(DE) polarization

A toolkit for youth workers to counter polarization through constructive communication and critical thinking



Depolarization • Constructive Communication • Critical Thinking

SPRIING
INITIATE
INNOVATE
INSPIRE

ARGAN

(DE) polarization

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INTRODUCTION

We begin with the context of polarization and the reason this booklet exists.

Here, you will read what to expect and how you can use this workbook within your organization.

INTRODUCTION

Polarization is no longer merely a “news topic;” it increasingly appears in everyday interactions: at school, in youth groups, among friends, even in online comments and casual catchphrases. Sometimes it involves major societal fault lines, but just as often it is something unfolding right in front of you: a clash within the group, someone feeling attacked, a joke that goes a little too far, us-versus-them language that shifts the atmosphere, or participants dropping out because things become too heated. Polarization is therefore not only something distant; it is also happening within your own circle.

What non-formal learning can mean

Polarization requires not only knowledge of the subject but, above all, craftsmanship in facilitation. You want to let young people explore without things getting out of hand, and to create space for disagreement without people losing touch with one another. This rarely succeeds in a single workshop. Polarization has deep roots, and you cannot resolve them in an afternoon. What is possible, however, is creating a space where people meet each other again as human beings, and not merely as viewpoints.

The true art is not persuasion, but maintaining connection in the midst of disagreement.

Toolbox

This workbook does not stand alone. On depolarisatie.be, you will find a digital toolbox with methodologies you can use immediately, filterable by topic, age, and level. This book is not a copy of that website; it is the layer beneath it: how to build a workshop, when to use which methodology, what to do when emotions run high, and how to maintain safety without shutting everything down.

INTRODUCTION

We begin from a simple observation. Polarization is reinforced by echo chambers and the constant confirmation of one's own correctness, causing empathy for other viewpoints to diminish. Depolarization, on the other hand, requires conscious steps that make dialogue and understanding possible again. Non-formal learning offers an environment in which young people can practice living together, where skills develop gradually, and where bridges can be built between spheres of life that would otherwise remain separate.

In this publication, we deliberately focus on three elements that help young people and facilitators deal with tension. We work on critical thinking so that young people learn to slow down and recognize nuance. Constructive communication receives equal attention: differences must remain open for discussion without people being dehumanized. And we make us-versus-them thinking visible — you can only depolarize if you understand how quickly a group can fall into camps.

The activities in this book are not a magic solution. However, they are designed with polarization and conflict in mind. They help reduce tension, make conversations safer, and strengthen empathy, communication, and self-awareness. Moreover, they are created to remain workable and engaging for participants, so that young people not only think but also experience.

If we succeed in this, something emerges that we hope to see time and again in youth work: that young people do not need to convince one another in order to grow closer; that they learn to listen without losing themselves; and that differences do not automatically lead to distance, but can also open the door to understanding, curiosity, and growth.



THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

What exactly is polarization?
How does it escalate?
And what frameworks exist?
Three questions,
three models,
and a guide for your
facilitation.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Polarization as a dynamic

Researchers point out that polarization easily becomes a catch-all term that lumps together diverse tensions, conflicts, and disagreements, making both analysis and intervention more difficult. It is therefore useful to identify precisely which dynamic is being observed: is it primarily about divergent viewpoints, or is the conversation shifting toward mistrust, aversion, and hostile perceptions between groups? (Van Alstein, 2021)

In research, polarization is usually described as a process in which differences within a society or group increasingly align along a single dominant fault line, leading people to read themselves and others more and more in terms of "us" and "them" (McCoy, Rahman, & Somer, 2018). It is therefore not merely about divergent opinions. It concerns what happens when disagreement becomes identity — and when that identity, in turn, produces mistrust, hostile stereotypes, and social distance (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015).

It is not merely about differing opinions.
It is about what happens when disagreement turns into identity.

