Odyssey of the Mind

It's beginnings

In 1973 Dr. Sam Micklus, an industrial design professor, is frustrated by his students' lack of ability to "see" engineering outside of class. He tells them to close their books and gives them a real world problem.

It's present

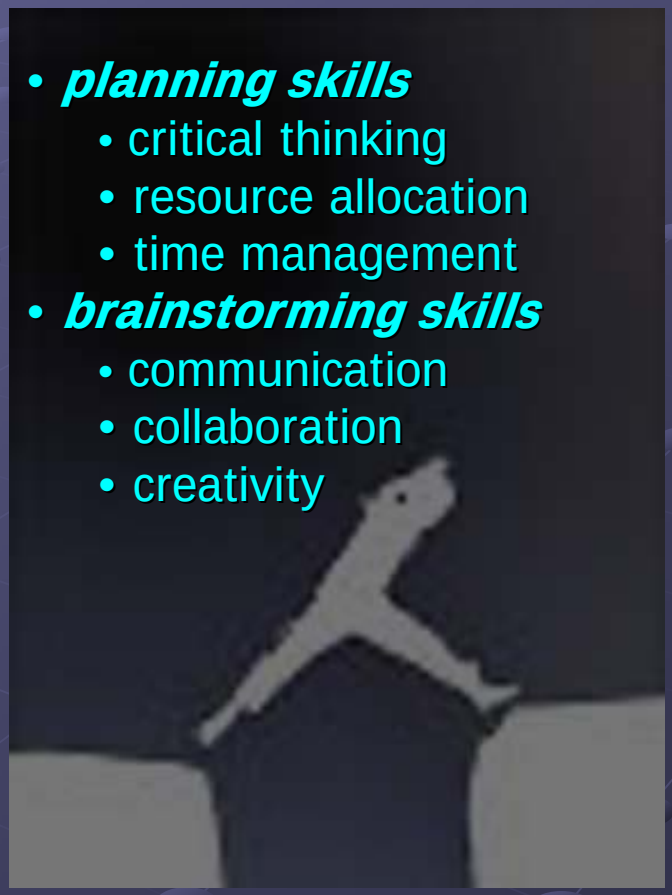
Over 1,000,000 students, from 25 nations and 40 states, participate annually in a engaging, quirky, and internationally acclaimed problem-solving program.

What are it's goals?

To promote the essentials of life-long learning

- ***intrinsic motivation***
  - hard work can be fun
  - curiosity can yield results
- ***self-reliance***
  - purpose
  - focus
  - adaptability
- ***responsibility***
  - pride
  - integrity
  - reflection
  - ownership

To provide practical uses for these qualities



- ***planning skills***
  - critical thinking
  - resource allocation
  - time management
- ***brainstorming skills***
  - communication
  - collaboration
  - creativity

To allow these lessons to develop in a supportive environment, managed by an adult coach

How are they realized?

#1 The Long Term Problems

The problems still use the guidelines of Dr. Sam's 1973 classroom assignment

- ***They are open ended***
  - there is no right answer.
  - they each have specific criteria and limitations, designed to serve as a common "jumping off point"
- ***They include a budget***
- ***They require the integration of a variety of hands-on skills.***
- ***They are interdisciplinary***
- ***They are collaborative***
  - the team is responsible for its solution.
- ***Solutions are "graded" by teams of judges.***
  - on the degree of completion and detail
  - on the creativity of the ideas and the sophistication of their realization

There is a critical line separating the problem solving process and its content

- ***The coach facilitates the process only.***
  - establishes a meeting time and place
  - supports an environment conducive to the team effort
  - asks questions to promote discussion
  - shepherds the team with the basics of brainstorming, organization, and strategy
  - provides "experts" as requested
- ***The team must provide the content of its solution***
  - it has responsibility to conceive, design, construct, and perform its own ideas.
  - it must both choose and understand the problem, including its scoring, purpose, and specific requirements
- ***There is NO OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE!!!***

The Long Term Problems

They are designed to appeal to a wide variety of interests

Problem 1: Vehicle

The emphasis is the construction of one or more vehicles, large or small, that complete a course or perform a series of tasks

Problem 2: Technical

The emphasis is on a performance that presents an obstacle, and requires that a device be designed and constructed to overcome it.

