

# Chapter One

## Getting to Know You: Introductions

*We've all been there: the teacher tells us to pair off, interview our partners, then introduce them to the class. And we do it.*

Some of us enjoy the activity. But many of us, given the choice, would prefer to be somewhere else, doing something else, something less stressful and more enjoyable—having a root canal at the dentist, for example. Perhaps that's an exaggeration, but only a slight one. Shy people, quiet people, listeners, and introverts often find the prospect of physical pain less threatening than the potential embarrassment and humiliation that may result from speaking in front of a group of strangers or peers. Adults have options. We can escape to the restroom, fake an emergency phone call, or simply get up and leave when we feel too uncomfortable. Typically, students don't have those options. They are stuck. They have to disrupt the class or defy the teacher in order to avoid participating in unappealing activities. So they stay and participate. But being physically present in the classroom with us doesn't mean they are "with us." Mentally, they may be far, far away.

### *Stress-Free Introductions*

The academic icebreakers in this chapter are designed to engage students, make them feel welcome, and allow them to mingle and interact in a nonthreatening, nonstressful environment.

Students feel self-conscious for so many reasons: their height, weight, acne, scars, accents, speech impediments, “bad” hair, lack of friends, fear of bullies, “uncool” clothes or shoes, body or facial hair, physical discomfort caused by raging adolescent hormones, or past experiences with racial or cultural or religious prejudices.

Many teachers sincerely believe that students need to learn to speak comfortably in public. That may or may not be true, but forcing shy or self-conscious students to stand up and speak during the first moments of a new class is not likely to help them develop confidence or comfort; it’s much more likely to make them withdraw even more. It may make them wish fervently that they were any place other than school. Definitely not our goal for the first day of class.

It’s very simple to research this topic: simply ask the adults you know to recall their first days of school. Ask how they felt about being required to stand up and speak in front of their peers. Most of them will remember very well—and their memories may help you design effective and enjoyable icebreakers for your own students.

# 1. THE ADJECTIVE GAME

★ **PURPOSE:** getting acquainted

★ **AGES:** 7–adult

★ **TIME:** 10–30 minutes

★ **MATERIALS:** dictionary (optional)

## PREPARATION

Create a list of adjectives that might be used to describe students (*happy, energetic, worried, musical, lovable, talkative, quiet, sleepy*, and so on). Post your list on the board or project it on a screen where students can see it.

Place chairs or desks in a circle, semicircle, or some other arrangement where everybody will be able to see each other.

*Option for teachers who enjoy using humor:* Stand by the door to your room and greet students as they enter. Use various adjectives to describe yourself. For example, “Hello, I’m Mr. Dexter and I am *delighted* to see you.” “Welcome to my classroom. I’m Ms. Takada and I’m *thrilled* to see so many interesting people joining our class today.” Students may laugh at you, but laughter is a good thing.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1. Take a few seconds to think of an adjective that describes you today. You might be excited or hungry, for example. This isn’t a test and you aren’t stuck with this adjective forever. It’s just for the purpose of getting acquainted. I have posted a list of adjectives for those of you who would like help getting started.
2. I’ll start by introducing myself and giving an adjective that describes me. Then we’ll go around the room. When it’s your turn, your mission is to repeat all the names and adjectives of the people who went ahead of you. If you get stuck, we will help.
3. Just for fun, you may choose an alliterative adjective—one that begins with the same letter or sound as your first name—such as Musical Malik or Jumpy George.
4. After we have completed a full circuit, I’ll ask for volunteers to see if anybody can remember every name and adjective. *[Skip this step if time is an issue.]*

## FOLLOW-UP

On the second day of class, ask for volunteer(s) to try and identify all their classmates by name and/or adjective. Or give students a 5–10-minute “quiz” to see how many names they can remember. This is a challenge if they are seated in different places than they were on the first day. Give volunteers—or the class—a round of applause.

Take note of the people who remember all or most of the names. Those students exhibit strong interpersonal intelligence, a key factor in academic, professional, and personal success, according to many researchers. They may be good team leaders or student mentors.

## 2. AUTOGRAPH COLLECTORS

★ **PURPOSE:** getting acquainted

★ **AGES:** 7–adult

★ **TIME:** 10–30 minutes, depending on number and age of students

★ **MATERIALS:** custom templates (see Preparation below) and colored pencils

### PREPARATION

Create a template that lists the names of all the students in your class in a column on the left-hand side of the page. Add your name to the list (this will require each student to talk to you individually, which will give you a chance to meet them in a nonthreatening circumstance).

Mix up the order, so the names are not listed alphabetically. Remove any personal information such as ID numbers, phone numbers, birth dates, and so on. To the right of each name, draw two blank lines that students will fill in during the activity.

Greet students as they enter the classroom and hand each student a copy of the template and a pencil. Ask them to be seated and wait for everybody to arrive. Do not tell them your name. They will need to find out when they begin the activity.

Prepare your Attention Getter (see the Introduction for details).

