

## **Parties with a Purpose**



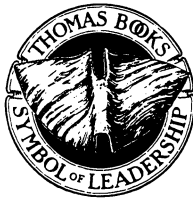
# Parties with a Purpose

A HANDBOOK FOR ACTIVITY DIRECTORS

By

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**To the residents and devoted staff of Allen's  
Nursing Home, this book is lovingly dedicated**



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## **Parties with a Purpose**





## **PART I. THE PURPOSE**

**T**HIS is a special kind of party book. It is designed for use in nursing homes, retirement homes, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and other long-term health centers by activity directors and other leaders to awaken the dormant mental powers of residents, remotivate their interest in life, and increase their creative potential.

Here are forty-two parties for year-round use for groups of up to twenty-five people. Each has a set of carefully developed games that allow maximum participation of those with limited physical and mental abilities and that serve as “thinking” exercises.

Each party, including introduction, games, and refreshments, can be completed in one and one-half hours or less. Only one hostess, or leader, is needed. Materials required are those found in any activity director’s supply closet.

### **WHY PARTIES?**

Everybody loves a party. There is a special magic in the word that promises sociability and fun. Having a party is the quickest, easiest way to get a group together, and from an activity director’s standpoint, groups are best to work with. Reaching a number of residents at one time increases job efficiency in terms of time, effort, and skill expended.

Parties also are therapeutic for residents. Having fun in a group alleviates feelings of loneliness and isolation. It enables residents to get involved, to share, to interact, and to work together toward reachable goals.

Ideas are to the mind as air is to the lungs. All the parties in this book are built around a central idea, or theme. The idea may point up a month or special holiday to help with reality orientation. It may draw the mind outward to the remembrance

of historic events, to the beauty and wonder of the turning seasons, to the many things that give life added meaning. These are parties to furnish food for the mind primarily, not food for the body.

For many, “party” is synonymous with “lots of gooey goodies.” There is a place in an activity schedule for parties that focus on sweet treats, but refreshments for idea parties should be kept minimal. Sparkling fruit punch in a pretty bowl and simple snacks are all that is really needed.

Lack of manpower is another reason for keeping things simple. Unless assistants are regularly available, helping the nursing staff get residents to the party room, directing the games, interacting with the players, and serving light refreshments are just about all one pair of hands can manage.

Fewer parties are furnished for December and the summer months. The big holidays of winter bring an influx of visitors and fatigue. Summertime is made for outdoor activities; it is a wonderful opportunity for lawn parties emphasizing games that involve physical movement and require more space than a party room can provide.

#### **WHY GAMES?**

Man is instinctively a playful animal. From the infant’s first “pattycake” to the executive’s Sunday golf, play is a necessary part of life. “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,” is trite, but true.

Those of us charged with maintaining a successful activity schedule for the well-being of residents confined to long-term health care facilities know the importance of variety in the diet of daily existence. Bingo and bus rides, handicrafts and movies, sing-alongs and church services all contribute to the social, emotional, spiritual, and physical health of our residents. But mental stimulation is an uphill battle.

The world shrinks in a nursing home. It becomes a place of too-familiar corridors, predictable meals, and routine days — a squirrel cage of sameness. Exhausted by contending with loss of independence, self-esteem, and dignity, residents in varying degrees lapse into apathy, withdrawal, and depression. As ac-

tivity staff members, we know that our most important job is to combat this decline by providing opportunities for sparking interests, expanding initiative and imagination, and increasing self-expression. Psychologists agree that the relationship between mental health and creative expression is reciprocal — whatever increases creativity improves psychological well-being, and whatever enhances psychological well-being increases creativity. None of this, however, is possible without exercise.

### **“USE IT, OR LOSE IT”**

“Like muscles and organs,” points out Doctor Alexis Carrel, “intelligence and [creative power] become atrophied for want of exercise.” On the positive side, however, is the happy fact that mental and creative power is never entirely lost, no matter how rusty from disuse. The games in this book are mental exercises to help sweep cobwebs from the brain, polish up the mental wheels, brush dust from the deeper reaches of the personality, and serve as a mooring post for those disorganized thoughts that drift rudderless through the days. Aside from all these worthwhile things, the games are fun.

### **SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE**

Each party has been planned to allow success for every player during at least one game. In the nursing home in which I work, Mrs. C. is blind. Her bean-bag tosses are guided by my voice and usually fall short, but she’s a whiz at Categories. Mr. J. loves the fast games like Similies, Opposites, and Proverbs, and the following day he usually presents me with additional items to add to the list. Mrs. L. does not speak, but when she adds to her team’s score with a well-placed bean bag, she settles back in her chair with an air of triumph.

Variety is the key, but, given the narrow range of games possible, variety is difficult to achieve. The party theme helps by giving freshness and a shift in focus to basically identical games, and when used in different ways, by adding a step here and combining elements there, the games are always sparkling