

Overview of Activities for the First Days of School

This collection is designed for you to pick and choose activities from each section to help you welcome back your students, get to know each other, and start building a community that centers relationships and care. You may want to coordinate with teachers in other departments to ensure that students are not doing the same activities or readings multiple times. After completing the activities in Section 3, you should work with your students to create a [classroom contract](#) that establishes norms and expectations for your classroom community.

Section 1: Welcome Back!

Title	Purpose	Materials	Activities
Building Connections with Concentric Circles	Students build connections with their peers by sharing small details about themselves in paired discussion.		<p>Students participate in a low-stakes community building activity using the Concentric Circles strategy.</p> <p>Extension: Students have the opportunity to brainstorm new questions to ask their classmates. This can be done independently, in groups, or for homework.</p>
Looking Back, Looking Ahead	Students reflect on the past year before generating ideas for the kind of learning community and learning experiences they want this year.		<p>After being welcomed to the space by their teacher, students reflect on learning experiences from the last school year, identifying what happened and how they felt. Then they work in small groups to come up with ideas to share with their teacher that could help turn a negative experience into a more positive one this year.</p> <p>Extension: Students reply to a letter from their teacher, introducing themselves, sharing their best experiences at school, and providing ideas for replicating these experiences.</p>

Title	Purpose	Materials	Activities
Create a Goal and Discover Your “Why”	<p>Students create a personal goal for the school year and engage in a reflection protocol to discover their source of motivation, also known as their “why.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handout: Quotes About Goals and Your “Why” • Handout: Create a Goal and Find Your “Why” 	<p>After students are oriented towards goal setting, they create a personal goal they want to achieve by the end of the school year and reflect on their reason for pursuing this goal.</p> <p>Extension: Students create a poster with their “why” to post it in their bedroom. They may make a poster by hand or using an online tool like Canva.com.</p>

Section 2: Exploring Identity and Getting to Know Each Other

Title	Purpose	Materials	Activities
What's in a Name?	Students explore the relationship between our names, identities, and the societies in which we live.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handout: The Power of Names Group Work 	<p>Students do a gallery walk to read a selection of quotations about names and explore two in a short reflection. Then they engage in a silent discussion by adding comments and questions to one another's reflections. Finally, students discuss the power of names in small groups and as a class.</p> <p>Extension: Students write their own original quotation about names.</p>
Pronouncing Names	Students examine the significance of pronouncing a person's name correctly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading: Is it Kay? Handout: Is it Kay? Graphic Organizer 	<p>Students reflect on why correctly pronouncing each other's names is important. They read and discuss a text written by a young person that explores the anxiety she experiences during roll call on the first days of school, and the compromises she makes to avoid the stress created by these moments. By the end of the activity, students will understand that learning and correctly pronouncing a person's name creates a welcoming and inclusive environment where everyone feels like they belong.</p>
Our Names and Our Place in the World	Students consider what parts of our identities we choose for ourselves and what parts are chosen for us, as well as the impact our names can have on our identities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading: Names and Identity Handout: Names and Identity Graphic Organizer Handout: Teach the Teacher Exit Card 	<p>Students reflect on their names and personalities and hear their teacher share a personal name story. Then the class reads a personal essay by a student about a time when she had to introduce herself to her class. After discussing the essay, students complete an exit card to help their teacher to get to know them.</p> <p>Extension: Students continue their exploration of identity by reading and listening to three poems.</p>

Title	Purpose	Materials	Activities
Frame a Special Item	Students identify an object that holds special meaning and learn about each other by sharing the stories of these special items.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video: Frame a Special Item • Handout: My Very Special Item 	<p>Students watch a short video from Jason Reynolds’s “Write. Right. Rite.” project and then respond to questions that he poses about the special item they would frame. Students share their ideas and then have an opportunity to develop the story of their item.</p> <p>Extension: Using their classwork as a starting place, students tell the story of their special item. There are options for a range of creative ways they can tell and share their stories.</p>

Section 3: Fostering a Community of Learners

Title	Purpose	Materials	Activities
Making Meaning of Community	Students explore the idea of “community” in order to identify its key aspects and deeper meaning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handout: My Community Exit Card 	<p>Students explore the meaning of a familiar concept, <i>community</i>. Using the “Make Meaning” thinking routine, students generate ideas, draw connections, synthesize information, ask questions, and propose a definition. At the end of the lesson, they reflect on a community they belong to and the feelings associated with membership.</p> <p>Extension: Students use the Color, Symbol, Image strategy to explore the concept of community on their own. They can present their ideas in a brief presentation in a future class meeting.</p>
Community Is . . . Community Isn’t	Students explore the factors that make up a community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handout: What Is Community? Anticipation Guide Handout: Exploring Community in Three Ways Handout: The ABCs of Community 	<p>Students complete an anticipation guide in order to share their opinions and hear from others about the factors that make up a community. Then they work with a group to analyze a definition of <i>community</i> and discuss questions that the definition raises for them.</p> <p>Extension: Alone or in pairs, students use the Alphabet Brainstorm strategy to generate a list of words starting with every letter of the alphabet that reflect an aspect of “community.” There are multiple creative options for how they share their work with their teacher and others in the class.</p>

Title	Purpose	Materials	Activities
Envisioning Our Classroom Space	Students analyze a poem in order to determine the qualities of a classroom community where members are seen, valued, and heard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading: Untitled Poem by Beth Strano 	<p>Students reflect in their journals on the idea of belonging. Then they read and discuss a poem that explores the idea of “safe” spaces. Finally, students imagine a classroom space where all members feel seen, valued, and heard. Use ideas generated in this activity as framing for creating a classroom contract in the next lesson.</p> <p>Extension: Students review the poem and choose one line to illustrate with a drawing or represent with an image they find online or in a magazine. Start the next class by asking students to share their ideas individually.</p>
Contracting for Back to School	Students develop a classroom contract to create a brave and reflective community of mutual respect and inclusion.		<p>Students reflect in their journals on their experiences as students in a classroom community. Then they work together to develop a class contract.</p>