Starting Points
An Amplify Playbook*

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Introducing Starting Points

The activity set described in this guide represents a way for students to re-engage with school. Emerging from the research on stereotype threat, socio-psychological interventions, and culturally sustaining pedagogy, the activities are aimed at students returning to school, and can be implemented in person, remotely, synchronously, or asynchronously.

Centered around a 15-minute writing exercise, Starting Points prompts students to consider and freely express the values they live by. Studies show that by writing about themselves and their values, students move towards a positive mindset that leads to better long-term academic and socio-emotional outcomes.

We believe that Starting Points will:

1. help support the emotional-well being of all kids, especially Black and other marginalized students;

2. help improve academic indicators for all kids, especially for Black and other marginalized students;

3. help you better understand your students as individuals,

4. enable you to gain a sense of how your students reason and express their thoughts;

5. help foster in each student a sense of belonging to your classroom and school.

Procedure at a Glance

Starting Points activities are sequenced to fit within a standard 45-minute class period and can be unbundled to be sequenced over several days. Ideally, the exercise is repeated throughout the academic year.
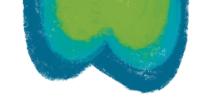
1 — **2** — **3** — **4** — **5** — **6**

1	2	3	4	5	6
Introduce values	Reflect on and prioritize values	Make meaning of important values	Write about self	Read and respond	Repeat as requested

Get Started Now!

Student directions are built into student print and digital editions.
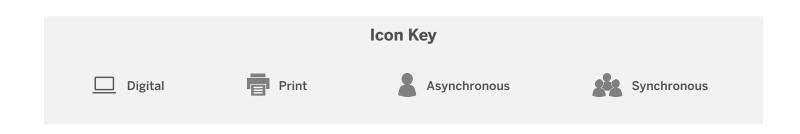
How to Use this Guide

Time
minimum time needed to complete activity

Teacher Talk
priority points and student-facing directions to say or just copy & paste

Assets
ready-to-go instructional delivery tools

Implementation Notes
different settings, scenarios, and ways teachers remix these activities

Icon Key

Digital   Print   Asynchronous   Synchronous

ACTIVITY 1
Select Values

🕐
5 mins.

The goal of this activity is to first expose students to the Value Cards and have them ask themselves, "What matters to me?"

Value Set

- honesty
- courage
- creativity
- hard work
- learning
- friendship
- laughter
- athleticism

- family
- independence
- truth
- originality
- revolution
- pride
- community
- individuality

- kindness
- compassion
- history
- faith
- style
- (add your own)

Assets 📋

- Value Cards—available as google slides, .ppt, or to print and cut
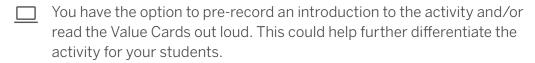
Teacher Talk 💬👤

You will view a set of values, or words that represent things that matter to different people your age.
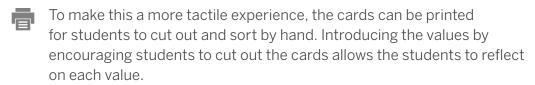
As you view or cut each of the cards, think about what the word means to you.

ACTIVITY 1 (continued)
Introduce Values

5 mins.

Implementation Notes

You have the option to pre-record an introduction to the activity and/or read the Value Cards out loud. This could help further differentiate the activity for your students.

To make this a more tactile experience, the cards can be printed for students to cut out and sort by hand. Introducing the values by encouraging students to cut out the cards allows the students to reflect on each value.

Direct students to move through each card individually. Give them time recommendations, such as pausing on each card for 10 seconds. Or, allow them to view the pre-recorded introduction to the values.

Guide students through each card individually. Display the Values Cards from your facilitating screen, and read them aloud to students. Remember, you are able to control timing, and have an opportunity to model a reflective moment with your students through a think aloud.

Students are asked to rate the values they selected. Sorting the Value Cards in this way helps to scaffold a complex inner process for students.

Teacher Talk 💬👤

Now that you've started to think about what matters to you, you're ready to start sorting your own set of Value Cards. If you don't see the Values that matter to you, feel free to write in your own!

Then, sort each card into 1 of 4 categories:

- Most Important
- Really Important
- Kind of important
- Trash—not important

Keep in mind, there are no right or wrong answers here. In fact, the same person might sort their values differently at different moments in their life. Your ranking list continues to change and evolve over time—as you do, too!

Keep going until all your cards have been sorted.

Be sure your Most Important section contains at least 1 Value Card and no more than 4 value cards. The other sections can have as many or as few cards as you like!
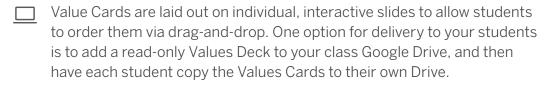
Add those below.

Assets 📋

- Every student needs an individual set of Value Cards

ACTIVITY 2 (continued)
Prioritizing what matters

10 mins.

