

FACILITATING NECESSARY SPACES:

*A TOOLKIT FOR
CHANGEMAKERS DURING
EXTRAORDINARY TIMES*



**TOOLS FOR
SELF-AWARE,
ANTI-RACIST
FACILITATION**



**CLASSROOM
CHECK-INS,
CIRCLES, +
REFLECTION
ACTIVITIES**



**RESOURCES FOR
EMPATHETIC
LISTENING,
PROCESSING, +
TOGETHERNESS**



**LOWER
ELEMENTARY –
HIGH SCHOOL
ADAPTABILITY**



UMOJA CENTERS STUDENTS IN OUR MISSION, ADULTS IN OUR PRACTICE

We build deep social-emotional learning (SEL) skills in educators to transform the ways young people experience school and the ways schools exist to serve society.



FACILITATING NECESSARY SPACES TOOLKIT

Classroom Discussion Resources for Empathetic Listening, Processing, and Togetherness

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**"TO ANY CITIZEN OF THIS COUNTRY WHO FIGURES HIMSELF AS RESPONSIBLE –
AND PARTICULARLY THOSE OF YOU WHO DEAL WITH THE
MINDS AND HEARTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE –
MUST BE PREPARED TO 'GO FOR BROKE.'"**

- JAMES BALDWIN



GUIDANCE FOR ADULTS ON FACILITATING NECESSARY SPACES:

Classroom Discussion Resources for Empathetic Listening, Processing, and Togetherness

PLEASE READ THIS (2 min): A Note to Educators + School Leaders

Our nation sits at an important inflection point--we are a nation in anguish, disbelief, disconnection, and division. For some of us, the murder of George Floyd was a starting point, a wakeup call, a catalyst. Welcome to the work. For others of us, the murder of George Floyd and the murders of Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, David McAttie, and James Scurlock are recent losses in a long legacy of violence against Black and Brown people in our nation that dates all the way back to our inception.

Violence and terror against people of color in the United States is a part of our history, our systems and structures, and the social fabric of society--with an absence of systemic accountability along the way. We must acknowledge where we have been and come from as a nation if we have any chance of moving forward, of *changing-forward* together. And, we must hold space for the young people that we serve to process, listen, and reflect together. We must show up for young people as anti-racist educators committed to the lives, futures, and souls of Black and Brown people in this country.

This guide is *a* tool, *a* starting point. It requires *you* as its facilitator to engage in deep self-awareness, attunement to group dynamics, and commitment to safety for your entire classroom community. **If you cannot commit to these things, please only utilize the check-in suggestions provided.**

Please commit to spending 20-30 minutes reviewing the *For Educators* tools at the beginning of this toolkit. Holding necessary space is hard; doing so during a global pandemic, in a virtual classroom, during a rapidly changing climate of fear, conflict, and anguish is even more difficult.

Thank you for showing up with self-awareness.

With Radical Love,
The Entire Umoja Team



FOR EDUCATORS:

Tools + Preparation for Self-Aware Engagement

SELF-AWARENESS STARTS WITH YOU!

“How you show up for yourself will speak volumes when it’s time to show up for others. You cannot fill the cup of your neighbor or loved ones when you’re depleted. Take care of you. Take care of them. In that order.” -Alex Elle

We suggest engaging with the following two tools, in sequence, to build a sustained self-awareness practice:

- **SOCIAL IDENTITY WHEEL: INDIVIDUAL EXPLORATION** (p. 4)
 - **5-10 MIN:** Consider the aspects of your identity that make you whole. Consider the ways your identities give or deny you the freedom and ease to move through the world. Remember that some aspects of identity are immutable, while others are not.

- **CHECK YOURSELF: SELF-AWARENESS TOOL** (p. 5)
 - **10-15 MIN:** Consider the aspects of your identity that will impact your interactions with others. Reflect on the potential to leverage similarities for powerful connections, check biases from hindering relational growth, explore differences to deepen and grow connections that have yet to be built. Checking your physical self, your mindset, and your identities ensure that you are less likely to engage in unintentional harm against others and are more equipped to hold appropriate, objective space. This tool is important always, and especially important when preparing for tense or conflict-based conversations.

LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND + KEEP THE DOOR OPEN FOR CONNECTION

“Powerful teaching is rooted in powerful listening.” --Cornelius Minor

Difficult conversations become even harder when we lead with our own self-interest, judgments, and assumptions. Utilize the following tool to ground yourself in a practice of empathetic listening prior to facilitation:

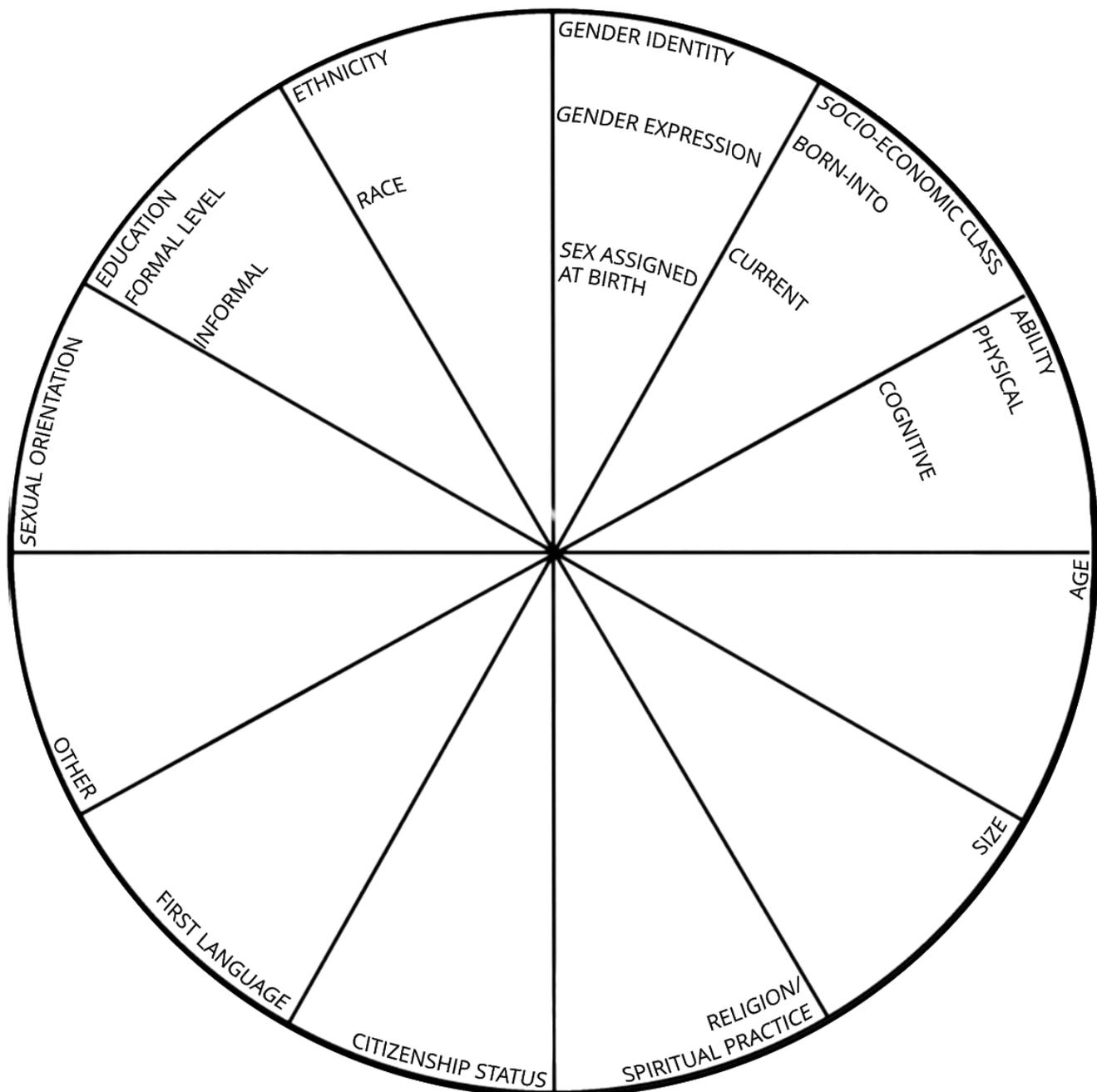
- **GUIDELINES FOR EMPATHETIC LISTENING** (p. 6)
 - **5 MIN:** Modeling and practicing empathetic listening creates an environment of inquiry, non-judgment, safety, and equity.



