



**NYC OUTWARD BOUND
SCHOOLS**

Transforming Schools, Changing Lives

BUILDING COMMUNITY IN THE BLENDED AND REMOTE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

PARTICIPANT TOOLKIT

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INTRODUCTION

At **NYC Outward Bound Schools**, building strong communities is an essential component of our educational approach. In a world changed by COVID-19, NYC Outward Bound is well-suited to meet the needs of NYC students, teachers, and schools by helping to adapt their practices and programming to the blended and remote learning environments.

Now more than ever, students need to feel a sense of belonging and connection to their school communities. Many of the community-building techniques teachers have relied upon in the past are no longer suitable, as they now violate social distancing protocols and/or cannot be done virtually. We have created this free digital toolkit in hopes that it helps school leaders and educators to build classroom and school communities in blended and remote learning environments, and supports them during this difficult time.

We divided this toolkit into three sections: routines and structures to set the stage for successful communication and engagement at the beginning of the school year; community-building activities that are often conducted in Crew/Advisory/Morning Meeting/Family Group spaces, but can be adapted for use in content area classrooms; and academic discussion protocols that promote belonging and engagement.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you'd like to learn more about NYC Outward Bound Schools' work and the ways in which we partner with schools, please reach out to:

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SECTION 1: ROUTINES & STRUCTURES

IN THIS SECTION

- Netiquette Guidelines
- Creating and Using Norms
- *GUEST ESSAY* | Facilitating Through a Screen: Learnings from a Virtual Expedition, by: Aileen Soto, Staffing Manager at NYC Outward Bound Schools

NETIQUETTE GUIDELINES

Navigating the classroom in an online environment requires clear expectations. Simply defined, “netiquette” means etiquette on the internet (or net). Let’s look at three important netiquette guidelines:



1. Be friendly, positive and self-reflective. When people cannot see you, and also cannot talk to you in person, it’s easy to hurt feelings if you are not careful in how you express yourself. The old saying, “Think before you speak” is important here, in a slightly different context — think before you write. Reread what you have written to be sure it is positive.



2. Write as if the whole world can read what you’re writing (chances are they can). Avoid using informal words, texting abbreviations (brb; lol), and inappropriate words in an online environment, even if they are words you consider, “not so bad,” as they might sound offensive to the reader. Try to write as clearly as possible. Also, try not to use caps lock when writing — it will insinuate YELLING!



3. Ask for clarification — don’t assume. If you are unsure of what someone said or are trying to interpret a person’s comment, then ask again. Do not sit in silence either misunderstanding or feeling offended. Do not interrupt though — wait until there is a break in the conversation, or send an email in the moment so you don’t forget your question.

The Golden Rule of Netiquette

Most importantly, when speaking in an online course or in any online environment, the same rules apply for etiquette as in real-time. The golden rule of netiquette is: **Do not do or say online what you would not do or say offline.**

Click below to watch this YouTube video that covers Discussion Board Netiquette:



CREATING AND USING NORMS

Norms are the agreements we make with each other. They represent community goals, and as such, all classroom members should be given the opportunity to contribute to their creation. Some examples of norms include the active participation of all classroom members and “leave no trace.”

How are norms different from rules?

Rules serve an important function in school communities. Rules are non-negotiable. They are created by adults and must be followed at all times. Some examples of rules include prohibitions against violence or offensive language.

Norm guidelines

Norms are created and used in many different ways across schools. In general, you may want to consider the following guidelines:

- Write norms in student-friendly language
- Prioritize a few key norms
- Post the norms in a clearly visible space
- Provide opportunities to monitor and address norm progress (or setback)

Norms exist to be used by students, thus students must be able to define and explain them. Additionally, choosing a few norms (no more than six) will promote student familiarity and ownership of the norms. Beyond participating in the creation of norms, students must be given regular opportunities to interact with the norms through self-reflection, peer and class assessment, and discussion.

How can I create norms with my students?

There are many ways to create norms. The simplest way is to ask students to generate a list of norms they might want to adopt. However, without proper framing, this activity may be difficult for students previously unfamiliar with norms. Here are some suggestions for how to introduce norms to your classroom:

- Read a story about a model school or classroom. Ask students to identify the traits that made this environment successful.
- Have students brainstorm a list of “ideal classroom” characteristics. Identify trends and use these trends to start discussion around norms.
- Ask older students to write a reflection on their most (or even least) successful team experience. Identifying the specific qualities of these situations can support norm creation.
- Begin a conversation or activity with students about the differences between the law and common practices. For example, there is no law that students must give up their seat to the elderly on public transportation, but many of them do. Ask them to reflect on other similar situations in order to begin a conversation around norms.

After generating lists of potential norms, you may want to have students vote on their favorites. You may also want to have students sign a class contract pledging their commitment to the norms.

How are norms monitored?

- Inviting students to participate in norm creation is essential but not sufficient. In order for norms to work they need to consistently “live” in your classrooms. Here are some suggestions to help make norms an active presence:
- Have students make posters of what the norms look and sound like. For example, your class may choose “respect” as a norm, but in order to promote respect there must be common agreement about what respect involves.
- At consistent intervals, have students assess which norm they would like to award a ‘star’ (meaning this norm is alive and well in the classroom) and which norm they would like to designate as a ‘stair’ (meaning more focus is required). Have students support their choices with specific evidence.
- Choose a norm of the day, week, or month on which to focus. Provide consistent opportunities for reflection on progress.
- Create norm spies. Assign students as spies to each other. At the end of the day/week, have them report out on a time they saw their subject following the norm. Alternatively, you can assign spies based on the norms, such as the respect spy. It is that spy’s job to announce three students who he/she “caught” following the norm. Make sure all students get a chance to be the spy!

The effective implementation of class norms empowers students to take ownership of classroom culture. They make expectations explicit and recognize student voice. Norms help to promote an environment where all students feel safe, respected, and valued.

