

Strategy and Lesson Plans

Humans of Your School

Grades K-2

Making Caring Common

Caring Schools Network 2022 - 2023

Updated September 2022

Overview

Students will learn about themselves and others in their school community by reflecting on the importance of names and building towards an understanding of each other's identities. Students will conduct "name interviews" to connect with peers, build interviewing skills, and learn about what makes others special and unique.

Recommended time

- 20-35 mins per lesson (Use the pacing suggestions or timestamps to adjust, depending on time available.)
- Five lessons in total, one lesson per week

Materials and advance prep

- Worksheets in Appendices
- Books or YouTube links found in [Appendix 2](#)
- Tape/string (for the "Line Game" in lessons 1-2)
- Lessons 4-5 require students to interview a buddy, potentially from a different class. Preparation is required to find a buddy classroom (ideally an older grade). Together with the other classroom teacher, schedule 15-20 minutes for Lesson 4, the interview, and 15-20 minutes for Lesson 5, the presentation.
- Review classroom norms ([Appendix 1](#)) at the start of the series of lessons and whenever necessary to support a caring classroom environment.

Objectives

- To reflect on personal interests and characteristics; begin to understand identity; learn about others' interests, characteristics, and identities.
- Discover the importance of names both for oneself and for others
- Learn and practice to interview others by learning to ask thoughtful questions and listen deeply to others' responses

Why this matters

Students' capacity for empathy develops when they hear others' stories and backgrounds. By engaging in self-reflection about their names, students will learn what makes them who they are,

and will then use a similar approach to understand others' complex stories and identities. As students interview others who may be different from them, they will gain practice listening and developing trust which can have positive impacts on their school community.

Other considerations

In this strategy, students will have the opportunity to interview a fellow classmate or someone from another class or grade. If the latter, establish your buddy classroom, collaborate with the buddy class teacher to pick partners for interviews prior to [Lesson 4](#), and plan the final celebration and presentation in [Lesson 5](#). The buddy pairings can happen organically or with careful planning and conversation between you and the buddy teacher. Either way, ensure buddies complement each other in the ways they are both similar and different from one another.

If time allows and if it feels appropriate to your classroom community, encourage students' caregivers to discuss with them the meaning or background behind their names ([Appendix 7](#)).

Extending this strategy

To extend these lessons, continue to ask students in class about identity when reading stories in class, talking about historical figures, or anytime it is appropriate, to help students think about what makes others who they are. Furthermore, you can have students (individually or in groups) do more rounds of interviewing by interviewing other students, the janitors or librarians, school staff such as yourself, other teachers, etc.

For more details on these activities and additional extension ideas, see [Humans of Your School | Routines K-5](#).

Lesson 1: My Name (30-35 minutes)

Read Aloud and Name Discussion (15-20)

Before beginning the read aloud, review the classroom norms ([Appendix 1](#)).

Begin the lesson by telling the class something like, “*Today we are starting the first of a series of activities that help us learn about what makes us who we are, and what makes other people who they are. This is called “identity.” By looking deeply at our names and the names of our peers, we will start to better understand each other’s identities.*

Begin the lesson by reading *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes ([Appendix 2](#)). Follow-up with questions about the book such as:

- How did Chrysanthemum feel about her name at the beginning of the book?
- How did she feel about it at the end?
- Why does Chrysanthemum think her name is special?

Continue your classroom discussion about the importance of names by saying, “*Names are often the first thing we learn about a person, but there is always so much more to find out. Just because we know someone’s name doesn’t mean that we really know them!*”

If you feel comfortable, share about your name (e.g. how you are known as a teacher and how you are known by your friends and family, how your name was chosen, your nicknames, and what you like or dislike about your name, or other anecdotes that feel appropriate).

“Line Game” (5 minutes)

First, ask students to move aside chairs/desks, so there is space for the class to move around. Either make a long line with masking tape, string, or an invisible line, and separate students equally on either side of the line facing one another. Students should begin by standing about a foot or two away from the line. Explain the game by saying something like,

“We are going to play a game to learn about what makes your classmates who they are. I will call out different statements, and if any of them are true for you, I want you to move forward and stand on the line. Try to do this activity in silence, but think about who is standing next to you after each statement. See what you can learn about yourself and others.”

Begin with the statement “*Stand on the line if you are a student.*” Continue with multiple statements such as ‘stand on the line if your favorite color is blue, if you’re an only child, if you were born in a different state/country’ (see additional examples in [Appendix 3](#)). At the end of the game, ask students what they learned about their peers and what makes them who they are.

