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Club Operation

Art Project Engages Early Arrivals

For a pre-club activity, print the words “Sparks for Jesus” in large letters on mural paper. Hang the mural within children’s reach. Supply colored markers, rubber stamps and pads, glue sticks, glitter and other craft items. Invite Sparkies to decorate the mural however they wish during the pre-session time. Children will enjoy watching the mural become more colorful each week.

Photo Fun

Sparkies love to see their pictures. Take digital photos of kids in club and show them the following week. Don’t let the children see them on the back of the camera as you are taking them. Encourage them to be at club to see themselves on the TV monitor, computer or big projection screen

Grow Along With Your Sparkies

As much as we love to share God’s Word with our Sparkies, it’s important that we grow in the Word, too. The parent handbooks Beginnings, Promise and Glory are great study guides for leaders, too. They correspond with each of the Sparks handbooks. Besides facilitating your own spiritual growth, these studies will equip you to share insights with your clubbers.

A Pudding Perk

Encourage the Sparkies in your handbook group with a pudding cup snack along with a handwritten note that reads, “Thanks for pudding the effort into your Sparks handbook work this year.” Clip the note to their handbook to make sure the note gets home -- even though the pudding won’t!

A Sweet Way to Appreciate Leaders

This should bring a smile to your Sparks leaders’ faces and serve as a “thank you” for all their work. Give them each a box of animal crackers with a note that reads: “It would be a zoo here without you!”

Remember the Good Times in Awana

Have all your Sparkies and leaders sit in a circle. Let them take turns and share their favorite thing about Awana this year. Do it again, this time asking for their favorite verse. Encourage clubbers to look forward to next year. For this age clubber, the summer is very long. Do all you can to get the kids enthusiastic about next fall.

Pre-Club Activity Motivates Early Arrival

Mount a poster board or mural paper on a wall within Sparkies' reach. Print Ephesians 6:1 across the top. Have markers handy. Invite clubbers who come early to write or draw how they obeyed their parents that week. Collect the markers five minutes before club starts.

This is a great way to motivate clubbers to come early (or ask their parents to get them to club early)! It also reinforces Scripture memory, helps the children to evaluate themselves and encourages them to share with others how they are learning to obey their parents.

The First Shall be Last!

One club instructs their Game Time line leaders to put the first Sparkie in line at the end of the line after each game. This allows different children to have the opportunity to be first.

Jar Game Inspires Sparkies to Remember Their Dues

A Sparks club in Ohio collects dues with a clever game. They took a large jar and securely glued a small baby food jar on the bottom. Then they filled the jar with water. Sparkies must bring their dues in quarters and drop them into the jar. (Leaders keep a supply of quarters for those who bring dollar bills or a combination of smaller coins.) Those whose quarters land inside the little jar receive a small prize. Virtually all Sparkies are now remembering to bring their dues!

Make Birthdays Special for Clubbers

There are lots of ways to honor children on their birthday. Even if their birthday is not right on club night, you can recognize them the same week.

One way is to have a special decorated chair for the honoree to be seated in during Large Group Time. Decorate it with streamers or balloons or pictures of Sparky. To assure all clubbers are recognized throughout the club year, use the half-birthdays of children whose special day occurs when club is recessed for the summer. Or, recognize all summer birthdays the first club meeting of the year.

Here's another version of "Happy Birthday" you can use:

Happy birthday to you,
We're glad God made you.
You're special to us,
And God loves you, too!

Let Sparky Encourage Your Clubbers

As the children are leaving the room to go home, have a leader stationed by the door, seated or kneeling, with the Sparky puppet (or doll). Let them say goodbye to Sparky or high-five him.

Sparky should respond by saying "See you next week" or "Goodbye" but should always use the clubber's name: "Work on your verses for next week, Jason."

You remember best what you hear last and that personal touch will encourage Sparkies to look forward to next week!

Add Motion to the 'Sparks Theme Song'

Tell your Sparkies that when you sing the "Sparks Theme Song" you want them to jump up each time they sing the words "Sparks" or "Jesus." Children will enjoy this unusual activity while singing the familiar song.

A Clothespin for Good Behavior

As Sparkies check in, they get a clothespin painted with their team color. If a child exhibits inappropriate behavior any time during the meeting, a leader takes the clothespin. When the prize for the winning team is awarded, Sparkies must hand in their pins to receive their prize. This encourages children to conduct themselves properly. And if a child does misbehave, the entire team is not penalized.

