



## CLASSROOM CONNECTION CIRCLE QUESTIONS RELATIONSHIPS-ACADEMICS-CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT-DISCIPLINE

Use circles in the classroom whenever you want to hear from your students. Oftentimes our lecture-style classrooms allow quiet students to slip through the cracks. By contrast, **giving each student a voice** in the circle not only improves his/her/their communication and listening skills, but also sends a strong message that each student matters to you. The more you get to know and appreciate about each student, the less likely they are to act out or misbehave in the classroom. Circles present golden opportunities to nip inappropriate and negative behaviors in the bud. Students LOVE circles because they get to talk in their turn. Even if they pass in the beginning...with your patience and no one forcing them, they begin to feel comfortable and start to have fun. They find their voice.

### START OFF WITH A MINDFUL MOMENT

- Use a musical instrument to make a sound that carries for a while such as a chime or Tibetan singing bowl or rain stick...) Say: Take 3 nice big deep breaths. Now look down at the floor (or the centerpiece) and when you can't hear the sound any more, please look up and we'll be ready to begin our circle.
- Close your eyes for a moment. Feel your feet in your shoes without touching them with your hands. What do you notice?
- Close your eyes for a moment and feel your body in your chair. What do you notice? Close your eyes and listen carefully for all the sounds in the room or outside the room. What did you hear?
- Notice what tastes you have in your mouth. What does it taste like?
- Great way to end a circle: Give us one word to describe how you liked the circle today. All answers are OK whether they are good or not. Be honest.

### USE AN INTERESTING CENTERPIECE (to create interest and focus) AND USE A TALKING PIECE

- Use an interesting centerpiece and describe the significance of each piece in the center. Visuals offer a place to focus, learn, and build curiosity.
- Use a meaningful talking piece to ensure that all participants have a chance to speak while everyone else becomes a committed listener.
- **GUIDELINES:**
  - Whoever has the talking piece gets to speak. Everyone else in the circle has the very important job to listen.
  - If you can't think of an answer, you can pass and give it to the next person to keep it going around the circle.
  - Everything said in the room, stays in the room (this is confidentiality to protect people's personal information)...EXCEPT if someone says he or she has been hurt, feels unsafe or is planning to hurt him- or herself or others. Then it must be reported. Because we want everyone to feel and be safe.

### RELATIONSHIP BUILDING—GETTING TO KNOW YOU

- What was the best thing that happened to you so far today? Why is that important to you?
- What would make this day the best you've ever had?
- What is one thing that would help you to have a great day?
- What is one thing that you are NOT looking forward to?

- If you could change one thing about today, what would it be?
- What is one thing you are looking forward to this week?
- What do you look forward to when you wake up on your day off from school?
- If you could go back to a day in the past, what would you do differently and how would that change things today?
- What is a friend? How do friends treat one another?
- What does sticking together mean?
- Who do you love to spend time with? Tell us about him/her/them.
- What (or who) makes you laugh? What (or who) makes you happy?
- What do you think about nicknames? Do you have a nickname? Tell us the story of where it came from. Have you ever given someone a nickname? What was it? Tell us the story.
- When a nickname is intended to hurt someone, what can you say to the person who did the hurting? What could you say to help and support the person who was hurt?
- Using the first letter of your name, tell us something you love about YOU that starts with that letter.
- What is your favorite TV program (or movie)? What character do you most relate to/enjoy? Why?
- If you could be a cartoon character, which one would you like to be and why?
- What do you like to daydream about?
- What's your big dream for your life?
- Where would you most like to go on a vacation?
- What's your favorite thing to learn about?
- If you could have any career, what would you choose and why?
- What do you think is the best job in the entire world and why?
- If you grew up to be famous, what would you be famous for?
- If you opened a store, what would you sell? If you were a clothing designer, what kind of clothes would you like to design? If you could make up a holiday, what would it celebrate? What would you call it? What rituals and events would you have?
- What's your favorite sport to play? To watch? Why do you think people like sports? What is your favorite thing to do?
- What are you really good at? These are your natural strengths and gifts. Some people are natural athletes, some are natural artists, math whiz'es, great writers, great at taking care of children and animals, really interested in mechanical things or science. What about you? How might your natural gifts and talents grow into a great career for you one day?
- What is one thing you wish adults knew and understood about you?
- What movie makes you laugh?
- If you could have lunch with a famous person, who would you choose? If you could take a time machine trip, what time in history would you like to visit and who would you like to meet there?
- If you lived in a cave in the woods, how would you furnish it (what would you put in there to make it a great place to live)? If you were going to build a fort, what would it be made of? If you were on a wild adventure, what would you be doing and who would be with you? If you were asked to plan a party for all your friends, what theme would you choose for the decorations? If you were a newspaper reporter, what kind of news would you like to write about?
- What is your favorite kind of music? Who is your favorite musician and what do you imagine they are like as a person? What would you do with them if you got to hang out with them? Which famous singer would you most like to sing to you? If a current artist called you and said she wanted you to come to her art show and she would pay all your expenses to get there, what would you say to her? What