SOCIAL IDENTITY WHEEL: *INDIVIDUAL EXPLORATION*

DIRECTIONS:

- In the sections of the circle, use words or symbols to describe own identity within each category
- Star * identities that most often 'show up' in your interactions or conversations with others
- # categories that are not a part of (or you choose not to bring into) your work life
- Underline identities that have created barriers or challenges in your interactions with others in the past
- Circle identities that hold power (in a school, the workplace, or in society in general)





UMOJA CHECK YOURSELF! SELF-AWARENESS TOOL

LEARN TO...

- ENGAGE WITH INTENTIONALITY
- CHECK INDIVIDUAL BIASES
- REDUCE UNINTENTIONAL HARM
- BUILD RELATIONSHIPS
- USE YOUR POWER & PRIVILEGE FOR GOOD

WHO AM I?

IDENTITY

- *Am I aware of my social identities (Race, Gender, Class, Age, Sexual Identity, etc.)?*
- *Do I understand how my social identities are/are not connected to privilege?*
- *How do my social identities and privileges impact how I enter this conversation?*

ROLE

- *How does my identity influence how I fulfill my role at school?*
- *How does my role in this school influence how I enter this conversation?*

WHO AM I TALKING TO?

IDENTITY

- *What social identities do we have in common? What is different? How does that influence this conversation?*
- *How can I channel in true empathy to connect meaningfully where commonalities do not exist?*

RELATIONSHIP

- *Do we have a relationship?*
- *What have our past interactions been like?*
- *Can I empathize in a way that allows our relationship to grow?*

HOW DO I LOOK?



BODY LANGUAGE

- *How am I standing?*
- *What are my hands and arms doing?*

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

- *Is my forehead relaxed?*
- *What is my mouth doing?*

EYE MOVEMENT

- *Am I making eye contact?*
- *Am I rolling my eyes?*

HOW DO I SOUND?



TONE OF VOICE

- *Would I like to be talked to this way?*

LANGUAGE & WORDS

- *Am I using words that HURT or HELP?*
- *Am I using words that make this BIGGER or SMALLER?*

HOW DO I FEEL?



MOOD

- *How do I feel today?*
- *In this moment do I feel present or distracted?*
- *Can I be objective in this conversation or will my personal feelings and/or biases get in the way?*



EMPATHETIC LISTENING

GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORTIVE LISTENING WITHOUT OWNING THE PROBLEM

1. BE ATTENTIVE, INTERESTED + ALERT, NOT DISTRACTED.

Create a positive atmosphere through non-verbal behavior.

2. BE A NON-JUDGMENTAL SOUNDING BOARD.

Allow the speaker to express ideas and feelings without a critical response.

3. DO NOT MINIMIZE, CONSOLE, OR LOOK FOR SILVER-LININGS.

Avoid phrase like, "It's not that bad..." or "Well at least you're not..." or "It will get better soon..."

4. CHECK YOURSELF + YOUR INTERNAL REACTIONS.

Holding space for someone else isn't about you. Engage in self-awareness. Check you biases. Take a break or tap out if you feel yourself being triggered or at-risk of passing judgment on the speaker.

