

# AWANA

## Developing, Planning and Coordinating Theme Nights

By Richard Longacre

Many AWANA clubs have completely stopped doing theme nights because they think they are too much trouble. Clubbers have to prepare their outfit or uniform ahead of time or have to do some task and this is just another stressor for the parents. While this may be true, our club has discovered that theme nights are another great attractor for the children that keeps AWANA fresh, fun, exciting and interesting each week. We have learned to use the theme nights, as well as contests, as incentives to complete more sections, get the clubbers interested in mission work and present Biblical truths in fun ways. Very often our games relate to the theme night as do our counsel time lessons.

Below are some explanations of some of the theme nights that have been very successful for our club. Some of these are so fun the clubbers ask when a certain theme night will be on the first night of AWANA. I have worked in five different AWANA clubs in three different states and we have adopted for our club what I felt was the best from these different clubs.

**Fear Factor Night** – This is one of the most favorite nights for most clubbers (except for the squeamish).

What to do: Much like the show, the clubbers have to eat things quickly in a race. Everything needs to be safe to eat but with proper presentation many clubbers will be grossed out before they even start. One favorite is worm dirt and gummy worms (chocolate pudding and crumbled Oreo cookies with gummy worms hidden inside). Calamari rings and fish sticks work well especially when combined with bubble gum. (Don't swallow the gum but start with gum in their mouths). Sometimes having them drink small amounts of things, which of course they don't know what it is, conjures up their imagination and increases taste sensitivity (vinegar, hot sauce, soy sauce, pure vanilla, Mountain Dew). You can use just about anything to eat or drink but you must always consider safety (choking hazards and food allergies) so think about what you are using and know your clubbers allergies. One year we did the **Nineveh Fear Factor Night** where we blindfolded the clubbers and they had to feel some pretty slimy and smelly stuff while we walked them through the story of Jonah.

When: Counsel Time

Dress: Normal AWANA Uniform

Preparation: All food must be prepared ahead of time and you will need leaders to help set up each race.

Cleanup: Best if done on linoleum or concrete. Use paper plates and bowls for ease of cleanup. Don't force anyone to do these races or you may be cleaning up from a sick child.

Outcome: The children have fun and learn to take on something that they fear which is a very real life lesson.

**Mystery Meat Relay:** This is the other part of our Fear Factor night.

What to do: Have the clubbers do normal relay races only you use different meats as the baton. Some of the favorites are octopus, fish, cow heart, cow brain, cow intestine, cow tongue (Favorite of all), cow or pig feet, pig ears, pig snout, etc. (You get the idea) You can go as gross as you want or as tame as you want with this. You will be surprised that it is usually the boys that are squeamish compared to the girls. Do games that have them toss the meat a few feet to each other. The octopus is pretty cool when the tentacles wrap around someone's arm.

When: Game Time

Dress: Normal AWANA uniform

Preparation: Have plenty of baby wipes and paper towels ready. Most of these food items can be bought at a Mexican meat market. Be creative and of course the buildup at the beginning gets them all grossed out.

Cleanup: Throw everything away after wrapping in plastic to help with the stink. Plan on mopping the floor. Must be done outdoors. We use the parking garage.

Outcome: Loads of fun and of course the kids smell like fish all night. Teaches kids to go beyond their comfort zone.

**Blackout Night:** Play all games in the dark. The clubbers each bring their own flashlight to use. Counsel time in the dark or around a camp fire (real or fake).

What to do: **Game Time** - Depending on where your game circle is can make a difference. We use our parking garage and I paint the floor and walls with glow in the dark paint. We have the game pins painted as well as some of the other equipment. Sometimes we use a strobe light and even a fog machine (not indoors because it will set off the fire alarms). One year we pinned balloons filled with glitter confetti and white paper shredding on the ceiling and played a type of musical chairs game and popped the balloons over the clubbers heads. We have black lights permanently mounted in our garage which greatly adds to the effect. You can play nearly any games you want. I have hooks in the ceiling that I hang hoola-hoops from that are also painted with the glow in the dark paint. The children have to climb through them during the races. Flashlights are used during the races.

