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**BRIDGE Project: Building Respectful, Inclusive Dialogue for
Genuine Engagement Sensitive and Controversial Topics
in the Classroom (SCIs)**

SENSITIVE AND CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES (SCIS) IN THE CLASSROOM

TOOLKIT

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Introduction

Creating opportunities for respectful dialogue in the classroom is easier said than done. Every teacher wants to foster this among students and across the wider school community, yet the real challenge lies in putting it into practice. This toolkit is designed to support you as a teacher in doing precisely that.

This toolkit is a collection of strategies with step-by-step guidance for working toward a specific goal with students and colleagues. The strategies gathered here are ones that can be tried out repeatedly, building the kind of classroom readiness needed to address difficult conversations, and in particular, sensitive and controversial issues.

What do these mean exactly? Some topics that arise in the classroom are called sensitive: they provoke strong emotions and personal reactions, even when there is clear evidence or broad agreement about what happened. Their difficulty lies not in factual dispute but in the emotional weight that engaging with these issues generates. Genocides and wars are examples of topics that can be deeply painful to discuss precisely because of what they represent for people, regardless of how well documented they are.

Other topics are controversial: well-informed people, including experts, researchers, or individuals with lived experience, hold genuinely different views about them. Controversy does not necessarily require strong feelings. Whether phones should be allowed in schools is one such example. It is possible for an issue like this to be openly debated in reasoned terms while still leaving room for disagreement among people who have thought carefully about it.

Some topics, however, can be both sensitive and controversial. They touch people's emotions and identities deeply while also being subject to real disagreement about their causes, interpretation, or possible responses. These are often the hardest conversations to hold in a classroom because they combine the emotional weight of sensitive topics with the open-endedness of controversial ones. Migration policies and climate change are two examples that carry this dual character in ways that are difficult to overstate.

Yet sensitive and controversial topics are not only a challenge to address. They are also among the most productive learning opportunities available to teachers. Through them, students develop skills that extend well beyond the classroom, including bias awareness, source criticism, critical thinking, empathy, communication, and conflict resolution.

The strategies presented here therefore aim to help teachers navigate these topics and turn difficult conversations into mindful and powerful learning opportunities. These strategies found here do not presuppose a particular order of use. Teachers are encouraged to move through this toolkit according to the needs of their students and the demands of their specific classroom context.

To go deeper, you may find some guidance on the [BRIDGE online course](#).



What are some examples of SCIs?

Many topics can be SCIs. Below there are some of the most common examples:

Social and Political Issues • Migration and refugees • Racism and discrimination • Gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights • Freedom of speech and censorship • Religion and national identity, multiculturalism 	Global and Environmental Issues • Climate change and environmental policies • The truth of climate change • Sustainability and energy transition • Global inequality and poverty • International conflicts and wars 	Media and Technology Issues • Misinformation and fake news • Artificial intelligence and algorithmic bias • Privacy and digital surveillance • Social media influence on opinion 
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- These topics may emerge out of the blue in the classroom or be deliberately chosen to be addressed to allow students to develop skills to tackle them in responsible and constructive ways.
- One important point before proceeding is that it may be a bit confusing to distinguish what kind of SCI we are dealing with. Is the topic sensitive? Is it controversial? Is it both? This chart help us understand that with more clarity.

Sensitive, controversial, or both?

Category	Emotional Impact	Expert Disagreement	Main Risk in Discussion
Sensitive only	High	Low	Harm to dignity, relationships, and sense of belonging
Controversial only	Low	High	Misinformation, disinformation, and false beliefs
Both	High	High	Interpersonal conflict, factual confusion, and polarization



Quick Quiz about SCIs

These questions will help to consolidate these points seen before and prepare us for the strategies

1) Which of the following is an example of a Sensitive and Controversial Issue (SCI)?

- a) Classroom rules
- b) Discrimination
- c) Homework schedules
- d) School holidays

2) A topic that has high emotional impact but low expert disagreement is mainly considered:

- a) Sensitive
- b) Controversial
- c) Both sensitive and controversial
- d) Neither

3) Which statement about controversial topics is correct?

- a) Everyone agrees about them
- b) They can involve significant disagreement
- c) They are only political topics
- d) They cannot be discussed at school

4) Which situation best describes a topic that is both sensitive and controversial?

- a) It creates strong emotions and there is also significant disagreement
- b) Everyone agrees, but the topic is interesting
- c) It is difficult but not emotional
- d) It is emotional, but everyone has the same view

5) Why is it important for teachers to address sensitive and controversial issues in the classroom?

- a) To make sure all students reach the same opinion
- b) To help students develop skills such as critical thinking, empathy, communication, and conflict resolution
- c) To prevent students from discussing difficult topics outside school
- d) To focus mainly on testing students' factual knowledge



Quick Quiz about SCIs

These questions will help to consolidate these points seen before and prepare us for the strategies

Answer key:

1) Which of the following is an example of a Sensitive and Controversial Issue (SCI)?

b) Discrimination

2) A topic that has high emotional impact but low expert disagreement is mainly considered:

a) Sensitive

3) Which statement about controversial topics is correct?

b) They can involve significant disagreement

4) Which situation best describes a topic that is both sensitive and controversial?

a) It creates strong emotions and there is also significant disagreement

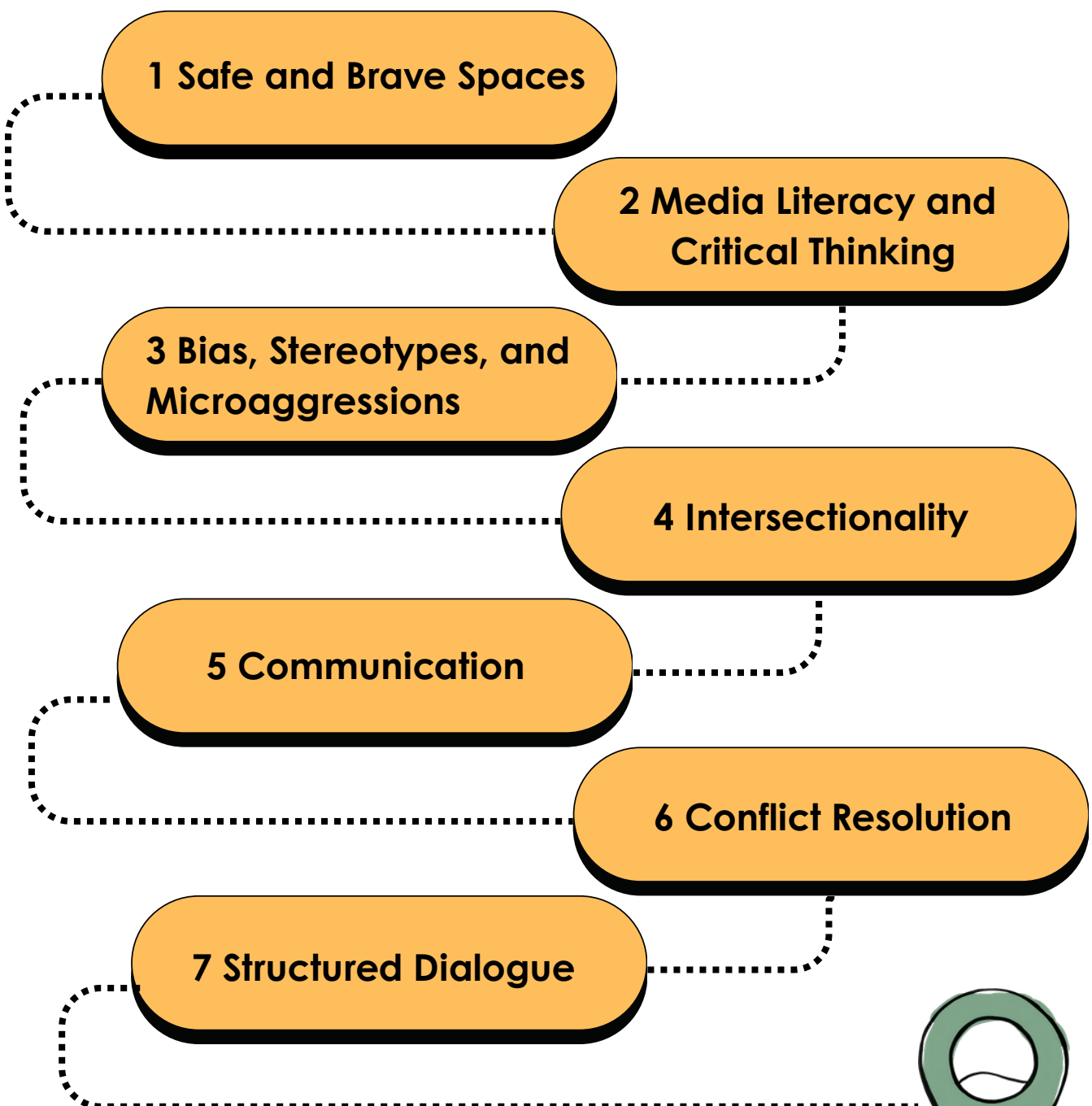
5) Why is it important for teachers to address sensitive and controversial issues in the classroom?

b) To help students develop skills such as critical thinking, empathy, communication, and conflict resolution.

- Having taken these points into account, in the next page the layout of the toolkit is presented, in which the strategies will be divided into themes. That is, each theme is understood as a "step" to tackle SCIs in the classroom. Teachers can choose strategies from all the themes and combine them, or work with one theme and its strategies at a time.
- It is up to the teacher to choose which theme to start with and which strategy they would like to try out first. The most important point is for the educator to feel the freedom to choose, adapt and work with these strategies in the way that best suits their classroom.



Navigating Sensitive and Controversial Issues (SCIs) Roadmap of strategies





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Safe and Brave Spaces

Strategies



Creating Safe & Brave Spaces

The concepts of safe and brave spaces are not a sequence (first safe, then brave), but rather two vital, interwoven layers of a healthy classroom. You cannot have a truly brave space without the foundation of a safe one.

When a classroom feels like a safe and brave space, it transforms the learning environment, particularly when addressing difficult topics.

The Classroom Environment

SAFE SPACE

A safe space is a classroom where students can express themselves freely without fear of judgment, harassment, or harm. Its goal is to ensure every student feels secure, respected, and valued.

BRAVE SPACE

A brave space builds on safety by encouraging students to embrace challenge and discomfort—stepping outside comfort zones, asking hard questions, and engaging with differing views. The focus shifts from protection to growth, aiming to foster intellectual risk-taking, critical thinking, and honest dialogue.



SAFE SPACES FOR EVERYONE

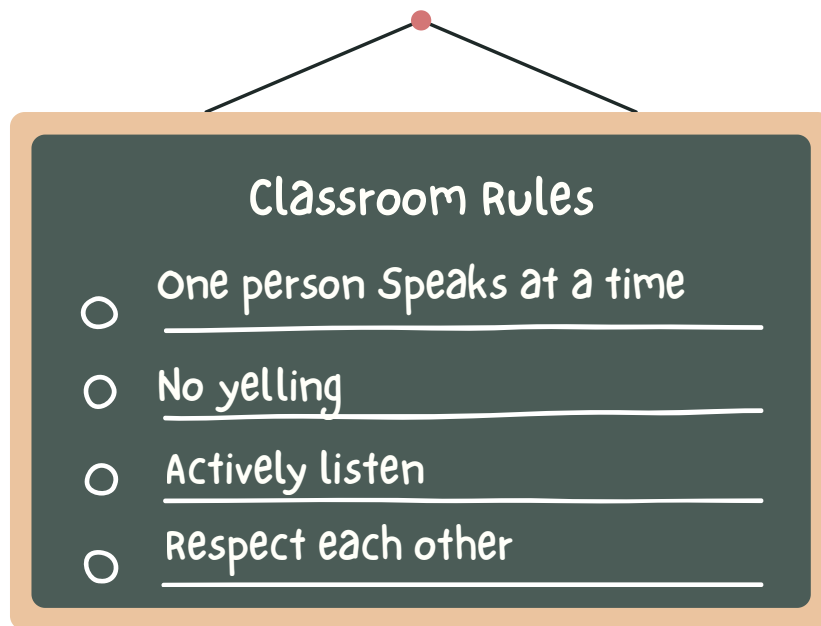
Think of a safe space as the foundation of a house. It's the stable, solid ground upon which everything else is built.



If a safe space is the foundation, a brave space is the rest of the house. The rooms where you live, grow, have difficult conversations with family, and sometimes feel uncomfortable but ultimately learn and become stronger.



Creating a Safe Space

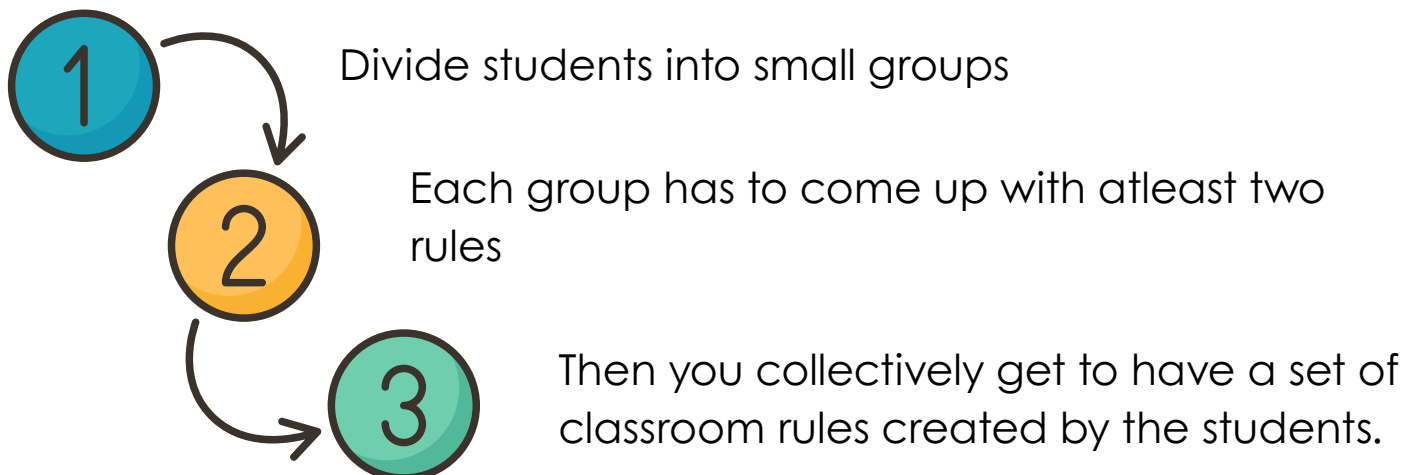


Establishing Ground Rules

Instructions:

At the start of the year, the teacher and students collaboratively create a set of discussion norms, such as "one person speaks at a time," "no yelling," "respect others' opinions even if you disagree," and "what is shared in the group stays in the group."

