

# TEAM POWER

## GOALS

### IN THIS UNIT, YOU WILL:

- Read about an unusual team game.
- Learn about the factors that can make a team successful.
- Explore ways to work together.

### THINK AND DISCUSS

1. Where can you find people working as part of a team?
2. Some teams work better than other teams. Why do you think that is?





Participants called 'Castellers' form a human tower during La Mercè Festival in Barcelona, Spain.



### PRE-READING

**A.** Look at the pictures on pages 26 and 27. Write answers to the questions below. Then discuss your answers with a partner.

1. What are the people doing? What materials are they using?

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2. What do you think the Marshmallow Challenge is?

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**B.** Read the first sentence of each paragraph on page 26. Choose the best answer to the question below. Then read the whole passage to check your ideas.

What is the passage about?

- a. How business people play a team game.
- b. How a man designed a team game.
- c. How people work together in a team game.



A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a light blue, textured paper cup. The cup is overflowing with white, fluffy marshmallows. The person's fingers are visible, with light-colored nail polish. The background is a warm, out-of-focus orange-brown color.

# THE MARSHMALLOW CHALLENGE

📺 “Every project has its own Marshmallow,” according to designer Tom Wujec. The Marshmallow Challenge helps people understand what he means.



What can you do with 20 sticks of spaghetti, one yard of tape, one yard of string, and one marshmallow? Try the “Marshmallow Challenge”!

- 1 The Marshmallow Challenge is a team game. The goal is to build the tallest **tower** you can in 18 minutes. You don’t have to use all the spaghetti, string, or tape, but the marshmallow must be at the top of the tower. The tower has to stand up by itself without any support. The team with the highest tower wins the challenge.
- 2 The idea for the activity came from a **designer** named Peter Skillman. Skillman’s idea inspired another designer, Tom Wujec. Wujec thought the activity might be a great way to learn how people collaborate, or work together, better.
- 3 Wujec noticed that the best teams have three different kinds of people in them: **experts**,

organizers, and experimenters. The experts know how to build strong **structures**. For example, they tape the spaghetti into small triangle shapes because triangles are **stable**. The organizers know how to **plan** a project. They help the team complete the project on time. The experimenters build lots of different towers. They try different prototypes until they find the right one.

- 4 Wujec has held more than 70 Marshmallow Challenges around the world—many with business people. Wujec realized that if business people work better as a team, they make better **products** or provide better services. As he says, “every project has its own marshmallow.” With a simple team game, business workers and other groups of people can learn how to collaborate better and become more **successful**.

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**prototype:** *n.* a model that you make before building something

## The **Challenge**

**18** minutes. . .    Teams of **8**. . .    **Tallest** freestanding structure



20 sticks of spaghetti    +    one yard of tape    +    one yard of string    +    one marshmallow





A team participates in the Marshmallow Challenge.

## Developing Reading Skills

### GETTING THE MAIN IDEAS

Use information from the passage on pages 25–26 to complete each statement.

1. When people do the Marshmallow Challenge, they learn how to \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. plan a large project
  - b. work as a team
  - c. design a real building
2. Tom Wujec learned that the best teams \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. have people with different skills
  - b. plan only one tower
  - c. have business people in them

### IDENTIFYING MAIN IDEAS IN PARAGRAPHS

Most paragraphs have a sentence—sometimes called a *topic sentence*—that tells the reader what the paragraph is mainly about. This main idea is usually in the first sentence of the paragraph, but it is sometimes in the last sentence or in another part of the paragraph.

- A.** Read the last two paragraphs of the passage again, and find the sentence with the main idea in each. Write them below.

Paragraph 3: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Paragraph 4: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



- B.** The paragraph below describes the Marshmallow Challenge. The sentences are not in the correct order. First, find and underline the topic sentence. Then put the sentences in order by numbering them 1–4.

