



✓ **Boost engagement and joy**

✓ **Foster relationships with your students**

✓ **Spark growth through Social-Emotional Learning**



5 Activities Successful Teachers Use in the Online Classroom

Every teacher should feel that they are making an impact.

A common refrain among teachers during these times goes something like this:

"I'm working harder than I ever have to feel like I'm the worst teacher I've ever been."

And despite teachers' efforts, students aren't turning on their mics or cameras and they are more disengaged from learning than ever. Teachers are feeling disconnected from their students and they want to build community online, but don't know how.

Let us show you how! The Better Together Labs framework draws from the fields of **Social-Emotional Learning and Applied Improvisation**. Improvisational methods, principles and skills can be used to teach any subject matter. It is an effective, experiential learning framework that inspires, educates, and entertains.

The activities below come directly from our hands-on professional development workshops. These are tools and activities that you can use right away in the online classroom. They focus on areas key to promoting engagement, relationships, and growth -- online and off:

- Cooperation and Generosity
- Flexibility and Acceptance
- Creativity and Spontaneity



ENJOY!

Activity 1: STORY SPINE

The Story Spine is an effective framework for telling an engaging, cohesive story. When used as an activity for students, it helps keep students focused and playfully co-creating, which in turn helps to establish a sense of community and trust. You can either keep the stories general or incorporate themes and content from class.



Story Spine:

1. **Once upon a time...**
2. **Everyday...**
3. **But one day....**
4. **Because of that...**
5. **Because of that...**
6. **Because of that...**
7. **Until finally...**
8. **And ever since then...**
9. **The moral of this story is...**

(Originated by Kenn Adams of Synergy Theater.)

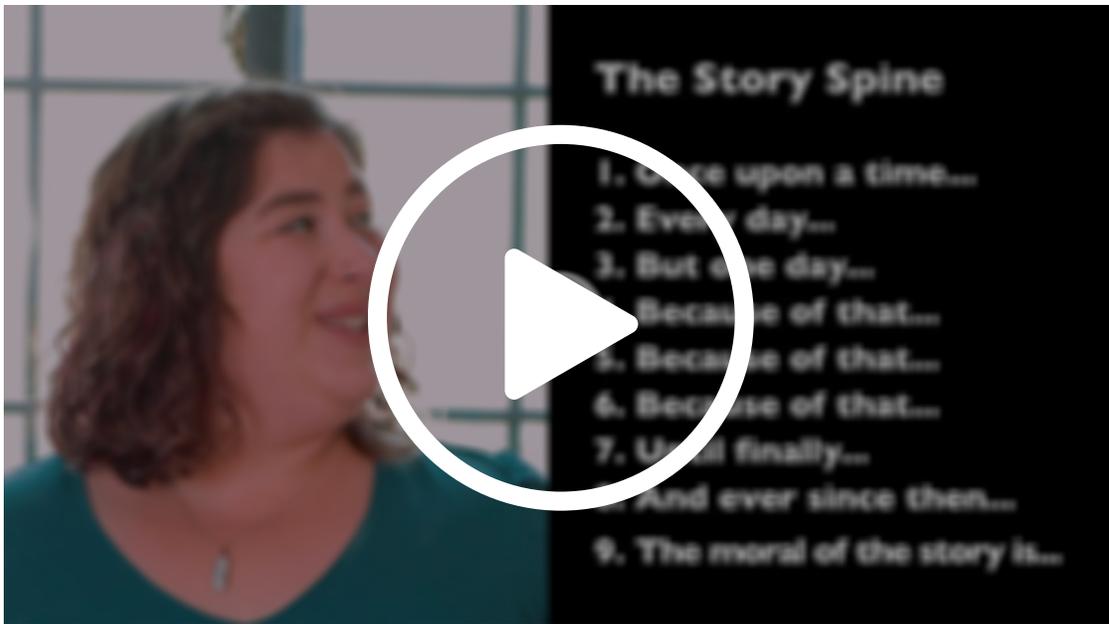
1. Ask the students to rename themselves by placing a number in front of their name, from 1 to 9. It's also helpful to paste the Story Spine in chat so that students can easily follow along.
2. The first person will start off with number 1, "Once upon a time" and finish the sentence with whatever they like.

3. The rest of the students continue in order, each adding on a line from the Story Spine (Everyday..., But one day..., etc.) until they reach the last line of the story, number 9.