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

- 1 You have a list of all the names of the students in this class. My name is also included.
- 2 Your job is to identify each person on the list and ask him or her to sign on the first blank beside his or her names.
- 3 On the second blank, ask the person to write their favorite after-school snack.
- 4 You will have \_\_ minutes to locate all the people and collect their autographs and information.
- 5 The pencils are yours to keep as my welcome gift.
- 6 This will be the signal that time is up. [*Demonstrate your Attention Getter.*] I'll use this signal whenever I need your quiet attention. Ready? Begin.

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## **FOLLOW-UP**

When you finish the activity, give yourselves a round of applause—this creates very positive brain chemicals. The day following this exercise, ask for student volunteers to try to identify each classmate by name.

You can use the information about snacks to provide favorites during special occasions. (If students list unhealthy snacks, consider offering healthier versions and explaining the strong connection between nutrition and brain function.)

## **VARIATION**

Add more blanks to the template and ask students to share more about themselves—nicknames, hobbies, favorite music or movies, and so on.

### 3. ARE YOU KIDDING?

★ **PURPOSE:** getting acquainted

★ **AGES:** 7–adult

★ **TIME:** 10–30 minutes, depending on number and age of students

★ **MATERIALS:** template (optional)

#### PREPARATION

*Optional:* Create a template with a space for the student's name and two numbered blanks. Distribute the template and give students five minutes to fill it out.

Place your desks or chairs in a formation where everybody will be able to see each other so students don't have to stand up when it's their turn to speak.

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

- 1 We're going to take turns introducing ourselves, but not in the regular way. When it's your turn, tell us your name and then tell us two things about you—but the secret is that only one of the things you tell us should be true. Our job is to guess which thing is true.
- 2 You could say, "I ate scrambled eggs for breakfast and I like green chile burritos." Or "I have a dog named Hank and I used to live in New York." You can choose how personal you want to be. Keep it clean, of course.
- 3 After everybody has taken a turn, I will ask you to see how many names you can remember. I'll go first. "I was born in Texas and I drive a Chevy truck."

#### FOLLOW-UP

When you finish the activity, give yourselves a round of applause—this creates very positive brain chemicals. The day following this exercise, ask for student volunteers to try to identify each classmate by name. Or give students 5–10 minutes to write down as many names as they can remember. This can be a challenge if students are sitting in different locations.

If you use student journals, you can use the activity as a good writing prompt. Ask students to write their response to the activity: *How difficult was it for them to tell when people were "just kidding"? Who did they think had the most interesting things to share? How would they modify the activity, if they have suggestions for making it better?*

#### VARIATION

This is a variation of the adult game Two Truths and a Lie, where people share two true things and one that isn't true with a goal of fooling the group. If you have older students or more time to spend, you may choose to use that version.

## 4. BUSINESS CARD CREATIONS

★ **PURPOSE:** getting acquainted

★ **AGES:** 6–adult

★ **TIME:** 10–20 minutes, depending on number and age of students

★ **MATERIALS:** card stock or index cards, pens or markers, quiet signal, business card templates (optional)

### PREPARATION

Cut card stock or index cards to a size appropriate for your students—the younger the student, the bigger the blank “business cards” should be.

Assemble a collection of real business cards to display. Use the Internet to get examples of interesting cards from around the country or around the world.

Before you distribute blank business cards to students, demonstrate your Attention Getter, which will mean time is up or that you need everyone’s quiet attention.

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

- 1 Let’s take five minutes to look at the samples of business cards. See how many different kinds of information they display. And while you are looking at the cards, think of things that you like to do or talents you may have. Maybe you are really good at coloring pictures in your coloring books or you can make a great grilled cheese sandwich. Or you know how to design web pages or do tricks on a skateboard. *[Of course, your examples will be adapted to suit your students’ ages and abilities. Use your Attention Getter to bring the students back to their desks.]*
- 2 Now you have 10 minutes to create your own business card. It’s your choice whether you want to create a “real” card based on real information—or a “fake” card based on something you think would be fun to do. Be sure to include a picture or description of your business and a phone number or e-mail address so people can contact you.

### FOLLOW-UP

When students are finished, ask them to share their cards with the class—or post their cards on the bulletin board and give everybody a few minutes to view them.

### VARIATIONS

If your students are older and you have computer access, have them draft a sample card one day. The next day they can create their cards on the computer and print them out on paper or actual business card templates. To build on this activity, you could design a “business conference” where students meet and greet each other and learn how to network (not just collecting names, but filing them under specific topics for future reference—somebody works in film, for example, and somebody else is a technology whiz).

## 5. FLASH FIGURES

★ **PURPOSE:** art icebreaker

★ **AGES:** 7-adult

★ **TIME:** 10–20 minutes

★ **MATERIALS:** flash figure templates on paper or card stock, multicolored markers

### PREPARATION

Prepare a template with the outline of a basic human figure. Make copies of the template for students. Make a few extra templates for unexpected arrivals or for students who “mess up” their figures and need to start over.