\_\_\_\_\_. They have to finish in 18 minutes. \_\_\_\_\_. The Marshmallow Challenge is a great activity  
 \_\_\_\_\_<sub>a</sub> for teaching teams to work together. \_\_\_\_\_. People can then use their new collaboration skills  
 \_\_\_\_\_<sub>b</sub> in their real job. \_\_\_\_\_. In the activity, teams work to build a tower with unusual materials.  
 \_\_\_\_\_<sub>c</sub>  
 \_\_\_\_\_<sub>d</sub>

## IDENTIFYING SUPPORTING DETAILS

Complete the mind map using the words and phrases below. Refer to paragraphs 3 and 4 of the passage on page 26.

- |                      |                            |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| a. makes products    | d. plan projects           |
| b. strong structures | e. try different           |
| c. more than 70      | f. provide better services |



## BUILDING VOCABULARY

- A.** Use **bold** words from the passage on pages 25–26 to complete each definition.

- \_\_\_\_\_ are people who have special knowledge.
- \_\_\_\_\_ are buildings of any kind.
- If an object is \_\_\_\_\_, it is strong and steady.
- If you are \_\_\_\_\_, you reach your goal or get a good result.



**B. Choose the best option for each statement or question.**

1. A **tower** is normally \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. tall and thin
  - b. short and round
2. A **designer** might work on a new \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. text message
  - b. cell phone
3. An example of a **product** is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. a box of spaghetti
  - b. a trip to Italy
4. Which of these are you more likely to **plan**? \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. A weekend activity
  - b. A yard of tape

**GETTING MEANING FROM CONTEXT**

A writer may explain certain words or phrases in a text using a definition or a synonym (a word or phrase with a similar meaning). These often follow words such as *that is . . .* or *in other words . . .* or are set apart with parentheses, dashes, or commas. Definitions may also be provided below the text, as footnotes.

Refer to the passage on pages 25–26 to answer the questions below.

1. What does *by itself* mean in paragraph 1? Write another way to say it.

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What synonym is given for *collaborate* in the passage? \_\_\_\_\_

3. How could you define *prototype*? Scan the passage and note a definition.

\_\_\_\_\_

**CRITICAL THINKING**

1. **Reflecting.** Think about a team you are part of. Are you usually the expert, organizer, or experimenter?
2. **Interpreting.** What do you think Wujec means when he says, “Every project has its own marshmallow”?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**EXPLORE MORE**

Learn more about Tom Wujec. Visit his TED speaker profile at TED.com.  
Share what you learn with your class.



# BUILD A TOWER, BUILD A TEAM

**TOM WUJEC** Designer, TED speaker

Through the Marshmallow Challenge, Tom Wujec has learned a lot about how people work together.

Some teams have problems because they jockey for power. In other words, team members spend too much time deciding who is in charge. Some teams sketch lots of different ideas, but then run out of time and don't finish their towers. And other teams assemble a tower that looks good—just before it collapses under the marshmallow's weight.

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**sketch:** v. to draw quickly

**assemble:** v. to build

**collapse:** v. to fall down

**In this lesson, you are going to watch segments of Wujec's TED Talk. Use the information above about his challenge to answer these questions.**

1. What do people do when they are "jockeying for power"?

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2. Why do some teams not finish their towers?

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3. What happens to some teams' towers when they put the marshmallow on top?

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Tom Wujec's **idea worth spreading** is that the Marshmallow Challenge can be a fun and playful way to teach lessons about teamwork and design.

**PART 1**

# A CHALLENGING TASK

## PREVIEWING

**A.** Read the excerpt from Wujec's talk. Complete the excerpt with the correct words or phrases (a–d).

- a. orienting
- b. talk about it
- c. assembling
- d. planning, organizing

« So, normally, most people begin by \_\_\_\_\_<sub>1</sub> themselves to the task. They \_\_\_\_\_<sub>2</sub>, they figure out what it's going to look like; they jockey for power. Then they spend some time \_\_\_\_\_<sub>3</sub>, they sketch, and they lay out spaghetti. They spend the majority of their time \_\_\_\_\_<sub>4</sub> the sticks into ever-growing structures. »

