

Strengths and Barriers: Valuing Others, Ourselves and Equity

Recommended Ages

Grades 3-8 (adaptable)

Key Themes

Diversity of ability, fairness, equity.

Materials Needed

For main activity:

- Activity bags – each bag is for a group of 3-6 students. 1 or 2 bags should include the complete list of items below. Other bags should have one or more things missing to simulate inequity.
 - Gallon size freezer bags
 - Safety scissors
 - ½ sheet Blue construction paper
 - ¼ sheet Yellow construction paper
 - Glue stick
 - Sharpie marker
 - Set of instructions (attached)

For optional / alternative activity:

- Band-aids
- 'Injury cards' (attached)

Learning Goals

- Students will understand that everyone has strengths and weaknesses – and that these do not define a person's worth
- Students will recognize that limitations can make tasks more difficult
- Students will understand the difference between equality (treating everyone the same) and equity (treating everyone fairly)
- Students will build empathy for people with different abilities or experiences

Lesson Instructions

1. Activity – ‘Bag of Inclusion, Diversity and Empathy’

Divide students into groups of 3-6.

“I will be passing out activity bags to each group. Please do not open the bag until I say so. The goal of this activity is to complete the task in under 5 minutes following the instructions provided.”

Pass out the material bags, one to each group.

“You may open your bag. Read the instructions first, before starting. Again, you will not be given any additional instructions beyond what is on the paper. After you read the instructions, please begin the activity”

Note: Some groups may begin to express confusion, frustration or say the activity is not fair. Allow them to vent but do not help them or provide additional information / instructions.

“You will have 5 minutes to complete the activity. Your time starts now”.

Set a timer or provide verbal updates

After a few minutes, it is likely that the team(s) with no limitations will finish. Ask for the class to enthusiastically give that group a round of applause and celebrate them being ‘first’.

Other groups will likely speak up, express frustration or say that they have it harder. Allow them to talk about their limitations without dismissing them. The goal of the activity is to get the participants to realize that not all groups were given the same opportunity but were expected to achieve the same goal.

(after 5 minutes) “Your time is up! Please stop what you are doing so we can discuss the activity”.

Discussion Questions:

How did you or your group feel while trying to complete the activity?

Which group was the best? The ones who finished first? Why or why not?

How do you think this activity relates to people who may have disabilities or who face barriers in life?

How could you have made the activity more inclusive? *(helping others by sharing resources or helping after their group finished, asking for help)*

2. Story – The Fish, Squirrel and Owl

Write the following quote on the board and then read the following story.

“Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it is stupid” – Albert Einstein.

Short Story

Once upon a time, in a big forest school, the animal teacher gave the same test to every animal:

“Today’s test is to climb to the top the tall oak tree.”

The squirrel was up the trunk in seconds.

The owl flapped her wings and made it halfway up before giving up.

But the little fish just stared at the tree.

“I can’t climb!” the fish said sadly. “I guess I’m not very smart.”

The squirrel felt bad. “But you’re amazing at swimming! You can do something I could never do.”

The owl nodded. “And if this test was about catching bugs underwater, you’d get the top mark.”

The teacher realized the test wasn’t fair. “Every animal is smart in its own way. We all have talents that make us special.” From that day on, the forest school had many different kinds of tests — climbing, flying, swimming, and digging— so every animal could shine.

Discussion Questions:

Which groups were the ‘fish’ in the story?

The fish represents anyone who is asked to do something they’re not naturally equipped for – not because they are not smart, but because their strengths lie in other areas. It’s a symbol for people whose abilities or talents are always recognized by traditional tests, activities or expectations.

How do you think the fish felt when asked to climb the tree? (*Frustrated, sad, embarrassed, dejected, not good enough, left out*)

Can you think of a time you or someone you know might have been in a situation like the fish?

Teacher Talk:

Just like the animals in the story, people in our class or community have different strengths and abilities. Some might be great at sports, others at art, math, music, or helping others. If we only measure people by one skill, we miss seeing all the amazing things they can do. Everyone has something valuable to contribute.

The key idea: Different abilities are equally valuable, and everyone has strengths that deserve to be recognized.

3. Optional / Alternative Activity – Fairness vs Sameness (Equity vs Equality)

Hand out 'injury cards' to each student.

