

First Week Day 2: Centerpieces

Purpose

Students should be able to form the circle and gather the centerpieces prior to this lesson.

Ritual is an important component of the circle meeting. Just like your favorite songs at camp or secret handshake with a best friend, rituals make us feel included and a part of a special community. During this lesson and the next lesson, you will introduce the group to the two symbols and tools used in circle rituals. These are the “center pieces” and the “talking piece.”

Teacher Work

Students gather in the circle with center piece items inside the circle on the floor.

“Beliefs are guidelines on how we think about and treat each other. The things we believe help us listen carefully, treat each other kindly, and encourage each other to share and problem solve. Beliefs are different from rules. Rules are often given to you to follow, but beliefs are something we agree on together.”

Look at the items in the middle of the circle. Each of them hold a particular meaning. All of the items represent things that are important to our time in the circle. How we treat each other, what we believe about the ideas of others, and how we should act when we are in this space. If you notice, we are all the same distance away from the center pieces. This signifies that all of our ideas and things to share are of equal importance... including me. Have you ever heard that “two brains are better than one,” well, imagine what we will be able to accomplish with all of these brains! The circle is where we put all of our smarts together. Let’s try it right away.”

Student Work

Pass out the centerpiece items to groups of kids around the circle. Depending on the amount of centerpiece items, you may have large groups. Ask them to come up with the belief that the item represents. Walk around and listen first, then ask questions that deepen their assigned meaning. This is about the length of time as a “turn and talk” – just enough for them to get an idea.

One by one, each group explains their item and its meaning. At this point in the circle meeting timeline, you may have to ask follow up questions and push their explanations, but eventually this work will be done by the other students. It is critical that you accept the answers of the group – do not correct or rephrase an answer that is close enough to a positive belief.

Possible Center Pieces

Vase of fake flowers: growing together

Lantern: guiding light

Key: unlocking new possibilities

Velcro: working together/ stronger together

Blocks: build each other up/ build new ideas

Band-Aid: mending hurt relationships



Especially at the beginning of the year, make hearing the voice of your student top priority. Teachers tend to correct and rephrase student thinking – try not to do this at first while they are learning to trust you in the circle.



Closing

Get creative! Don't purchase anything.

Explain that each time they form the circle, these items will be in the center to remind them of the core circle beliefs. Also, invite students to bring in items or gather items to add to the center. I usually cap it at one per person – although many kids will not add a center piece.

Storing these items close together in the classroom make it easier and faster for the kids to set up the circle.

Resources

Excerpt from “Teaching Restorative Practices with Classroom Circles” from the Center for Restorative Process. Check out our posts for more information.