Tip: You, as the teacher, can already write a few rules that you want the students to follow.

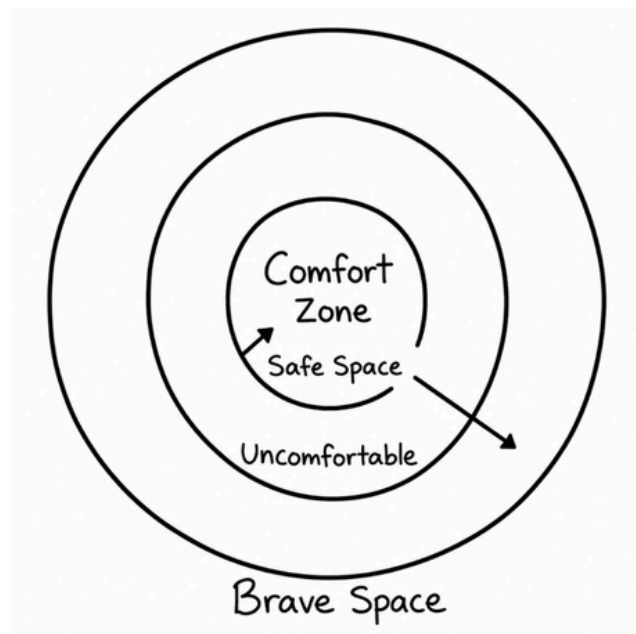


Creating a Brave Space

Safe and Brave Space Circle

Instructions:

Step 1: Once you have created your safe space rules, explain to students that you want the class to have opportunities for a Brave Space.



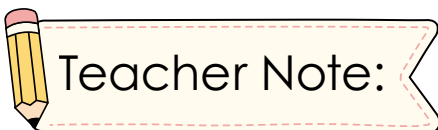
Step 2: Teacher Script:

1. Look at this circle. The center is your Comfort Zone—where everything feels easy and familiar.
2. To build a Brave Space together, we have to step into the next zone: the learning/growth zone. This is where things feel a little awkward, challenging, or uncomfortable.
3. The Comfort Zone isn't going anywhere—you can always return to it. But our most honest, meaningful conversations happen when we're willing to get uncomfortable together, without hurting or dismissing one another.
4. So let's answer this question as a class: **What do we all need in order to feel safe enough to be uncomfortable here?**

Step 3: Group Activity

1. Give each student a sticky note.
2. Ask them to finish this sentence: "I can be brave in this room if..." (e.g., "...I know I won't be laughed at," or "...I can change my mind later," or "...I can pass and write instead.")
3. Collect and group the answers on the board.
4. Condense them into your class's Brave Space Agreement (3–5 simple promises).

I can be brave
in this room if



The Myth (What we think it means)

Safe Space: A quiet, calm room where no one argues, no one gets upset, and everyone agrees to be nice.

Brave Space: A louder, intense room where we force kids to debate trigger topics and "toughen up."

The Reality (What it actually means in practice)

Safe Space: Teacher shields students from discomfort. Tension = shut down tension to protect feelings. Student takeaway: Stay quiet, stay safe.

Brave Space: Teacher supports students through discomfort. Tension = guide through it. Student takeaway: Speak up, stumble, and still be supported.

Trigger Warning (Content Notes)

What Are Trigger Warnings (Content Notes)?

A trigger warning is a verbal or written statement made before introducing material that may cause intense negative reactions for students who have experienced trauma. The term "trigger" is clinical in origin, referring to a stimulus that can cause a person with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to re-experience their trauma. Because the term "trigger warning" has become politicized, many educators prefer the terms content note or content advisory.

A PRIMARY GOAL OF A SAFE SPACE IS TO MINIMIZE PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM. FOR A STUDENT WITH A HISTORY OF TRAUMA (E.G., SEXUAL ASSAULT, COMBAT, VIOLENT LOSS OF A LOVED ONE), ENCOUNTERING A GRAPHIC DEPICTION OR DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THAT TRAUMA WITHOUT WARNING CAN BE DEEPLY DAMAGING.

Without a warning:

The student's brain may go into fight-or-flight mode. They are no longer able to learn; they are simply trying to survive the moment. This is a breach of psychological safety.



With a warning:

The student is given agency. They can choose to mentally prepare, step out of the room for a few minutes, or develop a plan with the instructor beforehand. The warning itself communicates, "I see you as a whole person, and your well-being matters here." This builds the trust essential for a Safe Space.





Content Notes Strategy

STEP 1: BE PROACTIVE, NOT REACTIVE.

Make content notes a regular habit, not just for the most sensitive topics. If you know a text contains graphic violence, sexual content, or trauma details, flag it ahead of time.

STEP 2: USE CLEAR, SPECIFIC, AND NON-JUDGMENTAL LANGUAGE.

Skip vague phrases like "This might be upsetting." Name the content clearly: "The reading includes a detailed, first-hand account of surviving a house fire—about two paragraphs."

STEP 3: PROVIDE THE WARNING IN MULTIPLE FORMATS.

In Writing: Add a syllabus note: "Content Note: This week's film contains gun violence."
Verbally: Give a heads-up at the end of class and again before discussion.

STEP 4: OFFER AGENCY AND CHOICE (WITHOUT CREATING EXTRA WORK)

Inform and empower. Offer options: step out without explanation, or email about an alternative assignment. The goal is engagement; if skipping the passage keeps them in the discussion, it worked.

STEP 5: FOLLOW UP AND NORMALIZE.

Check in after discussion: "Thanks for engaging. If anything resonated with you, I'm available and can point you to counseling resources."
Normalizes support-seeking.

SUMMARY: WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Content notes protect (Safe Space) and empower (Brave Space). They model care and transparency creating a classroom brave enough for anything.



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A Structured Routine for Navigating Sensitive and Controversial Issues (SCIs)

P.A.U.S.E PROTOCOL

What it is: P.A.U.S.E. is an acronym representing five sequential steps. Each step is explicitly linked to an SEL competency and a confidence-building outcome. Before engaging in a sensitive topic, walk students through the protocol. Post it on the wall or include it in the material as a reference guide.

P

PAUSE AND BREATHE

When I see a content note, I know I'm in control of my reaction. I can pause, breathe, and decide how to respond—rather than being blindsided and reacting instinctively. That gap between the trigger and my response reminds me I'm not powerless; I can choose what's best for me in that moment.



A

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR FEELINGS

The feelings check reminds me that every emotion is valid. I name it, I own it, and I move forward. No shame, no outburst—just awareness.



U

UNDERSTAND THE OTHER

Listening without planning my response changes everything. I hear more, understand better, and feel less defensive. And when I'm the one speaking, being genuinely heard makes me feel safe and valued.



S

SPEAK YOUR TRUTH (RESPECTFULLY)

"I" statements make speaking less intimidating. They keep conversations respectful and remind me that my truth isn't the only one. We can disagree without attacking.



E

EVALUATE AND REFLECT

I used to replay discussions in my head, cringing at things I said. But when we reflect together, I focus on growth instead of perfection. I notice what I'm proud of and what I can work on—and I leave class feeling okay, even if it was hard.





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Social Emotional Learning

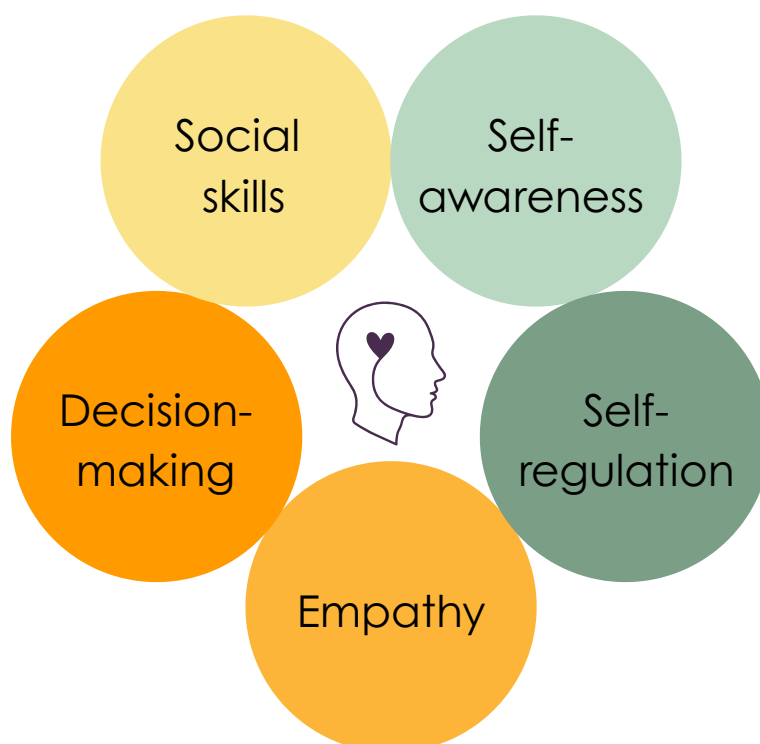
Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to:



- Develop healthy identities
- Manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals
- Feel and show empathy for others
- Establish and maintain supportive relationships
- Make responsible and caring decisions

Emotional Intelligence

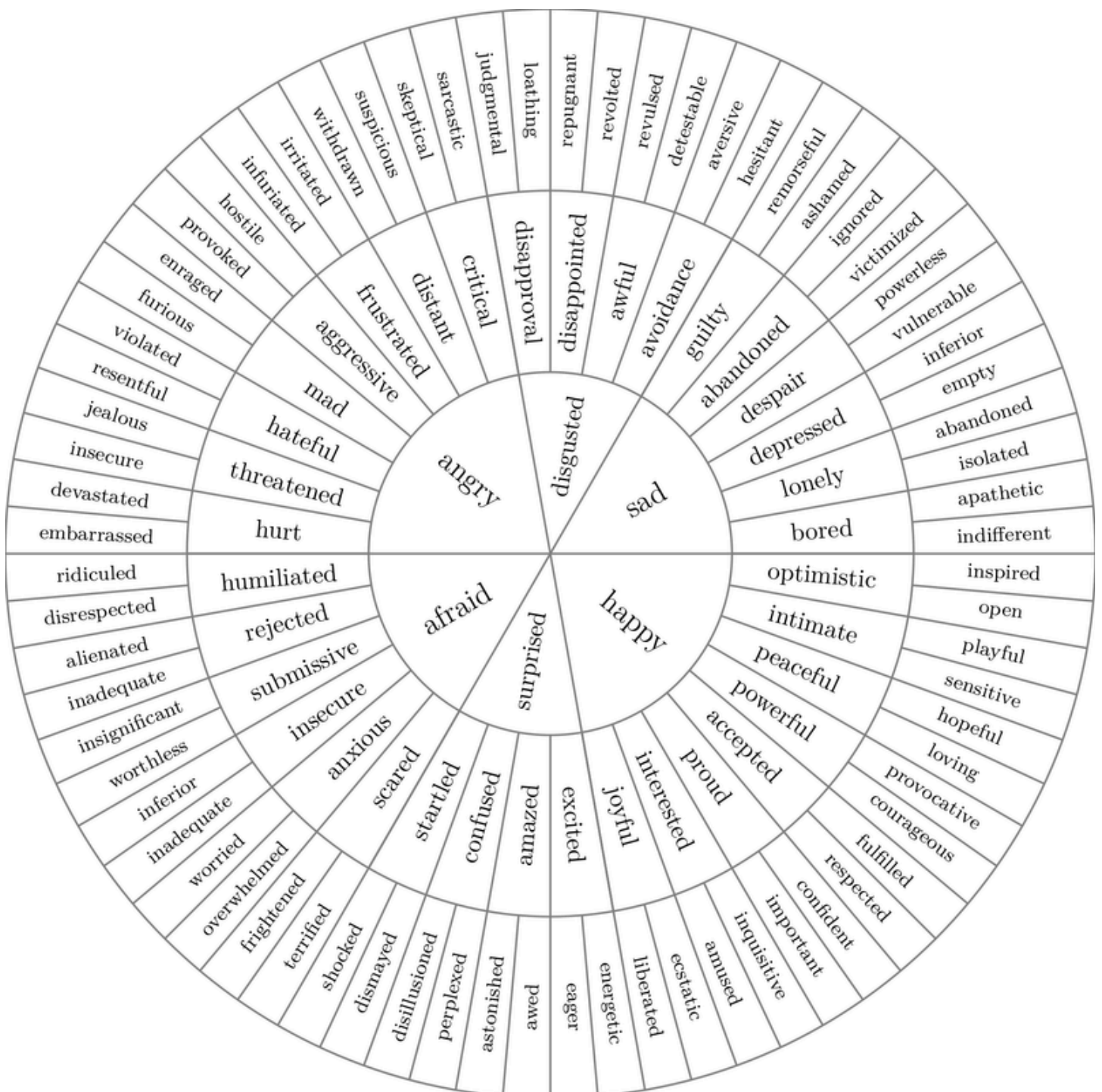
Emotional Intelligence (EI), popularized by psychologist Daniel Goleman, is broadly defined as the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and use emotions effectively. In the SCI classroom, EI operates on two levels: the intrapersonal (managing self) and the interpersonal (navigating others).





