



TIME SAVER:
Teamwork

TIME FOR CHANGE:

DREAM. ACT. CHANGE OUR WORLD.

Are you looking for creative ways to encourage collaboration and teamwork in your classroom or program? Sharing responsibility and encouraging each person to use their unique abilities towards a common purpose is the kind of sophisticated teamwork students need to practice in order to grow as changemakers. Our rapidly changing world demands this.

Follow these five steps to teach students the value of building an effective team. Effective teams develop and adhere to **teamwork guidelines**, allow for **multiple and flexible roles**, value **respectful communication**, and make decisions by **consensus**.

STEP

1

ADDRESS A PROBLEM WITHOUT A TEAM PLAN

Break the class into small groups (4-5 students). Have each group pick one of the problems below that is relevant. Give the groups 10 minutes to discuss their problem and design a solution:

- Students do not have enough time to eat during lunch.
- It is too loud in the cafeteria.
- Students have too much homework after school.
- A new substitute teacher is having a hard time.
- New students feel lonely and shy during their first week at school.
- *If you have time, let your students identify other problems.*

STEP

2

REFLECT

After the groups have discussed a problem and designed a solution, ask students to reflect on their teamwork experiences (as a class or in their groups), using these questions as a starting point:

- Was it difficult to decide on a solution?
- How did everyone in your group feel about the decision?
- Did everyone feel heard?

BEST PRACTICES FOR SUCCESSFUL TEAMWORK

Ensure that everyone has the chance to contribute at least one idea. Make sure those ideas are recognized positively.

Work through consensus, making sure to vote on a final idea.

Embrace evolving and/or multiple roles, sometimes leading and other times working in a supporting role.

STEP

3

CREATE TEAMWORK GUIDELINES

Some students may have felt unheard or unseen during this activity because there were no guidelines or expectations about working together as a team. Other students may not have realized that they were not allowing everyone to contribute their ideas.

Successful teamwork starts with establishing guidelines for how to work together fairly and effectively. Have students work together as a class to create guidelines they can use during teamwork activities.

- 1 Ask students how they would like to feel when they work in groups and write their responses (such as *valued*, *happy*, and *respected*) on the board.
- 2 Brainstorm how to turn these feelings into guidelines and expectations. Provide tangible examples like don't interrupt, make eye contact, and acknowledge team members' individual efforts and contributions.

STEP

4

ADDRESS A PROBLEM WITH A TEAM PLAN

Divide the class into their original teams. Go back to the first activity and have each team pick a *new* problem to solve. Have the students repeat the problem-solving activity, paying special attention to the teamwork guidelines they created together.

Changemaker Tips:

When your students begin the second round of problem-solving, suggest that those who were leaders and/or particularly vocal during the first round consider giving space for others to lead.

Encourage students who are passionate about the solutions they came up with to try them out. This allows them to apply their brainstorming to real life.

REFLECT

As a class, ask students to reflect on how these two experiences differed. Use these questions as a starting point:

- How did you feel at the beginning of the first activity? Second activity? (Examples: *nervous, confused, excited, confident, curious...*)
- How did you feel at the end of the first activity? Second activity? (Examples: *frustrated, disappointed, proud, satisfied...*)
- Which experience worked better for your team? Why?
- How did the teamwork guidelines affect the interaction and collaboration among team members?

FIND BOOKS ABOUT TEAMWORK ON THE FIRST BOOK MARKETPLACE

Visit our [Teamwork & Trusting Others](#) section to find stories of people working together to make great things happen.

For students to feel like they are making valuable contributions to a team, they need to develop an appreciation for their own unique talents, qualities, and gifts. Visit our [Self-Esteem & Individuality](#) section to find books that help kids develop.

Working together requires students to be respectful of one another and demonstrate empathy for others' working styles, abilities, and ways of thinking. Visit our [Respect & Empathy](#) section.

LEARN MORE!

Learn more about transforming schools, programs, and classrooms into collaborative environments here.



