



Youth Action Project

Storytelling is more than just entertainment. When we read stories or watch movies, we often connect with the characters. We see ourselves in these stories and see the power we have, to not just control our own lives, but also to impact the lives of others.



The purpose of the Youth Action Project in the public school setting is to use narrative to help students identify a personal need, share it with others through the power of storytelling, and collaborate, create and deploy a solution that impacts the lives of other students.

Overview of the Curriculum

This six-lesson curriculum is designed to integrate social and emotional learning (SEL) research from multiple sources—particularly the Details Lens from Social Optics, David Yeager’s work on implicit theories of personality, Meryl Lipton’s insights on social information processing, and Dena Simmons’s anti-oppressive, human-centered SEL framework. Students learn to read and interpret sensory details (sights, sounds, tastes, smells, textures) in their environment, using that awareness to understand and navigate social interactions, practice empathy, and reduce interpersonal conflict through a growth mindset perspective. Teachers will guide them in questioning inequities, building responsible decision-making skills, and engaging in self- and community-reflection so that classroom changes are both inclusive and data-driven.

Lessons

1. Project Launch – Who Are We, and How Do We Observe Our World?
2. Defining a Shared Need – Rooting Our Project in Empathy & Justice
3. Inquiry & Brainstorming Solutions – Imagining Transformation
4. Planning & Design – Crafting an Action Blueprint
5. Implementation – Enacting Change & Navigating Challenges
6. Showcase & Reflection – Evaluating Our Impact



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Introduction

In recent years, educators, researchers, and policymakers have increasingly recognized the integral role of social and emotional learning (SEL) in fostering both academic and long-term success (Jones & Doolittle, 2017; Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Durlak, 2017). Grounded in decades of evidence, SEL encompasses a variety of skills related to understanding and regulating emotions, building empathy, maintaining supportive relationships, and making responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020). However, newly surfaced studies emphasize that SEL must go beyond simple competency-based models and acknowledge each learner's cultural and contextual experiences (Lin et al., 2023; Simmons, 2021). To be effective, SEL must be human-centered and anti-oppressive, actively confronting and dismantling inequities in school settings (Simmons et al., 2023).

This curriculum reflects current scholarship that integrates findings from growth mindset research (Yeager & Dweck, 2012; Yeager, 2020) and social information processing models (Lipton, 2009; McKown, Gumbiner, Russo, & Lipton, 2009). Specifically, it leverages David Yeager's work on implicit theories of personality, which suggests that adolescents who view themselves and others as capable of change are more likely to demonstrate resilience and reduce aggression (Yeager, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2012). Simultaneously, Meryl Lipton's research on social-emotional learning frameworks in children with developmental differences points to how carefully designed, brain-based SEL interventions can address challenges such as social misinterpretation, absenteeism, and marginalized experiences (Lipton & Nowicki, 2009; Social Optics Inc., 2024).

Another key impetus for designing this curriculum is Dena Simmons's assertion that conventional SEL runs the risk of becoming another tool of marginalization if it overlooks systemic injustices and cultural authenticity (Simmons, 2021). Studies confirm that supporting meaningful SEL requires examining the interplay of identity, emotional well-being, and structural inequities in students' lives (Simmons et al., 2023). Therefore, the curriculum prioritizes healing-centered approaches that value belonging, ongoing reflection, and collaborative dialogue, ensuring that students are not merely taught compliance-based social skills but are also empowered to analyze and challenge cultural norms (Lin et al., 2023).



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Aligned with these considerations, this curriculum weaves in the Details Lens from Social Optics, spotlighting the five senses to deepen students' awareness of the sensory data that inform their perceptions and interactions (Social Optics Inc., 2024). This framework helps learners anchor empathy and social interaction strategies in tangible sensory cues—thereby preventing misunderstandings rooted in overlooked context or misread social signals (Lipton, 2013). By encouraging students to observe their environments and relationships through concrete details like sight, sound, and body language, the curriculum taps into essential social-cognitive processes that help them navigate complexities ranging from everyday peer conflicts to larger community issues (McKown et al., 2009).

Embedding growth mindset principles ensures that students learn how to reinterpret setbacks and see themselves as capable of improvement and collaborative problem-solving (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Thus, they develop both the resilience to cope with adversity and the agency to recognize and address inequities that may manifest in school or beyond. Meanwhile, anti-oppressive, human-centered SEL practices promote inclusive classroom cultures, drawing on the wisdom of community members and acknowledging the lived realities of diverse students and families (Simmons et al., 2023). Together, these elements work in tandem to create SEL experiences that not only bolster individual well-being but also cultivate collective healing and equity-oriented outcomes.

This curriculum, therefore, stands at the intersection of CASEL's five SEL competencies, Dena Simmons's liberation-centered work, David Yeager's implicit theories of personality research, Meryl Lipton's social-emotional skill-building insights, and Social Optics' attention to social critical thinking skills for social understanding. Woven through project-based lessons, explicit instruction, and reflective discussions, the lessons aim to meet students where they are—respecting their cultural contexts, recognizing their inherent capacity for growth, and empowering them to co-create more equitable, compassionate communities (Lipton & Nowicki, 2009; Yeager et al., 2020). Ultimately, the curriculum underscores that SEL alone, without a justice-oriented and human-centered lens, is insufficient—but when guided by liberatory principles and grounded in robust research, SEL can be a transformative force for students and educators alike.



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Alignment With CASEL's Responsible Decision-Making

Responsible decision-making includes:

- Demonstrating curiosity and open-mindedness
- Making reasoned judgments after analyzing information, data, and facts
- Identifying solutions for personal and social problems
- Anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one's actions
- Recognizing how critical thinking skills apply both inside and outside of school
- Reflecting on one's role in promoting personal, family, and community well-being
- Evaluating personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts

Each lesson explicitly incorporates these elements, helping students practice skills that foster responsible decision-making.

Alignment With CASEL's Social Awareness

Social Awareness includes:

- Taking others' perspectives
- Recognizing strengths in others
- Demonstrating empathy and compassion
- Showing concern for the feelings of others
- Understanding and expressing gratitude
- Identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones
- Recognizing situational demands and opportunities
- Understanding the influences of organizations and systems on behavior

Each lesson explicitly incorporates these elements, helping students practice skills that foster responsible decision-making.



