

Surviving Adventure Island

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For the past two years, I have taught freshman and sophomore composition courses. Recently, the English Department rewrote the course descriptions with an increased focus on critical thinking skills. In response, I created a final project that would continue to demonstrate their writing skills but also evaluate their critical thinking skills. This integrated learning workout project is both fun and challenging; it takes four 50-minute class sessions to complete and requires students to work individually and in teams.

▼ Define a system; Day 1

On the first day, students are asked to write down names of six well-known people that they would like to be with if they were marooned on an island for the remainder of their lives. Students are also instructed that they must be ready to justify their choices. After the students have revealed their lists to the class, they are placed in groups of four to five students. They are informed that their group, along with six guests, have indeed been marooned on a South Pacific island with no hope of rescue. Students are then given a list of supplies that were salvaged at the time of their marooning.

▼ Set system parameters

As the result of an airplane crash, a group and its six invited guests have been stranded on a South Pacific island with no hope of rescue. The island is large enough that it takes approximately three days to walk across it. There is a fresh water supply, as well as an abundance of timber. There also appears to be a large variety of animal life present. There are several steep hills in the middle of the island, and a rocky beach is found on the north end of the island.

After the crash, the group managed to salvage the following items from the wreckage:

- A toolbox containing a hammer, two screwdrivers, a box of 100 nails, a box of 200 screws, a wrench, a tape measure and a small ax.
- An industrial-strength fire extinguisher.
- A first-aid kit, containing a box of bandages, a bottle of alcohol, snake bite medicine, a wrap bandage, a bottle of aspirin, 10 salt tablets, 12 water purification tablets, diarrhea medicine and a large tube of anti-infection medicine for wounds.
- Fabric from the airplane seats and carpet from the floor of the airplane.
- Huge junk metal pieces.
- A compass and small rubber craft.
- Seven blankets and pillows.
- 30-day supply of food rations for everyone.
- Ten packages of various vegetable seeds.
- Three boxes of matches.
- Each person has salvaged two complete outfits.



▼ Optimize systems functioning

They must, in order for their society to survive, create a guidebook that will help establish rules, contingency plans and a framework for their (system) society. They are then given time to decide on their guests and what role each guest and group member will serve in the new society. A rough draft of their guidebook is due on Day 2.

▼ Create guidelines; form a team

Their first task as a new community is to establish a constitution or guidebook for island living. Each person is to be responsible for the development of at least one section of this guidebook. Here are some categories to consider :

- Education
- Welfare (of sick, elderly and young)
- Legal system
- Economy (money system, job assignments)
- Defense
- Recreation

They will also need to assign each person (including guests) to a particular role in the society and to prioritize projects necessary for survival on the island.

▼ Codify system (community) guidelines; Day 2

The groups get together and discuss the rough draft of the guidebook for 30-45 minutes to come up with any changes, compromises, etc. as needed. The grading policy is explained, 50 percent of which is group work and 50 percent of which is individual work: Guidebook, 12.5 percent; Group Emergency Response, 12.5 percent; and Individual Emergency Response, 25 percent. The students are instructed that on Day 3 they should bring enough copies of their guidebook sections so that group members can use the guidebook to solve an emergency.

▼ Stress the system; Day 3

After a group's guidebook is turned in, each group member is given a slip of paper with Emergency #1 on it. The group members are not allowed to discuss possible solutions with the other members in any way except to identify members as designated by the emergency. Each group member is given exactly 30 minutes to compose an individual response to the problem, with a reminder that it should demonstrate their critical thinking skills, their problem-solving abilities and their writing skills. The students are also instructed to use the guidebook to help them resolve the emergency.

Nine Steps to Building an Integrated Adventure Learning Workout

5. Codify system guidelines
6. Stress the system—create emergencies
7. Analyze emergency response and revise
8. Restress the revised system
9. Evaluate learning process



• Emergency 1

Each group is randomly assigned one problem from this list. Guests are those people invited by the group. The problems should be solved individually first, with the only discussion being about which guest(s) are affected by the problem. The entire society has been functioning for two months at the time of this emergency.

- The party discovered a source of freshwater that it has been using for drinking for the past two months. However, it now appears that the water supply is greatly diminished, and arguments are beginning to break out among people. What should be done?
- Tensions from being stranded on the island have been mounting for the past two months. Finally, these tensions result in a fight between two guests, one of whom is injured. What should be done?
- Suddenly, three colonists get very ill. No cause or connection between these three colonists has been determined as of yet. What should be done?
- A small storm ruins all housing and stored food supplies. All colonists' spirits are down and there is a sense of resignation in the village. What should be done?
- One guest refuses to participate in the society. This person leaves and lives separately. The guest returns in a few weeks, injured, and promises to take part in society. However, the society has progressed without this person's aid. What should be done?
- A dry cave is found on the island; however, it is too small for everyone to live in. Arguments break out among colonists. What should be done?

▼ Analyze emergency response and revise

After they have finished writing their solutions, students should discuss them with other group members and choose one student who will be responsible for creating an official group response to the emergency. Once they have decided on their group response, the individual emergency responses are collected. The group may then discuss any shortcomings and strengths of their guidebook and may create amendments, which are due on Day 4. Again, they must bring enough copies for group members and the teacher.

▼ Restress the revised system; Day 4

This is similar to Day 3. The groups are given Emergency #2, the individual group members compose a response and then the group synthesizes an official response.

• Emergency 2

One year has passed.

- A panther attacks one guest, who is seriously injured. One guest kills it and several agree to a duel over the skin. What should be done?
- Fire breaks out on the opposite end of the island. What should be done?
- One member has been paralyzed from a serious back injury and requires permanent care. Everybody is extremely busy with preparing for hurricane season. What should be done?
- One guest goes mad from the situation of living on the island with no hope of rescue and is now hiding. Members of the society fear this guest's return. What should be done?
- Hurricane Henry hits the island. It wipes out shelters and stored food supplies. Three people are missing. What should be done?

▼ Evaluate learning process

After all work on the emergencies is finished, a full class discussion begins on the shortcomings and strengths of the guidebooks, how groups worked together, the answers to the emergencies and whether it was helpful to see other people's solutions when composing an official response.

Results

In addition to achieving my goal of evaluating critical thinking skills, I found that the students gained a great deal from the project. Group learning skills were strengthened, the value of other students' ideas was discovered and students became excited about learning. Students began showing up in class more regularly, because of this excitement and because they knew that group members were counting on them. The students were eager to work on the project, and they put more time and effort into it than expected. Some outstanding guidebooks were submitted, where students decorated their guidebooks, illustrated the island, wrote additional sections not specifically required. I found that the students like to solve problems where there isn't one right answer because they feel they have more control of their solutions. This final project taught more than the students—I found myself once again learning how much fun teaching can be.

