

Setting the Tone to Make FoodCorps Time Special

Tone-setting is an essential part of teaching. How can we create an atmosphere that encourages students to collaborate and focus on learning while also having fun and enjoying the experience? There are tone-setting strategies that are valuable at the beginning of the school year (or the beginning of your time with a new group of students) and also tone-setting strategies that are useful to incorporate throughout every lesson. As these tone-setting practices become routine, you and your students will often fall into a rhythm, and they'll become second nature.

Setting the Tone: Checklist

Percentage of students eligible for free or

- ✓ When You First Meet a New Class
- ✓ Build authentic relationships with and among your students.
- ✓ Make time for name games and icebreakers.
- ✓ Develop Group Agreements.

Every time you lead a lesson, use consistent and fun routines to do the following:

- ✓ Open each lesson with students sitting in a circle, if possible.
- ✓ Build anticipation with a quick, fun cheer or song.
- ✓ Provide an opportunity for students to share.
- ✓ Review Group Agreements, if needed.
- ✓ Gather the group's attention between activities.

- ✓ Structure student participation in discussions.
- ✓ Plan transitions between lesson activities.
- ✓ Be prepared with Back Pocket Activities.
- ✓ End with an intentional closing activity that allows students to reflect on what they learned and how they worked together.

Setting the Tone When You First Meet a New Class

As mentioned in "Managing Student Behavior: The 4P's," developing authentic relationships, or rapport, with and among your students is essential to establishing a foundation of trust onto which learning can build. When you meet a new class, make time to focus on getting to know one another, and let the teachers you are working with know you'll be starting with that. A few fun ways to get to know your students and, when relevant, help them get to know one another, are to play name games and engage in icebreakers, such as those listed below.

Remember, knowing your students' names helps you build relationships with them and show them you care!

Fun Name Games

The following are games that can help you learn your students' names and, when relevant, help them learn each other's names. They are organized from the most low energy to the most high energy. Please remember that your students have unique and individual abilities,

and it will be important to adapt these activities to meet the needs of your students. Make sure you consider this before facilitating a specific activity, and consult with the classroom teacher if you need guidance/suggestions.

Low-Energy Name Games

Name Associations

- Suggested grade range: K–5
- Group size: Unlimited
- Time required: 5–15 minutes, depending on group size
- Materials: None
- Risk: Low

Everyone stands in a circle. Choose a topic such as vegetables, food, types of music, or colors. Each person introduces him or herself saying their name and their favorite food, for example, or what color they would be if they were a color.

Variation: Each person must repeat all the names of the people before them. At the end, the person who started must repeat all the names for the whole group.

Medium-Energy Name Games

Name Gestures

- Suggested grade range: K and up
- Group size: Unlimited
- Time required: 5–10 minutes, depending on group size
- Materials: None
- Risk: Medium

Everyone stands in a circle. Each person says his or her name and makes a gesture that expresses something about themselves, such as how they are feeling that day, a movement

they like, etc. The whole group then repeats the name and gesture.

Variation: The same can be done by making a sound instead of a movement.

Name Race

- Suggested grade range: K and up
- Group size: Unlimited
- Time required: 5–10 minutes
- Materials: Stopwatch
- Risk: Low

Everyone stands in a circle. The goal is for each person to say their name as quickly and clearly as possible, one by one. Time the group to see how long it takes to get all the way around the circle. Participants cannot say their names until the person next to them has said theirs. Ask the group if they think they can do it faster. Repeat until the shortest time is reached.

Variation: Do the same, but have each person say the name of the person to their left instead of their own name.

High-Energy Name Games

Peek-a-Who

- Suggested grade range: 4th and up
- Group size: 10–30
- Time required: 5–10 minutes
- Materials: 1 large bed sheet
- Risk: Medium

This is a fun quiz once students know each other's names. Ask for two volunteers to hold the sheet up, with one person on each side and the sheet hanging vertically between them like a curtain. Divide the remaining students into

two teams. Send each group to opposite sides of the sheet so that the groups cannot see each other. Direct each group to silently decide, and send one person up to the sheet. On your count of three, the people holding the sheet will drop it. Then the two people on either side have to shout out the other person's name. The first person to shout it out gets a point for their team.

Variation: Send more than one person to the sheet at a time.

Race Around the Circle

- Suggested grade range: K and up
- Group size: Unlimited
- Time required: 5–10 minutes
- Risk: Medium

Everyone stands in a circle. Ask for a volunteer to be “it.” They must walk around the outside of the circle and choose a person. Once they’ve chosen someone, both people must then introduce themselves and shake hands. Once they have both introduced themselves and shaken hands, they both try to run in opposite directions around the whole circle and get back to the original place before the other person. The person who did not get back quickly enough becomes “it,” and the game continues.

