

Ask An Anthropologist
activity for classroom and home

by **Amy Peterson**

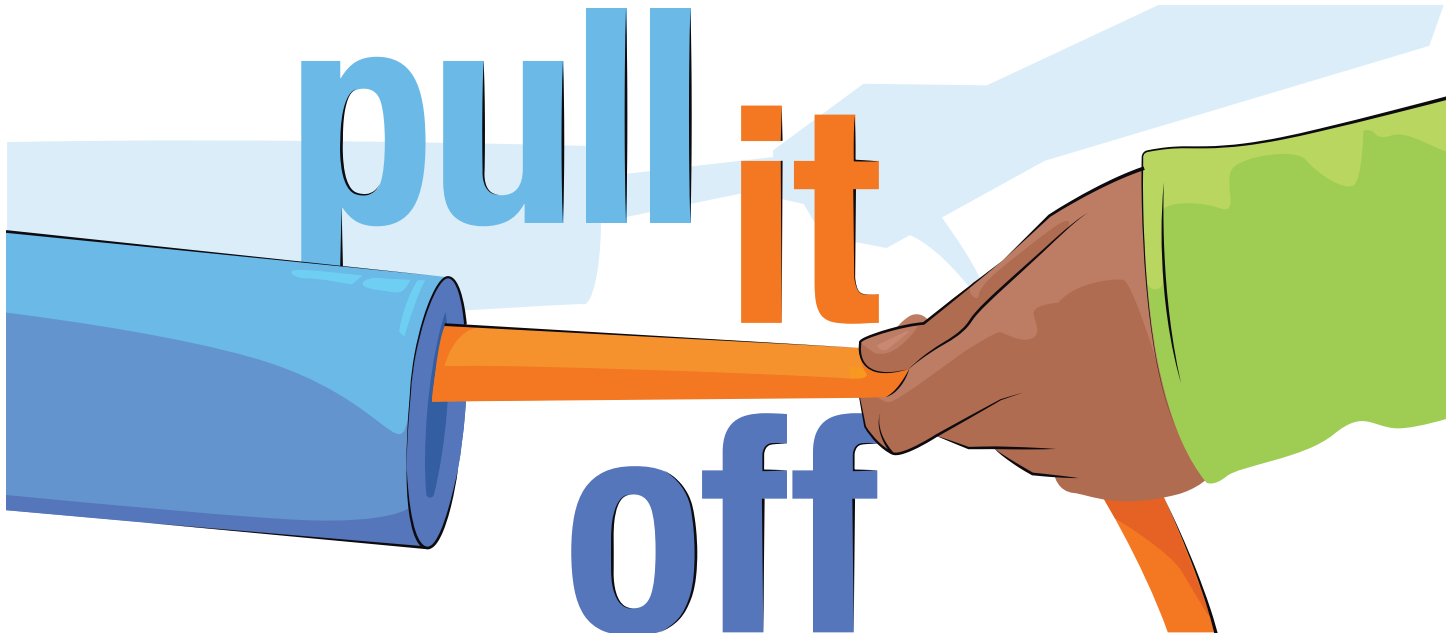


Table of Contents

Experiment procedures	2
Learn about human cooperation	3
Facilitator information	4

About the Author

Amy Peterson is a graduate student with the Institute of Human Origins at Arizona State University. Her research interests include paleoanthropology, functional morphology, and the evolution of the pelvis in early hominins.

Learn More

This is a companion PDF for the online article:

Pull It Off

askananthropologist.asu.edu/experiments/pull-it

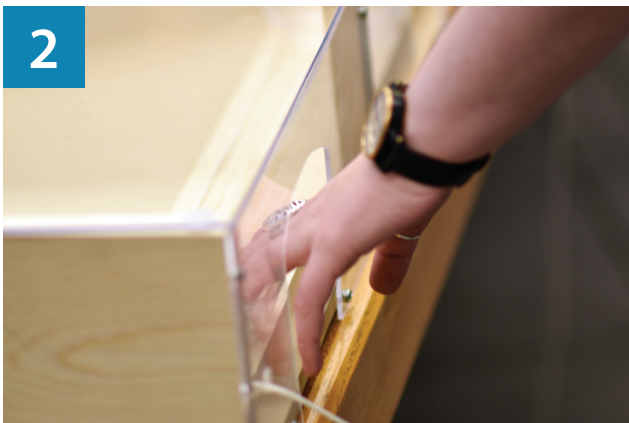
Pull It Off

Can you work together to pull the board?



Try this simple cooperation challenge!

You need two people. Each person pulls one end of the cord. Work together to bring the board to the other end of the box.



Each side of the apparatus has a prize that is now within your grasp. Reach in and get your reward!



Let's try that one more time!

This time, the rewards might not be split evenly. Is it easy to figure out how to share the reward?

Humans are naturally cooperative, and share the benefits of working together.

Our relatively big brains allow people to work together to accomplish tasks that benefit everyone.

Even very young human children can learn simple games such as working together to pull a board. They can also figure out a fair way to share the rewards from cooperating.

The activity may seem simple, but humans are the only animals with the ability and inclination to work together and negotiate a fair deal in this way. With effort, other primates can be taught to work together to pull the board toward themselves. But they have a difficult time sharing the rewards, which jeopardizes future cooperation.

It's not just our brains that give us an advantage—it's our social nature. Scientists think humans evolved to be social, and society and culture evolved from human nature.

Our big brains enabled us to live in complex social groups, a trend that has continued through many millions of years of primate evolution. While other animals live in social groups, only humans have developed such variety in social structures and culture.



Even at a young age, people can agree on what's fair and share. Image credit: Andreas Fischler via Wikimedia



Fossil evidence shows that our ancestors cared for the sick and elderly members of their groups. This Neanderthal skull belonged to an older man who was badly injured but survived. Image credit: James Gordon via Wikimedia

Facilitator Guide

Learning objectives

1. Humans are naturally cooperative, and share the benefits of working together.
2. Our relatively big brains allow people to work together to accomplish tasks that benefit everyone.
3. It's not just our brains that give us an advantage—it's our social nature.

Materials

- Painter's tape
- Rope and board apparatus
- Supply of small rewards
- Activity guide
- Table sign
- Videos of children and primates attempting the challenge (optional)

Notes to Presenter

This activity is very simple—for humans! To make it interesting, emphasize the difficulty that other primates have learning this type of cooperative task.

The first time participants try the apparatus, put one treat in the left and right hand bowl, so they each get one. The second time, put two or four treats in the center bowl, forcing them to decide how to share the rewards.

Safety

Do not allow participants to ingest the treats.

Credits and rights

Copyright 2018 Arizona State University.