[Source: EL Education](#)

GUEST ESSAY | FACILITATING THROUGH A SCREEN: LEARNINGS FROM A VIRTUAL EXPEDITION

Adapted from a piece written by: Aileen Soto, Staffing Manager at NYC Outward Bound Schools



On the day we launched our first Virtual Crew* session, I remember signing on to the Zoom call for the first time nervous, anxious, excited, and both very much prepared and unprepared at the same time. It was five minutes past the hour, and little by little the students started to log in. Three students kept their cameras on while the rest kept their cameras off. They all used the chat. When I began to facilitate that first day, it felt like I was talking to myself most of the time. Throughout the week, I realized that students were participating, just not in the way I expected. And I ran with it!

Our team had designed a program that mimicked an in-person Crew as much as possible. We used Zoom break-out rooms to give students one-on-one spaces to conduct interviews with each other. In lieu of an in-person scavenger hunt, we asked students to take pictures of items in their homes. There was even an opportunity for a field trip using Google virtual hikes.

Virtual facilitation, for me, is a new learning space worth engaging in because of the impact and effect we saw on our students. Here are my major learnings and “pro tips” for virtual facilitation:

Here are my 10 major learnings and tips for virtual facilitation:

1. **Planning and creating a virtual experience takes a lot of collaboration.** Don't try to do it alone, but share and work together with colleagues to brainstorm and plan.
2. **Zoom is imperfect.** Zoom is not compatible with all devices in a way that will allow for full participation and impact. For example, Zoom has limited features for Chromebook users, and the majority of our students use Chromebooks provided by the Department of Education. We worked on finding ways to make our sessions inclusive and equitable by providing activities that all students were able to participate in.
3. **The Zoom app looks different on all devices.** Test out all activities with multiple devices to learn what is possible when using a phone, iPad, tablet, Chromebook or desktop computer.
4. **Camera on vs camera off.** Don't force students to turn on their cameras or shame them for choosing not to. You never know what is going on behind their computer screens. Meet the students where they are and trust that they will participate. Allow students to find a comfortable space during this uncomfortable time we are all living in.
5. **Embrace the silence and the chat box.** We found that students used the chat box as their preferred way of participating. Sometimes when we would pose a question to the group, we'd be met with silence. Once we realized that students were participating through chat, we embraced it and read the chats out loud for the group.
6. **Time flies when you're having FUN!** Time goes by fast in a virtual world. Our sessions were only an hour long and I wished we had a little more time for more activities and participation.


7. **Games, Games, Games.** There are so many great games online that you can play via Zoom — [Skribbl.io](https://skribbl.io), free “Escape the Room” challenges, [Kahoot!](https://kahoot.com), etc. Students love games and participate in them. We found that Zoom is no different than in-person when it comes to playtime.
8. **Polls: Students LOVE polls!** We used polls to ask “would you rather” questions and to have students answer questions related to their learning targets. Polls are also a great way to measure if students met the learning target for the day.
9. **Be you — all of you.** It’s only a moment in time (literally) that you are facilitating. Even with all the cameras off and the participation through chat, facilitating this Crew was one of my most joyful experiences during the pandemic. Students feed off your energy as a facilitator. Don’t take it personally when students aren’t actively participating as they would in person — 99% of the time, they hear you and are into the experience even if it seems like you’re just talking to a black screen!

I didn’t expect to feel a sense of attachment towards the group of students I worked with. I didn’t expect that the group would feel much closer to each other after just a few days of sessions. On the last day, we held a celebration during which students facilitated a game for the rest of the Crew to play. We asked the students to either say or type some of their takeaways, and one that stood out to me was


“I never thought I would be closer to my Crewies even without seeing their faces.”

I was skeptical about this virtual experience in the beginning, but in the end, we were able to achieve our goals of increased attendance and engagement. Working on this project made me realize that as a facilitator, you can still provide the experience needed for students to bond, work together, celebrate and have fun! It just takes time to practice your Zoom skills, and the confidence that you as a facilitator can still impact lives, even through a screen.

On the last day, I remember the moment our students voiced their goodbyes and signed out of Zoom for good. As each square disappeared on our screens, I realized I’d learned so much from the students. It gave me hope and made me believe even more in the power of virtual facilitation during an uncertain time.



WHAT IS CREW?



Crew is the signature advisory structure at NYC Outward Bound Schools, and provides essential social-emotional support for students. Crews are made up of 10-16 students led by an adult Crew Advisor, often a teacher, and meet frequently (2-5 times per week). At some schools, crews stay intact throughout a student’s middle or high school career.



SECTION 2: COMMUNITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

IN THIS SECTION

- Openers
- Check-ins
- Icebreakers/Energizers
- Getting to Know You Activities
- Team and Trust Building Activities

OPENERS

BRAIN TEASERS



5-10 minutes (flexible)



N/A

Framing Purpose and Instructions: Fun questions to challenge your students to think “outside the box.” These can be great to fill time if waiting for students to log on, or to refocus the group and offer a break from another activity.

Examples Include:

Q: If a blue house is made of blue bricks, a red house is made of red bricks, a yellow house, yellow bricks, what is a greenhouse made of?

A: Glass

Q: What starts with the letter “t”, is filled with tea, and ends in “t”?

A: A teapot

Q: What goes up when rain comes down?

A: An umbrella

Q: What is full of holes that still holds water?

A: A sponge

Q: What gets more wet as it dries?

A: A towel

Q: What has a foot but no legs?

A: A snail

Q: What is so delicate, that saying what it is breaks it?

A: Silence

Q: If I have it, I don’t share it. If I share it, I don’t have it. What is it?

A: A secret

Q: If I eat, I am fine. If I drink, I die. What am I?

A: Fire

Q: A man leaves home, makes 3 left turns, and returns home. There are two men there, both wearing masks. What are they all doing?

A: Playing baseball. The man leaves home plate, reaches first base and makes the 1st left turn, reaches second base and makes the 2nd left turn, reaches third base and makes the 3rd left turn, and returns home where the catcher and umpire are positioned.

Q: The Fourth Dimension: Tell students that they must find out what the Fourth Dimension is by stating, "The first dimension is (random object or location), the second dimension is (different random object or location), the third dimension is (third random object or location).

A: What is the fourth dimension?" The answer is anything as long as it begins with "The fourth dimension is..."

Q: A girl and her dog go for a walk in the forest. She notices that, all of a sudden, her dog is on the opposite side of a river than she is. She calls her dog over and the dog crosses and arrives totally dry. How is this possible?

A: It is winter and the river is frozen, so the dog runs across.

