

Group Me![®]

Plants 1

A Grouping Tool for Teachers & Instructors

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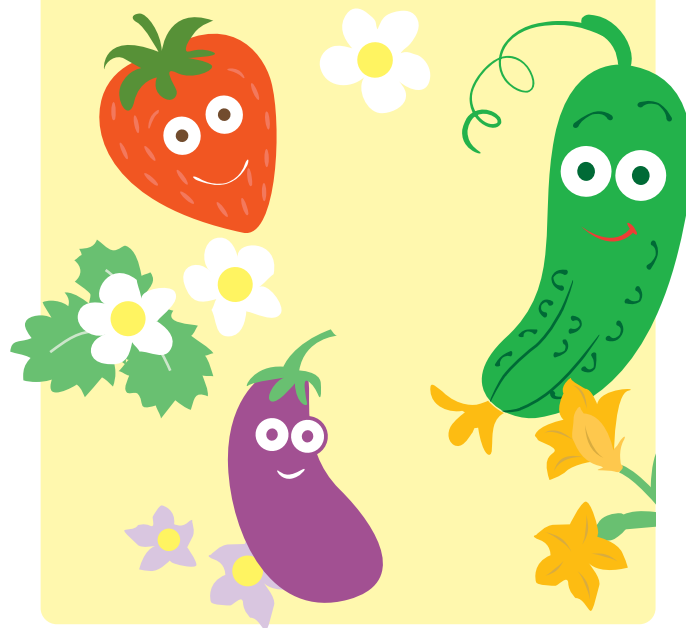
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I. What is "Group Me!"?

"Group Me! Plants 1" is a set of cards containing six sets of pictures relating to eight types of plants. This learning instrument has been designed to assist with relationship building through a group activity process. The cards comprise pictures of plants that appear in official Japanese textbooks from the first to the third grade. Each card shows an enlarged image of a certain developmental stage and/or a part of the plants familiar to children in Japan. It is a child-friendly design; the postcard-sized cards are non-slip and waterproof, and have no sharp edges. The cards are designed to be easy to handle in a classroom setting. There are various ways to use the cards, but the fundamental structure is for groups of two to five students, with a maximum of 40 participants.

II. Where can "Group Me!" be used?

In a new class, at the beginning of a semester, or in a workshop, whenever group of people are anxious because of a new environment, "Group Me!" can be used as an icebreaking tool. In Japan, people tend not to choose to sit in the front row or the front center when people are allowed to choose their own seats. Moreover, female and male school students often choose to sit separately due to their previous learning

experience, school culture, and so on. This does not facilitate the effective transmission of the instructor's knowledge, nor the resultant participants' learning capabilities. As such, "Group Me!" has been designed to help students form relationships and build a positive learning environment.

III. How can "Group Me!" help?

The plants contained in the cards provide clues for interacting with others. First, students observe some interesting pictures, arousing a natural curiosity, which leads to questions or statements such as "What is this?" or "I've seen this before," etc. For those people who are not interested in plants, they may even declare "Yuck!" In this way, the participants will be interested to see which card the other participants have, easily prompting them to ask each other, "What card do you have?" As aforementioned, the pictures are of common plants from Japan, and many people must have seen them before. Some people may have just seen them in books, while others might have had them at home. Such experiences are rooted in childhood memories and may remind participants of the places where they grew up, naturally facilitating conversation through the cards. Thus, "Group Me!" is a good way for participants to know each other and build relationships. As such, "Group Me!"

may not be suitable for people being grouped together for a short period.

IV. Users: Teachers, Instructors, and Facilitators

Participants: Elementary School Children to Adults

Anyone can use "Group Me!," from elementary school children to adults. However, "Group Me! -Plants 1" has been originally designed for Japanese learners because the plants in the images are common to Japan. Practice sessions of "Group Me!" have been conducted at a public elementary school for group learning and science lessons, and in a few classes for icebreaking and relationship building at Tamagawa University. It has also been used in staff development sessions at a leading global company in Tokyo to promote communication among co-workers from different sections and divisions. Thus, "Group Me!" has been utilized by a variety of people belonging to different age groups.

V. How is it used?

Sample A: Grouping

Preparation before lesson/workshop:

- ① Select sets of cards of the same plants according to the number of groups along with an additional card for each set. (i.e.: 5 cards of tulips, 5 cards of sunflowers, 5 cards of dandelions for 3 groups; each

group having 4 members.)

- ② Take a card from each set in order, until the instructor has combined the sets into one stack of cards.