Notes:

- This activity can also be done in smaller groups, even pairs.
- You can easily adapt this exercise for content. For a unit on photosynthesis, you could start off the story "Once upon a time there was a tree named Albert who was desperate for food..." or "Once upon a time a photon from the sun found the leaf of a tree..."
- You can make the story as long as you want by adding more "Because of that..." lines in the middle of the story.

Watch Story Spine in action!



Activity 2: 10 SECOND SCENES

This activity focuses on physicality and creativity. It promotes engagement by helping students feel seen and affirmed for their creativity.

This is best played in groups of 5–6 students. You can have the students that aren't participating stop their videos.

1. Call out a theme and give the students 10 seconds (countdown from 10 aloud) to take on a pose of a “character” in that theme. Encourage them to use their imagination and think creatively. For example, if the theme is “beach” encourage them to not only pose as

a person sunbathing, but also consider that they can pose as an umbrella, a seashell, the sun, the water, or anything else that might be found at a beach. By the time you've counted down from 10, they should be frozen in a pose. If it is appropriate for your group, you might take a screenshot at this point. These are always fun to look back on later.

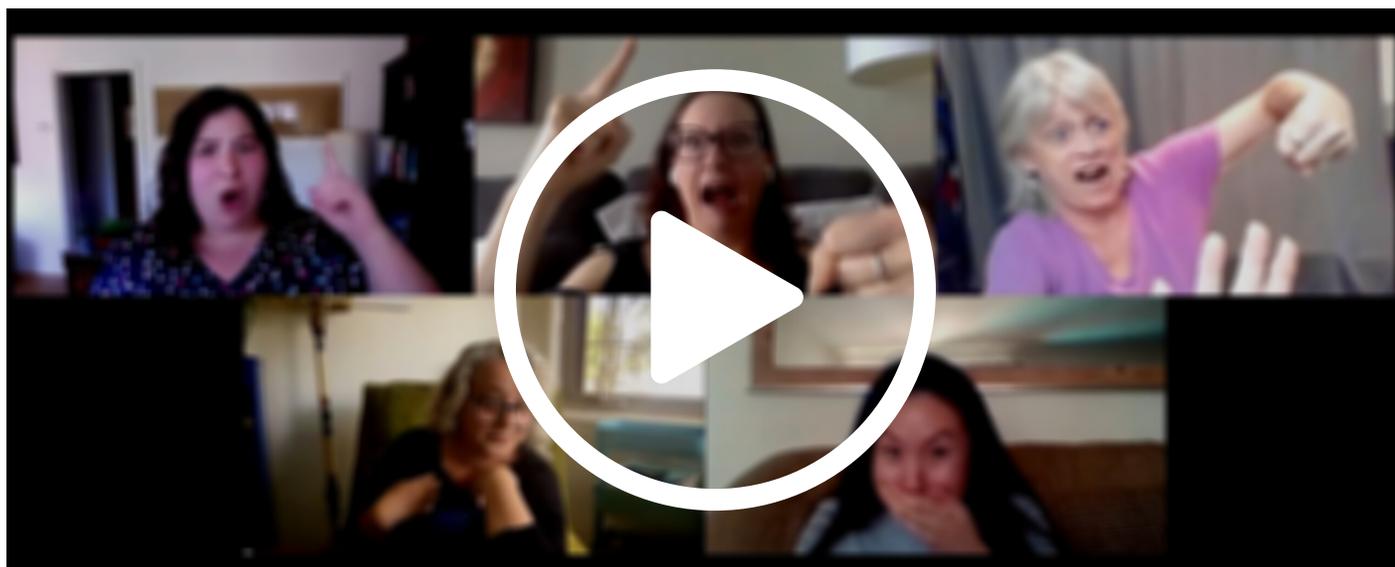


2. Now, you guess aloud what each student is posing as. Make sure to have fun with this. The faster and sillier you make guesses, the more enjoyable it is for your students. If you're stumped after guessing a few times, it's helpful to use language such as "you stumped me!" or "give us the big reveal!" This helps nurture a positive experience for the student even if you weren't able to guess what they intended.

*Some themes to consider:

- Haunted house
- Under the sea
- Outer space
- Enchanted forest
- Hair salon
- Restaurant
- Superheroes
- Video game
- Castle
- Farm

Watch 10 Second Scenes in action!



