

# 100 ideas to start the year

## Back-to-school icebreakers

**1. Opening-day letter.** Write a letter to your students. In that letter, introduce yourself to students. Tell them about your hopes for the new school year and some of the fun things you'll be doing in class. In addition, tell students a few personal things about yourself; for example, your likes and dislikes, what you did over the summer, and your hobbies. Ask questions throughout the letter. You might ask what they like most about school, what they did during the summer, what their goals for the new school year are, or what they are really good at. (In your letter, be sure to model the correct parts of a friendly letter!) On the first day of school, display your letter on an overhead projector. Then pass each student a sheet of nice stationery. Have the students write a return letter to you. In this letter, they will need to answer some of your questions and tell you about themselves. This is a great way to get to know each other in a personal way! Variation: Mail the letter to students before school starts, and enclose a sheet of stationery for kids to write you back.

**2. Stringing together conversation.** Cut string or yarn into pieces of different lengths. (Each piece should have a matching piece of the same length. There should be enough pieces so that each student will have one.) Then give each student one piece of string, and challenge each student to find the other student who has a string of the exact same length. After students have found their matches, they can take turns introducing themselves to each other. You can provide a list of questions to help students "break the ice," or students can come up with their own. You might extend the activity by having each student introduce his or her partner to the class.

**3. Animal groups.** On the first day of school, gather all the students from a grade level in a large common area. Give each student a slip of paper with the name of an animal on it. Then give students instructions for the activity: They must locate the other members of their animal group by imitating that animal's sound only. No talking is allowed. The students might hesitate initially, but that hesitation soon gives way to a cacophony of sound as the kids moo, snort, and giggle their way into groups. The end result is that students have found their way into their homerooms or advisory groups for the school year, and the initial barriers to good teamwork have already been broken.

**4. A tangled web.** Gather students in a circle sitting around you on the floor. Hold a large ball of yarn. Start by telling the students something about yourself. Then roll the ball of yarn to a student without letting go of the end of the yarn. The student who gets the ball of yarn tells his or her name and something good about himself or herself. Then the student rolls the yarn to somebody else, holding on to the strand of yarn. Soon students have created a giant web. After everyone has spoken, you and all the students stand up, continuing to hold the yarn. Start a discussion of how this activity relates to the idea of teamwork (for example, the students need to work together and not let others down). To drive home your point about teamwork, have one student drop his or her strand of yarn; that will demonstrate to students how the web weakens if the class isn't working together.

**5. Student dictionary.** Write five questions on the board. Questions might include the following: What is your name? Where were you born? How many brothers or sisters do you have? What are their names? Do you have any pets? Tell students to write those questions on a piece of paper and to add to that paper five more questions they could ask someone they don't know. Pair students, and have each student interview his or her partner and record the responses. Then have each student use the interview responses to write a "dictionary definition" of his or her partner to include in a Student Dictionary. You might model this activity by creating a sample dictionary definition about yourself. For example:

**Reynolds, Kim.** proper noun. 1. Born in Riverside, California. 2. No brothers or sisters. ...

Have students bring in small pictures of themselves to paste next to their entries in the Student Dictionary. Bind the definitions into a book, and display it at back-to-school night.

**6. Classmate scavenger hunt.** Provide each student with two index cards. Ask each student to write a brief description of his or her physical characteristics on one index card and his or her name on the other. (Physical characteristics usually do not include clothing, but if you teach the primary grades, you might allow students to include clothing in their descriptions.) Put all the physical characteristic index cards in a shoe box, mix them up, and distribute one card to each student (making sure that no student gets his or her own card). Give students ten minutes to search for the person who fits the description on the card they hold. (There is no talking during this activity, but students can walk around the room.) At the end of the activity, tell students to write on the card the name of the student who best matches the description. Then have students share their results. How many students guessed correctly?

**7. Cooperative musical chairs.** This activity is a takeoff on the familiar musical chairs game. Set a circle of chairs with one less chair than the number of students in the class. Play music as the students circle around the chairs. When the music stops, the students must sit in a seat. Unlike the traditional game, the person without a seat is not out. Instead, someone must make room for that person. Then remove another seat and start the music again. The kids end up on one another's laps and sharing chairs! You can play this game outside, and you can end it whenever you wish. Afterward, stress the teamwork and cooperation the game took, and how students needed to accept one another to be successful. Reinforce that idea by repeating this game throughout the year.

**8. Hands-on activity.** Have students begin this activity by listing at least 25 words that describe them and the things they like. (No sentences allowed, just words!) Then ask each student to use a dark pen to trace the pattern of his or her hand with the fingers spread apart. Provide another sheet of paper that the student can place on top of the tracing. (Since the tracing was done with a dark pen, the outline should be visible on the sheet below.) Direct students to use the outlines as guides and to write their words around it. Provide students a variety of different colored pencils or markers to use as they write. Then invite students to share their work with the class. They might cut out the hand outlines and mount them on construction paper so you can display the hands for open house. Challenge each parent to identify his or her child's hand.

**9. Chain gang.** Begin by asking students, "Who can do something really well?" After a brief discussion about some of the students' talents, pass out paper and ask students to write down five things they do well. Then provide each student with five different colored paper strips. Have each student write a different talent on separate paper strips, then create a mini paper chain with the strips by linking the five talents together. As students complete their mini chains, use extra strips of paper to link the mini chains together to create one long class chain. Have students stand and hold the growing chain as you link the pieces together. Once the entire chain is constructed and linked, lead a discussion about what the chain demonstrates (for example, all the students have talents; all the students have things they do well; together, the students have many talents; if they work together, classmates can accomplish anything; and the class is stronger when students work together than when individual students work on their own). Hang the chain in the room as a constant reminder to students of the talents they possess and the benefits of teamwork.

**10. Silhouette collage.** Stock up on old magazines. (Your school librarian might have a discard pile you can draw from.) Invite students to search through the magazines for pictures, words, or anything else that might be used to describe them. Then use an overhead projector or another source of bright light to create a silhouette of each student's profile; have each student sit in front of the light source as you or another student traces the outline of the silhouette on a sheet of 11- by 17-inch paper taped to the wall. Have students cut out their silhouettes, then fill them with a collage of pictures and words that express their identity. Then give each student an opportunity to share his or her silhouette with the group and talk about why he or she chose some of the elements in the collage. Post the silhouettes to create a sense of "our homeroom."

**11. Headlines.** As part of the normal first-day routine, many teachers have each student fill out a card with such information as name, address, phone number, parents' names and work numbers, and so on. You can use such cards to gather other information too, such as school schedule, why the student signed up for the class, whether the student has a part-time job, and whether he or she has access to the Internet at home. As a final bit of information, ask the student to write a headline that best describes him or her! This headline might be a quote, a familiar expression, or anything else. When students have completed filling out the cards, give a little quiz. Ask students to number a sheet of paper from 1 to \_\_, depending on how many students are in the class. Then read aloud the headlines one at a time. Ask students to write the name of the person they think each headline best describes. Who got the highest score? (Bonus! It seems as if parents are contacted only if there is a problem with students. At the end of each grading period, use the home address information to send a postcard to a handful of parents to inform them about how well their child is doing. This might take a little time, but it is greatly appreciated!)

**12. Pop quiz.** Ahead of time, write a series of getting-to-know-you questions on slips of paper -- one question to a slip. (You can repeat some of the questions.) Then fold up the slips, and tuck each slip inside a different balloon. Blow up the balloons. Give each student a balloon, and let students take turns popping their balloons and answering the questions inside.