In class/workshop :

- ③ For the sake of gender balance, distribute cards to create mixed-gender groups. One possible method is to distribute the cards in order from the instructor's stack to one gender first. If you use this method, it is recommended to alternate which gender receives cards first so that all genders are treated equally.
- ④ After the distribution, each group member will have a card, and for reference the instructor should have a card to represent each group. Now, the instructor can point to a group randomly, or allocate someone by specifying a card from a particular group (for example, the person who has the card featuring the youngest stage of the tulip).

Activity :

- ⑤ Before you start the activity, it is a good idea to set up a signal for when you need to attract the whole group's attention. Once the participants start the game, it can quickly escalate into an exciting and noisy discussion, so it will be beneficial to set a clear signal for attracting everyone's attention before the activity begins. Practice giving the signal, along with

showing the participants what you expect them to do when they see or hear the signal. If there are participants who appear to be shy, encourage them to participate in a friendly manner. Furthermore, humor while practicing giving and having the participants respond to signals aids in alleviating apprehensions, making the environment manageable.

- ⑥ Considering the age of your participants, briefly explain the purpose of the icebreaking activity, which is to get to know each other. Once you have explained the activity's purpose, you can commence.
- ⑦ Provide the following directions:
 - (1) In your group, determine the names of the plants on your cards.
 - (2) Once your group works out the plants' names, discuss what is on each card, for example, is it an enlargement? If so, which part of the plant is it? What is the stage of development?
- ⑧ Next, take about 10 minutes for the group members to introduce themselves. Use the cards to assist in storytelling with the following instruction: In your self-introduction, please share an episode or a story of when and where you encountered the plants or anything to do with it. If you have never seen it, then think why and share in groups (see "Samples of Topics" in the following "Tips").
- ⑨ Discussions may become quite exciting and your

participants may appear to want to continue the discussions, but use your signal to regain the participants' attention. Do not worry if your students do not realize you are making the signal, it shows that your activity is succeeding and that your participants are engaging with each other. However, when you really do need to get their attention, consider saying, "I can see you want to talk more and that's great but we need to move on." Try to use a clear voice with a cheerful tone.

Sample B: Seat allocation for a larger number of participants

The activity will require more organization if you have a large number of participants. You may need to use two or more sets of the "Group Me!" cards.

Preparation before class:

- ① Prepare two sets of cards, each set having identical cards to the other set.
- ② Place one set of cards on the tables for seating allocation.
- ③ Distribute the other set of cards to the participants as they enter the room. For a workshop or a class where many people are meeting each other for the first time, you can place this set of cards on a registration table for them to pick up as they enter.

- ④ Tell your participants to locate the matching card on one of the tables and to take a seat at that table.
(From here, follow the steps from sample A, 5. to 9.)

VI. Tips

Time to discuss

It is recommended to instruct the groups to take at least 5 to 10 minutes (depending on the number of groups and participants) to talk about the plant on the card. Usually their experiences, memories, or feelings of the plant help each person to get to know the other participants' backgrounds.

Samples of the topics

If time permits, it is recommended to share the best stories from each group. Then the participants can share their story with the whole class. Sharing in class often invites a good laugh and helps create a positive atmosphere.

Points to consider:

- Have you encountered this plant before? Tell your group members about it.
- Through discussion, please find a connection among each card in your group.

- Select the most impressive episode/story in your group (and share with the class). Stories can be anything interesting, weird, funny, or even scary!

When class gets too excited

When it is time to move to the next activity or the main lesson/workshop, and the class is engaged in an excited discussion, recognize that the activity has been a success, but give your signal clearly to attract the participants' attention. You might say, "I can see you want to talk/discuss more which is wonderful, but you can continue the discussion after this session!" Use a clear voice with a cheerful tone to help switch the class to focus on your main lesson/workshop. As mentioned before, introduce your signal to the class before commencing the activity.

Making groups with more than six members

If you want to make large groups of six or more, you can start making doubled group numbers, then unite two groups. However, groups of six or more will need to be supervised carefully, because the first students often take longer and the rest of them may not get as much time to share their stories. Thus, time management is more important for a larger group activity; the recommended number of participants in a group is two to four to maximize efficiency of group discussion.



VII. Background of "Group Me!"

A lack of communication skills is often highlighted at schools and in various other educational settings, and while many teachers utilize discussion and debate to increase communication skills, they often do so without having first built a positive learning environment. Speaking up or sharing ideas is often difficult, even for adults, which is why it is so important to create a safe environment that is accepting and respectful of all participants.

