

50 SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING LESSONS VOL. 1

GRADES 6-12

MEETS ALL
SOCIAL
EMOTIONAL
LEARNING
STANDARDS



DAVID PARIS

50

Social Emotional Learning Lessons



Vol. I



DAVID PARIS

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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------------|
| Acknowledgments | 5 |
| Imagine | 7 |
| Preface | 9 |
| Introduction | 11 |
| FAQ | 13 |
| UNIT 1: Community Building | 17 |
| Lesson 1: Classroom Agreements | 18 |
| Lesson 2: Getting To Know Each Other | 23 |
| Lesson 3: Learning About Who We Are | 28 |
| Lesson 4: Group Values | 33 |
| Lesson 5: Integrating Values..... | 37 |
| Lesson 6: Meaning | 43 |
| UNIT 2: Active Listening | 47 |
| Lesson 7: Listening Basics..... | 48 |
| Lesson 8: Open-ended Questions..... | 52 |
| Lesson 9: Listening Responses | 57 |
| Lesson 10: Paraphrasing..... | 60 |
| Lesson 11: Paraphrasing with Tone..... | 65 |
| Lesson 12: Listening and Disagreement | 69 |
| UNIT 3: Respect | 73 |
| Lesson 13: All About Respect | 74 |
| Lesson 14: Treating Others with Respect..... | 78 |
| Lesson 15: Inclusion..... | 81 |
| Lesson 16: Kindness Experiment..... | 84 |
| UNIT 4: Emotional Literacy | 89 |
| Lesson 17: Connecting to Feelings—Part 1 | 90 |
| Lesson 18: Connecting to Feelings—Part 2..... | 96 |
| Lesson 19: Feelings Practice..... | 100 |
| Lesson 20: Feelings Exploration | 105 |
| Lesson 21: Feelings...Now What?..... | 109 |
| Lesson 22: Precision with Feelings, Thoughts, and Judgments | 113 |
| UNIT 5: Empathy | 119 |
| Lesson 23: Feelings Empathy..... | 120 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| Lesson 24: Connection through Tone..... | 126 |
| Lesson 25: Values Empathy | 129 |
| Lesson 26: All Roads Lead to Needs | 134 |
| Lesson 27: Empathy Similes..... | 139 |
| UNIT 6: Communication..... | 143 |
| Lesson 28: Effective and Ineffective Communication | 144 |
| Lesson 29: Paraphrase Request..... | 148 |
| Lesson 30: Communication Styles..... | 152 |
| Lesson 31: Communication Tools | 156 |
| Lesson 32: “I” Statement..... | 161 |
| Lesson 33: Intention | 165 |
| UNIT 7: Integrity..... | 171 |
| Lesson 34: Morality..... | 172 |
| Lesson 35: Rules | 176 |
| Lesson 36: Keeping Your Word..... | 181 |
| Lesson 37: Excuses..... | 185 |
| Lesson 38: Group Integrity | 189 |
| UNIT 8: Mindfulness..... | 193 |
| Lesson 39: Breath..... | 194 |
| Lesson 40: Sensory Mindfulness..... | 197 |
| Lesson 41: Self-Talk..... | 201 |
| Lesson 42: Mindfulness...Now What?..... | 205 |
| UNIT 9: Goal Setting | 211 |
| Lesson 43: Starting with Goals..... | 212 |
| Lesson 44: Step by Step | 218 |
| Lesson 45: Creative Solutions | 223 |
| Lesson 46: Increasing the Possibility for Success | 227 |
| UNIT 10: Resilience..... | 231 |
| Lesson 47: Bouncing Back | 232 |
| Lesson 48: Growth Mindset..... | 235 |
| Lesson 49: Beliefs | 238 |
| Lesson 50: Practice | 241 |
| Conclusion | 245 |
| About the Author..... | 247 |
| Appendix | 248 |

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IMAGINE

- Imagine a school where every student's social and emotional need is met so that academics can flourish.
- Imagine an emotional literacy curriculum that transforms students' relationships to their feelings through self-reflection, self-regulation, and responsible decision making.
- Imagine a classroom where personal sharing leads to belonging, respect, and inclusion for all students.
- Imagine a reduction of conflict through communication skills, active listening, and perspective taking.
- Imagine a culture of integrity that permeates every interaction in a community.
- Imagine students collectively excited about life.

This is possible...

<https://vimeo.com/275941803>

50 Social Emotional Lessons Vol. I will show you how to get there.

PREFACE

In the summer of 2018, the New York City mayor, the Police Commissioner, and the NYC Schools Chancellor came to Middle School 88 for a press conference celebrating our school's SEL (social emotional learning) environment as well as our reduction in school suspensions.

As the SEL Director at my school, my contribution to our school's success took many forms. I held community building circles with over 200 students weekly. I led professional development workshops teaching emotional literacy and our school's core values: respect, empathy, curiosity, integrity, and resilience. I facilitated restorative justice gatherings and mediated student conflicts. Additionally, I led meetings with classes that struggled with peer relationships and academic performance. I called these meetings a "Respect Reset" and they completely changed the trajectory of a class in just 45 minutes. This is what I did during the meetings:

- **INCLUSIVE CIRCLE SEATING:** I started the class by moving all the chairs into a circle so that everyone could see each other.
- **GROUP AGREEMENTS:** I proposed a set of agreements and asked for consensus.
- **PERSONAL VALUE SHARE:** We did a "Go around" where each person in the circle shared a value that was important to them. By doing this, everyone was seen and heard.
- **GAME TO BUILD FUN & HOPE:** The next step was to lead a fun, experiential game to enliven students and build hope that their classroom experience can be different.
- **GAME REFLECTION:** We reflected on what values were demonstrated during the game and how we could apply that knowledge to improve the class culture.
- **CLASS ASSESSMENT ON WHAT IS GOING WELL:** I posed two questions to the class for the next "Go around."
 1. What is going well in the class?
 2. What needs to be improved?

- **VALIDATION & DISCUSSION ON IMPROVEMENTS:** I facilitated a discussion about how to improve the culture in the class. I paraphrased every idea so that everyone's voice was validated.
- **GROUP CONSENSUS ON NEXT STEPS:** Based on what I heard from the class, I offered suggestions for actions to take and sought consensus from the group about what they wanted to do.
- **APPRECIATION CLOSING:** Lastly, I led a closing "Go around" where everyone shared something they liked or appreciated.

The "Respect Reset" works every time. Why?