The Emotion Wheel

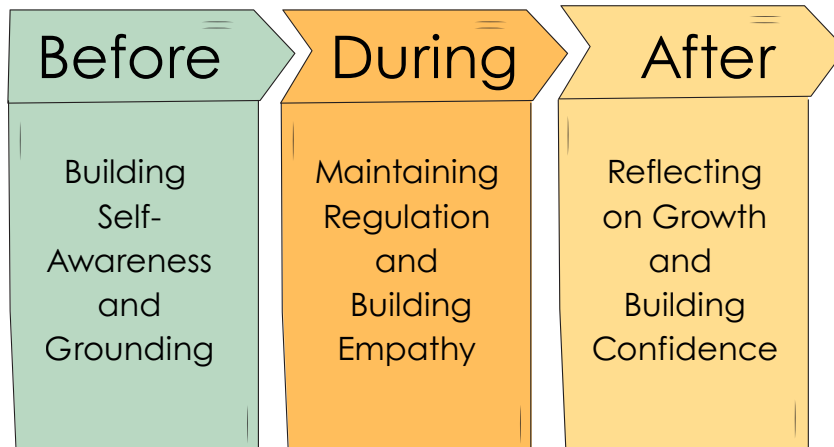
The Emotion Wheel is more than a poster on the wall. It is a tool that, when used consistently, transforms the way students relate to their own emotions and those of others.





The Emotion Wheel

This strategy integrates the Emotion Wheel into three distinct phases of classroom discussion:



By using the wheel at each stage, students learn that emotions are not obstacles to learning, rather they are data that can guide them.

Phase



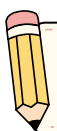
Before Discussion – Grounding and Self-Awareness **Routine 1: The "Check-In" Circle**

Instructions:

- As students enter the room or just before introducing a sensitive topic, hand each student a small copy of the Emotion Wheel or direct their attention to the poster.
- Ask them to take 90 seconds of silence. They should look at the wheel and identify one or two words that describe how they are feeling in that moment.
 - Option A (Private): Students write their emotion word(s) in their journal. This is for their eyes only.
 - Option B (Community): Go around the room and have each student share only their emotion word (no explanation). This builds a collective awareness of the room's emotional temperature.

Teacher Script:

"Before we begin our discussion, let's ground ourselves. Take a minute with the Emotion Wheel. Just notice what you're bringing into the room today. Are you feeling anxious? Curious? Tired? There's no right or wrong answer. Just name it for yourself."



Teacher Note:

Why It Builds Confidence:

Students learn that their feelings are valid and that they have a tool to understand themselves. This reduces the anxiety of the unknown and gives them a sense of control before the discussion even starts.



Routine 2: The Emotional Forecast

Instructions:

- Ask students to look at the Emotion Wheel and predict how they might feel during the upcoming discussion.
- Prompt: "We're about to talk about [topic]. Looking at the wheel, what emotions do you think might come up for you? What feelings are you bringing with you that might get triggered?"
- Students write this in their journals or share with a partner.

Teacher Script:

"If we know a storm is coming, we prepare. The same is true for emotions. If you think you might feel defensive or angry during this talk, you can prepare for that now. You can decide ahead of time how you want to respond."



Teacher Note:

Why It Builds Confidence:

Anticipating emotions reduces their power. Students feel prepared and proactive rather than caught off guard.

Phase

2

During Discussion – Regulation and Empathy

Routine 3: The "Pause and Name" Intervention

Instructions:

- When you notice the discussion becoming heated, tense, or overwhelming, pause the conversation.
- Direct students' attention to the Emotion Wheel.
- Ask them to silently identify what they are feeling in that exact moment.

Teacher Script:

"I'm noticing the energy in the room is getting intense. That's okay, but let's pause for 30 seconds. Look at the wheel. What are you feeling right now? Just notice it. Take a breath."



Teacher Note:

Why It Builds Confidence:

This teaches students that they can hit the "pause button" on their emotions. They learn that they are not slaves to their reactions. This builds confidence in their ability to stay in control during difficult moments



Routine 4: The "Empathy Turn"

Instructions:

- After a student shares a personal story or a strong opinion, invite the class to practice empathy using the Emotion Wheel.
- Ask students to consider what the speaker might be feeling.

Teacher Script:

"Thank you for sharing that. Before we respond, let's all take a moment with the wheel. If you were in [Student's Name]'s position, what emotions might you be feeling? You don't have to share out loud, just think about it."

"Now, [Student's Name], would you be willing to tell us if any of those guesses are close? What are you feeling right now?"



Teacher Note:

Why It Builds Confidence:

- The speaker feels seen and understood, which builds their confidence to share again.
- The listeners practice perspective-taking, which builds their confidence in navigating disagreement with empathy.

Routine 5: The "Feeling-Based Contribution"

Instructions:

- When students want to contribute to the discussion, encourage them to anchor their comment in an emotion from the wheel.
- This is not required for every comment, but it is a norm you can establish for sensitive moments.

Teacher Script:

"As you share, try to connect your idea to a feeling on the wheel. It might sound like, 'I feel frustrated when I hear that because...' or 'I feel hopeful about this because...'"



Teacher Note:

Why It Builds Confidence:

This structure protects students. By framing their comment as a feeling, they are less likely to be attacked for their idea. It also deepens the quality of the discussion by moving beyond pure facts into the human impact of the topic.



Phase



After Discussion – Reflection and Growth Routine 6: The "Emotional Arc" Reflection

Instructions:

- At the end of the discussion, give students 5 minutes to reflect in writing.
- Provide prompts that guide them to compare their emotional state before, during, and after the discussion.

Journal Prompts:

- Look back at the emotion word you wrote before we started. Did your feelings change during the discussion? What new emotions showed up?
- Was there a moment when you felt a strong emotion? How did you handle it?
- Is there anything you wish you had said but didn't? What held you back?
- What is one emotion word that describes how you feel now that the discussion is over?



Teacher Note:

Why It Builds Confidence:

Students see that they survived a challenging conversation. They also identify areas for growth, which turns silence or struggle into a learning opportunity rather than a failure.

Routine 7: The "Growth Check-In"

Instructions:

- Once a week or once a month, have students look back at their journal reflections.
- Ask them to notice patterns or growth.

Teacher Script:

"Look at your emotion words from the last few discussions. Do you notice any patterns? Are there emotions that show up a lot? Are there emotions that are showing up less often now than they did before? What does that tell you about your growth?"



Teacher Note:

Why It Builds Confidence:

This metacognitive practice helps students see themselves as learners who are growing. They realize that they are getting better at handling hard topics, which builds enduring confidence.



Values & Worldviews

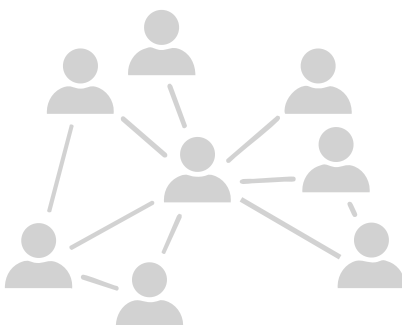
The purpose of this activity is to help students reflect on their values and worldviews by going below the waterline of the iceberg. Students write down five values that are important in their lives and rank them in order of importance. They then compare their lists with one another and consider how their values may be similar or different.

Through this exercise, students are encouraged to reflect intentionally on the experiences, people, and influences that have made them into who they are. In this way, they become more aware that their worldviews are connected to their values, and that these values are often shaped by ideas, relationships, and past experiences that strongly influence how they interact with others and with the world.

This activity also helps students understand polarization by showing that what may appear to be “polarized” views are often rooted in non-reflective deeper personal values and life experiences rather than in simple opposition or disagreement.

Instructions:

1. Identify five values that matter most to you and list them in order of importance. Once you have written them down, exchange your list with a colleague and compare your answers.
2. Then choose one or two of your top values and ask the other person: Was there a person, experience, or situation that strongly influenced why this value is important to you? How? Write a short note beside each selected value describing that influence.





Person 1

Which are my top 5 values?

Value	Influence

Person 2

Which are my top 5 values?

Value	Influence

Digging Deeper with the Spiral

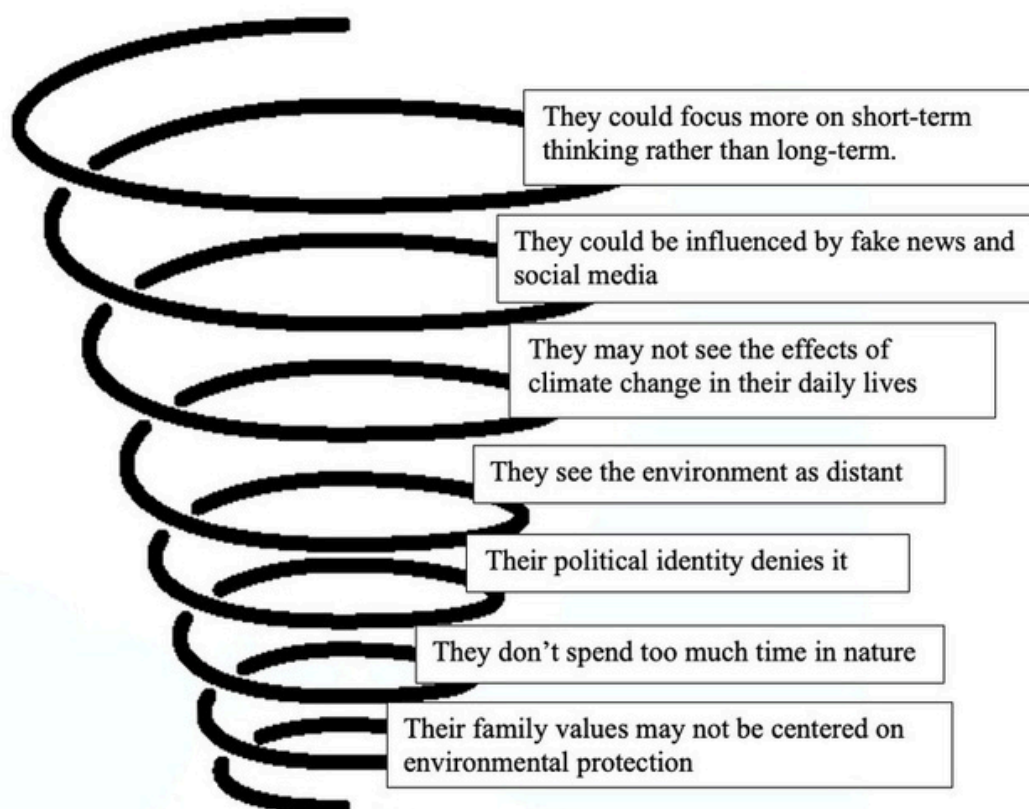
This activity helps students go deeper into ideas and understand what could be behind a person's views about the world.

Students are exposed to a series of scenarios of people with different worldviews, the core of the exercise is to go through the spiral identifying what are the layers of thoughts that may build up for the person to hold a particular view.

Example:

Scenario

Tom thinks environmental issues are exaggerated and does not believe climate change is real. He sees concerns about pollution, rising temperatures, or extreme weather as overreactions. Because of this, he does not pay much attention to recycling, saving energy, or reducing waste. When others talk about protecting nature or changing their habits for the environment, he tends to dismiss these actions as unnecessary or pointless.

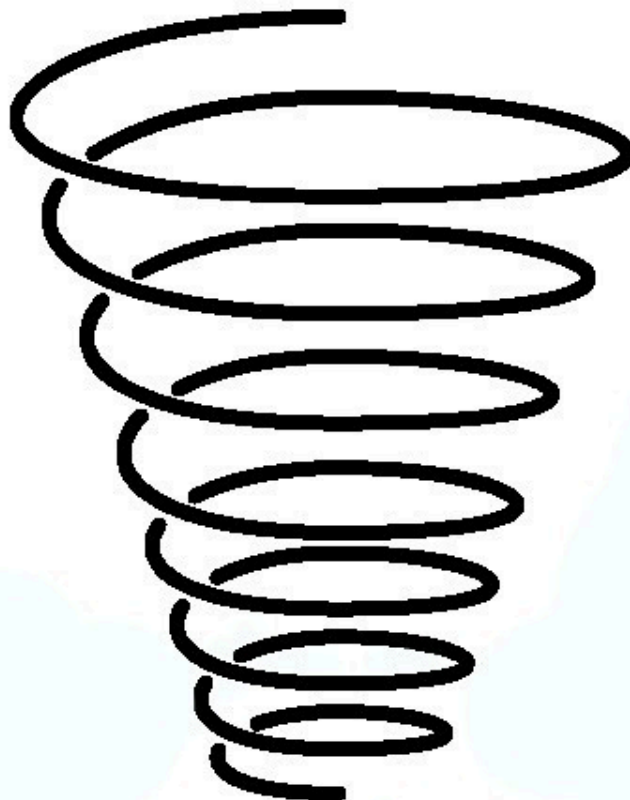


Instructions:

1. For each person described, look beyond the opinion you see on the surface and think about what may lie behind it. Work through the spiral step by step and identify the layers of thinking that may help explain why that person holds this particular worldview. Consider possible beliefs, values, experiences, influences, assumptions, or social surroundings that may shape their perspective.
2. Write down your ideas for each layer of the spiral. Focus on exploring what might be underneath the worldview, rather than judging whether it is right or wrong.

Scenario 1:

James believes that some ethnic groups are naturally less hardworking and less capable than others. Because of this, he tends to make quick judgments about people based on their background. In conversations, he supports stereotypes or assumes that some groups are less deserving of opportunities. When others challenge these views, he often dismisses their concerns as exaggerated or overly sensitive.





Scenario 2:

Simona believes that men are naturally better suited for leadership than women. Because of this, she tends to take men's opinions more seriously in group discussions and expects women to take on more supportive roles. When women speak confidently or take charge, she may see them as too aggressive or unsuitable for leadership. She says she is not a feminist and does not think feminism is necessary.

Scenario 3:

Amina believes that every person deserves dignity, safety, and equal treatment, regardless of their background, religion, gender, or identity. Because of this, she listens carefully to others and speaks out when she sees unfair treatment. When people are excluded or stereotyped, she believes it is important to respond with respect and fairness.

Scenario 4:

Sophie believes that people who are religious are less rational and less open-minded than those who are not. Because of this, she quickly dismisses religious perspectives in discussions about society, morality, or education. She tends to assume that religious beliefs are outdated and incompatible with modern life. When others speak positively about faith, she often reacts with skepticism or ridicule.

Scenario 5:

Samuel believes that no ethnic or cultural group is superior to another. Because of this, he tries to treat people as individuals rather than through stereotypes. When others make racist assumptions or jokes, he does not see them as harmless, but as harmful attitudes that affect how people are treated.



