

As a boy growing up in Bellaire, Texas, I was involved in a recreational gymnastics program which used games, contests and challenges on a daily basis to teach the sport and to keep the group engaged. We loved our workouts because there was always something new and fun to do. Because our time in the gym challenged us with creative class instruction and a bit of



AS A COMPONENT OF RECREATIONAL GYMNASTICS CLASSES

BY MIKE SPILLER

fun, I grew to love gymnastics. I couldn't wait to get to the gym each day to be with my friends and to learn new and different skills. We worked hard because we loved what we were doing, and we always made a game of challenging one another to be the best we could be.

Later in my life as I began to coach, I put into action the same philosophy for a successful recreational program: a caring coach who is enthusiastic and motivated, a well-planned class with attainable progressions with a pinch of fun and games.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN TO PLAY?

After observing and studying play for 40 years, I understand play is more than just fun. It is an essential part of every child's life and is vital for the enjoyment of childhood, as well as the development of social competence, emotional maturity, intellectual and physical growth. Play is highly important in learning and crafting the brain. Play creates a brain that has increased flexibility and improved potential for learning later in life.

"Children who know how to play well can easily leap over the adversities of life." Play is a universal and vital process for the healthy development of every child. It is said, "Play is the child's work." It allows the child to explore the world in which he or she lives and grows.

Programs that include play, such as gymnastics schools, give children the chance to learn together and play together in a safe and stimulating environment. It also nurtures sharing and personal growth. A gymnastics school's success largely depends on their students' ability to interact positively with their peers and their coaches. Children who engage in quality play are more likely to have well-developed memory and language skills, and are better able to regulate their behavior. Physically active play allows children to test and develop all types of motor skills.

BENEFITS OF PLAY

PURPOSEFUL PLAY CREATES RETENTION.

A knowledgeable gymnastics school knows the importance of play and will incorporate it into its daily curriculum. A well-trained

recreational coach creates a class designed to include a touch of fun.

Fun, used during class, equals retention of the students and retention allows students to progress and develop their skill level and to build their self-esteem (not to mention prolonged income for the gym club). The goal of recreational gymnastics classes is to make sure each student progresses in a fun and positive way. As a coach and/or gym owner, you want the students to walk away from the gym each day saying, "This a fun place and I'm really learning how to do gymnastics."

FUN LEADS TO POSITIVE RESULTS.

Using Fun to Get Things Done

Fun creates enjoyment,
Enjoyment invites participation,
Participation focuses attention,
Attention expands awareness,
Awareness promotes insight,
Insight generates knowledge,
Knowledge facilitates action,
Action yields results.

If you want incredible results, add a little fun to your class curriculum.

Remember: Enthusiasm is caught, not taught.

When a coach says, "We are going to play a game," the students come alive with excitement. Take the excitement and give the students a game, a challenge or a contest that will help them improve. This is called "Purposeful Play." Play with an outcome. Play with intention to grow and learn with fun.

Every gymnastics school has its favorite games, contests and challenges. It is always nice to mix-up the activities that you present to the

classes or teams. Use every resource you can find for your play research.

SAMPLE GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

Wiggle Warm-up / Warm-up Activity for Younger Class Students

Toss a bunch of elastic loops around the floor and tell the kids that they need to jog to a band while the music is playing, step through it, pull it over their heads and shoot it up into the air as far as possible. After that, they must go find a different band and repeat the action. If they can't shoot it, they can just wad it up and toss the band away from them. Buy 1-inch flat, elastic from a craft shop, cut it into 3-foot strips and tie the 2 ends together to make the loop. This is a great full-body warm-up and really gets the students energized.

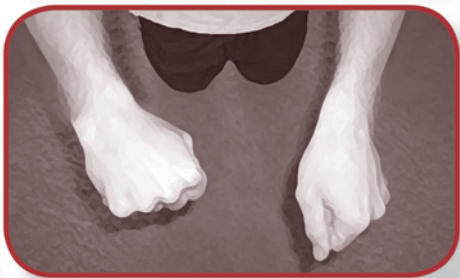


Rock & Roll Guessing Game / Recreational Class Challenge

Have all of the athletes line up on one side of the gym floor. The leader of the game will place a coin or small stone in his hand. The leader moves his hands around, changing the stone from hand to hand to hide it. When finished, the players try to guess which hand the stone is in by raising their right or left hand. If correct, they do a forward roll to the next line or cone on the floor mat. If incorrect, they do five jumping jacks. Play continues and the objective is to roll to the far boundary line, turn around and roll back to the starting point for the win. Number the

PLAY

players from 1 to 4 when they first line up. These are the teams. Play until there are three to five players back to the finish line. Ask what team they are on and add up the points. Play several rounds and total up the points for the overall top team. The second round could be cartwheels or handstand roll outs.



Rock, Paper Scissors SPLIT

Players start out with their feet set one behind the other, heel/toe and the front foot of each participant about a foot away from the other player. Play Rock Paper Scissors. Winner puts his front foot directly behind his back foot (toe to heel again). The loser slides his front foot forward until it touches the winner's new front foot. Keep playing and moving feet until one person can't reach the other's front foot. The one left standing is the winner.



Pose Game / Warm-Up Activity for All Ages

Have all the gymnasts spread out around the floor exercise mat. Let them know that during this activity you are looking for them to be very original while creating gym poses. As a leader, you will call out from one to several different body parts, and the students will create an interesting pose of some kind using only the parts of the body called. The coach might say, "The only thing that can touch the floor is one hand, one foot and one head." The students try to make a pose using only these body parts. To continue, the coach could say, "Create a pose with only your seat, one toe, and one hand touching the floor." After everyone is in a pose, look around and point out exceptional poses to the group. Do this activity several times, making sure you change the body parts each time.



Scan the QR code to view more games from Mike Spiller:



Mike has traveled the world to find innovative and stimulating game data for his many summer camps, teacher in-services and Games of the World workshops. His *450 Games for the Gym School* can be purchased from USA Gymnastics by visiting the online technical store at usagym.sportgraphics.biz

20 REASONS TO PLAY

- Reduces stress
- Increases productivity
- Improves services
- Promotes positive attitude
- Strengthens communication skills
- Breaks down barriers and builds bridges
- Helps develop individual skills
- Helps with goal setting
- Increases morale
- Creates immediate feedback
- Solving problems can be fun
- Strengthens commitment
- Creates a social, interactive environment
- Provides testing ground for new games and activities
- Breaks down sub-groups
- Allows for individual/group encouragement
- Allows staff to take on leadership roles
- Creates a team atmosphere
- Builds trust in one another
- Creates faith in the purpose of the organization