**13. Fact or fib?** This is a good activity for determining your students' note-taking abilities. Tell students that you are going to share some information about yourself. They'll learn about some of your background, hobbies, and interests from the 60-second oral "biography" that you will present. Suggest that students take notes; as you speak, they should record what they think are the most important facts you share. When you have completed your presentation, tell students that you are going to tell five things about yourself. Four of your statements should tell things that are true and that were part of your presentation; one of the five statements is a total fib. (This activity is most fun if some of the true facts are some of the most surprising things about you and if the "fib" sounds like something that could very well be true.) Tell students they may refer to their notes to tell which statement is the fib. Next, invite each student to create a biography and a list of five statements -- four facts and one fib -- about himself or herself. Then provide each student a chance to present the 60-second oral biography and to test the others' note-taking abilities by presenting his or her own "fact or fib quiz." You can have students do this part of the activity in small groups.

**14. Circular fact or fib?** Here's a variation on the previous activity: Divide the class into two groups of equal size. One group forms a

circle equally spaced around the perimeter of the classroom. (There will be quite a bit of space between students.) The other group of students forms a circle inside the first circle; each student faces one of the students in the first group. Give the facing pairs of students two minutes to share their 60-second oral "biographies." While each student is talking, the partner takes notes. After each pair completes the activity, the students on the inside circle move clockwise to face the next student in the outer circle. (Students in the outer circle remain stationary throughout the activity.) When all students have had an opportunity to share their biographies with one another, ask students to take turns each sharing his or her facts and fib with the class. The other students refer to their notes or try to recall which fact is really a fib.

**15. People poems.** Have each child use the letters in his or her name to create an acrostic poem. For example, Bill could take his name and write

Big  
Intelligent  
Laughing  
Loving.

Tell students they must include words that tell something about themselves -- for example, something they like to do or a personality or physical trait. Invite students to share their poems with the class. This activity is a fun one that enables you to learn how your students view themselves. Allow older students to use a dictionary or thesaurus. You might also vary the number of words for each letter, according to the students' grade levels.

**16. Another poetic introduction.** Ask students to use the form below to create poems that describe them.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Title (of poem) \_\_\_\_\_  
I will never \_\_\_\_\_;  
I will never \_\_\_\_\_;  
and I will never \_\_\_\_\_.  
But I will always \_\_\_\_\_.

This activity is another that lends itself to being done at the beginning of the school year and again at the end of the year. You and your students will have fun comparing their responses and seeing how the students *and* the responses have changed.

**17. Food for thought.** To get to know students and to help them get to know one another, have each student state his or her name and a favorite food that begins with the same first letter as the name. For example: "Hi, my name is Latrece, and I like liver." As each student introduces himself or herself, he or she must repeat the names and favorite foods of the students who came before. Watch out; it gets tricky for the last person who has to recite all the names and foods!

**18. I am NOT!** Here's a challenging activity that might help high school teachers learn about students' abilities to think critically. Send students into the school hallways or schoolyard, and ask each to find something that "is completely the opposite of yourself." (Option: To widen the area to be explored, provide this activity as homework on the first night of school.) When students bring their items back to class, ask each to describe why the item is *not* like he or she. You'll get a lot of flowers, of course, and students will describe how those flowers are fragrant or soft (or otherwise unlike themselves). But you might also get some clever responses such as the one from a young man who brought in the flip-top from a discarded can; he talked about its decaying outward appearance and its inability to serve a purpose without being manipulated by some other force (and how he was able to serve a purpose on his own).

**19. Personal boxes.** In this activity, each student selects a container of a reasonable size that represents some aspect of his or her personality or personal interests (such as a football helmet or a saucepan). Ask students to fill that object with other items that represent themselves -- for example, family photos, CDs, dirty socks (because their room at home is always a mess), or a ballet shoe -- and bring their containers back to school. Students can use the objects in the containers as props as they give a three-minute presentation about themselves. (The teacher who provided this idea suggests that you model the activity and encourage creativity by going first -- it's important for them to see you as human too! She included in her container a wooden spoon because she loves to cook, a jar of dirt because she loves to garden, her son's first cowboy boot, a poem she wrote, a rock from Italy because she loves to travel, and so on.) You'll learn much about each student with this activity, and it will create a bond among students. As each student gives the presentation, you might write a brief thank-you note that mentions something specific about the presentation so that each

student can take home a special note to share with parents. It might take a few days to give every student the opportunity to share.

**20. Following directions.** How well do your students follow directions? Provide instructions for folding a drinking cup from a piece of paper, and see how many students can make a cup. You can use the printable template and instructions at the [Origami Japanese Paper Folding Web page](#). Fill each complete cup with apple juice to see how many students correctly followed the directions! (You might want to conduct this particular assessment on the playground, however!)

**21. Learning styles survey.** How do the students in your class learn best? Do they learn by seeing, hearing, or doing? Invite students to discover their most successful learning strategies by taking the [Modality Questionnaire](#) provided by the Center for the Advancement of Learning at Ohio's Muskingum College.

**22. A world of change.** On the first day of school, provide students with an 11-inch by 17-inch piece of drawing paper. Challenge students to draw a map of the world and label as many countries and bodies of water as they can. Collect the maps and put them away. At the end of the school year, repeat the activity. Has a year of lessons focused on world geography and current events increased your students' knowledge of the world? (If this activity isn't appropriate for you, why not share it with a social studies or history teacher in your school?)

**23. Time capsule.** Turn empty Pringles cans or paper towel tubes into miniature time capsules. Ask each child to create a time capsule that includes such items as a handwriting sample, a hand tracing, a self portrait, and so on. At the end of the school year, compare samples from the beginning of the year with new samples.

**24. A video keepsake.** At the start of the school year, or before school starts, if possible, provide parents with a list of supplies to send to school with their children. Include on the list a blank videotape for each student. At least once a month, invite a parent volunteer to come in and videotape each student reading aloud from a favorite book. Send the videotapes home at the end of the year as a memento and as a reminder of the reading growth that happened during the course of the year.

**25. Sticks and stones...** This simple activity has been making the rounds of mailing lists recently: Provide each student with a small paper cutout in the shape of a human, or have students cut out their own paper figures. Ask each student to write his or her name on the cutout. Have students form a circle. Then tell students to pass the cutouts to the person on their right. As the cutouts are passed around the circle, have each person make a small crumple or tear in the cutout or add a pencil mark. When the cutouts have made their way around the entire circle, have students try to repair their own cutouts by flattening, erasing, or taping. After the cutouts are repaired, discuss the activity. Talk about the effects of unkind words and hurt feelings. You might display the cutouts on a classroom bulletin board as a constant reminder of the effects of hurtful actions.

**26. Illustrated student reflections.** Students in middle school and above can reflect on their dreams and accomplishments with this [First Day of School](#) activity provided by an Indiana teacher. A simple illustration provides a backdrop students can use to share their dreams, their interests, and the high and low points in their lives. The activity can provide teachers with important information about students' interests, concerns, and goals; teachers can use the information to determine how best to direct students and provide for their individual needs.

*I Wish I Were a Butterfly.* Students across the grades will enjoy this book, written by James Howe and illustrated by Ed Young. A cricket longs to be a pretty butterfly until a spider teaches her that all friends are beautiful. Read the book aloud, and then discuss the story's message.

