The Butterfly Effect

Theme: Intellectual/Educational Values
Goal: Ever wonder the impact of your decisions? Wish someone or something could just disappear? See how simple choices can make a huge impact.
Group size: Unlimited
Time: Approximately 45 minutes
Materials: Handouts, envelopes, fake “candles”
Setting: A room big enough for your group to divide and sit in circles.

Activity Set-up:
I. There are two parts to this activity. The first revolves around the printed handout story about the Mandarin man. For this activity, divide up the group into groups of at least 4. Have them sit in a circle and place the candle in center. Read the first page of the Mandarin story. The groups must now make a decision... depending on how you feel about the group as a whole, the decision may be arrived by the following:
   a. Everyone must agree to keep the Mandarin alive... if one person votes against him living, then he must die.
   b. A simple majority. [After the fourth page, ALL decisions are made by a simple majority.]
Now they must make a decision. If a group decides to kill the Mandarin man, then that group must now sit out until the story is done or all groups have killed the Mandarin man.
II. Between the two activities there is no discussion
III. For the second activity, separate the group throughout the room so that they are spaced out (they can go wherever they want). Have them squat or kneel. Tell them to close their eyes and that throughout the whole activity, they must keep them shut. Begin reading these ruled out loud:
   a. Don’t cheat.
   b. If tapped once, put both arms up in the air.
   c. If tapped twice, stand up.
   d. If tapped three times, do whatever you want.
What you will do is to keep reading these rules aloud and walk around the room. You will then tap people (you decide how many times the individual people should be tapped). Periodically, ask everyone “who is left to be tapped.”
IV. After you’re done tapping everyone, follow up with a discussion.
V. Questions:
   a. Who wanted to kill the Mandarin man? How did you feel about making that decision?
   b. Of those who didn’t want to kill him, how did you feel when someone in your group wanted to kill the Mandarin man?
   c. How hard was it to persuade people to kill or not kill the Mandarin man? Why?
   d. How did you feel having the ability to decide one’s fate?
   e. Do you like making these types of decisions? Why or why not?
   f. Is it easier for you to make decisions in a group or alone? Does one carry a heavier load?
   g. Contrast the first activity with the second... now that you were by yourself and someone else had control over your actions, how did that make you feel?
   h. How did you like not knowing what was happening around you?
   i. Which situation, activity one or activity two did you like being in more?
   j. Any other questions you’d like to ask...

This activity is based on a proverb from the Talmud, an encyclopedia of Jewish knowledge, “if you kill one man, you destroy the world. Save one man, you save the world.”