Therefore, the literature often distinguishes between opinion polarization (the distance between viewpoints) and affective polarization (the emotional distance between groups, in which people trust, respect, or even reject one another less). Once it is no longer about ideas but about who someone is, depolarizing guidance becomes far more urgent. (Iyengar, Lelkes, Levendusky, Malhotra, & Westwood, 2019; Reiljan, 2020)

This shift is also visible at the micro level. A topic may begin as a conversation about policy, school rules, or news events, but end in a clash in which participants feel that their dignity, group, or worldview is being attacked. At that stage, arguments rarely work as hoped, because polarization is not only cognitive but also emotional and relational (McCoy, Rahman, & Somer, 2018).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

At the same time, polarization is not by definition "bad." Historically, it has even enabled movement and progress: consider the struggles for women's rights, civil rights, or social protection. Bart Brandsma therefore calls polarization, in a certain sense, "a beautiful thing": it can expose what is wrong and force change (Brandsma, 2016). The key distinction lies in whether polarization remains constructive or escalates into a dynamic in which camps can no longer hear one another, where nuance disappears, and where the loss of the other becomes more important than the gain for a shared future (McCoy & Somer, 2018).

Bart Brandsma's Framework

Bart Brandsma is a Dutch philosopher and practitioner-theorist who developed an influential model for understanding polarization as a force field with recognizable roles and rules of the game (Brandsma, 2016). His core insight is that polarization does not primarily revolve around "substantive positions," but around positions within an us-versus-them field. Those who polarize do not merely try to be right; they primarily try to position people.

In Brandsma's approach, polarization arises when an opposition is framed in such a way that people feel compelled to choose, causing the middle ground to disappear. As the middle narrows, the conversation collapses into two camps that begin to see one another as morally wrong, dangerous, or foolish (Brandsma, 2016). This aligns with broader literature on social identity: once group membership becomes central, people are quicker to favor their own group and judge the other group negatively (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Strengthening the center creates more space for dialogue.

Five roles in the field of polarization

Brandsma describes five roles that frequently appear in polarizing situations. It is important not to view these roles as fixed personality types, but as positions that people can temporarily occupy (Brandsma, 2016).

