



Fannie Lou Hamer  
Freedom High School  
Bronx, NY



# [Snapshot]

**School:** Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School

**Borough:** Bronx, NY

**Authors:** **Katie Simanovich**, Teachers Unite Social Work Intern (written in Spring, 2015) and **José Alfaro**, founding Fannie Lou staff member and retired school social worker (written in Spring, 2014)



**Grade Levels:** 9-12

**District** 12

**Number of Students** 493

**Scanning?** No

**% Title 1:** 100% free/reduced lunch

## **Students**

Ethnicity:

69% Hispanic, 28% Black, 2% White, 0% Asian/Pacific Islander

***For more resources from Fannie Lou,  
visit their student-created website:  
[RestorativePracticesFLH.weebly.com](http://RestorativePracticesFLH.weebly.com)***

# [Testimonials]

**School:** Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School

**Borough:** Bronx, NY

**Author:** Katie Simanovich, Teachers Unite Social Work Intern / Spring, 2015



What does restorative mean to you?

***“It’s like a PlayStation when it’s loading, it takes time, but eventually it’s going to get there.”*** -11<sup>th</sup> grade student

This year at Fannie Lou Hamer High School, I worked closely with a teacher and students on confronting the question, how do we increase Restorative Justice Practices at the school? What comes first? We agreed that establishing a Restorative Justice Team at the school would help institutionalize circle practices that would build community and decrease suspension rates or punitive discipline. Questions we considered at the beginning of the school year were:

- 1) What's already in place at Fannie Lou (a strengths assessment) related to circles and restorative justice?
- 2) Where do you want to be in a year from now (goals around creating a R&J team, student-led committee, etc)?
- 3) What are the next steps, including who is involved (teachers, students, and staff)?

Three aspects around increasing R&J at Fannie Lou that we established were:

- 1) gaining support from administration and other teachers,
- 2) increasing community building circles in advisories through institutionalizing circle practices as something consistent,

- 3) and establishing an RJ action team composed of teachers, staff, and students.

In the fall 2014, we did a lot of planning and strategizing on how to implement circles school wide. Who do we involve? How do we institutionalize circles? How can we transform school culture at Fannie Lou into a more loving and caring community?

We discussed student leadership and what it would look like for students to lead this movement in the school. Starting in the Spring 2015, Rosemary, a 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, created a Restorative Justice class composed of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students that would learn about Restorative Justice practices and learn how to facilitate circles with other students and teachers.

The students attended a circle training with members from Lyons Community school in Brooklyn where we met in a circle at NYU to exchange ideas. After this dialogue, students were inspired to implement ideas used at Lyons at Fannie Lou, including establishing a Justice Panel that would address conflicts and establish RJ at a Tier 2 level. The Justice Panel became the first attempt at considering Tier 2 Restorative Justice practices at Fannie Lou. The importance of this training was that it jumpstarted student leadership in an authentic way that was empowering for everyone. The circle questions from the training were: 1) Why restorative? 2) What role do circles play? 3) What does restorative mean to you? What kind of leadership opportunities do you want to take on or have at Fannie Lou? I think these questions can provide some guidance to peer-to-peer exchange between students across school communities around RJ practices.

While students considered creating a Justice Panel at Fannie Lou as a part of the Restorative Justice Class, the students also began to go into 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade advisories to facilitate community building circles once a week.

In conclusion, students at Fannie Lou have been persistent in creating circles, implementing circles, facilitating circles, engaging in conflict resolution aside from punitive punishment, and have grown as individuals. The class has really emphasized socio-emotional growth on personal and community levels and to me recognizes the power of authentic relationship building when considering RJ on multiple levels.

Throughout this process, I have been in deep reflection of:

- 1) What true, authentic implementation of Restorative Justice practices looks like in schools,
- 2) What student leadership looks like in implementing these practices that simultaneously establishes relationships of growth and accountability between students, teachers, and staff, and

- 3) What is needed to create sustainable, effective change that is rooted in deep relationships between students, teachers, and staff that is truly restoring justice on individual and school-wide levels.

With these questions in mind, I have worked with students in creating a Tier I Restorative Justice Community Building Circles curriculum that can be easily implemented and facilitated by students, staff, or teachers. In the Restorative Justice Class at Fannie, I worked with students to create various circle topics, questions, and activities that the students discussed and implemented themselves. In summary, this curriculum provides just a framework of community building circles and activities that can be revised according to various groups and school-settings. I actually encourage people to revise the activities and questions in relation to the group. These are just examples to inspire creativity and ideas. Each group is different and rather than encouraging rigidity and establishing “rules”, I think the space should be open to transformation.

The purpose is to provide guidance in what authentic student leadership can look like through concrete Restorative Justice tools that can be effective in building community in a sustainable way. One of the unique and valuable part of this toolkit is that students almost exclusively developed all the questions/activities found in the kit on their own or in conversation with me based on their experiences.

A) Goals:

- 1) To inspire and invoke a caring school community of understanding and shared listening between students, teachers, and staff.
- 2) To create a transformative, democratic learning environment where students, teachers, and staff feel safe to voice thoughts, feelings, or attitudes around difficult conversations.
- 3) To create a climate of openness and critical consciousness.
- 4) To provide a socio-emotional Restorative Justice Circle Curriculum that students, teachers, and staff can implement and facilitate in advisories or group settings.

B) It is important to recognize systems of oppression on interpersonal and systemic levels in implementing restorative justice circles within school environments. Student leadership and authentic relationships between teachers, staff, and students could eliminate power dynamics and create a growth that looks beyond our perceived narratives that are constructed by our social identities. How can circles restore justice within ourselves in a community and in relation with others? The circle topics can breakdown erroneous assumptions between people and create space to establish loving relationships that recognizes our humanity, in the midst of inequality, oppression, and discrimination. How can circles and

difficult conversations recognize differences, while nourishing dialogue that inspires growth between people?

- C) I believe the strengths of this tool kit is that the content could create space for validation, collaboration, and restoration for students, teachers, and staff in school communities. As aforementioned, the circle questions and modeled sessions provide a framework to a plethora of ideas and creations. I encourage people to find strengths and transformation in ways that is authentic and true to them and group members. The questions can be changed, revised, and built upon to continue the conversation in the context of individual school communities across various groups.
  
