The Strategy Game

Mission: the thief locked the mascot again behind a trap, and rushing won't crack it. Win the games, plan the winning route on the whiteboard, whisper the password, open the box, free the mascot. Character trait today: **Self-Management**.

1 · Sharks and Minnows with a Plan (5–16 min) — 20 seconds to plan, then cross

Warm-up 2 sharks, no seaweed, wide lane. Coach the idea: "split up so the shark can't chase everyone."

Seaweed on tagged minnows freeze in place and tag from that spot. Ask a minnow to name the plan before "go."

Decoy 3 sharks. One brave decoy pulls the sharks one way, the rest cross the other. Reward thinking ahead over just running.

Diff TK–2: fewer sharks, more space, coach the plan aloud. 3–8: 4–5 sharks, two Minnow squads head-to-head, most survivors after 5 rounds wins, ties go sudden-death. An older kid runs it as head Shark.

2 · Last One Standing / Nim (16–31 min) — line of 15, take 1 to 3, take the last one to win

Setup Line of 15 (kids or board marks). Two teams alternate, remove 1, 2, or 3. Whoever takes the LAST one wins. Play several rounds.

Strategy Leave a multiple of 4. Go first, take 3 to leave 12, then 8, then 4, then 0. Whatever they take, you make the pair add to 4.

Diff TK–2: start at 9, take 1 or 2, coach thinks aloud. 3–8: run a best-of-three tournament bracket to a champion, then break it (line of 21, or take 1–4) and re-derive under a 20-sec move clock. Cracker designs their own setup and referees a match. Do not announce the trick.

3 · Plan the Escape (31–45 min) — draw a maze, the best route spells the password

EXIT 4-by-4 grid, START top-left, EXIT bottom-right. Put E, X, I, T on the one connected path in order (E top row, X 2nd, I 3rd, T bottom). Scatter 2–3 junk letters (Q, Z) on dead-end cells.

GO short straight row, START → G → O → EXIT. Two letters, no trap. Good for a first round or younger team.

Diff TK–2: short 3-cell GO path, coach helps trace. 3–8: 6-by-6 grid, longer word (PLAN, TRAP), two traps, lock in one route on paper (wrong first trace = out). Beat-the-clock scoreboard (3 pts fastest, 1 pt second). Older kids design a maze for a rival team and referee it.

4 · Finale + Wristband (45–60 min)

Open Winning team announces the password to the room, coach turns the key, mascot lifts out, big cheer. Optional "thief's note" inside: "You out-planned my trap. I surrender!"

Award the **Self-Management** trait wristband to detectives who slowed down and planned their move before acting ("I had a plan", "I thought ahead before I ran").

3–8 For older kids and the two middle schools, run the whole hour competitive: fixed teams, score every game on the whiteboard, visible timer each round, crown a champion here. Games bank adds **Detective Mafia** (2–3 Culprits + a Detective, 5–7 min rounds) — the one middle schoolers ask to replay.

Detective's Oath (say together, magnifiers up): I am a detective. / My brain is my best tool. / I don't guess, I reason. / I follow the clues to the truth.