Q: In a one-story pink house, the door was pink, the people who lived there were pink, there was a pink cat, a pink dog, the furniture was pink, the walls were pink, the floor was pink, everything was pink. What color were the stairs?

A: There were no stairs, it was one floor.

Debrief Questions for Reflection and Learning:

- How did you come to the answer?
- Were some questions harder than others? Why?
- Did they get easier the more you heard? Why or why not?

Virtual Modifications: Students can send chats

Age Modifications: N/A

WORDLES



5-10 minutes



A white board to write the wordles out

Framing Purpose and Instructions: The purpose of this activity is multifaceted. Wordles can be used to engage students, to get students thinking and problem-solving or to provide a fun introduction to the session. Wordles can be used at any time as a filler activity, as well.

SAMPLE SET-UP: "We're going to start off our session today with some warm-ups for our brain. I'm going to show you an image or an assortment of words, and it's up to you to determine what they mean. They are riddles made out of words, hence the name 'wordles.' We're going to begin easy so you get the hang of it, but then they're going to get harder! Here's our first one."



Write these wordles on your white board exactly how they're shown below. Sometimes if students are having trouble, it's good to explain that the answers are typically sayings, phrases, or common things.

Easiest	Getting Harder	Tough
BAN ANA	You / Just / Me	HIJKLMNO
Noon Lazy	ECNALG	BJAOCKX
side side	MCE MCE MCE	IECEXCEPT
lean revo	XQQQME	T I M E abde
_____IT	HE'S/HIMSELF	THHANGERE
NAFISH NAFISH	ME QUIT	(HEAD)1/4s

Answers		
Banana split	Just between you and me	H2O
Lazy afternoon	Backwards glance	Jack in the box
Side by side	Three blind mice	I before E except after C
Lean over backwards	Excuse me	Long time no see
Blanket	He's beside himself	Hang in there
Tuna fish	Quit following me	Headquarters

Debrief Questions for Reflection and Learning:

- Which ones were harder for you?
- Which ones were easiest?
- Did it get easier as you went along?

Virtual Modifications: To do this virtually, use a physical white board and the "share screen" option, OR use the digital white board function on Zoom. Google "wordles" to find several online resources for this activity.

Age Modifications: If you need to make it harder, you can use the number riddles below that are quite tough.

- 26= L of the A (26 letters of the alphabet)
- 7= D of the W (7 days of the week)
- 1001= A N (1001 Arabian nights)
- 12= S of the Z
- 54 = C in a D (with J)
- 9= P in the S S
- 88= P K
- 13= S on the A F
- 32 = D at which W F
- 18= H on a G C
- 57 H V
- 90= D in a R A
- 200= D for P G in M
- 8= S on a S S
- 3= B M (SHTR)
- 4=Q in a G 16. 24= H in a D
- 1 W on a U
- 5 D in a Z C
- 57 H V

WOULD YOU RATHER



Flexible



N/A

Framing Purpose and Instructions: The purpose is to have fun and let participants share their opinions/thoughts. Ask a question that gives two options to choose from. Participants can only choose one option. (To have longer discussions, you can ask participants to explain why they chose a certain option) .

Examples:

- Would you rather have a dog with a cat's personality or a cat with a dog's personality?
- If you were reborn in a new life, would you rather be alive in the past or future?
- Would you rather eat no candy at Halloween or no turkey at Thanksgiving?
- Would you rather lose the ability to lie or believe everything you're told?
- Would you rather be the funniest person in the room or the most intelligent?
- Would you rather have a Lamborghini in your garage or a bookcase with 9,000 books and infinite knowledge?
- Would you rather reverse one decision you make every day or be able to stop time for 10 seconds every day?
- Would you rather win \$50,000 or let your best friend win \$500,000?
- Would you rather run at 100 mph or fly at 10 mph?
- Would you rather continue with your life or restart it?
- Would you rather have free Wi-Fi wherever you go or have free coffee where/whenever you want?
- Would you rather have seven fingers on each hand or have seven toes on each foot?
- Would you rather go back to the past and meet your loved ones who passed away or go to the future to meet your children or grandchildren to be?
- Would you rather speak your mind or never speak again?
- Would you rather speak all languages or be able to speak to all animals?

Debrief Questions for Reflection and Learning:

- What did you learn about another participant in the group?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- Was it difficult to just choose one option? What was your thought process?

Virtual Modifications: Participants can respond verbally or in the chat. Facilitator can type questions in the chat or create a slideshow with questions.

Age Modifications: Change the questions to better meet the needs of the age group.

CHECK-INS

WEATHER FORECAST



Flexible



N/A

Framing Purpose and Instructions: Participants will be able to check in and share their feelings/mood with each other.

SAMPLE SET-UP: “We are all going to get a chance to check in with everyone in the group. A check-in is when you give a brief description of how you are feeling at the moment or for the day. The way we are going to share this information today is in the form of a weather forecast. You are going to pretend that you are a TV news anchor giving a weather forecast for the day to represent your mood. For example, if you are in a very happy or excited mood, your forecast may sound like this: ‘Hi my name is [NAME] and I’m speaking to you from the classroom station. Today’s weather is looking bright and sunny with the temperature rising in the afternoon.’



Everyone, please take 30 seconds to think about how you are feeling, what type of mood you’re in, and what weather report that best represents your feelings and mood today.” *(Wait 30 seconds)*

Debrief Questions for Reflection and Learning:

- Was there any forecast that was interesting or surprising to you?
- Did you notice any trends among your classmates’ weather reports?

Virtual Modifications: Participants can take turns responding verbally or in the chat.

Age Modifications: For younger or shyer participants, you can offer the group some different options to choose from, such as sunny, stormy, cloudy, etc., and then have them choose one that best represents them.

IT ALL ADDS UP!



Flexible



Flashcards

Framing Purpose and Instructions: This activity combines math and greetings into one! You will need to prepare a number of flashcards for this activity: one set will have math problems on them and the other set will have the answers. Mix up the cards and have students each choose one. They then have to find the student who holds the match to solve their problem and greet each other on how they are feeling that day. This activity is a great one to grow with throughout the year. Students can start super simple, and as they advance in their studies of math, the problems can get harder to solve. Note that this activity can be adapted to other subject areas — instead of a set of math problems and a set of answers, use a set of content-specific questions and a set that has the answers to those questions.