- Student knowledge and experience is validated.
- Students are actively participating.
- Students draw upon their own experiential knowledge.
- Questions guide deep reflection.
- Connection is created.
- Hope is generated.
- Students feel a sense of agency for improving their class culture.

After the end of every "Respect Reset" meeting, students expressed their gratitude and desire for more opportunity to do this type of work. They wanted to be heard, they wanted to practice being with each other in a supportive environment, and they wanted skills to improve their social and emotional lives. Teachers expressed to me that they would love to lead this type of work, but they didn't know how to do it. And so I embarked on writing this book with the hope that every student will have an opportunity to learn social and emotional skills, create socially and emotionally safe classrooms, and teach students the skills they need to navigate a complex and challenging world.

INTRODUCTION

50 Social Emotional Learning Lessons is a comprehensive curriculum that teaches crucial skills at a pivotal time in our society. This book synthesizes the best practices of personal development, life coaching, and mindfulness into a clear set of instructions for teachers. There are ten units of instruction that span a broad spectrum of essential SEL skills and values. Each unit is a self contained set of lessons that can be taught independently or sequentially as part of a year long curriculum. Every unit meets all of the Social Emotional Learning Standards created by CASEL.org.

UNIT 1 — **COMMUNITY**: lays the foundation for connection, trust, and belonging with powerful icebreakers and interpersonal sharing.

UNIT 2 — **ACTIVE LISTENING**: develops the skill and practice of becoming a good listener.

UNIT 3 — **RESPECT**: creates opportunities for treating each other well and valuing kindness.

UNIT 4 — **EMOTIONAL LITERACY**: comprehensively explores feelings through games and reflection.

UNIT 5 — **EMPATHY**: builds upon a student’s emotional awareness by practicing how to have compassion for someone else’s experience.

UNIT 6 — **COMMUNICATION**: provides new frameworks for dialogue, handling conflict, and being assertive.

UNIT 7 — **INTEGRITY**: explores the importance of responsibility, keeping your word, and the impact of your actions.

UNIT 8 — **MINDFULNESS**: looks practically at how being present and aware can spark personal transformation and consciousness.

UNIT 9 — **GOALS**: empowers students to achieve something they want in life.

UNIT 10 — **RESILIENCE**: establishes a new mindset for overcoming challenges and achieving success.

These units are a blueprint for Social Emotional Learning. Each lesson engages students with a question that embraces their social emotional knowledge and experience. A skill is taught through Socratic-based discussion and then integrated using real life scenarios and experiential games. At the end of each lesson, students process their experience through reflection and integrate important tools for improving their social and emotional life.

50 Social Emotional Learning Lessons will help students cultivate a connection to their mind and emotions, so that they make responsible decisions. Students will develop communication skills to advance their social awareness and improve relationships. Classrooms can become nurturing environments for intrapersonal and interpersonal development. A journey of transformation awaits, one lesson at a time.

FAQ

Q: What is Social Emotional Learning?

A: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) describes SEL as “The process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.” For more information, go to CASEL.org.

Q: Why implement Social Emotional Learning in schools?

- A:**
1. Students want it. They are asking for help to understand themselves, their peer relationships, and their world. They want to learn in emotionally safe classrooms, be seen, and be heard. They want guidance for their lives and support for their interests and goals.
 2. Administrators want it. SEL programs have proven to increase academic achievement and reduce bullying.
 3. Parents want it. They are asking for support for their children’s emotional regulation, executive functioning, and decision-making.
 4. Businesses want it for their future workers. Social and emotional skills are important elements of productivity and are crucial in today’s collaborative work environments.

Q: What if I don’t know how to teach SEL?

A: The book is designed for you. The lessons were created based on simplicity and effectiveness. You don’t need to have previous knowledge or training. You will only be required to pose a few questions, facilitate a group activity for practice, and lead reflections on what was learned.

Q: What if I am not very emotional?

A: Share your discomfort with the students and lead the lessons anyway. They will respect your willingness to try teaching SEL despite your unease. Authenticity is crucial to leading SEL. And once you start teaching the lessons, they will have so much fun and experience so much value, your discomfort will not be an issue.

Q: Do students need to sit in a circle?

A: The circle is a democratic structure that allows every student to see each other and symbolically shares the power within the group. The first SEL moment in the class could be an exploration of how the class can work together to move the chairs into a circle and place the tables on the perimeter. Alternatively, you can have students just move chairs to the perimeter of the room into an imperfect circular structure. It's not absolutely necessary, but it does signify to students that they are transforming the space for a significant purpose.

Q: What if I don't have time to teach SEL?

A: You can do as little as 10–15 mins a week and it will make a difference.

Q: Can I modify the lessons?

A: Yes. Modify anything based on the needs and interests of your class. A deep question or powerful story can sometimes lead to an in-depth discussion that will last the entire class. These moments become experiences that students will remember forever.

Q: Why are there so many questions?

A: Questions allow students to play an active role in their learning. Student engagement increases when their experience and knowledge is valued.

Q: How important are reflections?

A: Reflections are crucial to extract the full value of the activity. When students think about their experience, it offers them an opportunity to integrate what happened during the games and extend the lessons to other parts of their lives.

Q: How long should the reflections be?

A: No longer than 5 minutes. I use Outward Bound's three questions for reflection:

1. What happened? (Share their experience).
2. So what? (Articulate why this was meaningful to them).
3. Now what? (How to apply the lesson to other parts of their life).

Q: Should students be graded?

A: It depends. For some classrooms, individual grades are antithetical to SEL. In other classrooms, grades create accountability, rewards participation, and provides quantitative feedback. When time is limited, have students grade themselves. If time allows, ask students to write about their experience.

Q: What is the role of homework in SEL?

A: Homework extends the lesson beyond the classroom. You can create accountability by asking students to share their homework verbally at the start of the next class or you can have them submit a written reflection.



UNIT 1: Community Building

- ▶ Creates relationships and trust through ice breakers, sharing, and storytelling
- ▶ Establishes a foundation for safety, positivity, and support
- ▶ Fosters social engagement and communication
- ▶ Ensures that all students are seen and heard



LESSON 1: Classroom Agreements

Lesson Overview:

| Activities in this Lesson: | About These Activities: |
|--|--|
| <i>Opening Question</i> | Builds intimacy through sharing stories about students' names. |
| <i>Tiny Teach</i> | Helps students value their knowledge and appreciate a positive learning environment. |
| <i>Group Agreements</i> | Facilitates a democratic structure for creating classroom norms. |
| <i>Are You Like This or Like That?</i> | Invites students to share something a little more personal about who they are. |

SEL Standards:

Relationship Skills / Self-Awareness

SEL Objectives:

Communication / Recognizing Personal Strengths

ACTIVITY 1: Opening Question

Time:

10–15 mins

Ask:

“What is the story behind your name?”