WATCH ▶

Sources

[A Toolkit for Promoting Empathy in Schools | Ashoka](#)

[The Young Changemaker's Guide to Team Building | Ashoka | Medium.com](#)



TIME SAVER:
Conscious
Empathy

TIME FOR CHANGE:

DREAM. ACT. CHANGE OUR WORLD.

Are you looking for ways to help your students practice conscious empathy but short on planning time? Here are three quick steps to help students develop and practice empathy as they embark on or continue their changemaker journeys.

STEP

1

READ ALOUD

Read alouds are a great tool for starting discussions with students of all ages. Reading a book that features diverse characters and experiences gives students the opportunity to reflect on what it would be like to have a different identity or set of struggles.

Books have many different purposes in the classroom and can help students learn about themselves and their own culture as well as other people and different cultures. For some students, literature may be the first time they are exposed to differences in culture, religion, and lifestyle.



A *window* is a text that offers a view into someone else's experience.



A *sliding door* is a text that allows the reader to become a part of the story's world.



A *mirror* is a text that reflects the reader's own culture and helps them build and be proud of their identity.

Educator and author Cornelius Minor shares his tips for selecting and discussing stories that invite students to notice differences without assigning value.

Source: [Empowering Educators: A Digital Series on Race and Racism](#)

Who Do We See? Using Books to Have Conversations About Race



I'm providing kids a blueprint and I'm providing kids language by exposing them to different characters in books so that kids can develop a healthy reverence for people that they have never met by beginning to empathize with them in the pages of a book.

CORNELIUS MINOR



WATCH ▶

REFLECT & DISCUSS

Regardless of the book you choose, you can use these questions to help students deepen their sense of empathy and consider different experiences and perspectives. This exercise in perspective-taking encourages students to practice curiosity, nonjudgment, and empathy.

- What do you think a particular character is feeling right now?
- Why do you think the character feels that way?
- What about another character? Can you reflect on what they are going through?
- If you were one of these characters, what would you do differently?

SHOP THE FIRST BOOK MARKETPLACE

You can use any book you have in your classroom or program, but if you need suggestions, the First Book Marketplace offers many books about empathy and compassion.

Visit the [Respect & Empathy](#) section of First Book's Marketplace to find stories of kids and adults demonstrating appreciation for others.

Browse the [Kindness & Compassion](#) section to find examples of empathy in action. When people use empathy to spur action, that results in kindness.

See our ever-expanding selection of diverse books and resources in the [Diversity & Inclusion](#) section.



STOP. BREATHE. LISTEN. RESPOND.

While it's important to discuss empathy and books can spark reflection, students also need opportunities to *practice* conscious empathy. With practice, this mindset will become a natural part of their changemaker toolbox. This exercise teaches kids active listening and to pause before reacting, the key to emotional regulation and empathy. This is also a great strategy when dealing with conflicts between students. Take them aside and ask them to use this technique to listen to and consider the other person's side of the story.

- ❶ Divide students into pairs.
- ❷ Explain that being empathetic requires us to be present with someone and not be distracted or preoccupied. Attentive and empathic listening is possible when we:
 - a. **Stop:** We stop what we're doing when a friend has something to say, and we don't text, doodle, or multitask.
 - b. **Breathe:** We slow down, find a quiet place, and really concentrate on being present.
 - c. **Listen:** We allow our friend to share whatever is on their mind and listen without interrupting. Try saying, "Tell me more..."
 - d. **Respond:** After listening, we respond in a kind and compassionate way. Try asking, "How do you feel about what is going on?" or "What do you think you should do?"
- ❸ Give each pair of students the opportunity to share and listen. They can share anything that's on their mind—what they did last weekend or an upcoming test, for example. After each pair has had the opportunity to share and listen, reflect as a class by discussing these questions:
 - a. How did you feel doing this activity?
 - b. Did you learn anything new about how to listen?
 - c. How did it feel to have someone give you their undivided attention?
 - d. Why do you think good listening skills and empathy are important qualities in a leader?

This exercise is adapted from [Ashoka's Empathy Toolkit](#).

LEARN
MORE!

For more information about how empathy relates to changemaking, explore [Time for Change: Dream. Act. Change. Our World](#), an introductory guide for educators.