Create two or three sample finished figures, with faces and clothing added. On one sample, write words to represent favorite hobbies and interests. On another, use only illustrations such as various animals, books, or sports equipment.

Prepare your Attention Getter (see the Introduction for details).

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

- 1 We're going to introduce ourselves—but instead of words, we're going to use art.
- 2 Everybody will begin with the same template because we are all humans and we all share many things in common. *[Show the sample template.]*
- 3 But when we finish, the templates are going to look very different. *[Show samples.]*
- 4 We're all going to add our names, faces, and clothes, along with words or pictures of things we enjoy.
- 5 We'll have \_\_ minutes to finish our templates. I will give you a 1-minute warning to let you know it's time to finish up. *[Demonstrate your Attention Getter.]*
- 6 Don't panic if you don't have time to finish your figure right now. You can always add to it later.

### FOLLOW-UP

As students finish, ask them to post their figures on the bulletin board or wall. When the entire class is finished, allow students to browse and discuss their figures. If students seem talkative and comfortable, invite them to present their figures to the class and explain the various words and illustrations they chose to represent themselves.

For classes where students don't already know each other, collect the templates and give them to a volunteer. See how many templates he or she can deliver to their proper creators.

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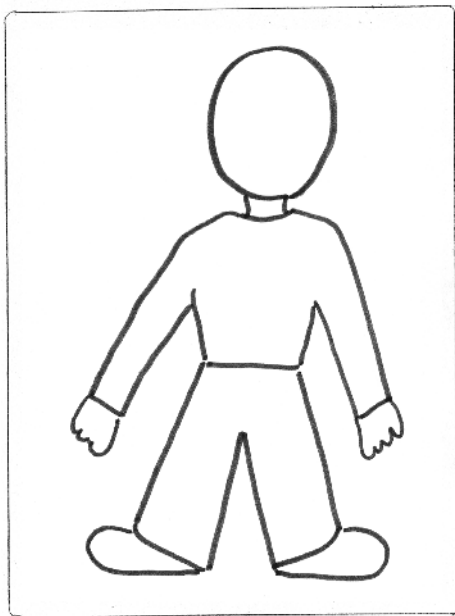


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Collect the templates, shuffle them, and randomly select one—ask that student to answer a question about the material currently being studied. Or turn the cards face down and have students select one or more to find out who will be their work partners for a specific assignment.

## VARIATION

Provide crayons instead of markers for young children. If they can't draw pictures to illustrate their favorite games or toys, let them write any alphabet letters they may know.



*Flash Figure Template*



*Student Flash Figures*

## 6. GETTING TO KNOW YOU

★ **PURPOSE:** getting acquainted

★ **AGES:** 6–adult

★ **TIME:** 10–20 minutes, depending on number and age of students

★ **MATERIALS:** student survey, pens or pencils

### PREPARATION

Create a survey that is subject-appropriate and age-appropriate for your students. Include a mix of questions just for fun, questions about study habits and learning preferences, and personal (but not too personal) questions.

Greet students as they enter your classroom. If you have open seating, hand each student a copy of your survey and a pen or pencil, and ask them to choose a seat. If you have assigned seating, print each name on your roster on a copy of the survey and place the surveys on student desks. As students arrive, greet them and give them pens or pencils. Then ask them to find their own surveys and fill them out. (Have some spare surveys on hand for unexpected arrivals.)

### Here are some sample questions:

If you could be invisible for one day, what would you do? (Keep it clean!)

If you could be any animal, what animal would you be, and why?

Would you rather listen to a story, read a story yourself, or never read a story?

How do you prefer to learn a new game?

- a. Have somebody explain how to play.
- b. Watch people play until you get the idea.
- c. Jump right in and learn as you go along.

How do you handle homework?

- a. I do it right away.
- b. I do it at night.
- c. I put it off until the last minute.
- d. I usually forget to do it.

What is your all-time favorite snack?

What can I do as a teacher to help you get a good grade in this class?

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Please circle the activities you like most in school:

- Individual projects
- Discussions
- Group projects
- Doing research
- Writing reports
- Science experiments
- Solving math problems
- Spelling bees
- Group reading
- Individual reading
- Writing journals
- Watching videos
- Portfolios where we work at our own pace

Many teachers find that including an optional bonus question—*What would you like to know about me, your teacher?*—is a student favorite because it gives them a chance to learn something about you. When students view teachers as human beings as well as teachers, it improves communication and encourages mutual respect.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

- 1 You will have \_\_\_ minutes to complete the surveys. When your time is up, I will give you the quiet signal. [*Demonstrate your Attention Getter—see the Introduction for details.*]
- 2 If you have any questions, please raise your hand and I will come and help you.

