

Communicating With the Power of Magic

by James Warren

SESSION TWO

In this second session you're going to learn some fantastic routines that can be used for all grade levels. You can use these routines for pure entertainment, or you can customize the presentation to fit your topic – I'll be giving you plenty of suggestions on how to do that.

THE MAGIC APPLE

THE EFFECT

In order to give you a sense of the effect, I will use a presentation designed for elementary school students, first grade and up. Later, I will offer presentational ideas for older students, and suggest ways that school counselors can use this trick.

For purposes of this presentation, we'll use an apple (but later you'll see that many types of objects that can be used). Bring out the apple, which has been cored so there is a large hole right through the middle of the apple. Pass it around for the kids to examine. (In what follows, dialogue is in italics.)

One reason for cutting out the middle of an apple like this is to remove the seeds, like when you want to make apple pie. But that's not why I took the middle out of this apple. It did it in order to tell you a story.

Once upon a time there was a magician who grew the most delicious apples in the entire kingdom. Everyone who ate his apples grew healthy and strong, and so the magician became rich, since everyone bought his apples.

One day, the magician died, and dozens of people started showing up claiming to be relatives of the magician, and thus rightful inheritors of the magic orchard. There were so many people making this claim that there seemed to be no way to figure out who really was the rightful heir.

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Then the king had a great idea. He took an apple from the field and cut a big hole out of its center. He took two pieces of rope and threaded them through the apple, then tied one of the ropes around the apple to make it even more secure.

Then two of the king's soldiers held the ends of the ropes so the apple dangled from the center. [Teacher allows two students hold the ends of the ropes.]

"Now," said the king, "while my soldiers hold both ends of the ropes, let anyone who claims to be the rightful heir to the magician's orchard step forward and remove the apple from the ropes."

Someone stepped forward immediately with a knife, intending to cut the ropes to remove the apple.

"Oh no," said the king, "cutting the ropes is not allowed. Nor can you cut the apple!"

"But your Majesty," they said, "if we cannot cut the ropes or the apple, and if the soldiers keep holding onto the ends of the ropes, it's impossible to remove the apple!"

"Not impossible," said the king, "for when the magician's true heir or heiress holds his or her hands below the apple, the apple will magically fall from the ropes."

Well, everyone stood in line for a chance to hold their hands below the apple! But time after time the apple did not fall. At last, a young lady stepped forward and held her hands below the apple, like this. [Teacher cups her hands below the apple to catch it when it falls.]

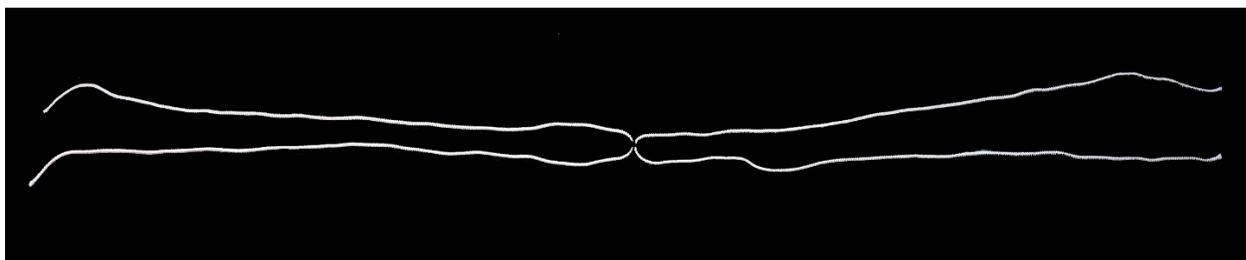
Now, soldiers, pull the ropes hard!

And the apple drops in the teacher's hands! The teacher then hands the apple and the ropes out for examination.

Remember, this is only one possible presentation, designed for elementary students. There are tons of other possibilities, some of which I will touch on later.

THE METHOD

This trick relies upon a very simple yet deceptive method. In a nutshell, two ropes that appear to be stretched out alongside one another, are actually doubled-back to form two loops, which meet in the middle and are tied together with a piece of thread.



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If you hide the portion where the loops meet, the ropes will appear to continuous from one end to the other.



Tie the loops together with a piece of thread. (Note: I use string instead of thread for enhanced visibility in the photographs, but you should use thread. Also, I used a dark string for the same reason, but you will want to use thread that is somewhat similar in color to the ropes to ensure it will not be visible to the audience.)



Pick up the ropes so that the joined loops rest upon your fingers, as in the photograph, and cover the join with your thumb. To the audience it will appear as though you are holding two ropes side-by-side in normal fashion.



Place the apple or tennis ball into your hand in preparation for feeding the ropes through it. (The photo shows your view of the situation; the audience sees only the back of your hand and thus cannot see the joined loops.)



Use your free hand to feed the two ends through the apple. Then pull the ends out the other side and continuing pulling *until the joined loops are inside the apple*. (Be careful not to expose the loops at this point, or accidentally pull them too far so they pop out the other side of the ball.)