Be Allergy Aware

Peanut allergies and lactose intolerance are on the rise and schools are going gluten free. Be careful when you incorporate food into any aspect of your club, especially Game Time. At the start of your club year, ask parents/guardians to fill out a form listing any allergies/medical conditions that their Sparkie has. Do not allow any child to participate in a food-related game (even candy-diabetic children could have a reaction) until you know for certain that the child can handle it. A good rule of thumb is better safe than sorry. Adapted from The Official Sparks Game Book, page 5.

Bring Order to Your Flag Ceremony

Here's a different way to start your Sparks flag ceremony. Enlarge and reproduce two copies of Sparky's face and tape or glue them back to back on a yard stick. When flag ceremony time has arrived, have the designated clubber hold the Sparky face high so children will know it's time to be quiet. The designated starter says, "Sparky says it's time to start." The Sparkies repeat the phrase as a group. When everyone is quiet, begin your flag ceremony.

Special Flight 3:16 Group

Depending on your facilities and numbers of children and leaders, consider having a permanent Flight 3:16 group during Handbook Time. We all start out the year with lots of kids in the entrance booklet, but as they complete it, leaders are then working with clubbers in their handbooks.

Dedicate a specific leader to new children to assure they get a consistent gospel presentation. It also relieves leaders of having to orient new kids while trying to pass the regulars on their sections. This leader could acquaint new kids with Sparks in general, procedures such as the five-count and all of your church policies such as gum chewing or restroom breaks, etc. Outlaw the use of the word "visitor" in your club – refer to them in a more positive way as "new friends!"

Creating Orderly Transitions

Try these tips for making your transitions from one club segment to the next more efficient. This will give you more time for handbook review and teaching.

- From Handbook Time to Game Time: Line clubbers up according to teams and give points for the most orderly team entering the Awana Game Square.

- From Game Time to Large Group Time: Make sure chairs are in order and play a music CD as kids enter. Have them remain standing and start singing the song. Again, give points for the best team.

Shake Hands With Sparky!

Try adding a Sparky handshake to your awards segment of Large Group Time. Seat a leader with the Sparky puppet near the person who is announcing and presenting the weekly awards. After the children receive their awards, invite them to shake hands with Sparky before returning to their seats.

Happy Birthday Jesus Party!

Instead of the usual Christmas decorations, use pastel-colored balloons and crepe paper to give your Sparks room a "birthday feel." Give each Sparkie a cupcake with a single candle. Set them all on a table in the center of the room. Light the candles, turn out the lights and sing Happy Birthday to Jesus. Then have all the children blow out their candles at the same time. Turn on the lights and enjoy the birthday cake!

Should Your Club Impose Section Limits for Each Meeting?

The answer will vary depending on your club. Some churches with a large number of unchurched Sparkies see no need for a limit. Others, that have a lot of Christian kids, may be concerned the children are only rote memorizing – so they set a limit. Also, churches with a large number of children in Handbook Time may see the need for a limit so all the kids get attention.

If you have a limit, what should it be?

In Sparks, the rank has eight sections. The eight jewels each have four sections for a total of 40 sections. A four-section limit would still allow a Sparkie to finish her book in 10 weeks, well before the midpoint of your club year. This would give her ample time to complete the Extra-Credit Review and the Frequent Flyer cards.

A middle-of-the-road method

Set a section limit for team points only, and any other sections passed do not count for team points that evening. This prevents the one "Super Sparkie" from carrying his team each week. This issue can cause serious discussion if a policy is not set and agreed

upon by all leaders ahead of time. Of course, clear communication to parents is also a must.

Music Enriches the Club Experience

Music brings so much to the club experience, whether it's adding excitement, reinforcement of the lesson or a memorization help for your Sparkies. Did you know that there's a CD available for each of the Sparks handbooks with all the Bible verses set to catchy, upbeat tunes?

The updated "Awana Theme Song" is also included! Depending on your facility and schedule, it's a good idea to have music playing as the children enter the large group room. It sets the tone and gets them in the proper mood to learn. Don't forget that Awana music is available on iTunes, too!

A Flag Ceremony That Involves Everyone

To involve more Sparkies in the opening ceremony, obtain several inexpensive 4"x 6" American flags. Have one team do the flag ceremony each week. Choose two kids to hold the American and Sparks flags. The rest of the team stands in a line behind them holding the miniature flags. In the course of four weeks, every child will have participated in the opening ceremony!

