

# Broken Squares

Cultural Activity

## Explanation

### Goal

To analyze certain aspects of cooperation in solving a group problem and to learn how our personal behavior may contribute to or obstruct the solving of a group problem.

### Group Size

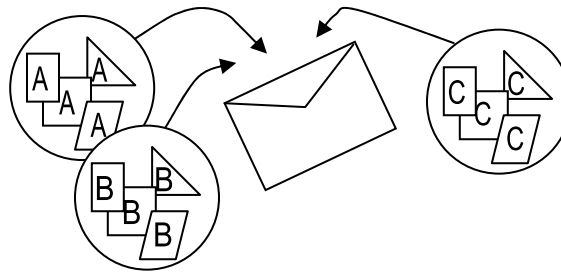
Any size group, broken into small groups of five people per group

### Materials

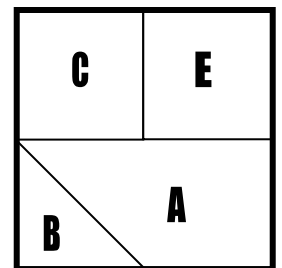
- Photocopies of page 4 – 6, scissors, paper clips
- One **Broken Square Envelope** for each small group (*see below*)
- (*optional*) One set of “Observer Instructions” for each small group (*pg. 3*)

### Preparation

- Photocopy the squares onto card stock and cut into pieces.
- Paper clip each group of letters into like categories (i.e. All “A”s together, all “B”s, etc.).
- Place one complete set of letters into an envelope. Make enough envelopes for each small group to have one **Broken Square Envelope**.



Sample Square



### Instructions

Divide the participants into groups of five. Each group should form a small circle so they can work with the squares. Give each group a **Broken Square Envelope** containing one full set of squares.

**Do not let the group open the envelope until the instructions are read.** Once the instructions have been explained, let someone in the group hand out one set of letters to each person in the small group.

## Facilitator

### Read the following instructions out loud:

In each envelope there are five sets of puzzle pieces.

Your group has enough pieces to make five identical sized squares.

The task will not be completed until each individual in the group has before them a perfect square of the same size as that held by others.

### Specific limitations are imposed during this exercise:

- No member may speak.
- No member may ask another member for a piece or in any way signal that another person is to give them a piece.
- No member may take a piece from another member.
- Members are not allowed to put other member's puzzle together
- Members may give their pieces to other members, but not place those pieces in another member's puzzle. They must simply hand the piece to another member.

**Total Time:** 30 to 45 minutes

### Suggested Debriefing/Discussion Questions

1. How did you feel during the exercise? Why?
2. How many were frustrated? Why? How did you solve the communication challenges?
3. Was there any critical point at which the group started to cooperate? What was the cause?
4. What was the only way to be able to complete this activity? You had to be willing to give your pieces away. Why is that significant?
5. What are some principles for successful group cooperation?
  - Each individual must understand the total problem
  - Each individual should understand how they contribute toward solving the problem.
  - Each individual should be aware of the potential contributions of other people.
  - We need to recognize the problems of other individuals, in order to aid them in making their maximum contribution.

## Optional Idea for Larger Groups

For larger groups, make the small group size six with the sixth member being an observer. Use the attached instruction sheet for observers.

### Observer Instructions

Your job is part observer and part judge. Make sure each participant observes the following rules while playing the game.

1. No talking or pointing.
2. Participants may give pieces to others but may not take pieces from other members.
3. Participants may not simply throw their pieces into the center for others to take; they have to give the pieces directly to one individual at a time.
4. No participant may work on puzzle in front of other team members.
5. It is permissible for a member to give away all the pieces to his square, even if he has already formed a square.

**Observations:** As an observer, please record the following observations on this paper. You may record the names of individuals in your group who identify with a particular question. The participants are not to see these questions.

1. Who is willing to give away pieces of the puzzle?
2. Did anyone finish their puzzle but was unwilling to give any of their pieces away?
3. How many people are actively engaged in mentally putting the pieces together?
4. Periodically check the level of frustration or anxiety--who's pulling their hair out?
5. Was there any crucial turning point at which time the group began to cooperate?
6. Did anyone "mentally drop out" when they had completed their square?
7. Did anyone try to violate the rules by talking or pointing as a means of helping fellow members solve their puzzle?