**B.** Watch (▶) the first segment of the talk, and check your answers to Exercise A.

## GETTING THE MAIN IDEA

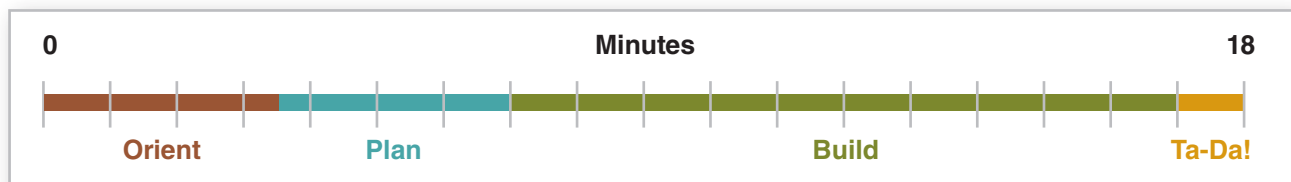
What is the most important idea in this segment of the TED Talk? Read the statements and choose the one that best describes the main idea.

- a. Teams usually don't make very stable structures.
- b. Teams usually fight with each other.
- c. Teams usually spend too much time planning and testing their structure.

## UNDERSTANDING KEY DETAILS

Teams usually go through four steps when they do the Marshmallow Challenge. Study the diagram and match each step with a description.

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. Teams assemble their towers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. Teams finish their towers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. Teams sketch designs for the structure.
- \_\_\_\_\_ d. Teams try to understand the task.





## CRITICAL THINKING

**Inferring.** Why do you think some teams “jockey for power”?

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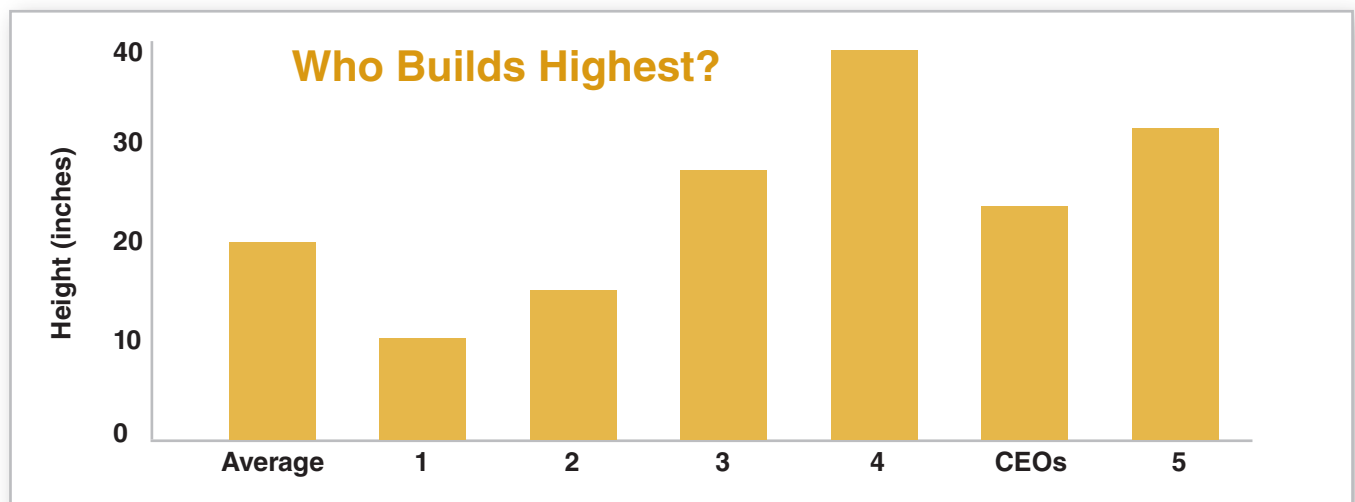
### PART 2

## COLLABORATION IS KEY

### PREVIEWING

In his TED Talk, Wujec reveals who builds the tallest towers. How do you think the people below do in the challenge? Work with a partner to match each group with a bar in the chart. Then check your answers as you watch (▶) the second segment of the talk.