Explain to the students that you are going to help them deal with their injury. Beginning with the student who has the 'cut' card, ask students to come to the front of the class and share their 'injury'. Once they have done so, give them a Band-aid.

If the next students object or say they need different treatment, highlight that you gave the first injured student a Band-aid and that it 'wouldn't be fair if you gave them something different'.

Continue until there is one last student left. Tell them you have run out of Band-Aids and can't help them.

Discussion Questions:

Was that fair for everyone? Is everyone feeling better now?

Does treating others fairly always mean treating everyone the same?

If someone is injured, should you help them? Should you make fun of them?

If someone is doing a different activity in class or needs different help than you do, should you make fun of them?

Teacher Talk:

Sameness means giving everyone exactly the same thing. Everyone is treated 'equally'. Sometimes, people feel this is 'fair'.

But often times – sameness is not the same as fairness. In this activity, different health conditions or injuries need different kind of help. Treating people fairly in this instance might mean giving them different things so that everyone has a better chance to feel better.

In our classroom, some students will need more help with some things than others. They might have different strengths and weaknesses. And some students might even do different things than others. We are all different but we all should have the opportunity to learn in the way that works best for us. It is important not to make anyone feel bad or to judge someone just because they have different strengths or weaknesses than you.

Remember that asking for help and getting help are never weaknesses! Not getting help in class is like not getting a band-aid or help when you are sick.

6. Wrap up and Personal Commitment

Reinforce the key takeaway of the lesson:

"In this classroom, we value each other for who we are, with our strengths and weaknesses. We will help each other succeed in the way each person needs."

Optional: Have students share something they are good at and something they find challenging.

Activity Instruction Sheets

Cut into strips and place one set of instructions into each bag.

Note: All of your team members must fully participate in the activity.

Instructions:

1. Take the blue piece of paper and fold it in half.
 2. Take the yellow paper and cut a circle out of it.
 3. Glue this circle onto the blue paper.
 4. Use the sharpie to write "School is Awesome!" on the circle.
 5. Write your names on the back side of the card. (All Team Members)
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Note: All of your team members must fully participate in the activity.

Instructions:

1. Tomar la pieza azul de papel y doblar por la mitad.
 2. Tomar el papel amarillo y cortar un círculo fuera de él
 3. Pegue este círculo en el papel azul.
 4. Utilice el lápiz para escribir en marrón "Yo amo la escuela." dentro del círculo.
 5. Poner su nombres en la parte posterior de la tarjeta.
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Note: All of your team members must complete the activity with their eyes closed

Instructions:

1. Close your eyes.
 2. Take the blue piece of paper and fold it in half.
 3. Take the yellow paper and cut a circle out of it
 4. Glue this circle onto the blue paper.
 5. Use the sharpie to write "I love School" on the circle.
 6. Write your names on the back side of the card. (All Team Members)
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Note: All of your team members must follow the directions with each member having one of their hands behind their back

Instructions:

1. Put one hand behind your back.
 2. Take the blue piece of paper and fold it in half.
 3. Take the yellow paper and cut a circle out of it
 4. Glue this circle onto the blue paper.
 5. Use the sharpie to write "I love School" on the circle.
 6. Write your names on the back side of the card. (All Team members)
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Note: Only two people on the team can give instructions to one person and they must have their eyes closed at all times.

Instructions:

1. Identify two 'instructors'. Have one group member close their eyes and them complete the following (with verbal instructions only)
 2. Take the blue piece of paper and fold it in half.
 3. Take the yellow paper and cut a circle out of it
 4. Glue this circle onto the blue paper.
 5. Use the sharpie to write "I love School" on the circle.
 6. Write the names of your group on the back side of the card.
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Note: No one can talk

Instructions – without talking to each other

1. Take the blue piece of paper and fold it in half.
 2. Take the yellow paper and cut a circle out of it.
 3. Glue this circle onto the blue paper.
 4. Use the sharpie to write "School is Awesome!" on the circle.
 5. Write your names on the back side of the card. (All Team Members)
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Injury Cards

Cut on your finger	Scraped Knee
Headache	Sore Throat
Broken Nose	Broken Arm
Sprained Ankle	Burned Finger
Dog Bite	Fever

Broken Collarbone	Nosebleed
Muscle Cramp	Dislocated Shoulder
Blurred Vision	Concussion
Dislocated Knee	Allergic Reaction
Heart Attack	