- D) Depending on the time of the session, class, or advisory determines the length of each circle session. Many questions are provided so that facilitators can choose which questions or activities to use in accordance to amount of time and type of group. Sometimes only choosing one question per topic is productive and leads to additional questions. *Strive for intensity so there is greater intimacy.*
  
- E) I believe that grassroots, school based empowerment is building loving communities through authentic relationships. I think this is the start to creating transformation within schools that addresses the injustices of the larger structures we live in. How can we as individuals in schools, as students, teachers, social workers, deans, and parents practice self-transformation in love and self-respect with others? How can we deconstruct stereotypes and assumptions based on our social identities in schools that can birth learning environments that establish justice, equality and critical engagement for everyone? How can we have difficult conversations together on racism, sexism, classism, and inequality that furnish individual growth that can simultaneously transform the oppressive systems to which we are confined? How can we reimagine education and what it means to academically achieve? How can we restore justice within ourselves and restore justice on systemic levels?

I believe this toolkit is just a snapshot of what can be used in school communities to begin embracing change and imagining an alternative that is founded in justice and love rather than indifference and violence. To me, this is the core of the work that organizations such as Teachers Unite are pursuing and what many school communities are embracing through restorative justice practices.

# [Testimonial]

**School:** Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School

**Borough:** Bronx, NY

**Author:** José Alfaro, founding Fannie Lou staff member and retired school social worker / Spring, 2014



Fannie Lou Hamer is a small public high school located in the South Bronx. It was founded in 1994 by a group of teachers, most of whom had worked in small, progressive schools. There were two basic principles we adhered to then and that continue to be the focal point of our work: first, the use of portfolios (demonstrating critical thinking skills) as the principal manner of evaluating a student's progress and second, building a strong relationship between a small group of students and their advisor.

When we began we found that a large number of our students had poor academic skills. For many regardless of their skills, discouragement deriving from their previous educational experiences appeared to play a role in their lack of motivation. While some just zoned out, others acted out and were experts at disrupting their classes. Their impulsiveness caused them to turn on their teachers and sometimes on their fellow students.

To handle these conflicts we developed a strong peer mediation program. In our second year we were fortunate to train a small group of students whose intuitive skills and maturity made them excellent mediators. For a number of years, the combination of our strong academic program, our mediation program, a strong counseling staff, and the arrival of a strong assistant principal kept the disruptions and violence at a level below that of schools with similar demographics.

Yet there remained a frustration at what some staff considered to be an over reliance on suspensions and we continued to seek alternative methods of managing inappropriate behavior. Aware that miracle programs come and go in the DOE there was a hesitation to embark on another journey to address the behavioral issues. Still, a few of us were

trained in Restorative Justice principles and Circles (RJC) and wondered how this could work at FLH.

Initially, a group of counselors, a dean, a few teachers and a staff member of our collaborating community agency began to discuss RJC principles and their relevance for the FLH community. At the time we were reluctant to present our ideas to the entire staff because of the demands of the academic programs that staff were already committed to. In January of 2013, eight FLH staff went to a conference on RJC organized by Teachers Unite. Excited by the possibilities, we followed up by visiting other schools to witness how they handled their behavioral issues. Returning with new ideas we began to envision alternative approaches to school discipline at FLH. Late in the school year we decided to start with one of our counselors going into advisories (family groups) to lead circles on a variety of topics. We chose our 12<sup>th</sup> grade advisories because staff complained of many 12<sup>th</sup> graders acting out and because some of these teachers had previously expressed an interest in circles. While the success of the circles varied, all the participating teachers remarked that they needed to continue these types of discussions to build community in their advisories. Building on the success of these circles we slowly expanded to other grade levels. We also facilitated a circle for office staff and one for a small group of parents and students.

During this period, the small group of staff committed to RJC continued to meet weekly, even inviting students and parents to participate. Our successes led to an increasing number of staff becoming interested in RJC; next year we are planning to extend our program to more advisories. We are also looking at other ways that RJC can be used in our school, particularly in supporting students in academic and behavioral difficulties, as an alternative to suspensions, as well as developing a student court using RJC principles. We are also considering proposing the use of circles within academic classes and family conferences.

While we are in the initial stages of RJC, those involved in the process are anxious to see how RJC can play a role in building the school community (including parents), increasing student accountability with one another, and enabling us to reduce suspensions and inappropriate behavior. Towards this goal a group of our staff are taking RJC training in the summer. With these additional resources we plan to train increasing numbers of students in the RJC approach and to integrate it into our mediation program.

While we do not consider our approach to be a blueprint for other schools, we do think that some key factors in our success were having a group of staff that continues to take the initiative around RJC ideas, and the patient introduction of circles to a small sample of teachers and their advisories as a prototype from which we continue to draw important lessons in order to



expand our vision.

### **Proposal for School to Plan a Restorative Justice Rollout**

*I prepared this document to be presented at an upcoming staff meeting (in Spring 2014) because I think it's very important that we go into this summer and next year with a plan that's as fully-developed as possible. The plan is divided into sections and hopefully each section paves the way for discussion of the next section. This is a working document, which will be revised and reworked. It is intended to introduce the idea of Restorative Practices and start conversation around how to implement RP in our school.*

#### The Significance of Social-Emotional Learning and Restorative Practices

What is social emotional learning and why is its important? How do Restorative Practices, like Circle Process and Restorative Justice protocol, enable social-emotional learning, strengthening both the community and the learning process?

There's a saying that you don't have to be a therapist to be therapeutic. Our staff is therapeutic every day in the way they listen to students, respond non-judgmentally when appropriate, and are present for students needing emotional support. We have small classes, an advisory system, and we build relationships with students. This is fitting with Nancy Riestenberg's, (author of *Circle in the Square*) belief that "...learning happens best in the context of good relationships; adults must be intentional about teaching relationship skills..."

