



Community Council

Pre-K through Grade 5, written to Grade 2 standards

Build connections, celebrate differences, and practice active listening with council! Adopted by many cultures and communities, council is a dynamic practice that invites participants to share their experiences, memories, and feelings with others. This simple and powerful discussion format can be used in your virtual classroom as a daily reflection, restorative practice, or a way to come together after a shared experience.

Objective

Students will strengthen active listening and self-awareness, value differences among their peers, and make personal connections to content.

Class Activity

1. Watch and participate in a Mindful Moment video activity to get students centered and focused on the present.



Mindful Moment: Storm

6:11 min.

Build and weather a rainstorm with Noah's Ark educator Savannah! Listen to the patter of rain, howling winds, and crashes of thunder aboard Noah's Ark at the Skirball. Make it through the storm together!

2. Establish a respectful space and work together to create guidelines that all participants promise to keep during the exercise. Examples of such guidelines, also known as council agreements, include speaking from the heart, being open-minded, and keeping answers as short as possible. Ask students to demonstrate what it means to be active listeners by using nonverbal responses for "I agree," such as a physical gesture or a thumbs-up response in Zoom.
3. Optional: Ask students to find a meaningful object around their home that they can use

to signal that they are ready to speak when it is their turn. Talking pieces can be anything from a favorite toy or family photo to a special pencil, a piece of art, or a refrigerator magnet. The teacher/facilitator should have a talking piece of their own so they can actively participate in council with students.

4. Select a council prompt that invites students to make personal connections to a theme or lesson. Council prompts are meant to encourage participants to reflect on the past, express themselves in the present, and share their hopes for the future.
5. Provide a moment for students to think about their responses and establish an order for students to share. Note: It helps to define an appropriate response length; students can share one sentence, a short phrase, or briefly retell a story.

Sample Council Prompts

- Talk about a time you were brave.
- Share a story of a time you made a new friend.
- Talk about a time you celebrated something.
- Share a story of a time you overcame a challenge.
- Talk about a community you are proud to be a part of.
- Share a story of a time you celebrated someone.
- Talk about a time you helped someone.
- Share a story of a time someone helped you.
- Talk about a time someone taught you something new.
- Share a story of a time you taught someone something new.

6. Take turns speaking and practice active listening. The teacher/facilitator will guide the order of speakers. For online platforms, we recommend muting all but the current speaker to minimize background noise. Make sure everyone, including the facilitator, has had a chance to respond to the prompt before moving on.
7. In the witness round—a final, brief reflection on the council session—ask students to share one word that either describes their experience in council or repeats a meaningful word or phrase from another person’s response.
8. To end council, connect students’ experiences to course content or point out commonalities between student responses. For example, “I heard many different ways of making friends in your stories: over a meal, on the playground, by helping one another, etc.” These connections allow students to get to know their classmates better and can be used to further understand course content and/or resolve conflict.
9. Acknowledge each other with a closing gesture (e.g., a group thank you, a cheer, an emoji, or a moment of stillness).
10. Once the class is familiar with council, invite students to take turns as the facilitator.

Dance and Visual Arts Activity

Pair council with an art project or movement activity to give students the opportunity to express their responses in multiple ways.

Curriculum Connections

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY: SL.2.1, SL.2.1.A, SL.2.1.B

Resources

Center for Council: An organization that delivers programs and trainings that promote communication, enhance well-being, build community, and foster compassion.

Contemplative Pedagogy at the University of Arizona: A guidebook on speaking from the heart, seeking understanding, using “I” statements, and other council practices.

Connect with Us

Our educators are here to help! If you would like to talk with us about how best to facilitate this activity with your students, please email teacherprograms@skirball.org.