

Escape Rooms “Breakout” Session

Tweakage Rendezvous - High point camp 2018

Introduction to Escape Rooms

“Escape games are live-action games where groups of people must discover and solve a series of puzzles and clues to accomplish a specific task like solving a mystery or finding a key to escape the room, all within a specific timeframe (usually around an hour).”

– Curt Jackson *How To Create a Low Cost Escape Room: for Camps, Youth Groups, and Community Centers*

*usually set up for 4-8 players (can accommodate more)

*built around a theme or storyline

*includes a series of puzzles and clues, locks and keys to point the group to a final goal or purpose

*clues can be found hidden anywhere in the room like desk drawers, coat pocket, behind picture frames, in a picture, on a map, under rugs, on a USB drive, etc.

*The goal is usually to find a key to escape the room, or to find a specific object that will help save the camp from certain destruction.

*These games usually have a Gamemaster that is monitoring the progress and helping the group when they need it.

*At their core, escape rooms are about teambuilding where communication is key. The adventure simply aids in the process.

So where do I start?

1. Determine a **LOCATION** on your property that can be used for an escape room.

-Permanent dedicated space if possible

-A portable room may be set up anywhere, but is obviously more labor intensive if you are setting it up on a regular basis

-Ours was run in an outdoor shed (8x16)

2. You need a **THEME** – Here’s some ideas to get you started.

-Egyptian, Detective, Special Ops Military, Save the camp, Time Travel, Diffuse the bomb, Western theme (most wanted),

3. What’s the **STORY?** AND WHAT’S THE **END GOAL?**

THEME: Camp

SAMPLE STORYLINE: A group of campers are locked in a room and have been wrongfully accused of starting a food fight in the dining hall. The camp director will be back in 60 minutes to expel them. They must find out the truth and clear their name.

THEME: Time Travel (science lab)

STORYLINE: The resident mad-scientist has discovered a mysterious substance while working on discovering time travel.

Something has gone wrong causing a tear in the time continuum. You have 60 minutes to find the substance and right the rift or the camp could cease to exist.

4. Find some **PROPS** to make it come to life

-Props are important to make this an immersive experience

-Props should be durable as they will be handled repeatedly

-Just remember, whatever props you use will be thought of as a potential puzzle or clue.

5. Write the **RULES**

-Respect any “Do Not Touch” signs

-Anything pinned down, nailed down, screwed down, or taped down needs to stay down

-Don’t force objects open

-Outlets are live and contain no clues

*Spell out any other rules for your room. If you don’t say it, they might try it.

Let the game begin

1. **Introduce** the storyline -

- Video

- Journal in room
- Character introduces the group to storyline

2. **Jumpstart** the room

- Leave certain objects out in the open
- Place keys in various places that can be found without having to solve a puzzle
- The group needs to taste success early.

3. Provide **hint cards** and a method of displaying those hints

4. Puzzles should get increasingly harder as the game progresses.

PUZZLE IDEAS

1. **General Search clues** – It is a good idea to have some clues out in the room for general searching. It is best to meld these clues into the décor or theme in some way. A clue could be on a sheet of paper in a typewriter, on a computer screen, in a picture frame, etc.

2. **Picture Puzzles** – A picture could be cut up and scattered around the room in several places. The group must assemble the pieces and put the picture together for a clue

3. **QR Codes** – This may not work depending on your rules at camp, but groups will use their phones to read a QR code which takes them to a website for a clue.

4. **Maps** – If a map of some sort plays into your theme. Possibly using blacklight ink to determine where on the map to look for a clue. Latitude and longitude can be used on a globe or map also to determine a country or city.

5. **Blacklight and invisible ink** – Kind of considered “overdone” in commercial escape rooms, but campers love this type of puzzle. You can write on any item in the room, but groups may need to be pointed to where to shine the light with a clue. (i.e. – clue found in room = “p. 145 will shed some light on the situation”)

6. **Images, photos, paintings** – Any of these things printed out or hung on the wall can contain potential clues. (i.e. – a photo of Alice reading a book can point the group to the book *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* which contains the groups next clue.)

7. **Hand-Eye Coordination** – Groups love these hands on type of challenges. (i.e. – a group could have to use a fishing pole with a hook or magnet to “fish” for a clue outside a window. Or use a Nerf gun to shoot a cardboard target down from a high place so a clue can be read).