MCC Tip: Choose statements that will be comfortable and engaging for your classroom community. Avoid sensitive or challenging statements that may isolate students.

Name Tags (12-15 minutes)

Next, have students return to their desks and pass out the “Hello, My Name Is” worksheet ([Appendix 4](#)). Explain the activity by saying something like, “*We often introduce ourselves to others by sharing our name. Today, we are going to make name tags but rather than writing our names on the paper we are going to write or draw different things that make us who we are. It can be about your interests, what you look like, or what you want others to know about you.*”

MCC Tip: If students struggle to come up with what to write, encourage them to think back to the things they stepped forward for in the “Line Game.” You can also make a demo name tag that reflects your own interests and identity, and explain to students why you chose to add certain things to your name tag.

When students are finished, collect their name tags (suggestion to write their names on the back) and let them know they will be sharing them with each other in an upcoming lesson.

Optional Extension (5 minutes)

To deepen the work around names and their meaning, consider involving students’ caregivers to get more information about each student’s name. Send home a letter (you can use the sample draft in [Appendix 7](#)). You can say to students, “*Some of us may know how we got our names or if we are named after someone, but some of us may want to learn a little bit more. When you go home tonight, share this letter with your grownups and see what you can learn about your name!*”

Depending on timing, either after students have finished or later in the week, create a name tag museum, and encourage students to walk around the classroom while looking at each other’s name tags. Encourage students during this time to guess if they can figure out who each belongs to.

Lesson 2: “Echoing a Friend” (20-25 minutes)

Read aloud (15 minutes)

Read the book *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi (see [Appendix 2](#)). Upon completing the book, have a classroom discussion with the following questions:

- Why was it important to Unhei to keep her name?
- What does *Unhei* mean?
- Why did Unhei think about changing her name in the beginning of the book?
- How would it feel to choose a different name for yourself?

After your read-aloud discussion, tell students they will continue to learn about each other and share about themselves today by doing an activity called “Echoing a Friend.”

Explain the activity (5 minutes)

To prepare students to step into another’s shoes, facilitate an “Echoing a Friend” exercise. Explain the activity to students by saying something like:

“We will be doing an exercise called “Echoing a Friend.” With our partners, we will take turns talking to each other about what we put in our name tags. Each student will have two minutes to talk about the things they chose for their name tags. The partner’s job is to listen carefully and express empathy. That means really listen to your partner, and try to understand what they’re saying. Then, the partners will switch roles and repeat the process. At the end of this exercise, each of you will be responsible for telling the whole class what you learned about your partner. Be sure to listen carefully to one another. You can ask your partner questions or take notes to help you remember.”

Take a minute to define empathy if your class is not familiar with the term.

Empathy: Empathy is the way we connect to others by trying to understand and feel what they are going through, and care for them as people.

MCC Tip: Feel free to adjust the timing for your students if you believe two minutes is too long to maintain their attention. For younger students, ask pairs to share for one minute and echo back one thing their partner shared.

“Echoing a Friend” (10 minutes)

Have students sit in pairs and begin the activity. Before beginning, make sure each group has decided who will start speaking first. Time the activity for students, indicating when to switch partners. Allow some time before switching in case partners want to ask follow-up questions. Once both partners have spoken, have the class stand or sit in a circle and report out what their partner told them one by one. If you are limited on time, ask for volunteers instead of having everyone share. Ask students to share what their partner told them and if they learned something new about their classmate. You can finish the exercise by asking students: *“How did you listen differently knowing you were going to share your partner’s work with the class?”*

MCC Tip: You know your class best. It can be helpful before the lesson to set pairs you believe may work well together. It is important for this exercise to pair students who don’t know each other well, so they can focus on learning about someone new.

Closing (1 minute)

Close the lesson by telling students they will continue to practice different ways to learn about their community and classroom in the coming lessons. Tell the class when you think the following lesson will take place.

MCC Tip: Remember that multiple seated discussions can be long and tiresome for some students. Consider including a movement break within the lesson, perhaps after students complete the “Echoing a Friend” activity and before they sit as a whole group to discuss the exercise. You can repeat the “Line Game” from lesson one, using the same or new prompts for 4-5 minutes ([Appendix 3](#)).

