



## Introduction to Unit One

We begin the yearlong process of engaging in arts-integrated, social-emotional learning with a project that asks students to recognize their own unique self-worth by writing a comic book about themselves. Middle-school-aged students can be reluctant to talk about feelings and emotions; it can feel childish and uncool. This unit eases into the subject by encouraging the foundational tools of self-confidence and recognition of the importance of unique work.

### Supporting Positive Behavior

From the start of the year it is important to acknowledge and positively reinforce the behaviors you want maintained in the classroom, such as sharing, sitting, working carefully, and creating unique work. Reviewing as well as reinforcing these behaviors should be done continuously throughout the year. At this age, the frontal cortex of the brain is still developing. It doesn't stop developing until people reach their 20s. This part of the brain controls impulsivity and self-regulation, among other things. By acknowledging positive behavior continuously, you are supporting students to behave positively and decrease the opportunity to exhibit undesirable behavior. In addition, you are helping to shape an important area of brain development while students practice sharing, working carefully, and so on. Students like having their work shown to the rest of the class. Teachers can support students to create unique work by using an interactive whiteboard or a computer connection to revisit a previous class's objectives by displaying images of exemplary student work.

### Circle Time

During the first class, it is important to spend time teaching the logistics of a circle.

### Listening

One important aspect of circle time is to help the students learn that listening and not speaking when it is someone else's turn is a way to show respect. To help students remember this rule, it is helpful to use a talking piece. Choose a talking piece that means something to you or the class. For example, one teacher uses a Zulu coconut given by one of her students in her first year of teaching. It is also important to make the procedure simple, saying for example, "When you have the talking piece, that is your

chance to talk. When you don't, that's your chance to listen. This is one way that we practice working as an ensemble." When we go around the circle answering the class question, students are always allowed to pass by taking the talking piece, saying, "pass," and handing it to the next student.

## Transitioning

Transitioning into and out of a circle can be difficult, which makes it a great opportunity to celebrate small successes. For example, "It was cool how Jenny moved to her space in the circle so quietly; that's a good way to work as an \_\_\_\_\_ because it helps get things started faster." It also provides an opportunity to help students learn from mistakes. After the circle/ team-building exercise, engage the class in a discussion with two guiding questions: What are some ways we worked as an ensemble? What are some ways our ensemble could improve next time? These discussions make an enormous difference in transitioning in the future.

## Class Objectives

It is important to lead each class by reintroducing and talking about the yearlong objectives, which can include work as an ensemble, recognize the importance of unique work, and express oneself in words and art. This not only endows students with vocabulary around these objectives (notably "ensemble," and "unique") but also gives you, the teacher, a useful tool to help reinforce yearlong goals. It is helpful to use different strategies to review these objectives. This keeps the students interested and aids with understanding the class goals. Some of the strategies to try include:

- Asking students to read class objectives with you
- Requesting students to repeat the objectives after you
- Having different table groups discuss the objectives

Talking about these objectives has an enormous payoff: students begin referencing the objectives in class themselves and begin to identify moments when they are meeting the objectives.

## Ending Class

It is important to help students transition to the next class. Try closing class with the \_\_\_\_\_ . It helps students think about what they did during class and settles everyone down after class is over. Another option is to have students journal on the prompts that are provided at the bottom of each lesson plan. In either case, it is useful to allow class to close with at least five minutes of focused silence. Students leave the class feeling calm and relaxed and ready to go on with their day.

## Unit One

In the first unit, students create a \_\_\_\_\_ comic book about something significant to their lives. This is a great opportunity to discuss the culture of manga in Japan and to draw connections to students' own unique cultures. It is helpful to bring in an array of manga books (readily available at any public library). Students are fascinated with the way the books traditionally open from left to right, the opposite of the books they know. They naturally draw connections to cartoons they've seen on television. (Manga-style cartoons are called anime.) Teachers have seen success in encouraging these life to school connections. The students are excited to see art as something that they interact with in daily life, rather than something only available at museums.