**Counsel Time:** We make this our testimony night around a campfire type setting. One year I pretended to be Peter and gave my testimony as if I were Peter. This is a good time to have some of the clubbers share their testimony. You can also do a lesson on how light overcomes darkness.

When: Game Time & Counsel Time

Dress: Black/dark clothes.

Preparation: Lots, depending on how far you want to take this. Glow in the dark paint needs time to dry and needs to be charged up with lights. If you use black lights you need to make sure they are covered incase a ball or something hits them. If you use a campfire you need a fire pit and a place to do that. You can have the clubbers all put their flashlights in the middle of the room to give the appearance of a campfire plus this way they are not shining them in each others eyes during the counsel time.

Cleanup: Depends on how far you go with this.

Outcome: A lot of fun. It goes from exciting and a bit scary during game time to a somber moment during counsel time.

**Yacht Races and Mix & Match Crazy Sneaker Night:** The clubbers all prepare their own yachts at home from a kit given to them and then race them in a rain gutter filled with water. Mainly they are just building a sail and mounting it. Some will go all out with painting and designs but they must all use the block and dowel rod given them. What to do: We give a candy bar for the top three designs in each club as well as for the top three racers. Remember that this is all for fun so don't take this too seriously. Have your leaders decide the design winners and then start the racing. The way the clubbers race is by blowing on the sail of their boat until it reaches the end. (No hands or faces touching the boat) First one to the end wins that race. We play a double elimination so once you lose 2 races you are out. You change lanes each time and race a different person each time. Once you get to the last three people award the candy bars and then let them see who is the fastest of the three. It goes very quickly as long as you keep it moving. Depending on how many clubbers you have you may need to break them up (boys and girls) and have 4 lanes instead of just 2. With 20-30 clubbers you can do the design judging and racing in under 30 minutes. We do this in our garage because if you do this outdoors the wind will mess with you. The floor and the clubbers do tend to get wet. Have a few extra buckets of water available to refill the rain gutters.

When: Game Time

Dress: Normal AWANA uniform but with mix matched crazy sneakers.

Preparation: Cut out the blocks and dowel rods about a month ahead of time. Make kits with instructions inside. Give to the kids about 2 weeks before the races. Have a few Rental boats prepared for those that don't build one so that everyone can participate in the race portion. Buy two or four 10 foot rain gutters with end caps.

Cleanup: Drain water and mop up. Store rain gutters.

Outcome: Just a lot of fun. I suppose you could develop a lesson for this theme as well.

**Wet and Wild Night:** Clubbers will get very wet. We don't allow swim suits for modesty reasons. Must be played outdoors and weather is always an issue. Plan as early as possible in the year or at the end of the club year. We had to cancel this one year due to extreme cold and one other year due to a lightning storm directly overhead. (We always reschedule because it is a lot of fun)

What to do: Break into 4 teams and do relay races using sponges, foam balls, mop heads and anything else that holds a lot of water. You will need buckets full of water and a way to keep them filled (Hose). Have them wear the mops on their heads or just carry them. Have them throw the foam balls to each other at a distance. Water balloons always play a part. We don't use water guns at all and don't have water fights but the clubbers get soaked. Bring plenty of towels and give them time to dry off before going back inside the church. You may need extra lighting because of nightfall if you don't have adequate lighting outdoors. Remember it is all about just having fun and getting each other wet.

When: Game Time.

Dress: Shorts. This is the one of only a few nights we let them wear sandals if they want to. We don't let them wear swim suits unless it is under their shorts and shirt.

Preparation: Obtain mop heads, foam balls, sponges, water buckets and a water hose.

Fill some large water balloons ahead of time and keep them away from the clubbers until

time to use them. An ice chest works well for this. Set up a clear path in the grass for them to run on and have some fun. Bring a lot of towels.

Cleanup: Water balloons add to the cleanup but if you have the last group of clubbers do a cleanup of balloon pieces it goes pretty quickly.

Outcome: Everyone gets wet and has a lot of fun.