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Elevating Student Voice

Student voice refers to the perspectives, ideas, input, and active participation of students in the learning process and in decision-making related to their education. Emphasizing student voice means recognizing that students bring valuable insights, experiences, and expertise to the table, and that their contributions can improve teaching methods, curriculum development, school culture, and overall educational outcomes. By fostering student voice, educators and institutions support students in taking ownership of their learning, developing critical thinking and leadership skills, and shaping an educational environment that better reflects and responds to students' needs. YAP embodies these principles.

Learning Outcomes

Below are learning outcomes for each grade level that align with CASEL's Social Awareness and Responsible Decision Making frameworks, Human Centered SEL, and the Details Lens, a core social critical thinking skill (Social Optics). Across 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, these learning outcomes deepen in complexity and independence. Younger students benefit from explicit support and simple, step-by-step approaches, while older students can analyze systemic inequities, advocate for themselves and their peers, and design more sophisticated solutions. The Details Lens anchors all grade levels, fostering a habit of identifying and addressing real-world environmental factors and sensory cues that shape social interactions. Throughout the process, an integrated growth mindset perspective encourages students to see social challenges as opportunities to learn and grow—both as individuals and as a classroom community.



Youth Action Project

Student Learning Outcomes by Grade Level

6th Grade

1. Social Awareness

- Recognize that others may see a situation differently based on their own backgrounds or perspectives.
- Demonstrate basic empathy by listening attentively and asking clarifying questions.
- Identify positive qualities in peers, celebrating small successes to foster group belonging.

2. Responsible Decision-Making

- Practice simple decision-making steps (define the issue, consider outcomes, choose a fair solution).
- Notice how choices impact immediate social groups (classmates, friends) and family.
- Accept feedback from peers or adults when a decision causes unintended hurt or conflict.

3. Human-Centered SEL

- Recognize that unfairness can show up in everyday school situations (e.g., classroom activities, peer interactions).
- Discuss the importance of respecting everyone's identity (culture, gender, religion) and how ignorance can lead to harm.
- Explore ways to include peers who may feel left out because of social or cultural differences.

4. Details Lens (Social Optics)

- Observe environmental **sensory details**—for instance, noticing when a classroom feels too noisy or bright—and how that might affect comfort levels.
- Pay attention to **nonverbal cues** from peers (e.g., facial expressions, posture) to gauge if someone is upset or needs help.
- Share basic observations in discussions (like “I saw that you looked worried when we started the group activity”).
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5. Growth Mindset & Social Information Processing

- Practice rethinking negative assumptions: “Maybe I misunderstood them. They might be having a bad day.”
- Use a simple “conflict resolution checklist” to interpret social setbacks as changeable rather than fixed.
- Recognize that personal or peer behavior can improve with effort and support (e.g., “We can learn better ways to talk out problems.”).



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Student Learning Outcomes by Grade Level

7th Grade

1. **Social Awareness**

- Delve deeper into others' perspectives, discussing how cultural and familial factors shape viewpoints.
- Show compassion by recognizing emotional needs (sadness, frustration) and offering supportive responses or solutions.
- Evaluate how social norms (e.g., peer pressure, popularity) influence group behaviors and personal choices.

2. **Responsible Decision-Making**

- Weigh short-term and long-term consequences of everyday choices (e.g., how gossip or teasing can grow over time).
- Reflect on ethical aspects of decisions (justice, fairness, safety) by discussing possible outcomes in class scenarios.
- Take proactive steps to fix a harmful choice, such as apologizing or making amends with those affected.

3. **Human-Centered SEL**

- Identify examples of bias or exclusion within school settings and brainstorm ways to reduce these.
- Advocate for self or peers when facing exclusion or microaggressions (e.g., speaking up in group projects, clarifying misperceptions).
- Engage in classroom dialogues around equity—why do some groups face more barriers, and how can we show solidarity?

4. **Details Lens (Social Optics)**

- Notice how environmental factors (group size, seating arrangement, cultural representation) impact everyone's comfort and engagement.
- Interpret nonverbal signals more accurately (like tension, hesitancy, or relief) and connect them to potential causes (like confusion about instructions).
- Use thoughtful, specific observations ("When the lights were dim, you seemed calmer—do you feel the same?") to build empathy.

5. **Growth Mindset & Social Information Processing**

- Reframe interpersonal conflicts by reminding each other that peers are capable of growth: "They might not realize how their words hurt me—maybe we can talk it out."
- Use a structured problem-solving approach (define problem, brainstorm solutions, evaluate, act) for peer disagreements.
- Recognize that negative self-talk ("I'm always messing up in groups") can shift to more constructive beliefs ("I can improve my group work skills with practice").



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Student Learning Outcomes by Grade Level

8th Grade

1. Social Awareness

- Analyze how broader social or historical factors might shape a person's point of view (e.g., stereotypes, media representation).
- Demonstrate nuanced empathy by validating others' feelings while acknowledging systemic or cultural contexts.
- Use reflective conversation strategies to handle complex group dynamics (e.g., building consensus in a diverse team).

2. Responsible Decision-Making

- Weigh ethical dimensions of decisions beyond the immediate setting—how an action might affect school climate, community, or marginalized groups.
- Use hypothetical or real scenarios to examine complex outcomes (benefits versus harms to different stakeholders).
- Demonstrate accountability by following through on solutions and self-correcting when discovering new information or biases.

3. Human-Centered SEL

- Critique structural inequities that may appear in curricula, school policies, or peer hierarchies (e.g., "Why do some advanced courses lack diverse representation?").
- Take collective action (like forming an equity club or project) to address forms of injustice or bullying.
- Cultivate active allyship by supporting classmates from marginalized backgrounds, focusing on collaborative, culturally affirming events and discussions.

4. Details Lens (Social Optics)

- Evaluate how subtle social signals—tone of voice, micro-expressions—can escalate or de-escalate conflicts.
- Observe and share how certain environmental or cultural elements (posters, language in announcements) might alienate or empower classmates.
- Incorporate consistent reflection: "In what ways have I observed changes in group morale based on small changes in our environment or how we communicate?"

