

Circles of Connection: Setting up for Drama

These introductory activities introduce the concept of boundaries, consent, and trust when engaging in classroom learning. Using the metaphor of circles, students will engage in games and activities that explore personal space, respectful ways of engaging with others, and communication techniques for setting boundaries.

These activities can be used to introduce the story of *Moon Mouse*, or as a way to build classroom agreements at the beginning of the school year. Alternatively, a teacher could dip in and out of the lessons, integrating different activities into other lessons.

Guiding Questions

- What is personal space? What are boundaries?
- How can we respect others' personal space and boundaries?
- How can we communicate what we are and are not comfortable with when learning together?
- What do healthy boundaries look like/act like in our classroom? When doing drama?
- How are we all connected?
- How can we respect each other, stand up for ourselves, and step out of our comfort zones to take risks?
- What agreements can we make about how we will work together?

Book Sources

The following books introduce the symbol of the circle and some of the themes explored in these activities. These books could be read as a class as an introduction before engaging in these activities.

[Circles All Around Us](#) by Brad

Montague [All Are Welcome](#) by
Alexandra Penfold

Materials

A large open space (optional) Music, hula hoops, yarn, Art materials (coloured paper, pens)

Personal Circles

Invite students to spread out in the space, making sure they have some space to move around them. Invite them to stretch out their arms, their legs, and their pinky fingers to make sure they have as much space as they can without touching anyone else. **This is their personal circle.** Prompt them to explore the circle without moving from the spot they are standing. How far can you stretch? What are the limits of your circle?

Our personal circles are important to keeping us safe and comfortable when doing physical and dramatic work in the classroom. At any point in time if the teacher says “Personal Circle!” students should find a spot to stand and explore the space of the circle around them, ensuring that they have enough space of their own.

Test out the activity by inviting students to move slowly through the empty space, trying to maintain their personal circles at all times, not making contact with anyone else. Have them try different types of movement: walking as if floating on a cloud, through mud, on a rainy day, like a lion, as if you are very heavy, etc. At key points, say “Personal Circle!” and see if students can get spread out into their own spaces. You could even try variations on the circle (i.e. personal triangles, squares, blobs, etc.)

Debrief Discussion

- Why is it important to have personal circles?
- How does it help keep us safe?
- What should we be aware of when it comes to other people’s personal circles?

Growing Your Circle

Now we are going to try growing our circles in safe ways. This is important because in drama, we often work together in groups, and we do physical work that might involve contact. Lead students through various forms of connection with each other, making choices about when and how you want to introduce physical touch.

- *Stand in your personal circle*
- *Explore the space around you.*
- *Find a partner near you who you can work with as you grow your circle (or assign partners). Stand facing your partner, still keeping your personal circle around you.*

Tip for teachers: Option to play music during this movement exercise. For younger students, try seated mirrored movement, beginning with one hand, then two, scaffolding partners as they become more confident to stand up and move slowly through the space.

Take a step forward. Step backward. Explore moving closer and farther apart, still not touching. You might even want to try mirroring each other’s movements, very slowly. Experiment with mirroring: copying movement; creating opposite movement, like a fun house mirror; experimenting with tempo, shape, levels, etc. Reach out to your partner with your hands, no touching. With your fingers. Toes.

Now, talk with your partner. Find one thing that connects you to each other, such as something you have in common, favourite colours, animals, food, hobbies.

Continue this activity with groups of three, four, etc.

Circles with Hula Hoops

Distribute hula hoops on the floor in a large open space. Cue students to begin moving through the space (experimenting with different kinds of movement, option to play music and stop it to cue them for the next step).

Call out a number and encourage students to gather in groups of that number around a hula hoop. Provide different prompts of how they can connect with each other and the prop.

For example:

Groups of 3! Put three feet in the hoop.

Groups of 4! Lift the hoop off the floor with four pinky fingers.

Groups of 5! How can you show the connection between all members of your group and the hoop?

Yarn webs

This game can be done as a whole group, standing or sitting, or in smaller groups with multiple balls of yarn.

First Round

Person A (such as the teacher) begins by holding the ball of yarn. Person A holds on to one of the loose ends of the yarn and then throws the ball to Person B in the circle, saying their name. When that person catches it, Person A and Person B are now connected by the string, creating a web.

Person B holds on to the yarn and throws the ball to Person C, saying their name, creating another string of connection. Continue passing the yarn until everyone in the circle is connected.

Second Round

Repeat the game, but now instead of saying names, share something that connects you together. For example, Person A says a favourite food; someone who also loves that food becomes Person B, who gives another favourite food; Person C also shares their favourite food, and so on, until everyone is connected in a web.

Debrief

- *In what ways are we connected as a class, school community, and world?*
- *How can we honour both what we have in common and what makes us different?*

Connected Circles and Shapes

For this activity, establish agreements for physical touch. You may want to do the

Classroom Protocol Setting activity first.

Invite students to begin moving around the room again in different ways, exploring their personal circles. But now, you may call out “Circle of 3!” If you do, students need to make a group of three as quickly as possible. To avoid people being left out, remind students to raise their fingers to indicate how many people they still need in their group and encourage people who have not yet found a group to hold up their hands so they are easy to spot.