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It now appears to the audience that the two ropes each pass completely through the apple when in fact each rope is actually looping back upon itself.

Now position a student to your left and to your right, and have them hold onto their respective ends. **Make sure they allow some slack in the ropes.** (You don't want them to pull the ropes taut lest the apple fall off prematurely!) If you are performing this without helpers or online, simply hold the ends yourself, as you see me doing in the photographs.



Now take **one end from each side** and tie them together around the apple in a **simple overhand knot**. (If doing this with helpers, have each of them hand you one of their ropes – it doesn't matter which end they hand you. Tie the knot and then hand the ends back to the students.)

Display the apple tied and dangling from the ropes.

NOTE: It doesn't matter which of the ends you use to tie the knot; just grab one length of rope from each side.

I have left the knot loose in the picture so you can see the type of knot to tie. When you do this in performance you can tighten it a bit more, *but do not tighten it too much because if you pull too hard you will prematurely release the apple!*

If you are doing this without helpers and you find it difficult to tie the knot while holding everything in the air, lay the apple on your desk, grasp a piece of rope from each side, and tie the knot around the apple. Now you can lift everything up to display the apple dangling on the ropes.

The apple now dangles from the ropes, to which it seems securely bound because of the knot. When your two helpers (or you, if you're the one holding the ropes) pull the ropes, the thread holding the loops together will break and the apple will fall free from the ropes!

If you are doing this live you can now allow both the ropes and the apple to be examined. If you are doing this over Zoom, just do your best to demonstrate both before and after that the apple

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and ropes are solid and ordinary. (Don't worry about the tiny piece of thread. It will either lodge within the apple core or fall on the ground – it will never be noticed.)

PRESENTATIONS

I gave you a children's story presentation in the description of the effect. I'm sure that if you have the creative urge, you'll be able to come up with other stories. A story presentation like this one is primarily for entertainment. It's a wonderful way to reward your class – combining story-time with magic!

But it is also possible to use this routine as a metaphor so it becomes a vehicle for communicating a message or addressing a particular subject. Whenever I customize a magic trick to convey a message, I first ask myself what the effect is. In this case, the effect is that an apple penetrates the ropes that bind it. I immediately think of liberation, getting free from a bind. Okay, what binds are your students facing? Where are they feeling "tied up" or held back?

Math? Are they confused and feeling blocked by the new equations you're introducing? Reboot their whole attitude and perceptual apparatus by taking a few minutes to do this routine – so delightfully out of context in a math class! Use it as an encouragement: you're going to help them get free from the "equation-knots" that look impossible to solve right now.

Phys.Ed.? Are you throwing them a particularly challenging obstacle they need to achieve? No need to tell a story – just do the trick and use it as a metaphor for encouragement. Don't use an apple, use a tennis ball. Cut two large holes in the sides of the tennis ball and feed the ropes through the holes. Let them know that the human body is like magic, and with the right attitude and technique it can overcome obstacles that seem impossible! Go team!

Emotions? Are their feelings all knotted up due to some tough situation? Did something sad happen to a classmate and kids are dealing with sorrow? You don't have to present this as "light and funny"; magic can be presented in a serious way with any emotional shading you wish. Present this routine as an "object lesson" in how we can work through sadness even though it seems to wrap around us like knots. How about using a *HEART* instead of an apple or tennis ball? Buy a styrofoam heart, make a tunnel through it, and paint it red. Or make one out of papier-mâché.

History? Forget using audience helpers – just do the whole thing yourself while you share the historical narrative. If your topic has to do with a war in which an underdog survived and triumphed under seemingly impossible conditions, tell the story while you display the ropes, thread them through the object, and tie the knot. *Do not tell the students beforehand what you intend to do with the ropes and ball.* Trust me, you'll keep their attention and interest! They'll be watching and listening carefully because they know something unusual and interesting is about to happen, but don't know what.

Are you getting the idea? It doesn't matter what the subject is – you can use this routine if you can fit it into some idea of liberation, freedom, working through something, or overcoming some bind or obstacle.

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If you're a school counselor I'm sure you can see how these themes might play out in your counseling work, whether that involves encouraging kids to hope for a future beyond a pandemic, or helping an individual student solve a problem with a particular teacher or class. Just as the object *moves through* the ropes, so can your students move through the obstacles they are facing.

Remember that when you experience a magic trick and it amazes you, something happens *physiologically*, in the brain. You are literally inducing an altered state, if only for a few seconds. *It is that altered state that creates for you a special moment of opening for your message.* That is the *real* magic that happens when you use magic as a vehicle for communication.

This routine can be used to put a *positive spin* on anything you need to present, whether that's for one student, one class, or the whole school gathered in an auditorium. (Note: You can indeed present this trick to an auditorium of hundreds of kids, and you'll have their complete attention. An apple or tennis ball, or any similar sized object, will be plenty visible even to those in the back row.)

CUTTING A BODY IN HALF

Whose body are we going to cut? If you're working in a live classroom, use a student. If you're working online, use a family member or cut your own body in half!

