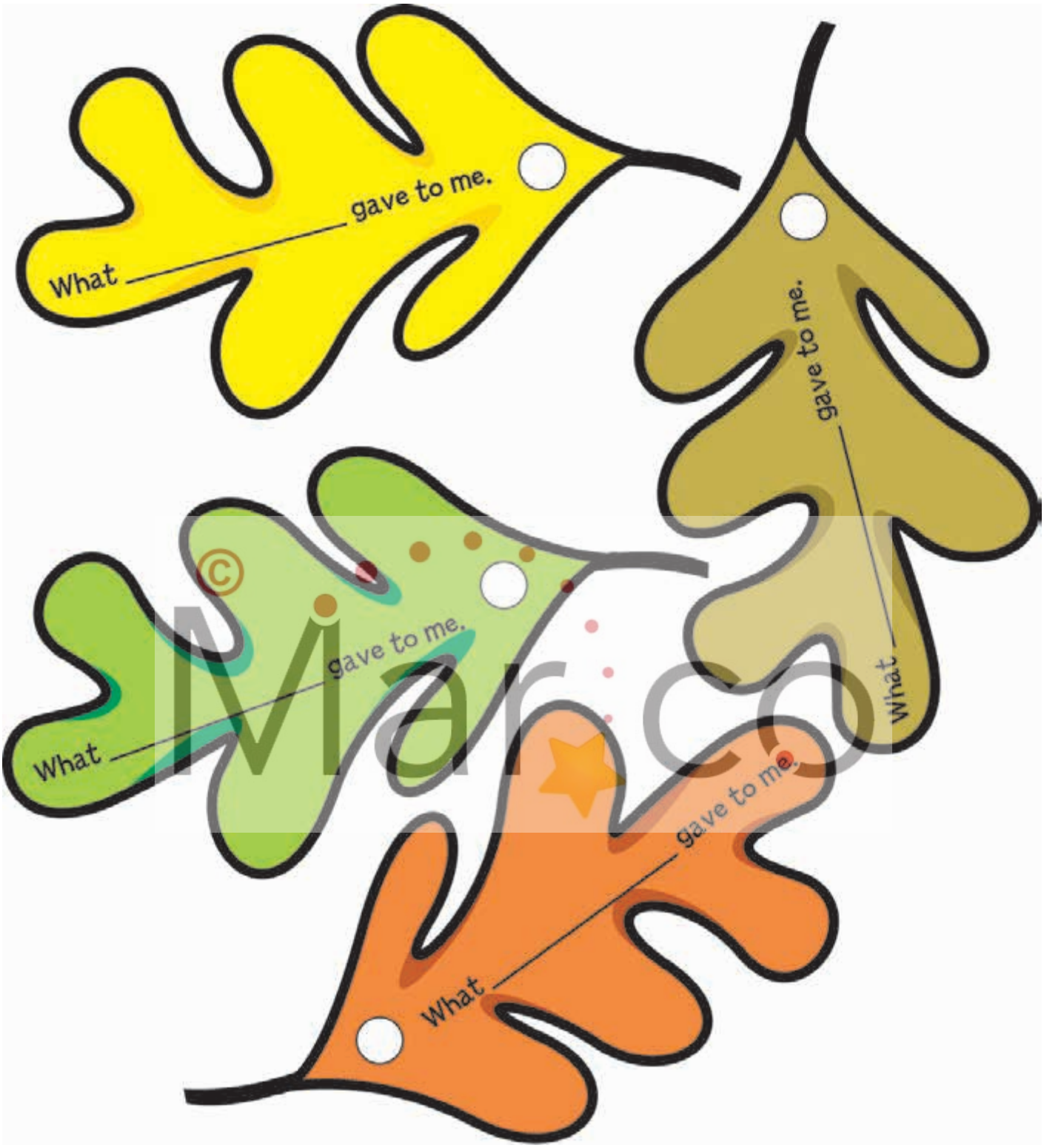
GIFT TREE LEAVES



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FAVORITE PLACE TO VISIT

ARE YOU LISTENING? LEADER'S DIRECTIONS

Read the following directions to the students. Read each direction only one time.

1. Color the dog brown.
2. Color the bushes green.
3. Color the sun orange.
4. Color the chimney bricks red.
5. Color the house yellow with a red door.
6. Color the curtains on the left pink and the curtains on the right purple.
7. Color the trunks of the trees brown. The leaves on the left tree should be yellow and orange. Color the leaves of the tree on the right orange and red.

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Color-Coded Questions Set 2

My Goals

Complete this sentence:

Red	This year in school, I want to…
Green	After high school, I want to…
Blue	Next summer, I want to…
Yellow	I plan to be…
Orange	Something I want to accomplish is…
Purple	I want to be known for…

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