- a. Students can share who they are named after.
- b. Students can share a story about how their parents came up with their name.

- c. Students can share whether their name has personal meaning to them.
- d. If students don't know a story behind their name, they can share the way a parent says their name when they are mad at them.

ACTIVITY 2: Tiny Teach

Time: 15 mins

- Instructions:**
- 1. Introduce the game "Tiny Teach."
 - 2. Students will have two minutes to teach someone else in the class something that is easy to learn.



- 3. Give an example of teaching something that would be easy to learn, such as:
 - a. Teach a few words in another language (but not the entire language), or
 - b. Teach a dance move (but not an entire choreography), or

- c. Teach a recipe (but not a whole cookbook), or
 - d. Teach a strategy for a video game (but not all of them).
4. Make sure everyone has something to teach. If a student seems stuck, ask them to teach something related to what they like to do. If they still don't know, ask them to teach a technique they use for getting something they want from a parent.
 5. Have students pair up, introduce themselves, and give them two minutes each to teach something.
 6. Repeat one or more times with a new student.

Reflections:

- What was it like to teach someone else?
- What did you learn about teaching?

Teacher Note:

This game can be used at the beginning of the year before discussing classroom norms.

ACTIVITY 3: Group Agreements

Time:

10–15 mins

Instructions:

1. Ask, “What made “Tiny Teach” a positive learning experience?”
2. Ask, “What agreements can we make so that everyone can have a positive learning experience in the class all year?”
3. Write these agreements on a sheet of chart paper or on a white board.
4. Ask, “Which agreements can be consolidated?” Where possible, consolidate agreements.
5. Ask students to give a thumbs up or thumbs down for each agreement.

6. If any student gives a thumbs down, ask them to explain their reasoning and suggest what works better for them.



7. Facilitate a discussion until a consensus for a complete list of agreements is reached.
8. Write the new set of agreements on chart paper.
9. Have every student sign it.

Reflection:

Which agreement is the most important to you and why?

ACTIVITY 4: Are You Like This or Like That?

Time: 10–15 mins

Instructions:

1. Divide the class into groups of 4–5 students.
2. Pose the question and have each member of the group answer and explain their choice.

Example Questions:

- a. Are you more like the sun or the moon?
- b. Are you more like a highway or side street?
- c. Are you more like a tree or flower?
- d. Are you more like a river or ocean?
- e. Are you more like breakfast or dinner?

Reflection: Did the group maintain the classroom agreements in this activity?

Homework: Notice how the classroom agreements affect the learning environment of the class.



LESSON 2: Getting To Know Each Other

Lesson Overview:

| Activities in this Lesson: | About These Activities: |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <i>Opening Question</i> | Asks whether you would prefer going backward or forward in time. |
| <i>Move Your Butt If...</i> | Combines relationship building with musical chairs. |
| <i>Who Wrote That</i> | Creates suspense and mystery while challenging students to notice each other. |
| <i>If I Were A</i> | Uses a creative metaphor to express who we are. |

SEL Standards:

Relationship Skills/Self-Awareness

SEL Objectives:

Social Engagement/Self-Perception

ACTIVITY 1: Opening Question

Time:

5 mins

Ask:

“If you could travel backward or forward in time, when and where would you want to go?”

ACTIVITY 2: Move Your Butt If...

Time: 10–15 mins

- Instructions:**
1. Have just enough seats in a circle for everyone except one volunteer, who will stand in the middle.
 2. The volunteer says, “Move your butt if...” and states something physical like, “You are wearing blue.”



3. Any sitting student wearing blue must get up and find another seat anywhere within the circle, except the seat to their immediate left or right. The initial volunteer also needs to race to claim a seat.
4. Tell students to move quickly, but also with safety in mind.
5. The student who is left standing after all the seats were claimed announces the next statement: “Move your butt if...”
6. After a few rounds of physical criteria, introduce statements of...
 - a. Preferences such as, “Move your butt if you like ice cream.” or
 - b. Experiences such as “Move your butt if you have been on a roller coaster.”

Variations:

- You can play this game without competition by changing the instruction to “Stand up if...”
- You can have the person in the middle give the prompt, “Never have I ever...”

Reflections:

- What was it like to share a commonality with someone else?
- What was it like to be different from the group?

ACTIVITY 3: Who Wrote That?

Time: 15–20 mins

Supplies: Index cards

- Instructions:**
1. Give out an index card to each student.
 2. Ask students to write an unusual experience, talent, or fact about themselves that they don't mind sharing.
 3. Collect the index cards, mix them up, and give them back out so that everyone has a new card.
 4. Ask students to question each other to find the original author.

5. When a student finds the original author, the author signs the card and gives it to the teacher.



6. Post all of the index cards on a bulletin board in the classroom.

Reflections:

- What was something interesting that you enjoyed sharing about yourself?
- What was something interesting you learned about other members of the class?

ACTIVITY 4: If I Were A...

Time:

5–10 mins

Instructions:

1. Divide the class into groups of 4–6 students.
2. Give students the prompt one at a time. Ask students to answer it and explain why.
 - a. If I were a type of weather, I would be _____.
 - b. If I were a kitchen appliance, I would be a _____.
 - c. If I were an item in the closet, I would be a _____.
 - d. If I were a tropical animal, I would be a _____.
 - e. If I were a famous building, I would be the _____.

Variation:

Play as a class.

Reflections:

- What were you able to share about yourself through the questions?
- Did anyone's answer surprise you?

Homework:

Consider asking a follow up question to anything you've learned about another student.



LESSON 3: Learning About Who We Are

Lesson Overview:

| Activities in this Lesson: | About These Activities: |
|----------------------------|--|
| <i>Opening Question</i> | Asks about your birth order in your family. |
| <i>Human Treasure Hunt</i> | Helps students get to know each other. |
| <i>Tracing Who We Are</i> | Uses an outline of our bodies as a way to share experiences. |
| <i>Web of Stories</i> | Increases the level of intimacy through storytelling. |

SEL Standards:

Relationship Skills

SEL Objectives:

Social Engagement/Relationship Building

ACTIVITY 1: Opening Question

Time:

5 mins

Ask:

“How many siblings do you have or are you an only child?”