5. INDICATE YOU ARE LISTENING BY:

- *Providing brief, non-committal responses like e.g. "Uh huh," or "I see."*
- *Non-verbal acknowledgments, e.g. head nodding, facial expressions, eye contact.*
- *Inviting them to say more, e.g. "Tell me more about it" or "I'd like to hear more about.."*

6. FOLLOW GOOD LISTENING GROUND RULES:

- *Listen without interruption*
- *Only allow the speaker to change the topic and course of the conversation*
- *Listening to understand, not to respond*
- *Avoid interrogation when asking follow-up questions*
- *Avoid teaching, lecturing, advice-giving*
- *Only share your own story/opinions if they are solicited; still keep the focus on the speaker*

7. BE A MIRROR: REFLECT BACK WHAT YOU HEAR + UNDERSTAND

- *"It sounds like..."*
- *"What I hear you saying is..."*
- *"I get the sense that..."*
- *"It seems as though..."*

8. ALWAYS ALLOW THE SPEAKER TO BE THE EXPERT OF THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE.

If you interpret something incorrectly, allow the speaker to correct you. If you say something unintentionally harmful, model vulnerable accountability and make it right.



FOR EDUCATORS:

Best-Practice Facilitation

FACILITATION CONSIDERATIONS

1. CHECK YOURSELF!

Consider the identities and experiences of your audience always

- How do my identities and experiences impact my perspective on this?
- Am I centering my own perspectives over those of my students?
- Am I aware of my social identities (Race, Gender, Class, Age, Sexual Identity) and how they are / are not connected to privilege?
- What social identities do we have in common? What is different? How does that influence this conversation?
- How can I channel true empathy to connect meaningfully where commonalities do not exist?

2. LEAD WITH INQUIRY

- Avoid judgment, embrace curiosity
- It is okay not to have all the answers and can be powerful to admit that. Model vulnerability

3. TRUST THE PROCESS

- A community will take from a well-facilitated experience what it needs
- One conversation may be the start of many or may be a stand-alone powerful experience
- Silence can be okay and even healing

4. ENGAGE WITH CLARITY + STRUCTURE

If you are a seasoned circle facilitator or have high confidence to hold challenging, identity-based conversations, modify our suggested structures as you see fit for your classroom.

If you are not a seasoned circle facilitator and are building confidence to hold challenging, identity-based conversations, we strongly recommend the following:

- Create a plan/structure for what you might hope to discuss
- Utilize conversation norms
 - **Need norms? Consider:** *Respect Multiple Truths; Open Mind, Open Heart; Keep Good Intentions; Withhold Assumptions + Judgment; Engage in Self-Awareness; Trust the Process*
- Utilize an ordered sharing process



- Make a list of all participants, put it in the chat or on a slide where everyone can see it--this is your virtual circle order. Direct participants to unmute themselves when it is their turn to speak in the “circle.”
- Provide clear directions and transitions during your conversation
- Interrupt and challenge harmful and racist ideas and comments:
 - Lead with inquiry (Ex: “What did you mean by...?”)
 - Explicitly center impact over intention (at beginning of circle/discussion)
 - It’s ok to stop the conversation if the space becomes unsafe for students
 - Follow up afterward with students who may have done or experienced harm
 - If you have caused the space to be unsafe, consider how you will model accountability to your classroom the next time you are together
- Acknowledge and validate that trauma shows up in many different ways
 - Silence or not engaging at all
 - Anger directed at peers or teachers

5. REFLECTION + FOLLOW-UP ARE IMPORTANT

- Follow up with students as-needed and connect them to resources at your school (i.e. counselor, social worker, another teacher with whom they have a good relationship).
- If students have shared something deeply personal, acknowledge it to them individually; see if they want/need additional support from you.
- If students share something that requires you to respond as a Mandated Reporter, seek the support of a supportive school staff member immediately to ensure the safety of your student.
- Continue to reflect and educate yourself as you work to create safe spaces for students.
 - **A Special Note to White Teachers + Leaders:** Do not rely on your students of color to educate you about your whiteness, your privilege, or how to understand what is needed of you as a white person to do right by them. Please check in with a white colleague or [reach out to Umoja](#) for support.



FOR COMMUNITIES:

Check-ins to start a conversation with acknowledgment + humanity

There is a lot happening right now. Our country is experiencing unrest and uprisings in reaction to the recent and historical killing of people of color, police brutality, and racism. COVID-19 has created loss, disconnection, and compounded disparities.

