



Icebreakers & short exercises

Icebreakers & short exercises

Exercises under 30 minutes designed to break the ice and open or close the retreat

1. Communication starters
2. One-word feedback
3. Two truths and a lie
4. I love my neighbour
5. Ungame
6. Five minute mindfulness to start meeting
7. This or that
8. The human knot
9. Better know a Forum mate: Introductions
10. Stepping in
11. Self-reflection and two levels of sharing
12. Scavenger hunt

1. Communication starters

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| EO chapter | |
| Shared by | |
| Type of exercise (icebreaker, team-building, closing, etc) | Closer or icebreakers |
| Time required for this exercise | 10 minutes |
| Objective of the exercise | Helps to break the ice and get to know Forum mates |
| Outcome of the exercise | Connection |
| Tools needed | None |
| Handouts and pre-work if any | None |

Opening

This is beneficial for newer Forums or Forums that have just brought in new members. They may also be used by mature Forums to bring some levity to the meeting. The questions tend to be light-hearted, but Level 1 questions can lead to deep responses as well!

- As a child, my favourite game was _____.
- My favourite movie of all time is _____.
- Today, I have the most fun when _____.
- I would be the happiest person in the world if I had _____.
- I will eat anything put in front of me except for _____.
- I can explain my life as an animal, and that animal is a _____.
- If I had all the money in the world, I would _____.
- School for me was _____.
- If I had to give up some modern conveniences, like my TV, car, toilet, telephone or lighting, I would choose _____.
- If I had to choose between losing my hearing or sight, I would choose _____.
- If you could be a character in any book, who would you be, and why?
- If you had the option to live in any period in history, what era would you select, and why?
- If you could relive your childhood in a country other than your own, what country would you choose? Why?
- List three things that bring you energy. List three things that drain your energy.
- How attentive are you to your physical health?
- If you could speak one language other than your native language, what would it be, and why?
- You are in a library that is burning down, and you can only save two books. Which two do you choose? What would the world lose if those two books were gone for good?

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Originator: Ellie Byrd (ellie@forumsherpa.com)

1. Communication starters

- *continued*

- What is the most transformative travel experience you have ever had? What made it so?
- A gift I can give to others is _____.
- A gift I would like to receive from others is _____.
- What makes me laugh is _____.
- Talk about a mistake you recently made.
- If you magically had two more hours every day, how would you spend the extra time?
- If you suddenly lost two hours every day (a twenty-two hour day), how would you cut that time?
- If there were NO restrictions and you could live anywhere, where would you live, and why?
- What restrictions did you have to "remove" from your thought process in order to live there?
- What was the last book that you read? Why did you read it? What did you learn from it? Would you recommend it to others?
- Share something mischievous you did as a child.
- Your home is about to be hit by a tornado! You have 10 minutes to grab a few things and get out. What would you take?
- What is the most surprising thing you have learned about your childhood?
- Name something that happened in the past 90 days that you are proud of.
- Which holiday has the most meaning to you? Why?
- Complete the sentence: "I wish all people would _____."
- Describe the perfect vacation for you.
- Think of the three things about yourself that you like the best.
- What dream do you have that you would like to become a reality?
- If you had one wish that was guaranteed to come true, what would you wish for, and why?
- How many hours of TV do you watch each week? In what way does TV influence your life?
- What would you like to be doing five years from now? What do you think you'll be doing five years from now?
- Do you feel you have achieved mastery in any part of your life? If so, which part(s)?
- If you were a lawyer, would you be a prosecutor or a defender, and why?
- What three adjectives best describe you?

1. Communication starters - 5%

This is beneficial for Forums that have been together for a while (one or more years). To be completely open and honest with members' responses, a strong level of trust and confidentiality in the Forum is required.