Kay Pranis and Watson write in *Heart of Hope* that "Circles can be a practical way to address the emotional and developmental needs that support healthy behavior for all youth..." so that they can "recognize the genuine obstacles that have impeded their growth, and then learn skills to manage those obstacles that will continue to challenge them in the future." They go on to discuss why students make poor choices:

We believe...it is because the behavior they choose reflects an emotionally compelling logic. Despite the objectively self-defeating consequences of their choices, at risk-behavior is often a meaningful effort to meet legitimate psychological and developmental needs.  
(Pranis and Watson)

According to Riestenberg, "The restorative conference and Circle processes offer a time and space for everyone affected by any kind of harm to practice empathy-that essential element that helps people treat each other with care." Research indicates that SEL (often called emotional literacy) can be helpful in improving attendance, academics, respectfulness and behavior within a school. Riestenberg, commenting on a US Department of

Education report on improving school safety in the early 2000's says that the report points out that, "People with strong, positive relationships listen to each other. They care about each other and feel cared for. They are less likely to hurt each other."

### How can we strengthen Social-Emotional Learning?

The advisory system is probably the best place to engage in SEL using RP (Restorative Practices) and other SEL approaches, though it's not the only place. A goal of advisors is to develop both an intellectual and emotional bond with the advisees. Unfortunately in some schools with an advisory, family group, or similar grouping, too often this group is limited to solely academic guidance. SEL asks staff to go beyond academic conversations and try strategies that encourage everyone in the advisory to build trust with one another. Circles can be a key approach to building the honesty and trust of the advisory group. Cooperative games and trust-building activities are a more physically active approach that can be used within advisories as well as within the rest of the school day.

In order to initiate a program of SEL and RP throughout as much of the school as possible, we have to consider the following issues. We also have to consider the concerns and obstacles that we envision?

#### **I. What can we learn from our experiences this year?**

- What do staff who used circles in their advisories say about the process?
- What, if anything, have we learned from using a restorative process in responding to student behavior?
- What, if anything, have we learned from using a restorative justice process in responding to long-term suspensions?
- What does the La Casa experience, though limited in duration, have to offer us?
- Might a survey of staff and students be helpful in gaining insight into ideas and concerns about SEL and the circles done this year?

#### **II. Staff Training**

- Arrange visits in June to other schools that are utilizing restorative practices and other methods of approaching SEL learning for staff and students to discuss how they use these approaches.
- The DOE is offering training over the summer and teaching staff should be encouraged to register, but this has to happen ASAP. The training is generally a week-long and trainees are paid. Unfortunately, "non-professional" staff are not allowed to attend the training, which I think is a serious mistake.

- Form a committee to meet in the summer to review and expand the advisory curriculum to address issues of emotional literacy and restorative practices.
- At the staff retreat prior to school beginning, set aside an adequate amount of time to discuss SEL and other SEL practices and to practice these approaches.
  - Watch relevant parts of Teachers Unite’s film as part of the orientation.
- Staff discussion on how we might use restorative justice to respond to Tier 2 and Tier 3 behavior and heal the community.
- Designate time throughout the school year to discuss the use of SEL practice at various staff meetings.

### III. **Curriculum Preparation**

- A team of staff meet to review the advisory curriculum over the summer and plan the integration of SEL approaches into the curriculum.

### IV. **Student Training - Division II Class**

- A Division II teacher teaches a semester-long class on SEL, RP, and other similar approaches for 11th and 12th grade students who have been recommended by their advisors. New 11th graders would be recommended for the class by their DI teachers.
- Enrolled students would be utilized as mediators, mentors and circle leaders and assigned to a Division I advisory as part of the class requirement.
- Students would meet with staff and students from other schools who are engaged in similar practices.
- Common period be utilized to train a small number of DI students as circle leaders.
- New enrollees/transfers and their parents would be oriented to the school using circles.

### V. **Advisory**

- Staff use one advisory per week for circles and other SEL approaches, and when appropriate utilize circles for other discussions.
- When appropriate, staff uses circles for discussions in advisory about academic topics covered in advisory.
- Utilize the 100% Respect program or a similar program to discuss and develop school guidelines.

### VI. **Other Stakeholders**

- Teach paraprofessional staff and school aides restorative approaches.

- Inform parents as to our use of restorative practices and circles in the initial orientation meeting and in subsequent PTA meetings.
- Train Social Work Interns immediately to become co-circle facilitators

#### VII. **Whole School Approach to Restorative Practices**

- Consider when to use RJ and who will be the participants.
- Interested staff, parents, and recommended students participate in school-wide RP Team
  - Develop a small committee of staff to consider appropriate activities, equipment needed, and purchase and/or construction of equipment
- Ask teachers to volunteer to utilize circle practice in academic classes in a variety of ways.
- Ask counselors to utilize RP when appropriate

#### VIII. **Program Evaluation**

- It is said that it can take 4 - 5 years to change the culture of a school when implementing restorative practices. What are the different ways we can measure our progress?
  1. Anecdotally
    - Does staff feel that students are taking increasing responsibility for their behavior?
    - Are advisory and class conversations more respectful and thoughtful?
    - Regularly get feedback from students about their feelings about the restorative practices approach
  2. Statistically
    - Are principal suspensions decreasing?
    - Are superintendent suspensions decreasing?
    - Has attendance improved?
  3. Develop an SEL committee that meets regularly to evaluate the work and provide guidance for the larger school community
    - Meets on a consistent basis
    - Prepares material for advisory circles
    - Investigates other forms of SEL approaches
    - Facilitates RP meetings and prepares agenda

# [Tools]



### **Components of each session:**

- Opening Circle: check-in
- Activity/icebreaker
- Large Circle: Community Building Circle Topic
- Closing Circle (meditation, reflection question, activity)

### **A Few Notes:**

\* Select an icebreaker/activity and a circle topic for each session

\*\* The **opening circle** could be brief:

1. How was your weekend?
2. How are you feeling in one word?
3. How is your day?

\*\*\* The **activities** could be used as a circle for the entire session. Some activities require more time than others, but could be shortened according to time.

\*\*\*\* **Closing Circle** also brief:

1. Where do you find hope?
2. What's one thing you are looking forward to?
3. One word to describe today's circle for you?
4. What did you learn?