## FOLLOW-UP

If time allows, or some time during the next few days, assign students to work independently or in pairs on an interesting, challenging assignment that doesn't require your supervision. Then place a chair beside your desk and invite students, one at a time, to come and have a brief (2-3-minute) private conference with you. If you can't conduct all the interviews on the same day, do a few each day until you have had a personal conversation with each student. Begin each conference by reviewing and discussing the student's Getting to Know You Worksheet. End each conference with a handshake and a smile (even teens who like to pretend they are "too cool" to care about anything may surprise you by being quite personable when they have no audience).

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If you added the optional bonus question to your survey (asking students what they might want to know about you, their teacher), select a few student questions to answer at the start or end of each class meeting until you have answered them all. (In the event that students ask inappropriate questions, ignore them. Some students like to show off at the beginning of the term, just to test your sense of humor.)

## VARIATION

Ask students to create their own survey and print their name on the back of the survey they create. Collect their surveys and check to make sure there aren't any R-rated questions. Then assign students to work in pairs. You may choose to do an activity from Chapter Two before doing the surveys, so pairs will already be randomly assigned. (If you have an uneven number of students, you or a classroom aide will need to participate.) Have each pair exchange their surveys, and give them 5-10 minutes to complete them and discuss them with each other.

## 7. I HAVE TO & I CAN'T

★ **PURPOSE:** getting acquainted

★ **AGES:** 6–adult

★ **TIME:** 10–20 minutes, depending on number and age of students

★ **MATERIALS:** have to/can't handouts, pens or pencils

### PREPARATION

This activity is especially effective for reluctant learners and at-risk groups, because it reminds them that they have the power to choose their own school experience. In a nonthreatening way, it places the responsibility for their learning and behavior on their own shoulders. (If some students choose not to fill in the handout, you can ignore them as long as they aren't disruptive. They will learn just as much by observing as by doing this exercise.)

Create a handout for students that includes the following two incomplete sentences:

I have to \_\_\_\_\_.

I can't \_\_\_\_\_.

Place one copy of the handout on each student desk or greet students at the door as they enter the room and give each student a handout and a pen or pencil.

Before you begin the activity, demonstrate your Attention Getter, which means time is up or you need everybody's quiet attention.

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1. Today we're going to do a short exercise that was designed by a psychologist to help his clients take control of their lives. This exercise is for you. It isn't graded. You don't have to put your name on it or hand it in. And you don't have to share what you have written with anybody.
2. On your handout, you will see two incomplete sentences. Fill in the blanks with the first thing that comes to mind. Don't worry about spelling or grammar.
3. Then go back to your first sentence. Cross off the word "have." Replace it with "choose." Go to your second sentence. Cross off the word "can't" and replace it with "don't want." Now read your two sentences and see if they are true.
4. We often tell ourselves that we *can't* do things, but there are actually very few things in life that we can't accomplish *if* we are willing to do the work. And most of the things we think we *have to* do are really choices—because we don't want to face the consequences of not doing them. There are only five things we truly *have to* do to stay alive: breathe, drink water, eat, sleep, and go to the bathroom. Everything else is optional.

### FOLLOW-UP

Ask for volunteers to share their answers. Discuss them as long as you choose. Be prepared for resistance—but let classmates do the arguing. You won't have to.

## 8. I NEVER WOULD HAVE GUESSED

★ **PURPOSE:** getting acquainted

★ **AGES:** K-adult

★ **TIME:** 10–20 minutes, depending on number and age of students

★ **MATERIALS:** none required

### PREPARATION

Arrange desks or chairs so that all students will be able to see each other. If you have stationary tables or desks, chairs can be grouped in a large circle.

Prepare your Attention Getter (see the Introduction for details).

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1. Today we are going to introduce ourselves in an unusual way. In addition to saying our names, each of us is going to share something about ourselves that nobody would guess if they just happened to pass us on the street. This can be something about you as a person or about something you have seen or done: you can wiggle your ears, you once saw a shark, you broke your arm when you were six years old, or you hate chocolate ice cream.
2. Let's take 2 minutes to think of something that nobody would guess about us. Then we'll begin.
3. Okay. I'll go first. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and something you probably wouldn't guess about me is: \_\_\_\_\_.

### FOLLOW-UP

Give yourselves a round of applause—this creates positive brain chemicals. Ask for volunteers to see if they can go around and correctly identify everybody by name. Take note of students who can do this—these students have strong interpersonal intelligence. They may turn out to be good leaders or student mentors.

### VARIATION

To build on this activity, ask students to write about it in their journals or as short informal essays. Suggested writing prompts: *Which things that other students revealed were the most surprising? The most interesting? How might they modify the activity, if they have suggestions for improving it?*

## 9. MAGIC EYES

★ **PURPOSE:** getting acquainted

★ **AGES:** 6–adult

★ **TIME:** 10–20 minutes, depending on number and age of students

★ **MATERIALS:** Magic Eye samples (from a book or the Internet), quiet signal

### PREPARATION

Check your local library or bookstore for Magic Eye books that have stereograms with hidden 3-D images that become visible to the naked eye. Or you can print sample pictures from the [www.MagicEye.com](http://www.MagicEye.com) website. If your classroom has computers, you can access a variety of pictures online.

