

Open•Up

Getting to Know You!

This activity invites students to identify their own special qualities and then to learn about the special qualities of others. We sometimes allow differences among us to keep us apart. This activity encourages students to recognize and articulate what they have in common with others but also what is different or “unique” about their fellow students.

Mental Health Highlight: This activity begins by asking about external qualities and appearances but shifts to behaviors. Some people who have mental health disorders such as AD/HD or depression may exhibit behaviors that are difficult to understand and may be off-putting. This activity asks everyone to recognize that we all have things that make us different from each other, but we also have something in common with others too. By focussing on our similarities, we can often find a way to understand and relate to each other.

In addition, this activity invites students to see each of their classmates as *unique* rather than *different*. It may seem like just a word change, but reframing how we say what we say can truly change the way we see things.

Adapt this activity for any age group by adjusting the examples and by explaining the core concepts in a way that resonates with the age/maturity of your students.

Primary Activity	Additional Activities	Open•Up Activities
 Name Portrait Booklet	 Getting to Know Your Classmates	 Class Portraits  Portraits in Poetry

Activity Key	
 Visual Arts	 Creative Movement and Music
 Experiential and Role-Playing	 Conversations and Discussion
 Creative Writing, Storytelling, and Drama	 Research/Service Projects

Getting to Know You!

Everyone possesses characteristics that make them different as well as similar to one another. This lesson encourages students to view their differences as uniquenesses and to take the time to discover what they have in common with others.

Objectives

- Describe the significance of getting to know others who may be perceived as different and learn to find shared interests with them.
- Explore one's own qualities and interests.
- Share with others to discover each others' unique qualities and similarities.

Materials

- dictionary
- 1 sheet of lined paper for each student
- 1 sheet of 8 1/2 x 11 unlined paper for each student
- pencils, markers, scissors, glue sticks
- construction paper and/or other decorative papers in different colors
- decorative art materials
- *Make Your Own Book* handout
– 1 copy for each student

Prepare in advance: Create your own name portrait book as an example to show students.

Core Lesson

Write the word *unique* on the board and ask students to define it. They may look up the word in the dictionary and read aloud its definition. Then ask the following questions:

What is an example of something that is unique?

Is each and every person unique? How so?

Explain that each person is unique but that similarities also exist among people. Write *similar* on the board and ask students to define it. Then ask:

What is an example of something that is similar?

Is each and every person similar? How so?

Explain that sometimes children feel like they are very different from their peers. For instance, if a girl from a different culture who dressed very differently joined their classroom, she might feel out of place—especially if other students made her feel bad for dressing differently. However, she is also similar to the other students in many ways, and surely every student could find *something* they have in common with her once they started to get to know her. Her different clothes can be looked at as an interesting uniqueness instead of something that's "bad" or "weird." Other people *can* have a big effect on how someone feels. How the other students *act* towards her has a lot to do with how she *feels* about herself fitting in with other students.

Discuss how this is also true for behavior—sometimes a student has *behaviors* that are different than his or her classmates. Sometimes these behaviors are caused by mental health disorders or other problems that classmates don't know about or don't understand. Sometimes people don't even try to get to know

someone because they think he or she is “weird” or “bad.” Students should try to look past these differences or think of them as unique qualities, then, look for similarities—they *will* find them. Although a student may appear or act differently from the other students, he or she will still have something in common with the other students. These differences are the things that make our lives interesting; these common threads can be grounds for new friendships and greater understanding of people different from us.

Describe how boring the world would be if everyone were exactly the same, but how difficult it would be if nobody had anything in common! Tell students that each of them possess characteristics that make them unique as well as similar to one another—which makes each and every student an important part of the world in which we live. They can show this by creating *name portraits*.

Activity

Demonstrate a name portrait by writing your name vertically on the board. To the right of each letter of your name, write a word that begins with that letter and describes your personality or interests.

After doing this with your own name, ask students to think about what makes each of them unique as they write their first name vertically on the left side of the lined paper, leaving ample space between letters. Have them come up with and write words that describe themselves and correspond to the letters of their name.

Use the following questions to help students generate ideas:

What is your favorite food?

What do you like to do for fun?

Do you have a pet? If so, what is its name?

What is your favorite movie or cartoon?



Anna and Grant get to know one another by discovering each other's talents.

Next, tell students that they will make a book in which they will create their name portrait, adding illustrations with paper cutouts or other art materials. Direct students to either put 1–2 letters of their name on each page (depending on how many letters are in their name) or write their whole name portrait on one page and put their describing words and illustrations on the remaining pages. They may also add a couple more words in their decorating if there are important words to describe themselves that didn't fit into their name. Show them an example of a finished product and display it where all can see it.

Distribute the *Make Your Own Book* handout and walk students through the process of making the book. Hand out scissors, unlined paper, decorative paper, and glue sticks.

Once students complete their books, designate a time when they can share their books with classmates.

