

Building Community for Powerful Learning
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Some Ideas for Establishing Group Identity

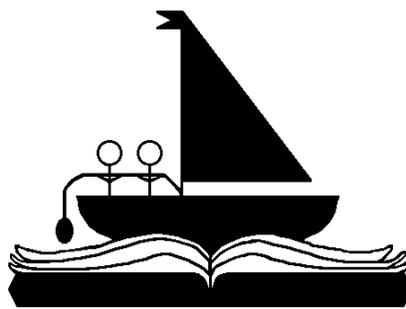
I. Take a digital class/team portrait on the first day.

Get it enlarged to poster size (16"x20" or 18"x24" or 20"x30"), frame it, and display in the room. (Hint: Always take several photos because it's tough to get everyone looking their best at the same time!)

II. Create a Class Mural:

Designate a bulletin board or section of wall for the mural. Have class decide upon a theme appropriate to your class. We once used a sailing ship, and another time we used a building under construction as our theme. Have students design the basic theme on a large sheet of paper covering the designated space. Then each student decides how he/she wants to appear on the mural. For example, on our ship, we had a student climbing the rigging, one looking through a spyglass, and another fishing from the deck. Several students chose to be swimming around the ship. On our building mural, one student was lying atop a girder, another was hammering, and another was carrying a load of bricks, and so on. Find a blank wall for background, establish a camera point so all photos are taken from the exact same distance to ensure scale, and take digital photos of the students in the pose they want. Print the photos on plain paper. Cut them out and have students glue them to the scene and add any appropriate accouterments like a spyglass or a hammer, for example. These can be drawn on or cut out and attached.

III. Design a class or team logo



SOUNDINGS[©]

Use your logo on letterheads, websites, e-mails, T-shirts, door decoration, etc.

Strategies for Getting to Know Each Other

Ask Me Anything

Start by emphasizing the importance of familiarity and honesty as the foundations for trust and teamwork. Then give each student a 3 x 5 card with instructions to write his/her name on it, and then list up to three questions he/she would like to ask me. Questions could be about me personally, or about the class, or the school, anything. I did request that they keep their questions “school appropriate,” and I promised to answer *truthfully*, though perhaps not conventionally; because while I wanted them to get to know me, I didn’t want them to rely on me to give them easy answers. I also wanted them to begin thinking carefully about their questions and how to phrase them precisely, an important part of all communication, and in preparation for the unit planning process. I’d collect the cards into a “deck” and have a volunteer select a card. We’d identify the author and have him/her read one of the questions. I’d answer the question, and then ask a similar or related one of the student. That student would then select the next card, and we’d go through the process again a few times. I’d hold all the cards and repeat the activity several times over the opening days until every student had had the chance to ask a question.

To give you an example, someone always asked how old I was. I would always reply “6.5 billion years, give or take,” which caused them to have to stop and think, particularly when I added, “as are you” before asking my question. (Elements from starts)

This simple technique always established a foundation of openness and trust that helped the kids know that I meant what I said and hoped they would do the same.

FORCED CHOICE STRATEGY

There are several formats which can be used with this activity. One that is usually successful with middle school students is to have each student complete the list privately. After making choices, have students who made the same choice stand on one side of the room and students who made the opposite choice stand on the other. Ask for volunteers to share reasons for making the choice. A second technique would involve pairs. After students complete the list, they would share their results with one other person. After the pair had discussed their decisions, they would find another pair and would share.

Instructions: Write or circle the word in each pair of words that best describes you. You will be asked to show your choice by standing as directed.

- _____ 1. More of a saver or spender?
- _____ 2. More of a loner or a grouper?
- _____ 3. More like summer or winter?
- _____ 4. More yes or no?
- _____ 5. More present or future?
- _____ 6. More intuitive or rational?
- _____ 7. More like a paddle or a ping-pong ball?
- _____ 8. More like a mountain or a valley?
- _____ 9. More like a book or a picture?
- _____ 10. More an arguer or an agreeer?
- _____ 11. More like a clothes line or a kite string?
- _____ 12. More like hard candy or soft-centers?
- _____ 13. More physical or mental

If I Were In Charge of the World

~ Judith Viorst

If I were in charge of the world
I'd cancel oatmeal,
Monday mornings,
Allergy shots, and also
Sara Steinberg.