ACTIVITY 2: Human Treasure Hunt

Time:

10–15 min

Instructions:

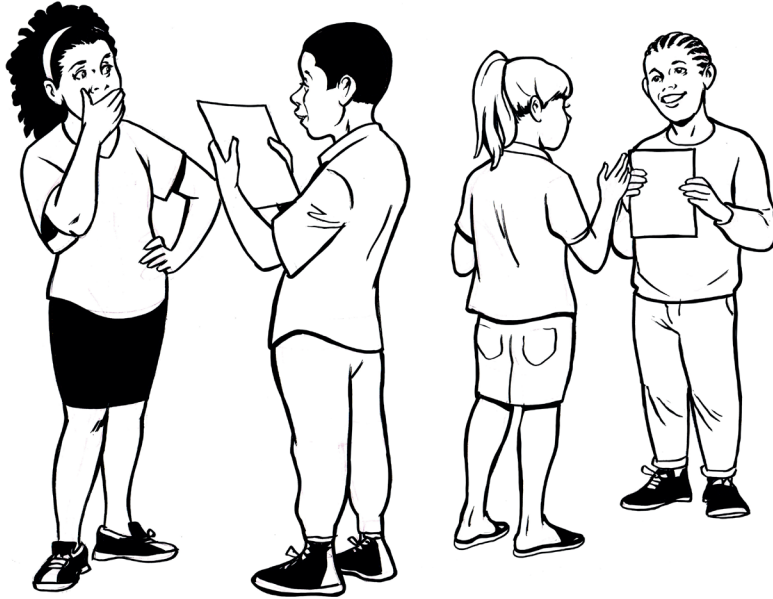
1. Photocopy and distribute the Human Scavenger Hunt Worksheet.

A full size version of this worksheet is available in the appendix.

HUMAN SCAVENGER HUNT!!!

| | | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Has a pet other than a dog or cat | ENJOYS DANCING | HAS THEIR OWN YOUTUBE CHANNEL | Has a name longer than 6 letters | Speaks another language |
| Is left-handed | Favorite color is purple | Loves Math | Plays an instrument | Likes vegetables |
| Enjoys cooking | Likes talking in front of groups | Has a birthday in the same month | USES SAME BRAND OF TOOTH-PASTE | LIKES THE SAME VIDEO GAME |
| Same taste in shoes | Loves snow | HAS BROKEN A BONE | Has won an award | Exercises every day |
| Walks to school | Likes the same music you do | Does not like pizza | Can make a scary face | Likes to repair things |

2. Tell students that they will have 5 minutes to find someone who matches the descriptions in the boxes.
3. Once they find someone who matches the description, they ask that student to sign their name in the box.
4. One student can only sign one box on the worksheet.



5. The goal is to have as many signatures as possible on the worksheet before time runs out.

Variations:

- Have multiple students sign their names in each box using their initials.
- Declare that the winner is anyone who has five boxes signed in a row.
- Have students create the content of the scavenger hunt based on what they want to know about other students. Everyone can have their own scavenger map, or the class can create one together.

Reflections:

- What did you learn about your classmates?
- What was it like to compete to get to know each other?

ACTIVITY 3: Tracing Who We Are

Time: 15–20 mins

Supplies: Copy paper



Instructions:

1. Draw an outline of a human on a marker board.
2. Share details about your life related to different parts of your body.
3. Write a sentence next to the corresponding body part.

Example:

- a. "I saw the Grand Canyon" —near the eyes
- b. "I broke my arm" —near my elbow

- c. “I love my dog”—near the heart
 - d. “I love spaghetti”—near the stomach
4. Give out a sheet of copy paper to teach students and have them create their own body outline.
 5. When completed, have students leave their outlines on their table and do a gallery walk to see what other people created.

Reflection: What is something interesting that you learned about someone else in the class?

Teacher Note: Depending on the maturity of a class, it could be risky to use a full body outline. It’s better to use just the top half of the body.

ACTIVITY 4: Web of Stories

Supplies: Ball of yarn (or string)

- Instructions:**
1. Hold a ball of yarn and tell a quick story about your life.
 2. Ask anyone if they have a similar story or something your story makes them think about.
 3. Whoever raises their hand, pass the ball of yarn to them as you hold one end of the yarn.
 4. Have that student share their story or thoughts, and ask the rest of the class if what they shared reminds them of anything.
 5. Keep passing the ball of yarn around until everyone has gotten a chance to share.

Reflection: How does the yarn reflect the connection people have with each other?

Homework: Now that you know more about your classmates, how has your experience in class changed?



LESSON 4: Group Values

Lesson Overview:

| Activities in this Lesson: | About These Activities: |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <i>Opening Question</i> | Asks what you value most in life. |
| <i>Individual Values</i> | Offers an opportunity to share values through art and storytelling. |
| <i>Sounds of the Universe</i> | Is a popular team building game that demonstrates the joy in supporting each other. |
| <i>Class Values</i> | Is a democratic activity to discover what the class collectively finds important. |

SEL Standards:

Self-Awareness / Social Awareness

SEL Objectives:

Self-Perception / Respect For Others

ACTIVITY 1: Opening Questions

Time:

5 mins

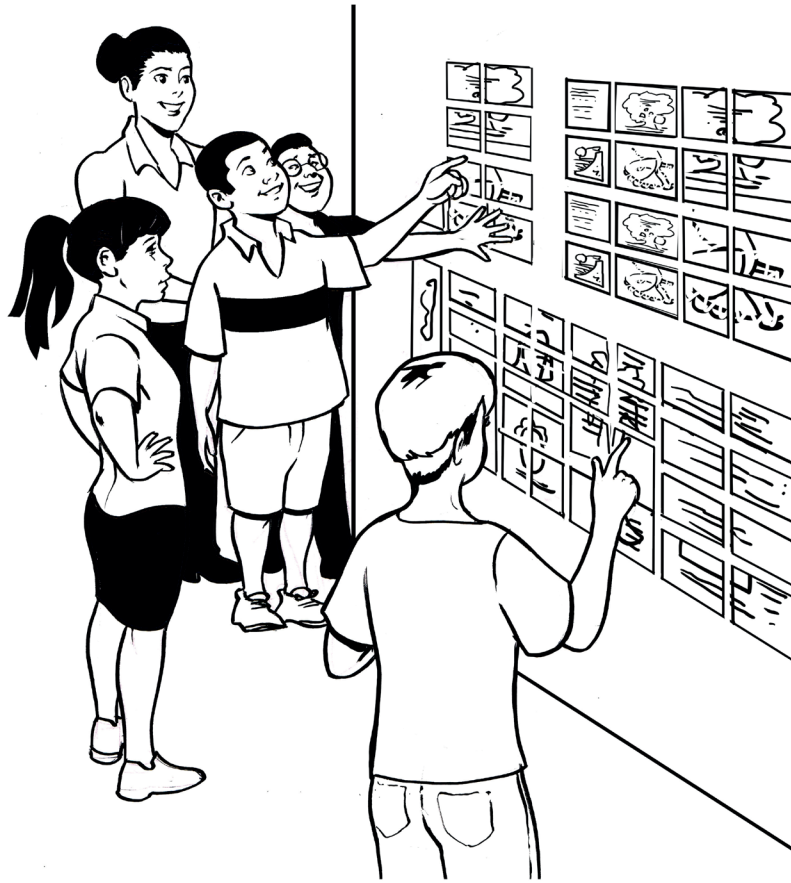
Ask:

1. “What value is most important to you?”
Share examples like trust, family, creativity, connection, knowledge, friendship, love, justice.
2. “When have you experienced your value in your life?”

ACTIVITY 2: Individual Values

Time: 10–20 mins

- Instructions:**
1. Hand out 5" x 7" index cards and ask students to fold them in half.
 - a. On one side, have them write their names.
 - b. On the other side, have them write their values.
 - c. Have them decorate their cards, and on the inside, write a story about when they experienced their value.



2. Do a gallery walk so that students can view each other's cards.

Reflection: How did it feel to connect to your value?

ACTIVITY 3: Sounds of the Universe

Time: 5–10 mins

Instructions:

1. Ask for one volunteer to step out of the room.
2. Ask someone else to choose a spot in the room for the volunteer to find.
3. Ask for the volunteer to return to the room.



4. As the student enters the room, have students indicate how close or far the volunteer is to the spot by the intensity of their clapping of hands or thighs.
5. If the volunteer goes away from the spot, lessen the intensity.
6. If the volunteer goes towards the spot, increase the intensity.
7. Celebrate when the volunteer hits the spot.
8. Repeat!

Variations:

- Select two volunteers and divide the rest of the class into two groups. Assign each group a volunteer and compete over who can find the spot the fastest.
- Use facial expressions, but not sound, to guide volunteers.

- In addition to finding the spot, have the volunteer do a specific and easy-to-do task.

Reflections:

- What did it feel like to collectively help a classmate?
- What did it feel like to get support from the entire class?

ACTIVITY 4: Class Value

Time:

10–15 mins

Instructions:

1. Ask, “What did it feel like to collectively help a classmate?”
2. Ask, “What values were demonstrated in the activities?”
3. Ask the class to come to consensus for 5 values that will preserve the same energy for future lessons.
4. Write the values on the class agreements.

Reflection:

Share one value that resonates with you after today’s lesson and why it’s important to you.

Homework:

Notice when classmates support each other.



LESSON 5: Integrating Values

Lesson Overview:

| Activities in this Lesson: | About These Activities: |
|----------------------------|--|
| <i>Opening Question</i> | Asks students to share an example of how the class values were actualized. |
| <i>Group Juggling</i> | Absorbs students in an engaging group challenge in order to practice class values. |
| <i>Silent Line-up</i> | Challenges students to create non-verbal solutions. |
| <i>Acronym Party</i> | Harnesses the power of group effort. |

SEL Standards:

Relationship Skills/Self-Awareness

SEL Objectives:

Team Building

ACTIVITY 1: Opening Question

Time:

5 mins

Ask:

“How have you seen or demonstrated the class values since the last time we met?”

ACTIVITY 2: Group Juggling

Time: 20–25 mins

Supplies: 20 Tennis balls or Koosh balls

- Instructions:**
1. Divide students into groups of 7–10 students and have them stand in a circle.
 2. Explain that they will be juggling one or more tennis balls as a group.



3. Choose someone who will start the group juggle. That student will pass one ball underhanded to another student anywhere in the circle.
4. The student who receives the ball will then pass the ball to someone different in the circle.
5. Passes are always thrown to someone who has not yet received the ball.
6. This continues until everyone gets a chance to have the ball tossed to them.
 - a. When possible, students should not pass the ball to someone next to them.
 - b. If the ball drops, the group repeats the same passing pattern that was established when the first student tossed the ball to the second student.
 - c. It is important to emphasize underhand tosses. If not, someone will mistake the activity for a professional baseball game.
7. When the ball reaches the last person, that student tosses the ball back to the first student.
8. Once everyone has touched the ball, the passing pattern has been established. Tell the class they will now repeat the established pattern, but ask them to try to do it a little faster.
9. After the group seems confident with this faster pattern, the group can now graduate to tossing two balls, one at a time. NOTE:
 - a. They can keep adding balls into the group juggle every time they successfully complete the pattern without dropping a single ball.
 - b. There is almost no limit to the number of balls that can be added.

Variations:

- Groups can add a verbal challenge such as saying the student's name when passing them the ball.
- Groups can reverse the passing pattern after they complete the first one.

- The group can simultaneously do the original passing pattern AND the reverse pattern using two balls.
- The circle can move clockwise or counterclockwise so students have to throw to a moving target.

Reflections:

- What can this activity teach us about how to support each other as a group?
- During an activity, what can you do to help someone else?

Teacher Notes:

- Demonstrate with a small group and show that when mistakes happen, the group can support each other.
- This is a great activity to check in midway and celebrate any positive displays of support. This support might mean giving information on how to catch, or how to toss a ball so someone can catch it more easily.

ACTIVITY 3: Silent Line-up

Time:

10–15 mins

Instructions:

1. Divide students into two groups of 10–15 students.
2. Explain that this activity is silent.
3. Tell students that they will have 4 minutes to line themselves up by the month and day of their birthday (not including year).

Variations:

- Restrict the techniques they use for success, such as:
 - a. No mouthing words to each other,
 - b. No writing,
 - c. No using fingers to form letters or numbers.
- Have students line up alphabetically using their last name or their favorite animal.

Reflections:

- What strategies did you use?
- Were you surprised by the results?