**27. Surveys and graphs.** Start the year with a survey activity in which students get to know one another as they create simple bar or picture graphs. Students work in pairs or small groups to collect responses to a class survey, and then they graph the results. Older students can develop their own survey questions; younger students might collect data in response to questions provided by the teacher. Questions might include the following:

- When you bring lunch to school, how do you carry it?
- If you were to carry a thermos bottle to school, what would be in it?
- What is your favorite sandwich?
- How do you get to school most days?
- What is your best subject in school?
- How many miles do you live from school?
- What is your favorite snack?

- What was your favorite summer movie?

After students collect the data, they create a simple graph to display the results of their survey. One student in each pair or group can then report the findings while another explains the graph. Display the graphs on a bulletin board for all to see!

**28. An average day.** Challenge students to compute class "averages." Have students work in pairs or small groups to collect, calculate, and report on the average age, shoe size, height, family size (and so on!) of the students in your class.

**29. Personalized classroom calendar.** Every classroom has a calendar. Why not personalize your classroom calendar with photographs of your students? First, make a calendar pocket chart with seven columns (one for each day of the week) and five rows (so the chart can handle months with five weeks). Then have students make signs with the numbers 1 to 31 on them. The numbers should be large enough to be clearly seen from a distance. Use a disposable camera to take a picture of each student holding one of the numbered signs. Slip the photographs into the pockets on the calendar. Change the calendar each month!

**Back-to-school ABC book.** This is an activity that can be done across the grades! Share with students some ABC books from the school or town library and tell them that they will be working together to create a *Back-to-School ABC Book*. Assign a letter of the alphabet to each student. Brainstorm with students possible words for each letter or allow each student to choose his or her own word. Explain that the words must be related to activities associated with school. Of course, the difficulty of the words will vary, depending on the grade level of the students. For example, A might be represented by the words *art, abacus, attendance, algebra, addition, advisor, athletics, auditorium, alphabet, answer key, apple, arithmetic, announcement, award, A-V, aide, or assistant principal*. Finally, have each student illustrate his or her word. Combine the pictures to create a book. Display the book in the classroom or school library. As an extra challenge, you might limit older students to choosing adjectives; no nouns allowed!

**Back-to-school word search.** Print a [Back-to-School](#) word search and challenge students to find the school-related words hidden in the puzzle. Or create your own word search puzzle containing the first names of all the students in your class. Go to [Puzzlemaker.com's Word Search Puzzlemaker](#) to create your puzzle.

### 30. Making An Important Book ...

On the first day of school I read *The Important Book* by Margaret Wise Brown. I review paragraph writing and instruct them to write a paragraph following the same format as the book about themselves. I also do the same. After the rough drafts are written they are to do a final draft and attach it to a white piece of paper, where they add an illustration. All the pages are laminated and bound into a book. Students reread this book throughout the year. It easily becomes a favorite. Students also enjoy reading the book from the previous years classes.

### 31. Names Word Search ...

In order for my students to get to know their classmates, I create a word search with the names of my students. After all the names are found the remaining letters reveal the hidden message "welcome back to school." This website is great for creating various types of puzzles <http://www.puzzlemaker.com>

### 32. "Me" Puppets...

On the first day of school (unlike the remaining days of the school year), the children are usually reluctant to talk about themselves. We make "me" puppets using paper plates for the head, yarn for the hair, and construction paper facial features, with a popsicle stick for a handle. Upon completion, we stage a puppet show. The children hide their faces with the puppets and tell their classmates all about their families, hobbies, pets, etc.

### 33. First Day Name Puzzle...

On the first day of school, I like to make a name puzzle with my students. I take a large piece of poster board, and mark out lines that can be cut into pieces. Make sure that the puzzle will have enough pieces for each student to have one. We all gather on the floor to write our name on the blank side of the poster board. I write my name in the middle, and the students write their name in all different directions. When I have free time, I cut the board into puzzle pieces. As a class we each find the spot where our puzzle piece belongs. Tape the puzzle together after school, and post it on the wall in the classroom. When the students return the next day, they will be excited to see the puzzle, and to show off their name. My kids have fun talking and, working to put the puzzle together.

### 34. First day (or week) of school--Family Wreath...

I collected family pictures of each of my students during our Introduction Day. I told the family I would probably not return these pictures. I then took the pictures and made a "family wreath", for the lonely days or when the students just missed home. This was a huge hit with all the families and the children. I placed the wreath in the home living area, and was amazed to see the students, all year

long, go over to the wreath and take time to admire it and their family. (Some families included pet pictures to put on the wreath). On the last day of school I auctioned it off to a family and bought supplies for the class room. All my parents wanted this "keepsake".

### **35. Getting Acquainted..**

I like to have some get acquainted projects for the first few days. One thing I do is when I send my parents a welcoming letter, I ask that the children bring in a small bag of pictures and other small objects that could be part of a "me" collage. These collages are a good springboard for the children to discuss their unique qualities, and at the end of the year, they enjoy seeing how they have changed. We also make schoolhouse picture frames for their first day of school photos. I cut schoolhouses out of oaktag, and the children glue pasta on the frames. I spray paint the pasta frames gold. The parents love having this memento of their child's first day when I give it to them on Back-to-School Night.

### **36. Getting to Know Each Other ..**

On the first day of school do an activity to bring the class together such as a classroom survey. The students walk around and talk to the other students and fill out a questionnaire. At the same time they are getting to know each other.

### **37. Fun First Day Activity ..**

On the first day of school I have plenty of pre-cut letters in lots of different colors on a table. As the children come in they find the letters to spell their names and glue them together. I hang these from the ceiling! They really brighten up the room and look great for Open House! Usually this is the first thing they point out to their parents.

### **38. What are your expectations?**

Ask for their expectations. Tell them you're interested in their opinions and you're asking them these questions as a way of finding out about their learning styles and preferences. Ask them to write, using as much detail as possible, their responses to questions, such as

- Now that I've told you my expectations of a good student, what are your expectations of a good teacher?
- Tell me about the best teacher you've ever had. What made that person such a good teacher?
- Now that I've told you some of my ideas about how we will go about learning this year's material, tell me about how you learn best. Give me an example of a project or unit where you learned a lot. Describe the project in detail.

### **39. TIME CAPSULES: A TIME-PROVEN YEAR OPENER**

I give each student a sheet with questions such as *What's your favorite TV show? What's your favorite song? and What's your favorite book?* on it. There's a space for students to answer the questions at the beginning of the year and another space for them to answer the same questions at the end of the year. "After students put their answers in the first blank, I tie all the sheets together and put them in my file cabinet," Bright told Education World. "It's always funny at the end of the year to hear them laughing and screeching over their answers from the beginning of the year. They always change their minds by the end of the year!" Beginning-of-the-year time capsules can include many other items too. In addition to students' question sheets, their individual time capsules might also include a tracing of their hand, a piece of yarn cut to measure their height, and a writing sample. Sealed the items in envelopes, and open them at the end of the school year. Students will surely be amazed at their growth -- physically and academically!

For that time capsule writing sample, you might use another of Bright's favorite beginning-of-school activities. "I have students interview each other like newspaper reporters sometime during the first week of school," Bright explained. "They have to ask a partner five questions and use those answers to write a paragraph about their partner. Then they introduce their partner to the class by reading the interviews."