If I were in charge of the world
There'd be brighter night lights,
Healthier hamsters, and
Basketball baskets forty-eight inches lower.

If I were in charge of the world
You wouldn't have lonely.
You wouldn't have clean.
You wouldn't have bedtimes.

If I were in charge of the world
A chocolate sundae with whipped cream and nuts
would be a vegetable.
All 007 movies would be G.
And a person who sometimes forgot to brush,
And sometimes forgot to flush,
Would still be allowed to be
In charge of the world.

Small groups collaborate to re-craft the poem using the form below. Share and compare.

IF WE WERE IN CHARGE OF THE WORLD

By Judith Viorst

Adapted by _____

← Your Name

If I were in charge of the world

I'd cancel _____.

_____,
_____, and also
_____.

← 4 things, ideas, people, philosophies, etc.
that you don't particularly care for.

If I were in charge of the world

There'd be _____,
_____, and
_____.

← 3 things that you would like to improve
so they would be better for you.

If I were in charge of the world

You wouldn't have _____.
You wouldn't have _____.
You wouldn't have _____.
Or " _____."
You wouldn't even have _____.

← 3 things that you wish didn't exist
or were different about the world

← Something someone says to you
that you don't like to hear.

← Something that goes along with
your quote from above.

If I were in charge of the world

A _____

← A delicious food that you love to eat would be a
Vegetable.

All _____ would be _____.

And a person who sometimes forgot to _____

And sometimes forgot to _____,

Would still be allowed to be

in charge of the world.

← Something that you want to change
, and how you would change it

← Two things that you
sometimes forget to do

Making a Heart Map

We use the image of our heart to describe many things. Many of you may have had a broken heart or have felt your heart soar after an exciting moment in your life. In order for all of us to get to know you, I want you to create an image of your heart which you will later describe and explain to the class.

Assignment:

On a blank sheet of paper, draw a picture of what you hold close to your heart. Things to consider putting in your heart include the following:

1. People, places important to you
2. Things you do well or like to do
3. Hobbies, interests, sports, clubs you are a part of
4. Information about family, nationality, etc.
5. Unusual experiences
6. Favorite quotes, movies, books, etc.
7. Cultural symbols representing your heritage
8. Nicknames/adjectives to describe you
9. Photos of you or you with your family/friends
10. Anything else that defines you

As you design your heart keep in mind:

1. Color symbolism
2. Placement of information- things most important should go in the middle, least important outer edge or things not part of you anymore (like a broken heart or a bad memory) can go outside your heart
3. Design of heart- doesn't have to be typical heart shape (Be creative!)
4. Use words and pictures (drawn) or clip art okay...

You should bring this to class tomorrow and be ready to share your heart with your classmates- thus, please include material you will be comfortable sharing!

QUESTIONS TO HELP MINE YOUR HEART

What has stayed in your heart? What memories, moments, people, animals, objects, places, books, fears, scars, friends, siblings, parents, grandparents, teachers, other

people, journeys, secrets, dreams, crushes, relationships, comforts, learning experiences?

What's at the center? The edges? *What's in your heart?*

COMMON GROUND STRATEGY

Common Ground starter topics

Arrange students in a circle.

"Step forward if you:"

- Completed homework.
- Ate a healthy breakfast.
- Got up before 6:30 am.
- Watched the TV last night.
- Dreamt of summer vacation.
- Did something helpful on my way to school.
- Walked my dog today.
- Kissed my Mom or Dad or sibling before leaving.
- Have fun plans for the weekend.
- Forgot to make my bed.
- Rode a bus to school

Getting to Know You

Purpose: To allow students to become acquainted with each other.

Time: 30 to 45 minutes each

Materials: Two Truths: File cards or paper and pens

Activity: Two Truths and a Tale

Each student thinks of three pieces of information to share with the group. Two are actual facts about him- or herself; a third is made up. Students anonymously write the information on a file card or piece of paper. When everyone is finished, the advisor collects the cards and reads them one by one. The group first identifies who they think the mystery person is, and then when the individual is correctly recognized, the tale is separated from the truth. Both the truths and the tale are commented upon and/or the group may ask questions of the individual before moving on to the next card.

• **Reflection:** Who surprised you? If we did this activity again, what would you do differently about sharing information?