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Media Literacy and Critical Thinking

Strategies

Types of Media Literacy

1

Critical Analysis: The ability to question media messages by asking who created them, why, and what viewpoints are missing.

2

Creative Production: The skill to create your own media content responsibly, giving you a voice to share ideas and advocate for causes.

3

Digital Literacy: Understanding how platforms and algorithms work, including knowledge of data privacy, filter bubbles, and the business models driving social media.

4

Social & Emotional Literacy: Awareness of how media triggers emotions like fear or anger, and the ability to manage those responses while developing empathy for others.

5

Civic Media Literacy: Using all of these skills to participate in democracy, find reliable information, and engage constructively in civic life.

Misinformation & Disinformation

Misinformation

False or inaccurate information that is shared, but without the intent to harm or deceive. The person sharing it believes it to be true.

Example:

A student hears from a friend that the school is canceling a field trip because of budget cuts. They immediately text their parents and share the news in a group chat. Later, it turns out the friend misheard a conversation, and the trip is still on. The student spread false information, but they genuinely believed it was true and were not trying to cause panic.

Disinformation

False information that is deliberately created and shared with the specific intent to deceive, mislead, or cause harm.

Example:

A student privately sends a vulnerable, personal story to a friend for support. After an argument, that friend shares the story publicly to embarrass them. The story is true, but sharing it was an act of betrayal meant to cause pain.

"Fix the Caption"

Activity: Three Captions, One Photo – Understanding Intent

Objective: Students will distinguish between factual reporting, misinformation, and disinformation by writing captions with different intents.

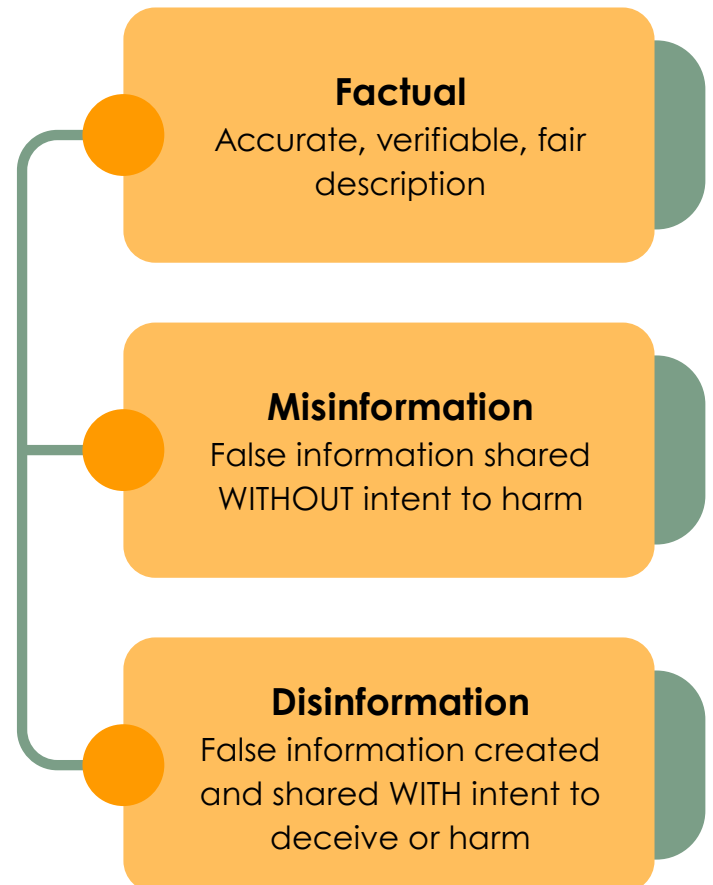
Instructions

Step 1: Image & Definitions (10 minutes)

- **Display** one of the suggested photographs (e.g., a crowded city street) on the screen.
- **Ask** the class: "If you had to describe what is happening in one sentence, what would you say?" (Write a few answers on the board).
- **Introduce the three core definitions** (Factual, Misinformation, Disinformation) clearly on a slide or handout. Emphasize that the only difference between #2 and #3 is **intent** (honest mistake vs. knowing deception).

Suggested Photograph Ideas

- A crowded city street
- A classroom full of students
- People waiting in line
- A busy school hallway
- A community event or fair



Example:





"Fix the Caption"

Step 2: Write the Three Captions (20 minutes)

- Instruct students to write one caption at a time using the same photograph. Pause briefly after each one to check for understanding before moving to the next.
- Caption 1 (Factual - 5 min): Write only what is literally visible. No opinions, no assumptions. (e.g., "Fifteen people stand on a sidewalk next to a red bus.")
- Caption 2 (Misinformation - 5 min): Write a caption where the writer makes an honest, accidental mistake. They misidentify something innocently. (e.g., "A crowd gathers to watch a street performer." ...when there is no performer).
- Caption 3 (Disinformation - 10 min): Write a caption where the writer knows it is false but shares it to cause anger, fear, or financial gain. (e.g., "Illegal immigrants are taking over our city streets!").

Example:



Factual

“A crowded subway platform with multiple trains, commuters waiting, and signs reading 'Public Subway,' 'Underground,' and 'Steamhouse.’”

Misinformation

“This looks like rush hour at London's Piccadilly Circus. I think it's an old railway depot turned into a food market, and people are queuing for holiday train tickets.”

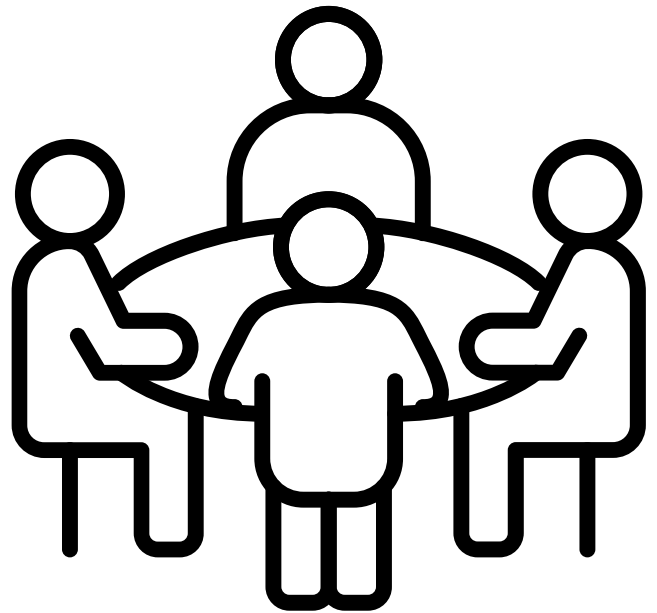
Disinformation

“BREAKING: Illegal immigrants are flooding London's subways, destroying local businesses and bringing crime to our streets!”

"Fix the Caption"

Step 3: Small Group Sharing (10 minutes)

- Break students into groups of 3–4.
- Have each student take turns reading aloud their three captions for the same photo—but without saying which is which.
- The group's job is to guess which caption is Factual, which is Misinformation, and which is Disinformation.
- Have each group vote on their favorite set of captions (the most creative or clearest example) to share with the whole class later.



Step 4: Whole Class Debrief (15 minutes)

- Bring the class back together and guide a discussion using the provided questions. Focus heavily on the emotional differences:
 - "How did it feel to write the factual caption vs. the disinformation caption?" (Students usually feel bored writing factual, but powerful or "dirty" writing disinformation).
 - "Which caption could cause the most real-world harm, and why?"
 - "What specific clues (words, exaggerations, emotional language) give away the disinformation caption as fake?"
- Write their detection "clues" on the board (e.g., all caps, vague claims, no named sources, extreme emotions).





"Fix the Caption"

Step 5: Exit Ticket & Wrap-Up (5 minutes)

- Hand out sticky notes or index cards. Have students complete these three sentences privately before they leave:
 - a. "One thing I learned today about MISINFORMATION..."
 - b. "One thing I learned today about DISINFORMATION..."
 - c. "One thing I will do differently when I see a powerful image online..."
- Collect these as they walk out the door. This gives you a quick grade and shows you exactly what stuck with them.



One thing I
learned about
misinformation

One thing I
learned about
disinformation

Seeing a viral
image, I will
now...

Extension Ideas (Optional)

- **Gallery Walk**

Post captions around room. Students guess which is factual, misinformation, or disinformation.

- **Create the Evidence**

Design a fake social media post to accompany your disinformation caption.

- **Reverse Engineering**

Find a real misleading viral image and infer the intent behind it.

- **Platform Response**

Write a comment or report flagging the disinformation caption.



BRIDGE Project: Building Respectful, Inclusive Dialogue for Genuine Engagement Sensitive and Controversial Topics in the Classroom (SCIs)

Emotional Forensics



What it is:

Teaching students to analyze their own emotional responses to media as a clue to manipulation.



How to teach it:

Show students a provocative headline, image, or post.

Ask: What emotion are you feeling right now? (Anger? Fear? Outrage? Joy?)

Follow up: Why might the creator want you to feel this way? What do they want you to do next? (Share? Click? Buy? Hate?)

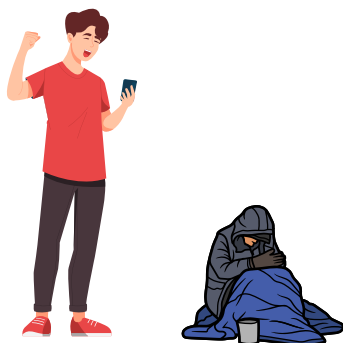


Connect to disinformation: Strong emotions short-circuit critical thinking. If content makes you instantly furious, that is a red flag to stop and investigate before sharing.



Why it works: It builds the social and emotional literacy needed to resist manipulation.

Here is a sample posts you can use. Adapt them to your students' age and context. Display one at a time. You can also have students select images.



Ask the key question:

"If this post is designed to make you angry and share it, what happens if you do exactly that—without verifying?"

Answer: You become a weapon for someone else's agenda. You spread their disinformation for them.

Post A: The Outrage Trigger

Image: A blurry photo of a politician smiling while looking at their phone.

Headline: "Politician Ignores Homeless Veteran to Check Social Media – Caught on Camera!"

Text: "While veterans sleep on the streets, this career politician can't even look up from their phone. Disgraceful. Share if you've had ENOUGH!"



Emotional Forensics

Teacher Script

"Your emotions are not just random reactions. They are data. Today we are going to become emotional detectives—or forensic scientists—investigating how content creators intentionally design posts to make us feel certain things. Because when we feel strongly, we stop thinking critically. And that is exactly what disinformation creators want."

The Emotional Forensics Framework

Question 1: What am I feeling?
Identify the emotion. Be specific. (Not just "bad" but "angry" or "humiliated" or "afraid.")

Question 2: What in this content triggered that feeling?
Look at the words, images, music, or headline. What specifically caused the reaction?

Question 3: Why would someone want me to feel this way?
Consider the creator's possible intent. What do they gain if I feel angry, scared, or outraged?

Question 4: What do they want me to do next?



Emotional Forensics

Small Group Practice

- Step 1: Divide students into small groups of 3-4.
- Step 2: Give each group one of the sample posts (or the ones students selected)
- Step 3: Distribute the Emotional Forensics Worksheet (see below). Instruct groups to complete it together.
- Step 4: Circulate and support groups as they work. Encourage them to dig deep into Question 3—who benefits?
- Step 5: After 10 minutes, ask each group to briefly share their findings with the class.

Whole Class Debrief

- Step 1: Bring the class back together. Ask each group to share their post and one key insight from their analysis.
- Step 2: Facilitate a deeper discussion using these questions:
 - Which post was easiest to analyze? Which was hardest? Why?
 - Did any post trigger an emotion that surprised you?
 - How does knowing about emotional manipulation change how you see posts like these?
 - Why do you think positive emotions (like joy or pride) can also be used manipulatively?
 - How might the Digital Services Act (DSA) help address content like this?
- Step 3: Connect back to the illusory truth effect and algorithmic amplification:
 - **Teacher Script:** "Remember: even if you don't share a post, just feeling that strong emotion makes the content memorable. And the more times you see something—even if you don't believe it—the more familiar and 'true' it feels over time. Algorithms notice what you stop and look at. They will show you more of the same. This is how filter bubbles form."



Emotional Forensics Worksheet

Post being analyzed: _____

Question 1: What am I feeling?
List the primary emotion(s) this post triggers.

Question 2: What in this content triggered that feeling?
Look closely. What specific words, images, or details caused the reaction?

Question 3: Why would someone want me to feel this way?
Consider intent. Who benefits if you feel this emotion? What is their goal?

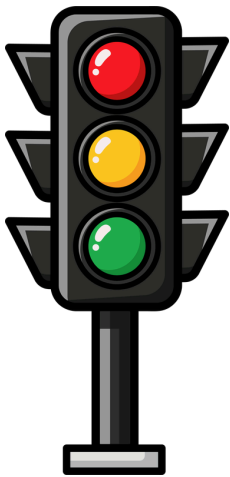
Question 4: What do they want me to do next?
Share? Click? Comment? Buy? Hate? Distrust? Be specific.

Verdict:
Is this more likely misinformation (honest mistake) or disinformation (deliberate manipulation)? Why?

Emotional Forensics

Personal Commitment – The "Red Light" Pause (5 minutes)

- Step 1: Introduce the Red Light, Yellow Light, Green Light system:



● Red Light

I feel intense emotion (fury, terror, disgust)
STOP. Do not share. Investigate first.

● Yellow Light

I feel curious or mildly interested
PAUSE. Verify before sharing.

● Green Light

I have verified the information
PROCEED with sharing if appropriate.

- Step 2: Give each student a sticky note. Ask them to complete this sentence:
 - "The next time I feel a ● RED LIGHT emotion online, I will..."
 - Examples:
 - "...close the tab and come back in 10 minutes."
 - "...ask myself: Who benefits from my anger?"
 - "...check the source before sharing."
 - "...talk to someone I trust about it first."
- Step 3: Invite volunteers to share their commitments. Collect the sticky notes and display them in the classroom as a reminder.

CRAAP-Based Source Evaluation

The CRAAP test is a structured method used to evaluate the credibility and reliability of information sources. It helps students critically assess whether a source is appropriate for fact-checking or academic work.