In Japanese university classes, it has often been observed that students avoid sitting in the front or center rows. Interestingly, most students continue to sit in the same seat where they sat in the first class, especially if the instructor does not encourage different seating. Teenagers often form a group of close friends and prefer to sit with their group. However, there are many different and wonderful people in any class, but unless teachers attempt to build a communicative learning environment, students may not increase their circle of friends. While "Group Me!" is a tool to use as an introduction of a lesson/workshop, it also encourages a better learning environment by providing the opportunity for students to get to know each other. "Group Me!" has been developed to help students in face-to-face lessons become more active contributors.

VIII. Strength of "Group Me!"

From elementary school students through to college students, grouping can be a huge issue. If you allow students to make their own groups, it can be time-consuming and sometimes leaves one or two students without a group, which can be very difficult for them. On the other hand, students may complain if teachers group them a certain way. By using "Group Me!," teachers and instructors can allocate groups without notifying the students. Moreover, teachers and instructors can easily select a particular group or student for a task. For example, teachers can choose a student, either randomly or intentionally, by asking "Who has the card of the frog's eye?" or "Who has the card with the beehive?" and so on.

• Icebreaking

Plants 1 uses all original images of plants that children often see in Japan. Since they are familiar plants, everyone has a memory or an experience of these plants to some extent. They may say "Oh, I know it!," or "Yuck! Looks weird ..." and so on because the cards can prompt students to recall certain experiences. Because the card stimulates their memories and emotions, students can easily ask each other "What is it?" and "What do you have?," helping the conversation to occur and develop naturally.

• Positive opportunities for diverse perspectives

At school, a student who is good at sports or studying tends to be popular. However, there are many students who have had a variety of experiences that are not directly reflected in sporting or academic achievement. "Group Me!" may provide an opportunity for such students to be recognized by their classmates. For college students and adults, it is an instrument for people to use to get acquainted with each other based on the different perspectives of the cards.

• From children to adults anywhere

At school, university, or in workshops, "Group Me!" can be used in any place where building relationships is important.

• Increased interest in tiny creatures and nature

"Group Me!" provides an opportunity to stimulate interest in plants and nature, especially for students who do not have much experience with nature. After completing the fun grouping activity, students will have increased their knowledge of plants that may lead to further learning and participation in science and nature.

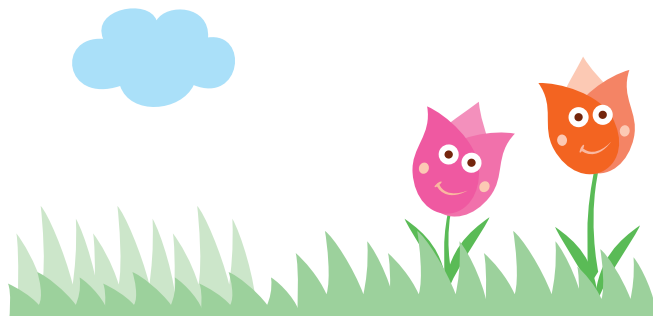
• Learning tool for science classes

Originally "Group Me!" was designed as a grouping tool; however, plants can be utilized as a learning tool for elementary school science study. In science lessons,

students can conduct research projects to study plants in groups. In addition, you can use "Group Me!" to play a matching card game (like concentration) and review previous learning activities.

• Increased interest in different languages and cultures

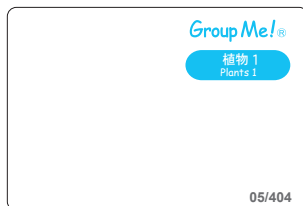
In the final stage of development, the names of the plants were printed on the back of each picture card in 12 languages (Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnam, Tagalog, Thai, Spanish, Portuguese, English, French, Italian, and German). The intention was to stimulate students' interests in different languages. Furthermore, considering that there are children from diverse cultures living in Japan, some of these languages are their native languages. Moreover, English is taught at the elementary school level in Japan, so English and other European languages have been added.



IX. Card structure

For identification purposes, there is a registration number located on the back of each card. The number on the right hand side (after the slash) identifies the type of plants. The number before the slash identifies the card number within that group. These numbers help to keep the cards in order.

Sample: 05/404 → The 5th card: Tulip



Plants 1 (flower)	(Vegetable, fruit, grain)
No.401 Sunflower	No.501 Strawberry
No.402 Dandelion	No.502 Persimmon
No.403 Impatiens	No.503 Cucumber
No.404 Tulip	No.504 Eggplant

X. Contact

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*If you lost or damaged any one of the cards, you can order it with the registration number on the back of the card.

For further information:

<http://www.tamagawa.ac.jp/info/groupme/>