### **40. THESE ARE A FEW OF MY FAVORITE THINGS**

Inviting students to share a few of their favorite things is a great way to break the ice!

Introduce an overhead transparency on which you have all kinds of pictures that "describe" yourself. There's a plane, lots of books, a hill, and more. Invite your students to guess from the drawings what your favorite outside interests might be. (Did you guess traveling, reading, and hiking?). Give each student a sheet of drawing paper and ask them to tell me about themselves -- using only pictures. Break into small cooperative groups, and each group tries to tell about the people in their group. Of course, walk around and interact with each group to know them too."

41. Make a large chart titled Getting to Know You. Laminate the chart and hang it on a wall in your classroom. The chart has sections for each student's name and interesting facts, such as how many people are in their family, how many pets they have, their favorite

color, favorite school subject, favorite sport, and so on. Everyone 'signs in' sometime during the first day of school. Leave the chart up for several weeks. The kids love to wander over to it when they have free time. They keep learning new things about one another.

#### **42. Outfit**

Bring something special. For example: your favorite hiking boots!

"I tell my students that my hiking boots -- which I call my "happy shoes" -- are one of my most sentimental objects". "They tell a lot about me, I say. Then I invite the students to ask questions and take notes about my hiking boots in order to get to know me better. Usually students come up with such questions as *Where have you been in your boots? Why do you call them 'happy shoes'?* and *How long have you had them?* What I want the class to discover is that I am passionate about traveling and that I have trekked all over the world in my 'happy shoes.'

"After the question session," Adams continued, "I ask the students to write a brief paragraph that tells what they learned about me that they would not have otherwise known. Then I give the assignment for the next day; each student is to bring in a sentimental object of his or her own. No one has to get up in front of the room to share it -- ninth graders are afraid of this kind of exposure! -- but I will visit each person's desk and ask the student to show me the object he or she brought. I admire and fuss over each object and ask several questions about it. Then I ask each student to write a paragraph that describes his or her object and explains what it tells me about the student that I would not know if we'd simply gone over classroom rules the first day.

"Students have brought in beautiful objects -- a girl's baby quilt made by her mother, fly tying equipment, keys to dirt bikes, stuffed animals, woven scarves, rings, photo albums of friends, you name it!" said Adams. "Students appreciate the personal, yet non-threatening, interest I take in their objects."

This activity could be easily adapted for use with younger students, added Adams. "Sixth graders would probably be jazzed about introducing their objects to the class!"

#### **43. All About Me Bag.**

"On the first day of school, a teacher fills a small brown lunch bag with items that best 'describe' him or her," said Baxter. "She or he pulls out each item and tells the children a short story about it. The bag might include things such as baby pictures, pictures of pets, an object from a collection, a food he or she does not like, and so on. Then students are given brown bags to decorate. For homework that night, the students must fill their bags with items that tell about themselves. Those bags are shared throughout the first week of school in community circle."

This activity gives the teacher a great understanding of each student right from the beginning of the new school year, added Baxter.

#### **43. Action**

"I use little beanbags and we go outside if the weather cooperates. Students stand in a circle at tossing distance. For the first round, when someone tosses the beanbag to a student, the person has to tell his or her name. The second round is favorite food, the third round, their favorite sport."

"You can add whatever you want to the list of information they share," adds Breeding. "I quit the game when the tossing gets a little wild!"

#### **44. Snowball activity**

Students write on a piece of paper three things about themselves. Then they crumple the paper up into a 'snowball' and have a one-minute snowball fight. At the end of the minute, everyone grabs the closest snowball and has to try to find the person who wrote it. They then introduce that person to the rest of the group, sharing the three facts."

#### **43. Chairs**

Begin by setting up chairs in a circle but set up one less chair than the number of participants.

Then it's time to explain the rules. The teacher can start the game by being the person in the middle without a chair. "Each person in the circle starts by introducing themselves to their two circle neighbors on either side," explains Dennett. "The teacher then introduces herself to a member of the circle and asks that person who his or her neighbors are. After the student responds, the teacher invites the student to ask a yes or no question of the whole group. That question must relate something true about the student. For example, a student who surfs might ask the group if anyone has ever been surfing. Members of the class who have surfed respond yes *not* by talking but by getting out of their seats and finding a new seat at least two chairs away."

Then the cycle starts again. Students introduce themselves to their neighbors, the person left standing introduces himself or herself to a new person, and the game continues.

#### **44. Drawing**

Hand a paper plate to each student in her class. "I ask each student to draw on the plate something that he or she feels is special about himself or herself," Doughman told Education World. "That might be a special hobby, an interest, an activity, anything!"

The students also draw or write their names on their plates in big letters. "Then all the students sit around a table covered with a red-and-white checkered tablecloth. They share with the group their picture plates and explain to the group the significance of what they drew."

This is a nice way for students and the teacher to get to know one another, but the activity also results in a fun bulletin board! "When the sharing time is over, I put the cloth up as a background on a bulletin board and then place the paper plates on the board!"

#### **44. Sweet tooth**

Pass around a basket of candy, and I tell the students to take as much of the candy as they want," said Vaughn. "They are usually pretty shy and take only a few pieces. Then I explain that they must tell one thing about themselves for each piece of candy they took!"

Pity the child who took a whopping handful!

#### **45. The observation game.**

"Line up your students in two lines facing each other," Buck explains, adding, "If I have an odd number of students, then I play with the unmatched student."

Buck gives the students exactly 30 seconds to look at the person with whom they're paired and to study everything about that person. Then the students in one line turn around and close their eyes while the students in the other line change something about themselves. For example, says Buck, one person may take off an earring, switch shoes, or put their hair behind an ear. Then the kids in the other line turn around and try to name what has changed. Switch roles and play the game again.

"The kids love this!" says Buck. "And some kids are very sneaky!"

#### **46. Circles**

Hand to each pair of students a blank Venn Diagram form. The students work together to complete the activity.

"One student writes his or her name at the top of one of the circles, and the other student writes his or her name at the top of the other one," explained Fernandez. "In the overlapping portion of the circles, the partners must list five things that they have in common. In the parts of the circles with their names, the students must each list five things that are unique about themselves."

#### **47. Mad-Lib game.**

"I write a generic story on an overhead transparency about 'The First Day of School in Mrs. Tupponce's Class,'" she explained. "Of course, I include in the story some strategically placed blanks. Without telling students what we are doing, I ask for nouns, verbs, adjectives, and other missing words, which I use to fill in the blanks as we go. I try to encourage students to use descriptive, exciting words.

"The students wonder what's going on when I start giggling, as I invariably do, because these are always funny," added Tupponce.

"Then I turn on the overhead to reveal our Mad-Lib, and I ask a volunteer to read it aloud.

"The kids will always beg to do it again, so it's a good idea to write the story in permanent ink and fill in the blanks with water-based ink. You can just wipe it off with a wet paper towel and start over," suggested Tupponce.

She offered one more suggestion: Do the activity on the last day of school with a story recapping the school year.

#### **48. Alliteration**

"Students introduce themselves with their names and something that they like that starts with the same letter as their names," said Lenhart. "The person who starts the game states the alliteration; then it's the next person's turn. That person repeats what the first person said, then adds his or her name and alliteration and so forth around the circle."

For example, Lenhart might start by saying, "My name is Gloria and I love green grapes!" The next person in the circle says, "Her name is Gloria and she loves green grapes. I am Susan and I love silly stories."

