Camp Themes and Ideas
By Martha Garton

Abstract
Ideas for camp themes and ways to incorporate the theme into every aspect of camp. Tips on committees and planning camp.

Use Committees to Expand Creativity
If you really want to make camp something to remember, get a committee together to plan it. Remember, you are only limited by your own imagination! Involve kids in the planning; they may not be bogged down by conventional ideas. Appoint committees for program covers, name tags, decorations, party activities, special theme song. Give kids several months notice for a camp costume party, and challenge them to have the best costume on a shoe string budget.

Two Camp sub-committees you may not have thought of...

Build-Up – This little group builds-up anticipation and curiosity—through word of mouth, impromptu skits at meetings or county events, posters, bulletins, invitations with an unusual angle; unlike office newsletters, which are often ignored.

Atmosphere – This committee sets the stage for the camp and/or party through costuming and decorations and gives the first arrivals something to do to get them in the spirit.

Choose a Great Theme and Use It
Nothing makes camp planning come together like a great camp theme. Carry out the theme in nametags, assemblies, classes, bulletin boards; rename the dining hall, cabins, and even menu items. Have morning thoughts related to the theme and challenge kids to share their thoughts on the “daily thought” at council circle or at the evening meal. Have “table topics” at meals and encourage discussions on those topics. Every chance we give kids to speak before a group helps build those life skills.

There are only a few basic camp rules that must be followed. Everything else can be changed. One year we had a holiday theme and had planned a big Thanksgiving dinner. The older kids decided they also wanted to have a backwards day. This put Thanksgiving dinner at breakfast! We finally convinced the cooks that it would work. The turkey, etc. was cooked the night before, so we woke up early, had a backwards council circle and then ate a huge dinner! Despite the cooks’ misgivings, the kids ate more at that meal than any other meal of the week; in part because they planned it. We had the required food groups at each meal, plus some extra ones at “breakfast” and the necessary number of hours between meals. The French toast “supper” went over well too!

Remember the Ages and Stages
Remember, younger campers need a routine. So don’t get too crazy for them. They need to know what comes next and to feel secure about their day. For instance, a “backwards” council circle can confuse a first year camper if they haven’t experienced enough “frontwards” council circles to know what comes next. That’s why traditional songs, rules of the council, etc. go well at the beginning of the week.

Don’t Over Plan—Leave Room to “Create”
Spend some time at camp “creating” some of the props and decorations. If the kids create it they will be proud and feel more ownership. Too many things are just spectator sports in today’s world. Teach youth to make their own fun. For instance, one year we had an impromptu parade and each tribe had to create a float and...
marching band. You might miss some very creative ideas if too many things are planned ahead by the planning committee.

**Have Something for Everyone**
Don’t forget the research on learning styles! Try to build in something for everyone. The camp bookworm needs to be recognized for knowing something no one else did just like the camp athlete does for winning a race. Keep creative juices running with all kinds of stimuli.

**Ideas that Work**
The Wizard of Oz – daily themes like “If I only had a brain”, “You gotta have heart”, “Courage to do your best”, “Somewhere over the rainbow”, “There’s no place like home”
Howdy Partner – southwestern, cowboys
Aloha – Hawaiian or Beach party
Circus
It’s a Mystery
Land of Make Believe
Be a Super Hero
TV Land – Producing a TV Program or looking at old TV programs
World of Books – pick a different book for each day or use one author like Dr. Seuss.
American Heritage – costume party where folks dress like someone from American History
Outer Space
It’s a Small World – different country each day – great for trying new foods
Those were the days – pick any decade 60’s 70’s, 80’s 90’s
Fantasy land, elves, dragons, etc.
Sports of all Sorts
Way Off Broadway
You’re the Star – could emphasis each person’s talents and uniqueness

**Challenges**
Physical challenges, Mental Challenges, Social Challenges

The Olympics
Cartoons
Life on the River
Creativity
Holidays (campers could hang their stockings, snowflakes and other decorations on the cabin porch and a “Santa” character could leave them a piece of candy and a cheap toy)

Hooray for Hollywood
Together We Can…..
Our Great State
Happiness Is…
Rock Around the Clock – one of the best assemblies for this was a DJ who talked about the history of rock and roll and played examples – kids danced through the whole assembly and learned lots.

Let’s Celebrate
Surf’s Up
4-H Friendship

Military theme – Sometimes local ROTC and recruiters can really make this work – make sure they don’t go overboard with the recruitment, however. We even got dog tags for name tags – couldn’t see them, but they were cool!

Humor – have a funny t-shirt contest, write clean limericks, have a knock, knock joke day, study the effects of humor, learn how not to use humor, use brain teasers and have a comedy club party.

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**Caution** – try to anticipate if any of your themes may spark controversy. Certain religions don’t celebrate holidays. Religious holidays may cause controversy. Certain groups may object to themes with dragons, witches, etc.