Print and copy the instructions for viewing 3-D images from the [www.vision3d.com](http://www.vision3d.com) website. They offer three methods, and the majority of students find the second method the most helpful: [www.vision3d.com/method02.html](http://www.vision3d.com/method02.html).

Before you begin the activity, demonstrate your Attention Getter, which will let students know when the time is up or that you need their quiet attention.

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

- 1 Today we're going to do an experiment using 3-D images.
- 2 First we'll read some instructions on how to view 3-D images. We'll practice the movements. Then I will give everybody a sample picture. *[Or, if you have computers in the classroom, students can look at images online.]*
- 3 If you can see the 3-D images easily, please help your neighbors see them.
- 4 When I give the quiet signal, we will exchange pictures or look at a different image online, because some pictures are easier to see than others.

### FOLLOW-UP

Cut several 3-D images from a book or from a calendar and hang them on the wall at student eye level. Students of all ages love looking at the images, and it's actually good exercise for their eyes. When students need a break from sitting or when they finish their work ahead of deadline, let them quietly view the 3-D images.

If you have students who absolutely cannot see the images, you might want to refer them to the school nurse or inform their parents. Research indicates that 10 to 16 percent of children who have convergence insufficiency or double vision are misdiagnosed as ADD (research link: <http://www.childrensvision.com/ADD.htm>). Another good resource on this topic is the College of Optometrists in Vision Development website ([www.covd.org](http://www.covd.org)), where you can read current research or browse links such as Vision & Learning.

## 10. ME IN A BAG

★ **PURPOSE:** getting acquainted

★ **AGES:** K-adult

★ **TIME:** 5-10 minutes for first session; 10-20 minutes for second session

★ **MATERIALS:** small paper bags, markers or crayons, teacher bag

### PREPARATION

*Please note:* this activity takes two sessions to complete.

Collect enough paper bags to offer one bag to each student plus a few spares (lunch bags work well). Write your own name on the outside of your bag and draw a simple design. Inside, place three small objects that have some meaning for you. If you suspect that some students may come from economically disadvantaged homes, include no-cost items—a small pebble, a leaf or flower petal, or a picture from a magazine.

When students are seated, show them your bag. Then show each item and tell them why you placed it in your bag: I brought this photo of my dog because he's my best friend. I brought this leaf because I love trees—I used to climb trees all the time. I cut this picture out of a magazine because it makes me happy to look at it (or because that's the kind of car I want to have some day).

Distribute the paper bags to students. Be sure to give the instructions *before* you distribute the markers, because students (even adults) will stop listening when they have markers in hand!

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

- 1 After I pass out the markers, I would like you to print your first and last name on the outside of your bag in large letters. Then draw pictures or designs on your bag. Keep it clean. You will have 10 minutes to label and decorate your bag.
- 2 Tomorrow bring your bag back with three items in it that mean something to you. We will share our bags with the class so we can learn a little about each other.

### FOLLOW-UP

On the second day students take turns showing their bags and the items they chose. This can be done as a whole-class activity or in small groups. If some students seem shy, small groups may work best. Shuffle students and repeat two or three times so they have a chance to share with more classmates. After everybody has shared, give yourselves a round of applause.

### VARIATION

Instead of paper bags, distribute small cardboard boxes for students to use. The collapsible boxes used for restaurant leftovers are a perfect size.



# 11 DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?

★ **PURPOSE:** getting acquainted

★ **AGES:** 8–adult

★ **TIME:** 10–20 minutes, depending on number and age of students

★ **MATERIALS:** sample optical illusion(s), pens and pencils

## PREPARATION

Find samples of optical illusions. Label each illusion with a unique title. Make 2–4 copies of each illusion, depending on the number of students you want per group.

Prepare your Attention Getter (see the Introduction for details).

As students enter the room, hand each person a copy of one of the illusions. Ask everyone to be seated and wait for instructions.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1. Everybody has a copy of an optical illusion—something that tricks our eyes because it is not exactly what it seems to be. We’re going to do a short activity with these illusions to give us a chance to get to know each other.
2. When I give you the signal to begin, you will have \_\_ minutes to locate the other students who have the same optical illusion as yours. Introduce yourselves. Then examine and discuss your illusion.
3. This will be your signal that the time is up. [*Demonstrate your Attention Getter.*]
4. Next brainstorm some possible reasons why your illusion tricks people’s eyes.
5. Briefly explain one or two of your reasons, in writing, on the bottom of the page. Please write clearly so others can read your ideas.

## FOLLOW-UP

Allow students to circulate around the room, looking at the illusions and explanations. Encourage them to discuss alternative explanations. For more confident groups, ask students to select a representative from their team to share their illusions and explanations with the class.