5. Growth Mindset & Social Information Processing

- Critically examine "fixed" labels (e.g., "They're just a troublemaker") and practice re-labeling peers with strengths-based language to encourage growth.
- Apply perspective-taking and self-reflection when facing interpersonal conflict—e.g., step back, recognize personal biases, re-evaluate.
- Use advanced problem-solving frameworks (like restorative justice circles or peer mediation) to handle disagreements in a constructive, future-oriented manner.



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Lesson 1: Project Launch – Who Are We, and How Do We Observe Our World?

Purpose

- Engage students in identifying personal needs that impact their desire to come to school and be in class.
- Begin with an initial self-reflection activity measuring their self-assessment of responsible decision-making skills.

Objectives

- **All Grades:**
 1. Complete a self-reflection survey or journal to gauge personal decision-making strengths and areas for growth.
 2. Identify and list personal needs or challenges (e.g., needing more breaks, difficulty with organization, social anxiety).
- **6th Grade Focus:** Recognize and name personal feelings that arise in school situations.
- **7th Grade Focus:** Delve deeper into the causes of personal needs (why these needs or challenges exist).
- **8th Grade Focus:** Connect personal needs to broader school or systemic factors.



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Activities

1. **Self-Reflection Survey and Journal:**

Frame: Inspired by the “Identity Journal,” ask students to reflect on who they are, a recent challenge or conflict they overcame, and how they typically respond in stressful situations.

Implementation:

1. Distribute a short responsible decision-making survey (teacher reads each question aloud if needed).
2. Students respond independently (they may write or discuss verbally/scribe, depending on accommodations).
3. Emphasize noticing any sensory details (e.g., a noisy hallway, a bright classroom) or social cues (body language, tone of voice) that made the challenge more or less intense.

Outcome: Students begin to self-assess how they approach decisions in school and identify what they need (quiet space, clearer instructions, emotional support).

2. Needs Brainstorming: Use graphic organizers (e.g., a “Needs Web”) for students to map out areas (academic, social, emotional, physical) that affect their motivation, attendance and well-being

3. Discussion: As a class or in small groups, share a few identified needs. Emphasize an open-minded, supportive atmosphere. Ask students to think about the story or ‘why’ behind the need in preparation for **Lesson 2: Defining a Shared Need** – Rooting Our Project in Empathy & Justice



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Connections to the 5 Learning Outcomes

1. **Social Awareness**

- Students gain empathy and cultural understanding by listening to classmates' experiences and challenges.

2. **Responsible Decision-Making**

- Reflecting on personal needs clarifies how their daily choices affect attendance and learning (for instance, deciding to ask for help or to take a calming moment).

3. **Anti-Oppressive/Human-Centered SEL**

- Students' experiences—particularly those from marginalized backgrounds—are validated and taken seriously. They see that the classroom can adapt to meet their needs.

4. **Details Lens (Social Optics)**

- By naming specific sensory details (noise, lighting, visuals), they see how the physical environment and subtle social interactions can influence their well-being.

5. **Growth Mindset & Social Information Processing**

- They recognize conflicts or needs as changeable—their situations, peer dynamics, or their own responses can shift through new strategies and self-advocacy, which reduces harmful assumptions about themselves or others.



Meet Cody



Cody is a friendly young man with traditional values. He often feels confused by different perspectives from school, media, and peers. He enjoys helping others but struggles to recognize when his help isn't wanted. With a strong moral compass and a black-and-white view of the world, he seems rigid and inflexible. However, Cody is empathic and understands other perspectives, though he finds it challenging to express his respect for differing beliefs in a way that makes others comfortable.

Age 14 years old

Pronouns He/Him/His

Hobbies Soccer, singing, guitar, and playing video games

Interests Concerts, sports

Pet Peeves He doesn't like to be stereotyped as the sporty kid, and he wears glasses for taking tests

Cody wears glasses when in class or while doing school work. But he tends to not wear them the rest of the time.



Do you share any of Cody's characteristics?
Which ones?



Meet Lyla



Lyla is a cheerful girl who loves making the world around her more beautiful. Her bedroom has been turned into her own personal garden, with many varieties of potted plants. She enjoys shopping for cute clothes and getting coffee with friends. Even at school, she's popular for her art skills and willingness to help people out. However, Lyla is secretly insecure about her tendency to overthink and freeze in situations. She can be hard on herself for messing up social cues or needing extra time on tests in class.

Age 15 years old

Pronouns She/Her/Hers

Hobbies Drawing, caring for plants, playing phone app games, getting coffee with friends

Interests Art History, Horticulture

Pet Peeves People chewing loudly, people watching her draw or staring in general, public speaking

Lyla is a picky eater and likes to stick to certain foods. But when it comes to coffee she's not choosy. Hot or iced, plain or sugary... and anything in between!



Do you share any of Lyla's characteristics?
Which ones?



Meet Florence



Florence's strong, enterprising personality can be seen as money-hungry or vain by outsiders, but once Florence gets to know someone, they show their selfless side by giving gifts, free services, and standing up for friends. Florence grew up in an impoverished home as an only child. Despite not having much, Florence found a way to make the little her own. She likes the character of worn-out clothes and furniture, often adding distressing, alterations, and personal touches to her unique style.

Age 14 years old

Pronouns Any

Hobbies Starting big projects, learning new skills, DIYing wardrobe items, and crafting bedroom decor

Interests Entrepreneurship, animals, comedy, DIY

Pet Peeves Unfair or unethical practices, people stealing their opportunities, masking

