

Connecting Class Cultures through Active Listening

Rationale: To develop empathy in the classroom and help them understand how to practice active listening.

Objectives: This lesson will break down social walls constructed between students and provide a safe place for them to be honest. This assignment will show the value of listening and asking meaningful questions.

Materials:

- Series of questions printed out
- Chairs with tables moved out of the way.

Time: One 45-minute class

Assessment:

- **Informal:** Have a class discussion, ask them something they learned about a classmate? What were some similarities or differences?
- **Formal:** Have students write a reflection and mention what was something a classmate said that stood out to them.

Procedures:

Pre-Reading for Teachers - [Dialogue Versus Debate](#)

Step 1: Show a Hook

There are two options to select from:

[What is Culture?](#) - "I understand culture as a treasure that is a part of our collective memory, of our perception of ourselves." - Lidija N., Macedonia. This video illustrates an international conversation that took place on the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' social media sites.

[How to Dialogue and Why](#) - Dialogue is one of the peacebuilding tools used by the United States Institute of Peace to build mutual understanding and trust among individuals and groups. This video provides a basic introduction to dialogue from one scholar's point-of-view.

Step 1: Set up the room for the dialogue. Have an inner circle with chairs facing out and outer chairs facing in. Each chair should be facing another chair. With an even number of students, everyone should be able to sit and face one person. Set the chairs far enough from each other so they can't be distracted by another group

Step 2: Explain the directions

Directions:

To practice active listening you are going to either listen to the person sitting across from you or speak from the heart. When it is your turn to listen, do not say anything. Just listen. Be present. When it is your time to speak, be honest and focus on telling your story.

If you finish early, just sit in silence. Wait for the teacher to tell them to stop. Do not speak to those around you, you are only speaking to the person in front of you.

You may be asked to move to the left or right or switch with the person sitting across from you.

If there are no questions, now is the time to offer the first questions.

Step 3: Give them a question to answer and have either people on the inside or outside start (always alternate who starts first). After 30-60 seconds, tell them to switch the storyteller.

Step 4: Have the outside rotate to their left or inside rotate to their right. Repeat step 3. Every 4-5 questions have every other person on the inside flip chairs with their outside partner and then rotate to the left or right.

Step 5: Towards the end of class stop and have a conversation. Ask them something they learned about a classmate? What were some similarities or differences?

If needed, have students write a reflection and mention what was something a classmate said that stood out to them.

Questions

Feel free to pick and choose and add your own questions. The questions become more serious as they continue to become more comfortable with sharing. Be sure to have a good sense of the room and know when it is appropriate to go deeper.

Level 1

- How have you helped someone?
- If you could change something about your school, what would it be and why?
- What is your favorite family tradition?
- What do you enjoy most about 'people watching'?
- Do you cry easily? Why or why not?

Level 2

- Describe a time you have struggled to do something, and how you overcame the challenge.
- What do you think about this quote: "It is better to offer no excuse than a bad one." - George Washington?
- If you had the chance, what would you spend a year learning?
- When have you been treated unfairly, and did anyone ever stand up for you?
- Have you ever stood up for someone being treated unfairly? Why or why not?

Level 3

- What do you think about this quote: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." - Martin Luther King Jr.
- Have you ever avoided an issue, what was the issue, and why did you avoid it?
- When did you have to make a serious decision, and are you still satisfied with the decision?
- What makes you different from your family?

Level 4

- When were you innocent and accused of something you didn't do? How did you respond?
- When have you felt different?
- What do you think about this quote: "Sharpen your anger at injustice." - Father Drinan
- Describe a time that you felt special. It could be in the classroom or outside the classroom.
- What do you need to tell someone, and why haven't you done it yet?