TIME FOR CHANGE:

DREAM. ACT. CHANGE OUR WORLD.

The leadership style used in changemaking recognizes that everyone has an area of expertise and is called upon to lead at different moments. Changemaking leadership means adapting to changing situations, being able to mobilize others around an idea, and maximizing the abilities and strengths of all team members. In other words, everyone contributes in different ways at different times.

A changemaking leader:

- Sees the big picture and helps others in the team envision it, too
- Stays focused on the main goal while facing complex, rapid change
- Connects the dots between individuals, communities, and society
- Is resilient and recovers quickly from setbacks
- Believes in every person's ability to lead and contribute positively to their communities

The following activity will give your students the opportunity to experience a range of roles within a team, including Builder, Adviser, and Observer. In changemaking, leadership is not rigid, static, or linear; everyone has the opportunity to lead as well as follow. In the days leading up to this activity, you may want to gather an assortment of empty recyclable containers, books, construction paper, pipe cleaners, wrapping paper rolls, etc. for students to use as building materials.



TOWER BUILDING ACTIVITY

STEP 1

DIVIDE STUDENTS INTO GROUPS

Divide students into groups of three. Students will do this activity three times, so each member of the group has the opportunity to experience various aspects of leadership.

STEP

2

EXPLAIN THE GOAL & DEFINE THE ROLES

Each team will try to build the tallest tower possible using items available in the classroom. Each member of the team will take turns **building, advising, and observing**.

Builder: The person in the role of Builder will construct the tower with input and ideas from the Adviser.

Adviser: The person in the role of Adviser will help guide the design of the tower — perhaps suggesting materials to use or noting that adding one more item to the top of the tower might cause it to fall.

Observer: The person in the role of Observer will watch silently — reflecting on what went well and what could be improved upon next time — and then share their observations with the team.

STEP

3

SHARE OBSERVATIONS

After the Builder has completed their tower, the Observer can offer feedback to the Builder and/or the Adviser using the Compliment Sandwich method. This means giving a compliment, offering a suggestion, and then closing with another compliment.

Example: 1) You gave thoughtful advice about the risks of adding one more item to the tower. 2) Next time, you could suggest a lightweight item for the top of the tower. 3) You were encouraging and supportive, even after the tower collapsed.

STEP

4

REFLECT

Once students have had the opportunity to try each role, have them discuss what they learned — either in their small groups or as a class.

- In which role did you feel most comfortable?
- Which role was uncomfortable and why?
- In which role did you feel the most responsibility?
- Can you think of examples of how you could use some of the lessons of this activity with your friends, at home, or in your community? What value and perspective(s) did each role bring to the tower building process?

SHARE
THIS!

Share this [video](#) about changemaker Matine Khalighi and how he stepped up to address homelessness in his state by noticing a problem, building a team, and designing a solution to help others.

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Your students have studied and practiced Empathy, Teamwork, and Changemaking Leadership. Now it's time to support them in using these abilities to innovate effective and sustainable solutions to problems in their communities. It's time for changemaking action! Sometimes, the hardest part is just getting started. Use this exercise to help students take their first three steps toward changemaking. Note that this is an opportunity to take only the initial steps toward completing a changemaking activity.

TAKING THE FIRST STEP: NEIGHBORHOOD OR SCHOOL MAPPING

STEP 1

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM

- 1 Divide students into groups of three.
- 2 Invite students to draw a map of their community, which could be their neighborhood or school.
- 3 If students are drawing their school, they should include classrooms, the cafeteria, the library, outdoor areas like fields and tracks, and nearby locations like bus stops and stores. If they're drawing their neighborhood, they should include all relevant features like bus stops, stores, parks, and buildings. They should draw symbols on the map using the key below and discuss the following questions as they create their map:
 - Who is a part of this neighborhood or school community?
 - Where do children play? Draw a smiley face to show where they play. 😊
 - Where do people gather? Draw a circle to show where they gather. ○
 - Where are decisions made? Draw a triangle to show where they make decisions. △
 - What are the assets of this community? This could be in terms of positive places, fun experiences, unique features that make your community special, or something else. Draw a sun to show the community's assets. ☀️
 - What are some of the things that could be improved? This could be in terms of safety, cleanliness, equity, accessibility, functionality, appearance, or something else. Draw a cloud to show the areas that could be improved. ☁️
- 4 Each group should identify an area on their map that they want to improve. It could be something that doesn't work well and could be fixed. Or something that is unfair that could be addressed. Or something that works well but could be even better. Allow for brainstorming time!