And so it goes. See how many of the alliterations the last person in the circle can remember!

#### **49. "List as many nouns as you can that are white and food."**

Students might remain engaged in this activity for as long as 30 minutes, said Virgil. "We have come up with as many as 30 items in past years," he added. "The kids get really creative with it, listing things such as the inside of an apple, parts of okra, and so on."

Karen Koester teaches middle-school level students at St. Marguerite Catholic School in Spruce Grove, Alberta, Canada. Before she began teaching, Koester created an idea that she used in her youth ministry work; it's an idea that might work in any middle-school classroom. The teacher saves junk mail from home as well as old magazines and newspapers. Cut out (or have students cut out) all kinds of words, phrases, and advertising slogans that are catchy and that might be used by your students to describe themselves. On the first day of school, display those scraps on a long table. "Students choose the ones that best describe themselves and glue those words or expressions onto their nametags," said Koester. "When they are called on to introduce themselves, they also tell why they chose those particular scraps from the pile.

"This is a fun way to get to know all the students' names and a little more," added Koester.

## 50. Scavenger hunt

At the start of each summer, the fourth-grade teachers at Rye (New Hampshire) Elementary School mail letters to the students who will enter their classes in September. "That letter informs the students that they are now on a scavenger hunt," said Melissa Bunton, one of the teachers. "They try to collect the items on the scavenger hunt list and bring them with them on the first day of school." Among the items Bunton and her team members might ask students to collect are

- something from nature that you found interesting,
- a picture of you doing anything,
- a brochure from someplace you went over the summer,
- a flower or vegetable from your garden,
- a list of books you read over the summer,
- a printed napkin,
- a postcard from somewhere you went over the summer,
- your favorite recipe,
- something from the beach,
- a symbol of New Hampshire (be creative!).

"I tell the students to find a box in which to store the items," explained Bunton. "On the first day of school, each student shares his or her scavenger hunt collection with a partner. Then two groups match up and each student shares four items. Then two of those groups are matched and each of the eight students shares three items. Eventually we'll be one big group, and each student will share one item. "The kids love searching for their scavenger hunt items and are excited to share the items on the first day!" said Bunton, adding, "Everybody gets to know one another and learn something about other people's interests."

One of the best parts is that the scavenger hunt collections can be used to create activities that go beyond the first day of school. "We continue to use them for the next two weeks," said Bunton. The items can be used to prompt writing and for many other activities.

## 51. True or False?

This activity is always fun, and we all learn something interesting about each other! I start. I write four facts about myself on an overhead transparency. Three of the facts are true and one is false. Students take my little true-false test. Then I survey students to learn the results. We go back over each question to see what they thought about each statement. That gives me a chance to tell a little about me. Then, on a sheet of paper, students write three interesting facts about themselves that are true and one that is false. Throughout the day, I ask a few students to try to stump the rest of us.

**52. Already a Test!** After the students are seated and roll is taken, I ask them to take out a sheet of paper and a pen or pencil for their first test of the school year. I explain to them -- in complete seriousness, of course -- that this will be the hardest test of the entire year since they have not been prepared in class for the test. I have them title the paper "Teacher." I ask them to answer all parts of each question. The questions might include: *Where was I born?*, *What did my father do for a living?*, *How many brothers and/or sisters do I have if any?*, *How many different states have I called home?*, *Where did I go to high school and college?*, *How old am I?*, *What is my favorite color?*, *What kind of car do I drive?* The test can be as long or short as you wish; make the questions fit the things you would want them to know. You can imagine the looks on their faces when asked these questions. I tell them they received their very first 100 in my class if they answered all of the questions correctly! At the end of the "test," I give the answers, and the kids marvel at the discrepancy of their answers. One of my favorite things to see is a student who was in my class the year prior. They always think they'll make a 100. They never do! With younger students, when they're right they think they can predict the future!

**53. Peek into Summer.** Divide a bulletin board into "window panes" using white strips of paper. Create one window pane for each child in your class. Assign two children each day to bring in some object (e.g., a shell) that represents what they had fun doing this past summer. Put the items in small zip-lock plastic bags. After each presentation, mount the plastic bag to their "window pane." This makes a great back-to-school bulletin board and provides each child an opportunity to talk about his/her summer.

**54. "The More Important Book."** On the first day of school, read to students a popular favorite -- *The Important Book*, by Margaret Wise Brown. It's a wonderful, repetitive book that tells the "important thing" about a variety of things (a spoon, an apple, the wind, etc.). After reading the book and discovering with students its repetitive form, we write our own "More Important Book." Each child tells about themselves, following the format of *The Important Book*. They end, as the book does, by repeating the first line, "But, the most important thing about (*their name*) is that he/she \_\_\_\_." Each child is responsible for a "most important thing" page about themselves, which becomes part of the class book. This is a wonderful and fun way to get to know one another, and the book is read throughout the year.

**55. Let's Hear It!** I believe students are more interested in school when they have a hand in their own learning. I ask my sophomores

to write a few paragraphs explaining what they would like to get out of my American Government class. If they could teach the class themselves, how would they make it more interesting, and what would they avoid doing?

56. **BINGO/Scavenger Hunt!** To get communication going between students who aren't necessarily friends, I start the year off with a game of BINGO. I make up BINGO cards for the students. Each square on the card includes a brief description. (Examples: *Visited Florida this summer, Is an avid waterskier, Has a big brother and little sister, Was born in another country, Lives nearest the school, Learned how to skateboard this summer, Didn't see the movie "Titanic," Likes anchovies on pizza, Was born in the same month as you, Has a brother or sister in the same school, Favorite subject is Science, Has an ear pierced more than once, Father's name is "Jim," Read more than one book this summer, Speaks two languages, Has two Pets...*) Students must walk around the room and get the signature of someone who fits the specific description in each box. The goal is to be the first student to fill the BINGO card with signatures. To make it harder, have students fill every square with a different student's signature and set a time limit. When a student has a BINGO (one name signed per square) give them a small prize such as being first in line that day. This is a great way to learn special things about your students and to get them to know each other. An alternative: Set this up as a scavenger hunt with a series of questions, each question with a line beside it. Students are given a time limit to circle the classroom and find someone who has "been there, done that." That "someone" writes her/his name in the blank space.

57. **BINGO Times 2.** Pass out "BINGO" cards to students. Each square on this card contains a question. (Click [here](#) for a sample card created by teacher Peg Teeter.) Have each student fill in the answers for ALL questions beside #1. Wait for all students to finish. Then students must find classmates with the same answers written in each box. The classmate with a matching answer prints his/her initials on line #2. Give a prize to any/all who get a BINGO!

58. **Going in Circles.** For the entire first day of school, I arrange all the desks in a large circle, with everyone facing the center. This makes it easy for the children to talk and get to know one another. Then I ask each child to introduce himself or herself. They must also provide one fact about themselves. As we go around the circle, students try to repeat the information (names and facts) about each of the other students in the circle.

59. **Jump Into Science.** This activity is intended to get high school science students thinking about the scientific process (what is the issue/problem, what do we know, what do we need to know...) and to assess what areas of the curriculum are familiar to them. Issue texts, group students, and provide the following activity: Invite students to scan the first chapter of their text (or the Table of Contents), which introduces major areas typically covered in the course. As a group, select a topic or related issue. Is this a controversial issue? That is, is there an ongoing debate related to it? Identify what you as a group know about this topic or issue. Determine what facts or information you as a group would like to know about this topic or issue. How would you go about answering the questions that you have just raised? Discuss in what way(s) this issue is relevant to you? After about 20 minutes, I stop the discussion and invite each group to share its responses.