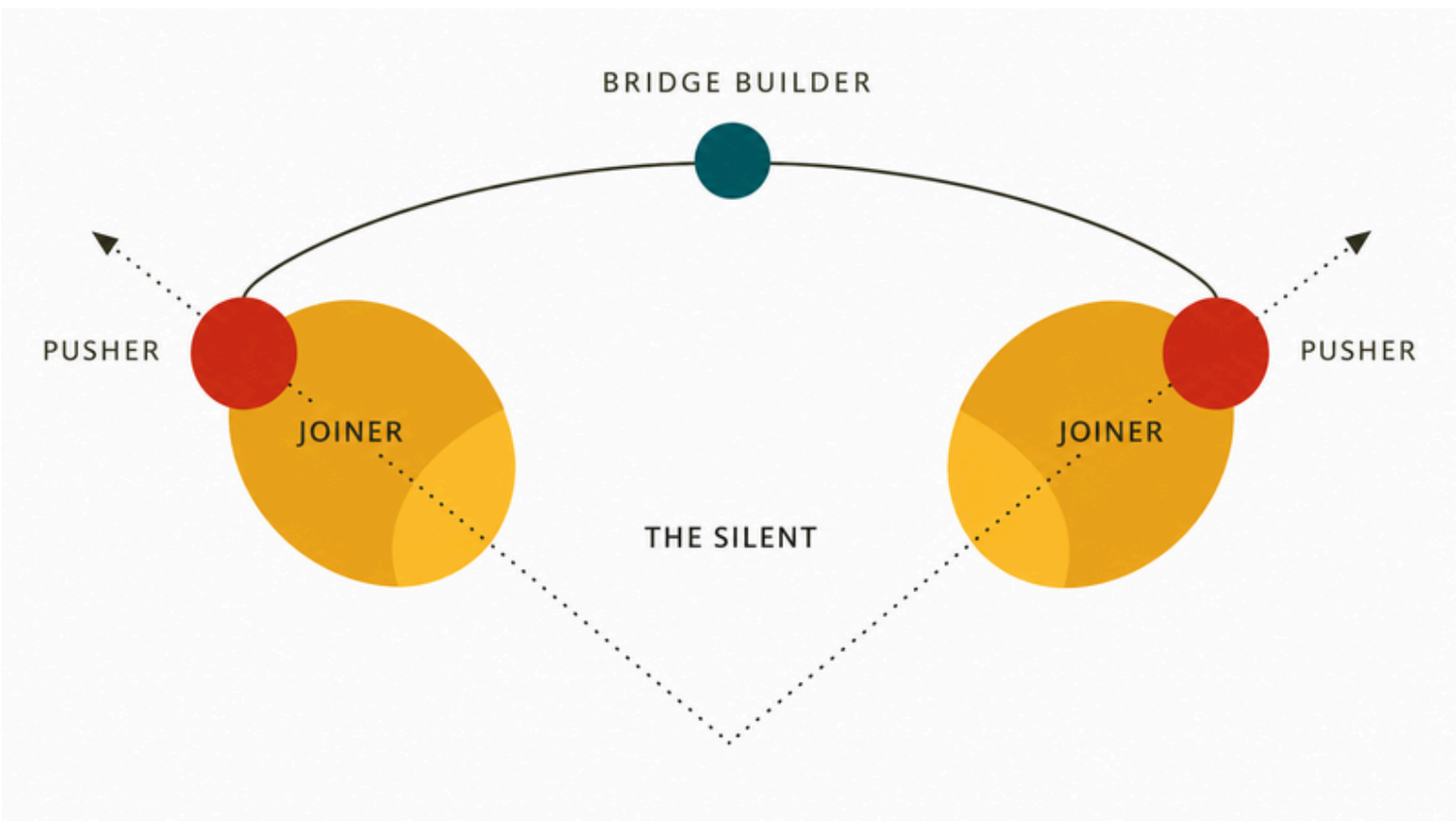
- Pushers drive the us-versus-them frame forward. They sharpen the tone, use slogans, and reduce complexity to a single dominant opposition.

- Joiners align themselves with one side and reinforce the camp mentality. They repeat, legitimize, and spread the pusher's narrative.

- The silent middle consists of people who resist camp thinking or who doubt, nuance, and weigh things up. In many contexts, this is numerically the largest group, yet in polarized situations it is often the most vulnerable to pressure and shame.

- Bridge builders try to bring the poles together. Their intention is often positive, but Brandsma warns that bridge-building at the wrong moment can add fuel to the fire, because it offers the poles an extra platform or confirms pushers in their struggle (Brandsma, 2016).

- Scapegoats become the "symbol" onto which frustration and anger are projected. At that point, it is no longer about a viewpoint but about dehumanization: a person is reduced to a bearer of the problem (Brandsma, 2016).



Depolarizing means strengthening the middle ground

An essential difference from many “debate approaches” is that Brandsma’s depolarization model does not begin at the poles, but at the silent middle. In his logic, the middle is key because it is the space where nuance, complexity, and humanity can continue to exist. Those who focus too quickly on the extremes unintentionally reinforce the us-versus-them script. Those who strengthen the middle expand the space for dialogue and reduce the power of polarizing frames (Brandsma, 2016).

Polarization and sscalation

Moreover, in escalation processes, one observes that groups increasingly view one another less as individuals and more as symbols. Research and practice descriptions show that misperceptions (“they hate us anyway”) and dehumanization lower the threshold for normalizing harsher language, exclusion, or even violence. This is precisely why early de-escalation is so important: it safeguards the relational foundation before the conversation becomes mired in moral superiority and hostile thinking (Van Alstein, 2021).

Polarization can also be a constructive force:
it makes visible what is wrong and can compel change.