Implementation Notes ⚙

Value Cards are laid out on individual, interactive slides to allow students to order them via drag-and-drop. One option for delivery to your students is to add a read-only Values Deck to your class Google Drive, and then have each student copy the Values Cards to their own Drive.

Individual student Value Cards are included in the student print edition.

Self-guided directions and set-up for prioritizing values are included in the student editions.

Demonstrate prioritizing the Value Cards for students.

ACTIVITY 3
Give voice to a value

Students are invited to express what the values they rated highest mean to them.

10+ mins.

Teacher Talk

Great! Your next step is to **find** or **make** something that shows what your **most important values** mean to you.

Choose one of your most important cards and find or make something that expresses what that word, or value, means to you.

This is your chance to let your imagination run wild: tell a story, draw a picture, copy a meme you find online, write the lyrics to a song, make a collage... the sky's the limit!

Assets

- Student samples—16 bar rap, simple drawing, collage

Implementation Notes

👤 Allow students to complete this activity overnight or in their own time, to allow them to dedicate more time making art or collecting personal artifacts. Popular creative outlets include: photo or image collaging, hand-drawn art, writing lyrics or making playlists, recording vlogs, collecting memes and videoclips, crafting short stories, or free writing.

👥 Looking for options for peer-to-peer sharing? Please **don't**! Student-to-student sharing explicitly disrupts the social-psychological safety that this experience hinges on.

ACTIVITY 4
Write about a value

This is the heart of the exercise: Students are asked to write about ways in which they live out their values.

Teacher Talk

Stress to the student that this is not a formal assessment and will not be evaluated or graded. In fact, it will remain private between you and the student.

For your chosen Value, write a paragraph about a time this past year when you were able to act on it—times that you moved towards your values.

You might want to consider how it felt to be able to express your values. How did others react? What did you learn about yourself?

Assets

- To gain a general understanding of a student's writing, you may reference the ELA Student Writing Rubrics

Implementation Notes

For remote submissions, one option is to have students email you their written responses. Another option is to teach your students how to set up and share a Google document.

Handwritten responses are easiest to collect during in-person or hybrid scenarios.

Invite students to complete this exercise for multiple values, letting them choose to share with you the work they are most proud of, or best represents them. This approach reinforces the benefits of this intervention at an individual level, allowing students to practice expressing themselves without the judgments typical of school assignments.

Our first priority is for students to feel relaxed, and ready to write. In order to facilitate a comfortable writing space for students, consider inviting students to handwrite or use their phone—whatever they prefer; additionally, they may want to include photos and/or doodles to illustrate their work.

ASSESSMENT
Responding to students

A guide for providing non-evaluative feedback to student writing.

The primary goal of this activity is to gain a deeper understanding of your individual students, personally and academically. The secondary goal of this activity is to use this information to develop your relationships with students. While these writing pieces should not be evaluated for academic merit, reading and responding to student work is still critical. This helps promote a sense of appreciation, validation, and belonging among your students.

By responding to student work you establish a dialogue. You are encouraged to use each student's response to learn a little about how they express their ideas. But—this is important—please keep in mind that **feedback should be framed non-evaluatively**. More specifically, there should be no corrections to spelling, grammar, or syntax, and no redlining of any kind.

Here are some ideas for non-evaluative feedback you might provide:

1. **Acknowledge receipt and show appreciation for having been granted access**
   - Thank you for sharing this with me.
   - I appreciate the time you took to write these thoughts.
   - I love your willingness to share more about yourself with me.
   - I read what you wrote. I'm glad you wrote it.

2. **Reinforce the student's connection to the identified value**
   - It sounds like you've nurtured a very supportive friend group.
   - Your sister is lucky to have such a fun and responsible caretaker.
   - I'm grateful you'll be playing for our team! Go wildcats!
   - I'm proud of you for standing up for what you believe.
   - Your accomplishments in elementary school really demonstrate your ability to work hard!
   - It's incredible to hear how much fun you had performing in the musical.
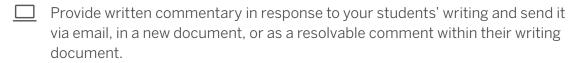
3. **Pose a question. Support and/or challenge the student further.**
   - How did it feel to express this?
   - How did your family or friends react to this situation?
   - I hope you continue doing this!
   - I am here to listen if at any time you want to try this activity again.
   - If you are looking for more resources or support, I have ideas for you.
   - I encourage you to continue to think about your values.
   - I challenge you to add on to your _____ story. I know there is more!
   - If you're up for it, add another value—I'd love to learn more!

Implementation Notes

Provide written commentary in response to your students' writing and send it via email, in a new document, or as a resolvable comment within their writing document.

Avoid marking up student writing. There should be no redlining of any kind. Write your comments below students' responses, or on a separate page.

In both synchronous and asynchronous settings, consider participating in this activity alongside your students! Students can read and respond to your writing while you read and respond to theirs.