### **Facilitating Your Circle: Preparation for Facilitator**

Who is a part of your circle?

What is your talking piece?

What would you do if someone cries?

How would you want people to respond to you if you were crying in a circle?

How do you stay emotionally present?

## **General Guidelines for a Circle**

- Respect the talking piece as it goes around in a circle and the circle keeper may suspend the circle when she/he feels it's appropriate.
- Breathe when you disagree and consider what part of disagree you agree with.
- Advocate your position without imposition.
- Speak and listen from your heart, you're the expert of your experience.
- You can pass, but please challenge yourself to participate because we want to hear from you.
- A circle is the beginning of a conversation; play a role in keeping it going.
- Trust the process

## Circle Topic Ideas

Love  
Empathy  
Parents  
Intimate relationships/partner  
College  
Drugs  
Sexuality  
Body image/beauty  
Health  
Best friends/friendships  
Technology  
Religion  
Poetry/art  
Trust  
History  
Money/social class  
Advice  
Career/work  
Humanity

## Activities

### **1) Toilet Paper Activity**

What you need: One roll of toilet paper

Pass around a roll of toilet paper and ask everyone to take some toilet paper. People can take as much or as little toilet paper as they want. For each sheet of toilet paper, each person tells the group one thing about themselves.

### **2) Balloon Activity**

What you need: packets of balloons, one balloon per person

Everyone stands in a circle and takes a balloon. Everyone is asked to blow up their balloon. The facilitator draws a smiley face on one balloon. Someone is selected to be the first narrator who stands in the middle and narrates a story using the words “right” and “left”. Each time the narrator says “right”, everyone in the outer circle passes their balloon to the person to the right of them. Each time the narrator says “left” everyone passes their balloon to the person to the left of them. The person who ends up with the smiley face balloon at the end of the story is the next narrator.



### **3) Meet Me Halfway**

What do you need: place a piece of tape across the floor about 10 feet long, depending on the number of participants. You can also use other identifiers to represent a line or division.

Divide the group into two groups. The facilitator asks a series of questions beginning with “Walk to the line if...” Each person that identifies with the statement meets at the line. The activity is done in silence. Each person stands on the line for three seconds and then walks back to their side.

Example statements: Walk to the line...

1. If you know every ones name in this group
2. If you think you are doing well this semester
3. If you wish you could be closer to someone in the group
4. If you think you can do better in school
5. If you think we could go deeper in the circles
6. If you dislike school
7. If you really enjoy being at school
8. If you feel like you don't have anyone to talk to about your problems
9. If you would like someone to talk to
10. If you think circles bring you closer to people
11. If you feel safe at school

### **4) The World in My Hands**

What you need: A sports ball such as a basketball, soccer ball, or volleyball

The facilitator gives the ball to one person in the circle and asks the first question. After each response, the person who has the ball does their favorite trick with the ball and then passes the ball to another person in the circle, popcorn style. One round is complete after each person answers.

Example questions:

1. What do you think about when you hold this basketball in your hands?
2. How does the basketball represent the world, to you?
3. How could the lines on the ball represent something about the world or humanity?

### **5) Starburst Activity**

What you need: A packet (s) of starburst.

Each person gets one of each color starbursts (red, yellow, orange, pink). Each color represents something different. The facilitator models and asks the first question. After each color, the person unwraps that color starburst and can eat it.

Example circle questions-themes:

#### **Social Identities**

Red= Race/ethnicity

Yellow= Class

Orange= Sexual orientation

Pink= Gender/sex

Follow up questions:

1. What identity impacts you the most?
2. What identity means the most to you?
3. What identity do you want to learn more about?

#### **Your Favorite**

Red= Your favorite person to talk to

Yellow= Your favorite thing to do alone

Orange= Your favorite activity

Pink= Your favorite day so far this school year

### **6) Timeline of Your Life**

What you need: paper and pens/markers

In partners, people draw a timeline of their lives, from childhood to present and share with their partner what they feel comfortable sharing. After sharing, each partner presents their partner's timeline to the class.

Questions to talk about in pairs or in the group:

1. What part of your life do you think has had the most significant impact on who you are today?
2. Which time period of your life means the most to you?
3. Which part of your life will you most likely always remember?

### **7) Stereotypes: Gender & Sex**

What you need: paper and pens/markers

The class takes two pieces of paper. Together the class draws a picture of a man and a picture of a woman. Everyone writes down stereotypes they have towards the opposite gender-sex.

Each group shares:

1. What stereotypes came up for you?
2. How do you know that one of the stereotypes isn't truth?
3. What is one small way you break a stereotype that the world carries about your gender identity?

### **8) Rotating circles**

Divide the group into two groups, one group stands in a circle and the second group stands outside the first group, forming an outer circle. The two circles rotate. The facilitator tells the group when to stop. Whoever each person is standing in front of, is a pair. The person in the outer circle asks the person in the inner circle. The facilitator allows 30 seconds for each question. The game can be played faster or slower.

\*\* Alternative: In pairs, one person talks for 3 minutes while their partner listens. The listener cannot respond to the sharer at all nor make any physical gestures. The talker speaks for 3 minutes, answering the question: What was a low of your week & what was a high of your week? After three minutes each pair switches, the listener becomes the sharer and the sharer the listener.

Debrief questions:

1. How did it feel to listen without responding?
2. How was this activity uncomfortable to you?
3. What did you learn?

### **9) Grandma's House**

What you need: a talking piece

The facilitator models by saying what they want to bring to grandma's house. The item they bring with them to grandma's house has to begin with the letter of their first name. Going around the circle, each person says their name and tells the group what they want to bring to grandma's house. If a person says an item that does not begin with the letter of their

first name, the facilitator tells them they cannot come to grandma's house because grandma does not like that item. If the person says an item that does begin with the letter of their first name, the facilitator invites them to grandma's house. The game continues until everyone catches on.

### **10) 3, 6, 9**

Everyone stands in a circle. The facilitator starts counting with the number one. The group counts up from 1 to ----. The numbers 3, 6, and 9 are not said. Instead of saying the number 3, 6, or 9, the group claps once. When 3, 6, or 9 are in a number twice, the group counts twice (Ex: 33, 66, 99). If a person says the numbers or the group mis-claps, the group starts over with number one.