First Round

When groups form, ask them to “connect” using a different part of the body. If you have decided to play the game without physical contact, they can connect these parts with space in between them. If using red-yellow-green light, have students check in with each other before they make their connection. For example, back to back, elbow to pinky finger, hand to knee, etc.

Second Round

Have the groups make shapes, objects, or settings the group needs to make. For example, a two-person swan, a three-person motorcycle, a four-person mountain, etc. Invite them to freeze in formation so other groups can see them, or add sound and movement to their creations, or construct their images in silence. Do multiple rounds with different formations, having them practice safe touch. Conclude the game by keeping them in groups of 2-4 for the next activity.

Creating Images of Trust and Connection

Students will work in their groups to create a frozen image (freeze frame) inspired by a single word. Their images can be realistic (i.e. frozen scenes with people engaging in activity) or can be abstract, conveying the idea in a more symbolic way. Consider practicing one image as a whole class first (i.e. each group makes an image, we share and discuss, then try it again).

Single Word Prompts

Create an image of.....

- Trust
- Connection
- Cooperation
- Respect
- Boundaries
- Friendship
- Community

Or, reuse prompts from the previous games.

Debrief

Literacy connection: making inferences

Ask the groups to reflect on the image they felt was their best. Invite groups to share their frozen images and get feedback from the other groups.

- *How do these images reflect these ideas?*
- *What connections do we see between the images?*
- *What do these images tell us about ourselves, our classroom community, and relating to others in the world?*

Setting Classroom Protocols

Wellbeing connection

This activity draws from intimacy protocols used in theatre, film, and stage combat settings. You may want to do this activity with students before starting the preceding games, or you may want to use the games as a way to get them thinking about what kinds of protocols they want in their classroom.

Protocols are agreements we set and use when we are doing drama or other kinds of physical work together. They help keep us safe, promote a sense of trust, cooperation, and respect with each other. Thinking about the images we've just created and the games we've played, can you think of any protocols we should set as a class when we work together?

Examples of Classroom Protocols

Red-Yellow-Green Light: Before doing an activity that involves physical touch, group members check in with each other to communicate what they are comfortable with. For example, if the game asks us to hold hands, we can say "green light" if that is okay, "red light" if we would rather not, and "yellow light" if we want to talk about it more (i.e. "I'm okay with holding hands, but please don't squeeze too tight").

Check Ins/Check Outs: Before starting work together as a class or in small groups, students can do a quick check-in to let others know how they are feeling today and what they

might need (i.e. "I'm feeling very tired today, so please understand I might be quiet"). Check-outs can be used at the end of class to communicate what has worked well in class today, and any issues that are arising that the students might need help with (i.e. "We had a hard time hearing each other today, and next class might need a quieter space to work in"). Check-outs can also be done in written form, such as exit cards left with the teacher at the end of class.

Hand Signals (or "The Button): The class can establish a hand signal (such as pressing an imaginary button) that can be given to the teacher or another group member to let them know they are uncomfortable, may need to leave the space, have a moment to themselves, etc.

Create a list as a class of classroom protocols that we will try out during our class work. Display the protocols in a prominent space in the classroom and revise them often.

The Right to Pass: Establish that students have the right to pass during class discussions if they would rather not contribute, and during games and activities. Decide as a class how someone who needs to pass and step out of an activity can still be included (i.e. sit off to the side and watch, take a moment to themselves in the hallway before rejoining, etc.).

Stepping Out: If students cannot play a game or activity safely, the teacher may ask them to “step out” and watch the others participate from the sidelines. After watching their peers work together safely, those students can re-enter and try again.

Setting Classroom Agreements

In addition to setting protocols for working together, students may want to create broader agreements for cooperation, connection, and respectful relationships in the classroom.

Sample statements

- *We will listen to each other's ideas.*
- *We will include all members of the group when working together.*
- *We will be respectful of people's bodies and personal space.*

These groups can be created in small groups, presented to the class, and made into a kind of charter or treaty, or they could be embodied in frozen images like the previous activity. If making frozen images, groups should add a spoken caption of their agreement to their freeze frame.

Setting Protocols for Drama

Dramatic play often requires its own protocols, such as the suspension of disbelief when engaging in role play together. Consider having a conversation with students about how you will do this together, and consider using some of these tips from drama experts.

- When in role, we will agree to present that what happens in the drama is real.
- Let's agree on a signal that the teacher will use to let you know when the drama begins, and when it ends, and we go back to being ourselves. This can be a hand signal (such as a snap of the fingers) or a costume piece, such as the teacher putting on a hat to show you they are. Imagine the drama as a bubble that we don't want to pop. What kinds of things would

pop the bubble? (i.e. bringing up something off topic, coming out of role, etc.

- Rub your hands together, getting them warm, and then place them on the part of your body where you think your imagination is. Use this practice to “warm up” your imaginations before the drama begins.
- Or create your own metaphor for drama, such as “story dust,” a magical spell, or a balloon that we don’t want to pop to get us ready for Moon Mouse!