Birthday List:

• This is a silent activity! Without talking, students must line up in chronological order. After this is successfully completed, individual birthdays are recorded on a chart and posted in the advisory room to create opportunities for future celebrations.

• **Variations:** Ask students to group themselves by how many people are in their families, where they were born (indicate the walls of the room as being north, south, east, and west and let students find their place geographically), or in alphabetical order by their middle names.

Five Elbows

• This is a silent activity! The teacher begins by identifying a number (i.e., five) and a body part (i.e., elbow), and then all participants must find five players to create a human sculpture by touching elbows. Every student needs to be included in a sculpture. If there are extra people, then the players must incorporate the extra person into the sculpture through other contact, for example by holding hands. Once the first sculpture is created, the advisor calls out new directions, for example, eleven fingers. Multiple sculptures may also be created, depending on group size. Other possible sculpture ideas include four heels, six knees, eight thumbs, and three shoulders. The activity usually ends with the advisor using a number equal to the group size and a singular body part (i.e., 15 heads).

• Reflect on this activity with questions regarding the comfort level of participants.

• If any students are uncomfortable with physical contact, they can facilitate this activity

Building Community through Cooperative Challenges

Goals:

- To improve problem-solving and other higher level thinking skills
- To build trust
- To build self-confidence
- To develop leadership skills
- To develop cooperation and teamwork skills
- To develop listening and discussion skills
- To promote understanding of group dynamics
- To help students recognize strengths and weaknesses in themselves
- To provide strategies for maximizing strengths and reducing weaknesses
- To have fun

Process: Regardless of the specific activities, the general process involves four basic steps.

1. **Introduction:** This step, often but not necessarily in story form, sets up the problem to be solved. It should generate enthusiasm and establish any pertinent restrictions.

Standing restrictions: *No goal is worth an injury; no gain should cause pain.*

No “Put-Downs” allowed.

2. **Play:** The group works together to solve the problem or achieve the goal.

3. **Celebration:** The group applauds its efforts and those of individuals.

4. **Debriefing:** This is a crucial part of the process as the leader asks questions designed to get the group to explore strategies, strengths, weaknesses, results, and process. In a sense, this is the metacognitive stage where we think about our thinking and talk about our actions.

B. While there is no established order or sequence to cooperative challenges, the leader should gear his/her choices to the size, age, experience, and ability levels of the participants. This goes for selecting the challenge, developing variations, and also for asking the questions.

Start simply, then build complexity and rigor.

Key Questions: The following questions are suggestions for ways to debrief participants after a cooperative challenge activity in order to sharpen their awareness of the process and its implications beyond the activity. It is by no means an exhaustive list of possible questions!

- How did it feel to succeed?
- What allowed the success to happen?
- What could have prevented success? [What did prevent you from succeeding?]
- Could you have succeeded alone?
- How did it feel to cooperate?
- What are the rewards of cooperation?
- What can/did you do to cooperate?
- How would you rate your own participation?
- How effective was the group in achieving the goal?
- How did you first think you would meet the challenge?
- How was your initial idea modified?
- Did you share your idea?
- How did others react to your idea?
- How did their reaction make you feel?
- How did the group develop a plan?
- What did you think of the plan?
- What is the relationship between the amount you put into deciding on a plan and the amount of effort you put into enacting or fulfilling the plan?
- Who emerged as a leader?
- What traits made that person a leader?
- Why did you choose to lead/follow?
- What does it take to be a good leader? A good follower?

- Can a person be both a leader and a follower?
- Did leadership roles change during the activity? Why?
- How did you communicate in this activity?
- What makes for effective communication?
- What impedes effective communication?
- Did it require certain skills or knowledge to achieve this goal?
- Does everyone possess the same skills and knowledge?
- What were some important differences you noticed among group members?
- How do you recognize someone's skills, talents, abilities, or knowledge?
- How did group size affect communication and success?
- How did physical positioning affect your role in the activity?
- How did that position affect your point of view?
- Did everyone have equal input into the process? Why or why not?
- How can you get people to share their ideas?
- How did it feel to put your safety in others' hands?
- How does your level of trust affect the group's success, and what can you do to build trust?