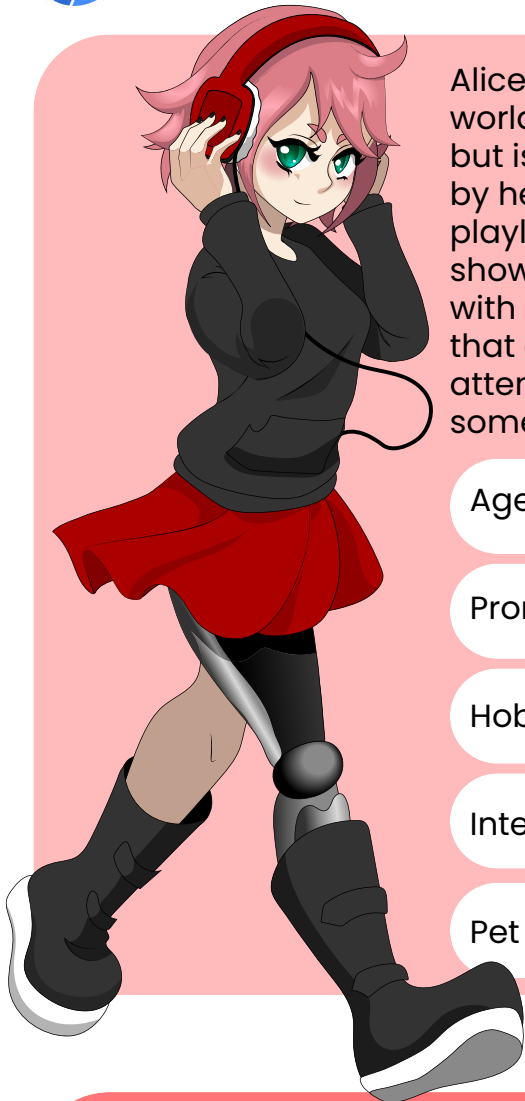
Florence has big aspirations of providing for their family, so they work hard with many side jobs, like reselling clothes and grooming pets.



Do you share any of Florence's characteristics?
Which ones?



Meet Alice



Alice is an introvert who feels misunderstood by the world. She puts on an act to seem cool and grown up but is really very sensitive. She shows friends she cares by helping them with homework, making them playlists, and bring them gifts. However, she isn't one to show verbal affection. When Alice feels comfortable with someone she will often begin to make comments that can be perceived as mean or intentionally attempting to push them away, making her difficult for some people to understand or get close to.

Age 14 years old

Pronouns She/Her/Hers

Hobbies Shopping for clothes, making makeup videos, listening to music

Interests Supernatural subjects, cooking

Pet Peeves People starring or making rude comments about her prosthetic, people calling her a "kid"

Alice has a social media profile she uses to create makeup videos. She enjoys getting tips from her followers and trying new styles.



Do you share any of Alice's characteristics?
Which ones?



Meet

Tell us about yourself:

Age

Pronouns

Hobbies

Interests

Pet Peeves

A fun fact about you:

What is something you wish people knew about you?



Survey

Read each statement below and select the response that best describes how true it is for you, using the following scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

I look for different ideas or opinions before deciding what to do.

1 2 3 4 5

I think carefully about the facts and consequences before making a choice.

1 2 3 4 5

When I have a problem, I try to come up with more than one way to solve it.

1 2 3 4 5

I consider how my decisions will affect me, my friends, and my family.

1 2 3 4 5

I think about how my choices today might shape my future.

1 2 3 4 5

I ask a trusted adult or friend for help when I feel unsure about an important decision.

1 2 3 4 5

My Needs Web

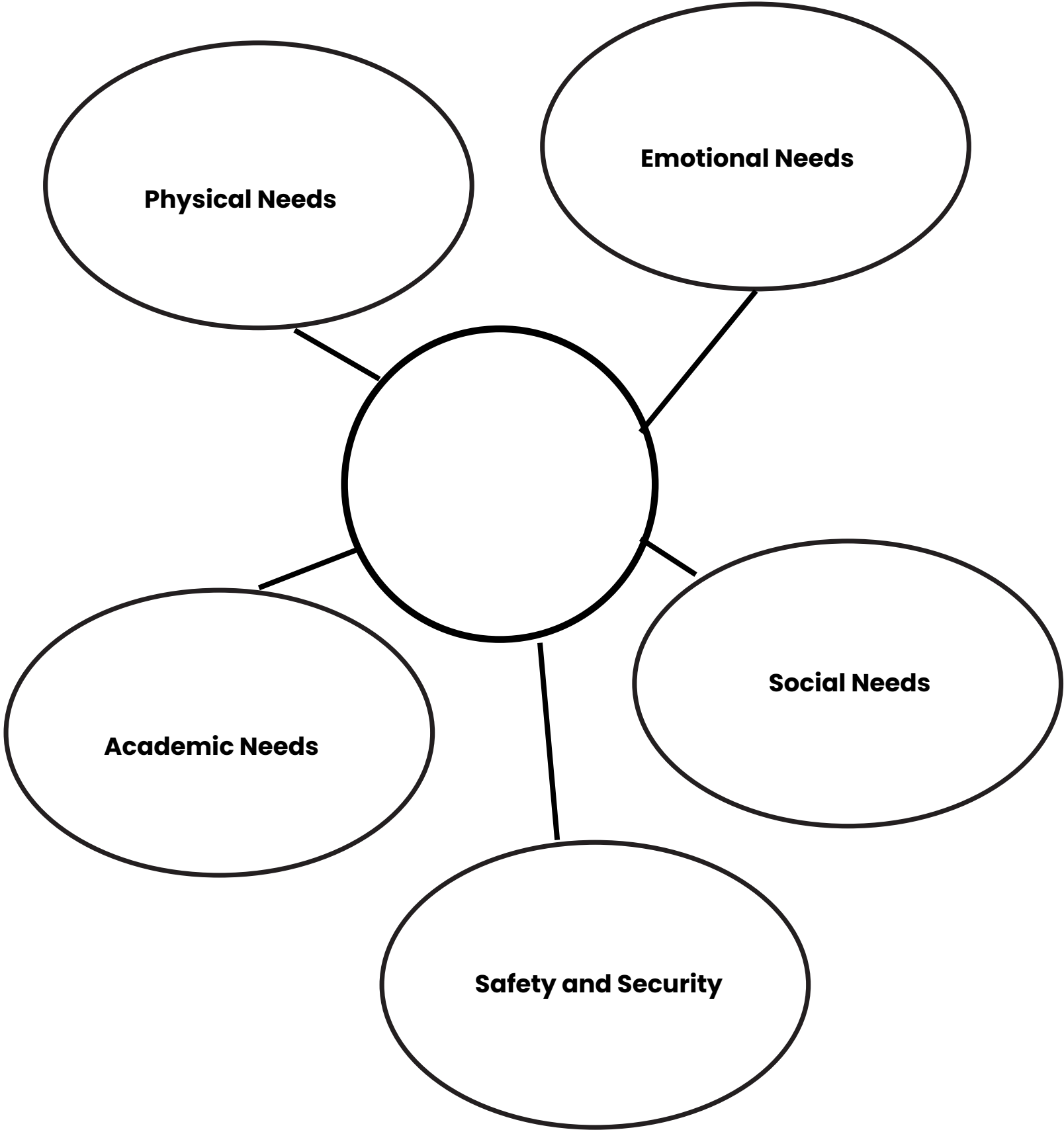
Physical Needs

Emotional Needs

Academic Needs

Social Needs

Safety and Security



Discussion

Examples of Needs:

- Physical Needs: Health, rest, nutrition, exercise.
- Emotional Needs: Support, understanding, coping strategies.
- Social Needs: Friendships, belonging, communication skills.
- Academic Needs: Study skills, help from teachers, organization.
- Safety & Security: Feeling safe at home and school, trusting relationships.