Lesson 3: Interviewing Skills (35-40 minutes)

Interviews vs. Chit-Chats (10-12 minutes)

Introduce the new topic by saying something like, “Today we will learn a new way to get to know other people in school. Like our “Echoing a Friend” activity from Lesson 2, we will be paired with different students to learn about their names and who they are through interviews.” Write and share the following definition.

An **interview** is a meeting or conversation where one person asks questions and the other person answers. Interviews are used to learn information about the person being interviewed.

Ask, “When have you seen an interview? What do they sound like and look like? What makes an interview different from a chit-chat with a friend?” As students answer, build a venn-diagram on the classroom board or an anchor chart outlining the similarities and differences between the two types of conversations: an interview and a chit-chat (see [Appendix 6](#) as an example). Prompt students with questions like the following:

- Who speaks more in an interview?
- What is the purpose of an interview? What is the purpose of a chit-chat?
- What is your body language like in either scenario?
- When do interviews happen? When do chit-chats happen?

Model interview (5 minutes)

Next, pass out the ‘My Buddy Interview’ worksheet ([Appendix 5](#)) and read through the questions as a class to ensure students understand them. Ask for a student or adult volunteer to serve as the interviewee. Set up two chairs in the front of the class and have the volunteer sit across from you. When necessary refer to the venn diagram you created.

Upon completing the model interview, reference the classroom norms ([Appendix 1](#)), and ask the class to share which norms are important when conducting interviews.

Practice Interviews (10-12 minutes)

MCC Tip: In this activity you'll teach interviewing skills through a musical game. Make sure to pick out fun music ahead of time. Consider asking students for songs they'd like to use as well. Sharing music provides students an opportunity to reveal things important to them, their family, and their culture.

Next, it's the students' turn to practice asking interview questions. Explain the directions for 'Musical Interviewing' to the students by saying something like:

"Now we will play a game to practice our listening and interviewing skills with partners. Instead of being assigned one partner you will have many different partners. First, we will all stand up, and when I play the music everyone will move around the room. Find a partner when the music stops. Once everyone has a partner, I will ask a volunteer to pick an interview question from my bag ([Appendix 8](#)). In your pair, one student will start by asking their partner this question and listening carefully to their response. Then, the partners will switch jobs, so the other person can ask the same question. I want you all to practice asking questions and listening carefully because next week we will do a full interview with a buddy from another class!"

MCC Tip: As students work on this skill in later grades they will be asked to take notes during their interviews. For now, emphasize the importance of listening to remember important information. Refer back to skills learned in the [Listening Deeply strategy](#).

Have students stand up and begin the activity. When you stop the music, make sure everyone finds a partner. Next, ask students for a volunteer to come and pick a slip out of your bag and read out the chosen question. Time the activity for the students depending on your time frame (e.g. at least 1 min for each partner to talk before you ask them to switch tasks; 30 seconds of music in between for students to find partners; conduct 2-3 rounds).

Close the lesson by telling students they will continue growing their interviewing skills next week with a buddy class, so they can get to know other students in the school. Let them know when you think the next lesson will take place.

The following lesson will include pairing each student with a student in a later grade. Planning ahead to find a buddy class, collaborating with the buddy class teacher to decide on good pairings, and coordinating locations for the interviews are all important logistical steps leading up to [Lesson 4](#).

Lesson 4: Buddy Interview (25-30 minutes)

Prepare for Interviews (5-10 minutes)

Begin this lesson with a quick review of the similarities and differences between an interview and a chit-chat by referencing the venn diagram you made in [Lesson 2](#).

“Today we have a very special lesson where we will practice our interviewing skills with [a classmate, or a buddy in a different class] to learn about someone in our community. In a few minutes, we will meet with our buddies and have time to ask them questions from your worksheet. Your partner and the teachers will help you read the questions if you need help. Make sure to write notes, so you can remember what your buddy tells you. At the end of the interview you will get to draw and write about your buddy and anything that you think shows who they are. In the next lesson we will get to showcase our work with our buddies and have a little party to celebrate all we have learned.”

Next, pass out the Buddy Interview Worksheet ([Appendix 5](#)) and read and review the questions as a class, pausing to answer any questions. Make sure students understand each question so they can be as independent as possible during their buddy interviews.

Then, take about 5 minutes for students to come up with one question of their own they want to ask their buddy. When students have their question ready, help them write it at the bottom of their Buddy Interview Worksheet. If students need help coming up with a question to ask offer the following suggestions:

- What is your favorite thing to do on the weekend?
- What is something you are really good at?
- What is a hope or dream you have for when you get older?