- My most prized possession (material item) is _____.
- If I could throw caution to the wind and really take a risk, I would _____.
- I cry when _____.
- If you could choose a second set of parents in addition to your own, who would you choose, and why? What would they offer or contribute to you?
- How many of your friendships have lasted more than 10 years? Which current friendships will last 10?
- Describe what would be a perfect day for you, from beginning to end.
- If you were magically granted your dream talent, what would it be? How would that change your life?
- How do you react to difficult situations in your life?
- Describe your relationship with your mother and/or father. What was it like growing up?
- Who has been the most powerful influence on who you are today? How was that person significant to you?
- Can you be counted on to do what you say you will do? What does it take for you to trust someone?
- If someone were to write a biography about you, what would the title be?
- Name one thing you could do to improve an important relationship in your life.
- What could you stop doing now that would benefit your own growth and well-being?
- Imagine you could go back in time and change one decision in your life. Which one would it be, and why?
- Who would you like to apologize to, but haven't yet done so? What happened? What are you waiting for?
- Who owes an apology to you? What is the situation? Why haven't they apologized to you yet?
- What is your exit strategy for your business?
- Summarize your childhood in three words.
- Is it easy for you to accept help when you need it? Will you ask for help?
- Think back to when you were a child. What did you think your life would be like when you grew up?
- What were your dreams? Have any of them come true?
- Think of a positive or negative remark that was said to you as a child. How did it affect you then? What is the impact of it on you now?
- When was the last time you felt intimidated in a Forum meeting?
- What has been the greatest joy in your life?
- What are your most compulsive habits? How do you handle these?
- What is one thing you could do to improve your business?
- What is the most risky decision you ever made in your life? What made the risk so great?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, rate how balanced you think your life is right now. Name one thing you could do to improve the balance.

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1. Communication starters - 5%

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- When is the last time you were in a fight with someone? Who caused it?
- If you could change one physical feature about yourself, what would you change, and why?
- Imagine you are diagnosed with a rare disease. Would you choose to live healthily for six more months, or dependently and debilitated for six more years? Why?
- What is the single best decision you have made in your business?
- What is the single best decision you have made in your life?
- Describe the funeral service you would like to have held for you.
- When was the first time you fell in love? Share that story – how long, with whom, and why?
- Are you a good judge of character? Think of a time when you were wrong about someone's character, and describe the situation.
- Which photograph means the most to you? Describe the photo and why it is so powerful.
- Share a childhood experience with death.
- What are your top five priorities in life?
- Imagine you are going to be stranded on a desert island with two people for the rest of your life. Who are the two people you would choose to take with you and why?
- Describe your perfect day. How would it start? How would it end? What would you do in the middle of the day?
- Talk about a time when you have lost your temper.
- What has been your greatest success? Your greatest failure?

2. One-word feedback

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| EO chapter | Idaho |
| Shared by | Jennifer Perez |
| Type of exercise (icebreaker, team-building, closing, etc) | Closer or icebreaker |
| Time required for this exercise | 20 minutes |
| Objective of the exercise | To boost self-esteem and help individuals bond |
| Outcome of the exercise | Feedback on how others see you |
| Tools needed | Paper, to create a raffle on the order in which you will do the names. |
| Handouts and pre-work if any | None |
| Description of the exercise You go around the table and each Forum member says one word that they think best describes one particular Forum member. Each person says one word about the same person. You then switch who is being described and go around the table again. The only rule is that two people cannot say the same word about one particular person. | |
| Step-by-step instructions Choose an individual to start or draw a name. Go clockwise as each person delivers their descriptive word to the person indicated. Once you've gone around the circle, start with the next person in the circle (or draw a name) and then go around counter-clockwise. Continue until everyone is done, switching between counter-clockwise and clockwise. | |

3. Two truths and a lie

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| EO chapter | Toronto |
| Shared by | Yafa Sakkejha |
| Type of exercise (icebreaker, team-building, closing, etc) | Icebreaker |
| Time required for this exercise | Three minutes per person |
| Objective of the exercise | The objective of the exercise is to learn more about your peers - in a fun and interactive way. |
| Outcome of the exercise | |
| Tools needed | Pens and paper (optional) |
| Handouts and pre-work if any | None |
| Description of the exercise Everyone writes down two truths and one lie about their life and takes turns reading them out to the group. The group has to guess which one is the lie. After the presenter reveals the lie, the audience is free to ask clarifying questions about how the story came about. | |
| Step-by-step instructions Everyone writes down two truths and one lie about their life, and takes turns reading them out to the group. The group has to guess which one is the lie. After the presenter reveals the lie, the audience is free to ask clarifying questions about how the story came about. Option: You can win one point for every member fooled and a winner can be crowned. This exercise can be deepened by asking questions and clarifications about the story. | |