Problem 3: Classics

Utilizing a theme from the classics (literature, music, art, mythology), its solution incorporates specific elements of the theme to create a perspective about the world.

Problem 4: Structure

The emphasis is on the weight held by a structure conforming to unique specifications, made from balsawood and glue.

Problem 5: Theatrical

Often with a humorous component, a performance emphasizing the qualities of the team and its visual presence.

Problem 6: Primary

Designed for the primary grades (k-2), it offers an introduction to the program, and often times utilizes a “what if” scenario.

Realizing the goals

#2 Style

On top of the Long Term solution, and off to the side

Style requires the analysis of a long term problem from the perspectives of scoring and creativity. With both required and free choice items, style encourages a team to add another dimension to its solution, one that showcases both the theme of its performance and the ability of the team to realize its imaginative potential

Style requirements vary from problem to problem:

The key to unlocking a successful style component is a writing assignment.

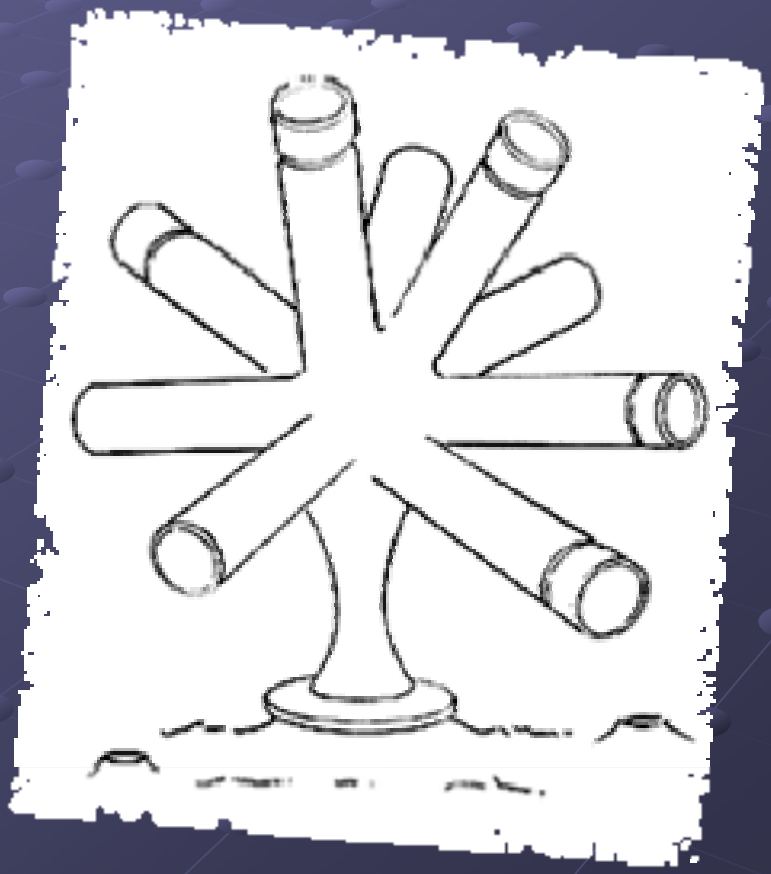
THE STYLE FORM

Realizing the Goals

#3 Spontaneous

The proof is in the pudding

There are thousands of "spont" problems in several categories. Practicing them develops analytic skills, strategies of approach, and teamwork. Each team is required to solve a single spontaneous problem at the tournament. It is a test of quick and flexible thinking, collaborative effort, and creativity.



Realizing the Goals

#4 The Tournament

Measuring accomplishment

At a tournament, the contents of a team's solution are dovetailed into its understanding of the problem solving process to determine a score, based on its age group and choice of Long Term problem.