Then have a class discussion using the following questions:

Is it possible for someone who appears or acts very differently than you to have the same likes/dislikes that you do?

Does this mean that each of you is unique as well as similar to your classmates? Provide some examples.

How do you think it feels for someone who appears or acts differently than you to know that he/she also shares similarities with you?

Emphasize that it is important that we all feel like we belong, despite the differences among us. And no matter how great the differences may seem, there are almost always similarities that can bridge the gaps and make it possible for us to understand one another better.

Display books in an area where students can look at them during independent reading or free time.

Additional Activities

 **Getting to Know Your Classmates** – Have students look through every student’s book over the next week or two. Have them keep a list of similarities they have with other students. Ask them to share their discoveries with the students they find something in common with. After they have completed this process, have the students discuss as a class what they have discovered and learned about their classmates.

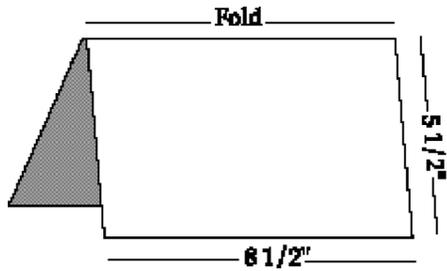
 **Class Portraits** – Ask students to list five characteristics that describe them or things that are very important to them. Then, have them create a drawing or painting that communicates their list. Display finished artwork in the classroom. Also have students write a personal profile to display along with their artwork.

 **Portraits in Poetry** – Have students write poems that reveal something about themselves using the following instructions:

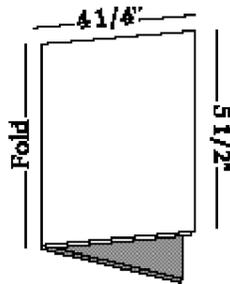
1. Choose one word to describe your favorite thing to do or your favorite food.
2. Write down a few words to describe where and with whom you enjoy doing this thing or eating this food. Are you with your family? Friends? Alone?
3. Write down a few words that describe how you feel when you do this thing or when you eat this food.
4. Create a poem that incorporates the words you have just collected.

Make Your Own Book!

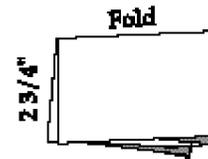
Materials Needed: One 8 1/2 x 11 plain sheet of paper, scissors



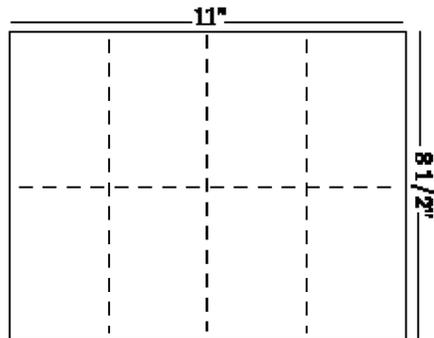
1. Fold in half.



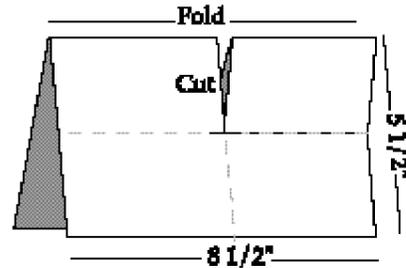
2. Fold in half again.



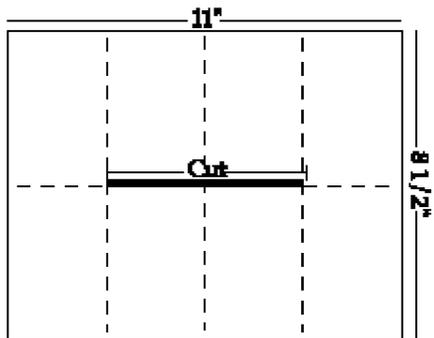
3. Fold in half a third time.



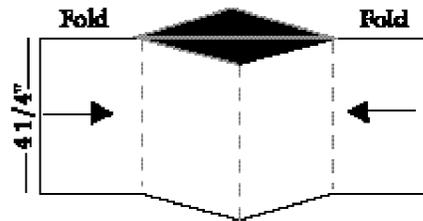
4. Unfold. You should now have 8 rectangles.



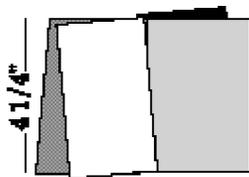
5. Fold in half as in step 1. Make a cut from the fold to the center of the paper.



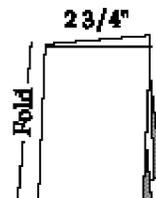
6. Unfold. Your cut should be in the center.



7. Fold in half the long way. Your cut should be on the fold. Push the left & right rectangles towards the center.



8. Your paper should have the shape of a plus (+) sign. Press flat with front flap to the left and back flap to the right.



9. Fold in half.

10. Fill your book.