4. I love my neighbour

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| EO chapter | San Francisco |
| Shared by | Cory Levenberg |
| Type of exercise (icebreaker, team-building, closing, etc) | Icebreaker |
| Time required for this exercise | 10-20 minutes |
| Objective of the exercise | To help people get to know each other better, and to have participants recognize commonalities and personal characteristics within the group. |
| Outcome of the exercise | |
| Tools needed | None |
| Handouts and pre-work if any | None |
| <p>Description of the exercise</p> <p>The person standing in the centre of the circle begins the game by saying, "I love my neighbour who _____," and completes the sentence with a piece of information that is true for him/her.</p> <p>Example: "I love my neighbour who was born out-of-state, loves to play basketball, has a pet, is an only child, etc."</p> <p>As soon as he/she is finished with the statement, everyone (including the person in the centre) whom this applies to moves from their current position to an empty chair that is not right next to them. The person who does not find a chair to sit in goes to the middle and begins a second round of the game.</p> <p>Step-by-step instructions</p> <p>Step 1: Set up chairs in a circle. There should be one fewer chair than there are people.</p> <p>Step 2: Everyone sits in one of the chairs (as if they are about to sit down) and one random person starts off in the middle (no chair).</p> <p>Step 3: The person in the middle says out loud, "I love my neighbour who ...," followed by a statement about themselves (eg, I love my neighbour who has older siblings).</p> <p>Step 4: Anyone for whom that statement applies must move to a new chair and sit down (the person in the centre also has to find a chair).</p> <p>Note: If the statement did not apply to a person, that person just stays where they are. It's the moving that frees up a chair for the middle person.</p> <p>Step 5: The person who is left without a chair stands in the middle and starts "Step 3" all over again.</p> <p>Do this for several rounds (usually 10-20 minutes) to reveal all sorts of stuff about folks.</p> | |

5. Ungame

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|---|---|
| EO chapter | Pittsburgh |
| Shared by | Casey Carr |
| Type of exercise (icebreaker, team-building, closing, etc) | Icebreaker |
| Time required for this exercise | 10 minutes |
| Objective of the exercise | To open the group up by sharing opinions, feeling and beliefs, and increasing the understanding of fellow Forum members. |
| Outcome of the exercise | |
| Tools needed | The Ungame card deck by Talicor |
| Handouts and pre-work if any | None |
| Description of the exercise Randomly pull a card from the Ungame and use the question on that card for all Forum members. | |
| Step-by-step instructions <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Purchase the Ungame2. Pull a card and ask the question3. Repeat | |

6. Five-minute mindfulness to start each meeting

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| EO chapter | San Francisco |
| Shared by | Rudolph Mutter |
| Type of exercise (icebreaker, team-building, closing, etc) | Icebreaker |
| Time required for this exercise | 5 minutes |
| Objective of the exercise | Centre and focus the group from outside distractions or whatever they were dealing with before continuing to the next Forum exercise |
| Outcome of the exercise | Calm and focused Forum group ready to tackle the next part of the agenda |
| Tools needed | Computer / audio |
| Handouts and pre-work if any | Search YouTube for "5 minute guided meditation" or other website of choice |
| Description of the exercise Participate in a guided mindfulness exercise, usually a 5-minute recording of a guided breathing meditation. | |
| Step-by-step instructions At the beginning of an exercise or when coming back together from a break, play a pre-chosen guided mindfulness audio or video. | |
| Debrief questions/notes You can do an "opening word" exercise after doing the mindfulness exercise. | |

