

The **thrill** of the **hunt**

by Megan F. Salch, contributing writer

Scavenger hunts are a great way to bring friends together. Themes for all ages introduce exciting adventures to the traditional hunt. Here, we explore six sensational scavenger hunt themes for various age groups.

Preschoolers

By carefully involving parents and friends, scavenger hunts for young tykes are memorable experiences. Paint can be a creative theme to weave throughout the event. Set up stations in your home or yard that the youngsters can visit to collect paint-at-home items. At the bean bag toss, toddlers can collect a watercolor kit as a reward. Move onto the face painting station to become adorned. Lay butcher paper out on the driveway and invite all guests to add their personal touch to an autumn banner. Plant paint brushes and small notepads in an area of the yard and ask the youngsters to find at least one of each to take home. Focusing on a handful of activities where preschoolers work to earn a prize simplifies the scavenger hunt for younger mindsets.

Early elementary

Teams compete through a series of miniature sports games. The first team to complete all five sports adventures wins. Each team member must participate in at least one game, although involvement in multiple games is encouraged. Start with easier tasks and work up to the more difficult games. Simple exercises include scooping up pool rings from the bottom of a pool with a net or a game of hopscotch. Include popular sports like shooting a basketball through the hoop from three different spots or volleying a ball in the air 10 times without it falling to the ground. Guests will be motivated to collaborate as two people, who are 8 feet apart, toss a water balloon back and forth. Award the winning team with sports apparel or memorabilia.

Upper elementary

Expand your scavenger hunt to your neighborhood by throwing a recycle hunt at a local park. Upon arrival, each child receives an earth-friendly, reusable grocery bag. Teams search for recyclable items (soda cans, newspaper, glass bottles) within a designated amount of time. Next up is the reuse challenge. Examine each recyclable item and ask players to list on paper ways to reuse it instead of just throwing it away. The guest with the most reuse ideas wins a prize such as a potted plant. Combining the physical scavenger hunt with

the intellectual hunt for ideas gives all talents a chance to win. The park gets a makeover, too.

Junior high

Middle schoolers get super involved in the glow-in-the-dark hunt. Paint several items such as packs of gum, erasers, sports drinks, and magazines with glow-in-the-dark paint. Expose the treasures to plenty of light before the hunt so that they glow enough to spot. Strategically hide these around the yard and add them to the scavenger hunt list. Paint symbols with the glow-in-the-dark paint throughout your yard and ask guests to report back on where these symbols were found. For example, a peace sign lies on the big pine tree and a heart is painted on the back of the garage. When kids return at the designated time to determine who discovered the most glowing objects, serve drinks in glowing cups available at party supply stores. Winners can receive free music downloads or movie passes. Each guest takes home a collection of glowing discoveries.

High school

Take advantage of teenage creativity by hosting an invention scavenger hunt. Make a list of off-the-wall names, such as fuzzy-wuzzy spazwaddles, that don't really exist. Encourage guests to use their imagination to create these items using everyday products available around the house. At the appointed time, everyone congregates to demonstrate what each item is and how it works. While the team with the most inventions wins, every guest gets a kick out of the innovations. Offer a cool prize so that there's a good incentive to get

creative. Starbucks offers free Song of the Day music downloads in conjunction with iTunes. Collect them a week or two before to give winners a nice selection.

Adults

Scavenger hunts aren't just for the young. If the host provides the main course, the guests work for the side dishes. Start by picking a type of food, such as Chinese food, that doubles as your theme. Give your guests 30 minutes to scavenge for complementary side dishes. For instance, participants might return with chopsticks, soy sauce, fortune cookies, and rice for the Chinese food hunt. Upon everyone's return, adults share stories while the meal is finalized and eaten. A prize that's sure to motivate participants is a gift certificate to a favorite restaurant or tickets to a sports game.



Elementary age children can have fun with creative scavenger hunts, like one involving a water balloon toss.