**The Framing Story:** Read this before the lesson/activity.

**Try Softer**

*A young boy travelled across Japan to the school of a famous martial artist. When he arrived at the dojo he was given an audience by the sensei. “What do you wish from me?” the master asked. “I wish to be your student and become the finest karateka in the land,” the boy replied. “How long must I study?” “Ten years at least,” the master answered. “Ten years is a long time,” said the boy. “What if I studied twice as hard as all your other students?” “Twenty years,” replied the master. “Twenty years! What if I practice day and night with all my effort?” “Thirty years,” was the master’s reply. “How is it that each time I say I will work harder, you tell me that it will take longer?” the boy asked. “The answer is clear. When one eye is fixed upon your destination, there is only one eye left with which to find the Way.” ~ Joe Hyams* [*Zen in the Martial Arts*](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0553275593/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0553275593&linkCode=as2&tag=davidtrcom-20)*(pg. 95)*

**The Activity: Tick-Tack-Treat**

**Supplies:** A white or black board,

pens/chalk, eraser

a 5×5 checkered grid

masking tape (for the grid)

small wrapped candy

**Set-up:** Create the gird in advance.

Read ‘Try Softer’.

Ask for volunteers for a ‘challenge’.

Select two ‘groups’ of 4 students.

These students sit on benches or on the floor in two rows in front of the checkered playing grid. One group is assigned X and the other O, and they are given the following instructions: (As described in The Debrief, your language here is important. Know exactly what you want to say and don’t take questions from the students. If students raise hands to ask questions tell them they can work out their questions as they complete the task).

Look at one group, “The task for this group is to get four X’s in a row, and you all get a treat.”

Look at the other group, “The task for this group is to get four O’s in a row and you all get a treat.”

The groups alternate opportunities to put a mark on the grid, and the students in each group will take turns so that they rotate who gets to place the mark on the grid. (If they are sitting in rows and rotate to the back this works best or else there is crowding at the grid and no one can see what is happening).

**The Lesson:** What happens when a team gets four in a row?

When a group gets four in a row, they get candy BUT the game keeps going! (Do not tell them this in the set-up). When no team can get more candy, send them off and pick two new groups.

What usually happens is that the first group or first few groups battle one another competitively, trying to block their “opponents”. When they realize that the game continues after candy is given out, then eventually they realize that it is in their best interest not to compete but to work together to maximize how much candy both groups can get.

*Note: Most often it is the 2nd, 3rd, or 4th group that figures it out. Once, doing this with Grade 5’s they got it on the first attempt, Another time with parents and Grade 8’s working together I had to model it for them because the competitive nature of the adults didn’t allow them to see the win-win possibility.*

**The Debrief:** What was the goal of the activity?

It is interesting what responses you will get to this question, but what you are looking for is, “To get candy”.

What happened when you got candy? (The game kept going)

What did the last group figure out?

Note the language in these following questions- Keep this language out of the activity to enrich the discussion during the debrief.

Did I ever say it was a competition? (No)

Did I call you teams? (No, groups)

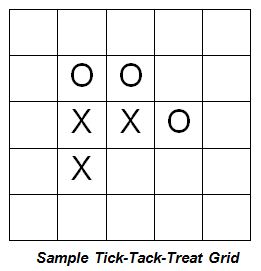
Did I call it a game? (No, a ‘challenge’, or you can say ‘activity’)

Did I say that you had to put your own symbol, X or O, on the grid? (This is an interesting point- if you are careful in your explanation then really students could have taken turns placing four X’s in a row, two from each group, followed by four O’s on the grid. They share in completing each other’s task.)

Question students about competition and why they thought it was a game with two opposing teams (Team sports, game shows, -competitive paradigm)

Now is your opportunity to refer back to the framing story… “When one eye is fixed upon your destination, there is only one eye left with which to find the Way”…

Sometimes we try harder instead of trying smarter.

Sometimes we are so fixed on the task, (what we are doing), that we forget the goal or the outcome, (what we really want).