**Veggie Game Night:** For games you eat a lot of raw vegetables.

What to do: Do relay races having the children eat the raw vegetables. They have to eat their veggie before the next person comes out. Have them run around the circle before eating not after eating. We use baby carrots, celery, broccoli, cauliflower, radishes, onions, potatoes, mushrooms, bell peppers and my favorite brussel sprouts. I don't recommend hot peppers. Use small paper plates to keep everything off the ground and for ease of cleanup. It is a lot of fun and they get some healthy food along the way. Make them eat only one food item at a time to prevent choking hazards. This is also a good time to show a short Veggie Tales video during the counsel time.

When: Game Time and Counsel Time

Dress: Normal AWANA uniform

Preparation: Make up the veggie trays ahead of time. Have paper plates ready and some paper towels on hand.

Cleanup: Usually there are no veggies left so just throw the plates away.

Outcome: They eat healthy veggies and have fun doing it.

**VIP Parent Night:** Do this very early in the year. Invite the parent to spend the entire night with the children during game time, counsel time and handbook time. At the end of the night we do the longest ice cream sundae in Colorado Springs that night. We use the rain gutters from the yacht races and set them on tables so the clubbers can get to either side. We are up to 50 feet of ice cream so far and growing each year.

What to do: At the very end of the night have the entire club (let Cubbies do their own ice cream separately) gather around the ice cream sundae, welcome all the parents and invite them to join in, say a quick prayer and then let nature take its course. We put Styrofoam bowls inside the rain gutter to keep it cleaner but have the clubbers and parents eat out of the rain gutters. You can add cherries, candies and chocolate syrup. If you use whip cream wait until the very last moment to put it on or it will just melt away. Check for food allergies ahead of time or you will have a disappointed child, or worse yet, a sick one.

When: At the very end of the night. It only takes about 10 minutes to devour about 20-30 gallons of ice cream.

Dress: Normal AWANA uniform

Preparation: You need to get all the ice cream and fixings ahead of time and have freezer space to store it. You will need some people to help dish the ice cream out and prepare it. I wait until about 15 minutes to chow time to allow enough time to make up the ice cream but not too long so everything is melted. Check the ice cream ahead of time in case it is too hard to scoop out. Oh yah, we let them use spoons.

Cleanup: Throw the bowls away and rinse out the rain gutters outside. Have plenty of garbage cans, paper towels, napkins wet rags around. Clean off the tables when done.

Outcome: The parents get to see how your club is ran and what their children are doing each week. Ice cream is a good socializing food so parents get to meet the leaders and other parents while having some fun.

Here are some of our dress-up nights that are pretty simple to do and add to the fun: We use the word “crazy” a lot in our theme nights.

**Crazy Hat Night** – Wear a hat you made yourself or just some crazy hat you have. Wear a bunch of hats and have them hanging all over yourself.

**Crazy Inside Out and Backwards Night** - Wear your clothes inside out and backwards. You can have your pockets pulled out. You can wear a hat. Shoes are pretty tough to do this with. Please don't wear your underwear on the outside.

**Crazy Sock Night** – Wear crazy socks and lots of them. Wear them all over, in your hair or hanging from your pants. Tuck your pants into your socks if you're not wearing shorts.

**AWANA Sunday and AWANA Store Night**– Wear your uniform to church on Sunday and get extra AWANA shares for the AWANA Store. We do a store night once a quarter. Clubbers earn “AWANA Shares” for saying sections, wearing their uniform, bringing their Bible and handbook, wearing sneakers, bringing a friend and for doing something good like helping a leader or another clubber. For the store we buy things from the Oriental Trading Company and the Dollar Store. We figure about 10 cents per AWANA Share for toys but charge about double that for candy. You have to budget for this. We also make store night our **uniform inspection night**. You can get ribbons from AWANA for this or just give more AWANA Shares.

**Missions Night** – We bring in an outside missionary to give a presentation. We have used many different people for this. One lady did a chalk drawing that captivated the children's attention. We had a missionary from Mexico give a talk. We have had a ventriloquist share with the children. The last two years we did an offering contest (Boys Vs. Girls) to raise money for a church that our church built in Juarez Mexico. We take a team down there each year to build a house and then stop by the church and present the offering from our children to be used for reaching the children of Juarez. Almost every one of our high school AWANA clubbers have been on this trip at least once. It is a great eye opener for a young person and builds a sense of mission mindedness that will stay with them forever. We have the teens give testimonies to the club about their experience. Of course we all have our own AWANA missionaries, Chad and Karen, as well as probably other people in your own church that do mission work to turn to for this.