60. **Twenty Questions.** One of my objectives is to get the kids used to "true participation," and to the idea that being wrong can lead to being right! Playing Twenty Questions is a great tie-in to what I start class with the following day -- how sometimes we learn as much or more from being wrong as from being right. The game is easy and requires no set-up or materials. I choose an item in the room and students have to guess what it is. They can only ask questions that I can answer with either yes or no. (For example: "Is it blue?", "Is it in the front half of the room?") The person who finally gets it, gets to be the next yes/no person, but I also stress that that person would never have gotten it without everybody else's help; the "no" answers helped as much as the "yes" answers did. I also get to be a participant, and to point out that sometimes I am wrong too! The tone of friendly cooperation on the first day lasts into the school year, and the first day becomes part of a lesson, not just a day of record keeping.

61. **"Who Am I?" Riddle Book.** Have the children share facts about themselves by creating a "Who Am I?" riddle book. Students write 4 or 5 statements about themselves. The last line is a question, "Who Am I?" I put this up as a bulletin board and have students guess who each person is. The first person to guess correctly gets to choose who guesses next.

62. **"Math About Me."** Students create a "Math About Me" sheet. They share the sheet with the class and the sheet becomes part of each student's portfolio. The "Math About Me" information might include birthday, address numbers, phone number, sports number, favorite number, number of pets, number of people in the family, etc. When the class gathers together to share their numbers, students see what numbers they have in common with their classmates and everyone learns a little bit about one another. The numbers are then used to make a "Math About Me" poster. I take a snapshot of each child for the center of the poster. Then they design the math facts in a colorful, interesting presentation. We use these as a hallway bulletin board.

63. **Alphabetical Roll!** After introducing yourself, create some chaos. Tell students they have 3 minutes to complete their first

assignment: "Sort yourselves in alphabetical order by last name." After the initial shock and after they succeed, remind them how capable they are to handle their first day, and every day, by asking questions, getting help from others, working together, trying and evaluating strategies to "just do it"! Whatever "it" might be, they can do it!

**64. Puzzling Activity.** Students use colorful markers to write their names in big letters on a sheet of drawing paper. Under their names, they write several sentences describing themselves, e.g., favorite things, family info, hobbies, and pet info. Then hand out blank puzzles (which can be found in craft stores -- cheap!). Privately -- perhaps behind a folder upright on their desks -- students illustrate on the blank puzzles the interests and information on their name sheets. They break up their puzzles and place the pieces in a brown paper lunch bag with a question mark on front. Post the large papers with the descriptive sentences on a bulletin board and, beneath that display, line up all the paper bags full of puzzle pieces. Throughout the week, during free time, students can choose a bag, put the puzzle together, compare the puzzle with the posted sentences, and guess which classmate it may be. At the end of the week look at guesses and find out whose puzzle is really whose.

**65. Hello, amigos!** For ESOL tutors or teachers in schools with a multicultural population: Create a poster with hands of different colors and write on each hand the word HELLO in a different language. Greet the children, saying "Hola, amigos" and introduce yourself, giving brief background. Then ask students to introduce themselves and to say "Hello" in their native language if they can. This is a nice ice-breaker and the children enjoy learning to say hello in different languages.

**66. Chrysanthemum's Graph!** Read the book *Chrysanthemum*, by Kevin Henkes, to the class. Talk about the main character's name and how her parents made the decision to name her. Discuss with the children, if they know, how they received their names (e.g., it was a family name, their parents liked the name). Discuss the length of Chrysanthemum's name. How many letters are in each of your students' names? Give each child a piece of large block graph paper or have them draw boxes to show the number of letters in their names. Take the data and transfer it to a class "Number of Letters in Our Names" graph. Teachers should include their names too!

**67. We are all unique!** On a sheet of paper, invite students to list some things that make them unique. From that list I create a bingo-like card with a square for each student; I write one fact from each student's list in one of the squares. Then the fun begins! Students must ask each other if they "sleep with a stuffed lizard" or another question that relates to the information in one of the squares. When they find the person who matches the information in a square, that person writes his/her initials in the box. Set a time limit and see who collects the most initials before time runs out. We learn some very interesting things about each other. This activity reveals commonalities and creates lively conversation!

**68. Sticker partners!** Each student is given a sticker to put on his/her hand when they enter the classroom, but they aren't told what the sticker is for until the time is right! Be sure there is a partner (matching sticker) for every student, and when the time comes ask students to find their partners and interview them (name, grade, hobbies, etc.). Then, each interviewer is responsible for introducing each interviewee to the rest of the class. You might find that students find it less threatening when someone else shares information about them than when they are asked to share about themselves.

**69. "The Me Bag."** Have a white paper sack sitting on each desk in the morning of the first day. In the sack is a pencil, a name tag, and other items students will need to help get the class organized. The teacher also includes in the sack a letter introducing her/himself, telling of hobbies, etc. The students then empty the contents of the sack and decorate the "Me Bag" with pictures from magazines or drawings that represent themselves. (The teacher has already completed a sample "Me Bag" with pictures and drawings representing her/himself... Students love to hear about their teacher!) Then students share their "Me Bags" to help class members get to know one another. That afternoon, the students take their decorated "Me Bags" home and put inside any object(s) that is special or important to them. (The teacher might share a few items from his/her bag as examples.) The students keep their objects secret until the next morning when they share their "Me Bag" objects with the class. They're very excited to tell about the special things they placed in their sacks, and why they are special! From this bag can stem some neat writing assignments or coloring activities, depending on the age.

**70. Candy Gets Kids Talking!** Bring in Skittles, one of your students' favorite candies for sure! (Another favorite, M&Ms, are an option.) Tell the kids to take as many as they want. Most are pretty apprehensive -- afterall, it's the first day of school! -- so they usually take about 10-15 Skittles. Then the teacher takes some too. Next, pick out some fun music, and for each Skittle they took the students must say one thing about themselves while moving to the music. The teacher demonstrates first, of course. An option: Each color of candy represents a category students must speak about, e.g., orange = scary memories; red = great vacations; green = something about your family; blue = favorite hobbies... The activity is as real ice breaker and the kids love it! After that, they are feeling comfortable and the class is no longer quiet.

71. **Take As Much As You Want!** During the first "circle time" activity, have a roll of toilet paper on hand! Explain to the children that they will need this for the next activity. Tell students that you're going to pass around the roll. Invite each student to take as much as they want. (One middle/high school math teacher invites students to "take as much as you need to complete the job." She doesn't tell them what the job is yet!) After everyone has had a good laugh over the amount of paper they took, explain how the game works. For every piece of toilet paper the students ripped off, they must tell the class one thing about themselves. Some realize they took quite a bit of toilet paper, but with a little prompting and probing from the teacher they will find things to share. In the math teacher's class, students have to say what their favorite thing about math is when they get to the last piece. This activity provides a nice way to find out about students' personalities, families, likes, and dislikes -- and the students really love it!