Once students have their sheets ready, tell them they are ready for their interviews and give them a brief overview of what the process will look like. Say something like:

“We are ready to interview our buddies. These might be students you have seen around school or whose names you know, but our job today is to get to know them a bit more. When we enter the class, remember that your role is to be an interviewer. You will be asking the questions, and they will be answering.”

Interviews (15-20 minutes)

When the classes combine, call out the student pairs, remind older students to help younger students with reading/writing the interview, and have them begin. Walk around the room to check on students. Give them up to 10 minutes to interview their partners, and give them a 2-minute warning so they can be sure to ask their questions. After students finish the interviews, say a classroom thank you to all of the buddies and tell everyone what you and the buddy teacher have planned for the final lesson.

MCC Tip: If you have the time, play a quick icebreaker when your class meets with their buddy class before you explain directions/pair students. You can play a name game, "[All My Friends and Neighbors](#)," or another MCC game.

Wrap up (1 minute)

When your students return to their desks/rooms, wrap up the lesson by saying something like *"I am so proud of how well everyone interviewed and listened to their partners. I hope you all learned a bit about your buddy. Next week we get to work on drawing and writing about our buddies so they can see all that you learned."*

If time allows, ask some reflection questions like:

- What did it feel like to be an interviewer?
- What are some things you learned about your buddy?
- Was it hard to not have the opportunity to talk about yourself during the interview?
- How do you think you'll greet your buddy next time you see them?

MCC Tip: Students can undergo a gallery of the worksheets they will fill out about their buddy, or you can have them volunteer to present their work to the entire buddy class. You might instead have a small party with each buddy class where they can talk to their buddies, show their work, and share the worksheet they completed with their buddy as a gift.

Lesson 5: Buddy Worksheets, Presentations & Party (30-40 minutes)

Introduce the lesson (1 minutes)

Begin this lesson by telling the class the plan for the day. Say something like, “*Today we will get to show our buddies all that we learned about them. First, we will draw and write about our buddy. After we finish, we will hang our work on the wall in a gallery (or tell them what else you have planned). Our buddy class will join us to have a little celebration, so they can see the hard work you did.*”

Worksheet (10-15 minutes)

Explain to students that they will be drawing a portrait and a name card ([Appendix 9](#) or [Appendix 10](#)) for their buddy inspired by the things they learned in their interviews. In the name card students should reference their interview sheet to correctly spell their buddy’s name and decorate it with things they learned about their buddy.

It is helpful to complete a buddy teacher worksheet as an example. Allow students to work for 10-15 minutes, depending on your time. When they are finished, post the student worksheets in a gallery on a wall for the presentation/party.

MCC Tip: The worksheets are intentionally simple, so students can use the space provided to write or draw to the best of their ability. You can provide students who can write the worksheet in [Appendix 10](#). Help students that cannot yet write to think of all the ways they can express what they learned through drawings on the worksheet in [Appendix 9](#).

Celebration and gallery walk (15 minutes)

If applicable, have your buddy class join you for a final celebration where buddies can see your students’ work. Have everyone do an informal gallery walk with their buddy, and ask your students to tell their buddy about their worksheet.

Debrief (optional; 5-6 minutes)

If time allows, engage in a quick debrief about the experience using the sample discussion questions below.

- What was easy about this exercise? What was hard about it?
- What was it like asking these questions to someone you didn't know before?
- What did you enjoy about meeting someone new and learning their name?

Wrap up (1 minute)

Wrap up the lesson by thanking everyone for participating, listening deeply, and getting to know someone new. Say something like, *“I hope you enjoyed getting to know each other better. I’m proud of how hard you all worked. I hope you continue to listen to others and get to know them deeply.”*

Extension ideas

To extend these lessons, continue to ask students in class about identity whenever reading stories in class, talking about historical figures, or during other appropriate times. Furthermore, you can have students individually or in groups do additional rounds of interviews with different students, school staff and faculty, or other school adults.

For more details on these activities and additional extension ideas, see [Humans of Your School | Routines K-5](#).

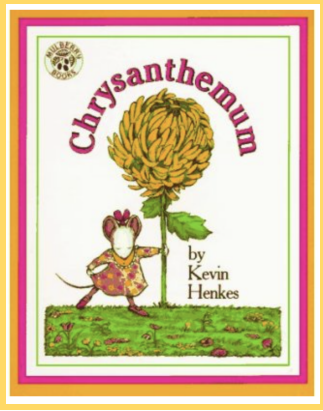
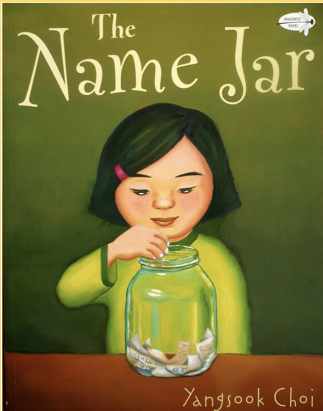

Appendix 1: Recommended Elementary Classroom Norms and Moral Principles

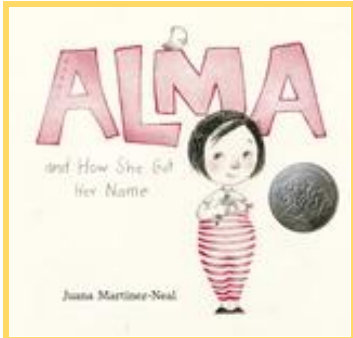
1. Consider WHAT someone said, not WHO said it
2. Assume that we all mean well and are trying our best.
3. You are responsible for your actions.
4. If you leave class with questions, it's ok and it's likely.
5. Be present, continue to listen and learn
6. Avoid generalizations about people, races, ethnicities, or economic class.
7. Think about who is in the room and how what you say can affect them.
8. Remember that we are all learning together and have different strengths and knowledge.
9. Mistakes are OK. They help us learn and grow.
10. When mistakes and conflicts happen, keep them in the classroom
11. Respect each other's privacy. Share lessons from class, not people's stories. Sensitive topics that are shared in the classroom should stay in the classroom.
12. Be open to learning something new or changing your opinions and beliefs.
13. When you disagree with someone, challenge yourself to ask kind questions and listen carefully.

If someone says something that is hurtful, help them understand how they hurt you without causing shame, or speak with them privately.

14. When challenges come up, work to build a classroom community that is kind, honest, forgiving, and fair.

Appendix 2: Recommended Reading & Media List

	<p><i>Chrysanthemum</i> by Kevin Henkes, Published by Mulberry Books</p> <p>Chrysanthemum YouTube Read-Aloud</p>	<p>Description: Chrysanthemum loves her name but when some classmates tease her, she is left feeling sad and insecure.</p>
	<p><i>The Name Jar</i> by Yangsook Choi. Published by Knopf Books For Young Readers</p> <p>The Name Jar YouTube Read-Aloud</p>	<p>Description: Unhei has just moved to America from Korea. She is nervous about fitting in and nervous her new classmates won't be able to pronounce her name.</p>
	<p><i>Dreamers</i> by Yuyi Morales. Published by Neal Porter Books</p> <p>Dreamers YouTube Read-Aloud</p>	<p>Description: This is the story of a mother and her baby who move to the United States and become immigrants.</p>

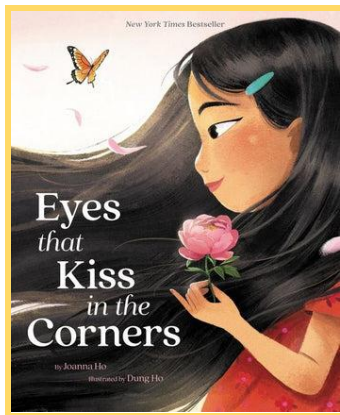


[*Alma and How She Got Her Name*](#) by Juana Martinez-Neal Published by Candelwick Press

[*Alma and How She Got Her Name* YouTube Read-Aloud](#)

Description:

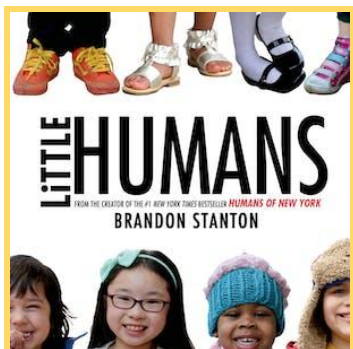
Alma wants to know why she has such a long name. Her father tells her the story of her names and about the family members she is named after.



[*Eyes That Kiss in the Corners*](#) by Joanna Ho and illustrated by Dung Ho. Published by HarperCollins
[*Eyes That Kiss in the Corners* YouTube Read-Aloud](#)

Description:

Unhei has just moved to America from Korea. She is nervous about fitting in and nervous her new classmates won't be able to pronounce her name.

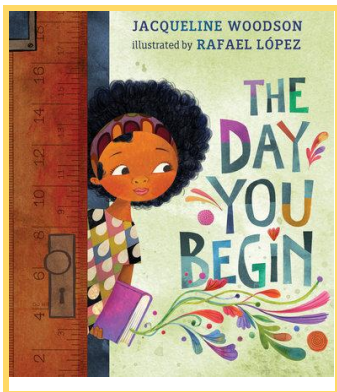


[*Little Humans*](#) by Brandon Stanton. Published by Macmillan

[*Little Humans* YouTube Read-Aloud](#)

Description:

Here Brandon Stanton shares some of his favorite photographs of children from his blog Humans of New York.



[*The Day You Begin*](#) by
Jaqueline Woodson.
Illustrated by Rafael López,
Published by Nancy
Paulsen Books

[*The Day You Begin* YouTube
Read-Aloud](#)

Description:

At times we all feel different. When we are brave and move forward anyway we make space for ourselves and forge connections with others.



Rebel Girls Podcast
Produced by Rebels Girls
Inc.
[Rebel Girls Podcast Website](#)

Description:

Choose through the list of inspiring girls and women to find someone whose story your students will relate to.

Appendix 3: “Line Game” Sample Statements

Stand on the line if....

- You are wearing (any color)
- You are (age most of your students are)
- You were born in (year that most students were born)
- You like to dance
- You like to play soccer
- You like to play outside
- You like to play inside
- You like dessert
- You like to sing
- You like food
- You like gym class
- You were born in (the state you are in)
- You have siblings
- You have a pet
- You like to read
- You like to do math
- You were born in a different country
- You like coming to school
- You have brown hair
- You have blonde hair
- You are wearing glasses
- You like the winter
- You feel nervous sometimes
- You are a picky eater
- You love waking up early

Appendix 4: Name Tags

Directions

- Print out one Name Tag sheet for each student plus extras (**page 18**)
- Provide pencils, crayons, and markers
- Remind students they won't be putting their names anywhere on the sheet, and suggest they write their names on the back
- Once all students are finished collect Name Tags to be used in the upcoming lessons

Appendix 5: Buddy Interview Worksheets

Directions:

- Print enough copies of interview sheets on **page 22** plus extras
- Remind students that their buddies can help them read the questions if necessary
- Students can use the blank space on the sheets to write any notes if they are able, but it is not necessary
- Students should take time to carefully spell their buddy's names
- Explain to students that they will be writing their own question in the space at the bottom of the page

My name: _____

Buddy Interview

What is your FULL name?

How did you get your name, or what does your name mean?