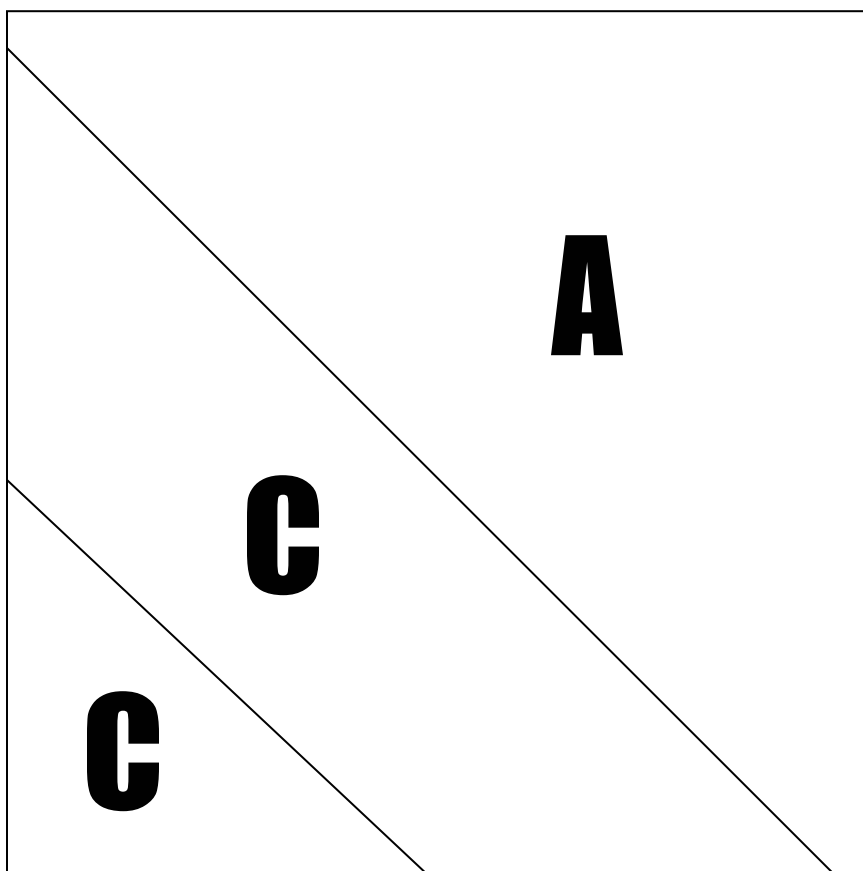
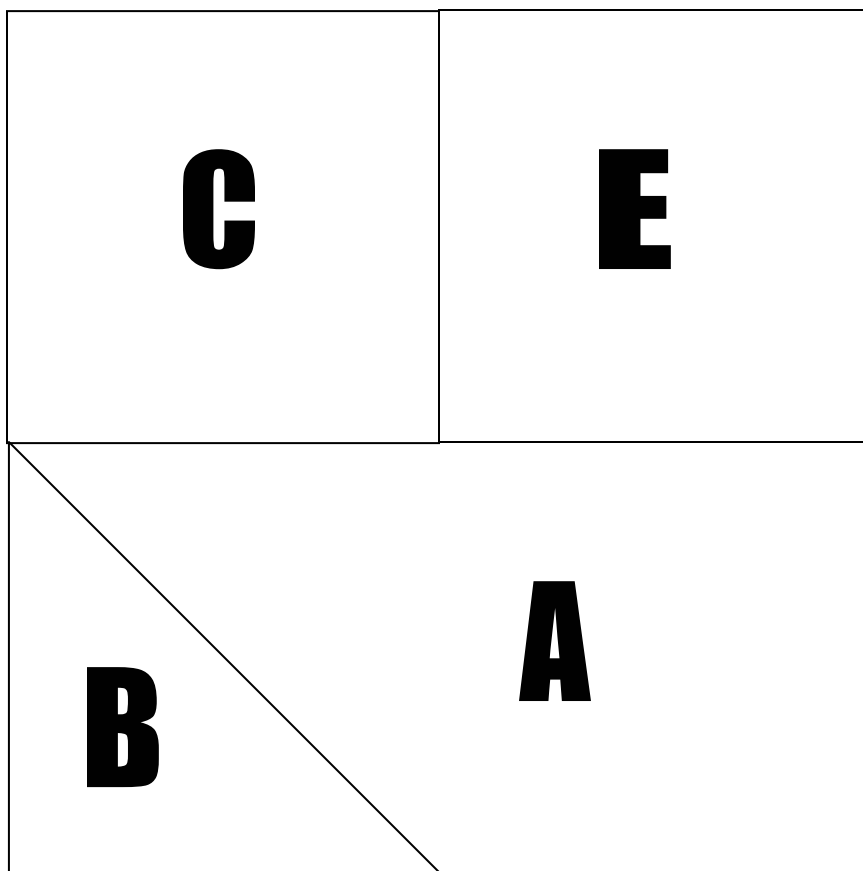
Cut out each  
and every  
shape.

Then place all  
pieces with the  
same letter  
together in a  
paper clip.

