



Literacy Connects

A Content Literacy Newsletter from Regional Professional Development Program-Issue XXX



Building Classroom Community

Educators have always understood the importance of building and nurturing positive relationships with and among students. Recent brain research has shown that emotions are the single most important consideration in learning. Emotions determine whether or not we pay attention or make personal connections, while positive emotions increase our motivation to learn. Our most powerful memories are emotional. In fact, feeling stressed or threatened alters the body's chemistry which can impair the ability to learn and cause health problems. Emotions are so powerful that the brain can not differentiate between emotional and physical danger. With this in mind, it is essential that educators take time at the beginning of the school year to establish a safe environment where students are part of a positive learning community. Subsequent *Literacy Connects* will focus on ways to build community in your classroom, starting with the following "Getting to Know You" activities:

Spotlighting: Ask students to make a list of as many things about themselves as there are students in the room. They should write things that not many of their friends know but that they would be willing to share. Examples are "I raise hamsters; I have been to Russia twice; I eat pizza for breakfast; I love cream cheese and jelly sandwiches." Then allow students to move around the room and talk to one another. They should trade one fact with each student and write the student's first name beside the fact. Then let students take turns sitting in a chair at the front of the room, being "spotlighted," while everyone goes around and calls out the things they have learned about that student.

Name Game: Starting with the student nearest you, ask, "What is your name?" Repeat the student's first name. Then go to the next student and ask, "What is your name?" Repeat that student's first name and ask him/her, "What is his/her name?" while you gesture to the first student. Then go to the third student and continue around the room. The last student will have to name all the students in the room. After the last student has named all students, you should name them all again. Then tell all students to get up and sit somewhere else. Then ask, "Who can name everybody now?" Then you do it too.

Alliteration Name Game: A variation of the Name Game can be played by adding alliteration and a ball. Have everyone stand up. Say your name using alliteration. For example, "I am Lucky Lasley" then throw the ball to a student who says his/her name using alliteration and then repeats yours. For example, "I am Reggie Robert and this is Lucky Lasley" and then throws the ball to another student. Once the student has introduced him/herself, he/she can sit down. The last student to introduce himself must repeat all the names.

Two Truths and a Lie: Ask students to make a list of 2 things that are true about themselves and one thing that is a lie. The students introduce themselves and read their three facts. The rest of the group tries to determine which fact is a lie. You should start by introducing yourself and your two truths and one lie.

Snowball Fight: Have each student in your class write 3 interesting things about themselves on a piece of paper, wad up their paper and throw it across the room (the snowball fight part). Each student picks up a paper ball and finds the person who wrote it. The students interview each other based on the details written on the paper. They then introduce each other to the class. If time is an issue, you can have the students write only one detail about themselves.

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