Icebreakers

Icebreakers are structured activities that are designed to relax learners, introduce them to each other, and energize them in what is normally an unduly formal atmosphere or situation. Icebreakers are not normally related to the subject matter, where as "openers" are related to the subject matter that is to be discussed. In addition, they often help to break up the cliques and invite people to form random groupings in a non-threatening and fun way.

The term "icebreaker" comes from "break the ice", which in turn comes from special ships called "icebreakers" that are designed to break up ice in the arctic regions. And just as these ships make it easier for other ships to travel, an icebreaker helps to clear the way for learning to occur by making the learners more comfortable by helping to bring about conversation.

Marooned

You are marooned on a island. What five (you can use a different number, such as seven, depending upon the size of each team) items would you have brought with you if you knew there was a chance that you might be stranded. Note that they are only allowed five items per team, not per person. You can have them write their items on a flip chart and discuss and defend their choices with the whole group. This activity helps them to learn about other's values and problem solving styles and promotes teamwork.

The Interview

Break the group into two-person teams (have them pick a partner that they know the least about). Have them interview each other for about 10 minutes (You can also prepare questions ahead of time or provide general guidelines for the interview). They need to learn about what each other likes about their job, past jobs, family life, hobbies, favorite sport, etc. After the interviews, reassemble the group and have each team introduce their team member to the group. This exercise helps them to learn about each other.

Finish the Sentence

Go around the room and have each person complete one of these sentences (or something similar):

The best job I ever had was...
The worst project I ever worked on was...
The riskiest thing I ever did was...

This is a good technique for moving on to a new topic or subject. For example, when starting a class and you want everyone to introduce themselves, you can have them complete "I am in this class because..."

You can also move on to a new subject by asking a leading question. For example if you are instructing time management, "The one time I felt most stressed because I did not have enough time was ..."
Crossword Connection
This activity includes visual symbols of connection and self-introductions.
The teacher prints their name on the board leaving some space between each letter and tells the class something about herself. Then they pick a student to come to the board, tell something about themselves, and print their name crossing the teacher’s as in a crossword puzzle. Students take turns telling something about themselves and adding their names. Volunteers copy the completed puzzle as a poster. To save time, the puzzle could be written on paper taped to the board and left up in first draft form.

This activity can be extended by asking each student to write their name and a statement about themselves on a sheet of paper. The teacher can then use the statements as clues for a class-names crossword puzzle which can be made with crossword puzzle software.

TP Surprise
Students will know you are full of fun with this one.

The teacher welcomes students at the door while holding a roll of toilet paper. They instruct students to take as many sheets as they need refusing to explain the purpose. Once class begins, students are instructed to write one interesting thing about themselves on each sheet. When students are finished, they introduce themselves by reading their TP.

Variation: Students write one thing they hope or expect to learn in the course this year on each sheet.

Take A Stand
The purpose of this question is for students to get a feel about their peers’ positions on various matters. Unless you make the survey aspect of the exercise clear, students may think it is ridiculous despite their enjoyment of the physical activity.

The teacher puts one long line of tape down the center of the room, pushing desks out of the way so that students can stand on either side of the tape. The teacher reads statement with “either-or” answers such as, "I prefer night or day," "Democrats or Republicans," "lizards or snakes." Statements can range from silly trivia to serious content.

After hearing each statement, students agreeing with the first response move to one side of the classroom and those agreeing with the second, to the other. Undecided or middle-of-the-roaders, straddle the line.

Birthday Lineup
Students are instructed to line themselves up around the perimeter of the room according to their birth date. The challenge is to do it without speaking or writing.

Students especially enjoy the search aspect of this activity.

The teacher prepares construction paper jigsaw puzzle shapes of several different colors. The shape may be symbolic of a topic being introduced. These are cut as a jig saw puzzle with the number of pieces matching the desired group size from two to four.

The teacher allows students to select one puzzle piece from a container as they walk into the room. At the designated time, students search the room for peers who have puzzle pieces that fit theirs and then team up with those students to perform a task. Some interesting tasks might be introducing a partner, making a poster to define a concept, decorating puzzle pieces, and making a mobile. Having students print their names on both sides of their puzzle piece might facilitate name learning during the search activity. The names could be erased or crossed out if puzzle pieces are reused.

Note: If the number of puzzle pieces does not match the number of students in the room, some students will not have a complete group. Left over puzzle pieces can be placed on a table for students to check to see if their group will be short members. To avoid groups being short members you could use two-piece puzzles and participate with a student left out yourself.
**Mingle! Mingle!**
This is one of the good icebreakers for high school students. To play 'Mingle! Mingle!', distribute strips of blank paper and a pen. Each person must write a question on the strip such as, 'what's your favorite song?', 'which is your favorite movie?', 'what's your favorite cuisine?' and so on. Let the students roam around shouting 'Mingle! Mingle!' before you say 'stop', and bring the class to an immediate halt. Once everyone's stopped moving around, the student must grab the closest person and ask the question. After talking for about 30 seconds, the moving begins. This an excellent way of finding out things about classmates, that probably you'll never find out! Funny icebreaker questions:

- If you were an animal, what would you be and why?
- If you were a cartoon, which one would you prefer being?
- What is the weirdest thing you have ever eaten?
- What's the worst thing you did as a kid?
- What do you do to have fun?
- Have you been told, you look like someone famous? (This question looks simple but funny answers can come up!)
- Asking each one in the group to tell a joke can be a very straightforward yet a funny starter!
- Ask each of the participants to make a funny face and teach the others how to make it. The efforts taken by every one in learning will itself create humor.
- Ask each of the group members to say "hello" to the others in some funny and different way.
- Ask each of the group members to state something that makes him/her different from the rest.

