

THREE INTERACTIONS

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OBJECTIVE //

- Introduce the Culture of Encounter by having participants interact at various levels, from surface-level to deeper sharing

TIME // 60-80 minutes

GROUP SIZE // 10-30 people

MATERIALS // A prize (optional)

INTERACTION 1: HUMAN KNOT (ICEBREAKER) (10-15 minutes)

1. Divide students into medium-sized groups of six to ten (6-10) people. Instruct the group to stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder, facing inwards.
2. Invite participants to reach their hands into the center of the circle and grab onto another hand.
3. When every hand has a partner, instruct participants to open their eyes.
4. Invite the groups to undo the knot their arms have created without letting go of any of the hands they are holding. They must twist, turn, and go over and under each others' arms without letting go of any hands along the way.
5. Once students return to the (initial) circle formation as best they can, the game is over. Announce the next interaction (debriefing as a group will occur at the end of the three activities).

INTERACTION 2: QUICK MEET-AND-GREET (15-20 minutes)

1. Invite students to position themselves in two circles: a small, inner circle and another slightly larger circle around it. Both circles should have the same number of people. Teenagers and adults may prefer to use chairs, but the activity can also work on the floor, especially for elementary students.
2. Instruct the inner circle to turn so that they are facing the outer circle (the outer circle remains facing inwards).

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3. Instruct each member of the outer circle to form a pair with the person standing across from them in the inner circle. Explain that it is not important who you are paired with at the beginning since everyone will have many different pairs over the course of the activity. Ensure that everyone is matched a starting pair.
4. Instruct participants that they will be given 30 seconds to find something in common with their partner. Explain that, in every instance, their commonality must be something other than what is obvious or common to the whole group (same school, same age, same class, both girls, on the same sports team, etc). Also explain that you will help participants by providing them with a category for each round.
5. Demonstrate how the activity works with one to two (1-2) participants. Explain: "if I was [insert name of student in the outer circle], and I was paired with [insert name of partner in the inner circle], and if the leader said, 'The category is sports,' we might have a conversation like this [begin talking to the inner circle partner]. 'What do you think of sports? I pretty much love everything except swimming. How about you?'" Allow the student to respond and have a dialogue until you find a commonality.
6. Encourage participants to take a genuine interest in the other person and ask questions to get to know them in a more profound way.
7. Announce the first category: "The first category is [insert category] – GO!"
8. After 30 seconds, announce "Time is up."
9. Explain to the inner circle that they get to rest for a moment.
10. Explain to the outer circle that each of them is going to rotate around the circle to form a new pair for the next round. Instruct them to move two people to the left of their former partner (not to the person directly beside their former partner). For small groups, you may wish to have the outer circle move just one person to the left. You can also play around with the rotations, saying, "move 3 people right and 1 left."
11. Call out the next category. Categories can include anything really that comes to mind.
For instance:
 - Board games, Vegetables you dislike, television shows, insects, hobbies/leisure activities, pets/animals, good movies, baked goods, siblings, restaurants, music, pizza, dream jobs, ice cream, holiday destinations, breakfast cereal, Christmas traditions, school break, seasons, trees

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- For a fun twist, try one round or the whole exercise where pairs have to make up their OWN categories (do provide them with categories that are off limits).
 - Please use your discretion regarding timing: some categories, particularly in the first rounds, will need a shorter time, while others will need a minute or more. Keep the atmosphere of 'speed dating' (quick conversations) while allowing the flexibility so participants can find commonalities.
12. Sample discussions around the circle continuously, ensuring the quality of discussion and commonalities are getting progressively deeper.
- For instance, in the first round, it is sufficient that both participants identify a shared Asian heritage. In the sixth round, however, we might discover that the pair both eat bibingka (a type of rice cake native to the Philippines) prepared by their aunts on Christmas Eve at their grandmother's house.
13. At the end, offer a prize to the first person who can tell you the names of three people that they met and what they had in common with each of them.

INTERACTION 3: TIME, PLACE, BEAUTY, CHOICE (20-30 minutes)

1. Explain that in this next activity, participants will pair up and have an extended conversation.
2. Invite the group to find a partner and head to a place in the room where they can be comfortable.
3. Once everyone has partnered up and is in place, explain that the pairs will use the next 20-30 minutes sharing with their partner/s in four areas: something about time, something about place, something about beauty and something about choice.
4. Invite students to repeat – **"Time, Place, Beauty, Choice"** – aloud with you.
5. Explain that, if time permits, everyone can switch partners and encounter with another student.
6. Read out the full set of prompts for each of the four areas:

(Alternatively, for the first round at least, you can read the instructions for time, then allow for discussion. Then read the prompts for place, then allow for discussion, etc..)