### **11) UncleSam's Suitcase**

What you need: a talking piece

In a circle, the facilitator starts by saying something they would like to take with them on a trip. The following person says what the previous person wants to take with them and what they would like to take on the trip. Each additional person must say what each person before them would bring on the trip, including what they will bring.

### **12) Number Game**

The group stands in a circle. The group chooses how to count. Every time someone messes up the count/number, the group starts over. For example count by 1s, count by even numbers, count backwards, count by 5s, etc.

### **13) Going to the Supermarket: A, B, C, D**

The facilitator starts by saying what they will buy from the supermarket that starts with the letter 'A'. The following person says the item the facilitator will buy and then says what they want to buy at the supermarket that begins with the letter 'B'. Each person goes, saying what each person before them will buy and what they will buy that begins with the letter they have.

## **CIRCLES & TOPIC QUESTIONS**

### **Music: Soundtrack of Your Life**

1. What kind of music do you like?
2. How does music play a big part in your life?
3. What does music mean to you and how does it make you feel?
4. Why do you think music changes people's attitudes towards the world or even towards other people?
5. Do you enjoy music? Who are your favorite artists?
6. What song is the "soundtrack of your life" and speaks most clearly to you?
7. How often do you listen to music and where?
8. What inspires you most, the lyrics, the beat, the artist as a person, the rhythm, or the instruments?

### **Womanhood**

1. What does womanhood mean to you?
2. What are judgments made towards young women and their sexuality?
3. Why do you think women are always categorized as hoes/sluts/thots?
4. Why are men and women judged differently based on their sexuality? Or are they judged differently?
5. What do you find attractive in other people?
6. If you believe men and women are judged differently, what can we do to change this difference and make it equal?

### **Women's Gender Circle**

Cut out strips of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's verse in Beyonce's *Flawless* lyrics:

We teach girls to shrink themselves  
To make themselves smaller  
We say to girls,  
"You can have ambition  
But not too much  
You should aim to be successful  
But not too successful  
Otherwise you will threaten the man."  
Because I am female  
I am expected to aspire to marriage  
I am expected to make my life choices

Always keeping in mind that  
Marriage is the most important  
Now marriage can be a source of  
Joy and love and mutual support  
But why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage  
And we don't teach boys the same?  
We raise girls to see each other as competitors  
Not for jobs or for accomplishments  
Which I think can be a good thing  
But for the attention of men  
We teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings  
In the way that boys are  
Feminist: the person who believes in the social  
Political, and economic equality of the sexes

Each woman in the group takes a section of the song and reads it aloud to the group using a talking piece.

### **Circle Questions:**

1. What is your interpretation of this part of the song?
2. What do you think she is trying to say to women in this section?
3. Do you agree with what she is saying? Why or Why not?

### **Friendship**

1. What do you consider a friend?
2. What makes a good friend to you?
3. Do you have a best friend? Do you believe in having a best friend? Why or why not?
4. Is it possible to have a best friend of the opposite sex? Does gender matter?
5. What is trust to you and what makes you trust a friend?
6. How do you keep a friendship "alive"?

### **Technology**

1. What technology do you use everyday and how important is it to you?
2. Do you feel safe with using the technology that you use?
3. What would life look like for you without technology? How would it be different?
4. How do you think technology brings people closer or further a part? Why?

## **Sexuality**

1. Do you see a future with yourself and a person of the same sex?
2. Have you ever been judged about your sexual orientation?
3. Have you ever been attracted to someone of the same sex?
4. Do you consider yourself gay if you have ever liked someone of the same sex?
5. How are you sure of your sexuality?
6. Do you believe in “phases”?
7. Do you believe sexuality can change overtime? Why or why not?
8. Do you believe people can be bisexual? Why or why not?
9. What is different about women and men about expressing their sexuality?
10. Why do you think it’s hard for people to “come out”?
11. If you had a kid, what would you do if they identified as lesbian, gay, queer, bisexual, asexual or transgender?

## **Love**

1. What makes you really think that you’re in love with your partner?
2. What are the different types of love to you?
3. How do you feel loved and by who?
4. How do you show love to another person?
5. Do you think love is a double edge sword? Why or why not?
6. Do you believe in love at first sight? Why or why not?
7. What do you think love is?
8. How is “love” different between a friend and a lover-partner?
9. What would your view be about love after getting heartbroken?
10. How do you feel about love?
11. How do you know when you’re “in love”?

## **Intimate relationships**

1. Would you rather be intimate with one person or more than one?
2. Is it okay to have sex with someone else while you’re in a relationship?
3. Do you have to be in a committed relationship to have sex with someone?
4. Why do you think people cheat?
5. Does sex play a big part in a relationship?
6. When do you think it’s appropriate to drop the “L Bomb” with someone?
7. How do you know if someone is lying about saying “I love you”?
8. What are people afraid of in a relationship?
9. What is self-respect mean to you in a relationship?

10. How do you know you have found the right person to lose your virginity to?
11. Do you think there are different expectations between men and women when it comes to having sex?
12. How would you compare losing your virginity between men and women?
13. Is someone's past important to you---the number of sexual partners?

### **Parents**

1. Do you tell your parents everything?
2. What is the importance of having parents or having guardians?
3. How close are you with your parents?
4. If you have kids would you want them to tell you everything?
5. What qualities do you want to keep about your parents if you had kids? What qualities would you want to be different?
6. Do you trust your parents? Which parent do you trust the most? Why or why not? If you don't live with your parents, do you trust your guardian?
7. Have you ever had a moment when you wanted to fight one of your parents or both? How did that feel?
8. What is one small thing you could do to better the relationship between you and your parent (s)?
9. Do you depend on your parents? Do you think this is good or bad? Why or why not?

### **School & Peers**

1. How is school for you?
2. Can you be yourself at school? And do you feel comfortable being yourself at school?
3. What is the best part of school for you? What is the worst part?
4. Are you a part of a clique? If so or if not, why or why not?
5. How do you deal with conflict with other students at the school?
6. How do you feel safe at school or how do you feel unsafe at school?
7. What's the best part of school to you and why?

