

The best way to start the year?

Break the ice!

Picture this: It's the first day of class, and you're facing 24 wide-eyed and excited students. You've reviewed classroom policies, necessary supplies, and homework expectations – and you still have 15 minutes before the bell. How can you foster a true feeling of community in your classroom after information overload? Icebreakers that promote movement, creativity, and engagement are an excellent way to make everyone feel comfortable and eager to return to class the next day.



IF YOU WANT TO SHARE THAT YOU'RE A PERSON OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM, TOO...

Bring in one or two objects that have a significant meaning to you. Show them to the class and have students infer what the object says about you. This can be anything from a favorite coffee mug, to a piece of sports equipment, to a concert ticket stub – whatever you choose! Ask students to make as many inferences as possible, encouraging them to think outside the box. Once they're done brainstorming, provide an explanation about the object.

Alternative: Ask students to bring in an artifact for the second day of class so everyone can share something about themselves. Not only will students learn more about each other, but also they may discover some common interests!

IF YOU WANT TO REINTRODUCE STUDENTS WHO HAVE BEEN CLASSMATES SINCE KINDERGARTEN...

Write some sentence starters on slips of paper or on Popsicle sticks and place them in a jar. Have each student pull a starter from the jar and complete it, adding some additional sentences to provide necessary context. All students will share their responses with a paired classmate. All pairs will then take turns introducing their partners to the rest of the class. Some sample sentence starters include:

- I love it when...
- The funniest thing that ever happened to me was...
- The most unbelievable thing...
- The thing that makes me laugh is...
- The best way to save...

Alternative: These sentence starters can be reused throughout the year as creative writing prompts. If you teach a history or science course, have students take on the persona of a Founding Father or scientist and then answer the prompts.

IF YOU WANT TO GET STUDENTS OUT OF THEIR DESKS...

The human knot is used to promote team-building, problem-solving, and consideration of others. Lead your students outside or to an area in the building where they have room to move around. Divide the class into circles of eight-ten students. Students must cross their arms in front of their bodies and join hands with someone not standing next to them and with two different people. This will form a knot that they now need to untangle without letting go of each other's hands. Students have to be able to move, twist, and turn during this icebreaker. Take some time to have students reflect on the experience of untangling themselves, individually or as a class.

Alternative: Create a friendly competition between the groups, awarding the winners something small. For an additional challenge, instruct students to untangle themselves silently, promoting the importance of body language!