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PROMPTS

TIME Think of a time that was special. What is time? Are you aware of different ways of understanding time (outside of the Western culture or mentality)? What has been a particularly memorable 'time' for you? (eg. When I was 7... Last Christmas... This summer...)

PLACE Think of a place. What is place? We are in a 'place'. This 'place' is special. Many have been here before us. Many will be here after us. Now you are here, and you bless this place, as it blesses you. Think about a place that blessed you. The place itself was the blessing: a vacation, a summer camp, your home, a favourite reading spot.

What happened in this place you are thinking of? Who was part of it with you? What is it about the place that was so good for you?

BEAUTY Where have you seen beauty recently? (eg. A song? Someone did something for you? A flower on their walk? A friend's smile at your joke?). Maybe you saw beauty in an unexpected moment. Maybe you saw a nest of robin's eggs, by surprise. Maybe you saw a stranger help someone in a wheelchair cross the street.

Think of beauty a little differently than what we might normally think of beauty. When have you seen something beautiful?

CHOICE What is a choice you had to make (either recently or over the course of your life)? Why did you choose as you did? Are you glad you made this choice?

7. Before letting the pairs begin the encounter, explain to the group that they will be asked to share about those they encountered at the end of the activity.
8. Tell them: "You must listen well to your partner, because you are not to repeat the stories that were shared with you, because they are not your stories to share with the group. Rather, you'll need to tell us what you learned about that person: that they are courageous, insightful, funny, that they have integrity, or that you could go to them if you ever needed a book recommendation."

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9. Allow time for each pair to encounter. Circulate through the room to encourage and praise deep sharing, and to determine if you have time for the pairs to partner with someone else.
10. Pay attention to the clock so that your schedule remains on track but allow flexibility to prioritize a valuable encounter among participants. Consider giving extra leniency to the first group as they settle into opening themselves in this way.
11. Once the different pairs have had the time to share, gather everyone back together in one large circle.
12. Sample the group, and have a few participants identify the person they talked to and share the 1-3 things they learned about them with the group (Remind them not to share the others' stories, but what they themselves learned about their partner).

DEBRIEF //

(10-15 minutes)

Invite the group to think back to each of the three encounters they participated in (Human Knot, Brief meet-and-greet, and Time, Place, Beauty, Choice).

Ask them the following reflection questions and discuss:

- Which encounter was the most fun? Why?
- Which encounter was the most difficult? Why?
- Which encounter was easiest? Why?
- Which encounter require the most of you? How so?
- Which encounter helped you learn the most about someone else? What did you learn about them (remember, not their stories, but what you learned about them through their stories)?
- Which encounter will you remember the most? why was it memorable?
- Which encounter was the most life-giving? How so?

CONCLUSION //

Ask participants if they've heard of something called 'the Culture of Encounter' and who coined that term. Encourage those who know it to share what they know with the group. If no one is aware of the term, ask them to guess what it might be.

After various answers are generated, ask for a volunteer to read the following paragraph:

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"Pope Francis has spoken of a 'culture of encounter' as a common goal, encouraging people to be fearless in the ways they look beyond themselves to the needs of others. "Faith," he has said, "is an encounter with Jesus, and we must do what Jesus does: encounter others."

Christ is constantly reaching out to us. But an encounter only happens when that invitation is acknowledged and responded to. By encountering Christ, we can then encounter others. This means reaching out, building friendships beyond our circle and meeting people on the peripheries, the most poor and vulnerable, migrants and refugees.

While washing the feet of Muslim, Hindu and Christian refugees during Holy Thursday Mass, Pope Francis said, "We are children of the same God." He has travelled to the Italian island of Lampedusa, the Greek island of Lesbos and the USA-Mexico border, shining a spotlight on the human tragedy of forced migration."

(Source: journey.caritas.org/the-culture-of-encounter)

Invite participants to think about the experience they had in the activities, as well as the additional information that was read out. Ask the group, "How would you explain the Culture of Encounter to someone who has never heard of the term using your own words?" and get various participants to share their ideas.

If needed, summarize the text by discussing how Pope Francis is asking us not just to help others by providing food, shelter, water, etc. He's asking us to SEE them, to see Christ in them, to love them the way Christ did by meeting who they are as individuals. This requires we are open to those who have different perspectives, experiences, values than we do, and that we get to know those who are not necessarily like us. We are called to value them as sisters and brothers, and then to work together to make the world a better place, one encounter at a time.