Debrief Questions for Reflection and Learning:

- How did you find your flashcard partner? Did you use a strategy?
- What did you learn from your partner?

Virtual Modifications: In the chat box, you can post each student's name with a problem or solution next to the name, so all students can see all other students' names with their problems/solutions, and then once they figure out who their partner is, they can privately message them and check in with each other.

Age Modifications: N/A

ADJECTIVE GREETING



5 - 7 minutes



N/A

Framing Purpose and Instructions: This greeting is appropriate to use with participants who have studied adjectives and understand their use.

To start the greeting, each student chooses an adjective describing their mood/feelings for that day, and then introduces themselves to the group by saying, "Hello, my name is [adjective] [first name]."

For example, "Hello, my name is Excited Eddie!"

Tell participants to take 15 seconds to think about the adjective and ask them to start with "Hi, my name is [adjective] [name]."

Debrief Questions for Reflection and Learning:

- Was it difficult to think of an adjective?
- What was your thought process?

Virtual Modifications: Participants can take turns responding verbally or in the chat.

Age Modifications: If you have a young or shy group, you can take a few minutes before starting the greeting to brainstorm with the participants a long list of adjectives that you write on the board or chart.

ICEBREAKERS / ENERGIZERS

5-MINUTE EXPERT



5 minutes



N/A

Framing Purpose and Instructions: The purpose of this activity is for participants to get to know each other while having fun and expressing themselves.

Ask participants to think of a unique skill they can do without using any props — for example a yoga move, dance move, balancing a spoon on their nose. (If necessary, the participant can use one or two small props that are common and can easily be found). The skill should be something that they can share and teach to other participants. If possible, tell the participants the day before so they can prepare. If not, give each participant time to prepare and make a plan. Then have participants take turns being the expert and teaching their skill to others.

Debrief Questions for Reflection and Learning:

- What did you learn about another participant in the group?
- What did you learn that you can use in the future?

Virtual Modifications: Ideally participants should participate with their camera on. They can also participate verbally or in the chat.

Age Modifications: You can also provide participants with a skill that they should show. (i.e.: stretch, karate move, balancing something on their head, etc.)

STATUES



5-10 minutes



N/A, list of statue categories (i.e.: dinosaurs, ballet, space, sea animals, karate, love, Halloween, etc.)

Framing Purpose and Instructions: The purpose of this activity is for the participants to have fun and be creative, work together as a team, be able to move and stretch.

- Divide the participants into two groups, while still maintaining social distance (can be more groups for larger amounts of participants).
- Ask — “Who can explain what a statue is?” (Make sure, if not mentioned, that a statue is explained to be a solid, frozen, silent, non-moving object that represents someone/something/an idea/concept).

- Each group will receive a category that they will have to represent as statues only using their bodies. They are not going to share their category with anyone not in their group. One group will be acting as a statue for about 30 seconds at a time and then the other group will have to guess what the category is. All groups will have one minute to plan.
- Now each group will plan. (With a 6-foot distance, consider having one group leave the room so the planning group can discuss without being heard).
- After a minute or so, choose which group will become statues first.
- Then say, "On the count of three, the group presenting will become statues. One, two, three."
- Give the other group about 30 seconds to shout out guesses of the category, then reveal the category if it wasn't guessed already.
- Allow the group to discuss for a few minutes how the statues either represented or did not represent the category in their opinion.
- Then repeat the process with the other group presenting.

Debrief Questions for Reflection and Learning:

- How did it feel being stared at for so long?
- Are there any other times in your life where you feel like you're being observed?

Virtual Modifications: Participants should participate with their cameras on. The participants can either stand or sit, as long as they can be seen on camera. The participants can be separated into breakout rooms online in order to plan. The facilitator can send a private message to each group with their category.

Age Modifications: Say the category out loud for each group and then have the participants become statues. Have a discussion afterwards about if the statues represent the category.

WRENCH OR HAMMER?



10-50 minutes



N/A

Framing Purpose and Instructions: The purpose of this activity is for participants to have fun while testing how well they know each other. It also encourages participants to think about characteristics of the other group members rather than just their likes and dislikes, making for a deeper understanding of each other. The participants should know each other at least somewhat by this point. It is not advised to play this on the first day of participants meeting each other.

- The game is played by first explaining to participants that one of them will be asking the group questions in the form of metaphors, to describe another participant who they do not know the identity of.
- Then, a "guesser" is chosen who then must leave the group or cover their ears and turn away from the group (must not be able to see or hear anyone else).
- Explain to the guesser that you will let them know when the group is ready and that they may begin guessing by asking questions along the lines of: "Is this person more of a wrench or a hammer?" OR "Is this person a forest or desert" OR "Is this person a sports car or a station wagon," for example.
- While the guesser is away from the group, the group must select one member of the group who they will

answer the questions about and who the guesser must identify correctly.

- When they are ready, they let the guesser know, and the game begins.
- The questions are asked to the group as a whole so there may be some different answers depending on how people either interpret the questions or know the person.
- The guesser is allowed three guesses as to who they think the person is.
- Celebration and creativity is encouraged. If time allows, try to let everyone who wants to guess go, or try to let students play the game later at another break.

As an option for taking the game a bit further, when the group understands how the game works, allow questions such as “If this person were a book, what would the title be?” or “If this person were a breakfast dish, what would it be?”

Debrief Questions for Reflection and Learning:

- Did any specific question(s) stand out to you? Why?
- Why did you choose the answer that you did for this individual?
- As the guesser, what questions gave away who it was? Were there any questions that made it easy or challenging? What were your reasons behind the questions, if any?

Virtual Modifications: You can utilize the Waiting Room feature in a virtual setting to have the guesser wait while the group decides who to pick.

Age Modifications: N/A

GETTING TO KNOW YOU ACTIVITIES

IF I WERE...



Flexible



Paper and pen

Framing Purpose and Instructions:

SAMPLE SET-UP: “Today, we will each share with each other ideas and images that represent us as individuals. Please take out a piece of paper or interactive electronic device. In a moment, I will ask you to write down answers to a series of questions. These questions will require you to think about yourselves — something this activity will help you learn to do.”
(Pause after each question, allowing participants time to jot down answers).