Variation: This can also be done with specific questions rather than introductions, like favorite food, vegetables, colors etc. Instead of running, try hopping, skipping, running backward, etc.

Names in the Air

- Suggested grade range: 4th and up
- Group size: Best in groups of 8-12

- Time required: 10 minutes
- Materials: 3 or more soft bean bags
- Risk: Medium

Everyone stands in a circle (or circle of their group). One person starts with the ball, says his or her name, passes it to the person on their right, and continues around until it reaches the first person. Then the facilitator passes it to a person across the circle saying, “Here you go _____.” That person catches the ball and says, “Thank you _____.” That person then chooses another person and repeats the pattern until each person has had a turn, and the ball is returned to the facilitator. Ask each person to remember who they received from and threw the ball to. Repeat this pattern and dialogue a few more times, making sure people are saying names clearly. Add a second, third, or fourth ball into the mix.

Variation: For less of a challenge (e.g., for younger students), use a large beach ball. Have students sit down and roll the ball between people instead of tossing. For a greater challenge, use tennis balls instead of bean bags.

Icebreakers

The following are all games that can help you and your students “break the ice” and start interacting. Some icebreakers will focus on helping you and your students learn about one another, while others are just about building a sense of teamwork by accomplishing a shared task. The following icebreakers are organized from the most low key to the most high energy.

Low-Key Icebreakers

Sharp Eyes

- Suggested grade range: 4th and up

- Group size: Unlimited, even number preferable
- Time required: 5–10 minutes
- Materials: None
- Risk: High

Ask each person to find a partner. Ask each pair to examine each other's appearance carefully for a few seconds. When they feel that they have studied all the details, ask them to turn around and change three things about their own appearance. Emphasize subtlety (unbutton a sleeve, untie a shoe, move a ring to another finger, etc.). When everyone has changed their three things, invite them to turn toward their partner, and identify the three ways they have changed their appearance.

Wrap-up: Ask, When, in life, is it important that we notice subtle details?

Hula-Hoop Pass

- Suggested grade range: 3rd and up
- Group size: At least 5–unlimited
- Time required: 5 minutes
- Materials: Hula-Hoop (if the group is large, two or more Hula-Hoops)
- Risk: Medium

Stand in a circle holding hands. Put a Hula-Hoop between two clasped hands, and pass it around the circle by maneuvering but never letting go of hands (participants will step through it). Keep time to see how fast the group can complete it. Repeat to see if the hoop can be passed around the circle faster.

Variation: Try passing two Hula-Hoops around the circle.

Pull-Up Game

- Suggested grade range: 5th and up
- Group size: Unlimited, even numbers
- Time required: 5 minutes
- Materials: None
- Risk: Medium-high

Ask everyone to find a partner. Sit on the ground facing your partner with your toes touching. Hold each other's hands, and try to pull each other up to standing. Variation: Once pairs have pulled each other up, do this activity in groups of three or four. How many people can you add to successfully pull the whole group to standing?

Wrap-up: Ask, What were techniques that helped make each group successful? Can we use these lessons in any other part of our work or lives?

Medium-Energy Icebreakers

Zip, Zam, Boing

- Suggested grade range: 5th and up
- Group size: 5–15
- Time required: 5 minutes
- Materials: None
- Risk: Low

Stand in a circle, and pass an invisible object around the circle. Students say "Zip" to pass the object to the right or left, "Zam" to pass it to someone across the circle, and "Boing" reflects it back to the person who passed it.

Where the Wind Blows

- Suggested grade range: 4th and up
- Group size: Unlimited
- Time required: 10–15 minutes

- Materials: A place marker (such as an index card or wood chip) for one less than the number of students; a cup full of little statements that might be true for many of your students like, "Has brothers or sisters," or "Speaks two languages," etc.
- Risk: Low-medium

Ask for a volunteer to begin in the middle and everyone else to stand at a marked spot. The person in the middle will either choose a question from the hat or make up their own question beginning with, "The wind blows for me and all those who . . ." If the statement is true for any participant, they must run across the circle and find a new place to stand. If they are left without a new spot, they become the person in the middle.

Birdie Wants a Perch

- Suggested grade range: 4th and up
- Group size: Unlimited
- Time required: 10 minutes
- Materials: None
- Risk: Low

Have everyone stand in a circle with one person in the middle. The person in the middle approaches various people around the circle saying, "Birdie wants a perch," and the person they asked must respond with, "Go ask my neighbor." The person in the middle then goes and asks a new person. While this is happening, other people in the circle must make eye contact and try to switch places with other members of the circle. If the person in the middle notices a blank spot in the circle, they take it, leaving a new person in the middle. This person becomes the new "birdie" looking for a perch.