Those who build bridges between the poles too early can unintentionally reinforce the us-versus-them frame, because the poles gain extra visibility and the middle sinks further. Depolarizing work therefore begins by protecting a shared space in which people continue to see one another as legitimate adversaries, even when they fundamentally disagree (Brandsma, 2016; Van Alstein, 2021).

Polarization becomes dangerous when it provokes escalation. Escalation means that the conflict not only becomes “harder,” but that its underlying logic shifts. People no longer seek a solution, but rather victory, punishment, or protection. In conflict studies, this shift is described as a movement from win-win to win-lose, and ultimately to lose-lose, where even one’s own harm becomes acceptable as long as the other side loses (Glasl, 1982).

A useful model for understanding this shift is Friedrich Glasl's escalation ladder. Glasl describes nine escalation phases, grouped into three levels. At the first level, a win-win outcome is still possible because, despite rising tension, there remains enough common ground to rely on dialogue. At the second level, the dynamic shifts to win-lose: factions form, reputational damage and pressure increase, and one party must lose for the other to win. At the third level, the logic becomes lose-lose: destruction prevails, even when it harms oneself as well (Glasl, 1982).

What makes this model valuable in youth work is not that one must place a group "in a phase." Rather, it helps practitioners recognize when the conditions for learning and dialogue begin to disappear.

- In the win-win zone, one often sees hardening and debate: positions become sharper, people speak more in terms of opposites, yet there is still room for nuance and repair. When escalation veers toward win-lose, the tone shifts. The group begins to seek allies, people feel attacked more easily, and a dynamic emerges in which loss of face must be avoided. Glasl notes that "loss of face" can be a tipping point: from that moment, attention moves away from the issue itself toward hurting the other person, and the conflict becomes increasingly emotional and personal (Glasl, 1982).

- Therefore, practical guidelines on polarization management emphasize intervening early in process and safety, before escalation takes on a life of its own (European Commission, 2017).

Level 1: Win-Win	Level 2: Win-Lose	Level 3: Lose-Lose
• Collaboration & understanding • Dialogue & compromise • Constructive discussion	• Image and coalitions • Loss of face • Threat tactics	• Limited destructive actions • Destruction • Together into the abyss

What changes concretely when escalation rises?

As escalation increases, both the intensity and the interpretation of interactions shift. Language hardens and nuance disappears. Humor turns into sarcasm. Silence is read as “you’re taking their side.” Intentions are assumed to be negative. People listen less to understand and more to gather ammunition. Moral superiority also emerges more quickly: one’s own group becomes “the good side,” the other “the bad side,” and every misstep by the other is taken as proof. Within that logic, loss of face becomes dangerous: admitting fault feels like betrayal, hesitation looks like weakness, and making amends feels like bowing (Glasl, 1982).

Therefore, depolarizing guidance at such moments is rarely about “adding more substance.” It is usually the opposite: slowing down, structuring, and returning to the minimal conditions for dialogue. Not following the polarizing logic, strengthening the “silent middle zone,” and choosing interventions that do not feed escalation (European Commission, 2017).

Win-win as a guidance choice

Aiming for a win-win is therefore a conscious choice of guidance in this context. It signals that the goal is not to convince or expose one another, but to understand what is at play, what needs underlie the positions, and what boundaries are required to remain safe together. This sometimes means explicitly interrupting “the rules of escalation.” You allow space for difference, but you halt processes that dehumanize. You make it possible to repair the situation without losing face; for example, by normalizing the possibility of retracting one’s words, or by rephrasing in a way that preserves the core message without sharpening the conflict (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1981).

In that sense, the escalation ladder also functions as an early warning system. Not to apply labels, but to ask yourself in time: are we still in a phase where the group can manage this on its own, or do we need additional structure, a pause, mediation, or support?

What intensifies polarization?

Research points to a cluster of factors that can accelerate polarization. One is group polarization: when like-minded individuals talk mainly to one another, they tend to become more extreme in their views on average. This pattern is well documented in work on group dynamics and deliberation (Sunstein, 2002). A second mechanism is biased assimilation. People do not process information neutrally; they interpret the same facts differently depending on their existing beliefs, which can cause opinions to diverge even further when "evidence" is discussed (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979).