You can use these examples to guide the discussion on the personal needs web activity. Give students 5-10 minutes of independent work time to identify their OWN needs without peer discussion.

Wrap Up Discussion:

- We can tap into who we are through movies, characters, books and stories--our stories and those of our friends and community.
- Think of a time when your need was or was not met. What is the story behind it? Think about how you will tell that story next time we meet.



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Lesson 2: Defining a Shared Need –What do we ALL have in common?

Purpose

- Engage students in moving from “I need...” to “We need...” by using Lesson 1 responses to create a group Venn diagram
- Increase cultural responsiveness by recognizing that each student’s needs can be shaped by different home, community, or cultural contexts.

Objectives

- **All Grades:**

1. Complete a group Venn diagram poster of individual and shared needs to improve a sense of belonging at school.
2. Have students rank the shared needs in order of impact for them personally and in order of impact for the group.

Create a list of the top 3 shared needs for **Lesson 3:**

Brainstorming Solutions – What can we do to improve our sense of belonging?

- **6th Grade Focus:** Recognize shared needs and shifting focus from ‘Me’ to ‘We.’
- **7th Grade Focus:** Ask students to complete a reflection on how often they think of what they need first--do they notice patterns in when they tend to center themselves over others?
- **8th Grade Focus:** Encourage discussion on the definition of community needs and how collective impact translates to individual impact.



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Activities

1. Shared Needs Venn Diagram:

This diagram can be completed on a whiteboard or extra large sheet of poster paper/construction paper. Ask students which method they prefer. The paper will serve as an artifact for final review. You can also take a photo of the whiteboard for a final discussion. The whiteboard allows students to move needs between individuals and the shared section more easily.

However, items can be erased and lost in the process.

1. Draw as many circles as there are students in the group, overlapping in the center of the paper/whiteboard. You can draw an arrow from this central overlap to another circle outside of the group to provide more space for collecting shared needs.
2. Hand students their needs web from the last lesson--have them list their needs in one of the circles.
3. Ask students to notice what they have in common and list them in the 'shared needs' circle. Engage them in deeper discussion: as they talk about what they have in common, do any other needs come up? Can they be added to this section?

Outcome: Students engage in a collaborative discussion that raises awareness of others and encourages centering discussions on what people have in common versus what makes each person different.



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Activities

Zeroing in on Action: Use the 'Priority Needs' worksheet to have students independently rank the Shared Needs on what would impact them the most, and also what would impact the group the most based on the discussion. Have them do this independently.

Use the student sheets and create a list next to the Venn diagram of the common Top 3 Individual and Shared Needs.

1. Ask the students to discuss similarities and differences between the 2 lists.
2. Ask students to pick the Shared Need that they would like to find a solution for in order to increase a sense of belonging for themselves and their fellow students.

Discussion: Ask students to discuss how they felt during this activity: Was it easy/hard to share the needs they had identified in Lesson 1? Were they surprised by any of the needs they had in common, or that were different? What skill did they learn in today's activity that they could use when doing group work for other classes? Ask students to start thinking of solutions to share with the group for **Lesson 3: Brainstorming Solutions - What can we do to improve our sense of belonging?**



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Connections to the 5 Learning Outcomes

1. **Social Awareness**

- Students gain empathy and cultural understanding by identifying shared experiences and challenges.

2. **Responsible Decision-Making**

- Reflecting on group needs builds critical thinking skills for perspective taking and identifying how individual actions impact the collective.

3. **Human-Centered SEL**

- Students' experiences and needs are the focus of the activity. Students decide the need that should be addressed.

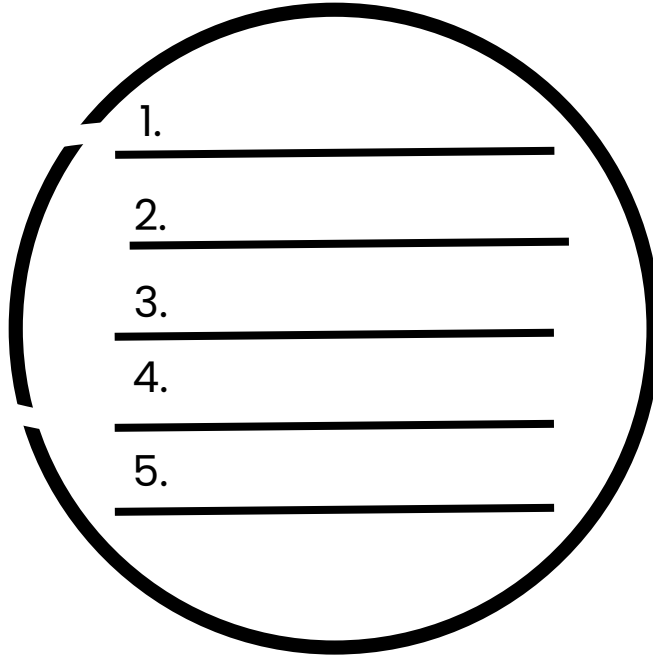
4. **Details Lens (Social Optics)**

- Students are challenged to link concrete information to the feelings associated with belonging/not belonging in order to identify specific needs that are actionable.

5. **Growth Mindset & Social Information Processing**

- They recognize conflicts or needs as changeable—their situations, peer dynamics, or their own responses can shift through new strategies and self-advocacy, which reduces harmful assumptions about themselves or others.

Priority Needs



1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Me

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The Group

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Which need do I think we should work on? Why?