**Fear in the Hat**
Icebreakers for high school students are meant to bring students together and develop team spirit. To play fear in the hat, distribute papers and pens to all the students and make them write at least one of their fears anonymously. Deposit all of them in a hat and one by one, ask every student to pull out the pieces of paper and read the fears. Ask the students to explain what the other person must be going through while experiencing the fear. Playing this game fosters interpersonal empathy and support amongst students.

**Who Am I?**
Pick a category such as cartoon characters, movie stars, vegetables, etc. Pin the name of one of these items on the back of each guest as they arrive. Tell them that they need to find out who they are by asking other people for help.

The rules are:
1. Ask yes or no questions only
2. Answer yes or no questions
3. No removing your own name tag to find out. If you ask, anyone will help you find out your identity.

If you need people seated or grouped up this may be a good way to do it. Have place cards at the seat of each item. Or have a few different categories of item to guess. Then when it comes time to group up have the cartoon characters go here, vegetables there, etc.

Variation: Make name tags of famous pairs (each name separate) (they can be any type pair). As group arrives, place one name on his/her back. The person cannot see his own name. While they are mingling, they may ask questions about the person on their back (real person/character, male/female, married/not, etc), however the other person may only answer yes or no! The first pair to find each other wins. It is lots of fun, plus it gets everyone energized.
**Find Your Kind**

Students answer the questions in ink to reduce answer changing later. When everyone is finished, students find others who have the same answers on any question and get their signatures under the answers they had in common.

Variation for mature students: One student stands up and says only his name. Other students introduce him by telling what they have learned about him by checking for his name on their handout. (Use this with caution.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Where were you born?</td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. If someone wanted to give you and unusual pet and promised to provide for its upkeep, what kind would you select?</td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If your house was on fire and you had time to recover only one inanimate object, what would you save?</td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What two qualities do you consider essential in a friend?</td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. If you could change one rule that you must follow at home, what would it be?</td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What is the most difficult aspect about being a teenager?</td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What are the two most important qualities you would want in a boyfriend or girlfriend?</td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Where do you think is the best place to go on a first date?</td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New Friend Scavenger Hunt
For each of the categories below, find a person in the group who fits the description. Make sure to introduce yourself before asking the question to a person you do not know. Write the person’s name down next to the item that fits them. You can only use each person three times. The individual who gets the most matches wins!

1. Was born in February __________________________
2. Is an only child __________________________
3. Loves country music __________________________
4. Has been to Europe __________________________
5. Speaks another language __________________________
6. Likes to go camping __________________________
7. Likes to paint __________________________
8. Is from a different ethnic group than you __________________________
9. Has 5 or more brothers and sisters __________________________
10. Owns a car __________________________
11. Likes to sing __________________________
12. Has been to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. __________________________
13. Has been on a cruise ship __________________________
14. Loves purple __________________________
15. Has been to more than 2 continents __________________________
16. Has gone white water rafting __________________________
17. Plays sports __________________________
18. Likes Mexican food __________________________
19. Dislikes hamburgers __________________________
20. Has been to an art museum __________________________
21. Has had braces __________________________
22. Has met a movie star __________________________
23. Was born in the state where you are located __________________________
24. Was born outside the state where you are located __________________________
25. Has a twin __________________________
26. Has sleep problems __________________________
27. Flosses their teeth daily __________________________
28. Recycles __________________________
29. Is wearing the same color that you have on today (only one color need match) __________________________
30. Has eaten a whole pizza by themselves __________________________
Find Somebody Who...

**Directions:** In this class we will be doing lots of group and partner work. So, it is important that you get to know your classmates and are comfortable interacting with them. In order to help you do so, complete the following scavenger hunt activity. First, fill in the bottom row with facts you would like to find. Then, find a classmate who matches each statement and write his or her name in the box. **The first student to complete the most squares in the shortest amount of time will win a prize!**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1...has broken a bone.</th>
<th>2...has long hair.</th>
<th>3...celebrated a birthday this month.</th>
<th>4...has visited a different country.</th>
<th>5...has won an award or prize.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6...is wearing earrings.</td>
<td>7...was born in the same month as you.</td>
<td>8...loves vegetables.</td>
<td>9...has an after school job.</td>
<td>10...plays a sport at Sheridan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11...is afraid of an animal.</td>
<td>12...knows somebody famous.</td>
<td>13...shares your favorite TV show.</td>
<td>14...likes the same music as you.</td>
<td>15...lives on a farm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16...wears contact lenses.</td>
<td>17...moved here from a different school district.</td>
<td>18...travels more than half an hour to get to school.</td>
<td>19...knows how to drive.</td>
<td>20...has green eyes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21...has a family member in the military.</td>
<td>22...is an only child.</td>
<td>23...has more than 3 siblings.</td>
<td>24...is allergic to something.</td>
<td>25...can play a musical instrument well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26...collects something as a hobby.</td>
<td>27...has flown in an airplane.</td>
<td>28...was born in a different state.</td>
<td>29. is wearing the same color shirt as you.</td>
<td>30. has false teeth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>32.</td>
<td>33.</td>
<td>34.</td>
<td>35.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>