Sometimes it's hard to know how you're feeling about things as big as these. It's also important to remember that it's okay to not be okay. Consider utilizing the following check-in resources with students to support them in reflecting on their feelings and well-being.

LOWER ELEMENTARY - HIGH SCHOOL

Consider verbally checking in with students and or utilizing the **weather** or **feelings** graphics below to check in:



SUNNY



WINDY



LIGHTENING



HAIL



PARTLY SUNNY



FOGGY



THUNDERSTORM



TORNADO



RAIN W/ SUN



LIGHT SHOWERS



COLD + WINDY



HURRICANE



CLOUDY



HEAVY RAIN



SNOWY



CALM / RAINBOWS



MIDDLE - HIGH SCHOOL ONLY

CHECK-IN: *What am I thinking about right now?*

It can be helpful to identify how you are thinking and what emotions are coming to the surface. Finish these sentence starters to help you reflect on what is going on right now.

1. When I woke up this morning, I felt...
2. When I see posts on social media about protests and uprisings across the country, I wonder.... I feel....
3. The protests going on in Chicago make me think of and I'm curious about....
4. When I think about the murder of George Floyd and other Black people by police, I think about...
and this makes me feel...
5. Right now something I miss is...



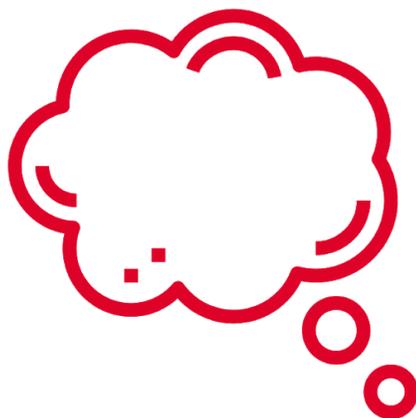
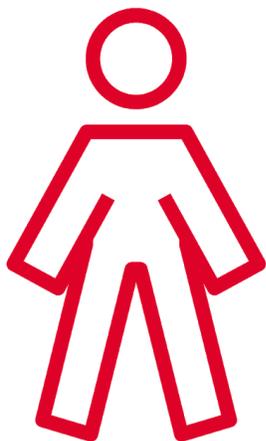
CHECK-IN: *How am I feeling in my body?*

Take a moment to get comfortable where you are so you can focus on your body.

When you think about what's happening in our nation right now, what do you notice?

Take a moment to write or draw how that part of your body feels.

(E.g. knots in the stomach, head feels fuzzy or numb, legs feel restless, palms feel sweaty, etc.)



You can also write down how you're feeling here:

Part of the body	How it feels
<i>Example: Head</i>	<i>Example: Fuzzy, like there are bees buzzing in it</i>



CHECK-IN: *Are these feelings familiar?*

It can be difficult to identify how our feelings are affecting us and what we can do to cope with them. Move from left to right using this activity to help you identify what actions your feelings are causing and remember how you have shown resilience to cope with them in the past.

When I feel...	...I can tell I feel that way because...	...and something that has helped in the past is...
<i>Example:</i> <i>angry at something I can't change</i>	<i>Example:</i> <i>It's hard for me to focus on things and I get really mad at people who ask me how I'm doing</i>	<i>Example:</i> <i>taking a shower and imagining the feelings going down the drain with the water</i>



FOR UNDERSTANDING + CONNECTION:

Circles to process, share, and understand the impacts of police brutality, structural racism + needs, and accountability for building-forward

Note: The following circles can be facilitated as stand-alone circles, or at the middle + high school level, can be facilitated as a sequence over the course of several days.