Online environments can amplify these processes through the selection and dissemination of like-minded information. Studies on information exposure show that people, on average, encounter less ideologically diverse content than is possible, and that network structures and algorithmic filtering contribute to this pattern (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015). Crucially, this does not mean that "the internet is the cause," but rather that digital environments often act as accelerators of dynamics that also exist offline (Sunstein, 2002).

Why depolarize?

After examining escalation, one thing becomes clear: the further a group moves toward win-lose or lose-lose, the smaller the space becomes to genuinely learn, listen, or repair (Glasl, 1982). Depolarization is the opposite process. It is the act of reclaiming that space; not by pushing differences away, but by strengthening the conditions under which differences remain manageable. The aim is to guide the group back into a win-win zone.

Depolarization is therefore not a naïve call to "be nice." It is a strategy to protect learnability, safety, and humanity in contexts where identity plays a role. Research on intergroup contact shows that contact alone is insufficient, but that it can be meaningful when it occurs within a framework of clear agreements, equality, shared goals, and support from the surrounding environment (Allport, 1954). Meta-analyses indicate that intergroup contact is, on average, associated with reductions in prejudice; though the quality of the contact is crucial (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Brandsma's framework adds a strategic dimension here: those who depolarize work not only toward "more understanding," but also toward less camp pressure. By strengthening the silent middle, interrupting scapegoat mechanisms, and building bridges at the right moment, you protect the space in which learning remains possible (Brandsma, 2016).

This is why we deliberately choose a win-win horizon in this publication. Not in the sense that everyone must agree, but in the sense that the group becomes stronger in bearing difference. That is precisely where youth work has unique value: it can serve as a training ground for critical thinking and connective communication, where young people learn to navigate tension without losing connection to one another.

Role of the facilitators

If polarization operates through emotions, fuel, and roles, then the logical next step is to ask a practical question: how do you maintain support within the group while still enabling deeper understanding? It requires three types of alertness from a facilitator.

First, there is *language*: hearing when "us-versus-them" hijacks the content, and knowing how to rephrase without belittling anyone. The difference between setting boundaries and shaming lies precisely there.

Then there is the *process*. You pay attention not only to what is said, but also to pace, energy, and who disengages. Who falls silent, who pushes, who wants to mediate but doesn't dare.

And finally, there is *yourself*. Polarization pulls at you too. Every facilitator carries both a jackal and a giraffe: the jackal judges quickly, the giraffe wants to understand. Working in a depolarizing way therefore also means training yourself not to escalate automatically with others, but to remain a point of calm when they accelerate.

In the next chapter, we zoom in on safety within the group: how to recognize signals that participants are approaching the panic zone, how stress reactions can hijack the conversation, and how to restore learnability using simple anchors. We strongly recommend that facilitators read that chapter before starting with the methodologies, as it forms the foundation for almost every exercise that follows.



SAFETY IN THE GROUP

A safe space is the foundation for open conversation and learning.

In this chapter, you will find practical guidance on how to create and maintain safety within your group.

SAFETY IN THE GROUP

When working with polarization, topics can hit close to home for some participants. What feels like “a debate” to one can feel like “an attack” to another. You therefore manage not only the content but also the tension. In other words, you consider not only what you discuss, but also the group’s capacity to handle it.

We use a simple model with three zones:

- Comfort zone: familiar, predictable. People feel okay.
- Learning zone: exciting and new, but still manageable. Growth happens here.
- Panic zone: too much stress. Learning shuts down (or escalates).

Comfort zone: this is the zone of the familiar. People feel okay. They know roughly what is expected of them. That provides peace of mind, and that calm is sometimes necessary, especially in the beginning. At the same time, a group can also get stuck here: then the conversation remains tame and superficial, and no one dares to truly name what is on their minds.