72. **Paper dolls!** Have students cut out "paper dolls." Each doll is two feet tall and all are alike in the beginning. Then students "dress" their dolls by coloring or making clothes out of material, wallpaper, etc. They are instructed to leave the face portion blank. While they are doing this, I use the digital camera to take pictures of all of them. We crop the pictures so that we see only faces, and blow them up to fit the paper dolls. Students glue their faces to the dolls, we laminate them and hang them in the entrance to the classroom across from each child's coat cubby. It is a colorful display, helpful in finding cubbies, and appears to be a quiet class standing in line. Students and parents love them! At the end of the year, students take home their "paper dolls."

73. **Where Do I Sit?** Make cut-outs of apples. Cut each apple in a zigzag (like a puzzle piece). Place one side of the piece on each desk in the room. As the children are lining up to come into the classroom, give each of them one half of an apple puzzle. The children find their desks by matching the piece they are holding with the rest of the puzzle on a desk. (You might find it easier to write a number on the back of each piece; the numbers will help you locate the correct matching apple if a child is having difficulty finding his/her spot.) This activity has the children sitting in desks randomly and not with friends.

74. **The "Me Shield."** We use a copy of a banner (from a Red Cross education program), drawn like a shield and divided into 4 sections, for this activity. We pose to students seven questions they can answer about themselves: *What are 3 things you are good at? What do you like most about your family? What do your friends like about you? What do you think you can do better than almost anyone else your age? What do you dream about doing one day? What is something you have already done that makes you feel really good? What is one thing you are planning to change about yourself so you will be even better?* Each student writes his/her name at the top of the paper and then answers four of the seven questions, one answer per section, on the banner. They can write the answer or use a combination of art and writing to express themselves. The students volunteer to share their banners, and then the teacher can proudly display them after the students have had a chance to decorate them.

75. **The Kindergarten "What Is Your Name Game?"** Use the Hap Palmer song, "What is Your Name?," for this activity. Point to each student as it is his/her turn to respond. Then each student is given their name card to place on a "What is Your Name?" chart. We read the chart together with their names. (First reading experience in the classroom for many kindergartners!) Later in the day, we place all the name cards on the floor, and with the children seated on the floor in a circle, we have a name search. One child at a time comes to the floor to select their name. If they have trouble identifying it, I have a duplicate and will show it to them. They really enjoy all the activities using their names.

76. **The Thinker!** On the first day of school, many teachers like to stress to students that not everyone thinks alike. I say the word "cornfield" and I ask the children to think of the first thing that comes to mind. Some will say they think of a cornfield they've driven by, some have never been near one and recall a picture of one, etc. Then, place a special chair somewhere in the classroom. Divide students into groups of about 6. Tell them that the group that comes up with the highest number of unique ways to sit in the chair will win a piece of candy. Each group sends a different representative to demonstrate a new unique way to sit in the chair. I keep score on the board. Inevitably, someone says, "This could go on forever!" At that point, we discuss if anyone's way was better or more correct than another's way. We discuss that everyone can come to conclusions and solve problems in their own way, and that no one's way is necessarily wrong or right. We think of examples in television commercials: Pizza Hut's "eating your pizza crust first," "How do you eat a Reese's?," or "How do you eat your Oreo?," etc. Of course, all students will get a piece of candy -- they're all winners!

77. **Circle of Foods.** This activity helps teachers get to know their students while providing insight into healthy eating habits as a lead-in to health lessons! In a circle, the first child begins "My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and my favorite food is \_\_\_\_\_." The next person in the circle then has to introduce her/himself *and* the previous person to see if they have been listening. The activity builds as you make your way around the circle!

78. **What Are Your Goals?** Teachers of older students might welcome students to class by having them write a short essay answering questions that might include: Who are you? Why are you here? What are your short-term goals? What are your long-term goals? What do you plan on accomplishing while you are here? What obstacles do you have and how can you meet your goals? This

activity gives students (and teachers) a diagnostic tool, a self-motivating statement, and a good feeling for being in school. A number of different activities can then be done, e.g., sharing, presenting, reading to class, hopes and dreams exposes, newspaper/vocational interest articles...

### 79. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and if I were an animal I'd be a \_\_\_\_\_ because....

I demonstrate for my students: "My name is Mr. H., and if I were an animal I'd be a turtle," I say, "because I'm always rushing around. Sometimes I wish I could slow down."

Then I give the students a little time to think about what animals they might like to be --- and why. I encourage them to be creative, to be different and unique. The first student to one side of me in the circle starts out. After the first student finishes, I say, paraphrasing, "My name is Mr. H., and if I were an animal I'd be a turtle because I'd like to be able to slow down. And this is Emily, and if she were an animal she'd be a hyena because she likes to laugh a lot." Then it's on to the next child. After each child speaks, I try to repeat all the other kids' name-and-animal combinations in order. (That's always good for a laugh or two. Shows the kids right from the start that the teacher isn't perfect!)

Next, I ask the kids to draw themselves as their animal, leaving space at the bottom of the drawing for their first writing assignment. I ask them to write at the bottom of the page a complete sentence following the form "If I were an animal, I would be a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ because..." When we're all done with the activity, I know all the kids' names and a little something about them.

As I call on students during the day, I'll always repeat their names-and their animals! But I learn a lot more about my new students from this little activity. I find out who is able to follow simple directions. I learn about their writing abilities and their creativity. And I have a hint about which students might be independent workers.

### 80. We are all unique!

Each day throughout the school year, I introduce a "Word of the Day." The first day's word is UNIQUE. I write the word on the board and ask students to read the word. (I don't recall any of my third graders ever identifying the word without a few clues. My last clue, using proper emphasis, is usually "This word is a very *unique* word!")

Then I use the word in several statements, the last of which is "Each of us is unique." We talk about ways in which we're each unique. I'm the only one over 6 feet tall. Mia is the only one who's wearing a pink shirt. Sam is the only one of us who has a pet ferret. (I learned this from the previous activity.) And so it goes.

Next step: Out comes the roll of white mural paper. I tear off a sheet about ten feet long. Sometime during the day, each child goes out into the hallway and uses markers to draw his or her name on the mural paper. "Make it unique!" is my only direction.

I start out by writing "Mr. H" in big bubble letters inside an explosion design like you see declaring NEW! or IMPROVED on product packaging in the grocery store. I draw colorful polka dots inside the bubble letters. When completed, this colorful mural makes a great (and an easy) hallway bulletin board under the cutout-letter headline "We Are All Unique!" Also, I can see from this activity who some of the truly unique characters will be in my new class!

### 81. Let's play detective.

I hand out a "Clue Sheet" to each student. We go over the statements on the sheet and then I ask the students to find a quiet spot where they can fill in the blanks in statements such as

- "My favorite hobby is \_\_\_\_\_."
- "When I grow up, I want to have a job as a \_\_\_\_\_."
- "The most fun thing I did all summer was \_\_\_\_\_."

I preface this activity by telling the students that this will be one of the few times this year that I *don't* want them to put their names on their papers. As the students finish filling out their Clue Sheets, each picks up the sheet and a book and joins me on the rug for a class meeting. They hand the sheets to me and read quietly while the rest of the class finishes the task. Then I introduce the activity. I hand an anonymous Clue Sheet to each student. (If a student ends up with his or her own sheet, we make some switches.)

"I want to see if you're good detectives," I tell the students. Then I invite them to move around, asking questions of their classmates, narrowing down the list of "suspects" until they find the one person who matches all the clues they hold.

Note: If it's a nice day, you might move this activity outdoors. Set up boundaries-the basketball "court" (if that isn't carrying the detective/suspect theme too far!), for example. Or the base paths on the ball field. When all the students have located their "suspects," each student takes a turn introducing the guilty party, telling others in the class a little about that boy or girl.