The acronym CRAAP stands for Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose. Students analyze a source using these five criteria before trusting or using the information.

Key Steps

 **CRAAP Source Check**

Quick questions to evaluate a source

- C** — **Currency:** Is the information **current**?
- R** — **Relevance:** Does it fit the topic or question?
- A** — **Authority:** Who **created** the information?
- A** — **Accuracy:** Is it supported by evidence or sources?
- P** — **Purpose:** Why was the information **created** (inform, persuade, sell, entertain)?



“Check Three Sources” Rule

Students verify a claim by finding the same information in three different reliable sources (for example: a major news outlet, an educational website, and an official organization). If the information appears consistently across sources, it is more likely to be accurate.

Template: “Check Three Sources” Fact-Checking Activity

Students verify a claim by comparing information across multiple reliable sources.

Step 1 – Identify the Claim

Write the claim you want to verify.

Example:

Claim: _____

Step 2 – Find Three Reliable Sources

Source	Type of Source	What does it say about the claim?
Source 1	(news / educational site / official organization)	_____ _____
Source 2	(news / educational site / official organization)	_____ _____
Source 3	(news / educational site / official organization)	_____ _____

Students should include the title of the article/page and the website name.



Step 3 – Compare the Information

- Do the sources agree, partly agree, or disagree?
- Are they using evidence, data, or expert statements?

Answer:

Step 4 – Conclusion

Based on the three sources, how accurate is the claim?

☐ Likely true ☐ Unclear / mixed evidence ☐ Likely false

Reason:



Image and Media Verification

Students learn to use reverse image search (e.g., Google Images) to check whether a picture has been used before in a different context. This helps detect misleading images or reused photos in fake stories.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Identify the claim | What claim or story is the image supporting? |
| 2. Run a reverse image search | Upload or paste the image into a reverse image search tool (e.g., Google Image.) |
| 3. Check where the image appears | Look at other websites where the image is used. |
| 4. Compare the context | Is the image used in the same event, place, and time? |
| 5. Draw a conclusion | Decide whether the image supports the claim or is used in a misleading way. |

Template next page

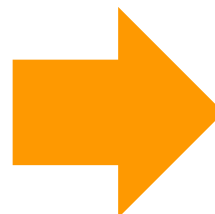




Image and Media Verification

1. Identify the Image Claim

What claim is the image supporting?

Claim: _____



2. Reverse Image Search

Use a reverse image search tool (e.g., Google Images).

Source Website

Date

Context of the Image

1

2

3

3. Compare the Results

Has the image appeared before?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Is it used in the same context?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Any signs of editing or misleading framing?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Notes: _____



4. Conclusion

☐ Correctly used image ☐ Real image but misleading context

☐ Manipulated or misrepresented image

Explanation: _____





Date and Context Check

Students learn to verify when, where, and under what circumstances information was originally produced before accepting or sharing it.

Information can be misleading when it is removed from its original context. Even accurate content (a real photo, statistic, or news article) can create a false impression if it is presented as something recent or related to a different event.

Key Elements Students Examine

1. Publication date

Students check when the information was originally published.

Example:

A news article about protests from 2015 might circulate on social media during a current political event, making it appear as if the protests are happening now.

2. Location

Students verify where the event actually took place.

Example:

An image from a natural disaster in one country might be shared online and falsely claimed to be from another country experiencing a crisis.

3. Context

Students consider the circumstances surrounding the information.

Example:

A statistic about unemployment might come from a specific economic crisis period, but it could be reused later without explaining the conditions under which it was collected.



Date and Context Check

Objective

Verify whether information is current and used in the correct context.

1. Identify the Claim or Information

What information is being shared?

Claim / Headline: _____

Source (website or post): _____



2. Check Key Context Details

Element What does the source say?

Publication date _____

Location of the event _____

Author / organization _____

3. Look for Original Context

Find another source reporting the same information.

	Source	Date	Context
1	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____



4. Evaluate the Context

- Is the information recent? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Is it being shared in the correct location/event? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Could this be old information reused as current news? ☐ Yes ☐ No



Notes: _____

5. Conclusion

- ☐ Information is current and correctly used
- ☐ Information is old but reshared as new
- ☐ Context is unclear or misleading

Explanation: _____

Claim vs. Evidence Separation

Students learn to distinguish between claims, opinions, and supporting evidence in texts or media. This helps them evaluate whether a statement is actually supported by reliable information.

- 1. Identify the claim**
Determine the main statement the author is trying to convince the reader of.
- 2. Locate the supporting evidence**
Identify the information used to support the claim (e.g., data, statistics, expert quotes, examples).
- 3. Separate opinions from evidence**
Distinguish statements that express opinions, interpretations, or judgments from those supported by evidence.
- 4. Evaluate the evidence**
Assess whether the evidence is relevant, credible, and drawn from reliable sources.
- 5. Assess the claim**
Decide whether the evidence sufficiently supports the claim.





KEY STEPS


 **CLAIM vs. EVIDENCE** 

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Wheel of Power and Perspective for Fact-Checking

Students learn to analyze how power, identity, and social position may influence the way information is produced, framed, or interpreted. The goal is not only to check whether information is correct, but also to understand whose perspective is represented and whose may be missing.

Students use a Wheel of Power and Perspective to situate a claim, article, or media message within broader social contexts.

Key Steps

1. Identify the claim or news item

What statement, story, or argument is being presented?

2. Identify the source and author

Who produced this information? What organization, group, or institution is behind it?

3. Locate the perspective on the Wheel of Power

Consider which social positions may shape the perspective of the author or source.

4. Analyze potential bias or framing

Ask how power, privilege, or marginalization may influence:

- ☐ what is emphasized
- ☐ what is omitted
- ☐ how the issue is framed





5. Consider missing perspectives

Which groups or viewpoints might not be represented in the information?

6. Reflect on interpretation

How might the story look different from another social position or perspective?

Power and Perspective

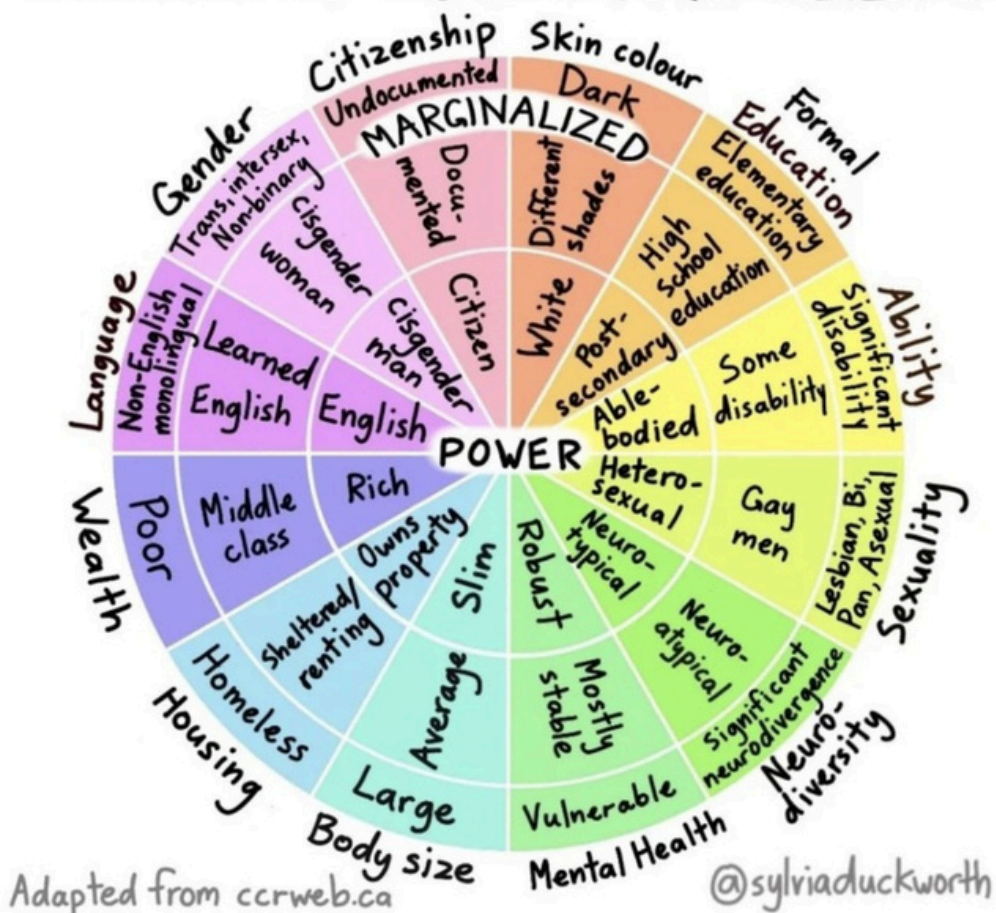
Whose perspective is centered here?

Which groups might be affected by this issue?

Which voices are missing?

How might power relations influence the way this story is told?

WHEEL OF POWER/PRIVILEGE





Fact or Opinion?

This strategy is excellent for students to develop strong critical thinking skills while engaging with SCIs. It provides opportunities for deep reflection and for students to think about reasons behind statements. With these cards, students can engage with complex statements that will challenge them to think along the lines of reason.

Instructions

Ask students to read each statement carefully and decide whether it is a fact or an opinion.

For each one:

1. Label it as Fact or Opinion.
2. Justify your answer by explaining why.
3. Ask students:
 - Can this statement be checked with evidence or reliable sources?
 - Is it a verifiable claim, or does it express a belief, interpretation, or position?



Teacher Note:

Practical scenarios to use in the next page

You will find different scenarios ready to print in the next page but you always change them and add different scenarios to your students. In the following pages you find the written down scenarios and a template in blank for you to fill in



Fact or Opinion?

FACT OR OPINION?

Discussing civic topics like voting rights is part of many school curricula.

FACT OR OPINION?

Teachers should never share their political views with students.

FACT OR OPINION:

Generalizing behavior to an entire group based on identity (e.g., migrants) fits standard definitions of stereotyping.



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Fact or Opinion?

FACT OR OPINION?

Same-sex relationships exist across cultures and history, documented in sociology, anthropology, and psychology.

FACT OR OPINION?

Same-sex marriage is wrong.

FACT OR OPINION:

Gender is entirely biological and cannot change.



Fact or Opinion?

FACT OR OPINION?

FACT OR OPINION?

FACT OR OPINION:



BRIDGE Project: Building Respectful, Inclusive Dialogue for Genuine Engagement Sensitive and Controversial Topics in the Classroom (SCIs)

Bias, Stereotypes, & Microaggressions

Strategies



Bias, Stereotypes, & Microaggressions

Before a teacher can even begin to facilitate a discussion on a controversial topic (like politics, race, or historical atrocities), they must first cultivate an environment where the invisible forces of bias, stereotypes, and microaggressions are understood and mitigated.

A classroom is never neutral. These three forces shape the learning environment every day, whether acknowledged or not.

BIAS

Bias acts as the invisible filter through which students and teachers judge who is "smart," who is "trouble," and who belongs.

STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes place students in boxes, pressuring them to conform to expectations or fight against labels, which steals cognitive energy away from learning.

MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions are the daily, often invisible wounds that tell students they are different, they are lesser, or they are unwelcome



Bias, Stereotypes, & Microaggressions

Teacher Check-list: Bias in Practice

☐

Can students identify assumptions about people based on gender, race, culture, ability, or other characteristics?

☐

Do students notice when language, tone, or imagery in media or texts reflects bias?

☐

Can students point out missing perspectives or voices in a story, article, or discussion?

☐

Do students understand that bias can be unconscious and unintentional?

☐

Do students attempt to understand the feelings or experiences of those affected by bias?

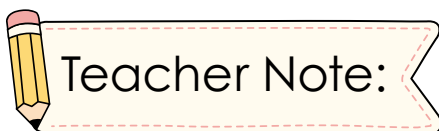
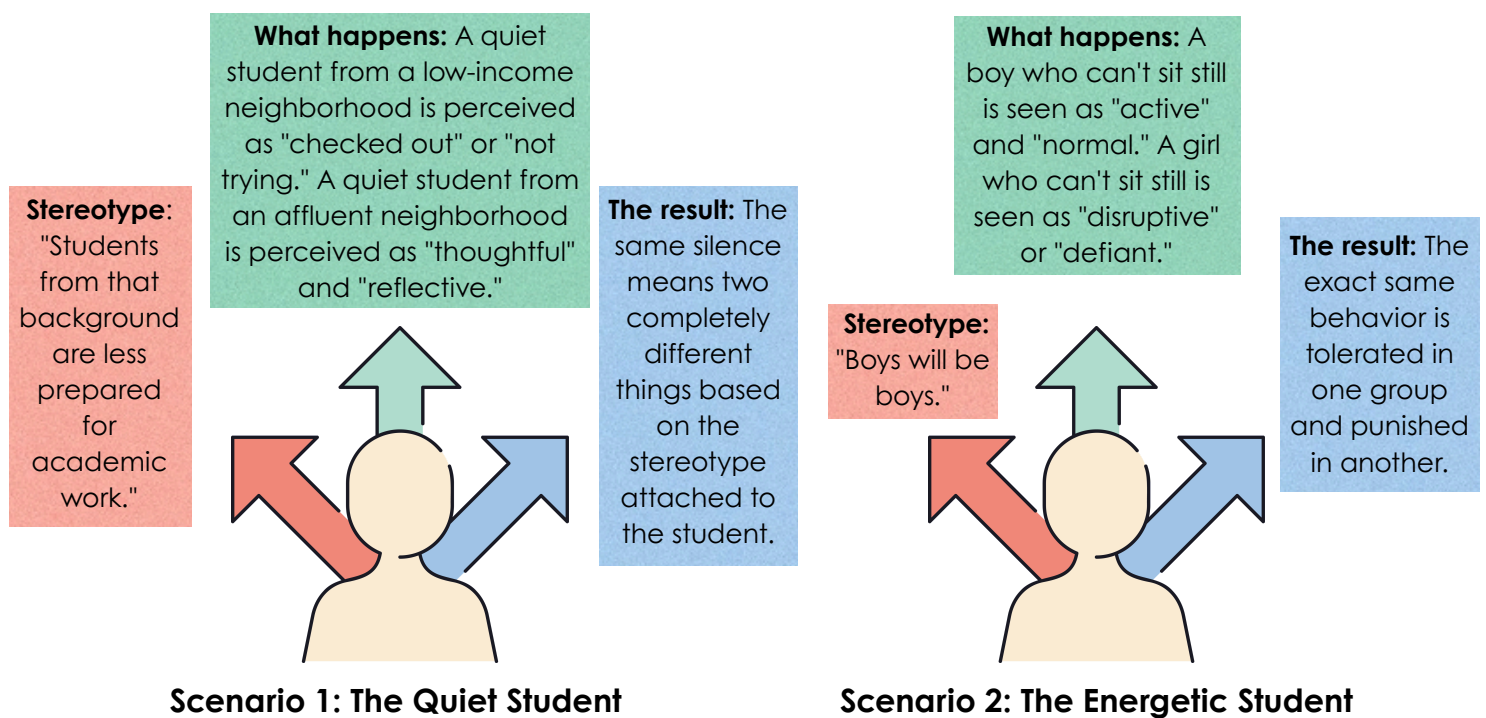
☐

Do students practice inclusive behavior in group work, discussions, or collaborative projects?



