


THE EDIBLE  
SCHOOLYARD  
PROJECT



MINDSETS FOR OPEN DISCUSSIONS  
[A TEACHER PREPARATORY LESSON]



**Summary:** This lesson is designed for you, the teacher, to explore a variety of mindsets that can support you in building an open, supportive, inclusive, and rigorous classroom community. In this lesson, we ask you to review suggested mindsets and reflect on what comes up for you. We then suggest ways you might bring these mindsets to your students and provide a lesson plan for tone-setting in your classrooms. These tools can help build a classroom culture that supports open discussion.



**Teacher Notes:**

- This resource is from the Edible Schoolyard Project’s [Understanding Organic](#) curriculum and is part of the preparatory resources of the curriculum.

**READ:** The creation of an open, supportive, and challenging classroom space allows for deeper learning, discussion, and reflection as a class. For open discussions and inquiries to flourish, the environment must foster trust and care. For us at the Edible Schoolyard Project, “open discussions” are non-hierarchical and learner-centered. They welcome critical engagement, possibility, and surprises. They reflect:

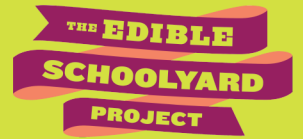
- A prioritization of learning through peer exchange.
- A commitment to student voice and acknowledgment of student’s lived experience, opinions, and ideas.
- A teaching approach that emphasizes guiding the discussion rather than asserting authority.

You, as the teacher, play an essential role in building a learning environment that supports open discussions. Mindsets (how you think about something) impact how you approach the classroom environment and the practices you employ. For more resources on open discussions check out our tips for [Facilitating Open Discussions](#) document.



# MINDSETS FOR OPEN DISCUSSIONS

[A TEACHER PREPATORY LESSON]



**Name:**

**REFLECT:** Take time to answer a few questions that allow you to reflect on your experience leading discussions.

- What has been your experience facilitating open discussions?
- What feels challenging about leading open discussions? What are barriers for you?

*Use this space to jot down reflections*

**READ:** Take some time to read through the classroom mindset suggestions. Use the [Talk to the Text](#) strategy to take notes in the margins on your reactions, connections, emotions, and questions as you read. We offer these mindsets as important frames to ground your approach in anti-oppressive pedagogical practices that foster care, critique, and exploration.



# CLASSROOM MINDSETS

## Classroom Mindsets

### **Brave Learning**

A brave learning mindset sees discomfort as an important step in the learning process. When we are exposed to something that challenges our previous beliefs, it can bring up strong emotions and reactions. Instead of seeking to avoid those emotions and reactions in class, we accept them as part of the process and learn to navigate them with respect and kindness.

### **Mindful participation**

A mindful participation mindset is one that is aware of speaking time in the classroom. Each person has something unique to bring to the learning space, so it is important to do what we can to create the space for everyone to share. Mindful participation in discussion is based on your ability to listen to, respond to and leave room for others, as well as your ability to contribute relevant thoughts and experiences to the discussion.

### **Loving accountability**

A loving accountability mindset recognizes the importance of addressing harm in the classroom when it comes up as a part of community care. Everyone is capable of hurting someone, whether intentionally or not, and we should acknowledge harm caused, and the impact our words and actions can have. This also means that we have a responsibility to address when we notice that someone has done harm, and to do so in a way that focuses on growth, learning, and repair, rather than punishment. Learn more by checking out these resources on [Restorative Justice](#), [Talking Circles](#), and [Transformative Justice](#).

### **Situated Interaction**

The classroom does not exist in a vacuum. Systemic forces such as racism, heterosexism, ableism, and classism (to name a few) are built into our laws, norms, services, and interactions. Each of us has a unique relationship to those forces. Some of us are told in many areas of our lives that our experiences and voices are important, and some of us are repeatedly silenced and marginalized. We bring these embedded understandings to the classroom, and they can impact our discussions, our learning, and our feelings of belonging. As a class, we should have a situated understanding of our engagement where we recognize how our backgrounds and relationships to power impact our classroom experiences, and actively work to combat power imbalances by centering marginalized perspectives whenever possible. Read more about situated experiences with this resource on [Positionality](#) and check out the [Social Identity Wheel](#), a useful tool for thinking through the identities we bring to the classroom.

## Classroom Mindsets Continued

### Respectful Speech

A respectful speech mindset means doing our best to use language that respects all identities and experiences. For most of us, it is a struggle to recognize our false assumptions and our hurtful behavior. Most people occasionally say something that is influenced by the biases and stereotypes of a society that does not treat every person equally. Learning to be more inclusive and/or more humble in our statements is a process, and many of us do not have language that can appropriately describe everything we want to talk about. As a class, we can commit to helping each other to grow our vocabularies and understandings with patience and accountability.

### Focused Critique

A focused critique mindset embraces critique and disagreement with ideas, statements, etc., but not a critique of a person's character. It is much easier to feel open to changing a belief when it is not tied to your character. For example, we can say, "I think what you just said is sexist, because..." and not: "You are sexist." It's important to approach a focused critique mindset with an optimistic orientation. This involves the choice to have an encouraging and open attitude towards each other and the texts we engage with, without compromising honesty or criticality. Critiquing a perspective can be necessary, but it should be done with positive intention and care. Imperfect perspectives can often contain learning opportunities. There are, however, instances when real harm occurs, and that should always be addressed.

**REFLECT:** Take some time to reflect on what you read. Consider the following questions:

- What stood out to you when reading the mindsets?
- Which of the mindsets feel particularly inspiring or useful?
- Where do you notice discomfort, hang-ups, or questions arising?

*Use this space to jot down reflections*

## Applying the Mindsets

Now that you have read through the mindsets, how might you engage them to build a strong and supportive classroom culture? First, it's important that you as the teacher continue to reflect and challenge your own biases and assumptions. Where and how might they arise in open discussion? Where do they come from, and what is needed to lessen their impact on your work as a facilitator? Hold space for processing your own experiences along with the students'. While there is no exact formula, there are a wealth of resources and potential instructional practices you can employ to better facilitate open discussions in your classroom. See our [Tips for Facilitating Open Discussions](#) for more.

In order to establish a feeling of trust and community in your classroom, it can also be helpful to generate shared agreements at the outset of your time together. See our [Agreement Setting](#) Lesson for instructional practices and processes for establishing agreements and upholding mindsets. These shared agreements set the stage for the expectations that you can have for each other and can act as a contract to return to when necessary. By making agreements as a class, each person can share what they need in order to thrive in your classroom community and can learn what it takes to participate in that community with others. You may choose to introduce one or more of the mindsets above during the community agreement process. Have students discuss what the mindset means to them, and what it might look like in practice.

As educators and curriculum designers, we believe it's important to employ ongoing reflection and understand that there are always ways we can learn and improve. Make time for yourself to periodically reflect on your work and growth as a facilitator. It can be helpful to set concrete goals: *Practice summarizing the main points of a discussion without asking a follow-up question in order to leave space for students to follow-up themselves or ask more critical thinking questions to prompt deeper student thought.* Similarly, make time to support students in reflecting on the community agreements over time. See the "Ongoing Practices" section in the [Agreement Setting](#) resource for more ideas on how to do this. Finally, on our end, this document reflects our best thinking up to this point. As we learn and grow, we will continue to refine and update this resource

## References

\*Mindsets were adapted from Guidelines for Discussion, (2020). Adapted by Jacqueline Simmons from an original post on Women's Studies Listserv (WMSTL), ca. 2002

## Resource List:

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