Some Sample Challenges:

Line Up

- I. Group Size: Any; the larger the better.
- II. Equipment: None
- III. Goal: Cooperate to form a line as quickly as possible, without talking, that meets the stated criterion.
- IV. Procedure: Tell students that they may not talk in this challenge. They are to get up and form a line around the room according to a criterion of the leader's choice. For example: by birthdate, alphabetically by first name or by the name of their favorite type of animal. Leader can select virtually any criterion with consideration to the age/experiences of the group. NOTE: this is a good way to learn names, birthdays, or other types of information that helps group get to know each other better. When the line is formed, have participants verify out loud. Debrief.

Pulse

- I. Group Size: Any; the larger the better.
- II. Equipment: A stopwatch or second hand on a regular watch.

III. Goal: Cooperate to pass a pulse around the group as quickly as possible.

IV. Procedure:

1. Form a circle. Explain the object is to pass an electric pulse around the circle as quickly as possible. Ask for guesses on how quickly the group can accomplish the task. Decide on a time goal.

2. Have participants hold hands. Indicate a pulse starter and a direction for the pulse to travel, clockwise or counter-clockwise. The pulse starter will gently squeeze the hand of the person to his or her right or left (depending on direction pre-determined) and say "BEEP" to indicate the pulse has started.

The next person passes the pulse in the same manner, with a gentle squeeze and the word "BEEP." This continues around the circle until the pulse returns to the starter. Leader, who has been timing, announces time it took for the group to pass the pulse.

3. Discuss ways to improve performance and decide on a new time goal.

4. Repeat the procedure. Debrief. Repeat as desired.

V. Variations:

1. Reverse the direction and say "PEEB."

2. Have participants try the procedure with eyes closed or blind-folded.

3. Allow only every other person to say "BEEP."

Some Valuable Resources (only a few among many!)

New Games. More New Games. San Francisco: Main Street Books, 1981. Print.

Play Hard Play Fair Nobody Hurt. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company Inc, 1976. Print.

Lefevre, Dale N.. *Best New Games: 77 Games and 7 Trust Activities for All Ages and Abilities.* 1 ed. Champaign, IL Human Kinetics Publishers: Human Kinetics Publishers, 2001. Print.

Luvmour, Josette, and Sambhava Luvmour. *Everyone Wins!: Cooperative Games and Activities.* Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2007. Print.

Building Class Norms

- A. Students each take time to respond to the following:
1. I like classrooms where students ...
 2. I don't feel good in classes when students ...
 3. I can concentrate in class if ...
 4. I learn best when ...
 5. I feel safe when ...
 6. Teachers can help me best when they ...
- B. Students meet in small groups to review the needs of their group and make suggestions for the CLASS Norms or Ways of Living Together.
- C. The entire class shares each group's ideas and synthesizes the final list (this could take several attempts).

Establishing Norms

After students have had a chance to get to know each other, and after they have discussed what it takes to be successful in class, have them create a class constitution or Bill of Rights. Two examples follow. The first was written by 7th graders, the second by 8th grade students.

Class Bill of Rights

We, the students of Watershed, in order to form a more perfect classroom, establish justice, insure tranquility, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of learning, do approve and establish this Bill of Rights for the Watershed Class of Radnor Middle School.

Everyone in Watershed has the right:

- to be treated with respect;
- to be equal with everyone else;
- to have fun;
- to be heard;
- to have their own ideas;
- to share their ideas;
- to speak freely;
- to feel that their materials are safe;
- and to expect everyone to do his or her share of the work.

SOUNDINGS VI CONSTITUTION

We the students of the sixth Soundings class, in order to form a more perfect learning environment, establish justice, insure a safe learning community, provide for a sense of respect, promote responsibility, and secure the rights and privileges of Soundings students, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the Soundings community of 2004 and 2005.

The members of the sixth Soundings class have the right and responsibility to do their best to help the Soundings community work together. Members have the responsibility and right to ask questions, debate to reach a consensus, strive to achieve daily, weekly, and yearly goals, contribute ideas to discussions, be respectful to others and to their environment, and to help the Soundings environment run smoothly. Students must not abuse these rights and privileges and must not keep other members from exercising these rights.

Soundings is a democratic classroom. In order to keep this privilege, students must contribute their ideas and help plan. If students are respectful of their responsibilities and obligations, they may exercise the following privileges: to eat in the classroom, to play educational games during breaks, to debate and to reach a consensus, to have their voice heard, and to be a part of the Soundings experience.

Soundings students are given certain rights that shall not be abused by any individual, whether teacher or student. These rights will help improve the learning experience for all members of the class.