Learning zone: this is the zone where things get exciting, but still manageable. This is where growth, nuance, and genuine reflection emerge. People dare to ask a question, question something, or try a different perspective. They still feel safe enough to stay. This is usually the zone you want to move towards: not too comfortable, not too overwhelming.

Panic zone: this is the zone where stress becomes too high. Someone feels threatened (sometimes by words, sometimes by a sense of injustice or insecurity). Learning stops in this zone. People start protecting themselves: they go on the offensive, shut down, or disappear from the conversation. If you stay here too long, you get escalation or disengagement, sometimes visible, sometimes very silent.

Important: these zones are personal and situational. Someone might be in the learning zone during “difference of opinion,” but move more quickly towards the panic zone regarding “identity” or “discrimination.” Your goal, therefore, is not to keep everything comfortable. You do want to prevent participants from panicking.

SAFETY IN THE GROUP

In practice, it can be difficult to estimate a group's "zone," especially when tension rises. The image below makes the three zones visually recognizable. We recommend keeping it at hand as a guide during your session, or even reviewing it together with the group.



When a participant enters the panic zone, it is often because something hits too close to home. This can happen because certain words land hard, because of a sense of injustice or insecurity, because of peer pressure, or simply because someone is tired and has little resilience at that moment. In that phase, it is not "thinking" that takes over, but the stress system. The reaction becomes automatic and rapid, as if the body is saying: I must protect myself. In such moments, you often see automatic stress responses.

They are sometimes described as the 4 Fs: Fight, Flight, Freeze, and Fawn. We briefly explain them below.

SAFETY IN THE GROUP

Fight is the reaction in which someone goes on the attack or tries to take control. You notice this through harsher words, interrupting, arguing to win, or pinning someone down on mistakes. It can look like “dominant behaviour,” but underneath often lies a need for safety, respect, or fairness.

Flight is the reaction in which someone tries to step out of the tension. This can be literal: creating physical distance; but also mental: joking it off, changing the subject, giving a sudden, very brief answer, or disappearing into one’s phone. The body seeks breathing space and wants to avoid the situation becoming even more intense.



Freeze is the reaction in which someone falls silent or checks out. You see little response, a vacant look, no eye contact, or someone who can no longer participate in the conversation. This is sometimes misinterpreted as “uninterested,” while it is often a sign that things have simply become too much.

Fawn is the fourth reaction, and you see it more often than you might think. Someone tries to reduce tension by pleasing, soothing, or giving in. This can sound like agreeing quickly, apologizing, making oneself smaller, or becoming overly friendly to avoid conflict. It is a way of seeking safety by maintaining connection; sometimes at one’s own expense.

When a participant enters the panic zone and triggers one of the stress reactions, it is important to act on that information. Clearly, something has become too intense; either for the individual or for the group as a whole. This can happen because a boundary has been crossed, because someone feels unheard, because the topic touches on something personal, or simply because the group is tired and has been working intensely for too long. In such moments, clear thinking becomes harder, and reflexes take over more quickly.