ACTIVITY 4: Acronym Party

Time:

10–15 mins

Instructions:

1. Divide the class into groups of 4–6 students.
2. Define an acronym and give some examples:
 - a. UFO = Unidentified Flying Object
 - b. FBI = Federal Bureau of Investigations
 - c. LOL = Laughing Out Loud
3. Give the class three letters of the alphabet.
4. Their task is to create their own acronyms with these three letters.
5. Let them know the acronyms have to make sense.
6. The group will have 2 minutes to brainstorm as many word combinations as possible.
7. After two minutes, tally the number from each group.
8. Repeat with a new set of letters.

Variation:

Use more than three letters.

Reflections:

- What was your process for creating acronyms?
- How did your group use teamwork?

Homework:

Notice when students act in agreement with the class values.



LESSON 6: Meaning

Lesson Overview:

| Activities in this Lesson: | About These Activities: |
|----------------------------|--|
| <i>Opening Question</i> | Builds intimacy through sharing something meaningful about one's home. |
| <i>Bin of Meaning</i> | Asks students to share what's meaningful to them. |
| <i>Community Mural</i> | Visually creates meaning as a group. |

SEL Standards:

Relationship Skills/Self-Awareness

SEL Objectives:

Relationship Building/Self Connection

ACTIVITY 1: Opening Question

Time:

5 mins

Ask:

“What is your favorite spot at home or in your neighborhood and why?”

ACTIVITY 2: Bin of Meaning

Time: 10–15 mins

Supplies:

- Class set of index cards
- A small storage bin

Instructions:

1. Give out an index card to each student.
2. Ask students to write about an item that has meaning to them and why.



3. Give them the option of writing a story or drawing a picture.
4. After 5 minutes, have students place the index cards in the bin and give them the option of sharing what they wrote.
5. Keep the bin in the same location for future classes.

Reflections:

- How did you feel sharing what was meaningful for you?
- What was it like to hear about what was meaningful for others?

ACTIVITY 3: Community Mural

Time: 20–25 mins

Supplies:

- Chart paper
- Markers

Instructions:

1. Divide the class into 4 groups.
2. Give every group one sheet of chart paper and a collection of markers.
3. Have students choose one value that's important to them or assign a communal value to the class.
4. Tell students to write the value in large letters and decorate the paper with art, poetry, slogans, and uplifting imagery.
5. Have every student sign the chart paper and post it in the room or hallway.

Variation: Choose academic content as the subject matter of the mural.

Reflections:

- What were you able to contribute to the group?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing art as a group?

Homework: Think about what rituals you have in your life that are meaningful to you.



UNIT 2: Active Listening

- ▶ Establishes what good listening looks/feels/sounds like
- ▶ Explores the roles of questions and responses while actively listening
- ▶ Utilizes paraphrasing as a tool for listening and understanding
- ▶ Teaches tools for respectful disagreement



LESSON 7: Listening Basics

Lesson Overview:

| Activities in this Lesson: | About These Activities: |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Opening Question</i> | Asks students to think about what good listening skills looks like. |
| <i>Looks / Sounds / Feels Like</i> | Examines good and bad listening skills. |
| <i>Concentric Circles</i> | Uses the speed dating structure for quick interactions and listening practice. |

SEL Standards:

Relationship Skills

SEL Objectives:

Listening Skills / Social Engagement

ACTIVITY 1: Opening Question

Time:

5 mins

Ask:

“How do you know when someone is listening to you well or is not listening well?”

ACTIVITY 2: Looks / Sounds / Feels Like

Time:

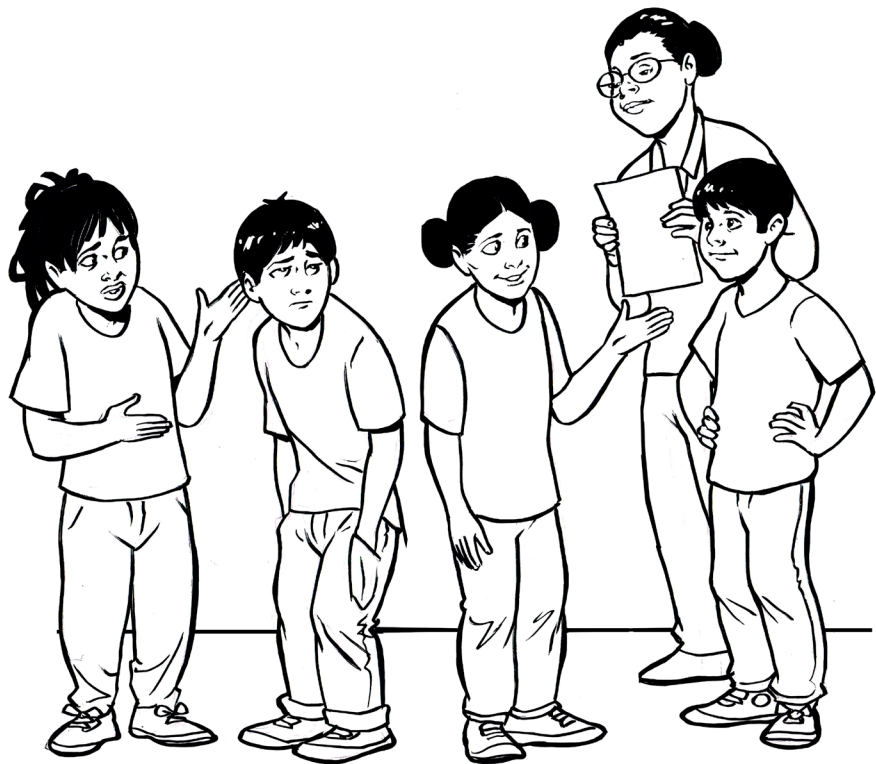
15–20 mins

Instructions:

1. Create the following chart:

| Looks Like | | Sounds Like | | Feels Like | |
|------------|---|-------------|---|------------|---|
| 😊 | 😞 | 😊 | 😞 | 😊 | 😞 |
| | | | | | |

2. Ask two students to demonstrate listening skills in front of class.
3. Student A will answer your question and Student B will demonstrate good listening skills.
4. Give Student A the prompt, "What is the best invention? Why?"
5. After Student A answers, ask the class, "What did Student B look like when they demonstrated good skills." Emphasize the body actions (stillness, nodding head, eye contact).