Understanding Stereotypes in the Classroom

In the classroom, stereotypes are rigid, oversimplified assumptions about students based on gender, race, class, ability, or other identities. They matter because they work beneath awareness, subtly influencing who you call on, who receives harder questions, who gets interrupted, whose misbehavior is overlooked, and whether you praise effort or intelligence.



Reflection questions:

- How might my background and life experiences shape what I notice, value, or expect in students?
- Which students do I feel most naturally connected to? What might be the basis of that connection?
- Which students do I find more difficult to connect with? What might be getting in the way?
- When I imagine "my ideal student," what do they look like, sound like, and act like? Where did that image come from?
- How do my own school experiences—positive and negative—influence how I treat students today?



Microaggressions in the Classroom

When a microaggression occurs in the classroom, silence is interpreted as agreement. However, a harsh, public scolding can shut down the student who committed it and make the targeted student feel like a spectacle. The key is to intervene in a way that is firm but educational.

Situation	Response Goal	Sample Action
A microaggression happens in class.	Stop the harm, uphold the norm.	"Let's pause. That language isn't okay here. [Student], see me after class."
A student seems hurt but no one saw it.	Build trust and support.	Private check-in: "I noticed you seemed upset earlier. I'm here if you want to talk."
The aggressor didn't mean harm.	Educate and build empathy.	Private conversation: "I know you didn't mean it, but here is why that was hurtful..."
The class has a pattern of this.	Systemic change.	Re-teach norms, diversify curriculum, bring in a guest speaker or a new text.



Teacher Note:

By moving from reaction to prevention, a teacher transforms their classroom from a place where harm is merely punished into a place where respect is actively taught.

Microaggressions and Sensitive and Controversial Issues

Step-by-Step

1. **Prepare thoroughly:** Know your "why," the content, and your students' backgrounds.



2. **Create a "brave space":** Establish guidelines for respectful discomfort and engagement.



3. **Teacher as facilitator:** Guide inquiry and remain neutral; avoid debating your personal views



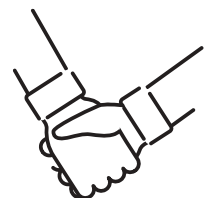
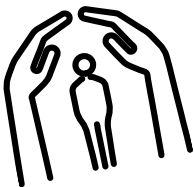
4. **Validate emotions:** Acknowledge feelings while focusing on academic content and evidence.



5. **Handle "hot moments":** Pause, inquire with open-ended questions, and restate/reframe.



6. **Protect marginalized voices:** Don't let one student be the spokesperson for a group.



7. **Accept non-closure:** Complex issues don't need tidy answers; deeper thinking is the goal.



The "Draw a Scientist" Experiment – Bias in Life

Part 1: The Classic Experiment (15 Minutes)

Objective: To reveal the internal bias students may hold.



1. Distribute Paper: Give each student a blank piece of paper and drawing materials.
2. The Prompt: Ask them to draw a scientist. Be specific with your wording: "I don't want you to draw a specific scientist you've heard of. Just close your eyes and think of a scientist. Now, draw the first image that comes into your head."
3. No Peeking: Ask students not to look at their neighbor's drawings yet.
4. Collect and Display: Collect the drawings and quickly sort them into two piles: "Male-presenting scientists" and "Female/Other/Ambiguous scientists."
5. Reveal the Data: Tape the drawings to the board or hold them up. Ask the students to observe the patterns.
 - "What do you notice about these drawings?"
 - "How many have lab coats? How many have glasses? Wild hair?"
 - The Key Question: "How many of these scientists look male? How many look female?"

The Reveal:

Explain to students that this is a real, famous psychological experiment called the "Draw a Scientist Test" (DAST) . For decades, when this test was given, over 90% of children drew a man. This happens because, for a long time, media, history books, and even our culture mostly showed male scientists.



BRIDGE Project: Building Respectful, Inclusive Dialogue for Genuine Engagement Sensitive and Controversial Topics in the Classroom (SCIs)

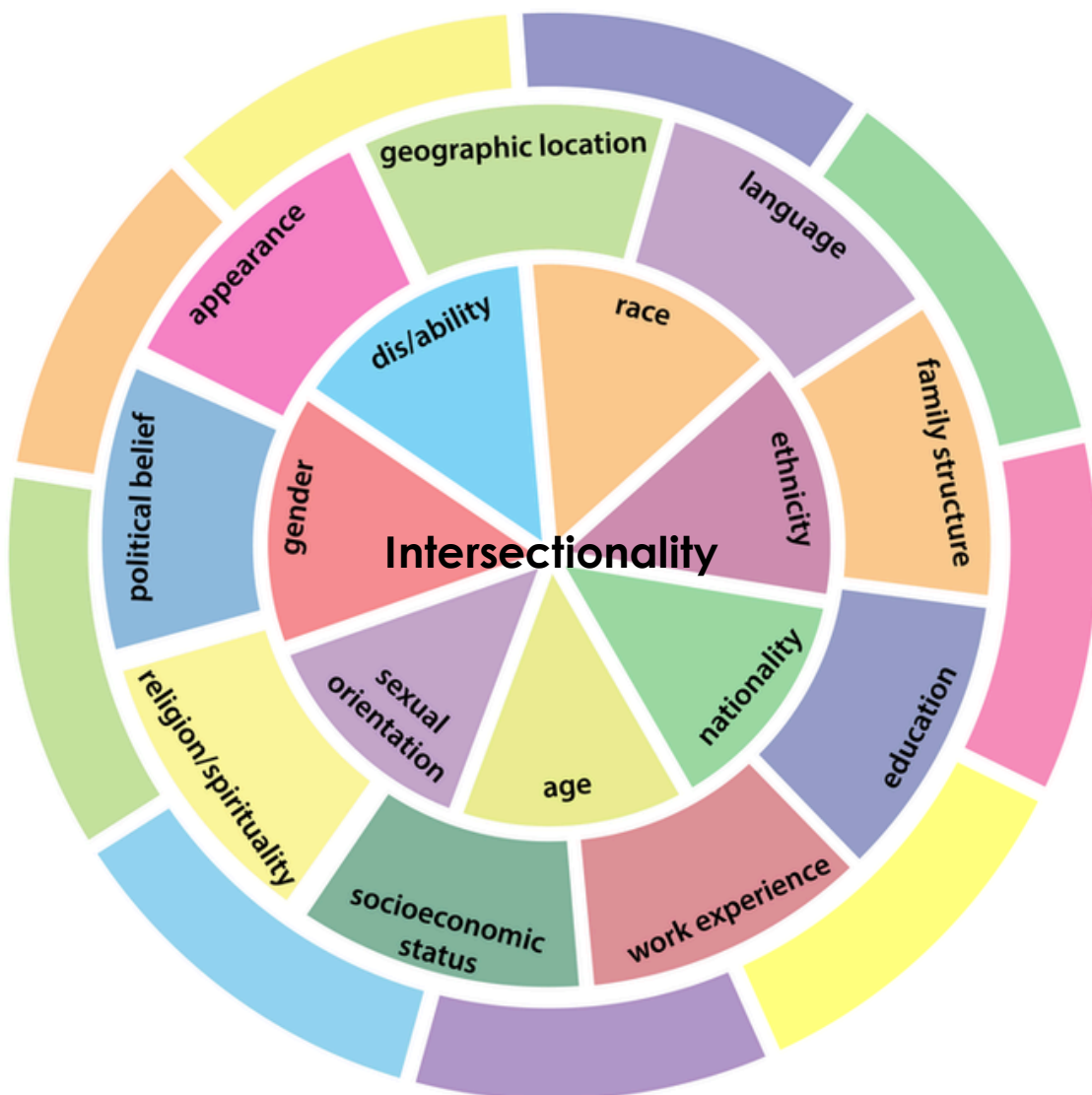
Intersectionality

Strategies

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it locks and intersects. It is the acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and privilege.

-Kimberlé Crenshaw





Intersectionality

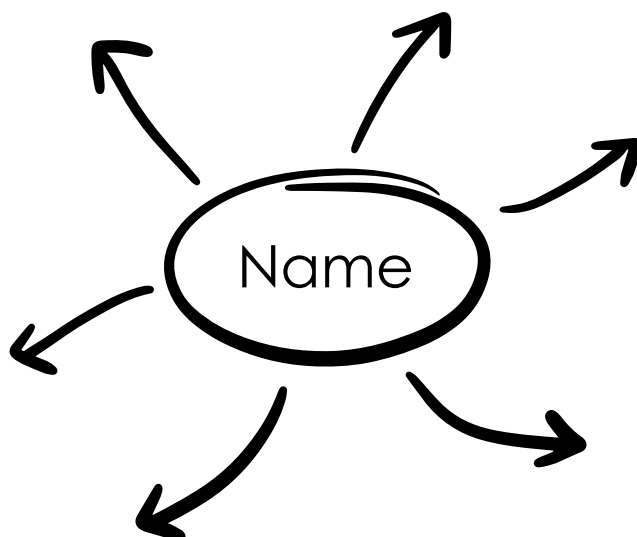
Why DEI Matters in the Classroom

Term	Definition	Why It Matters Intersectionally
Diversity	The <i>presence</i> of varied identities, perspectives, and backgrounds in the classroom.	Without diversity, we erase the lived reality of students with overlapping identities and miss critical perspectives.
Inclusion	The <i>active engagement</i> and belonging of all students—ensuring they are heard, respected, and centered.	Without inclusion, diverse students are merely "tolerated" rather than empowered, and intersectional voices remain silenced.
Equity	The <i>fair distribution</i> of resources, support, and opportunity based on individual need, not sameness.	Without equity, we ignore how intersecting barriers compound disadvantage—treating unequal students equally only deepens inequality.

Intersectionality

Who Am I? Activity

Objective: Help students reflect on and share their multiple, overlapping identities in a creative, low-pressure way—and explore how those identities intersect to shape their unique experiences.



- **Step 1: Mind-Map:** Ask students to draw a mind-map and have them answer the question: Who am I? (Whatever they want to share about themselves)
- **Step 2: Think, Pair, Share:** Have students get into pairs and share
- **Step 3: Big Group Discussion:**
 - What was easy to share? What was harder?
 - Which parts of your identity do people usually see first?
 - Which parts are less visible but still important to you?
 - How does this activity help us understand each other better?



Teacher Note:

Quick Variation (for younger students or time limits):

Use a simple template with 6 boxes instead of a mind map:
| My name | My family | My culture | My favorite things |
What I'm good at | What matters to me |



BRIDGE Project: Building Respectful, Inclusive Dialogue for Genuine Engagement Sensitive and Controversial Topics in the Classroom (SCIs)

Inclusion Strategy: In & Out of Ideas



Purpose

In SCI discussions, students may feel reluctant to participate when topics intersect with identity, religion, nationality, or community. This activity helps redistribute responsibility for explaining perspectives so that no student feels expected to represent a group they belong to. Instead, the class collectively engages with ideas.

Activity Overview

In & Out of Ideas is a short participatory exercise that separates ideas from the individuals who might be associated with them. By temporarily moving ideas “in” and “out” of the discussion space, students explore perspectives without attaching them to classmates’ identities.

Step 1: Idea Collection (Anonymous)

Students individually write one idea, question, or perspective related to the topic on a card or digital note. These should not reflect personal identity, but rather possible viewpoints someone might have.

“One perspective someone might have about migrants is that our country should not welcome them...”

“A concern people might raise about migration is that if we ban everyone we are not fair...”

“A question that often comes up in debates about this issue...”



Step 2: The “In & Out” Discussion

Students sit in two circles:

Inner circle (“In”) – discusses one of the redistributed ideas.

Outer circle (“Out”) – listens and observes.

Students in the inner circle speak on behalf of the idea they received, explaining or questioning it. They are not required to agree with it.

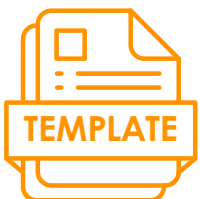
After several minutes, groups switch roles and a new idea is discussed.

Perspective 1

Perspective 3

Perspective 2

Perspective 4





BRIDGE Project: Building Respectful, Inclusive Dialogue for Genuine Engagement Sensitive and Controversial Topics in the Classroom (SCIs)

Communication

Strategies



BRIDGE Project: Building Respectful, Inclusive Dialogue for Genuine Engagement Sensitive and Controversial Topics in the Classroom (SCIs)

Cultivating Assertive Communication



Assertive Communication for Students

Talking About Sensitive and Controversial Issues in Class

Assertive Communication: A way of communicating where you say what you think, feel, or need clearly and respectfully, while also respecting other people's right to think and feel differently.

Traits of Assertive Student Communicators

- Says what they think clearly
- Listens without interrupting
- Speaks in a calm tone
- Disagrees without being rude
- Stays on the topic
- Uses confident and respectful body language

Assertiveness Tips for Students

- Your opinion matters and so does everyone else's.
- You have the right to speak up, disagree, or ask questions, but without putting someone else down.
- Say what you mean, but don't attack.
- You can be honest without being rude, sarcastic, or aggressive.
- Take a second before reacting.