BASIC CIRCLE: LOWER ELEMENTARY - HIGH SCHOOL

1. INTRODUCTION

- Create a welcoming space by playing music as students enter or sharing a visual of your choice on the screen.
- Suggested opening/closing songs found [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#); if you choose to select a different musical selection, it is critical to ensure the selection is culturally sustaining

2. OPENING

"Things are feeling heavy in our city, country, and world right now. George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Tony McDade became the latest in a long list of Black folks who have been killed by police--and the list is growing. Our country is experiencing a pandemic as well as unrest as a result of police brutality, killings, and racism. Many of you are experiencing loss--loss of people, celebrations, and closure. You may feel a number of different emotions; that's ok. Show up in whatever way feels best for you. If you want to observe and listen, please do. If you want to share, we are ready to hear you."

3. REVIEW NORMS for the circle, display on screen or in chat.

4. CHECK-IN

Please respond in the chat with the first word/words that come to mind when asked: **How are you feeling?** (*Utilize the Weather or Feelings graphics from pgs 9-10 if desired.*)

5. CIRCLE CONTENT

Opening Quote: *"The world is not going to change unless we change ourselves."* - Rigoberta Menchu Tum

- What are you feeling right now?
- What fears do you have?
- What challenges are you facing?
- How can I help you to get through this difficult time?

6. CLOSING

Thank you for sharing, listening, and supporting one another.

To close, please leave a word describing how you feel right now in the chat for the group.



INTERMEDIATE CIRCLE: UPPER ELEMENTARY - HIGH SCHOOL

1. INTRODUCTION

- Create a welcoming space by playing music as students enter or sharing a visual of your choice on the screen.
- Suggested opening/closing songs found [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#); modify as-desired

2. OPENING

“Things are feeling heavy in our city, country, and world right now. George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Tony McDade became the latest in a long list of Black folks who have been killed by police--and the list is growing. Our country is experiencing a pandemic as well as unrest as a result of police brutality, killings, and racism. Many of you are experiencing loss--loss of people, celebrations, and closure. You may feel a number of different emotions; that’s ok. Show up in whatever way feels best for you. If you want to observe and listen, please do. If you want to share, we are ready to hear you.”

3. REVIEW NORMS for the circle, display on screen or in chat.

4. CHECK-IN

- Right now, it may be difficult to describe the emotions you are experiencing. Please respond in the chat with the first word/words that come to mind when asked: **How are you feeling?** (*Utilize the Weather or Feelings graphics from pgs 9-10 if desired.*)
- Ask if anyone wants to say more about how they are feeling. (aloud or via the chat)

5. MINDFULNESS MOMENT

Before we begin, let us take a few collective breaths together. (Take 3 slow breaths in, and three slow breaths out)

6. CIRCLE CONTENT

Opening Quote: *“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” -MLK*

EXPLAIN: *“In a moment, I am going to read sentences aloud and ask that you fill in the blanks in the chat. You are always welcome to expand aloud or in the chat after everyone has had the opportunity to share. Please be honest and speak your truth. Your feelings and thoughts are important.”*

ROUND 1: When I hear the word justice I think/feel...

ROUND 2: When I hear the word protest I think/feel...

ROUND 3: When I hear the word racism I think/I feel...



ROUND 4: When I hear the word privilege I think/I feel...

ROUND 5: When I hear the word police I think/I feel...

ROUND 6: When I hear the word healing I think/I feel...

Thank everyone for sharing, listening, and supporting one another. If time permits, invite students to expand on their responses or ask follow-up questions in a free-form discussion.

7. REFLECTION

Open the floor for free-flowing discussion to allow students the chance to reflect, ask questions, or explain thoughts and feelings shared during circle rounds.

Facilitator Note: Remember to pay attention to safety, self-awareness, norms, and empathetic listening during this free-flowing conversation. Affirm students for uplifting norms as-appropriate.

8. CLOSING

To close, please leave a word or affirmation in the chat for the group. If you feel inspired to do so, you can share your affirmation aloud.

Closing Quote: *“I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept.” —Angela Davis*



ADVANCED CIRCLE: MIDDLE SCHOOL - HIGH SCHOOL

NOTE: This circle is best when facilitated in sequence with the Intermediate Circle coming first. By “sequence” we mean that these could happen on back-to-back days or could follow a weekly cadence. The sensitivity of this circle content is high; please take care to build context and relationships before engaging in this circle.