EXAMPLE: *There's a big crack in the sidewalk outside the school, and kids often trip over it and fall down.*

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CONDUCT AN EMPATHY INTERVIEW

Once each group has selected a topic, ask them to identify at least one person who might be affected by the problem they identified. This could be a classmate, friend, family member, or someone else. Each group should prepare 10 questions and then conduct an empathy interview with the person they selected. The empathy interview can be conducted during school or program hours, in the evening, or on the weekend.

EXAMPLE:

Find a classmate who has tripped on the crack in the sidewalk and ask them about the experience. Don't make any assumptions about whether they got hurt or think the sidewalk should be fixed. Just ask about their experience and listen to what they say.

What is an empathy interview?

An empathy interview is a way of asking questions that allows the interviewee to share their experiences, feelings, and ideas in a nonjudgmental space. This means asking questions without expecting certain answers and listening with an open mind and heart. Empathy interviews are an important step in changemaking because they help you learn how the problem you identified actually affects the people in the community and allows you to get a broader understanding of the problem.

Empathy Interview Tips:

Interviewing with empathy is all about...

- **Active listening:** Focus on what the other person is saying without judging or interrupting.
- **Encouraging storytelling:** Instead of asking, "Have you ever ridden the bus before?" try saying, "Tell me about the time you rode the bus. What happened?"
- **Seeking clarity:** If something the person says doesn't make sense to you, ask, "What do you mean by...?" or "Can you tell me more about...?"
- **Avoiding yes or no questions:** Instead, try *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why* questions.
- **Taking notes:** After you have received permission, take notes so you can remember the details of your conversation later.

Learn more about conducting empathy interviews [here](#).

Examples of Empathy Interview Questions:

- How long have you been a part of this neighborhood or school community?
- What changes have you seen in this neighborhood or school community recently?
- What changes would you like to see in this neighborhood or school? Why?
- What is the greatest asset of this neighborhood or school?
- What is the greatest challenge of this neighborhood or school?
- Describe a time when you faced this problem. What happened? How did it feel?
- If you were going to solve this problem, what would you do?
- How would your life be different if the problem were addressed? How would you feel if the problem were addressed?

CREATE A PLAN

After they have gathered information, have each group determine the **first three steps** needed to get their idea off the ground to create a sustainable, positive change.

What are your next three steps?

- 1 Our first step is _____.
- 2 Our second step is _____.
- 3 Our third step is _____.

If students need ideas for their first three steps, suggest keeping the steps simple and actionable. Examples include researching online, journaling, building a team interested in solving the problem, conducting additional interviews, and getting advice from adults like teachers and parents.

EXAMPLE:

Create a survey about the crack in the sidewalk. Then ask your teacher or the principal for help distributing the survey. Once you have the results, make an appointment to talk to the principal. Explain that 20 students have tripped in the last month, and 3 students twisted their ankles. Then ask an adult ally or do research to find out who is in charge of the sidewalk. Is it the school? The city? The district?

Our first step is to create a survey.

Our second step is to ask the teacher or principal for help distributing the survey.

Our third step is to make an appointment to talk to the principal about the results.

Class Discussion

Ask groups to present their maps and interview findings. Then, discuss the following as a large group:

- What community did you choose to focus on? Who is a part of that community?
- What positive places or features did you identify? What problems or areas for improvement did you identify?
- What did you learn from your empathy interview? How did it feel to talk to someone about this topic?
- **Now that you have thought deeply about your community and how to go about improving it, what, specifically, are you going to do next?**

Share Stories of Changemakers in Action

For more information about Changemaking, visit the [First Book website](#).



Making a Difference

Activism & Civic Engagement