This activity is a perfect lead-in to a discussion about the importance of thinking—even if you don’t get the “right” answer. Sometimes the “craziest” idea leads to the most brilliant answer. If we are afraid to make mistakes, we can miss out on a lot of good learning. Sticky notes, for example, were a mistake involving paper that didn’t have enough glue to stick permanently—a million-dollar mistake.

## VARIATION

If you have computers and Internet access, students can search online to find sample optical illusions. Then they can print copies or create a digital slide presentation to share their illusion with the class.

## 12. NAME CARDS

★ **PURPOSE:** getting acquainted

★ **AGES:** K-adult

★ **TIME:** 10–20 minutes, depending on number and age of students

★ **MATERIALS:** card stock or heavy construction paper, markers

### PREPARATION

Create your own name card by folding a piece of card stock or paper to create a tent shape that will stand up on its own, then printing your name in large letters on it and decorating it with pictures or designs.

Prepare one tent card for each student in your class (and make a few extras for unexpected arrivals).

Count your markers in advance so you know how many to collect at the end of the activity. If you use black Sharpie brand markers, be especially watchful. They tend to disappear—even adults forget to return them—and they may end up being used for graffiti that is difficult to remove from surfaces.

Prepare your Attention Getter (see the Introduction for details).

Place a tent card on each student desk or hand them to students as they enter the classroom.

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1. First, please print your name in large letters on one side of your tent card. I have already made my card. *[Show them your model card.]*
2. You may decorate your card if you want to—just keep it clean.
3. You will have 5–10 minutes to create your name card. When you hear this signal, it means you have one minute to finish up. *[Demonstrate your Attention Getter.]*
4. After I collect all your cards, we'll test our memories. I will ask for volunteers to see if they can go around and place the correct name cards on the desks of the students who made them.

### FOLLOW-UP

Repeat Step 3 on the second, third, and fourth class meetings until students know each others' names. This helps foster a sense of community among classmates. Give a round of applause to anybody who volunteers to try to distribute the cards correctly.

### VARIATION

Ask students to list (or illustrate) some of their hobbies or interests on the backs of their name cards. Then collect the cards, draw a random card, and name a hobby or interest. Ask students who share that interest or hobby to raise their hands. Or ask if they can correctly guess whose card you are holding.

# 13. RIGHT OR LEFT BRAIN?

★ **PURPOSE:** getting acquainted

★ **AGES:** 9–adult

★ **TIME:** 10–30 minutes, depending on number and age of students

★ **MATERIALS:** poster board, brain quiz, Internet access, markers, easel paper

## PREPARATION

Brain hemisphere dominance is much more complex than simply saying right brain = creativity and left brain = logic. Both hemispheres analyze data and form thoughts, but they also specialize. The left (analytical) hemisphere handles “hard” facts such as reasoning, science, words, structure, and time. The right (intuitive) hemisphere works with “softer” facts such as color, rhythm, relationships, and humor.

Read Harvard researcher Diane Connell’s excellent article for teachers “Left Brain/Right Brain: Pathways to Reach Every Learner” online at <http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3629>. Since teachers tend to lead with methods that suit our own brain dominance, she offers suggestions to expand our teaching repertoires to include methods that will reach more students.

Copy and paste one of the many hemisphere preference quizzes available online (see two resources in the Variations section here) or select questions to create an age-appropriate quiz for your class. Make copies for students.

Create two posters and label them as “List #1” and “List #2.” *List #1: Listen to the teacher, discuss things, do research, work by myself, solve problems. List #2: Build things, make models, work in groups, draw my own pictures.*

Next, display the posters on opposite sides of the room.

On separate sheets of easel paper, write “List #1,” “Middle,” and “List #2” at the top of the page. Provide markers for students to add their names under one of these headings.

*Optional:* Prepare two short activities: one that requires left-brain skills, such as a logic problem or brain teaser, and one that requires right-brain skills, such as drawing a picture of a scene from a familiar story or making a model to show a process.

Before you begin the activity(ies), demonstrate your Attention Getter to indicate that time is up or that you need everyone’s quiet attention.

Do not distribute quizzes until after you have completed Step 3 in the next section. If you provide the handout early, many students will stop listening to you and start reading.

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## INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

- 1 There are two posters in the room that list some activities we do in school. When I say “Go,” please get up and go read both posters. You’ll have 5 minutes. Go. *[After 5 minutes, give your Attention Getter and continue.]*
- 2 If you prefer the activities on List #1, please go to the easel board with List #1 and print your name. If you prefer the activities on List #2, print your name under List #2. If you enjoy some activities from both List #1 and List #2, print your name on the Middle list. Then please sit down.
- 3 Now we’re going to take a short quiz—not for a grade—but to find out which side of your brain is dominant. Just as most of us are left-handed or right-handed, we also have a dominant brain hemisphere. And just as some people are *ambidextrous*, meaning they can write equally well with both hands, a few people rely equally on both sides of the brain. We also have a dominant ear and a dominant foot. But right now, let’s focus on our brains. There are no right or wrong answers on this quiz—just choose the answers that are the most true for you. *[Distribute the quizzes.]*

## FOLLOW-UP

Using language and visuals appropriate for the age and ability of your students, discuss brain dominance and how it affects the way we learn. Explain that lessons in your class will include activities that encourage both left- and right-brain thinking.