Discussion

Wrap Up Discussion:

- When we stop to connect with others, we often realize that what we need and want is no different from our neighbor.
- Being able to discuss what we have in common, gives us a foundation to explore what makes us different and different perspectives.
- What is one thing you learned about a classmate today that you did not know at the beginning of this activity?
- How could that change how you view them?
- What is one thing you will do differently when working in a group after today's activity?



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Lesson 3: Brainstorming Solutions – What Can We Do to Improve Our Sense of Belonging?

Purpose

- Encourage students to creatively explore ways to address shared needs identified in Lesson 2.
- Students will collaborate to generate actionable solutions that promote inclusion, belonging, and justice within their school community.

Objectives

- **All Grades:**
 1. Brainstorm possible solutions to one or more top shared needs identified in the previous lesson.
 2. Categorize ideas into small, medium, and large-scale actions.
 3. Evaluate the feasibility and potential impact of selected solutions.
- **6th Grade Focus:** Use simple language and direct examples to generate ideas that help classmates feel more included or safe.
- **7th Grade Focus:** Encourage students to consider how their solution ideas affect both individual experiences and group dynamics.
- **8th Grade Focus:** Push students to evaluate which solutions address root causes versus surface-level issues. Ask them to consider equity and sustainability.



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Activities

1. Solution Brainstorm Wall

Materials: Chart paper, sticky notes, markers

Create three columns labeled:

- *Small Actions (1 day – 1 week)*
- *Medium Actions (1–2 weeks)*
- *Big Projects (more time + support)*

Each student writes as many ideas as they can on sticky notes and places them in one of the three columns. Examples might include:

- Small: “Sit with someone new at lunch,” “Make posters with positive messages”
- Medium: “Organize a student-led gratitude wall”
- Big: “Create a peer buddy program,” “Revise hallway rules with staff”

Encourage them to build off each other’s ideas.

2. Gallery Walk & Dot Voting

After the brainstorm, students rotate around the room reading all ideas. Give each student 3 sticker dots or colored markers. Ask them to “vote” for the ideas they believe will make the most difference.

Discussion Questions:

- Which ideas got the most votes? Why do you think that is?
- Are any ideas connected or could they be combined?



Youth Action Project

Activities

3. Feasibility vs. Impact Matrix

As a class or in small groups, choose 3–5 top-voted ideas and plot them on a two-axis chart:

- X-Axis: Feasibility (Easy to Hard)
- Y-Axis: Impact (Low to High)

Use this visual tool to identify “quick wins” and big-picture goals. You can use the whiteboard or a large sheet of paper.

Wrap-Up Discussion

Ask students:

- Which solution feels most exciting to you personally?
- What might get in the way of making this solution happen?
- What would we need from teachers or the school to do this?

Prepare students for **Lesson 4**, where they'll create an **Action Plan: Think and Do**, to bring one idea to life. Ask students to start to think about resources and adults they would need to have involved? What student groups or clubs could they ask for help?



Youth Action Project

Connections to the 5 Learning Outcomes

1. **Social Awareness**

- Students deepen empathy and perspective-taking by designing inclusive solutions rooted in others' needs.

2. **Responsible Decision-Making**

- Students apply critical thinking to evaluate the pros and cons of their ideas, anticipating outcomes and consequences.

3. **Human-Centered SEL**

- Ideas are centered on lived student experiences, ensuring authenticity and cultural responsiveness.

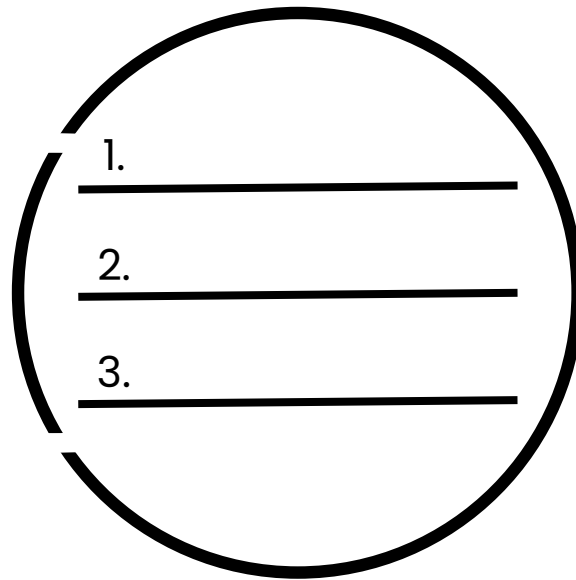
4. **Details Lens (Social Optics)**

- Students consider concrete environmental and interpersonal details that affect belonging (e.g., lighting, classroom tone, teacher-student dynamics).

5. **Growth Mindset & Social Information Processing**

- Students approach social challenges as opportunities for growth and use peer feedback to revise and improve ideas.

Shared Needs



1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Idea

Size

1. _____	S M L
2. _____	S M L
3. _____	S M L
4. _____	S M L
5. _____	S M L

Which Idea do I think is best? Who would it help?

Shared Needs

Reflect

Check the box if you agree:

- ☐ I thought about how my idea could help more than just me.
- ☐ I worked with others to combine or improve ideas.
- ☐ I am ready to help turn this idea into action!

Exit Question (Choose One):

- What's one thing you could do tomorrow to help someone feel like they belong?
- How might our ideas change someone's school experience for the better?
- Which of our solutions addresses a root cause? Which might only help short-term?



Youth Action Project

Lesson 4: Action Plan – Think and Do

Purpose

- Guide students in turning their best solution ideas from Lesson 3 into an organized plan they can start to carry out.
- Students will break their idea into small steps, assign roles, and list the resources or help they will need.

Objectives

- **All Grades:**
 1. Choose one solution idea to plan in detail.
 2. Break the idea into simple action steps with a timeline.
 3. Identify what help, tools, or approval they'll need to move forward.
- **6th Grade Focus:** Practice breaking down a big idea into doable steps with help from the teacher.
- **7th Grade Focus:** Assign roles and consider who will do what. Talk about how to get support from adults or clubs.
- **8th Grade Focus:** Evaluate what resources are needed, and create a plan that includes backup options if obstacles arise.



Youth Action Project

Activities

1. Pick Your Project

Students review the ideas from Lesson 3 and select one that they are most excited to turn into action. This can be done individually or in small groups.

Prompt: Which idea do you think we can actually make happen in the next 4 weeks?