- If you were a book, what book or type of book would you be?
- If you were a character in a story or a movie, who would you be?
- If you were a piece of clothing, what would you be?
- If you were an animal, what would you be?
- If you were food, what would you be?
- If you were one of the four elements — earth, wind, water or fire— which one would you be?

Now, choose a group of participants who are similar in some way (i.e.: everyone in the room wearing black shoes, all the folks with brown eyes, all participants who have an older sibling, all participants with birthdays in September, all participants in the back row), and invite this group of participants to share their answers to the first question. Encourage them to explain their choices. Express interest in and appreciation for all responses. Choose another group of participants with a common trait to share their answers to the second question, etc.

Debrief Questions for Reflection and Learning:

- Did you notice any commonalities with you and your classmates?
- Why is it important to connect with your classmates?

Virtual Modifications: You can assign groups and put them in different Zoom rooms. You can also have students share their responses via chat.

Age Modifications: N/A

LIFE STORY



Flexible



Paper and pencil

Framing Purpose and Instructions:

One thing that makes school fun is the opportunity to get to know a lot of people. This activity is the perfect way to help students get to know each other better. Remember to use social distance practices: In a classroom, you can either move desks to the sides of the classroom to allow participants to walk (remind them to stay six feet apart), or keep the desks in their places and use them as a natural separator.

Set Up & Rules:

- Give each participant a piece of paper and a pencil.
- Have participants fold the paper into six sections and number each section.
- Have participants turn outward from the circle.
- Have participants draw or write in the sections based on the following questions that you ask.
- Give them about 30 second for each response.

Questions:

- Draw a picture of your favorite toy as a little kid.
- If you could go to a concert, who would you go see and who would you take with you.

- Draw something that reminds you of a special memory.
- Write the name of an adult (other than your parents) whom you really respect.
- Draw or write something you would like to try that you haven't yet.
- Write the name of a job you would like to have in the future.
- After the sixth question, go back and review what each one was so they know what should have been drawn or written in the area.
- Assign each person a partner and have each share their Life Story for one minute.
- After those two minutes are finished, have them select a new partner to share with for one minute each.
- After they have shared with the second partner, have everyone return to their desk.

Debrief Questions for Reflection and Learning:

- Why is it important to know each other?
- What's one thing you learned about a classmate that surprised you?
- Were there any answers you want to know more about?

Virtual Modifications: Using breakout rooms, split participants into random rooms of two, and set a timer for two minutes. Then, repeat multiple times so that each person gets to share their story with (and hear the stories of) a few different people in the group. Participants can still use paper and pencil for their responses, and then hold up their paper to the camera when sharing.

Age Modifications: For older participants you may want to add a few more questions to the list.

RECORD COVER



Depends on the number of students you have; approximately 10 minutes for students to create, 5 minutes to share per student.



- For classroom: Paper and markers. The weirder the paper the better; this can be colorful construction paper, cardboard or whatever you can find! It should be cut into 12 inch x 12 inch squares.
- For virtual: For simple set-up, students use the same materials as mentioned above (can be given to them on an in-person day), and then they complete and show their finished product by holding it up to the screen. If you are comfortable using online platforms, students can do this activity on a shared online platform like [ConceptBoard](#), which is fairly easy to use, and you can track students' work.

Framing Purpose and Instructions: The purpose of this activity is for students to begin the process of sharing and being vulnerable with each other in a safe way, in order to learn about their classmates. The instructor can show actual record covers or internet images of album covers, as many students will not be familiar with the idea of an "album."

The students' goal is to create an album cover about their life, connecting to a musical format. Students are to come up with everything that goes into an album that reflects different aspects about them. It should include the following:

- The name of the album could be the general title of their life thus far or who they are today
- At least five songs on their album with each song corresponding with a time or event of their life. Students can share as much as they want to and in any way they want to.
- Album artwork.
- Important people in their lives (“featured artists” on their album).
- The songs can be either made-up titles OR songs they already know that they are choosing to use to tell their story.

Debrief Questions for Reflection and Learning:

- What was hard about this activity?
- What did you learn about another crew mate that you also identified with?
- If there were things that members of the group didn’t share, why do you think people didn’t share them?

Virtual Modifications: This can be done almost exactly the same way virtually. Something that may help with people sharing is if students are put into breakout groups with another instructor or facilitator guiding the conversation. Additionally, [ConceptBoard](#) can be used as a way for students to engage virtually and see each other’s work. This way, all students’ albums will already be shared with each other, taking away the scariness of choosing to share that part.

Age Modifications: In this style of activity, it gets harder the older you get. Emphasize with older participants that they share what feels comfortable for them in this moment.

TEAM AND TRUST BUILDING ACTIVITIES

THE MATRIX



A group of 12 needs approximately 15-20 minutes.



- Classroom: Anything that will allow you to make a grid on the floor. The more spaces in the grid, the harder it will be. You can use tape on the ground, pieces of paper, paper plates, carpet squares, anything! You can also use tape to space out students who are waiting for their turn to go, remaining socially distant.
- Virtual: By using Concept Board, you can make a grid that students are able to interact with and take turns figuring out the “matrix” just like you would in person.

Framing Purpose and Instructions: To promote team building, problem-solving, and fun

SAMPLE SET-UP: “Today we’ll be entering the matrix to learn how important it is work together, pay attention and learn from our mistakes. You’ll be playing as a team so the goal will be to see how many tries it takes to complete the matrix successfully, and then to see if we can lower that number during the next round (likely on another day).”



- Make a grid on the floor (or virtually in [ConceptBoard](#)) using whatever materials you have, that looks like this:

- Once you've made a grid (either physically or on [ConceptBoard](#)), you'll make a second grid on a piece of paper identical to the grid the students will use. On this personal grid, you will draw the corresponding sequence, or matrix.

↑ exit			
X	X		
	X		
	X	X	
		X	
↑ entrance			

Students cannot see your personal grid. One by one students will attempt to figure out the matrix. You tell them one end is the starting end and the other end is the finishing end. Students can start on any of the first four blocks. Student #1 will then begin by stepping on any of those first four boxes (pieces of paper, paper plates, etc.) If a student guesses correctly, they keep going until they misstep, at which point they go to the back of the line and Student #2 begins. This game is also a memory game, so students can verbally help whoever is currently going, but they cannot point. The students waiting to participate must remember the correct and incorrect moves the participants prior to them made.