Activity 3: WORD BALL

This warm-up activity is extremely effective in getting students engaged and present. We often use this before having them do more involved storytelling activities like Story Spine.

1. You, as the teacher, may choose to have students do this activity all together in the main session, or if you have a group larger than 10, you may choose to split them up into breakout rooms. Doing this activity in pairs is excellent for building relationships in a fast yet low-stakes way.



2. Assign a number to each of the students and ask them to rename themselves by placing their number in front of their names. This creates an order -- essentially a “virtual circle”. We find it easiest if the teacher assigns number 1 to themselves.

3. You hold an imaginary ball and “pass” the ball to the next person in sequential order by throwing the ball directly into the camera. When passing the ball, say a word.

4. The next person “catches” the ball, repeating the word that was passed to them by the previous person. They then pass the ball to the next person, saying the first word that comes to mind.
5. This continues until the last person catches the ball and then passes their new word ball to the first person. The cycle repeats for as many times as you wish.

Notes:

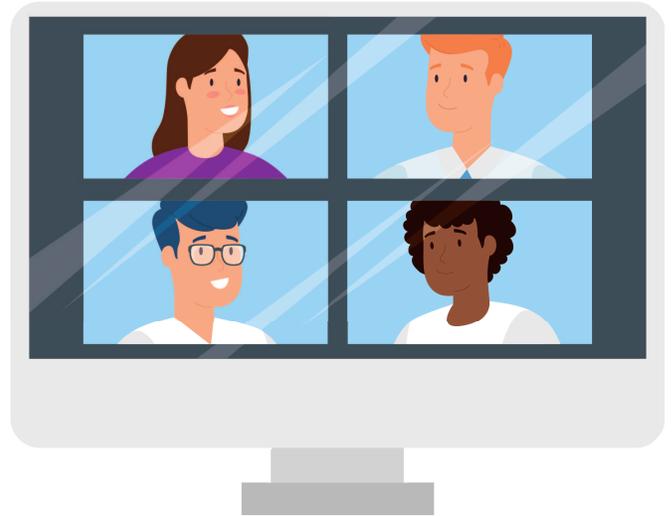
- This activity should be done quickly. When people play this game for the first time, they may want to spend a lot of time thinking of the “right” word. It’s helpful to remind them the right word is the first word that comes to mind and the objective is to be as quick and spontaneous as possible.

Watch Word Ball in action!



Activity 4: SHOW YOURSELF IF

This ice-breaker helps students connect on a deeper level and discover what they have in common with each other in a fun, low-stakes way.



1. You, as the teacher, begin by asking everyone to stop their video.
2. State a prompt that begins with “Show yourself if...” and can be followed by whatever you’d like. Ask students to start their video if the prompt is true for them. Example prompts include:
 - a. Show yourself if you have a pet
 - b. Show yourself if you are you the oldest sibling
 - c. Show yourself if you like ice cream
3. Once the students have shown themselves, pause a moment to allow all students to take in everyone who has shown themselves. Then ask everyone to stop their videos again.
4. Repeat for as many times as you like. Once you have done several rounds, you may choose to ask students to provide their own prompt. Give them the option to do so vocally, or to type their prompts in chat then read the prompt out loud for them.

Activity 5: 3 THINGS IN COMMON

This is another ice-breaker to help students connect with each other in small groups.



1. Inform the students that they are going to be split into groups of 2-4 using breakout rooms. While in the breakout rooms, they are to find 3 things they have in common that are not obvious based on their appearance. This encourages students to get deeper and look beyond the surface.
2. Create, then open the breakout rooms. 4-5 minutes should be sufficient, depending on the size of the breakout room groups.
3. Once time has expired, close the breakout rooms and ask students to share what things they found in common with one another. You can ask them to do this vocally, or to type in the chat and read aloud for them.



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How to bring our workshops to your teachers



1. Schedule a call

We'll discuss your needs and schedule. Then, we craft a workshop specifically for your group.



2. Enjoy your workshop

Your teachers will learn how to implement our framework and tools in our fun, interactive workshops.



3. Realize the benefits

See an immediate boost to engagement, joy, and achievement in your online classroom.

EMAIL: contact@bettertogetherlabs.com

WEBSITE: www.bettertogetherlabs.com