THE EFFECT

The effect is that ropes magically penetrate through a body. However, it sounds more exciting if you frame it as "cutting in half." (Other possibilities will be addressed soon.)

You show two ropes, each about five feet long (length can vary). The ropes are stretched out with the ends held by two students. A third student stands in front of the center of the ropes. One of the ropes is tied around the third student's waist; yet when the two students pull their ropes, instead of cinching the knot even tighter, the ropes penetrate the third student's body. That student now stands *behind* the ropes!

THE METHOD

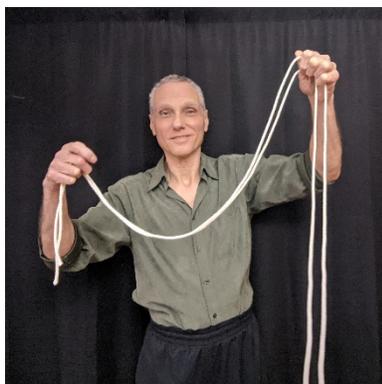
You already know the method: it's essentially the same method as *The Magic Apple* routine.

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Take two ropes about 5' in length, fold each of them in the middle to form a "U" shape loop, and tie the loops together with a piece of thread – just as you did with the ropes in *The Magic Apple* routine. In this routine, however, you'll want to use thicker rope.

That's the only preparation you'll need to do in order to perform this routine. First, I'm going to describe the procedure for cutting *yourself* in half.



Display the ropes with the joined loops hidden in your hand. The audience is unaware of the real situation.



Place the ropes behind your back so the tied loops rest against the middle of your lower back.



Bring the ropes around to the front of your body.

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Tie a **simple overhand knot** using one of the two lengths of rope your left hand is holding, and one of the lengths of rope from your right hand. *It does not matter which rope you select from either side:* just use one strand of rope from each hand and tie them together to form an overhand knot. Gently pull the knot to secure it around your waist.



When you are ready for the magic, pull hard on the ropes. The thread holding the loops together will break, and the ropes will appear to penetrate through your body! If you are doing this live, you can immediately hand out the ropes for examination. Don't worry – no one will notice the tiny piece of thread that falls to the ground when it breaks.

Cutting Someone Other Than Yourself in Half

If you want to do this with audience participation, bring up a student volunteer to be cut in half. (You'll have no problem getting someone to volunteer!) Display the ropes, then position yourself directly behind the student. Position the joined loops against the small of the student's back as you bring the ends around each side of his or her waist – exactly the same procedure as if you were doing this on yourself, as outlined above. When you are ready for the magic to happen, pull the ropes.

Performing live, you can take showmanship a step further and bring up two additional volunteers to hold the ends of the ropes. The "victim" to be cut in half stands in front of you, in the center, while the other two students stand off to the right and left. Position the loops against the victim's back, and hand the ends to each of the other students to hold. (Note: You may have to keep a hand on the loops to make sure they stay in position, hidden behind the student's back.)

Have each student hand you one of their ropes (doesn't matter which). Tie the overhand knot and hand the ropes back to the students. When you are ready for the magic to happen, tell them to pull hard on the ropes, which will penetrate the victim's body!

(Note: Make sure the two helpers holding the ropes cannot see the joined loops behind the victim's back. You may need to position them slightly forward.)

PRESENTATIONS

As was true of *The Magic Apple*, this is a penetration effect, which connotes liberation, getting free from bondage, working through a problem or obstacle, achieving victory, overcoming

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oppression, and similar ideas. Does your lesson or counseling task involve anything similar to those themes? If so, think about where it might be appropriate to insert a little “comic amazement relief,” that will not only be entertaining and intriguing, but also fit with your message.

Remember, as I mentioned earlier, magic does not have to be presented frivolously. It can also be a vehicle for serious stories or messages.

Here's an idea: do a little googling and learn about the history of the magic illusion “Sawing The Lady In Half” – when it was invented and what a sensation it was. You can also use this as an opportunity to raise gender issues: why was it always a *woman* who was cut in half? Offer to demonstrate your own version of the trick – maybe cutting a *guy* in half for a change! Tell the class that you are going to use ropes for this demonstration, since the risk of failure has dissuaded you from trying it with a saw! :)

Instead of the sawing theme, you could talk about your strange ability to make yourself insubstantial, like a ghost through whom things pass. This would be a great way to begin or end a ghost story. For elementary children, you could even throw a sheet over yourself or one of the kids – they become ghostlike as the ropes go right through their body!

BONUS

Perhaps you've already realized – you can use this same principle to make the ropes penetrate almost *anything* you can feed them through. Use your imagination to come up with a small object that you can feed the ropes through, and which ties in with your topic or story.

By the way, the method you've learned here makes a very effective neck penetration, although I don't recommend you do it for elementary students. Just lay the loop joints against the back of your neck, take two of the ends and tie the overhand knot around your neck, and pull. The ropes go right through your neck.