2. Action Planning Sheet

Use a simple handout (see below) to fill out key parts of the plan:

- What are we trying to do?
- What are the steps?
- Who will do each step?
- When will each step happen?
- What help or tools do we need?

Encourage students to be specific and realistic. Have them work as a group. They can fill in a worksheet individually or a single worksheet as a group.

3. Resource Brainstorm

As a class or in groups, create a list of:

- Adults who can support the project (teacher, principal, custodian, etc.)
- School clubs or student groups who might help
- Materials needed (posters, markers, paper, space to meet, etc.)



Youth Action Project

Activities

4. Barriers & Solutions

Ask students to think about what might get in the way of their plan. Write one possible obstacle and a possible solution.

Example:

Obstacle: "We don't have enough time during school."

Solution: "Ask to do it during advisory or lunch."

Wrap-Up Discussion

Ask:

- What's the first step we can take this week?
- Who will help us move this plan forward?
- How will we know it's working?

Prepare students for **Lesson 5: Implementation – Making It Happen!** Ask students to start thinking about



Youth Action Project

Connections to the 5 Learning Outcomes

1. **Social Awareness**

- Students reflect on the needs of others as they plan a solution. They collaborate with peers, listen to ideas, and build an action plan that includes the whole group—not just their own perspective.

2. **Responsible Decision-Making**

- Students practice organizing their time, tasks, and resources. They identify steps, assign roles, anticipate problems, and create realistic, ethical solutions to shared challenges.

3. **Human-Centered SEL**

- Student plans are based on real, lived experiences of students in the class. Students center their ideas around making school a more just and inclusive place, and they name the kinds of support they'll need to make change possible.

4. **Details Lens (Social Optics)**

- Students apply the Details Lens to anticipate real-world logistics that affect implementation—such as space, timing, communication, and environmental cues. They identify specific people and settings involved in their plan.

5. **Growth Mindset and Social Information Processing**

- Students recognize that change takes time and planning. They view obstacles as challenges to overcome rather than reasons to quit. They prepare to adjust and learn as they go.

Action Plan: Think and Do

What is our solution?

How will it improve a sense of belonging?

What are the steps to make it happen?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

Action Plan: Think and Do

Who will do what?

When will we do it?

Start Date: _____ **End Date:** _____

Materials:

Action Plan: Think and Do

People we need to help us:

Timeline

Week 1

Actions:

People:

Materials:

Outcomes:

Week 2

Actions:

People:

Materials:

Outcomes:

Week 3

Actions:

People:

Materials:

Outcomes:

Week 4

Actions:

People:

Materials:

Outcomes:



Youth Action Project

Lesson 5: Making It Happen! – Implementing Our Plan

Purpose

- Support students as they begin to carry out their Action Plan developed in Lesson 4.
- Emphasize teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and real-time decision-making. Help students practice persistence and flexibility as they bring their ideas to life.

Objectives

- **All Grades:**
 1. Begin implementing the solution plan from Lesson 4.
 2. Practice communication and collaboration in a real-world project.
 3. Reflect on progress and adjust the plan as needed.
- **6th Grade Focus:** Practice asking for help and working as a team. Recognize when something isn't going as planned and talk through what to do next.
- **7th Grade Focus:** Use self-monitoring skills to stay on task. Reflect on your role in the group and how your choices affect the outcome..
- **8th Grade Focus:** Manage responsibilities independently or in leadership roles. Identify and respond to barriers, and make adjustments with the group.



Youth Action Project

Connections to the 5 Learning Outcomes

1. **Social Awareness**

- Students build empathy by working with diverse peers and understanding different strengths and needs. They practice inclusive group work and communication.

2. **Responsible Decision-Making**

- Students apply real-time judgment and flexibility to solve problems and adjust actions. They take ownership of group tasks and learn from consequences..

3. **Human-Centered SEL**

- Students implement a solution that is rooted in real student needs. They learn that making change takes teamwork, persistence, and community support.

4. **Details Lens (Social Optics)**

- Students notice real-life details—who shows up, how the space feels, how people respond—and adjust their actions accordingly.

5. **Growth Mindset and Social Information Processing**

- Students understand that setbacks are normal and use them to grow. They reflect on what worked, what didn't, and how to keep moving forward.



Youth Action Project

Activities

Launch the Action Plan

Help students get started on their plan. Support them in setting up roles, gathering materials, and confirming logistics (space, time, adult help).

Examples:

- 1.If they're running an activity, help them set up the space.
- 2.If they're making something, make sure materials are ready.
- 3.If they're giving a presentation or announcement, practice beforehand.

2. Work Time Check-Ins

Give students 15–30 minutes to work on their project. Check in with individuals or groups:

- What's going well?
- What needs to change?
- Do you need help from an adult?

Use sentence frames like:

- "I noticed..."
- "What's your next step?"
- "Is this part going the way you hoped?"

3. Obstacle Coaching

If groups are stuck, prompt with these strategies:

- Simplify the plan: "Can you do a smaller version of this idea today?"
- Delegate tasks: "Who else can help with this step?"
- Ask for help: "Is there an adult or peer you can ask for support?"



Youth Action Project

Activities

4. Reflection Circle or Exit Ticket

After work time, bring the class together to reflect.

Ask:

- What did we get done today?
- What felt exciting or hard?
- What's our next step?

5. Student Reflection / Journal

Allow the students to choose one of the journaling papers.