Put these  
groups of  
pieces into one  
envelope  
called the  
**Broken  
Square  
Envelope.**

Each **Broken  
Square  
Envelope**  
should  
contain:

- 4 – A's
- 4 – B's
- 5 – C's
- 2 – D's
- 4 – E's



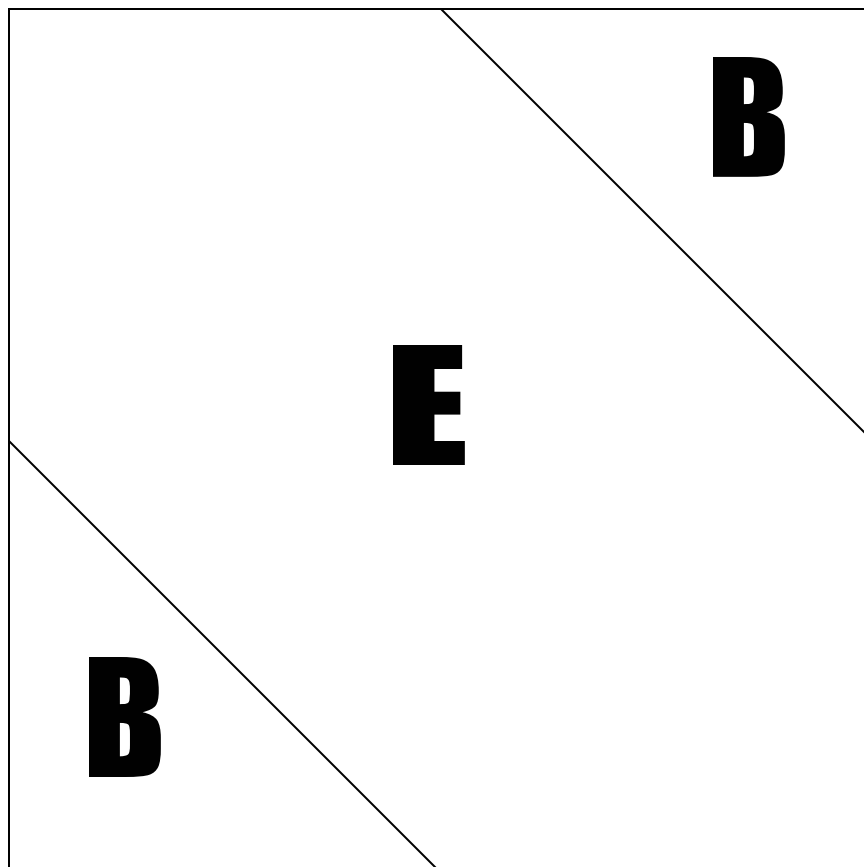
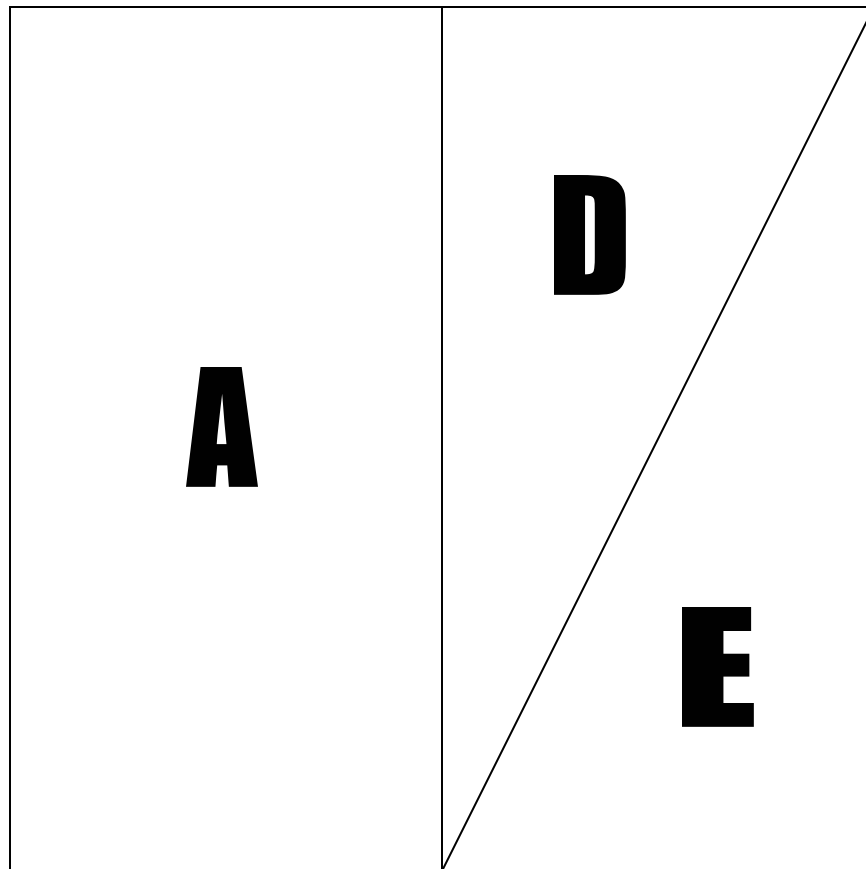
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