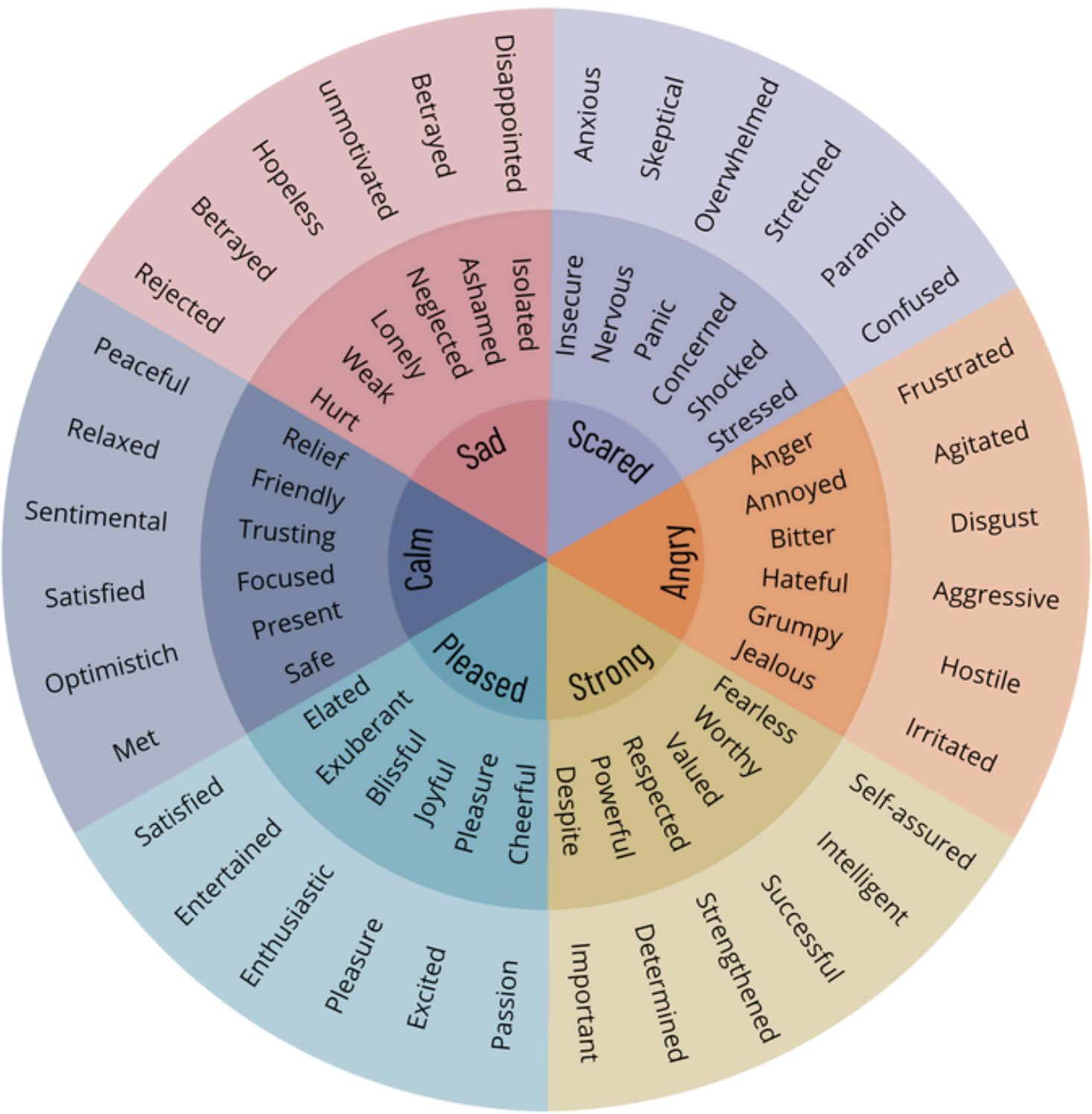
That is precisely why, as a facilitator, you do not only “steer” on content, but also help participants regain language and calm. When young people can put words to what is happening inside, the tension often eases. In this booklet, we use two simple anchors for this purpose—tools you can return to again and again: naming emotions (with the Feelings Fan) and returning to a basic attitude (attention, breath, and grounding).

Feelings Fan

The Feelings Fan is a simple tool that helps participants articulate more precisely what is going on. It makes a big difference when someone can accurately name their emotions; “Actually, I feel insecure,” or “I am mostly hurt”; instead of only “I’m angry.” This creates nuance and makes mutual understanding easier.

You can use the Feelings Fan in very practical ways. Place it visibly in the room, on a table, or on the wall. Normalize its use by telling participants they are welcome to choose a word that fits. Refer back to it regularly: during the check-in, after a deepening exercise, and certainly during the check-out. It helps young people understand themselves better, and it helps the group avoid slipping too quickly into an us-versus-them mindset.