8. **Assembling an object** – Groups find different pieces of an object that has to be assembled. (i.e. – pieces of a flashlight, pieces of the fishing pole, long pole with a hook on the end, etc.)

9. **Binoculars** – Search for a clue outside a window

10. **Flashdrives** – Containing 1 file

11. **Colored objects or objects of similar shape** – (i.e. – toy story aliens used in the demonstration, multiple badges for a detective theme, multiple test tubes for a science theme, etc.)

12. **Wooden puzzle boxes** – These are boxes that a puzzle in and of themselves. Take note that they will take abuse and may break.

13. **Books** – A clue that points to a specific page or word or series of words. Books can also be used to hide items.

14. **Math problems and number patterns** – Keep them simple enough for all age groups.

15. **Mystery Sensory box** – Participants have to stick their hand inside a dark box to feel the shape of the next clue.

16. **Riddles** – don’t make them too complicated

17. **Word Search** that will leave a few letters after all the words have been circled.

18. **Symbol Substitution** – A paragraph written in symbols. The symbol key code is found later to help the group decipher the clue. This could play nicely into the theme. (i.e. – hieroglyphics for an Egyptian theme, Morse Code, Braille, etc.)

19. **Grille Cipher** – Place a piece of card stock or sheet of plastic with holes strategically cut out of it over a page on a book. The words that show through the holes is the next clue.

20. **Pigpen cipher** – Another type of symbol substitution

hints

- Hint cards are one way of allowing many different age groups to enjoy your room.
- The younger the group, the more hints you will need to make available.
- Hints are not answers, they just move the group along. Be creative in giving hints, but make sure the hint is helpful and doesn't create even more confusion.
- Make a detailed RESET LIST for your counselors and facilitators to follow. After all, if the room doesn't get reset correctly, the next group may have a nearly impossible task.
- Make sure your facilitators know the room well so they can be of most help when hints are requested



PROPS AND LOCKS

1. Types of Locks

- Keyed locks
- Number locks (3 #s, 4#s, 5#s)
- Word locks (4 or 5 letter, or a combo letter and number lock)
- Spin dial locks (think school locker) – *note that kids don't know how to open these, so instructions in the room are important.*
 - Also letter dial locks
- Hasps
- Directional locks – Riddle with “DULL” as the answer–
Down, Up, Left, Left

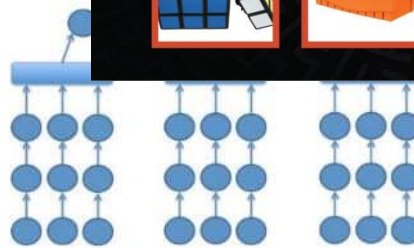


2. Lockboxes

- Toolbox
- Small safe box
- Key lock box
- Lockers
- Briefcase
- Backpack
- Hidden USB drive



Puzzle Organization and flow



Pyramid

CIRCLES = PUZZLES

RECTANGLES = LOCK/BOXES

Good puzzles I've seen

Typewriter puzzle – letter stickers placed over top of the real letters - rearranged.

Laser pen to map – Laser pen placed in a certain place shown on a certain map location. Or use a laser pen with multiple mirrors that have to be placed in the correct places.

Mag Locks – Nice technology in a room.

LED Light flickers in a specific color pattern

Assemble a long pole with a hook to retrieve a clue

Clues were given by way of an old school phone in a 1950s police office.

Using a Kindle to reveal a clue – plugged in a 4 digit number for the passcode

Hidden compartments are always fun! They always get the desired response of amazement from the groups.

Squidy Cartesian Diver puzzle (found on Escape Room disc provided)

Tips From my experience

1. Don't buy cheap locks – you will regret it.
2. Make a copy of all keys, because someone WILL lock the key in the box.
3. Buy some backup locks
4. Leave enough time in your schedule for room reset
5. Make sure your guides (counselors) are prepped and know the room well.
6. After several times in the room, you will know where a team should be at what time in order to be successful. Give them clues even if they don't ask for them. If you can work it so the group gets out in the last minute, that is ideal.
7. Use a visual timer that all can see. Some intense music at the end is also a great way to heighten the experience.

Much of the information from this session is used with permission by Curt "Moose" Jackson, author of summercamppro.com blog and website. I would encourage you to visit his site for more information about escape rooms and all other camp programming related things.

*Google "Escape Room Puzzles" for more ideas on puzzles types.

*Also check out BREAKOUT EDU

