

SAVING SAM!

Materials Needed: (Per Group of 2-3 Students):

- 1 gummy worm ("Sam")
- 1 gummy lifesaver candy ("Life Preserver")
- 1 plastic cup ("Sam's Boat")
- 4 paper clips (2 per student)
- Optional: Student reflection sheet & pencils



Activity Objectives:

Collaboration & Communication: Practice speaking clearly, actively listening, and negotiating solutions with a partner.

Problem-Solving & Fine Motor Control: Develop physical persistence and dexterity under strict constraints.

Perseverance & Growth Mindset: Reflect on how frustration can be overcome through trial, error, and calm teamwork.

The Backstory

"Poor Sam! Sam is a gummy worm who went out for a nice boat ride on the lake. A giant wave came and tipped Sam's boat upside down! Sam managed to climb up onto the bottom of the overturned boat to stay out of the water, but Sam can't swim! Sam's life preserver is trapped underneath the boat. Your mission is to help Sam put on the life preserver so Sam is safe. But there's a catch..."

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

1. Setup & Story Intro (5 Minutes)

- Turn a plastic cup upside down on each team's desk.
- Place the gummy lifesaver underneath the cup.
- Place the gummy worm (Sam) on top of the overturned cup.
- Hand out 2 paper clips to each student (4 per pair).
- Read the backstory aloud with enthusiasm to set a fun, empathetic tone for saving Sam!

2. Planning Phase (3 Minutes)

Before touching their paper clips, have partners spend 3 minutes discussing their strategy:

- "How will we lift the cup without using our hands?"
- "How will we thread Sam through the center of the ring?"
- "What will each partner's job be?"

3. The Rescue Operation (15-20 Minutes)

Unbend paper clips into hooks if desired (students can manipulate their paper clips with their hands, but the paper clips must be the only things touching the materials).

Walk around the room observing team communication, encouraging creative approaches, and enforcing the "no hands" rule.

Teacher Prompts During Rescue:

"How can you use your paper clips together to hold the boat steady?"

"If Sam keeps slipping off, what's a different way to hook or cradle him?"

"Are both partners actively participating in the rescue?"

4. Group Reflection & Debrief (10 Minutes)

Once all teams have successfully rescued Sam (or time runs out), gather the class to reflect on the experience.

Communication Questions:

"How did you and your partner decide what to try first?"

"What did you do when something didn't work as planned?"

Problem-Solving Questions:

"Was it harder to lift the boat or get the life preserver on Sam?"

"If you did this activity again tomorrow, what would you do differently?"

Classroom Management Tips & Extensions

Candy Policy: Decide ahead of time whether students can eat Sam and the life preserver at the end. Many teachers keep a separate bag of "clean" gummy worms to hand out as a treat after the activity since the activity candies are handled repeatedly!

Differentiated Challenge:

To make it harder: Give each team only 2 paper clips total (1 per person), forcing intense coordination.

To make it easier: Allow teams to use one hand if they wear a clean plastic glove, or allow them to touch only the paper clips to a plastic spoon.

SAVING SAM! RULES

1. You can ONLY touch Sam, the boat, or the life preserver using the PAPER CLIPS.

2. NO HANDS or FINGERS may directly touch Sam, the boat, or the life preserver.

3. You may NOT injure Sam (no tearing the worm!).

4. Sam is SAFE when the life preserver is around Sam's body and Sam is back in/on the boat!