Students may move forward, sideways, or diagonally forward. They cannot take steps backwards.

Once one student makes it the whole way through the grid without making a mistake, the rest of the students must now remain silent and can no longer help each other. The goal is to see how many students can then make it through the grid without making any mistakes.

Debrief Questions for Reflection and Learning:

- Did you have a strategy? If not, did a strategy emerge?
- Who stepped up as a leaders/followers? Why are both those roles important?
- What was challenging about this activity? Or the hardest part for you?

Virtual Modifications: If using [ConceptBoard](#), you have to do your best at keeping students from going out of turn. Explain to them that by going out of turn they will be given a time penalty, or something similar. Additionally, students tend to like to doodle off to the side while doing it.

Age Modifications: For older students, you can make the matrix harder.

FEARS IN THE FIRE



Flexible



Pieces of paper and writing utensils

Framing Purpose and Instructions: This activity will require everyone to be a bit vulnerable and empathetic, but will also help build trust while allowing students to share and discover their similarities and differences.

SAMPLE SET-UP: “As children (and possibly as adults) most of us were afraid of the dark. In our rooms when the light went off, all sorts of things started to grow and creep about in corners. But when the lights were turned on again all the monsters disappeared. This activity is turning on the lights for those fears of other monsters that we have.”



Process:

- Students write a fear they have on a piece of paper — you can prompt students to write a specific kind of fear related to the pandemic, an upcoming exam or other stressor, etc., or leave it more open-ended.
- Collect the papers and put them into a hat/box and mix them up.
- Each student takes one fear from those collected (ideally it should not be their own), reads it aloud, and explains what the fear means to them, reasons why someone may have that fear, and methods for dealing with it. You may want to model this first for students with a common fear as an example, emphasizing the importance of taking other students’ fears seriously and normalizing a respectful response.
- This activity can be both a discussion activity or regular classroom practice. The activity can conclude by throwing all of the fears away or destroying them somehow.

Debrief Questions for Reflection and Learning:

This is a great activity for participants to see the similarity of their fears and challenges, both emotional and intellectual. A nice introduction to this activity can include a discussion of fears. Some questions you can ask that might prompt this kind of discussion include:

- Did you hear any fears that weren’t what you wrote down, but still resonated with you?
- What did it feel like to hear some other folks’ fears?
- Clearly we all have fears--can you think of any ways of coping with our fears that might help others?

Virtual Modifications:

Students can private chat their fears to you, the facilitator. You will then write them back into the chat as anonymous fears. Students will then say out loud or write in the chat which fears that were not their own that they also have. Or, you can randomly assign a different fear to each student and instruct students to share what the fear means to them, why someone might have that fear, and methods for dealing with it, the same way you would run this activity in person.

Age Modifications: N/A

THE BLOB TREE



15 minutes



- Classroom: The Blob Tree image (below) can be projected onto a smart board or screen, or it can be printed and given out on paper.
- Virtual: Use screen share so that class can look at the Blob Tree together as students choose and also discuss their blob of choice.

Framing Purpose and Instructions: To share how students are feeling in a fun, low-stakes way and build trust in sharing feelings with each other.

SAMPLE SET-UP: “Today we’ll have a chance to think about and briefly share something about how we felt during remote instruction last spring and a hope for the next few months using THE BLOB TREE! Take a look at the Blob Tree. Each of you are going to choose two blobs (one blob that represents you during remote learning last spring and one blob that you are hoping to be this year). The group will have two minutes to decide on their best-fit blobs and then each of you will have one minute to share which blobs you chose and why.”



It may helpful to:

- Review listening norms before starting the shares.
- Have the sharer (you can model by going first) describe where the blob is on the tree and you can use the pointer to make sure all are clear which blob is being discussed.

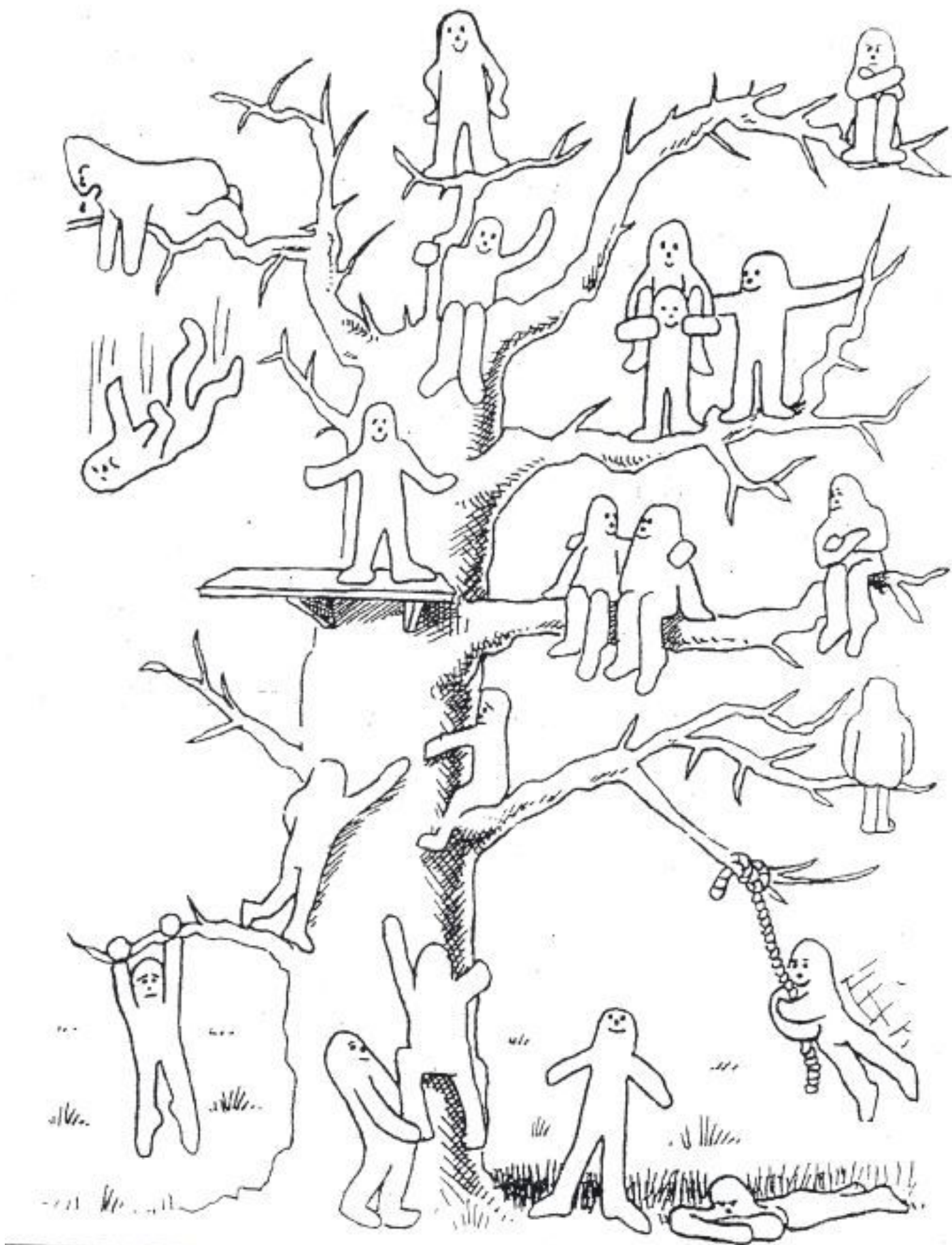
Debrief Questions for Reflection and Learning:

- Do you look at any of the blobs differently than you did before, based on shares.
- Did we hear any themes across shares?
- Are there any blobs not mentioned today that you wish had been? Why?

Virtual Modifications: Put the task into the chat box. Decide ahead of time if you’d like students to be able to make comments in the chat while others share (it can be distracting but some remote classes have already established respectful chat norms).

Age Modifications: Older students can be given the option of everyone describing and explaining their blobs into the chat (which can be saved) or on a Google Doc so that you can return to their blob-hopes in a month to follow up on how everyone is doing.

Alternate follow-up activity: For a quick check-in on a later day after the Blob Tree has been introduced, ask “What blob describes how you feel today and why?”





SECTION 3: ACADEMIC PROTOCOLS THAT PROMOTE BELONGING & ENGAGEMENT

IN THIS SECTION

- Take a Stand
- Silent Conversation
- Socratic Seminar

TAKE A STAND



Flexible



- Classroom: Physical signs in the room indicating which parts of the room represent which opinions (one classic example would be setting up a line from one end of the room to the other where the far end is “Strongly Agree”, and the other end is “Strongly Disagree”, while the center is “Neutral” and students can place themselves anywhere along the spectrum between those options depending on their opinion).
- Virtual: Use a collaborative whiteboard app and have students create an icon or sticky note with their name, which they can move anywhere along the spectrum from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” as prompts are given. We recommend [ConceptBoard](#), because you can see where students’ pointers are on the screen (allowing for increased accountability compared to other collaborative whiteboard apps), and under the default editor setting “Reviewer,” students can add, edit, and move their own icons, while not being able to edit other students’ contributions (as opposed to “Editors” who have unrestricted edit access).

Framing Purpose and Instructions: This activity asks ALL students in the class to respond to and participate in the class discussion by having them move physically (or virtually) to indicate their opinions, which engages more students than a traditional class discussion might, where students raise their hand to contribute. It invites shyer students to participate, whose thinking can also be highlighted as the teacher can ask students to share out why they placed themselves in certain positions on the spectrum (i.e.: “Michael, I’m curious why you stood mostly at ‘Neutral’ but leaning a little towards ‘Agree’. Can you explain why that’s your opinion?”).

This activity is best done with rich, debatable statements that get to the guiding questions of a unit, such as **“Drafting young men to fight in the Vietnam War was necessary”** or **“We should build the Dakota Access Pipeline.”** It is also important to make sure students are set up for success by giving them opportunities beforehand to gather evidence that they can use to make their decisions.

SAMPLE SET-UP: “We are going to discuss/debate controversial statements today, and talk about whether we agree or disagree with them. The way we will do this is by “Taking a Stand” and physically/virtually moving to the place in the room that represents our opinion. On one end of the room is “Strongly Agree”, while the other end of the room represents “Strongly Disagree”, and you can stand anywhere in between. The center of the room is “Neutral”, while halfway between “Neutral” and “Strongly Agree” would be “Agree” (but not strongly). After I say the statement, and everyone decides where they stand, I’ll ask a few of you to share out your reasons for why you put yourself where you did. As you listen to each other’s justifications, you can move yourself along the line if what people are saying changes your mind.”



Click below to watch a video of an 8th grade class using this protocol to discuss whether the military draft was necessary:



Debrief Questions for Reflection and Learning:

- "Why did you stand where you did along the line?" (During Activity)
- "I noticed that _____ moved after hearing what _____ had to say. Can you tell us why?" (During Activity)
- What evidence did your peers share today that changed the way you think about the statement? (Reflection)
- How did your thinking change during this activity? (Reflection)

Virtual Modifications: Use a collaborative whiteboard app.

Age Modifications: For younger students, reminding them about active listening norms (i.e.: track the speaker to show you are listening) is necessary to set the activity up for success. In order for students to feel like their contributions are important (and thus that they belong in that academic setting) they will need to feel listened to and respected by their peers.

[Source: EL Education](#)

SILENT CONVERSATION



Flexible, but a minimum of 20-30 minutes for prep, activity, and debrief.