Soundings students have the right to...

- ...work in a group or as an individual.
- ...be respected and accepted as an individual.
- ...participate in class and to share ideas.
- ...be listened to.
- ...be supported.
- ...set goals and to do their best to achieve them.
- ...set aside time for research.
- ...depend on each other for support and for help with projects.
- ...disagree and to debate to reach a consensus.
- ...choose how to meet challenges.

- ... have their ideas heard and respected by others.

Norms for the Learning Community

Class members suggest words they would like to represent them. Once a long list is developed, students discuss connotations as well as denotations, choose between synonymous terms, and pare the list down to the desired number. Two sets of examples are shown below.

Watershed: 5 C's + 3

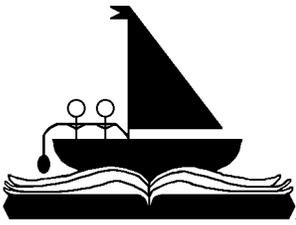
Commitment
Cooperation
Courage
Caution
Caring
Creativity
Friendship
Responsibility

Soundings Affirmations

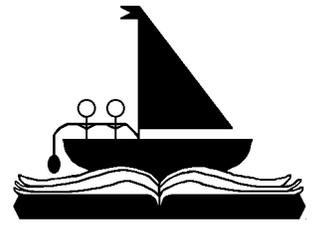
Adventurous
Creative
Democratic
Diligent
Enthusiastic
Unique

Once the list is agreed upon, each student defines the words in his/her own terms and provides a description (drawn or written) of what that characteristic might look like in action or what we might see when a person was demonstrating or embodying that trait. These definitions and descriptions can be kept in a class book or individually.

Throughout the year, students are asked to describe what they are doing to live up to these goals. They can also recognize each other for exemplifying an affirmation. See the forms next page.



RECOGNITION NOMINATION



[Print nominee's name here]

deserves special recognition for modeling the following Affirmation:

[Select one of our Affirmations]

Describe the actions that you think earned the nominee this special recognition. Please be as specific as possible. (You may continue on the back of this form if necessary.)

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Team

Name: _____

Please give an example to illustrate how you have lived up to each of our affirmations:

1. Confidence:

2. Responsible:

3. Curious:

4. Independent:

5. Motivated:

6. Enthusiastic:

CPR: Circle of Power and Respect Procedures

Getting Ready?

- Step 1: Select a focus or topic – students may help
- Step 2: Determine who will share. Limit to 3-5 students.
- Step 3: Determine who will lead (1 student only).
- Step 4: Gather in a complete circle.
- Step 5: Start the CPR Time (20 mins.)

Who does what?

Those who share:

The student(s) who is to share can make only one statement about the topic, and then is to ask the group, “Are there any questions or comments?”

The Leader:

The student who is the leader/facilitator takes charge of calling on persons to share, and on calling on 3 additional persons who have questions or comments for the individual who has just made their statement. This person should also keep the CPR format flowing according to guidelines established.

The Others:

All other members of the circle may volunteer to ask a question or make a comment to the speaker. Hands raised or pass the small ball.

The Teacher:

Just be in the circle. Only interfere in a serious crisis or during practice role playing.

Hints?

- Rotate all roles fairly.
- Let students evaluate “how we did” aloud and on paper, especially for first 3 sessions.
- Generate topics at first; but quickly turn it over to kids.
- Don’t overuse – maybe 3x weekly, for 20 mins each.
- Combine with Morning Meeting other pieces (e.g.; News, Special Business, Fun Activities).

Adapted from the Northeast Foundation for Children’s Responsive Classroom Practice

CHALK TALK PROTOCOLS

A Chalk Talk is what we do in Advisory or Class when we want to discuss something. If we were all talking it might not make any sense because we ‘d be talking on top of each other. So in a Chalk Talk, we write down everything that we think on a big piece of paper, and there is **no** talking. All you need to do is take a marker and write whatever you’re thinking.”

----*Wildwood sixth-grade student*

A Chalk Talk is a silent activity that gives participants the opportunity to brainstorm or share their thoughts about a specific question. A Chalk Talk allows students to express their feelings, emotions, and opinions about a particular topic that can then be commented on or discussed nonverbally. It’s like a big virtual chat room. Chalk Talks give even quiet students an opportunity to participate and “speak.”