Sparkles Means Fun for Sparkies!

Be sure to use the monthly newsletter Sparkles in your club! Easily accessible on the ART home page around the 15th of each month, this free four-page newsletter is available in color or black and white. It has age-appropriate articles, puzzles, riddles, etc. just for Sparks. Add your own club news, weekly themes to the blank page at the back.

In order to use Sparkles to the fullest, hand it out on the last meeting of each month. Fold and put it in the Sparkies' handbooks or in their book bags to make sure they get home. Or hand it to parents as they pick up their children. Don't forget to mail it to any absentees. Address it: To the parents of _____. Or you can email it to those who prefer to receive electronic communications.

Also, look for opportunities, especially in Large Group Time, to refer to the articles and even use the riddles!!

Going Home Time Obstacle Course Adds to the Fun

Add some fun, physical activity to going-home time! Set up a mini obstacle course just inside the exit door. When the Sparkies' parents arrive, have the children crawl under a table, step in some hoops, climb over a step stool and tight-rope walk along a three-foot length of masking tape as they leave the room.

Teach Proper Pledge Etiquette

On September 8, 1892, the Pledge of Allegiance was published. Plan now to teach your Sparkies its importance. On your first night of club, do a couple of practice salutes:

everyone quiet and looking forward, hands at your sides. At the “Right Hand Salute” command, all clubbers and leaders place their right hand QUIETLY over their heart. The pledge is recited slowly, with no one saying it faster or louder than anyone else.

Christmas Large Group Time Idea

We hope your club is using the *Who Do I Need to Know from the Bible?* series as a resource for your Large Group Time. As we look ahead to December and Christmas, take a look at the Christmas lesson in Book 2. The Christmas section starts on page 138. You'll find a unique object lesson and an age-appropriate word search puzzle.

Gift Ideas for Sparkies

Are you or the parents of your clubbers looking for last-minute Christmas gift ideas for your Sparkies? What could be better than the Sparky storybook series? Perhaps you are already familiar with *Sparky Shines His Light* and *Sparky Frees the Flea*. New this year is the third in the series — *Sparky Bops the Greedy Bug*-- teaching children to be generous and kind.

Teaching Tips

Evaluate Clubbers' Mid-Year Progress

The halfway point of most club calendars is in January. This is an ideal time to evaluate where Sparkies are in their handbooks. The midpoint of all three Sparks handbooks is at the end of *Red Jewel 2*.

Be sure to counsel kids who are behind, especially those who are capable of finishing their handbooks. There are only 40 sections in a Sparks handbook. Most churches run 32 to 35 club nights a year, so it's easy to set up individual schedules for clubbers to catch up.

Quick Way to Get Their Attention

A leader from Arkansas shared what she does to quiet a less-than-attentive group of Sparkies just before leading song time. She calls out some simple directions, such as:

- Raise your hand if you are wearing white socks.
- Raise your hand if you have brown eyes.
- Raise your hand if you have a nose.
- Raise your hand if the person sitting next to you has a nose.

Vary the descriptions to be sure everyone gets to raise their hand several times. Throw in silly ones to keep the kids interested. Speaking quietly also helps settle them down so they can decide if they need to raise their hand.

Sparkies Questions About God

In a recent survey, we asked Sparkies, "What question would you most like to ask God?" The top three responses were:

- 1) Why did Jesus die?

- 2) Where did Jesus/God come from?
- 3) What does heaven look like?

Sections That Can Be Postponed

In the Sparks program, the usual procedure is to do all sections in the order that they appear in the handbooks. But there are exceptions so a Sparkie's progress is not hindered. Here is a list of sections that can be bypassed. (They still must be finished by the end of the club year for book completion.)

HangGlider

Red Jewel 1:1 Bring a Friend
Green Jewel 2:1 Missionary Activity
Green Jewel 4:3 Obedience Chart

WingRunner

Red Jewel 1:1 Bring a Friend
Red Jewel 2:1 Missionary Activity
Green Jewel 4:3 Attitude Chart

In the past, the "Bring a Friend" requirement was near the end of the book and was often viewed as an obstacle at the end of the year. Leaders should use this section to teach children, even at this young age, the importance of concern for their friends and their salvation.