### **Draining Me of My Energy**

1. Do you believe in the statement "keep your friends close, but keep your enemies closer?"
2. How do you react when you feel drained of your energy?



3. How would you react if you feel like someone is acting funny towards you?
4. Could you work or collaborate with someone you consider an enemy?
5. How do you manage with people you may find annoying?
6. What is one small thing you could do to work better with others you don't typically get along with or like?

### **Words of Advice**

Say you were not going to be on this earth tomorrow....

1. Who is a person you would have dinner with tonight and where would you go?
2. What are three advices you would give to that person?
3. Would your advice change if it were a family member versus if it were a friend?
4. If you received this advice, how would this advice change your life?

### **Money**

**“Havin’ money’s not everything, not havin’ it is.”** -Kanye West

1. How important is money to you and why?
2. What do you think Kanye is saying in this lyric?
3. How often do you feel like you think about money?
4. Why is money significant to you?
5. If you had \$10, \$20 or \$100 dollars to spend, what would you buy?

### **Stereotypes & Race**

***“Not everything that is faced can be changed.  
But nothing can be changed until it is faced.”***

-James Baldwin

1. How do you identify racially and ethnically and what stereotypes do you think people have about your racial/ethnic background?
2. What messages did you receive growing up based on your racial and ethnic background?
3. Where do you think these stereotypes on race and ethnicity come from?

4. What one of these stereotypes positively impacts you and which one negatively impacts you?
5. How might your racial/ethnic identity impact your thoughts and feelings towards other people?

### **Imagine a World....**

1. Without police, how would it be?
2. Without violence, how would it be?
3. Without racism, how would it be?
4. Without a government, how would it be?
5. What does your perfect world look like?
6. What is one small way you could create change in order to be one step closer to this perfect world?

### **Assumptions and Stereotypes**

You and another person are part of the first group of people getting set to travel to a new planet because the earth is coming to an end in 10 years. The two of you have been told you can only choose three unknown people to come with you on the space ship. Here are the people you can select, but because the space ship is ready to leave, you have to decide immediately, but you can ask each person one question before leaving. Select three people from below. Think about: What's your question to each person? What are you basing your decision on?

1. There is a teenage girl sitting in front of her school. She's reading a book and carrying a book bag. She's dressed in a uniform and looks pretty tired. She has a lot of makeup on and long sleeves on a hot day. She's White.
2. There's a middle aged light-skinned woman dragging her son onto the bus. She looks annoyed at him because she's speaking to him loudly. She yanks his hand as she gets on the bus and fumbles for her metro card. She sounds like she has a Spanish accent.
3. There's a light-skinned teenage boy in the park getting harassed by another group of boys. You can tell that he doesn't want to fight them because he keeps backing up and tries to move away.
4. There's a Black man dressed in an expensive looking suit. He has a newspaper in his hand and he's getting ready to get on the train at Hunts Point heading to Manhattan.
5. You pass by a science research building. There are two people standing outside. One is a White woman dressed in a white lab coat and has a stethoscope around her neck. The other appears to be Latino and is dressed in jeans and smoking a blunt.

6. There's a young dark skinned guy on the corner and as you walk by, he asks if you want to buy some smoke. It's the best quality in town and cheap too.
7. There's a elderly Black woman walking crossing the street unsteadily and leaning on a cane. As she crosses, you notice that she looks strangely familiar.
8. There's a young Black guy being searched by the cops. He's dressed in jeans and protesting loudly, asking folks to videotape what's happening to him.
9. There's a White guy in a fancy suit getting out of a limo in front of one of the nicer restaurants in the Hunts Point area. The limo pulls away as he enters.
10. There's a young Black kid around 10 years old telling a funny story to his friends as they walk to school. Everyone is laughing and each time they run into another kid, he's the first one greeted.

### **Circle Questions:**

1. Who did you choose to join you on the space ship to the new world and why?
2. What other information might have helped you make a better decision?
3. Has anyone ever made an assumption about you based on one incident?
4. Has anyone every made an assumption about you based on your appearance, age, race, ethnic group, gender, sexual orientation, or anything else? How did that feel?
5. Why do we often create stereotypes about people before we get to know them?

### **Backgrounds of the People:**

1. This teenage female has been shooting drugs and has long sleeves on a hot day to cover up her tracks. She's returned to school after a long absence and is in a drug rehab program, but is struggling to stop using.
2. The middle-aged woman is a professor at Hostos College of Physics. She recently split up with her husband and now has to pick up her son at school. She's tired because she's writing her dissertation to get her PhD.
3. The teenage boy is a martial arts black belt, but doesn't want to fight.
4. The man in the borrowed suit form his friend has been unemployed for years because he just got out of jail. He's now trying to turn his life around and is very nervous about trying to get a job. Getting a job will keep him out of jail and allow him to support his family for the first time in a long time.

5. The White woman with the stethoscope is dressed to go to a costume party. She's really a secretary and is taking classes at night to become a nurse. The guy smoking is super smart and a scientist, but his smoking on the job is about to get him fired.
6. The guy selling smoke is trying to support his family. He should be at school, but his mom lost her job and now they're homeless so he's trying to help out. He really wants to return to school but can't seem to find a job.
7. The elderly woman crossing the street had been retired when her daughter was hospitalized with serious diabetes. The grandmother is now raising two teenage boys and had to return to work to support the boys.
8. The guy being searched by the cops is a community organizer and so he organized a cop watch in the community. The cops don't like what he's doing so they are harassing him.
9. The guy in the fancy suit is a doorman. He actually doesn't make a lot of money. He is trying to help the tenants fight for heat and hot water in the building.
10. The kid telling the jokes to his friends is mad cool and everyone likes him, except his family, which is often telling him to stop fooling around and get serious.

