



Odyssey of the Mind

Why Odyssey of the Mind is Good for Kids

The Odyssey of the Mind teaches students to learn creative problem-solving methods while having fun in the process. For more than twenty five years, this unique program has helped teachers generate excitement in their students. By tapping into creativity, and through encouraging imaginative paths to problem-solving, students learn skills that will provide them with the ability to solve problems -- great and small -- for a lifetime.

Odyssey of the Mind Problems

The problems are designed for competition, with scoring components and limitations, or rules to be followed. The long-term problems change every year. They fall into five general categories. These are mechanical/vehicle, technical performance, classics, structure and performance.

Mechanical/Vehicle

Teams design, build and operate vehicles of various size and with various power sources. Sometimes they drive the vehicles, and sometimes the vehicles perform tasks, such as overcoming obstacles or visiting other "countries" to retrieve artifacts.

Classics

The theme of this problem is based on the classical -- from literature to architecture to art. Whether it's writing an additional chapter to Moby Dick or bringing paintings to life, it's always a terrific learning experience.

Performance

In this problem, teams present performances that revolve around a specific theme and incorporate required elements. Past themes include "morphing" objects, animals that express human emotions, and originating folktales.

Structure

Teams design and build structures, using only balsa wood and glue. They test them by supporting and holding as much weight as possible -- sometimes more than a thousand pounds! Teams usually present a skit as part of the Style presentation.

Technical Performance

Teams make innovative contraptions and incorporate artistic elements into their solutions. They might be asked to write an original musical score to play on a "new" type of instrument, or to build a robot with human characteristics, or to perform tasks using a chain reaction of snapping mousetraps.



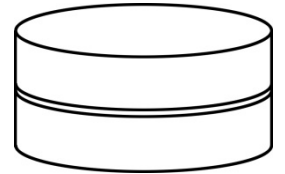
What Are the Three Components of Odyssey of the Mind?

At an OM competition, teams are judged in three distinct areas:

- The Long-Term Problem
- Style
- The Spontaneous Problem

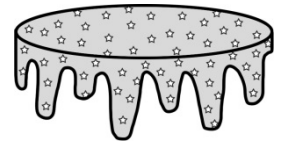
The Long Term Problem (200 points)

Every year, the OM organization publishes five competitive Long-Term Problems. Some problems are “dramatic” in nature, focusing on a literary topic, for example, with the performance generally in the form of a skit. Other problems are “technical” in nature, involving the creating of one or more devices that accomplish certain tasks. Other problems combine both areas, requiring some technical component in a skit. All problems are open-ended enough that an unlimited number of interpretations are possible. The Long-Term problems are prepared by the team in advance of the meet, and usually three to five months are spent developing these solutions. (*Example: Build a vehicle powered by a jack that will maneuver an obstacle course.*)



Style (50 points)

Odyssey of the Mind Long-Term Problem solutions require creative problem solving. The Odyssey of the Mind program rewards teams for elaborating their Long-Term Problem solutions since elaboration requires additional creativity. OM calls this elaboration *Style*. Confused? Think of it like the icing on the cake: If the Long-Term Problem is the cake itself, then Style is the way the cake is decorated, so to speak. All teams that solve a given problem have met the requirements of the problem – the cake. But all teams have “decorated their cake” in unique ways – they all have created special aspects of their solutions *that were not required* – and that is their Style. Up to 50 points can be rewarded to teams for these special features. (*Example: A team is required to do a skit about the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The team creates the required skit, but elaborates on it by making it an opera, complete with subtitles – that is Style.*)



The Spontaneous Problem (100 points)

Each OM team entering a meet must also solve a Spontaneous Problem. One of the purposes of spontaneous competition is to see how well the team members react to new situations. Spontaneous Problems take one of three forms: Verbal, in which team members generate as many creative verbal answers as they can in a short time period; Hands-On, in which a physical or technical problem must be solved in a short period of time; and a combination of the two, Hands-On Verbal, in which a physical object is manipulated in turns by the team members as they generate creative verbal answers. All Spontaneous Problems require teamwork and points are often awarded for this, regardless of the success of the team’s solution/answers. Team members will not know the content of the Spontaneous Problem until the judge presents the problem to them. Teams competing against each other are required to solve the same Spontaneous Problem. Team members are not allowed to discuss the problem they were given until the end of the tournament. (*Example: This is a verbal problem. There is a brown paper bag on the table. Your problem is to say what the bag may be used for. You have one minute to think and two minutes to respond.*)