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. Lawyers
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. Architects and engineers
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. CEOs and executive admins
- \_\_\_\_\_ d. Business school students
- \_\_\_\_\_ e. Kindergartners



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**CEO:** *n.* Chief Executive Officer; the person in charge of a business or organization

**Executive Admin:** *n.* a person who assists a CEO with administrative tasks

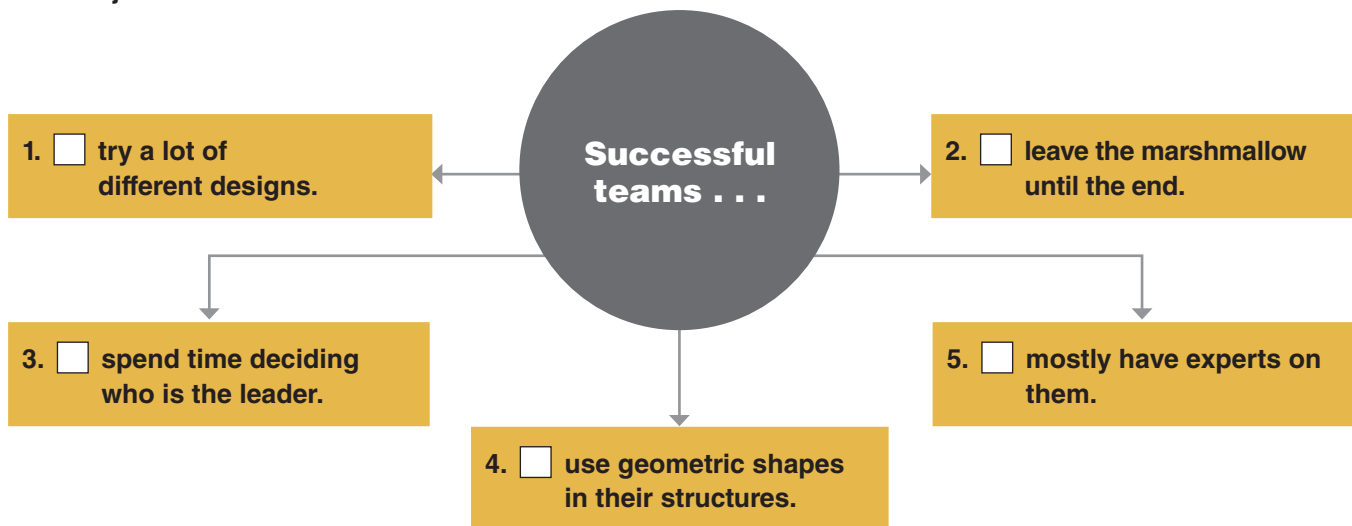
## GETTING THE MAIN IDEA

Use information from Wujec's talk to answer each question.

1. According to Wujec, why do kindergarten students do well in the activity?
  - a. They understand about strong structures.
  - b. They don't fight with each other.
  - c. They start with the marshmallow.
2. According to Wujec, it is better to build \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. very few prototypes.
  - b. many prototypes.
  - c. one good prototype.

## SUMMARIZING

What do successful teams do when they build their towers? Check (✓) the best ideas from Wujec's talk.



## CRITICAL THINKING

1. **Reflecting.** How well do you think you and your classmates would do with the Marshmallow Challenge? Give reasons for your answer.
2. **Applying.** What kind of structure do you think would work best in the Marshmallow Challenge? Work in groups and design the best structure on paper. If possible, try building it.

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## EXPLORE MORE

Watch more of Tom Wujec's TED Talk at TED.com. What happens when Wujec adds a financial reward for the winning group? Why? Share what you learn with your class.



## Project

**A. Work in a small team. You are going to design, perform, and share a team-building task.**

- Choose at least four everyday objects, such as the items below, to use in your task.
- Brainstorm ideas for a task using those objects.
- Choose one task idea, and decide the goal (for example, to build a bridge between two desks) and a time limit.
- Try the task as a team. Keep a note of your result.
- Demonstrate your task to other teams in your class, and have them try the task.
- Observe how the other teams perform the task and how their performance compares with your own team's.

**B. Discuss these questions with your class.**

1. What was easy about the exercise? What was difficult?
2. Were there any problems in your group? How did you solve them?
3. Which of the other teams was most successful in your task? Why do you think they were successful?
4. What did you learn about working in a team?



### EXPLORE MORE

What else can we learn from a task using a marshmallow? Check out Joachim de Posada's TED Talk "Don't eat the marshmallow!" at TED.com. Discuss what you learn with your class.