## 82. INTRODUCE MYSELF

Participants introduce themselves and tell why they are there. Variations: Participants tell where they first heard about the class, how they became interested in the subject, their occupations, home towns, favorite television programs, or the best books they have read in the last year.

## 83. INTRODUCE ANOTHER

Divide the class into pairs. Each person talks about him/herself to the other, sometimes with specific instructions to share a certain piece of information. For example, "The one thing I am particularly proud of is..." After five minutes, the participants introduce the other person to the rest of the class.

## 84. CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

Have students write down one or two adjectives describing themselves. Put these on a stick-on badge. Have class members find someone with similar or opposite adjectives and talk for five minutes with the other person.

## 85. I'VE DONE SOMETHING YOU HAVEN'T DONE

Have each person introduce themselves and then state something they have done that they think no one else in the class has done. If someone else has also done it, the student must state something else until he/she finds something that no one else has done.

## 86. FIND SOMEONE

Each person writes on a blank index card one to three statements, such as favorite color, interest, hobby, or vacations. Pass out cards so everyone gets someone else's card. Have that person find the person with their card and introduce themselves.

## 87. FAMOUS PERSON

People write a famous name on a piece of paper and pin it on someone else's back. Person tries to guess what name is pinned on his/her by asking others around the room yes or no questions. Variation: Use famous place instead of famous person.

## 88. MY NAME

People introduce themselves and tell what they know about why they have their name (their mother wanted to name me after her great aunt Helen who once climbed Pike's Peak in high heels, etc.). It could be the first, middle or nick name.

**89. HOW DO YOU FEEL?** Ask the students to write down words or phrases that describe their feelings on the first day of class. List the responses on the blackboard. Then ask them to write down what they think you as the teacher are feeling this first day of class. List them on the blackboard in a second column and note the parallels. Briefly comment on your feelings and then discuss the joint student/teacher responsibilities for learning in the course.

## 90. Song

Each student receives a slip of paper with a song title on it, with about four or five people receiving the same song. They don't show their song to anybody. Instead, they hum their song, walking around the room trying to find other people humming the same song. For younger students, put the name of an animal on their paper. They can walk around making their animal's noise until they find others making the same noise.

## 91. Letters

Have each student introduce himself by first name and tell something they did this summer that starts with the same letter. For example, I could say "Hi, my name is Nicole, and I nudged the President." The next person in the line (or circle) does the same but must also introduce the people before him and their summer activity.

## 92. Chairs

Place enough chairs for every student in a circle. Tell the children that you're sure you all have something in common with each other. Then say something like, "I really love pizza. If you love pizza, too, stand up by your seat." Comment on how many and continue with a few more statements like this. Then, and this is where the fun begins, tell the students to move to another seat if must stand in response to the next question. It should not be adjacent to them or occupied. As they do this, you sit in an empty seat. The last child standing will be the next person in the middle who must form an "if" statement. The trick to getting out of the center is to pick something that lots of people will have in common. Your students should learn this after a couple of rounds.

## 93. People Finder Sheet.

Make a list of qualifications like "Can speak another language" or "Has visited Europe." Then have students seek out these people in your class. Students who meet the qualifications initial the item. The object of the game is to fill the page with initials, but they can only use a student's initials once per sheet. Be careful, though. Because this icebreaker is a classic, many of your older students will have done this countless times in the past. But you can still use this icebreaker! The trick is to make the qualifications more interesting so they can learn fun things about each other.

Each student should write down three sentences describing himself. For example, "I have attended 11 schools," and "I have an aunt and an uncle both named Laverne," and "I love to vacation in Cancun." The catch is, two of the statements are true and one is false. (Try to guess which one I am lying about!) The students then share their three statements with each other or the entire class (whichever you prefer) and vote on which they think are true and false. The catch here is that the more unusual the information, the harder it will be for the other students to guess. Let them know this, and you are sure to learn some interesting trivia about your new students.

#### 94. Talk Time!

This teaching activity revolves around four major topics: a) The Home, b) School Life, c) Jobs and d) Spare Time. By answering a few simple questions and carrying out some easy tasks, students will get to know one another in a comfortable and co-operative environment. There is something for everyone and -hopefully- all of the students will have something to say.

Just ask your students to say a number between 1 and 40 and read the corresponding question. Do not ask for perfection right now. Building up everybody's self-confidence is much more important -and will prove more useful in the long run- so make sure that everybody joins in the talking.

#### A) The Home

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- 1) Design the ideal home. Tell your classmates about it.
- 2) Describe your bedroom. Your classmates should be able to produce a detailed plan of the place, according to your description.
- 3) You have won 25,000 dollars in the lottery. How would you redecorate your living room?
- 4) In groups, design the house of the future. Show the results on a poster.
- 5) Draw a plan of your neighborhood, show where your house is and explain how you go to the following places: a) the baker's, b) the supermarket and c) your favorite disco or pub.
- 6) Compose an advertisement to sell your house.
- 7) Give 3 reasons why you like/dislike your house.
- 8) Write a story about a house. Use between 120 and 150 words.
- 9) Would you rather rent a house or buy one? Discuss.
- 10) Write a list of the housework to be done in a house. Say who does each thing at your place.

#### B) School Life

- 11) In pairs, list the qualities of the perfect teacher.
- 12) Say what your favorite school subjects are. Give reasons.
- 13) Are you a "good" student? Explain why/why not.
- 14) Design a suitable timetable for your class. Show it to your classmates.
- 15) Homework is necessary. Discuss.
- 16) Plan the activities for a special "Cultural Events Week" at your school.
- 17) Suggest an itinerary for an end-of-term trip.
- 18) Devise a short English exam. Try it and see what happens!
- 19) Tell your classmates a funny story/situation that has taken place in your school.
- 20) Imagine what a small child would write about his/her first day at school.

#### C) Jobs

- 21) Write a short paragraph about your present/past/future job. Read it out and aloud.
- 22) Tell your students 5 things you would do if you were not forced to work..
- 23) Write a list of 10 machines/devices that make people's work easier these days.
- 24) Tell your classmates about one job you would NOT like to do. Explain your choice.
- 25) Would you work if you were a millionaire?
- 26) Think of 3 people you admire because of their jobs.
- 27) Would you like to be a policeman/policewoman? Why? Why not?
- 28) Many people have not got a job. Suggest some solutions to the problem.
- 29) Think of one job. Let your classmates ask you questions about it (i.e. "Do you work indoors?", "Is your job interesting?" etc.) You

may only answer "Yes" or "No". Can they guess the job you are thinking about?

30) How many different jobs can you name in 1 minute?

#### D) Spare Time

31) Summarize the plot of a book you have enjoyed. Can your classmates guess its title?

32) Tell the class about the worst TV program you have ever seen.

33) Are you sports-mad? Briefly describe the rules of your favorite sport.

34) If you could travel round the world, what countries would you visit?

35) Write a short paragraph about your favorite singer/band. Use about 70 words.

36) Tell your classmates about the (computer) game you like best.

37) Do you like reading comics? Which are your favorites? Why?

38) Think about your favorite radio program. Tell your neighbour, adding reasons why you think s/he should listen to it.

39) In groups, make a poster about your favorite singer/band.

40) Write the titles of the 4 best films you have ever seen.