- Classroom: This type of activity is easiest done in person using poster paper, on which each group can write their response at the top, leaving the rest of the poster paper as space for students to comment, agree/disagree, respond with evidence/counter-evidence, etc. Students should silently walk around the room adding ideas where they have something to add, and putting a star (or some sort of symbol) to highlight other students’ comments that resonate with them.
- Virtual: Silent conversations are very easily adaptable to the virtual environment. In fact, one advantage of a silent conversation is that it can be done asynchronously as well as synchronously (although students who complete their classwork first would not benefit from seeing the responses that other students post because they will not have added their contributions yet). Two possible apps that can be used are Padlet or Google Docs. [For Padlet](#), the teacher would create a Padlet with the question or prompt at the top of the page, and invite students or groups (use breakout rooms for groups to formulate their answers) to post their responses to the Padlet as posts (pink plus sign in the bottom right corner). Then, students could do a “gallery walk” of each other’s answers and post comments to those answers responding to them (make sure commenting is enabled on the Padlet, because it is not by default). Students can also “like” comments to show that those comments resonate with them or that they agree. For Google Docs, a similar structure could be achieved by giving all students editing access to a document with a table like the below (although we recommend using “landscape” orientation):

Prompt: i.e. What do these graphs tell us (and not tell us) about how effective the U.S. has been in managing COVID-19? What evidence shows you that?					
Group Answers	[Group 1 Answer]	[Group 2 Answer]	[Group 3 Answer]	[Group 4 Answer]	[Group 5 Answer]
Comments responding to group answers					

Keep in mind that using Google Docs gives students more editing access than [Padlet](#) does (they can delete each other’s comments, write anything they want anonymously, etc.), so if you feel your students struggle with responsibly using this type of tool, Padlet offers much stronger accountability and security.

One best practice for facilitating this type of discussion asynchronously could be assigning the initial answer posts on one day, then assigning students to respond to each other’s answers with comments on the next day.

Framing Purpose and Instructions: A silent conversation allows all students to be simultaneously engaged in reading and responding to each other, inviting shyer students to participate more and holding all students accountable for contributing to the discussion. It offers more chances for all voices to be heard. As much as possible, make sure students are referring to each other’s ideas by name as a way of showing that students’

ideas have value in the discussion. The question prompts that work best for this type of discussion are open-ended ones that do not have a clear answer (or perhaps have multiple points of view), and on which students can offer evidence in support of their opinions.

SAMPLE SET-UP: “Today we are going to have what’s called a “Silent Conversation.” That means I’m going to ask you a question, and each of you (or each group) is going to write a response to that question. Then, after all the responses are written (on posters or as Padlet posts), we will walk around the room and continue the conversation in writing by commenting on each other’s posters. You can agree/disagree (and explain why), extend on what someone said, or make a connection. Feel free to respond to other people’s comments as well, and draw a star next to any comments that resonate with you. As you walk around the room, keep reading the comments that other students are leaving as well. At the end, we will stop writing and just have a chance to read any new comments that have been added (to the posters or Padlet). Then we will have a debrief to think about how our thinking has changed at the end.”



Debrief Questions for Reflection and Learning:

- How did your thinking change during this activity? Whose comments (or what evidence) changed your thinking and why? (Possibly use “I used to think _____, now I think _____” sentence-starter as a scaffold).

Age Modifications: N/A

SOCRATIC SEMINAR



At least two class periods, one for preparation, one for the seminar itself and feedback/reflection.



- Classroom: Seating arrangement is a great way of signaling roles and responsibilities during a Socratic Seminar. The discussion circle would be the inner circle, while the partners of those participants would be in an outer circle looking in on the conversation.
- Virtual: Consider having participants in the “inner circle” turn their cameras on, while those who are observers in the “outer circle” turn their cameras off to simulate the physical seating used in a Socratic Seminar. Also, it could be helpful to teach students how to share Google Docs with each other (or set up shared Google Docs for partner pairs) so that they can share their feedback with each other.

Framing Purpose and Instructions: Socratic Seminars promote thinking, meaning-making, and the ability to debate, use evidence, and build on one another’s thinking. When well designed and implemented, the seminar provides an active role for every student, engages students in complex thinking about rich content, and teaches students discussion skills. In addition to the instructions below, [visit EL Education’s website for more resources on implementing Socratic Seminars](#).

Instructions:

- Select a significant piece of text or collection of short texts related to the current focus of study. This may be an excerpt from a book or an article from a magazine, journal or newspaper. It might also be a poem, short story or personal memoir. The text needs to be rich with possibilities for diverse points of view.
- Develop an open-ended, provocative question as the starting point for the seminar discussion. The question should be worded to elicit differing perspectives and complex thinking. Students may also generate questions to discuss.
- Students prepare for the seminar by reading the chosen piece of text in an active manner that helps them build background knowledge for participation in the discussion. The completion of the pre-seminar task is the student’s “ticket” to participate in the seminar. The pre-seminar task could easily incorporate work on reading strategies. For example, students might be asked to read the article in advance and to text-code by underlining important information, putting question marks by segments they wonder about and exclamation points next to parts that surprise them.
- Once the seminar begins, all students should be involved and should make sure others in the group are drawn into the discussion.
- Begin the discussion with the open-ended question designed to provoke inquiry and diverse perspectives. The teacher may pose follow-up questions.
- The discussion proceeds until you call time. At that time, the group debriefs their process; if using a Fishbowl (see Fishbowl entry and variations that follow), the outer circle members give their feedback sheets to the inner group students.
- Protocol norms: Students...
 - Respect other students. (Exhibit open-mindedness and value others’ contributions.)
 - Are active listeners. (Build on one another’s ideas by referring to them.)
 - Stay focused on the topic.
 - Make specific references to the text. (Use examples from the text to explain their points.)
 - Give input. (Ensure participation.)
 - Ask questions. (Clarifying questions and probing questions that push the conversation further and deeper when appropriate.)

Variations:

Combine with the Fishbowl protocol. When it is time for the seminar, students are divided into two groups. One group forms the inner circle (the “fish”) that will be discussing the text. The other group forms the outer circle; they will give feedback on content, contributions, and group skills. (Note: “Fishbowls” may be used with other instructional practices such as peer critiques, literature circles, or group work. If the number of students in the seminar is small, a Fishbowl does not need to be used.) Each person in the outer circle is asked to observe one of the students in the inner circle. Criteria or a rubric the observations should be developed by/shared with students in advance. See the following example.

Provide sentence stems that allow students to interact positively and thoughtfully with one another:

- “I’d like to build on that thought...”
- “Could you tell me more?”
- “May I finish my thought?”

[Source: EL Education](#)



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- [EL Education](#)
- [Columbus State University, Center of Online Learning](#)
- [byuicurdev, YouTube](#)
- [BlobTree.com](#)

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