Good examples of Assertive Communication



"I don't really see it that way. But what you are saying has relevance."

The student disagrees clearly at the same time acknowledging the other's opinion.

"I don't really see it that way. Can I explain how I understand it?"

The student disagrees clearly without shutting the other person down.

"I'm okay with disagreement, but not with people making it personal." The student sets a boundary respectfully.

"That's your view, but I see it differently based on what I know."

The student expresses a different opinion without attacking.

Bad examples of Assertive Communication



"That's stupid. You clearly don't know what you're talking about."

The student attacks the other person instead of disagreeing with the idea.

"Whatever. I don't care what you think."

The student dismisses the other person rather than communicating their own opinion respectfully.

"You're wrong, and I'm right."

The student states disagreement aggressively and leaves no room for discussion.

"If you actually understood the topic, you'd agree with me."

The student makes the disagreement personal and insulting.



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Practice

Tip: Before replying, think: What do I actually want to say, and how can I say it without making things worse?

Student: "That opinion is stupid."

Assertive Response:

Student: "You're wrong. End of story." Assertive Response:

Student: "That's the dumbest thing I've heard".

Assertive Response:

Student: "You're just making that up"

Assertive Response:

Student: "There's no point arguing with you."

Assertive Response:



Non-violent communication

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is a way of speaking that helps people express themselves without blaming or attacking others. It focuses on describing what happened, how you feel, and what you need. Then, you make a clear and respectful request. It also involves listening carefully to the other person's feelings and needs. The goal is to handle conflict with more understanding and respect.

How You Can Use the NVC Process



Clearly expressing
how **I am**
without blaming
or criticizing

Empathically receiving
how **you are**
without hearing
blame or criticism

OBSERVATIONS

1. What I observe (*see, hear, remember, imagine, free from my evaluations*) that does or does not contribute to my well-being:
"When I (see, hear) . . . "

1. What you observe (*see, hear, remember, imagine, free from your evaluations*) that does or does not contribute to your well-being:
"When you see/hear . . . "
(Sometimes unspoken when offering empathy)

FEELINGS

2. How I feel (*emotion or sensation rather than thought*) in relation to what I observe:
"I feel . . . "

2. How you feel (*emotion or sensation rather than thought*) in relation to what you observe:
"You feel . . . "

NEEDS

3. What I need or value (*rather than a preference, or a specific action*) that causes my feelings:
"... because I need/value . . . "

3. What you need or value (*rather than a preference, or a specific action*) that causes your feelings:
"... because you need/value . . . "

Clearly requesting that
which would enrich **my**
life without demanding

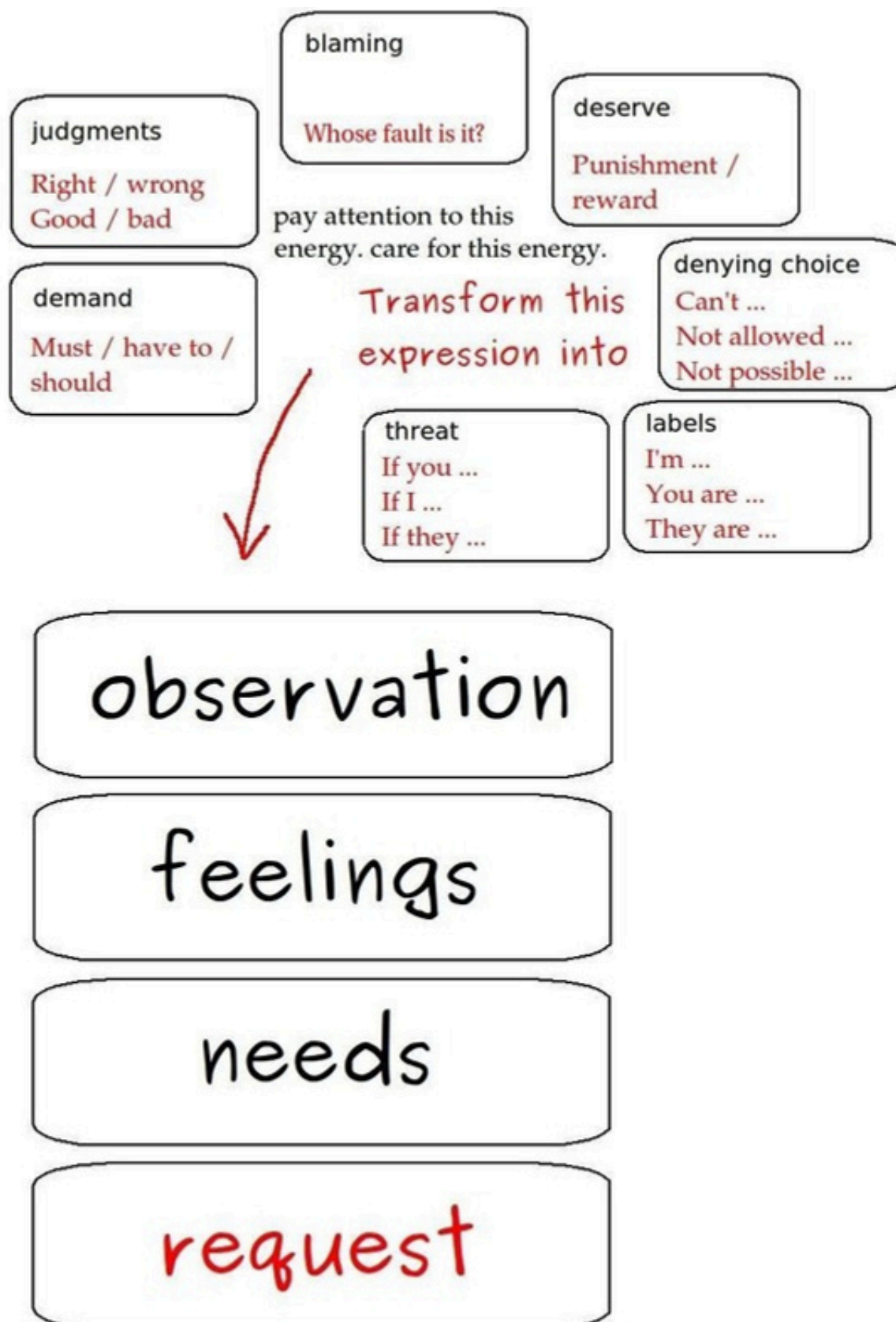
Empathically receiving that
which would enrich **your** life
without hearing any demand

REQUESTS

4. The concrete actions I would like taken:
"Would you be willing to . . . ?"

4. The concrete actions you would like taken:
"Would you like . . . ?"
(Sometimes unspoken when offering empathy)







What to do? Guide students to:

1 Observe

Describe what is happening in the discussion without judgment and identify the issue that has emerged.

Example:

"I notice that the discussion has shifted to the topic of gender equality."



2 Express feelings

Acknowledge the emotions present in the classroom.

Example:

"It seems that some of you feel strongly about this issue."



3 Express needs

Clarify the needs of the classroom environment, such as respectful dialogue and balanced participation.

Example:

"For this discussion to be productive, we need to listen carefully to different perspectives."



4 Request

Guide the discussion with a clear request.

Example:

"Let's take turns explaining our viewpoints and responding respectfully to each other."



Teacher Note:

If there isn't enough time to address every single step, feel free to adapt. In the next page you find an example for when there's not enough time.



If There Is Not Enough Time to Address the Issue (3 Steps)

1. Observation

Recognize that a sensitive issue has appeared in the discussion.

Example:

"I see that this topic is raising important questions."



2. Feelings

Acknowledge that students may have strong reactions.

Example:

"I can see that some of you feel strongly about this."



3. Request

Propose postponing the discussion to a more appropriate moment.

Example:

"Since we do not have enough time to explore this properly now, would you be willing to continue this conversation in our next class?"



Why use it even when there's limited time?

This structure allows teachers to acknowledge the issue, manage emotions, and maintain a respectful learning environment, whether the discussion continues immediately or is postponed.

- Teachers get control over difficult discussions
- Turn them quickly into learning opportunities
- Decide whether to pursue that talk now or later, not dismissing but acknowledging





Democratic Communication

What is Democratic Communication? It is open, respectful dialogue where everyone can express their views, question ideas, listen to others, and disagree without attacking or discriminating against people. This strategy allows teachers to foster this type of communication through key questions that go deeper into views.

The Fine Line: The difference often lies in the intent and impact of the comments is important when it comes to communicating through freedom of speech and hate speech.

Freedom of Speech: This is a fundamental right in many democracies, allowing individuals to express their thoughts, opinions, and beliefs without fear of censorship or legal repercussions. Freedom of speech is essential for a healthy and open society, encouraging dialogue, debate, and the exchange of ideas. However, this freedom comes with responsibilities and is not absolute; it does not protect speech that incites violence, constitutes hate speech, or violates the law.

Hate Speech: These comments are derogatory, demeaning, or dismissive and can harm the dignity and self-esteem of individuals or groups. Disrespectful comments often target someone's race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or any other personal attribute in a negative manner. Such comments may not necessarily be illegal or outside the bounds of free speech protections, but they can be harmful, creating a hostile environment for those targeted.





Democratic Communication

What is Democratic Communication? It is open, respectful dialogue where everyone can express their views, question ideas, listen to others, and disagree without attacking or discriminating against people. This strategy allows teachers to foster this type of communication through key questions that go deeper into views.

Exercise:

1) Choose one of the topics of discussion

*preferably topic that one agrees, and another disagrees.

Impact of Social Media on Society: Social media does more harm than good by spreading misinformation and fostering unrealistic life expectations.

Digital Books vs. Printed Books: Printed books will become obsolete as digital books and readers become more prevalent.

Education Technology: The increased reliance on technology in education is detracting from the development of critical thinking and interpersonal skills.

School Uniforms: School uniforms limit students' self-expression and should not be required in schools.



Important

These are just examples of topics of discussion. These can be changed by the teacher into what is more suitable for the class. What is important is that students engage with topics that allow them to explore polarized views.

Another important point is that if a topic naturally makes students disagree with each other because they genuinely hold different views that is always better. But if that is not the case, the students can take sides and pretend they hold a certain view. The reason why even the "pretended" version works is that it allows students to reason in a different way and step into another opinion. Does it hold? Is it reasonable? It helps them understand that.



Democratic Communication

2) Elaborate, manifest your opinions related to the topic chosen, and why you believe that, what motivates this point of view. One person at the time

First round: I agree because...

Second round: I disagree because...

3) Choose two or more phrases to ask each other while debating:

- "What experiences have led you to see it this way?"
- "What information or sources have most influenced your opinion on this?"
- "What do you think is often misunderstood about your position on this topic?"
- "What would you like people who disagree with you to know about your perspective?"
- "How does this issue affect you personally, or people you care about?"
- "What are the core values that underpin your perspective on this issue?"
- "What do you find most compelling about your viewpoint, and why should others consider it?"
- "Have you ever had a change of heart regarding this issue? If so, what caused it?"
- "How does your perspective address the concerns or fears that people on the other side of this issue might have?"
- "In what ways do you think your perspective is beneficial for a broader community or society?"



Democratic Communication

4) From the perspective shared, reply stating your perspective choosing two of these phrases below. Intention: both agree and disagree use at least two phrases.

"I see your point of view on [topic], and I understand why you might feel that way. From my perspective..."

"I agree with your point about [specific point], but I also think that..."

"I respect your opinion on [topic], but I view it differently. Here's why..."

"I appreciate your perspective on [topic]. However, my experience has led me to a different conclusion..."

"It's interesting to hear your thoughts on [topic]. I have considered that as well, but I also consider..."

"While I understand where you're coming from on [topic], I have to express my concern about..."

"I acknowledge the merits of your argument regarding [topic]. Still, I believe we need to consider..."

5) Although different opinions and points of view are being expressed, think about ways to answer the following question:

"What is a common ground you as a group believe exist between your viewpoint and opposing ones?"

"Is there a compromise or middle ground you could find in terms of some fragments of the shared points of views you agree with each other."



Democratic Communication

Key questions

"What experiences have led you to see it this way?"

"What information or sources have most influenced your opinion on this?"

"What do you think is often misunderstood about your position on this topic?"

"What would you like people who disagree with you to know about your perspective?"

"How does this issue affect you personally, or people you care about?"

"What are the core values that underpin your perspective on this issue?"

"What do you find most compelling about your viewpoint, and why should others consider it?"

"Have you ever had a change of heart regarding this issue? If so, what caused it?"

"How does your perspective address the concerns or fears that people on the other side of this issue might have?"

"In what ways do you think your perspective is beneficial for a broader community or society?"