1. INTRODUCTION

- Create a welcoming space by playing music as students enter or sharing a visual of your choice on the screen.
- Suggested opening/closing songs found [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#); modify as-desired

2. OPENING

“Things are feeling heavy in our city, country, and world right now. George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Tony McDade became the latest in a long list of Black folks who have been killed by police--and the list is growing. Our country is experiencing a pandemic as well as unrest as a result of police brutality, killings, and racism. Many of you are experiencing loss--loss of people, celebrations, and closure. You may feel a number of different emotions; that’s ok. Show up in whatever way feels best for you. If you want to observe and listen, please do. If you want to share, we are ready to hear you.”

3. REVIEW NORMS for the circle, display on screen or in chat.

4. CHECK-IN

- Right now, it may be difficult to describe the emotions you are experiencing. Please respond in the chat with the first word/words that come to mind when asked: **How are you feeling?** (Utilize the Weather or Feelings graphics from pgs 9-10 if desired.)
- Ask if anyone wants to say more about how they are feeling. (aloud or via the chat)

5. MINDFULNESS MOMENT

Before we begin, let us take a few collective breaths together. (Take 3 slow breaths in, and three slow breaths out)

6. CIRCLE CONTENT

Opening Quote: *“We have to get away from understanding racism solely as individualized acts of bigotry. We have to understand racism systemically.” --Dr. David Stovall*

EXPLAIN: *“For each of the following questions, please respond in the chat. If you would like to reflect out loud on your response to the entire class, please note within the chat that you would like a chance to expand your answer. With each circle round, we can have up to 3 classmates share beyond what you enter into the chat. Your feelings, truth, and thoughts are important.”*



ROUND 1: When I think about the murder of George Floyd and other Black people by police, I think about/I feel...

ROUND 2: When I see posts on social media about protests and uprisings across the country, I wonder/I feel...

ROUND 3: The protests going on in Chicago makes me think/feel...

ROUND 4: Right now, I want this classroom to know that I'm thinking/feeling...

ROUND 5: Right now something I miss is...

ROUND 6: Right now something I need from my school community is...

Thank everyone for sharing, listening, and supporting one another.

7. REFLECTION

We will now take a moment for individual reflection. You can sit with your eyes closed, you can draw, write, or simply be still.

(Facilitator Note: At this time, play instrumental music, a song of your choice, or offer a few minutes of silence.)

8. CLOSING

To close, please leave a word or affirmation in the chat for the group. If you feel inspired to do so, you can share your affirmation aloud.

Closing Quote: *UBUNTU: I AM BECAUSE WE ARE. "...speaks of the very essence of being human. A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are. It is to say, 'My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up in yours.'" - Archbishop Desmond Tutu*



FOR CONTINUED REFLECTION + CONNECTION

Follow-up questions to invite continued growth and relational support

Summer is near. Safety, accountability, and justice hang in the balance. The future realities and impacts of COVID-19 are uncertain. Consider providing the following prompts for further reflection and connection to your students as bell ringers, exit tickets, writing prompts, or food for thought.

- What do you need me/want me to know about what you're feeling/thinking/experiencing as we finish the year? going into the summer?
- What is something you can do to take care of yourself this summer? Of your loved ones? Of your community?
- How can I (or another adult at the school) support you as we head into the summer?
- What fears do you have about this summer?
- Who can you lean on this summer (a buddy, a family member, etc.) if you are struggling, and what is it about that person that makes you feel this way?
- What are you hoping to learn more about this summer?
- What is one thing you want your teachers/school to become better at over the summer?

IN LAK'ECH

TÚ ERES MI OTRO YO. YOU ARE MY OTHER ME.

SITE HAGO DAÑO A TI, IF I DO HARM TO YOU,

ME HAGO DAÑO A MI MISMO. I DO HARM TO MYSELF.

SITE AMO Y RESPETO, IF I LOVE AND RESPECT YOU,

ME AMO Y RESPETO YO. I LOVE AND RESPECT MYSELF.
