

MATH ADVENTURE KIT

Theatric Station Lead



THEATRIC STATION LEAD

This chapter gives more details for the people that will oversee each of the theatric stations during the event. Most adventures have 4 theatric stations. There is also a puzzle solving area, where the opening skit and wrap-up activities are usually held. Those are covered separately for that lead.

1. UNDERSTAND THE LARGER STORY HAPPENING AT THE EVENT

Read through the story summary. You want to know what happens at each station, and how the things students receive or learn at your station fits into the larger picture.

First, knowing this will help you set the tone for the characters. Should they be silly? Scared? Scary? The kids love it when all the adults stay in character -- even the incidental helpers.

Second, as departing teams leave, you can give them guidance on why their visit was important? Did they uncover an important clue? Did they vanquish a troublesome monster?

Third, knowing what station kids have after yours will help the helper who gives out the outgoing puzzle to add some character to that too, to set the stage.

Finally, if your station is the last in the loop for some teams, you'll be able to talk to them about how this last achievement caps off the adventure. Do they now have all the pieces to the puzzle? Is there a finale that they should go look for?

2. UNDERSTAND THE NARRATIVE HAPPENING AT THIS STATION

Each station is meant to convey an emotion. One station is the "funny" station. Another station might be the scary or stealthy station. A third might have an ooh-aah reveal. Know what emotion your station is trying to evoke. That will put the narrative in perspective. And if you bungle a line, or decide to improvise, that's okay, as long as you know what you're aiming for.



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The visiting teams of kids also have lines, but they won't know them. Your job is to elicit them by your acting. The scripts will anticipate what a team will do or say, but you may need to encourage them. Younger teams in particular may just freeze up. For them, consider having a guide provided by the station, who helps the kids discover and play their part.

3. VOLUNTEER ROLES

Each station will call for a number of volunteers. There are defined roles for 1 or more actors. But your station also benefits from a few helpers who don't need to be actors. The more teams you expect to see over the course of the event, the more volunteers you'll need. Work with Registration to know how many teams to expect, and then work with Volunteer Recruitment, to find your volunteers.

Hopefully, you'll identify beforehand a few parents with good senses of drama or humor, who can have fun with the roles. Share with all of your volunteers the kit scripts for both the narrative of this station, and the larger event storyline. You never know when you'll be surprised by a resourceful parent who can bring in their own costume!

If you won't know your volunteers until the last moment, you should bring printouts of the scripts, for them to read over as they arrive.

One of the actor roles is usually designated as the greeter. This role is meant to have a character to play, but doesn't leave the arrival location. Other actors usually step into a classroom, or are otherwise out of sight of subsequently arriving teams.

Another helper role is to designate someone to hand out outgoing puzzles to teams, once they have done the theatric step. This allows the actors to more quickly jump back into their part for another team that is waiting.

For smaller events, the actors can usually cover all the bases, both acting and helper. But for medium or larger events, you'll want to separate these roles. It's valuable to have staff that don't need to play pivotal acting roles, so that they can interact with arriving teams, while the actors are playing their roles with a previous team.

GUIDES

If you have an ample supply of actors, consider designating one or two to be guides for the youngest teams. Young students often freeze up when actors ask them questions, and the guide can act as an honorary team member, whispering appropriate responses in the children's ears. This role is particularly well suited to the youngest volunteers, such as middle school students, who can plausibly seem like fellow adventurers, rather than event staff.



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PARALLEL ROOMS

For particularly large events, you'll find that one group of actors would be overwhelmed by all the teams. You'll want to recruit a second group, who play all the same roles, in a parallel room. That way, as new teams arrive, they are directed by the greeters into first one room, and then the other. At the largest events we've held, we had 4 parallel rooms at each station.

ROOM MONITORS

If you choose to staff your rooms with teenage actors from the local high school, rather than with parents, it may be appropriate to draft a parent to hang out in the room as the official room parent. They don't even need to act, although they are often helpful resetting a room between visiting teams. We have found that doing this is part of building confidence with the teachers, whose classrooms you may be using.

4. YOUR ROLE DURING THE EVENT

Your primary job is station setup. Make sure you have all materials you need, and not accidentally the materials of a neighboring station. Make sure your rooms are unlocked, and you know any constraints on their use. Also, plan to mount signs to direct teams from the puzzle solving area to your station.

Once the adventure is underway, you can decide whether you're more valuable stepping into one of the acting roles, or overseeing the station as a whole. Certainly, if you're short-handed, you may have no choice but to jump into the fray.

However, there are two benefits if you can focus on oversight.

1. You can keep an eye out for bottlenecks, or other hiccups in the flow, and be proactive addressing them. Similarly, you can offer guidance to actors who need encouragement to find their inner dramatist.
2. About halfway through the event, when the early jitters have worn off, you can offer to give individual staff 5-minute breaks, where they can go observe other stations, or maybe check in on their children. Many parents who volunteer at stations worry that they are missing the action everywhere else, so they often jump at a chance to explore.

5. COMMON EARLY JITTERS

For the first one or two teams that come through, both the station staff and the visiting teams will likely be unclear of all the beats they need to hit. As such, here are a few to watch out for...

- When teams arrive, make sure they're in the right place. Teams occasionally get lost, and should have gone to a different station.