Earth, Eyes

- Suggested grade range: 3rd and up
- Group size: 5–12 Time required: 5–10 minutes
- Materials: None
- Risk: Low-medium

Stand with everyone in a circle facing each other. When the caller says, "Earth," everyone looks down at the ground. When the caller says, "Eyes," everyone must instantly choose a person and look them in the eye. If two people happen to look each other in the eyes, they must switch places in the circle. Play multiple rounds. End with some speed rounds—the caller speeds up the time in between each round.

Balloon Relay Race

- Suggested grade range: 4th and up
- Group size: Unlimited
- Time required: 10–15 minutes
- Materials: Balloons in different colors, one balloon for each person; yarn or chalk to draw a start and finish line Risk: Low-medium

Draw a start and finish line about 50 feet apart. Pass out balloons, and ask participants to find others with the same color balloon to form a team. Ask participants to blow up their balloons but to not tie them off. Instead, have them hold the end. One person from each team will begin at the starting line, pointing their balloon in the direction of the finish line, and let it go. The next person on their team will go to where the balloon landed and let their balloon go. The process continues until everyone has released their balloons. The team closest to the finish line wins.

Variation: Keep going with blowing up and releasing balloons until each team reaches the finish line. Or play without teams—each person blows, releases, blows, releases, etc.

Wrap-up: Ask, Was there a technique that worked best? How did you feel when you had no control over your balloon? How did you work as a team and encourage your teammates?

High-Energy Icebreakers

Blob Tag

- Suggested grade range: 2nd and up
- Group size: 15–unlimited
- Time required: 10–15 minutes
- Materials: None
- Risk: Low-medium

Designate the boundaries of a playing area. Ask for a volunteer to be “it.” If ‘it’ tags anyone, they link arms and become an extension of ‘it.’ Continue playing until everyone is in the “blob.”

Variation: Break the blobs into smaller blobs when they have six or more people attached.

Lighthouse

- Suggested grade range: 3rd–5th
- Group size: 5–10
- Time required: 5–10 minutes
- Materials: Blindfold
- Risk: High

Designate an area to be a bay of water. Ask for a volunteer to be blindfolded. They are the “ship.” Ask for another volunteer to be the “lighthouse,” or guide. While the ship puts on the blindfold, ask everyone else to make themselves into a silent obstacle in the bay— bridges, logs,

rocks, etc. Situate the ship at one end of the bay and the lighthouse at the opposite end. The lighthouse must then verbally guide the ship to the other side of the bay without hitting the obstacles.

Variation: If the ship hits an obstacle and “sinks,” choose or ask for another volunteer to be the ship, and begin again, rearranging the obstacles.

Wrap-up: Ask, How did it feel to be the ship? What did the ship have to do to stay afloat? How did it feel to be the lighthouse?

Bee Race

- Suggested grade range: 4th and up
- Group size: Unlimited, broken into groups of 3–4
- Time required: 5–10 minutes
- Materials: 2–3 large pieces of paper for each group
- Risk: Medium-high

Split the group into teams of three-to-four people, with each group having equal numbers of people. Create a wide area that each group must cross. Tell students that they are bees. Give each group their “wings” (two pieces of paper for groups of three, three pieces for groups of four). Tell the group that their job is to get everyone to fly across this area without touching the ground so that they can deliver pollen and nectar to make honey in their home. If someone touches the ground, they must begin again from the start. The groups can race against each other.

My Biggest Fan—Rocks, Paper, Scissors

- Suggested grade range: 5th and up
- Group size: Unlimited (the bigger the better)

- Time required: 5–10 minutes
- Materials: None
- Risk: Low

This icebreaker is energizing and extremely loud! Choose your setting accordingly. Invite students to get in a circle. Stand in the middle of the circle, and give the directions. Ask if everyone is familiar with “rocks, paper, scissors” and then give a quick refresher—rocks wins over scissors, scissors wins over paper, and paper wins over rocks. Tell participants that, immediately following the directions, they will be asked to line up in two rows facing each other. They will have the opportunity to play a “best-of-one” round with the person facing them. The winner will go on to play another winner. The person who is not the winner gets to be the winner’s “biggest fan” and gets behind them and cheers them on as they play the next

person. Model this with someone. The winner of that round will go on to find the winner of another pair and play again. As people move through the rounds, they gather more and more fans from previous rounds. By the end of the game, there will be two people playing against each other, and the rest of the participants cheering for one of them. Explain that each time someone wins, they get all those “biggest fans” to cheer them on until finally there should be two students with huge “fans” behind them getting increasingly loud until there’s one final winner! Then invite them to line up in two long lines with their partner on either side of you. Say, “Ready, set, GO!” and once this is in motion, as the facilitator, keep encouraging students to root on their partner and get hyped up!

Recommended Resources

- Playworks’ Game Library