other performer would you like to go see? Name a song that defines your life right now? What song makes you feel really energized/excited?

- What's the best thing about social media? Why do you think social media has become so popular? What do you think life was like before the internet? What do you think life was like before cell phones?
- What makes you feel brave (or elated, joyful, powerful, fully alive, etc.)? Who inspires you? What's the best thing that's ever happened to you? Name 2 people who have encouraged you. How? How do you gain confidence? How do we learn to be open-minded? What motivates you? How do you find motivation to do something you don't want to do? What self-talk do you use? Do you have a mantra when you are struggling with something? When you are having difficulties, what supports do you need to persevere?
- If you had a million dollars, what would you do with it? If you had enough money to buy the car of your dreams, what car would you buy? Tell us about a great trip/vacation you took. What did you see or do there? Who did you go with? Did anything weird or really funny happen? If you were chosen to be a foreign exchange student, what country would you like to go to and why? How would you describe yourself to a pen pal from another country?
- What's your favorite ice cream? Share a favorite memory about ice cream. A sad one? A funny one? What are you the most grateful/thankful for? What is another happy memory that you'd like to share?
- What is the best thing about nature? Tell us about your favorite thing to do outside or in the woods. Describe a raft trip down the Colorado River. What do you suppose it would be like and how would it make you feel? (Use mindfulness to have them get into their imagination).
- If you were a superhero, what kind of superpowers would you like to have and Why? What would you do with that superpower to make the world a better place?
- Name 3 things you do on a perfect day? What does your perfect day look like?
- If you had to describe yourself like a color or the weather, what would you say? And tell us what that means to you? (ie, blue can be sad for some people, but relaxing for others).
- Tell us about a time when you had amazing fun!
- Tell us about a time when you overcame a fear or an obstacle.
- Tell us about a time when you were brave and courageous.
- Tell us about a time when you felt smart.
- Tell us about a time when you achieved a big goal (like learning to ride a bike, or hit a home run, or built a snow fort/snowman, won a game of...)
- If you could give one gift to every child in the world, what would you give them? What is the best thing about being a kid? What's the hardest part about being a kid? At what age does someone become an adult and what makes you think that? If you could go back in time to when you were little, what advice would you give yourself? What is one thing you are learning that will be the most useful in your life? What makes you smile? What's the funniest thing you ever saw (or did)? What do you think of when you see little kids having a great time?
- If you were a famous chef on television teaching people to cook, what food would you make to demonstrate your amazing cooking skills? If you could own a restaurant, what would you serve? What is your favorite thing to eat and why? What is your favorite thing to cook/bake with a parent/aunt/friend, etc? What's the best or most memorable meal you ever had? What is your favorite "comfort" food? What do you eat when you are sick or when you had a bad day and feel sad?
- If you could be president, what would you do to make the people happy and successful? If you were an inventor, what problem would your invention solve or how would it make the world a better place? What's the best invention ever made?