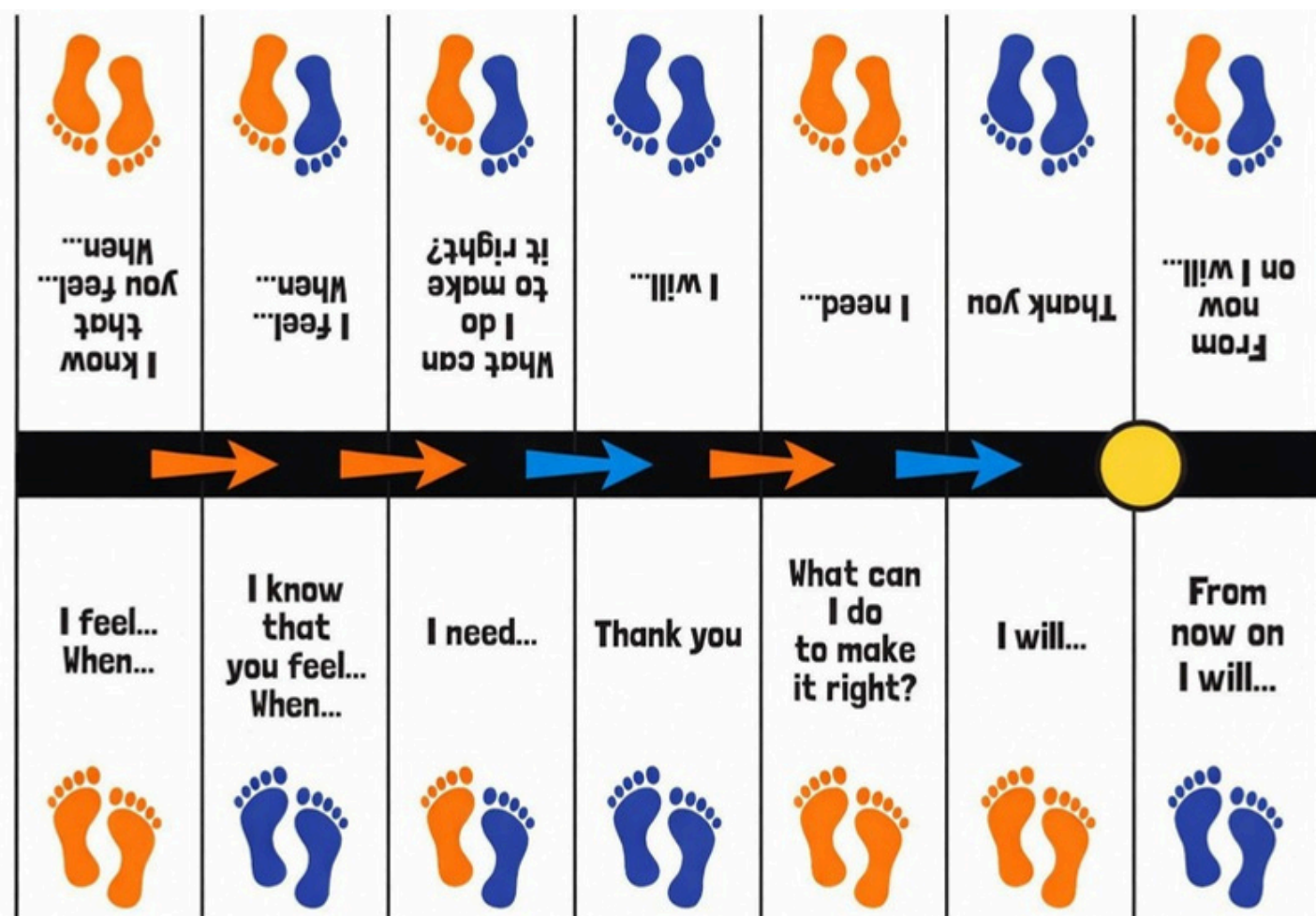


BRIDGE Project: Building Respectful, Inclusive Dialogue for Genuine Engagement Sensitive and Controversial Topics in the Classroom (SCIs)

Conflict Resolution

Strategies

The Peace Path: A Structured Method for Resolving Conflict



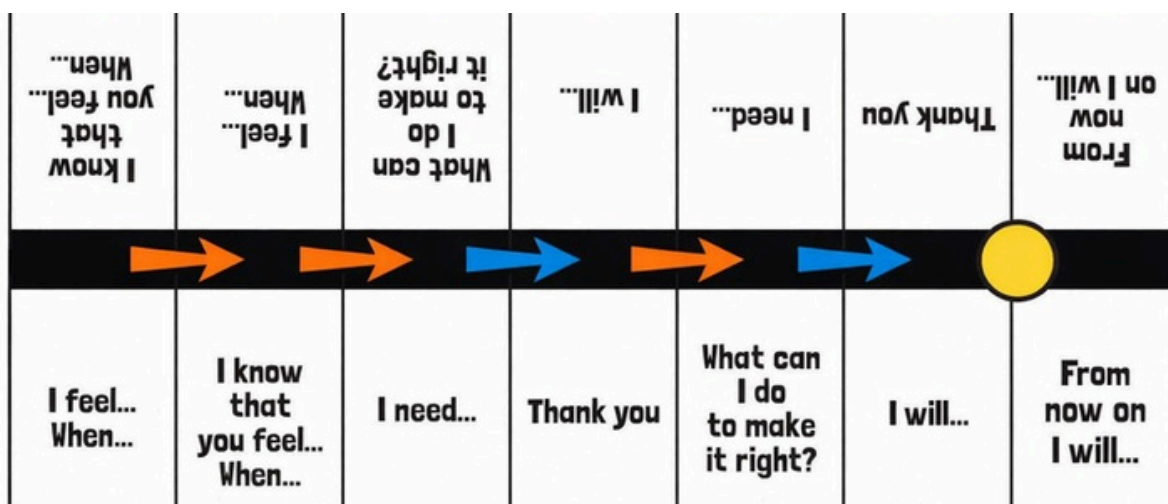
The **Peace Path** is a step-by-step method that helps students resolve disagreements through respectful communication. It teaches students to express their feelings, listen to others, identify their needs, and agree on solutions. The method relies on “**I-statements**,” which focus on personal feelings rather than blaming others, reducing defensiveness and encouraging constructive dialogue.

The goal is to guide students from **conflict to understanding and resolution**.



The Peace Path: A Structured Method for Resolving Conflict

- 1 Invite students to pause**
 Give students a short moment to calm down before talking. The goal is to solve the problem, not continue the argument.
- 2 Let each student tell their side using “I” statements.**
 Prompt them with: “I feel ___ when ___.”
 The other student listens without interrupting.
- 3 Help students identify what they need.**
 Ask: “What do you need right now to make this better?”
 Examples might be an apology, space, a turn, respect, or help fixing something.
- 4 Have each student suggest a solution.**
 Ask: “What can you do to make it right?” Help them choose a solution that is realistic and fair to both students.
- 5 End with a clear agreement.**
 Each student completes: “From now on, I will ___.” Teachers can briefly check in later to make sure the agreement is working.





The R.I.S.E. Strategy: Empowering Students to Address Bullying

Confidence plays an important role in helping students navigate the inevitable challenges that come with conflict and disagreement. This strategy is designed to help students not only respond to bullying, including situations that may happen beyond the teacher's watch, but also manage moments when disagreements or difficult discussions become heated.

The following points give students practical guidance on what to focus on when conflict, difficult discussions, or bullying arise, and what they can actually do in the moment. The aim is to build their confidence and equip them with clear, practical ways to respond rather than leaving them unsure of how to act.

R — Respect Yourself



Encourage students to respect themselves by standing up against a disrespectful person. Teach them to assert their rights in a respectful and confident manner.

- Stand tall: feet shoulder-width apart, demonstrating stability and confidence.
- Open chest and shoulders: avoid slouching to appear more confident.
- Maintain eye contact: shows you're not intimidated.
- Keep hands visible: indicates calmness and control.
- Neutral facial expression: avoid showing fear or anger.
- Calm, firm voice: steady and clear, not yelling or whispering.
- Direct language: use straightforward, assertive statements like, "Please stop that."
- Avoid escalation: don't insult back or threaten.

I — Involve Others



Promote the idea of involving friends, peers, or bystanders to form a supportive network against bullying, showing unity and collective resistance.

- Spot allies: quickly identify friends or peers nearby who can offer immediate support.
- Signal for help: use a prearranged signal or direct request for assistance to alert them.
- Stay together: group together to present a united front, which can deter the bully.
- Speak up collectively: if safe, express disapproval of the bullying behavior as a group.



S — Seek Help



It is about the importance of seeking help from teachers, counselors, or school administrators when facing bullying.

- Seek an adult: together, approach a teacher, staff member, or any trusted adult nearby.

E — Emphasize Accountability and Educate



Highlight the importance of holding bullies accountable for their actions in a constructive manner. This involves implementing restorative justice practices that focus on understanding the impact of bullying, encouraging empathy from the bully towards the victim, and working together to find solutions that repair harm and rebuild relationships.

- Clarify consequences: inform the bully about the immediate and long-term consequences of their actions, emphasizing the seriousness of bullying.
- Follow up on actions: monitor the progress of any measures taken against bullying, ensuring that accountability is maintained.

R — Respect Yourself

- Confidence
- Assertive voice
- Strong posture
- Clear boundaries
- Calm response

I — Involve Others

- Friends
- Bystanders
- Support
- Stand together

S — Seek Help

- Trusted adult
- Teacher
- Report
- Protection

E — Emphasize Accountability

- Responsibility
- Consequences
- Repair harm
- Empathy



BRIDGE Project: Building Respectful, Inclusive Dialogue for Genuine Engagement Sensitive and Controversial Topics in the Classroom (SCIs)

Structured Dialogue

Strategies



Structured Dialogue

Facts – Impact – Solution

Structured dialogue is a clear, step-by-step way of guiding a difficult conversation. Instead of students arguing freely or talking over each other, the teacher provides specific questions, turns, or rules for how the discussion will happen. It helps students focus on facts, different perspectives, and possible solutions rather than personal attacks. Each person gets a chance to speak and listen. The goal is not to agree, but to make the conversation respectful, organized, and productive.

Facts

What was actually said, shown, or discussed?

Impact

What effect could that statement or idea have on the discussion or classroom?

Solution

What would help us continue the conversation respectfully and productively?

Next step

Agree on how the discussion will continue



Teacher Note:

Teachers can always change the steps and adapt them to their needs. The goal is for students to think together and create their own steps. This means that if they think together about the steps they are not only more engaged to undergo them but also more able to remember the steps.



My Voice Strategy



(Ensuring Equitable Participation in Discussions on Sensitive and Controversial Issues)

The My Voice strategy uses short reflection tickets to ensure that all students contribute ideas before the discussion begins, while also encouraging students who speak frequently to pause and listen.

Each student responds to three cues, choosing how they wish to contribute. This allows students to participate in different ways while ensuring that multiple perspectives enter the discussion.

This strategy helps teachers:

Ensure that quieter students have an opportunity to contribute. Slow down fast-moving discussions and encourage reflection. Introduce multiple perspectives into the conversation. Create fairer participation conditions during sensitive discussions.

When to Use This Strategy

Use this approach when:

- A few students tend to dominate discussions.
- Some students hesitate to speak during whole-class dialogue.
- The topic may provoke strong opinions or polarized responses.
- The teacher wants to ensure that all students contribute ideas.
- The discussion would benefit from a wider range of perspectives.



Step-by-Step Implementation

1. Distribute “My Voice” Tickets

At the beginning of the activity/talk about a SCI, provide students with a My Voice ticket containing three cues.

Students are asked to respond to two of the three cues.

Examples of topics, an activity could talk about:

Climate change — Who is most responsible, and what should governments, companies, and individuals do?

Artificial intelligence in education — Should students be allowed to use tools like ChatGPT for schoolwork?

Social media and smartphones — Should phones or social media be restricted for children and teenagers?

Immigration and refugees — How should countries balance humanitarian responsibility, integration, and border control?

Freedom of speech — Should there be limits on what people can say at school or online?



Name: _____ Topic: _____

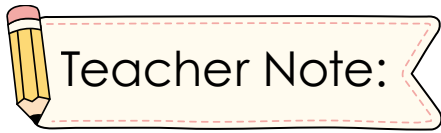
What is one idea or concern you have about this issue?

What is one question we should consider before forming an opinion about this issue?

Identify two different opinions that people might have about this issue.



BRIDGE Project: Building Respectful, Inclusive Dialogue for Genuine Engagement Sensitive and Controversial Topics in the Classroom (SCIs)



Students spend 2–5 minutes writing their responses. This step ensures that every student contributes ideas before the discussion begins.

2. Use Tickets to Open the Discussion

The teacher collects or quickly reviews several tickets and introduces some of the responses.

Examples:

“Several students raised questions about fairness.”

“Some responses highlighted different perspectives, such as scientists, policymakers, and communities affected by the issue.”

This allows student ideas to enter the discussion without relying only on volunteers.

3. Invite Students Who Have Not Spoken

During the discussion, the teacher can intentionally invite students whose ideas appeared on the tickets.

Examples on how to approach this:

“Someone mentioned the perspective of local communities. Would you like to expand on that?”

“Who wrote about economic concerns? Would you like to explain your thinking?”

This approach helps ensure that students who do not usually speak have opportunities to contribute.

4. Encourage Listening from Frequent Speakers

Students who often contribute verbally are encouraged to listen and build on others' ideas rather than responding immediately.

The teacher can reinforce this by saying:

“Let's hear from someone whose perspective we haven't heard yet.”



This helps balance the discussion and prevents domination by a small number of voice.

Close with Reflection

- At the end of the discussion, invite students to briefly reflect:
- Did you hear a perspective you had not considered before?
- Did writing your ideas first change how you participated?
- Why is it important to hear multiple voices when discussing controversial issues?

Key Principles

- Structure participation to support equitable dialogue.
- Collect ideas from all students before the discussion begins.
- Encourage listening as well as speaking.
- Highlight multiple perspectives during the discussion.

Expected Outcomes

Students:

- Have more opportunities to share their ideas.
- Feel more comfortable participating in discussions.
- Hear a wider range of perspectives.
- Engage more thoughtfully with sensitive issues.



3 CUES TICKET

Name: _____ Topic: _____

What is one idea or concern you have about this issue?

What is one question we should consider before forming an opinion about this issue?

Identify two different opinions that people might have about this issue.



3 CUES TICKET

Name: _____ Topic: _____

What is one idea or concern you have about this issue?

What is one question we should consider before forming an opinion about this issue?

Identify two different opinions that people might have about this issue.



Structured Dialogue

Problem – Options – Agreement

Problem

Clearly name the question or disagreement.

Perspectives

Let each side explain its reasoning without interruption.

Common Ground

Identify what the group can ground themselves on, even if opinions remain different.

Move forward

Choose one concrete next step for the discussion, such as asking a clarifying question, checking a source, giving another person a turn, or returning to the topic later.



Teacher Note:

Once more, as teachers, feel free to change the steps and adapt them to their needs. The goal is for students to think together and create their own steps. This means that if they think together about the steps they are not only more engaged to undergo them but also more able to remember the steps.

**BRIDGE Project: Building Respectful, Inclusive Dialogue for
Genuine Engagement Sensitive and Controversial Topics
in the Classroom (SCIs)**

thank you!

We hope that closing this toolkit leaves you feeling prepared, not paralyzed, by the sensitive and controversial issues that arise in today's classrooms.

By grounding your practice in the interplay of Safe and Brave Spaces, media literacy, and intersectionality, and by relying on the structured dialogue and conflict resolution tools within these pages, you now have a clear path forward for even the most challenging discussions.

Our sincere hope is that you find this resource not only practical in the moment, but enduring in its value, empowering you to lead with confidence, empathy, and critical rigor, no matter what your students bring to the table.



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