A Chalk Talk begins with the teacher/advisor writing a question or prompt on a chalk- or white board or on a large roll of paper that has been affixed to an advisory room wall. Students are given chalk or markers and are asked to write their thoughts, comments, or perspectives about the topic. Participants can comment in writing on what another person has said, agreeing, disagreeing, or sharing a different point of view. When not writing, students should be active readers, studying and thinking about what their peers are writing and commenting on each other’s statements.

At the end of a Chalk Talk, especially the first few that a group does together, the teacher/advisor and students should debrief the protocol verbally to reflect on both the experience of participating in a Chalk Talk and the question or prompt that they were commenting on.

Chalk Talks can be used as a tool to explore any unit in the advisory curriculum. For example, at the beginning of a unit on leadership, students are asked: “What is a leader?” Another example in Wildwood’s Division Two is when a Chalk Talk is used to explore the essential question: “How do we create a healthy community?” Using Chalk Talks in this way gives students the opportunity to write down their initial thoughts and to create, as a group, their own definitions of leadership or community.

A Chalk Talk can also be used to check on students’ understanding of a topic. Teacher Becca Hedgepath recalls a memorable Chalk Talk that she did with her sixth-grade students: “The topic for the Chalk Talk was, ‘What is advisory?’ I wanted to see if, having talked about advisory and seminared about it and having experienced it, they really understood it. Students wrote

statements like, 'It's an opportunity to get to know the teachers 'It's an opportunity to brainstorm: 'It's an opportunity to team-build: 'It's an opportunity to seminar: and so on."

Hedgepath continues, "I'll never forget that someone wrote, 'Advisory is like a cheese muffin. It's crusty on the outside, and then when you get to the inside it's nice and soft and sweet and delicious I thought that was great. And they sort of bounced off that and talked about how they enjoy it, how it's a safe space, and how advisory is an interesting place to come and connect."

A Chalk Talk is also a safe way to discuss problematic topics such as race relations, class conflicts, or bullying issues. Chalk Talks can also encourage students to dig deeper into a question or dilemma. Questions can range from "What is the difference between collaboration and cheating?" to "What is the difference between affirmative action and reverse prejudice?"

Chalk Talk

Purpose: To reflect, generate ideas, solve problems, or express opinions silently Chalk Talks encourage participation by everyone, even quiet students. The silence encourages thoughtful contemplation and dialogue.

Time: Typically 15 to 20 minutes plus 10 to 15 minutes to debrief

Materials: Chalk- or dry erase board or a large, 4-to 6-foot sheet of paper taped to the wall (this allows the Chalk Talk to be saved for future reference and/or documentation)

Colored chalk or markers

Protocol: • The advisor writes a question or prompt in large lettering in the center of the board or paper.

The question or prompt is used to generate written dialogue on a subject or issue for the advisory group to explore.

- The advisor explains that a Chalk Talk is a silent activity No one may talk. Students are given chalk or markers with which to write down their thoughts, opinions, or solutions. Besides writing, time is spent reading and reflecting on what others have said. Participants can comment or 'build on" what is written by:

- o Linking comments by drawing a line to connect one comment to another

- o Adding to what someone has written

- o Agreeing or disagreeing with what someone has written

- The advisor can choose to act as an observer or to interact with the Chalk Talk to expand the

conversation by:

- o Writing a question in response to a participant's comment
- o Adding his or her own reflections or ideas
- o Circling an interesting idea and inviting participants to comment
- o Connecting ideas or comments with a line and adding a question mark
- These types of interactions by the advisor encourage the participants to do the same, and a very active written conversation can develop. At the end of the Chalk Talk, the facilitator can choose to take some time to verbally debrief with the participants, asking them to further reflect on what they have learned.

Racism

Chalk Talk

Purpose: To explore the different perspectives and understanding of race, racial issues, and racism.

Time: 45 minutes to one hour

Materials: White board, chalkboard or large sheet of poster paper
Colored markers/chalk

Activity: • Write the question: "In your life, how have you experienced racism?"

- Allow students to silently dialogue on the topic.

Reflection:

- Advisory reviews the Chalk Talk. Potential questions include:
 - o What experiences do you have in common with your classmates?
 - o What experiences are different?
 - o What are your reactions to reading other people's experiences?
- The group reflection can be followed by an individual journal write.

Other Strategies:

