
Creative Icebreakers, Introductions, and Hellos for Teachers, Trainers, and Facilitators



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Message from the Author

Icebreakers, Introductions, and Hellos for Teachers, Trainers and Facilitators was written to add excitement and variety to training. Both new icebreakers and variations on timeless classics are included in this guide.

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Good luck and happy icebreaking!

Using Icebreakers for Maximum Effectiveness

When choosing your icebreaker, be conscious of your group dynamic. It is important that your activity not make anyone feel uncomfortable. No one should be forced to reveal extremely personal information or participate in a stressful environment. And of course, what’s personal to some may not be personal to others.

In addition to encouraging interaction, you should try to tie your icebreaker into the topic to be discussed. Are there any points of your presentations illustrated by the activity? If so, bring them out. If not, you may want to consider choosing a different icebreaker. At the very least, “pre-call” any unrelated icebreakers by stating that their sole purpose is to introduce participants to each other and get the session moving along.

Story of My Life



You have just been given a contract to write your autobiography for a major publishing company. Your agent Harry Hardnose is anxious to get to press. He has decided to help you get started with a few probing questions.

1. First, take a piece of flipchart paper and fold it in half and then in half again to form a book.
2. Choose the title of a popular song for the name of your book. Write that title on the front cover.
3. On the inside of the front cover (page two), list a table of contents.
 - o Name of the place where you were born
 - o Description of your first job
 - o Number of years you have been working for your company
4. On page three, draw a picture of your family.
5. On the back cover of the book, draw a picture of what you plan to do when you retire. Where will you go? Who will you go with? Etc.

Materials Needed

Paper
Markers

Time

Allow five to ten minutes for setup, and drawing. When all books are complete, have people tell their story, using the book as a visual aid. Depending on the size of the group, you may want to debrief in smaller groups. If possible, leave the books in a central location during your training to encourage further introductions and discussions.

Variations

- o Change the focus of the pages of the book. For instance, most exciting moment, favorite food, most exciting vacation, etc. Be careful not to make any of the questions too personal. The idea is to open people up, not shut them down.

Too Many Cooks



Your family (group) just inherited a successful restaurant from Chef Charlie, a long lost relative. The only problem: Charlie was very disorganized. The only recipes you have found are on torn strips of paper. You have to make sense of it all and quickly! The restaurant is opening tonight, and you have to have the food ready.

1. Each member of the group will be given part of recipe (an ingredient, instruction, etc.).
2. Your job is to put yourselves in order as quickly as possible. Your recipe must make sense.
3. When your group is done, loudly announce “bon appetite” to signal the end of the game.

Materials Needed

Several Small Prizes for the Winning Team

Cut Recipes (Separate the Title, Ingredients, Instructions, Etc.)

Time

Allow ten to 12 minutes for the game. Once a team calls “bon appetite,” have them introduce themselves and read their recipe in order.

Variations

- o For an added challenge, this game can be made considerably more difficult if groups are not pre-designated before the recipe pieces are distributed. Participants must then not only find the correct order but the correct recipe as well.

ABCs of Me



You have been hired by the Creative Classroom Company to illustrate a poster to help children learn their ABCs. By happy coincidence, you and your first name are the subject of the poster!

1. First, take a piece of flipchart paper and write your name vertically down the left side.
2. Next, choose a word that starts with each letter of your name. The word should describe something about you. Write those words horizontally across the paper, using the letters of your name as the first letter of each descriptive word.
3. After you have listed your words, draw an accompanying picture to illustrate each.
4. When you are finished, tape your poster to the wall.

Materials Needed

Paper
Markers
Tape

Time

Allow five to ten minutes for setup and drawing. When all posters are complete, have people introduce themselves using their name drawing. Depending on the size of the group, you may want to debrief in smaller groups. If possible, leave the drawings posted throughout your training session.

Variations

- o Narrow the focus of the words. For instance, all words must be adjectives, nouns, or verbs related to work, related to foods you like, etc.

I Remember



You and the others in your group are about to revisit the past and take a trip down “Memory Lane.”

1. First, get a coin.
2. Next, look at the year on the coin. Take a minute to think about what you were doing when that coin was minted. Were you in school? Were you a child? Where did you work? Were you married? Where did you live? What was going on in your life at that time? What was the music of the day? Etc. (If you were not yet born or prefer not to discuss your life during the year selected, choose another coin.)
3. After you have had some time to remember where you were, you are ready to play the game. Your goal is to find someone with a coin that was minted at least two years before or after yours. Ultimately, your goal is to have the oldest coin in the room.
4. Once you have found a partner, take three minutes to tell each other about your moments in time. When you are finished, each of you flip your coin. Reveal the results of your toss to your partner. If they are alike (both heads or tails) exchange coins. If they differ, keep your original coin.
5. Repeat the process up to three times as designated by the facilitator.

Materials Needed

Coins
Prize

Time

Allow five minutes for setup. Allow five minutes for each round. At the end of all rounds, call each year in order and ask each participant to stand and give his or her name. Award a prize to the holder of the oldest coin.

Variations

- o Use your own coins to ensure an even distribution of years.
- o If using your own coins, incorporate a piece of corporate history with each. Research a fact or figure about each year of your business and include it with the corresponding coins. When the participants exchange their own information, they can also share a piece of the corporate history. When debriefing, call each year in order and ask the participant with the year called to read his or her fact.

6 Degrees of Separation



It happens all of the time: we meet someone who knows someone we know. It's a small world, that's for sure. The object of this game is to see how small the world really is.

1. First, find a partner. Introduce yourselves and make a list of five to ten things that you have in common with each other: where you went to school, year you were born, number of years with the company, food likes, sports likes, etc.
2. Once you have completed your first list, you must find someone else in the room that also has one of those five to ten things in common with you. When you have found that person, repeat step one and develop a new list.
3. Repeat step two.
4. Continue until you have met five other people or time is called by the facilitator.
5. A prize will be given to the first person able to complete the game. When you are done, let the facilitator know that you have finished.

Materials Needed

Prize

Time

Allow approximately 15 - 20 minutes for game. Once most people have finished, call time. Ask your winner to reveal his/her chain of separation by introducing those interviewed.

Scavenger Hunt



You are about to begin a scavenger hunt with several members of this training group. The object of the game is to collect all of the items listed below as quickly as possible. You may talk with anyone in the group. You may not leave the room. You must associate each item with the person who gave it to you. You may not get more than two items from any one person. Once the facilitator has assigned groups, you may begin play. When your team is finished, your team should loudly announce the phrase “hunt over” to the rest of the group. Be prepared to say where you got each item. A prize will be awarded to the team that finishes first.

1. A Driver's License
2. A Family Photo
3. A Store Receipt
4. A 1979 or Earlier Penny
5. A Piece of Candy
6. A Ballpoint Pen
7. A Lipstick
8. A Planner, Palm Pilot, Calendar, or Other Organizer
9. A Drink
10. A Coffee Cup
11. A Marker
12. A Piece of Candy
13. A Store Credit Card
14. A Pair of Glasses
15. A Magazine or Book

The list of hunt items should be reviewed by the facilitator before the game begins in order to make sure that all items are available.

Materials Needed

Several Small Prizes for the Winning Team

Time

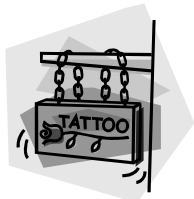
Allow 10 - 12 minutes for the game. Once a team calls “hunt over,” have them review each of the items, where they got them, and from whom.

Variations

- o Instead of using actual items, list activities and facts as the items to find. For instance, “plays piano.” The object of the game is to find someone who plays the piano and associate the person's name with that item.

Classic

Tattoo



You have just arrived at Tony's Tattoo Parlor for a tattoo. Tony is competing for "Tattoo King of the Year," a contest sponsored by *Needle Knows* magazine. Every design is a potential entry, and Tony wants each of his tattoos to say something about the person wearing them. From you, he needs a little inspiration and a design before he can start his work. Tony is excellent at lettering, animals, characters, band logos, maps, etc.

1. On your piece of paper, you are to design a rough tattoo that reveals something about yourself, your work, your hobbies, or your family, in order to help get Tony's creative juices flowing.
2. You must also make a note about how big the tattoo should be and where you will have it applied.

Materials Needed

Paper
Tape
Markers

Time

Allow five to ten minutes for setup, drawing, and posting designs on the wall. Depending on the size of the group, you may want to debrief in smaller groups. If possible, leave the designs posted throughout your training to encourage further introductions and discussions.

Variations

- o Narrow the scope of the tattoo design: what you do at work, an animal most like you, favorite song, favorite band, adjective that best describes you, etc.
- o Divide your group in two. For round one, assign one group the role of Tony and the other group the role of the customer. Each customer must find a Tony and tell him about the design they would like and why. Tony is to draw a design, asking questions as he or she goes. After the first set of designs is complete, the groups reverse roles. To encourage additional interaction, ask the customers to "shop around" and find another partner to work with. To debrief, let each Tony describe what he or she drew and for whom.

Storyteller



You are about to stretch your storytelling skills with the help of others in the group designated by the facilitator. You will incorporate facts about yourself into a story that could just go anywhere.

1. First, write down the name of ...
 - o something you would see in a store.
 - o something you would buy as a gift for your mother.
 - o your favorite sport
 - o your favorite celebrity.
 - o a crime.
 - o your favorite restaurant.
 - o a tourist attraction.
 - o a profession.
 - o the name of someone in the room.
2. The facilitator will begin the story with, "Once upon a time, I found the most unusual thing." The next person is to fill in the next piece of the story. The object of the game is to incorporate as many of the items as you can from those listed above. No one can say more the two sentences at a time. Turns must be taken in order. To win, you must incorporate all of your words and then conclude the story. Everyone must get an opportunity to "write" from their imagination at least twice before the story can end.

Materials Needed

Prize

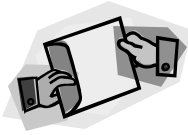
Time

Allow ten to 20 minutes for the game. If the group is large, consider breaking into smaller subgroups or reducing the number of incorporated words required to win. For instance, you must work in five words from those listed in part one.

Variations

- o You can easily tailor this game by changing the questions in part one to better match your industry, company, etc.

Trait Trader



You have just taken a job as a trait trader in the fictitious exchange, the Personality Market. You are a new executive, and it is very important to you that you do well in your new job. To do so, you must trade wisely and end the game with a trait that applies to you.

1. In a moment, you will be given a piece of paper (trade slip) with a personality or character trait written on it (e.g. tall, creative, adventurous, quiet, etc.) Write your name on the slip.
2. You must trade your slip with someone else. If your new trait also applies to you, write your name on that slip. If not, move to step three.
3. Trade again. Your goal is to end up with a trait that applies to you and to have written your name on more slips than anyone else.
4. When the facilitator calls out “exchange closed,” the game is over.
5. You may stop trading before the exchange closes. Remember, your goal is to end up with a trait that applies to you and to have written your name on more slips than anyone else.

Materials Needed

Prize

Trait Slips (Consider: Over 5'8", Born in the 70s, Red Hair, Curly Hair, Athlete, Creative, Talkative, Adventurous, Quiet, Bossy, Demanding, Funny, Dare Devil, etc.) You design the slips based on your group. Remember to be sensitive to age, gender, etc.

Time

Allow 12 - 15 minutes for the game and then call “exchange closed.” Next, ask everyone to turn their trait slip to the side that holds the names of the traders. Ask your first trader to say his or her name and to read his or her trait, stating whether or not it is true about them. Then, ask the others in the group to raise their hands if the trader’s name appears on their trade slips. Count the hands. Move to the next trader and repeat. When done, award the prize to the trader with the most slips signed who has a trait that describes him or her on the final slip.

Race for the Truth



You and the other “runners” in the room are about to embark on a race for the truth. Your goal is to cross the finish line as quickly as possible by truthfully answering questions about yourself as you follow the facilitator’s directions.

1. Line up on the starting line as directed by the facilitator.
2. In a moment you will hear a statement. If it is true about you, move forward one step. If it is false, remain at the finish line.
3. Once all first moves have been made, the facilitator will make another statement. Again, if it is true, move forward one step. If it is false, remain on the starting line if you have not yet advanced. If you have advanced past the starting line, take one step back.
4. Repeat step three until the first “runner” completes the race.

Materials Needed

2 Long Pieces of String for the Start and Finish Lines

List of Statements Related to The Group (e.g. “I have worked here more than one year.” “I think we have too many meetings around here.” or “I understand xyz aspect of my job.”)

Time

Allow five to ten minutes for this activity.

Variations

- o Narrow the scope of the statements to relate to issues at work, materials being covered, etc.

Candy Confessions



You have just taken a job as a candy tester in the Candy Confessions factory. What makes this candy different from other candy is that each flavor is associated with a fact about you. Your job is to select and “test” four different candies from a bowl/box that will circulate among all testers.

1. Choose four candies from the bowl without looking. In a moment, a key code will be revealed, indicating which truths you should tell.
2. Once the code has been revealed you may begin your confession.

Materials Needed

Basket of Candy

Key Code (e.g. Kit Kats = Favorite Movie, Favorite Magazine, Favorite Song, or Favorite Book, Krackle = Favorite Vacation Spot, Place You Would Like To Visit, Place You Would Least Like To Visit, or Worst Vacation, Lollipop = Number of Years in Current Position, Where You Work, What You Do, or Brief Description of First Job, Gum Drops = Something About Where You Live, Something About Where You Grew Up, Something About Your Family, Something About Your Town/City, Kisses = Wildcard [tell us anything])

Time

Allow ten to 20 minutes for the entire process.

Variations

- o Allow people to take as many candies as they like from the basket and reveal something random about themselves for each candy they take.
- o Use a ball of string. Allow each person to take as much as they like. For each inch, they must reveal something about themselves. (Additional material: string, scissors, and ruler)

Classic

True or False



You have just entered a new society of truth-tellers and liars. You and the others sometimes tell the truth and sometimes lie. The key to this society is knowing when you are being lied to and when you are being told the truth.

Partners must guess if a statement is the truth or a lie. If both players are correct, move on. If both are incorrect, move on. If one is correct and one is wrong, the wrong person is out.

1. First, flip a coin. If it reveals “heads,” you tell truth; if “tails,” you lie.
2. Find a partner, swap stories. Your partner must then guess if you told the truth or a lie. If both are correct, move on. If both are incorrect, move on. If one is correct and one wrong, the person who guessed incorrectly is out.
3. Move on and repeat steps one and two until one person remains and is declared the winner.

Materials Needed

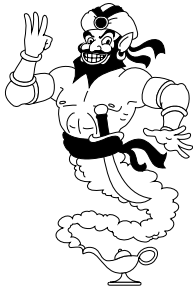
Prize

Extra Coins

Time

Allow ten to 20 minutes to play the game, depending on the size of the group. Award a prize to the person who remains standing.

The Magic Lamp



You and your team have just found a lamp. You rub it, and surprise! A genie appears. The genie grants you three wishes. You are allowed to make three changes at work. You may change yourself, your boss, your job, the people around you, etc.

1. The facilitator will soon divide you into groups of three to five people and give your team a piece of flipchart paper and a marker.
2. Once you have your materials, design your wish list for your genie. When you are finished, post it on the wall.

Materials Needed

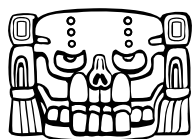
Flipchart Paper

Markers

Time

Allow five to ten minutes for setup, writing, and posting lists on the wall. Allow five minutes for debriefing. If possible, leave the lists posted throughout your training to encourage further introductions and discussions.

Totem Truths



In the past, a totem pole was carved for several reasons; for example, to honor a deceased elder who was important to the carver, to show the number of rights and names a person had acquired over his or her lifetime, or to document an encounter with the supernatural. Today, totems are carved not only for those reasons but also to tell the story about the person commissioning the pole. You and your team are about to design a totem pole to discover your group's strengths and weaknesses.

1. In a moment, the facilitator will divide you into teams. Each of you will be handed a piece of cardboard and a list of totems. You are to design a totem figure that best represents your strengths in the group. You may use one of the totem symbols given or make up your own.
2. Once you have completed your drawing, you and your team will tape them one on top of the other on a portion of the wall. Be prepared to explain your strength to the group.

Materials Needed

8.5" x 11" Cardboard Piece for Each Participant

Markers

List of Animal Totems (pages following)

Time

Allow 20 minutes for the entire process.

This exercise is excellent for teambuilding.

Variations

- o Ask each group to design a group crest, similar to a family crest. The only disadvantage to this versus the totem is that the groups are static. With the totems, you can reorganize the groups and have them rebuild the poles throughout the day's activities.

Classic

Totem Poles

SYMBOLS

Alligator - Maternal and vengeful
Ant - Group minded, patient, active, and industrious
Antelope - Active, agile, and willing to sacrifice
Armadillo - Safety oriented and cautious
Badger - Courageous, aggressive, healing and energizing
Bat - Regenerative and long living
Bear - Industrious, instinctive, healing, powerful, sovereign, protective of the world, and strong
Beaver - Determined, strong-willed, constructive, and protective
Bee - Organized, industrious, productive, wise, social, celebratory, and enthusiastic about life
Buffalo - Sacred and strong
Butterfly - Metamorphic and transformative
Cat - Protective, detached, sensual, mysterious, magical, and independent
Cheetah - Swift, insightful, and focused
Cow - Nurturing and maternal
Coyote - Intelligent, stealthy, tricky, and mischievous
Crane - Solitary, just, enduring, independent, intelligent, and vigilant
Crow - Law enforcing, shape shifting, changeable, creative, spiritual, energetic, and just
Deer - Intellectual, gentle, caring, kind, subtle, graceful, feminine, gentle, and innocent
Dog - Noble, faithful, loyal, trainable, protective, and guiding
Dolphin - Kind, prudent, capable of deep emotion, wise, and happy
Dragon - Enduring, infinite, wise, powerful, and fiery
Dragonfly - Flighty, carefree, and strongly imaginative
Eagle - Divine, sacrificing, intelligent, courageous, spiritually illuminated, healing, and daring
Elephant - Strong, powerful, and wise
Elk - Strong and agile, proud, independent, pure, and noble
Falcon - Adventurous, passionate, and leading
Fish - Graceful
Fox - Cunning, agile, quick-witted, diplomatic, wild; feminine in its magic of camouflage, shape-shifting and invisibility
Frog - Cleansing, transformative, sensitive, medicinal, undiscernibly beautiful and powerful
Gazelle - Aggressive
Goose - Self-demanding, reliable, prudent, rigid, vigilant, parental, and productive
Hawk - Informative, intuitive, victorious, healing, noble, cleansing, visionary, and protective
Horse - Independent, enduring, mobile, terrestrial, powerful, and free
Hummingbird - Portentous, timeless, healing, and combative
Jaguar - Chaotic and shape shifting
Lion - Family-oriented, strong, energetic, courageous, and protective
Lizard - Conservational and visionary
Llama - Comforting to others
Lynx - Discrete, protective, and guiding
Moose - Headstrong, enduring, steadfast, and wise
Mouse - Observant, orderly, organized, and detail oriented
Opossum - Diversionary, strategic, and deceptive
Otter - Playful, friendly, dynamic, joyful, helpful, and generous
Owl - Deceptive, clairvoyant, insightful, informative, detached, wise, changeable, and silent
Ox - Sacrificing and self-denying
Peacock - Immortal, dignified, and self-confident

Totem Poles

Porcupine - Innocent, companionable, and trustworthy
Rabbit - Fearful, timid, nervous, humble, fertile, intuitive, balanced, and fertile.
Raccoon - Curious and clean
Raven - Introspective, courageous, self-knowing, healing, protective, tricky, and magical
Salmon - Proud, intense, confident, wise, inspiring, and rejuvenating
Seahorse - Confident and graceful
Seal - Loving, desirous, imaginative, creative, and dreamy
Shark - Predatory, enduring, and adaptable
Skunk - Noticeably present, and strong
Snake - Impulsive, shrewd, transformative, healing, energetic, and wise
Squirrel - Organized and gathering
Stag - Sovereign, regenerative, giving of bounty, beauty, and mystical signs.
Swan - Graceful, balanced, innocent, soulful, loving, beautiful, self-possessed
Tiger - Strong, valorous, powerful, and energetic
Turkey - Generous, life-giving, and self-sacrificing
Turtle - Nurturing, shy, and protective
Weasel - Strong, energetic, ingenious, and stealthy
Whale – Wise and giving
Wolf - Loyal, persevering, successful, intuitive, trainable, ritualistic, and spirited
Woodpecker - Sensitive, protective, and loyal

Definitions



You have just taken a job at a dictionary company. You are responsible for editing a new edition. The only problem is that some of the computers went on the fritz and wiped out various definitions. You have decided to “wing it” and make up definitions for the words of which you don’t know the meaning.

1. In a moment, you will be handed a card. It will contain either a word or a word and a definition.
2. If you received a “word only” card, you must make up a definition.
3. If you received a definition card, you must explain the definition without reading the card.
4. The object of the game is for the others in the group to spot the real definition of the word.
5. You may not vote on your own word.

Materials Needed

Small Prizes

Index Cards with Words

Index Cards with Definitions of Lesser-Known Words (See Example)

Brobdignagian \brahb-ding-NAG-ee-uhn\, *adjective*:

Colossal; of extraordinary height; gigantic. -- as a noun: a giant. [Often misspelt *Brobdignagian*.]

- “The final triumph of my **Brobdignagian** persecutor.” --William Godwin, *The Enquirer*
- “A brand-new **brobdignagian** hotel.” --Benjamin Disraeli, *Lothair*
- “Known to our **Brobdignagian** intelligence as grains of sand.” ---Grant Allen

Time

Allow 5 minutes for preparation. Allow 10 minutes to play the game. Award small prizes to the people who guess the most correct answers.

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