### Example Session 1

#### **Opening Circle & Icebreaker**

\*Facilitated by \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*Talking piece

- Your name and one word to describe how you feel.
- Grandma's House

#### **Large Circle: Music & Art**

1. What kind of music do you like and who are your favorite artists?
2. Where do you listen to music and how often?
3. What song is the "soundtrack of your life" and speaks most clearly to you and your life?
4. What inspires you most, the lyrics, the beat, the artist as a person, the rhythm, or the instruments?
5. What other forms of art do you find inspiring?

**Closing Circle:** How has this circle been for you and what is one thing you are looking forward to?

### **Additional Circle Discussion Topics**

*We frequently use Circle Discussion in Advisory to address a variety of topics and to build community. The options are endless. Here are some examples of circle discussion topics.*

#### **“What Would You Choose?”:**

1. You are doing really well in school, but it’s a lot of work and when you are told that you could be skipped you are also told that it would mean a lot more work and you couldn’t spend time with your friends. Which would you choose and why?
2. In an effort to get you to help out more at home your mom offers you \$100 a month, but it means you have to clean the bathroom and kitchen weekly, wash the dishes and babysit your little siblings daily. If you refuse you can hang out with your friends, but you won’t have any money. Which do you choose?
3. You have to go to summer school to not be left back, but your friends are headed to Orchard beach daily. Your boyfriend/girlfriend tells you to skip summer school and hang out with them, or he/she is going to need someone else to hang with. You hate to be left back. Which do you choose?
4. You find a \$50 bill on your block. You tell people and a few days later you hear that an elderly person lost \$50 and really needs it to buy food this month. If you keep the \$ it will really help to get those Jordans, and the elderly person has never been very nice to you anyway. Which do you choose, giving the \$ to the elderly person, or putting it towards those Jordans?
5. You finally get a job in a clothing store. The manager of the store is very nice to you, almost like a friend, but after working there a few months you notice that there is constantly money missing from the cash register. You suspect the manager, but really can’t prove it, and since you’re afraid that the finger will point at you since you are the main cashier so which do you choose? Confront the manager and tell him/her to stop, go directly to the owner and tell him your suspicions, or keep your mouth shut?
6. Your friend is a low-level marijuana dealer. She asks you to carry the stuff into school for her because no one will suspect you, but even though you have some doubts because the school is constantly searching students, you’re thinking about the money you could have in your pocket for doing this. You decide to???
7. You hear a really nasty rumor about someone you don’t particularly like. You know definitely that the rumor isn’t true and that it will really hurt the person if it gets out. You choose to tell people the rumor isn’t true, or you keep your mouth shut and laugh to yourself as the rumor spreads?
8. If by some magic you could know your own future, but also know there is no way to change the future, would you choose to learn it even though there might be some very sad things happening to you, or would you decide not to learn it?

## **Circle on Violence Against Women:**

Recently a 21-year-old man in California posted a YouTube video talking about how much he hated women and said he would get revenge for their spurning him. He went on to kill six people. In Pakistan, a 25-year-old pregnant woman was stoned to death by her family for wanting to marry a man her family didn't approve of. And on college campuses there are increasing numbers of women who say that colleges are not taking the issue of sexual harassment and rape of female students seriously enough.

### *Questions for discussion:*

1. What is your reaction when you hear about these different examples of violence against women?
2. How do you define violence against women? Please give an example. Does it include?:
  - Catcalls towards women in the street?
  - Men making comments about women's bodies in public?
  - Men calling women "thots" for doing the same thing that men often brag about?
  - Men following women in the streets?
  - Men grabbing women in the streets?
  - Men controlling women's lives by telling their girlfriends they can't hang out with particular people or go certain places?
  - Men controlling women's lives by telling their girlfriends they can't wear certain clothes?
  - Boyfriends/husbands forcing their girlfriends/wives to have sex when the woman says no? Does no mean no?
  - Men hitting women?
  - Men murdering women?
3. Does your definition of violence change if it's your mother, your sister, or a female relative?
4. Can men (and women) play a role in ending violence against women?
5. What can you do today, tomorrow and in the future?

## **Circle for the Opening of the School Year**

*Circle Purpose:* Begin the process of building a school community.

*Materials Needed:* Talking Piece

*Opening Narrative: The Lion and the Tiger*

One hot summer's day a Lion and a Tiger came to a small well at the same moment. They were both very thirsty and began at once to argue as to who should be the first to drink. Neither would give in to the other. They were about to come to blows when the Lion looked up and saw some vultures in the sky above them.

"Look!" said the Lion. "Those vultures see us fighting and they are hungry. They are waiting to feed upon the loser."

"Then let us settle our quarrel," said the Tiger. "It is better for us to make friends than to become the food of vultures."

"I agree," the Lion said. "In the face of common danger, small differences are best forgotten."

*Large Circle*

1. How might this story apply to you?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10 give your summer experience a grade. 1 means terrible and 10 means unbelievably fantastic. Explain why you gave the grade you did?
3. What is something that you did or happened over the summer that helped you mature as a person or become a better you?
4. What are 3 goals you have for this school year including:
  - a. A goal you have for school?
  - b. A goal you have for your family?
  - c. Another goal (sports, a job, friends, or something else)?
5. Who are 3 people that can help you achieve these goals and how can they help you?
6. Who is one person that you can be helpful to and how can you do this?

*Closing Round:* How was this circle for you?

## **Circle on Race, Community, and Ferguson for Students**

*Circle Purpose:* To engage students in a discussion on community as it relates to race, and recent events in Ferguson and Staten Island

*Materials Needed:* Talking Piece(s)

*Opening Circle:* Staff and students work hard to create community at this school.

1. What does community mean to you?
2. Name some communities you're in and how they support you?
3. Make a list of what is important for you to create a strong community?
4. What are some of the issues that divide a community?

*Opening Narrative:*

Two recent deaths of U.S. citizens this summer have been in the news a lot recently. The first was the death of Eric Garner, a 42 yr. old man in Staten Island who was being arrested for selling "loosies" on the street on July. When confronted by the police Mr. Garner was refusing to be handcuffed and was put in a chokehold by a policeman. Mr. Garner died on the street saying, "I can't breathe." Medical examiners concluded chokehold and chest compression as the primary causes of Garner's death and Garner's heart problems, obesity and asthma as additional factors. As a result of Garner's death, four EMTs and paramedics who responded were suspended without pay and officers Justin Damico and Daniel Pantaleo were placed on desk duty, the latter stripped of his service gun and badge.

The shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri happened on August 9. According to witness reports and Ferguson police, Wilson drove up to Brown and a friend, Dorian Johnson, and ordered them to move off the street and onto the sidewalk. An altercation then took place between Brown and Wilson through the window of the police car. A shot was fired from within the vehicle and Brown and Johnson began to flee. Wilson left his vehicle, fired his pistol at Brown and confronted him. Wilson then fired several shots at Brown, fatally wounding him. Witness reports greatly differ as to whether Brown was standing with his hands up or moving towards Wilson when he was shot multiple times.

The shooting sparked unrest in Ferguson, a suburb of St. Louis, in part due to racial tensions between the majority-black community and the majority-white city government and police. Protests, vandalism, looting, and other forms of social unrest continued for more than a week, with occurrences of escalating violence and night curfews being imposed. Widespread media coverage examined the post-9/11 trend of police militarization, especially when dealing with protests.



*Large Circle*

1. What are some of the ways a strong community can/should respond to the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner this summer?
2. How did the deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner in Staten Island affect you?

*Smaller Circles (Divide students into smaller groups)*

1. If you were the mayor of Ferguson what would you have done to respond to the death of Michael Brown?
2. If you were the head of police in Ferguson what would you have done to respond to the death of Michael Brown? What do you think should be the role of police in a community?
3. If you were the head of a religious institution in Ferguson what would you have done to respond to the death of Michael Brown?
4. If you were a parent in Ferguson what would you have done to respond to the death of Michael Brown?
5. If you were a young person living in Ferguson what would you have done to respond to the death of Michael Brown?
6. Could what happened in Ferguson, St. Louis happen in NYC? Why or why not?
7. If you were of another race/ethnicity how might your sympathies change?
8. As a young person what can you do to stop NYC people from being killed by the NYPD?

*Large Circle*

1. What did you learn about the many communities you are in and how to make them safer and stronger?
2. Do you think things can change? How?

*Closing Narrative: The Man and the Lion (Aesop's Fables)*

A man and a lion were traveling together through the forest. They began to argue as to who was the stronger – man or lion. In the midst of their quarrel they passed a stone statue, which showed a man strangling a lion.

“There! The man said, pointing to the statue. “See how strong man is! Does this not prove that I am right?”

The Lion chuckled. “Ah,” he said, “But this statue was made by a man. If we Lions knew how to build statues, you would see that man under the paw of that lion.

Moral of the story: How a story ends often depends on the storyteller.

## **Staff Circle in Preparation for a Discussion on the Shooting of Michael Brown**

*Facilitator:* Introduction about the purpose of the circle and the courage of folks to engage in this discussion.

*Materials Needed:* Enough talking pieces for each triad

### *Opening Reading:*

Difficult dialogues are specific exchanges in which the possibility for increased intimacy and increased relational skill is present. Difficult dialogues tend to be characterized by anxiety, fear, excitement, anger, hurt, and wonder. They are uncomfortable conversations in which the intent is for people to challenge themselves and those with whom they are having these conversations to face and embrace their different positions while staying in relationship. Difficult dialogues are particularly challenging for all participants because each is required to express beliefs and opinions that they many never have expressed before, to themselves or to others, while staying connected to and sometimes even nurturing the very people who are activating these uncomfortable beliefs. Learning to handle differences in ways that humanize those different from you is an advanced relational skill that evolves out of sustained difficult dialogues.

-Linda Stone Fish: *A dialogue between a Jewish person and a Palestinian*

### *Large Circles:*

1. What is something you did over the summer that added to your development as a person and teacher of young people?
2. What were your initial thoughts when you heard about the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and/or the choking death of Eric Garner in Staten Island?

### *In Triads:*

1. If you spoke with anyone about what happened what was that discussion like and if you haven't spoken with anyone, why not?
2. What's difficult, maybe even scary about discussing the issue of race with students? Can you think of the kind of support that might be helpful to facilitate a discussion?
3. There are many reasons given for not having a discussion about race including:
  - Discussing it makes it worse.
  - Why traumatize students more?
  - If I don't see color then maybe they won't either.
  - It's divisive.
  - I'm white and they're students of color - how can I possibly have this discussion?
  - Someone may call me a racist?
  - What if someone asks me something and I don't know the answer?

- It's too emotional and I'm concerned about being too emotional in front of the students.
  - I don't see color, even if others do.
4. In your triad choose one of the above or another reason and discuss your thoughts about why teachers should or shouldn't have a discussion about race and racism with students.
  5. How might you evaluate the quality of your conversation with students?

*Return to the large circle:*

In the large circle, take one minutes and tell us how this discussion has affected your feelings about having this discussion with students and also, where do you find hope?

*Participant Readings: Last words of victims of police shootings:*

Distribute the last words of these 9 victims to 9 individuals and ask them to stand and read what is written aloud:

- "I don't have a gun. Stop shooting." Michael Brown
- "It's not real." John Crawford, 22, shot to death with a toy gun in a video game store, 8/14 in Ohio
- "I love you too." Sean Bell, 11/06 Shot to death by cops on his wedding day
- "What are you following me for?" Trayvon Martin, 2/12
- "Mom, I'm going to college." Amadou Diallo 2/99, Bronx, NY
- "I can't breathe." Eric Garner, 7/14, Bronx, NY
- "Why did you shoot me?" Kendrec McDade, 19, 3/12
- Renisha McBride, 19, Shot to death Nov. 2, 2013, by an middle aged white male at night through his screen door when she allegedly pounded on his door. He said it was an accident and then later clamed self defense. Detroit, Michigan area.
- "Please don't let me die." Kimani Gray, 16, 3/13, Bklyn

**Final Reading:**

"When one person listens to another's story, something magical happens. Our presence and our willingness to learn weaves us into their journey. And if we earn their trust, we become a part of their story. So that in the end, we are all witnesses and we are all part of the cure." -Lee Mun Wah