6. Write the physical traits on the Looks Like T-chart under the happy face.
7. Give Student A a different question to answer and this time, Student B will do a poor job of listening.
8. Ask Student A, “What is the best gift you have ever received?”
9. After Student A answers the prompt, ask the class, “What did Student B look like when they showed poor listening skills?”
10. Fill out the chart under the sad face.
11. Divide the class into pairs. Repeat the process so everyone gets to experience good and poor listening skills.
12. Repeat the process to fill out the “Sounds Like” and “Feels Like” parts of the T-charts.

Sample Questions:

- a. What are five things you want to achieve in your life?
- b. What is something you want to get better at?

13. Post the chart paper on the wall.

Reflection:

What did you learn about good listening skills?

ACTIVITY 3: Concentric Circles

Time:

20–25 mins

Instructions:

1. Say, “Now that we know what good listening looks, sounds, and feels like, we are going to practice it.”
2. Divide the class in half.
3. Have the group form two concentric circles: Group A is on the outside; Group B is on the inside.
4. Have the two groups face each other.
5. Group A will be the “talkers.” Group B will be the “listeners.”

6. Give Group A a prompt and give them 30 seconds to answer it.
7. Group B will listen and demonstrate good listening skills.
8. After 30 seconds, switch, Group B will answer the prompt, and Group A will listen.
9. Ask students to thank each other. Tell Group A to stand up and rotate one seat clockwise.



10. Repeat

Sample Questions:

- a. What's the best meal you have ever had?
- b. If you could be an expert in any subject, what would it be?
- c. How have you changed in the last five years?
- d. What is the best balance of life and work?
- e. What is the best job in the world? What's the worst?

Reflection:

How do you feel after being listened to by so many of your peers?

Homework:

Notice when you or others are listening well and when you and others are not.



LESSON 8: Open-ended Questions

Lesson Overview:

| Activities in this Lesson: | About These Activities: |
|----------------------------|---|
| <i>Opening Question</i> | Asks students to consider who in their lives listens to them well. |
| <i>Dog and Bone</i> | Is a classic theater game created by Viola Spolin that makes being quiet essential and attunes our ear to all noises. |
| <i>Asking Questions</i> | Explores the importance of curiosity when listening to someone. |
| <i>Walk and Talk</i> | Transforms the classroom into a leisurely stroll with a friend, with whom you can discuss all life's topics. |

SEL Standards:

Relationship Skills

SEL Objectives:

Listening Skills / Communication / Social Engagement

ACTIVITY 1: Opening Question

Time:

5 mins

Ask:

“Who listens to you well?”

ACTIVITY 2: Dog and Bone

Time: 10–15 mins

Supplies: Any small object (a stuffed animal, book, ruler, or ball)

- Instructions:**
1. In the middle of a circle, a volunteer plays the role of a sleeping dog with his bone.
 2. The dog lies down and must close their eyes.



3. Any object can be the bone and is placed in front of the dog, without any contact.
4. Choose one student, by pointing at them, whose job it will be to steal the bone.

5. If the dog hears a noise, the dog points in the direction of the bone thief.
6. If the dog correctly points at the culprit, congratulate the dog and the dog can open their eyes. The dog has the option of playing the dog in the next round.
7. If the dog points in the wrong direction, let the dog know that the point was unsuccessful and that the dog has two more tries.
8. If the bone thief successfully steals the bone and sits down without being pointed at, the round ends and the bone thief gets a roaring round of applause.

Variations:

- Have two bone thieves compete against each other.
- Have two dogs protect the bone.
- Have two bones.

Reflections:

- What techniques did the bone thieves use to stay quiet?
- What did you learn about listening?

Teacher Notes:

- Remind students that if they are not the bone thief, they must be completely quiet and still so as not to distract the dog.
- If a student does not want to lie on the floor, give them the option to sit in a chair.

ACTIVITY 3: Asking Questions

Time:

5–10 mins

1. Say, “Today, we are going to focus on another aspect of being a good listener: asking questions.”
2. Ask, “What type of questions do you appreciate when you talk?”
3. Ask, “What type of questions do you ask to keep a conversation going?”

4. Ask, “How do you create interesting questions?”
5. Ask for two students to demonstrate listening and asking questions.
6. Student A will answer a prompt; Student B will ask them follow-up questions.
7. Divide students into pairs.
8. Have Student A answer a prompt and have student B ask Student A questions.
9. Switch roles:

Sample Prompts:

- a. If your life was a movie with a soundtrack, what music would you use?
- b. If you could blast different music throughout the day without anyone complaining, what songs would you choose?
- c. If you could design a float for a parade, what would you make and who would you have on the float?
- d. If you had to spend a week as one type of plant, what plant would you be?
- e. Imagine you can create any one law; what would you create?

Reflection:

How does asking questions affect a conversation?

ACTIVITY 4: Walk and Talk

Time:

15–20 mins

Instructions:

1. Establish a circular pathway for walking around the room.
2. Demonstrate a slow walking pace.
3. Pose a question.
 - a. What was your worst day ever? Your best day?

- b. What is the best and worst advice you have ever heard? What is the best and worst advice you have ever given?
- c. If you could have any three guests for a podcast or talk show, who would you choose?
- d. If you could relive any time in your life, which time would you choose? Why?
- e. What is one piece of advice you would give others based on your life experience?



- 4. Have students find a student they don't know very well and ask them to walk slowly on the pathway together.
- 5. Have students share their answers and ask each other follow up questions.
- 6. When they are finished, ask them to sit down. Have students:
 - a. write down their partner's name.
 - b. write down what their partner said.
 - c. write down their follow up question.
- 7. After writing down their response, ask students to stand up and look for another person to walk and talk with.

Reflection:

What did you learn about the relationship between good listening and asking questions?

Homework:

Practice asking questions when listening to someone.



LESSON 9: Listening Responses

Lesson Overview:

| Activities in this Lesson: | About These Activities: |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <i>Opening Question</i> | Looks at the way people respond as a form of good listening. |
| <i>The Art of the Response</i> | Considers the variety of ways someone can demonstrate good listening skills based on the way they respond. |
| <i>Group Conversations</i> | Delves into dynamics of good listening skills in a group. |

SEL Standards:

Relationship Skills/Social Awareness

SEL Objectives:

Listening Skills/Communication/Social Engagement

ACTIVITY 1: Opening Question

Time:

5 mins

Ask:

“How do you like people to respond after you say something?”