**Bible Character Night** – Dress up as your favorite Bible character. This is a good time to do a lesson about a specific person in the Bible and add a little drama to your Counsel Time. Sometimes we have people guess who you are dressed as and give a prize to the person that guesses right. Game time is little tricky with all the robes and sandals.

**Honor Your Military Night** – Wear military uniforms. No weapons allowed. Some of our clubs make cards for our deployed military members and send that with a care package. Our church has a lot of military families and we consistently pray for their protection. You can also have them wear red, white and blue clothing.

**Decorate Your Leader and Caroling Night** – The week or two before our Christmas break we take the older clubbers (T&T and up) to a nearby nursing home and walk the halls singing Christmas carols to the residents. This takes the entire time so you will need to leave right after the opening ceremonies. You will probably want to use permission slips just to protect yourself since you are leaving the church grounds. The Cubbies and Sparks get to decorate their leaders with non-breakable Christmas ornaments, tinsel, lights (if you're careful) and wrapping paper during game time. Sometimes we end the night with hot chocolate, hot cider and cookies back at the church.

**Winter Nights** – Have the clubbers dress for the outdoors. If God provides snow that night it is even better. If there is snow play your games out in the snow. If there is no snow then we play games indoors using small Styrofoam balls. Don't paint them or they will be heavy enough to hurt someone. That is our game time. For Counsel Time we have a campfire outdoors and provide Smores and Hot Chocolate while we give the lesson around the campfire. This all works best if you hold this night in January or February.

**Sports Night** - Dress in sports outfits.

**Crazy Hearts Night** - Near Valentines Day we have the clubbers dress in heart clothing if they have it or pin paper hearts on their clothing. Heart tattoos work great. We make this night leader appreciation night as well so the clubbers often bring Valentine cards for their leaders.

**Affliction Night** – This works best right before Easter. Have the clubbers wear bandages, use crutches, ace bandages, braces or whatever like they are all beat up. We don't allow any fake blood. The lesson is on how much Christ suffered for us and we get pretty graphic in our lessons. Game time is tricky again because of their outfits.

**50's Sock Hop Night** – Wear those poodle skirts, high water blue jeans, white tee shirts, slicked back hair. We have done a 70's night that also worked well.

You can do just about anything for a theme night. Many are simple like just wearing a single color like red, blue, green or yellow. Come up with your own theme nights or use some of these. AWANA has a great resource to use titled, "**AWANA Encyclopedia of Ideas**". Remember to space these out so the clubbers are wearing their normal AWANA uniform often enough. It is very important that the leaders participate in the theme nights to encourage the clubbers to do something that would be considered un-cool otherwise.

Besides having many theme nights in the year we also hold many contests to continually encourage the clubbers to complete sections. The two biggest contests we use are "**Dunk**

**Your Leader” and “Pie in the Face”.** One year we did Dunk Your Leader in December but that was not very popular with the other leaders. You must figure out how many sections a clubber must say to earn a ball to throw for the dunk tank or a pie (whip cream only on a Styrofoam plate) to put in their leader's face. Some clubs consider this to be disrespectful to their leaders but if done right it works well and is a lot of fun. We don't allow any throwing of the pies. Give the clubbers 5 or 6 AWANA weeks to build up their sections and you may need to set a high limit for those overachievers just for the sake of time. We also allow our JV and High School clubbers (Trek and Journey) to get dunked or pied in the face. That gives the younger clubbers something to look forward to when they get older. We also let the clubbers pie themselves in the face with one pie if they earn three pies or more.

Christians should have the most fun of everyone on this Earth. The children need to understand how to have good clean fun in this world of hyper-sensory overload. Children have never had more things to play with and yet are always bored. We have a responsibility to teach our children how to live in this world as a believer while enjoying life to its fullest. Take a few chances with some of these ideas and add a few more each year and let the fun begin. Remember that children learn more while they are having fun.