A team's accomplishments are measured in 4 different ways.

Long term: A team's solution is performed before an audience and a team of judges; a score is tabulated based on the criteria of the problem, and penalties deducted for violating limitations. The maximum score is 200 points

Style: Style judges evaluate the style components during the team's performance of its long term solution. The are worth a maximum of 50 points.

"Spont": The spontaneous problem is not known to the team, and they are required to solve it with no one but the judging team in the room It is worth a maximum of 100 points.

Attitude: Yes....attitude. In Odyssey of the Mind, the tournament is much more than a competition, and a team is much more that a group of children trying to win a prize.

Realizing the Goals

#5 Understanding "accomplishment"

Is success only measured by where a team finishes at the tournament?

By the assessment of an 8 minute performance, and 15 minutes alone with the "spont" judges?

What does it mean if a team does not do well?
Is that failure?
What about those hours and hours of brainstorming, planning, building, and practice?
What are they worth?

What is THIS worth?

The tournament is a vital and dynamic learning tool. Being there is a TRIUMPH for the team: it is a recognition that those kids have solved their problem!!!
The tournament is a celebration of accomplishment, and one of them is always the last stop of an annual journey of discovery and growth.

Nuts and Bolts #1
Annual Monetary Commitment

- ***A national membership fee (currently $135):*** provides access to the full versions of the long term problems, a hard copy of the Program Guide, and a membership number; with certain restrictions, it allows for multiple teams. Discounts apply to multiple memberships.
- ***A state membership fee (currently $65):*** paid per membership
- ***A regional tournament fee (currently $55):*** paid per team
- ***The Long Term problem budget ($135-$150):*** the cost of materials ON STAGE during a team's performance of it's solution. Actual expenditure may vary depending on coaching style and a team's desire to experiment.
- ***Travel expenses for advancing teams.***

Nuts and Bolts #2
Annual Time Commitment

It is essential to understand here that everyone involved in OotM is a volunteer. This program is run by people who believe in its goals and the benefits they bring to kids.

- ***Coaching:*** varies, depending on the time of year and the people involved. One day for training. After that, coaches will spend anywhere from 1 to 3 hours a week with their team until the Christmas/Winter break. As the tournament approaches, this can mushroom into 6 to 10 hours a week, as teams prepare for tournament day.
- ***Regional tournament volunteers:*** one adult judge per team. This is a two day commitment: one for training, and one for tournament day.
- ***State tournament volunteers:*** one trained adult judge per team, one person (16 and over) for a two hour period at the region's assigned task (currently the souvenir table), and a door monitor (20 minutes).
- ***Parents:*** they may feel at loose ends, because they cannot help the team. There are things they can do, however: they can provide snacks, and breakfast/lunch on tournament day; they can help raise funds, chauffeur team members, transport sets. They are also the first source of tournament volunteer requirements.

Nuts and Bolts #3
Getting Started

Option #1: take the plunge; coach a team

- *Read the Program Guide*
  - www.odysseyofthemind.com/downloads/programguide.pdf
- *Send me an email*
  - la_odyssey@earthlink.net
- *Attend a training*
- *Meet with your team and their parents*
- *Buy a membership for your school*
- *Coach*

Option #2: generate interest in OotM at your school

- Talk to teachers, administrators, parents, and children: discuss potential team members, meetings, funding, and support
- We can provide promotional materials and links to resources
- Arrange a "spontaneous" lunch or club: run some problems; see who is interested, and who is interesting.
- Form a team
- Find a coach: see *Option #1*

In the end, this is all that matters.
Relax and enjoy yourself. Do not panic.
Laugh at yourself.
Celebrate and embrace creativity, the experience, and the journey.
Step back. Allow.
Be respectful, open-minded, flexible, and adaptable.
Be enthusiastic.
Have fun.
Accept this challenge, and the rest will of it will follow.