If time permits, do your left- and right-brain activities. Or save those activities for the next class meeting.

Compare the quiz results with the lists on the easel paper that students signed before taking the quiz. Discuss how closely they match. Assign a group portfolio project that requires reading, writing, discussion, art, and hands-on activities. After they have completed the project, ask students to assess which components of the portfolio were the most and the least difficult for them.

This topic is worth spending some time on for three reasons: it’s of high interest to students, it encourages students to reflect on their own thinking and learning, and it gives you information about the best way to communicate a complex idea to each individual student and to design lessons that cater to students’ preferred learning styles or challenge development of weaker skills. Experts suggest that we encourage students to develop thinking skills in both hemispheres, rather than always relying on the dominant one.

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## VARIATIONS

In a computer lab or library where students have Internet access, let students take an online brain dominance quiz. Here are two options:

About.com offers a short, 20-question quiz that is geared for teens, but younger students may also find it accessible:

[http://homeworktips.about.com/library/brainquiz/bl\\_leftrightbrain\\_quiz.htm](http://homeworktips.about.com/library/brainquiz/bl_leftrightbrain_quiz.htm)

Test Cafe offers a longer, 54-question quiz: <http://www.testcafe.com/lbrb>

Or search online for more websites; many of them offer quizzes. Be selective, though—some are much more scientific than others.

For younger students, adapt some of the questions or offer a selection of activities and note which students prefer to read or draw or listen to instructions before they begin to work. Also note which students enjoy working independently and which prefer social learning.

## 14. WAVE YOUR FLAG

★ **PURPOSE:** getting acquainted

★ **AGES:** 6–adult

★ **TIME:** 10–20 minutes, depending on number and age of students

★ **MATERIALS:** construction paper, markers, scissors, glue sticks or tape

### PREPARATION

Assemble a collection of flags from different U.S. states, including the state where your school is located. Tack the flags to the bulletin board or hang them on a cord along a wall or suspended from the ceiling.

Prepare your Attention Getter (see the Introduction for details).

As soon as students are seated, ask if anybody recognizes any of the state flags. Ask if any students have lived in other states. Discuss how each state's flag represents an attitude or philosophy, such as "Don't Tread on Me" or "The 'Show-Me' State." Also discuss animals and plants used as symbols—eagle = freedom, dove = peace, rose or heart = love.

Do not distribute supplies until *after* you have given instructions. People find it hard to listen attentively while they are holding scissors.

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1. Today we're going to make our own flags. Your flag should represent you in some way: a favorite hobby or interest, or something about your personality. Please print your name on the front or back of your flag to identify it.
2. You will have \_\_ minutes to create your flag. You may ask your neighbors for suggestions or help.
3. When you hear this signal, it means the time is up. [*Demonstrate your Attention Getter.*]
4. Then we will take turns showing our flags and explaining our designs.
5. After we have all presented our flags, we will hang them on the cord (or tack them to the board) so we can all admire them.

Distribute your supplies now. Or let students help themselves.

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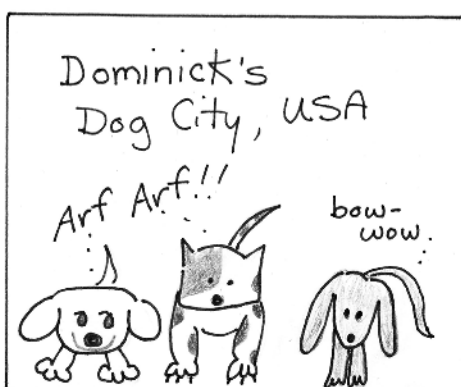
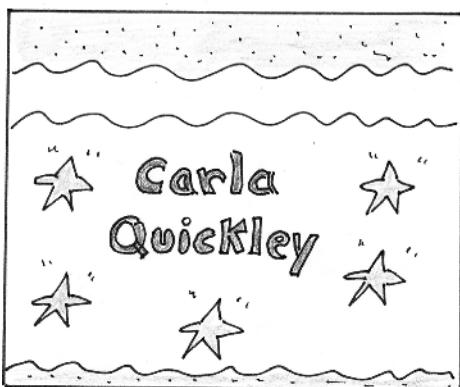
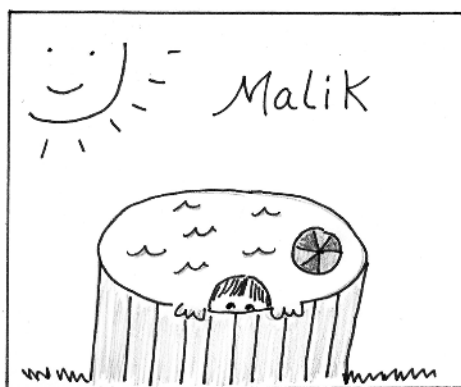
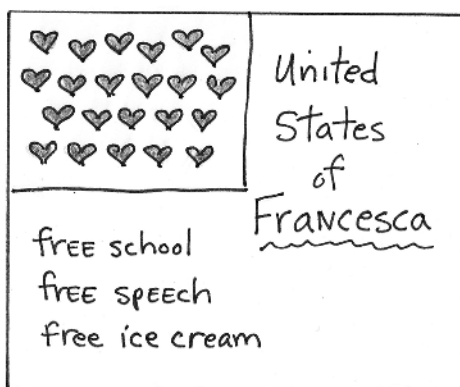
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## FOLLOW-UP