Allow students to choose one of the following brief writing/drawing prompts:

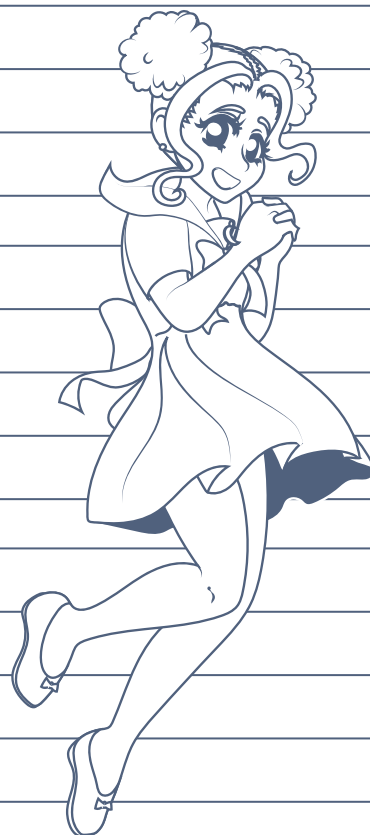
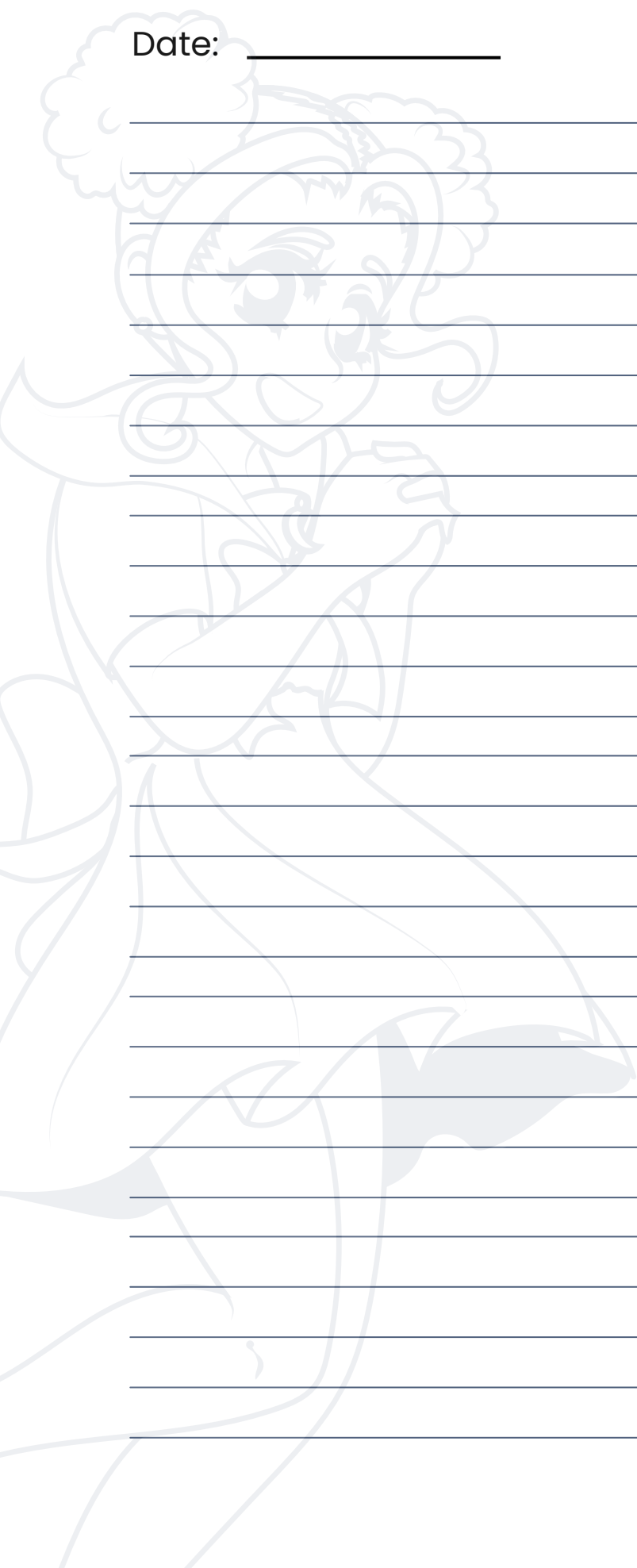
"Today we made progress by..."

"One challenge we faced was..."

"Next time, I will..."

"I learned that working with others means..."

Date: _____



Date: _____



Date: _____



Date: _____





Youth Action Project

Lesson 6: Showcase & Reflection – Evaluating Our Impact

Purpose

- Give students the opportunity to reflect on what they accomplished, what they learned, and how their actions impacted the classroom or school.
- Celebrate progress, acknowledge effort, and solidify lessons about empathy, inclusion, and responsible decision-making.

Objectives

- **All Grades:**
 1. Share outcomes of the action project (what was tried, what worked, what changed).
 2. Reflect on the process, growth, and challenges.
 3. Identify how to continue positive changes in the future.
- **6th Grade Focus:** Celebrate teamwork and reflect on how even small changes make a difference.
- **7th Grade Focus:** Evaluate the impact of the project on others and on group dynamics
- **8th Grade Focus:** Reflect on long-term sustainability and their own role in promoting justice and inclusion at school.



Youth Action Project

Connections to the 5 Learning Outcomes

1. **Social Awareness**

- Students acknowledge the contributions of others and reflect on how their actions affected peers and the broader school environment.

2. **Responsible Decision-Making**

- Students evaluate the outcomes of their choices, recognize their own growth, and consider next steps for maintaining positive change.

3. **Human-Centered SEL**

- Students affirm that their voices, stories, and perspectives matter in shaping school culture. They see themselves as agents of change.

4. **Details Lens (Social Optics)**

- Students reflect on how small details (like tone, visuals, space, or feedback) shaped the experience and outcomes of their project.

5. **Growth Mindset & Social Information Processing**

- Students connect reflection with growth, identifying how their communication, collaboration, and resilience evolved over time.



Youth Action Project

Activities

1. **Showcase Presentation**

Allow the group to share their solution with staff and students through a poster, oral presentation, slideshow, drawings or a story.

2. **Reflection Circle**

Lead a class discussion using prompts like:

- What are you proud of?
- What surprised you?
- How did our group handle setbacks?
- Did your idea help anyone feel more welcome or included?
- What would you do differently next time?

Allow time for everyone to share one insight.

3. **Final Survey**

Allow students time to complete the final survey. Encourage students to answer the questions based on their actual experiences over the past 6-10 weeks.



Survey

Read each statement below and select the response that best describes how true it is for you, using the following scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

I look for different ideas or opinions before deciding what to do.

1 2 3 4 5

I think carefully about the facts and consequences before making a choice.

1 2 3 4 5

When I have a problem, I try to come up with more than one way to solve it.

1 2 3 4 5

I consider how my decisions will affect me, my friends, and my family.

1 2 3 4 5

I think about how my choices today might shape my future.

1 2 3 4 5

I ask a trusted adult or friend for help when I feel unsure about an important decision.

1 2 3 4 5