

2021 BACK TO SCHOOL LESSON

LET'S GET STARTED

The pandemic has been an emotional rollercoaster for all of us. While it is always important to set up classroom guidelines, it will be even more important for the 2021-2022 school year to help young people feel safe and prepared to engage in school. This is an incredible opportunity to demonstrate how you value your students' input in creating a classroom culture and climate where everyone can thrive and feel taken care of.

OBJECTIVES

- To set up your classroom with student input
- To establish relationships with your students as you begin the school year
- To acknowledge the past

What Are We Doing Today?

One of Culture's of Dignity's principles is, "remember the past is prologue to the present." In this case, we want to create the opportunity for students to acknowledge the impact of the Pandemic so we can begin the year individually and collectively participating in school in a way that feels safe and consistent. For example, students may have different levels of caution and anxiety while feeling understandably reluctant to share how they feel because of possible social consequences. Allowing students to do the activity below anonymously will be helpful to decrease students' fear of judgement from their peers.

ACTIVITY: Sometimes We Have To Acknowledge The Past Before We Can Move Forward

Time: 20 minutes but allow more time if needed/ if possible

Purpose: To acknowledge the past and prepare for the new school year.

Materials: Pen and paper

Say: We all had different experiences over the past school year. Some of us loved being home, some of us hated it and some of us were in between. All of those feelings are OK. It can be easy to assume other people have handled things better than we have and that we are the only

ones struggling. Now that we are transitioning back into school it is important for us to check in with each other so we can help make this classroom and your school experience positive.

I know some people don't like to share things out loud so you are going to write some things down that only I will see. I would like to share some quotes from these papers without names so that your classmates can have a better sense of the different experiences in our class. If you do not want me to share anything with everyone, even without your name, please write NO across the top of your paper and I will know to keep everything you have written private.

I will provide some questions for you to answer. You will have plenty of time to answer them but start with the ones you have the strongest feelings about. You can answer all of them or just a few depending on how much time you spend on each.

Teacher Note: *Alter questions to suit your school and how much you were in or out of school last year.*

Have students get out pen and paper and answer the following questions.

Questions

1. What do you know now about yourself that you didn't know before the pandemic?
2. What was the most annoying or hardest part of school for you when you were hybrid or virtual learning last year?
3. What are you struggling with or you are worried about now?
4. What was the easiest part about being away from school?
5. What was the best part of being home so much more?
6. What was the hardest part of being home so much more?

Debrief

- Was there anything that surprised you about what you wrote? As in, did you realize anything new about yourself as you wrote?
- How did it feel to write about hard parts of the past year?
- Which part was harder to share? School or Home?

Before you hand it to me please take a minute to look it over. If there is anything you want to talk to me about specifically one on one, put a star next to it. *(Make sure you follow up with any student that "stars" their paper.)*

Takeaways

- No matter what your experience, your feelings about your experiences are real. They can change but they are real for you right now.
- No two people have the same reaction to their circumstances or the things they experience. That is also OK. Everyone has the right to their feelings and no one has the right to question someone else's.
- I am here for you. You may not always love my class, how I teach or even how I say things but I want everyone in my class to feel comfortable being here and to know that I am listening to you. Your experience in this class is important to me. The bottom line is that each of you should feel treated with dignity in our class; from me and from each other. That doesn't mean we won't sometimes have conflicts with each other but each person has the right to be treated with dignity in my class. If you need an adult and don't know where to go, I am here to listen and support you.
- There are times I may need to get someone else involved. I don't have all of the answers but we can work through that together and find you the support you need. I also have a legal duty to report concerns of you harming yourself or others*

Teacher Note: **Please be aware of mandatory reporting laws in your state so you are prepared if a young person shares something with you and you are legally required to report it. This is about making sure the young people we work with get the support they need as well as you providing appropriate care. Be clear with your students upfront about your obligation to report if they discuss certain issues with you or with the class.*