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- Make sure they've actually solved the puzzle, and brought the answer with them. The answer is key to their involvement in the theatrics. If their answer is slightly off, consider just fixing it for them, rather than sending them back to re-solve it.
- Make sure the entire team has arrived. You don't want to start the narrative with some of team still missing. This includes parents too -- kids in their enthusiasm often arrive well before their chaperoning parents.
- As teams depart, make sure they take their outgoing puzzle with them. This is the most common mistake! Teams can be so excited at having pulled off the challenge they faced, that they go running back to the puzzle solving area without another puzzle.
- Send departing teams back to the puzzle solving area (usually the cafeteria). We encourage all teams to do their solving there, and not to plop down on the floor near the previous station. Not only does that cause road blocks. It also means that those teams are not visible to the cafeteria organizer, and are farther from mentoring help.
- Watch for teams that have finished. Toward the end of the event, teams that come to your station will not need an outgoing puzzle, because they've already done it. Before handing it to them, ask if they've already done it, and if so, congratulate them on successfully completing the entire adventure. If there is a wrap-up activity, send them to it.

6. DEALING WITH BOTTLENECKS

During the event, if you notice that a substantial line has formed at your station, you should seek to address that. Waiting in line can take a lot of the fun and energy out of the evening for the kids. Here are a few ideas...

- Talk to the actors about shortening their scripted lines. Some actors can get so invested in their roles that it eats up a lot of time.
- Send two teams through at once. While the teams may not get to be as hands on as you'd like, many won't know the difference, and it's better than waiting.
- Consider creating an impromptu parallel station. This requires a second location, like a neighboring classroom, and a few more volunteers. If your event size is on the high side, consider planning ahead, and bringing a second set of props. You can start out with just one room active. But if you find yourself overrun, you can then bring the second room online. In these borderline cases, some stations will need a parallel station, while other faster moving stations don't.
- If teams are moving slowly because they don't seem to know how to act inside the play, consider appointing one or two of your staff to be a guide, who accompanies each team, and gives them tips for what to do.



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7. FOOD

Math Adventures are often held in the evening, at or just after dinner time. Teams are often encouraged to bring food, which they can eat in the puzzle solving area.

Station staff don't have it so easy. They are often busy throughout the event. However, you should encourage them to plan ahead, and bring a sack meal, or at least a snack. If you like, you might even coordinate a group pizza. The best time to eat is in the first 10 minutes after the kick-off, before any teams arrive.

8. MATERIALS CHECKLIST

Theatric stations have three sets of supplies: theatric props, giveaways, and paperwork.

THEATRIC PROPS

See the station script for prop lists for each station.

Some will be purchased by the organizing committee, or sourced from the community.

If you have the opportunity to invite actors to bring their own costumes, you will often be rewarded with far more creativity or authenticity than a prop purchaser is likely to achieve.

GIVEAWAYS

The storyline for most stations envisions giving each team something to show for their efforts. It might be a simple door prize, or a key piece of evidence for the larger mystery they are trying to solve. Sugary treats are always a hit too.

Most giveaways are meant to be given to each child in the team. Make sure you have plenty. If a team shows up with a bonus player, or a little sibling in tow, try to give some to them too without qualms. It's a good outreach way to build enthusiasm for the event, so that next year, those people will form their own teams.

PAPERWORK

Registration should provide each station with a team list. Check in teams as they arrive, so you know at the end if everyone has come. This is more reliable than simply counting visitors, because we have found that occasionally, enthusiastic teams will run through a station twice, and mess up the count. Note that the list will not reliably predict what order teams arrive.

Printing should provide each station with the puzzles that lead to the next puzzle in the cycle. NOT the puzzle that leads to this station. Give these to teams as they leave, after they've participated in the theatrics. Make sure they get the correct math level. The team list will list this. If they've switched levels, they may need to trade the puzzle you give them for the equivalent puzzle at another level when they get back to the puzzle solving area. If you give them the puzzle at their new level, you may have actually given away another team's copy.

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9. EVENT MILESTONE CHECKLIST

Following is a recap of the timeline of the event. For sake of example, this presumes a 6pm start...

Task	Timeline	Completed?
Gather supplies to the station area; verify their content	4:45	
If you find your room unexpectedly locked, the janitor will have the keys.	4:45	
Put up signs leading from the solving area to your station.	5:00	
Take a picture of the space with your phone, to remind yourself how it looked before you move anything.	5:10	
Setup props in the rooms, moving as few items in the room as possible. Hide containers with extra props or giveaways where visiting teams won't find them.	5:15	
Actors and helpers start arriving.	5:15	
Setup greeting stations in hallway, with team list and outgoing puzzles.	5:20	
Teams start arriving at the puzzle solving area; some will roam the school out of curiosity – shoo them away to avoid spoilers.	5:30	
Any actors needed in the opening skit need to go to the puzzle solving area	5:50	
Teams start their first puzzle in the solving area	6:00	
Fastest teams finish their first puzzle, arrive at stations	6:10	
Kinks worked out of station flow; a good time to let actors take short breaks, if staffing is sufficient.	6:50	
Fastest teams will arrive, where this is their final station. They won't need an outgoing puzzle. Send them to the wrap-up activity, if any (usually back in the solving area).	7:15	
Slowest teams will arrive for their final station	8:00	
Expect a message from the solving area lead, confirming that no more teams will be coming.	8:05	
Last teams leave. Start cleaning (use pictures taken at onset).	8:10	
Leave the school	8:30	

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