ACTIVITY 2: The Art of the Response

Time: 20 mins

- Instructions:**
1. Ask, “Besides asking questions, how else can you respond that demonstrates good listening?”
 2. List answers from the students (echoing words, giving feedback on what they say, sharing a similar experience, sharing agreement, sharing what makes sense, asking about what doesn’t make sense).
 3. Ask, “How do you know how to respond?”
 4. Say, “Knowing how to respond is not a science: it’s an art. Listen to your own mind about how to respond. With practice and reflection, you will become a master.”
 5. Divide the class into pairs.
 6. Share a prompt and have students practice listening, asking questions, and responding.

Sample Prompts:

- a. What was your favorite present that you ever gave or received?
- b. What art form interests or inspires you and why?
- c. What was the longest day of your life, and why?
- d. Where is the most interesting place you have visited and why?
- e. When are you happiest and why?

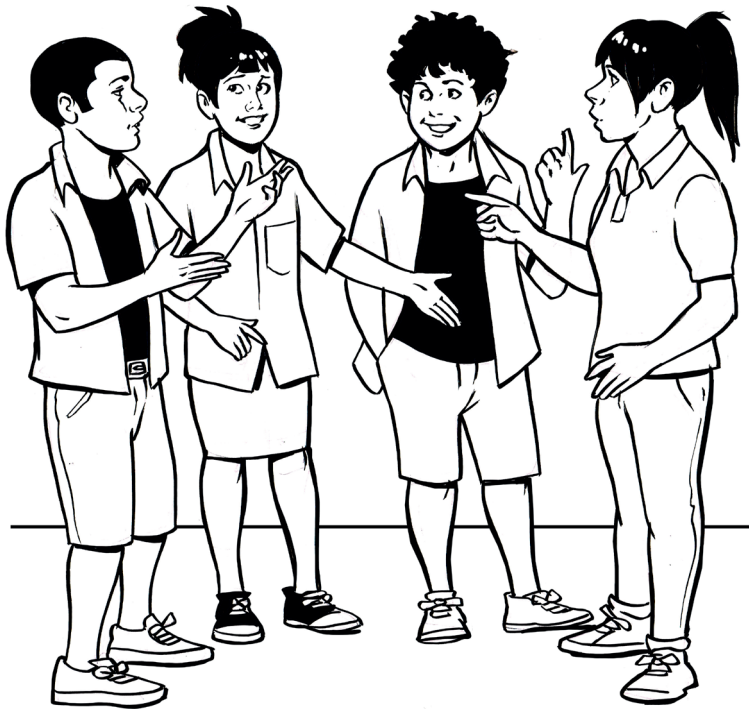
Reflection: What is your favorite response when someone is listening to you?

ACTIVITY 3: Group Conversations

Time: 20 mins

- Instructions:**
1. Ask, “How does listening in a group differ from listening to just one person?”

2. Ask, “What do you have to do to listen and respond well in a group conversation?”
3. List responses on the marker board or chart paper.
4. Say, “We are going to practice what it means to listen well in a group.”



5. Divide the class into groups of 4–5 students.
6. Give the students / groups a statement to discuss:

Sample Statements:

- a. Playing a game is fun only when you win.
- b. Decisions that people make quickly are always wrong.
- c. Luck has nothing to do with success.
- d. It’s okay to lie.
- e. Exams are the best way to motivate students.

Reflection:

What did you learn about responding and listening?

Homework:

Notice how you and others respond that demonstrates poor or good listening skills.



LESSON 10: Paraphrasing

Lesson Overview:

| Activities in this Lesson: | About These Activities: |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <i>Opening Question</i> | Explores what problems occur when there is miscommunication. |
| <i>Back to Back Drawing</i> | Brings awareness to language and the need to be precise. |
| <i>Paraphrase Practice</i> | Introduces a powerful tool for demonstrating understanding. |
| <i>Communication Breakdown</i> | Illustrates the value of paraphrasing. |

SEL Standards:

Relationship Skills / Social Awareness

SEL Objectives:

Communication / Perspective-Taking

ACTIVITY 1: Opening Question

Time:

5 mins

Ask:

“When has miscommunication been a problem in your life?”

ACTIVITY 2: Back to Back Drawing

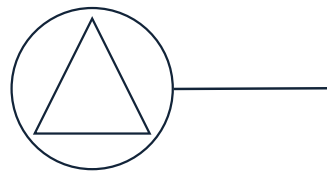
Time: 10–15 mins

Supplies: Blank paper

- Instructions:**
1. Divide the class into pairs.
 2. Have students sit or stand back to back.



3. Student A will draw a simple picture with at least 2 geographic shapes in 30 sec.
4. Give students a few example pictures, so they know this exercise is not an art competition.



5. Student A has 2 minutes to describe how to draw their picture. Student B listens, is not allowed to talk, and does their best job to replicate the picture.
6. Compare the pictures.
7. Switch roles and repeat the process.
8. Repeat activity with the same partner or a new partner.

Variations:

- You can give out preset drawings for students to describe.
- One person describes the drawing to a group of 3–4 students.
- Add more time to make the drawings more complex.
- Play a second round and allow Student B to ask questions.
- Instead of drawings, use blocks, Legos, or craft materials.

Reflections:

- Did your drawings look like what was described?
- What was difficult about describing the image? About listening?
- What did you learn about communication?

ACTIVITY 3: Paraphrase Practice

Time:

10–15 mins

Instructions:

1. Ask, “Are you surprised when what a person heard differs from what you said?”
2. Say, “To increase our communication skills we are going to practice ‘Paraphrasing.’ Paraphrasing is expressing what someone said in your own words.”
3. Demonstrate paraphrasing by asking a student questions and expressing what they say in your own words.
4. Ask the student if you understood them correctly by asking, “Is that right?”

5. Explain verifying accuracy after paraphrasing is crucial. If the paraphrase was inaccurate, the speaker can clarify their meaning.
6. Divide students into pairs.
7. Ask Student A to answer a question and Student B to paraphrase what they heard. Then switch roles.

Sample Questions:

- a. If you were an animal, which one would you be and why?
- b. Why do we sometimes have to stop and think before talking?
- c. If you could be an expert in two subjects, what would they be and why?

Reflection:

How did paraphrasing improve communication?

ACTIVITY 4: Communication Breakdown

Time:

15–20 mins

Instructions:

1. Ask for five students to leave the room.
2. Choose a student in the class, Student A, to tell a three or four sentence story.
3. Ask for one student, Student B, to return from outside the room.
4. Have Student A share their story with Student B.
5. Student B asks for Student C to come in from outside the classroom.
6. In front of the class, Student B shares Student A's story with Student C.
7. Student C asks for Student D to come in from outside of the classroom.