Invite students to go to the board and write the names of all the states. See if they can collectively remember all 50 names. If they have spelling questions, encourage them to discuss the questions among themselves or refer to a dictionary, instead of asking you for the answer. This will encourage them to become more independent learners and develop their teamwork skills.

## VARIATION

If manual dexterity or time constraints are problems, eliminate the scissors and glue and simply provide markers for students to draw their flags with.



Wave Your Flag Samples

## 15. STAND BY YOUR MUSIC

★ **PURPOSE:** getting acquainted

★ **AGES:** 6–adult

★ **TIME:** 5–15 minutes, depending on number and age of students

★ **MATERIALS:** assorted music CDs, posters of singers and bands

### PREPARATION

Display CDs or posters in several areas of your classroom, with each station devoted to a particular musical genre (such as country, rap, pop, hip-hop, jazz, classical, flamenco, and oldies) or particular singers or bands (depending on your geographic location and age of students). Place a blank sheet of paper and a pen or pencil at each station.

Create a CD or playlist on the computer that includes selections from each genre or band. Several minutes before students are due to arrive, play your mix at a soft volume.

Greet your students at the door and repeat the instructions several times as they enter the room, so that each incoming group hears them.

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1. Please walk around and view the musical selections at each station. Feel free to discuss the music with your classmates.
2. After a few minutes, you'll hear this signal. [*Demonstrate your Attention Getter—see the Introduction for details.*]
3. At that time, please go to the station where you believe the music you just heard is located. [*If you teach teens or preteens, they may complain that your taste in music is terrible. In that case, ask them to humor you and choose the least terrible now. Later, they can instruct you in what is currently “cool.”*]
4. You will find a blank sheet of paper at each station. When I give the signal to start, the group at your station will have three minutes to write your names and list as many reasons as you can think of to support your opinion that the music at your station is the best.

### FOLLOW-UP

After students have completed their lists, ask each group to share the entries on their list or, if your group is a bit rowdy, collect the papers and ask students to be seated. Then you can read out the names from each paper and ask students to raise their hands as you read their names. Ask for volunteers from each group to explain their statements in support of their favorite music. This discussion can take many directions and may provide inspiration for a student debate, private journal writing, or informal essays.

### VARIATION

Instead of music stations, create food, animal, or sports stations.



## 16. WOULD YOU EVER?

★ **PURPOSE:** getting acquainted

★ **AGES:** 6–adult

★ **TIME:** 10–20 minutes, depending on number and age of students

★ **MATERIALS:** poster board or heavy paper

### PREPARATION

Using poster board or heavy paper, create three individual signs, printed in large letters: “Yes,” “No,” and “Maybe.” Place each sign in a different area of the room, as far apart as possible. Make sure they are big enough to read at a distance.

On the board, write “Would You Ever . . . ?” in large letters.

On index cards, or in a digital slide show, create several thought-provoking questions, such as: *Would you eat a live bug for \$100? Would you ever tell a lie to your best friend? Would you ever lie to the police? Would you go to school naked for \$100,000?*

Prepare your Attention Getter (see the Introduction for details).

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

- 1 I am going to ask a series of questions. After I ask each question, you will have 15 seconds to move to the Yes, No, or Maybe station in the room.
- 2 Next you will have 30 seconds to introduce yourself to the other students at your voting station. Shake each other’s hands, if that feels comfortable for you.
- 3 When you hear this signal, the time is up. [*Demonstrate your Attention Getter.*]
- 4 After we vote on five questions, you will have the chance to make up your own questions to ask the class.

### FOLLOW-UP

Give students 5–10 minutes, working in pairs or small groups, to write more *Would You Ever . . . ?* questions to ask their classmates. Remind them to keep it clean. Ask students to write about this activity in their journals afterwards.

### VARIATIONS

If movement isn’t possible or appropriate in your classroom, have students do one of the following to vote:

- 1 Raise their hands when you ask for Yes, No, or Maybe votes.
- 2 Hold up a green (for yes), red (for no), or yellow (for maybe) card to vote.
- 3 Provide markers or crayons and let them write “Yes” in green, “No” in red, and “Maybe” in yellow—then they hold up the appropriate card to vote. Tally the vote totals on the board or computer screen.