7. This or that

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|---|---|
| EO chapter | San Francisco |
| Shared by | Mike Simonsen |
| Type of exercise (icebreaker, team-building, closing, etc) | Icebreaker - dinner conversation |
| Time required for this exercise | 20 minutes to several hours |
| Objective of the exercise | To engage everyone in one conversation |
| Outcome of the exercise | To achieve depth, insight and thought-provoking conversation |
| Tools needed | None |
| Handouts and pre-work if any | None |
| Description of the exercise One person offers a dichotomy choice (A or B) and everyone at the table picks one. You hear what everyone else picked. Then the next person at the table offers a different dichotomy. Repeat. The secret to a great exercise of "This or That" is to go around the group multiple times, so that each person gets multiple chances to get creative with the choice they're asking. If you only go once around the table, the insights will be a bit weak. | |
| Step-by-step instructions One person offers a dichotomy choice (A or B) and everyone at the table picks one. You hear what everyone else picked. The next person at the table offers a different dichotomy. Repeat. Keep repeating. Listening to the dichotomies that others offer may trigger creative ideas for you. | |

This or That – Originator - Ellie Byrd (ellie@forumsherpa.com)

8. The human knot

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|---|--|
| EO Chapter | San Francisco |
| Shared by | Cory Levenberg |
| Type of exercise (icebreaker, team-building, closing, etc) | Team-building |
| Time required for this exercise | 10 minutes |
| Objective of the exercise | Work as a team; stand up and move around during a meeting |
| Outcome of the exercise | |
| Tools needed | None |
| Handouts and pre-work if any | None |
| Description of the exercise A good, quick, fun, team-building exercise. Everyone stands in a circle, then each person chooses two people to hold hands with (not the folks next to each other), creating a crazy "human knot". And then everyone tries to untangle and get back into a circle, all while holding hands. | |
| Step-by-step instructions Step 1: All participants stand in a circle (fewer than 15 people is ideal). Step 2: Everyone reaches across the circle and holds hands with two <i>different</i> people (so there will be arms criss-crossing every which way). Step 3: Without letting go of anyone's hands, the participants work together to get back into an untangled circle with everyone still holding hands. | |
| Debrief questions/notes This works well (is possible) if everyone is holding two DIFFERENT peoples' hands. | |

9. Better know a Forum mate: Introductions

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| EO chapter | San Francisco |
| Shared by | Cory Levenberg |
| Type of exercise (icebreaker, team-building, closing, etc) | Connection: New member intro |
| Time required for this exercise | 2 minutes per person |
| Objective of the exercise | It's a quick way to introduce new members and familiarize them with the group. |
| Outcome of the exercise | New member gets to meet the Forum, and all members are reminded of aspects of themselves and their Forum mates. |
| Tools needed | None |
| Handouts and pre-work if any | None |

Description of the exercise

Forum members take turns introducing a current Forum member to the new Forum member in two minutes (two minutes total; not per person).

Step-by-step instructions

- Someone agrees to go first (an existing member). That person stays silent. Set the timer for two minutes.
- In a free-for-all, brainstorm-style session, the other existing members call out things about that person (eg, he's married, he loves to golf, play tennis, etc.).
- Everyone chimes in saying something they know about the person, but in no order; they just say it out loud.
- When the two minutes is up, do the same thing for the next person.
- Rinse and repeat all the way around.

Option

To deepen the exercise, the member being introduced can (after two minutes) be given the option to add something additional that was not mentioned or that nobody else knows about them.

10. Stepping in

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| EO chapter | South Florida |
| Shared by | Cesar Quintero |
| Type of exercise (icebreaker, team-building, closing, etc) | Icebreaker |
| Time required for this exercise | 10 to 30 minutes |
| Objective of the exercise | A non-verbal disclosure of different icebreaker questions or statements to get to know where people stand on different topics |
| Outcome of the exercise | Trigger alignment conversations based on what people stepped in for or not |
| Tools needed | None |
| Handouts and pre-work if any | None |
| <p>Step-by-step instructions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have everyone stand in a line or a circle. 2. Explain to the group that you will read one statement at a time. And if they feel they agree with that statement, they STEP IN. 3. Read statements one by one, and allow people to step in and out before you read the next one. Allow time for people to observe who stepped in and who didn't. 4. Make a note of those statements where ALL stepped in or NO ONE stepped in. 5. Choose the questions or statements you want to ask in advance to limit the time as needed. | |
| <p>Instructions for participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will read a statement, and if you agree, then STEP IN. • Note who else stepped in or didn't. • Note in what area you were hesitant to reveal the truth to the group, or perhaps were not willing to reveal to the group. | |
| <p>Debrief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the group to debrief for as long as they need to so they can clarify and have the conversations they need to have. • Give time at the end for them to reveal their truth. • Review how they found this exercise to be. Were they surprised by anything? Did they learn anything new? | |
| <p>Set-up questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am skeptical about giving up "real work" days to be here. • I have concerns about being fully transparent at this retreat. • I am losing faith in my business. • I believe my work life/balance has had a negative impact on my family. • I wear too many hats at work. • I have lost the passion for my business and am finding it difficult to stay motivated. • My relationship with my spouse is currently strained. • I feel overextended. • I am dealing with, or have dealt with, a very draining legal battle. • I am proud of my current physical status. | |
| <p><i>Continued on next page ...</i></p> | |

10. Stepping in - continued

Group dynamics

- I can share anything with this group.
- We have effective presentations.
- I have an issue with the direction of the Forum.
- I am concerned that not all members are in the same place financially or professionally.
- The amount of time the group spends together outside of Forum works for me.
- I believe that some members hold back important and relevant information.
- The strength and effectiveness of this Forum works for me.
- I have an issue with specific individuals in the Forum.
- I wish others in the group were as committed as I am.
- I prefer the Forum to be more relaxed and less rigid.
- My Forum members are really the only people that I open up to about personal things.
- Punctuality and preparedness have been an issue in our Forum.
- Fine implementation has worked well.
- I believe we should spend less time on business issues and more on personal issues.
- I think our meetings are too casual and people joke around too much.
- I am not clear on the true value of EO.
- I am overwhelmed by guilt when I have to ask for a change in the meeting time or date.
- The meeting agenda and timing works for me.
- I feel that other members take advantage by asking for professional advice.

Business

- My current business can likely produce dependable cash flow for a lifetime.
- I work with a business coach.
- I have a succession plan for my business.
- My business partner is a nightmare.
- There is a dynamic within my business that is keeping me up at night.
- I frequently work from home.
- My business situation is terrible.
- In my business, I'd rather be a manager than a practitioner.
- I am going through, or have been through, a business failure.
- My employees are happy and feel successful.
- I have an employee in an important role who is draining energy from our team.
- I am trying to build a broken business model.
- The roles I play within my business are my passion.
- I am very clear about where I think my company should go.
- Doing business with family members has negatively impacted personal relationships.
- I am butting heads with a partner/owner/board member, or someone on my executive team.
- I am good at expressing appreciation in my organization.
- I would like to focus more on my business strategy, rather than operations.
- I prefer to be the sole leader and decision maker.

Personal

- Besides being with my kids, I don't know what makes me genuinely happy.
- I know my children are happy with me as a parent.
- I have risked and lost people's money that are close to me.
- I am always overcommitted and have issues with time management.
- I have streams of income coming from more than one business.
- I am unorganized.
- A close friend's divorce has profoundly affected my family dynamic.
- My spouse and I frequently fight.
- My parents set a great example for me.
- I still seek the approval of my parents.
- Most people who know me well would consider me dependable.

11. Self-reflection and two levels of sharing

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|---|---|
| EO chapter | South Florida |
| Shared by | Cesar Quintero |
| Type of exercise (icebreaker, team-building, closing, etc) | Icebreaker |
| Time required for this exercise | Up to one hour |
| Objective of the exercise | To get to know each other better |
| Outcome of the exercise | Knowing each other better |
| Tools needed | None |
| Handouts and pre-work if any | None |

Step-by-step instructions

Each member shares when the statement is read aloud:

- One thing I can remember about when I stopped believing in Santa Claus is ...
- A childhood memory of death was ...
- I knew I was (or wanted to be) an entrepreneur when ...
- The first time I had my heart broken was ...
- My biggest regret as a teenager was ...
- My biggest regret as a college student was ...
- A memory of disappointing one or both of my parents is ...
- My biggest disappointment in life is ...
- My biggest failure in life, outside of business, is ...
- My biggest failure in business is ...
- My biggest success in life is ...
- My biggest success in business is ...
- One thing I would go back and change if I could would be ...
- In business, I wish I was better at ...
- In my personal life, I wish I was better at ...
- One person I wish I could be more like is ...
- The one good thing I am 100 percent confident that others would say about me is ...
- The one bad thing I am 100 percent confident that others would say about me is ...
- My biggest fear in life is ...