- If you had a magic wand, what magical experience would you like to create? If you were a magician, what trick would you like to perform? What magic would you do to make your life better? Your family's life?
- If you found a bottle at sea and uncorked it and a genie came out and said he would grant you three wishes, what would they be?
- What is the best way to bring about world peace? What can you do to make the world a more peaceful place? If you could make one rule that everyone in the world had to follow, what would it be?
- What did you do that made you proud of yourself when you have a really good day? or What's the best thing anyone has ever said to you/compliment about WHO you are?
- What makes you feel calm and relaxed.
- What can you do to help yourself deal with stress?
- If another student was upset, what can you do to help him or her?

### SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

- Ask questions related to *Sanford Harmony* or *Leader in Me* or some other program your school is using.
- Print and cut up small hearts. Have each student in the circle give a heart to someone else in the circle who has been kind to them. Have them say, "Thank you for helping me when you (did/said...)."
  - What is a good leader? How does a good leader act? How does a leader treat others?
  - What is kindness?
  - What are some ways you can be kind to your teacher? (your friends, your parents, your brothers/sisters)
  - What is respect?
  - Tell us about a time when you were respectful to someone.
  - Tell us about a time when someone was respectful to you.
  - What is disrespect?
  - Give us an example of a time when you saw someone being disrespectful to someone else.
  - What is honesty?
  - How does it feel when you've been honest?
  - Give us an example of dishonesty.
  - Is lying or stealing an example of dishonesty? What should you do when another student is being dishonest?
  - What is tattling? What are some examples of when you should tell a teacher about someone else's actions. [when safety and well-being are at stake]
  - What are some examples of when it's not necessary to tell a teacher [when it's just a very small or trivial thing and no one is being hurt, for example a student is running or talking in the hall and there is already a teacher in the hallway to take care of it.]
  - What are some ways to show people you care about them?
  - If a new student comes to school and doesn't know anyone, what could you do to help him/her/them to feel better or more comfortable. [Facilitator can use a stuffed animal as the new student.]
  - If **you** were a new student at a school, what would you like the other students to do or say to make you feel more comfortable?
  - What is a friend? Do you have a friend at school?
  - What are some of the good things friends do for each other?
  - What is love? What does it feel like in your body? What does it feel like in your mind? What does it feel like when someone hugs you because they really like you?
  - What does your family teach you about respect? or What is the Golden rule in your house?

- What does your school teach you about respect?
- How do you like others to show respect to you? How can you show respect to others?
- What is responsibility? Tell us about a time when you took responsibility for something you did that you weren't so proud of.
- What is a great way to repair harm that you've done? (apologize, return something you took, asked the other person what he/she would like you to do to make amends)
- What does relationship mean? What does connected mean? Tell us about a time when you felt like you were connected with someone you cared about and your relationship together was really good, like a friendship.
- What does the word reintegration mean to you? Being able to come back after a separation such as after harm was done and someone was suspended and came back to school and wanted to make better choices in the future.
- What does it feel like when someone disrespects you? What would you need to feel better after someone has been disrespectful to you? Think of a time when you were disrespectful. (You may not want to have them share out loud to avoid shame and embarrassment in front of the class). Tell us how you tried to make it right/apologize/change your behavior. If you didn't make it right, looking back now, what do you think you could have done to make it better for that person?
- Share one way you like to show kindness (or be shown kindness). Tell us about a time when it was difficult to show kindness?
- What's one way you can you do better in showing kindness? What will you be working on this week? How can you help others in the class show kindness? Fill in the blanks: When I say or do \_\_\_\_\_, I make things better. When I say or do \_\_\_\_\_, I make things worse.
- Tell us about a time you felt left out (or different/out of place). What did you need to feel included? How can you help others when they seem to feel left out or uncomfortable?
- What do you appreciate about YOU? What is one of your BEST qualities? How would people who really like you describe you?
- What do you value? What's important to you? If that person or thing went away, how would you feel? Do you value people, family, opportunity to learn, creativity, kindness, etc.?
- How would you describe yourself to others? If a really nice Martian landed on Earth who wanted to be your friend, what would you want your new friend to know about you? What could you tell your new friend about how to be a great friend on Earth?
- If you had to introduce your best friend to the class (imagine it is their first day here), what 3 words would you use to describe WHO they are (not what they look like, but character descriptors/qualities)? What 3 words would your best friend use to describe you? Remember to always add, "If you don't have a best friend, that's ok. Think of someone that you admire or look up to."
- What are you doing when you're your best self?
- Describe how you acted on a perfect day.
- What are you proud of about yourself?
- What are some helpful things you can do for your teacher? (parent, fellow student, principal, etc.)

