



GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER THROUGH DANCE

"Dance is the hidden language of the soul."

— Martha Graham

OVERVIEW

Students explore the idea of social engagement through both conversation and body language as they try a fun dance step and practice the art of “small talk” with one or several partners.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- As a team-building activity early in the year or any time it’s needed
- To build trust and cultivate positive relationships between students
- To set the stage for other kinds of partner work
- To end the week with a dose of movement and fun

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 30 minutes

LEVEL

- PreK/Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School

MATERIALS

- A short dance video that your students enjoy—look for something with just a few simple movements they can easily follow and learn. EduMotion’s free [Dance-of-the-Month](#) lessons work well. Alternately, the basic step from any well-known social dance, such as salsa, swing, merengue, waltz, can be incorporated into this activity. Hip-hop moves or “fad dance” steps can also work.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Respectfully engage with others in movement and conversation

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Relationship Skills

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to reflect on how you use small talk and casual conversation to get to know people better. Is this easy or challenging for you?

INSTRUCTIONS

OPENING PROMPT

- Tell students:
 - *A great way to build friendships is to ask questions and be a good listener. There are many things that just about anyone likes to talk about, such as favorite foods, favorite books or movies, or activities they enjoy.*

FOR DISCUSSION

- Ask students:
 - *What is a “small talk” question you could ask just about anyone to get to know them better?*

TIME TO MOVE

- Tell students:
 - *Asking questions and talking is a great way to get to know people better, but we can also communicate through our bodies and movement.*
 - *For fun, we're going to try a few dance steps and then practice getting to know our classmates better through a combination of conversation and movement.*
 - Watch the selected dance video and invite students to stand up in their own personal space and follow along.
- Once they know the step(s), have them face a partner and try moving together.
 - To mirror each other, have one person be the "Joymaker" and start on their right foot, and the other person be the "Peacemaker" and start on the left.
 - Perhaps add a "high-five" (one handed) or "high-ten" (two handed) hand connection to help them track one another better.
- Play the video or music several times so they can practice the movement with a partner.

SEL IN PRACTICE

- Once students are comfortable moving with a partner, it will be time to practice getting to know other classmates.
- In the final exercise, invite the Joymakers to move to a new Peacemaker and take a minute to engage in "small talk" with each new partner. Rotate several times.
- Then, when the music or video starts, have them try the movement with the new partner.

FINAL STUDENT REFLECTION

- Ask students:
 - *How did it go with making small talk? And how was the dancing? Did you learn anything new about your classmates?*

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Were students able to respectfully engage in both movement and conversation? Which was harder for them? What could you do to build upon this experience next time?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

In a [study](#) of 1st through 4th graders, teachers reported that dance and drama instruction contributed greatly to students' social and emotional development.

In general, arts education has been found to increase students' [prosocial behavior](#), [academic achievement](#), and [positive self-concept](#), among [other benefits](#).

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Cultivating positive relationships between students is key to their academic success and well-being. Indeed, studies have found that peer acceptance relates positively to [GPA](#) in middle school and can explain up to 40% of adolescents' [academic achievement](#). In addition, positive peer relationships help to increase students' [resilience](#) and [self-esteem](#), and reduce their [loneliness](#).

Programs that focus on cultural and social dance demonstrate that these kinds of dance experiences foster respect for others and collaboration across age, culture, and socioeconomic status.

SOURCE

[EduMotion: SEL Journeys](#) is a digital learning platform that integrates lessons on diversity, empathy and kindness with movement activities inspired by dances from around the world. EduMotion's evidence-based curriculum has been used for more than a decade as a strategy to help students develop peer relationships and explore what it means to be a global citizen. Educators can get started by signing up for free dance-of-the-month content and SEL resources on edumotion.com