Option: You can send out the exercise in advance and request responses on 5 percent.

12. Scavenger hunt

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| EO chapter | Inland Empire |
| Shared by | Anthony Gatto |
| Type of exercise (icebreaker, team-building, closing, etc) | Team-building |
| Time required for this exercise | 3 hours |
| Objective of the exercise | In teams of two to four, figure out how your Forum mates think and operate. |
| Outcome of the exercise | Team-building and fun; plus you can learn a little about the place you are visiting |
| Tools needed | http://www.urbanadventurequest.com |
| Handouts and pre-work if any | None |
| Step-by-step instructions Buy a scavenger hunt per team and then compete. | |

12. Scavenger Hunt - Variation

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|---|---|
| EO chapter | South Florida |
| Shared by | Cesar Quintero |
| Type of exercise (icebreaker, team-building, closing, etc) | Icebreaker, team-building, closing |
| Time required for this exercise | 30 minutes for a quick activity, or 2 hours for a longer version |
| Objective of the exercise | Fun way to connect with team members |
| Outcome of the exercise | Sheets of paper with the checklist of items |
| Tools needed | Teambuilding |
| Handouts and pre-work if any | |
| Description of the exercise | |
| Scavenger Hunt | |
| Step-by-step instructions | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divide members into teams on day of the scavenger hunt. • Give each team a list of items/challenges/riddles, and a time limit to complete. • The goal is to find all items, or complete all challenges, on the list. • Tell the players how the scavenger hunt will end. • Let the players know where they must meet once they finish. • For a timed hunt, teams will work to complete as many items/challenges as possible within the allotted time period. For untimed hunts, the team to complete the list (with the fewest deductions) and return to home base first will be declared the winner(s). | |
| <i>Continued on next page ...</i> | |

12. Scavenger Hunt - Variation

- continued

List of items/challenges/riddles

- 1. Get upside down**
 - a. 5 points for doing it
 - b. 5 points for each stranger you can get to do it with you
 - c. 5 extra points for getting upside down most creatively (as voted by group)
- 2. Do a cartwheel in front of a warehouse**
 - a. 5 points for doing it
 - b. 5 extra points if you get a stranger to hold up a judging card with a score of 1-10
- 3. Shake hands with a bearded man**
 - a. 5 points for doing it
- 4. Get a kid to sing a song**
 - a. 10 points for doing it
 - b. 5 additional points for getting someone to do it in a foreign language
- 5. Do the trust/fall into a stranger's arms**
 - a. 10 points for doing it
 - b. 10 additional points if the person is over 50 years old
- 6. Do a plank for at least 60 seconds**
 - a. 10 points for doing it
 - b. 5 extra points for getting someone to do it with you
 - c. 5 extra points for being the most creative (as voted by the group)
- 7. Play leapfrog with your team outside of an office (at least 8 total jumps)**
 - a. 10 points for doing it
 - b. 5 additional points for every stranger you get to do it with you
- 8. Give or get a piggy back ride from a stranger**
 - a. 15 points for doing it
- 9. Buy the least expensive things you can find. You must be able to show a receipt.**
 - a. 10 points for the least expensive item
- 10. Decipher these clues and write the answer below for each:**
 - a. 5 points - What's black when you get it, red when you use it and white when you're all through with it?
 - b. 5 points - Throughout history, there have been thousands of well-documented cases of horses jumping over towers and landing on clergy and small men, forcing their removal. What am I?
 - c. 5 points - Stiff is my spine and my body is pale, but I'm always ready to tell a tale.