Sparky Handshake:

Words Motion

- "Sparky High" Slap five way high up.
- "Sparky Low" Slap five down low.
- "Sparky in-between" Slap five in the middle.
- "See ya"

Circle of Light

Sparkies will enjoy this "Starting Time" activity. Bring a flashlight to club and have the children stand in a circle with the lights turned low. The kids pass the flashlight around the circle as the entire club sings the Sparks Theme Song. If your club is large, use two flashlights or form two circles.

Pump up the Volume!

Use this "Pump up the Volume" exercise when reviewing verses with your Sparkies. Stretch your arm out at your side as a volume control dial. As the Sparkies recite the verses, raise your arm for them to get louder or lower your arm for them to get softer. After a few rounds, allow Sparkies to take turns being the volume control.

Former Sparkies Can Inspire Your Clubbers

At one of your last meetings, have high schoolers or adults share when they were in Sparks. Have them bring their old vest if they have it. Ask them to recite two or three

verses they still remember. If you know people in your church who were saved in Sparks, invite them to tell about their experiences.

Incentives Motivate Kids to Recite Verses Perfectly

Encourage kids to recite their verses flawlessly by awarding extra points. If you normally award 100 points for each section a team member completes, award an additional 50 points if a section is completed word perfect. Your club leadership can come up with a simple recording device, such as circling word-perfect section numbers on the report slip or adding "WP" next to a section number. Some kids will want to repeat their sections after their book is signed just to get the extra 50 points!

Super Saturday Gets Kids Caught Up

When you pass the mid-year point, it's a great time to encourage children who are not halfway through their handbooks yet. If necessary, talk to parents and work out a schedule of how many sections the kids must finish each week to earn the appropriate book completion award.

Some churches run a Sparks Super Saturday meeting at the church for this purpose. Provide breakfast for clubbers and leaders followed by a time for passing sections. A devotional and some carefully planned games including the parents closes off the special activity.

Catch a Sparkie!

Here's an idea for a pre-session activity. Play "London Bridge is Falling Down" with leaders or Sparkies, forming an arch by reaching up and touching each other's hands. As children circle around through the arch, they sing:

Do you know your Bible verse?
Bible verse, Bible verse.
Do you know your Bible verse?
Do you know it?

When the song ends, the people forming the arch drop their arms to encircle or "catch" a Sparkie. That Sparkie can then choose a verse to recite alone or request that they all quote John 3:16 together. Repeat as time allows.

Parents

Invite Kids to Sparks

Get all the addresses of last year's graduating Cubbies and send a letter or flyer addressed "to the parents of _____", inviting them to Sparks. Use clip art from the ART Web site to make the invitation kid friendly, but address it to the parents. Follow up with phone calls to parents. After talking to them, ask to talk to their child, too. You will recognize many at church and can talk to them before and after services. Personal mail and phone calls go a long way to encourage participation in Sparks.

Awards

How to Keep Things Interesting on Awards Night

Have you sat through a long graduation ceremony trying to keep awake as you wait for that one name to be called? Here are some ways to keep that from happening at your awards ceremony:

1. Instruct the audience to hold all applause until signaled.
2. Announce the kids who have completed their first books, one at a time.
3. Children come forward and receive their awards from their club director along with a personal word of encouragement.
4. Have another leader line up all the kids for a picture. When all of the first book achievers are on the platform, take a picture and signal for applause.
5. Repeat for the second book achievers and then again for the plaque earners.
6. Do the same for the leaders when you award them their service pins.

Awards Song Livens Things Up

Add interest to your awards time by using this award song, sung to the tune of "Mary Had a Little Lamb."

Sparkies sing:

Who has earned a patch tonight?
Patch tonight, patch tonight?
Who has earned a patch tonight?
(Leader sings names)
Roger, Dale and Kim!

Use the word "jewel" in place of "patch" when appropriate. As soon as a child's name is mentioned, he comes up to receive his award. If several awards need to be distributed, Sparkies will enjoy singing the song multiple times; they may even be disappointed when awards are finished!

Extra Effort Deserves an Award!

It's the season for Award Nights, banquets and other special events! Be sure to include, not only the usual handbook completion awards, but the extra-credit awards: Book Review Emblems, Frequent Flyer Pins and Frequent Flyer Cards. Instead of doing a separate leaders' event, why not recognize them at your awards function, too, with the appropriate service pins.