## ACADEMICS

- What do you want to accomplish this year (or what goals do you want to reach)?
- Let's talk about today's lesson (or homework assignment, or the upcoming test). How are you feeling about it? What don't you understand that we can work on together so you feel great about it?
- What is your biggest fear about it?



- Everyone starts with an A+ today. What can we all do to make sure you keep it all day long (in academics, social skills, showing respect, listening and not talking out of turn, not getting out of seats, following instructions, getting your homework in on time, paying attention, having fun at recess without anyone getting hurt, sharing on the playground, etc.)
- How do you think math (or English or science or history) will make your life better in the future and maybe help you in a future career?
- What do you like about school? If you were a teacher, what subject would you want to teach? Why do you think people choose to be teachers? What's the best kind of teacher?
- What do you think teachers think of you?
- What's your favorite book to read and why (and how many times have you read it)? If you were an author, what do you think the title of your book would be or what would the story be about? Describe the main character in this book we're reading with only 3 descriptive words.
- What book do you like to read to others and why? What book do you like to have read to you and why?
- If you could be an animal, what would you be? If a bird could talk, what do you think it would say? Do you have a story about bugs? How would you teach a dog to do tricks? If you were a laboratory scientist that had to discover a cure for sick animals, what illness would it cure? How would the world be different if animals could talk? What would you ask your pet/favorite animal? What would you want to tell them? Tell us something about your pet (or if you don't have one, someone else's pet or a pet you wish you had).
- If a giraffe walked into the school yard today, what would you think?
- Why do you suppose hamsters like to run on a round treadmill?
- Let's talk about Native Americans. What was the most difficult challenge they faced when the Pilgrims landed in Massachusetts?
- What do you think it's like for Native Americans to live on reservations?
- Let's learn about animals and their defense mechanisms. Some are funny and fascinating (Google it) [and then go on to talk about our own human defense mechanisms.] Here is a starter list: CAT: puff up/hiss. DOG: Growl/snarl. DEER: Sense of smell OPOSSUM: Plays "dead." SKUNK: Smelly spray. HEDGEHOG: Curl up. SNAKE: Rattle. GOOSE: Squawk/Puff up/Hiss CHAMELEON: Camouflage. OCTOPUS: Ink. PORCUPINE: Quills/runs backwards and stops suddenly. HORNED LIZARD: Shoots blood from its eyes. DORMOUSE: Tail will fall off if grabbed. VULTURE: Throws up. SLOW LORIS: Poison in armpits (will rub its own pits then rub on predator...albeit very slowly). PYGMY SPERM WHALE: Makes poop-soup in water. HAIRY FROG: breaks own toe bones to make a claw. FLYING FISH: moves at 37mph (Man can only go 28mph.)
- What animal do you most identify with? What are some of your defense mechanisms? What animal do you feel like when you are happy? Sad? Angry? Have smaller children act-out animals.
- If you were an astronaut, where would you want to go in outer space? If you were an astronaut and could go to outer space to visit another planet, what would inhabitants look like and how might you communicate with them? If an alien knocked on your door at your house, what would you do? If you could name a star or a constellation, what would you name it? If you were magically transported to another planet, what do you think you might see?
- Who is your favorite artist? Here is a famous painting that was painted by a famous artist. What do you think the people are doing and saying? What do you think the artist was thinking about/imagining? What do you think the artist was feeling? How does it make you feel?
- Your assignment is to write a book report. Let's talk about the character in our book. Imagine that you were that character. What would you do differently? What do you think the results would be?