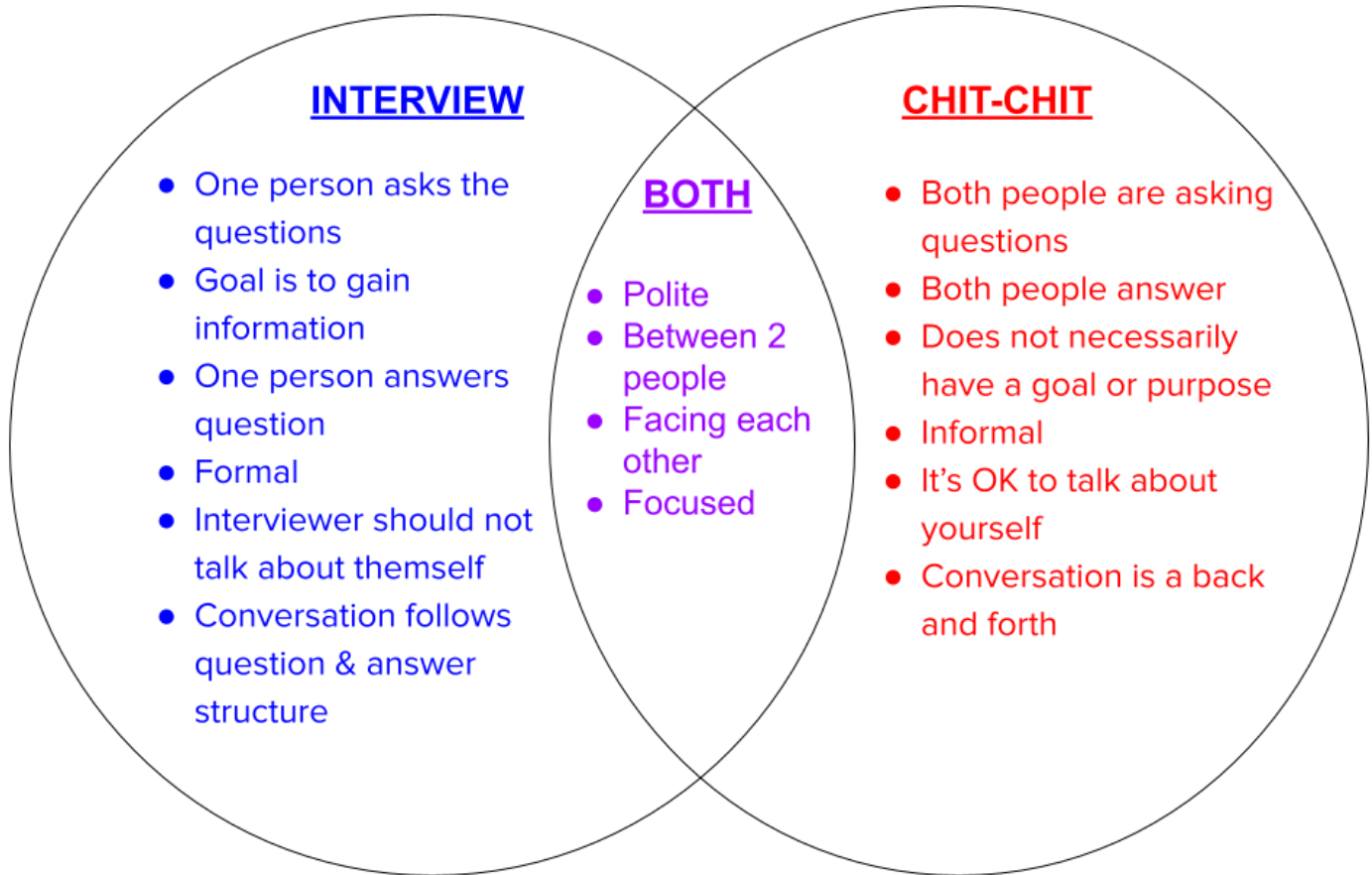
What do you like about your name?

What are some of your nicknames, and how did you get them?

With whom do you share your name?

My question:

Appendix 6: Interview/Chit-Chat Chart



Appendix 7: Letter to Caregivers

Directions:

- Use the sample letter and make any necessary changes
- Suggestion to email AND send home hard copies with students

Dear Caregivers of Class _____

Over the course of the next week or so, our class will be looking closely at their own names and the names of their peers to build community and empathy within our school. Students will come to understand there is more to know about each other beyond our names and that everyone has a unique story and identity. In order to further enrich this work, if you are able, we ask that you share with your child the details of how they got their name. Some things you might consider sharing include the following:

- How they got their name or how their name was chosen
- Whose name they were given, if applicable.
- What their name means
- Why you think their name is special
- Who else they share their name with (can be people you know or celebrities they can look up to)

Thanks for helping us deepen this work!

Appendix 8: Musical Interview Prompt Slips

What is something you are really good at?	What do you like about your name?
What does your name mean? Or, how did you get your name?	What are some of your nicknames? How did you get them?
Who do you share your name with?	What is a hope or dream you have for when you get older?

Appendix 9: Buddy's Name Final Worksheet, *Drawing Option*

Directions:

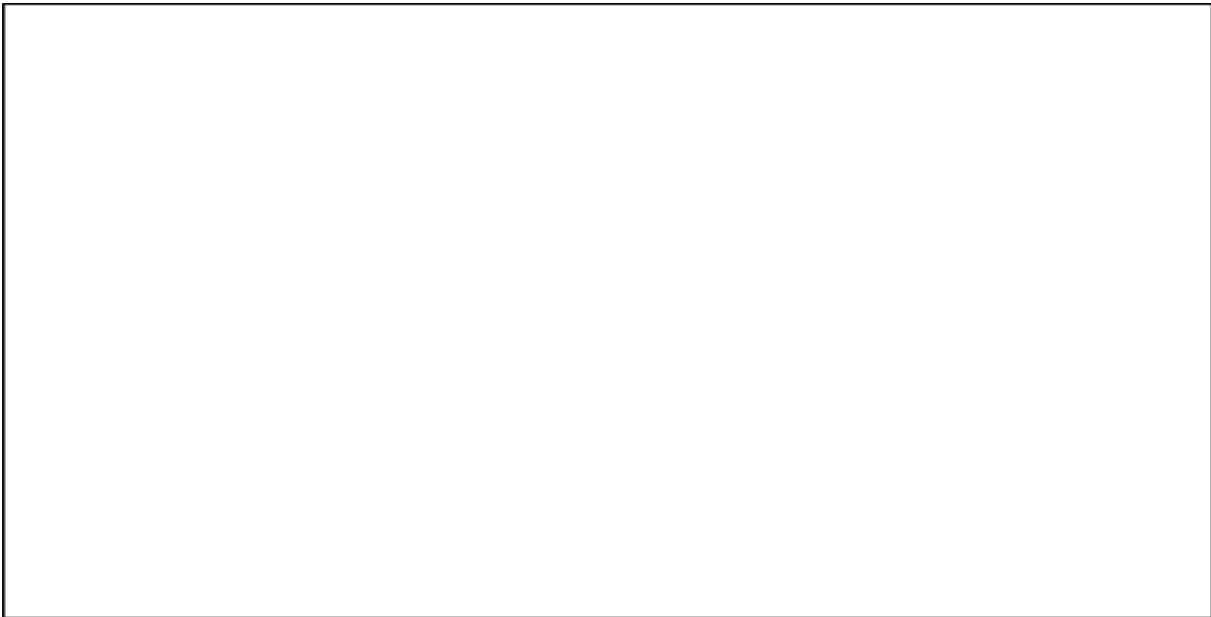
- Print one copy for each student of the Buddy Name Final Worksheet on **page 27**
- Instruct students to draw a portrait of their buddy in the box on top and to write their buddy's name and/or details about their buddy in the box below
- Make sure students know that they will be sharing these sheets with their class and their buddy's class so they should work carefully on them
- Hand out crayons, markers, pens, and pencils

MCC Tip: Pass out pencils FIRST, so students can draft what they'd like before handing out crayons and markers.

My Buddy



Portrait



Name Card

Appendix 10: Buddy's Name Final

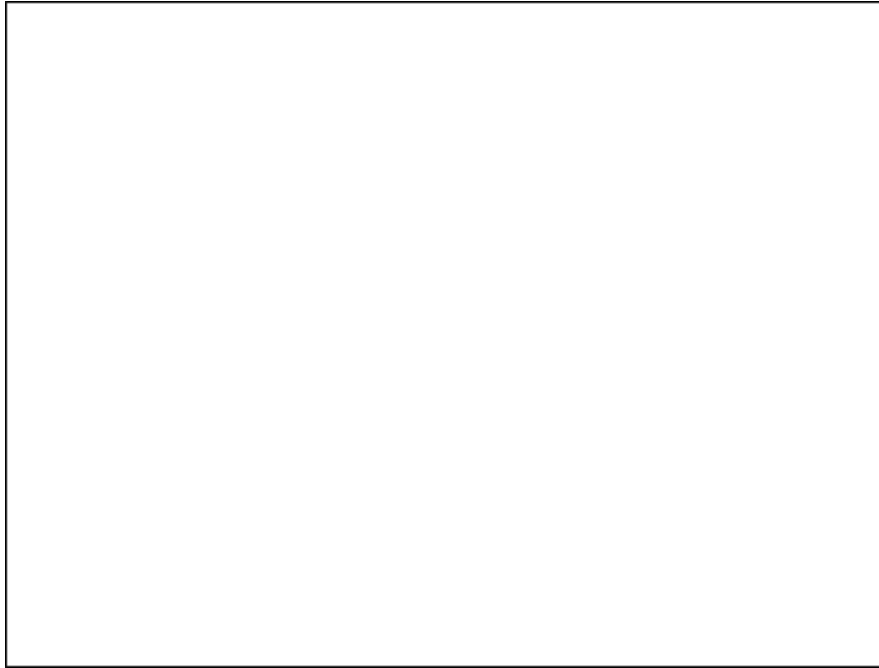
Worksheet - *Writing Option*

Directions:

- Print one copy for each student plus extras of the My Buddy Interview Final worksheet on **page 29**
- Make sure students know they will be sharing these sheets with their class and their buddy's class, so they should work carefully on them
- Give out crayons, markers, pens, and pencils

MCC Tip: Pass out pencils FIRST, so students can draft what they'd like before handing out crayons and markers.

My Buddy Interview



(Buddy's Name)