SAFETY IN THE GROUP



Basic posture

The second anchor is our basic attitude, and it is just as simple. Besides words, the body also helps. Especially with intensive topics, it is valuable to have one basic posture you can always fall back on.

We call this the 3 A's: Attention, Breath, and Grounding. They are three simple methods that work together to help you return to calm. You can use them as a small "route" through the body, from top to bottom.

Attention starts at the top. It is about being present and noticing: what is happening in the room, and what is happening inside me? What thoughts are racing? Where is my focus? You don't have to solve anything; you simply observe. That alone often slows the moment down.

Breath is central. When your breathing slows, your stress level drops. One calm, belly-down breath can be enough to take the edge off. It's not about technique; it's about slowing down: in... and out... and feeling space again.

Grounding is at the bottom. It is the feeling of support and stability: feet on the floor, sitting or standing firmly, distributing your weight, sensing that you are supported. Grounding helps you avoid being pulled into the drama of the moment. You stand firmer, literally and figuratively.

The beauty is that each A reinforces the next. With more awareness, you notice more quickly when your breathing is shallow. With calmer breathing, grounding becomes easier. And when you are grounded, it becomes much simpler to stay clear and respond respectfully.

You can use this basic posture at the start of a session to ground yourself, as a brief reset when tension builds, or at the end to wrap up calmly.



GETTING STARTED

From here, you get started.

First, you will read how to use this workbook and how to structure a workshop using building blocks.

After that, you will find the methodologies, organized by phase.

READING GUIDE

This is how you build a workshop

A strong session consists of clear, recognizable building blocks that together form a whole. For each building block, you choose a methodology, and in doing so, you assemble your own workshop.



Check-in

START

How does everyone get in? What's going on?
You gauge energy and land together.

Icebreaker

Connection and group energy.
The group loosens up and gets moving.

use an energizer when energy drops

Exploring

Opening the topic – without
immediately diving deep into it yet.

use an energizer when energy drops

Deepening

Practice, challenge with care,
broaden perspective.

use an energizer when energy drops

Evaluating

Identifying insights and feeding
them back into practice.

Check-out

Wrap up, unwind, part safely.

END

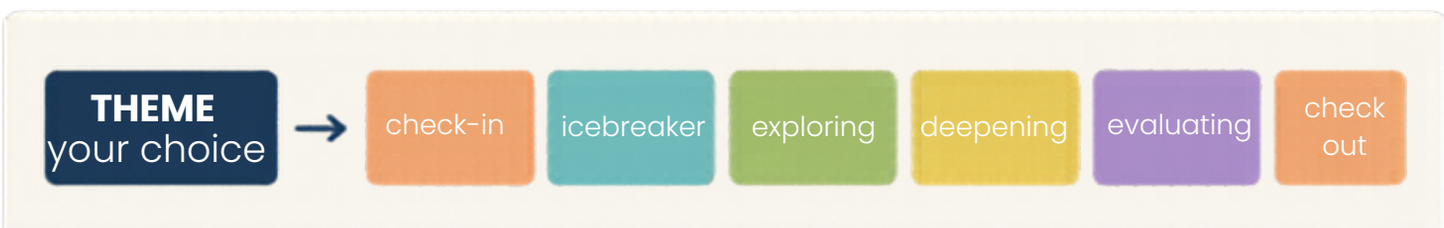
THE COLOR CODE

Each building block has its own color. You will find that color at the top of each methodology, so you can see at a glance which building block you are working with.

READING GUIDE

This is how you put together your workshop

1. **Choose a theme.**
   Constructive communication, us-versus-them thinking, or critical thinking.
2. **Take a methodology for each building block.**
   Choose one that fits your group, your available time, and your theme.
3. **Combine into a whole.**
   Not as a fixed script, but as a trajectory that works for your group.



How long does a workshop last?

NEW GROUP	EXISTING GROUP
± 2 hours	**until ± 4 hours**
Keep it compact and manageable. This reduces the risk of participants becoming overloaded.	If basic trust is already present, you can work longer and combine more methodologies.

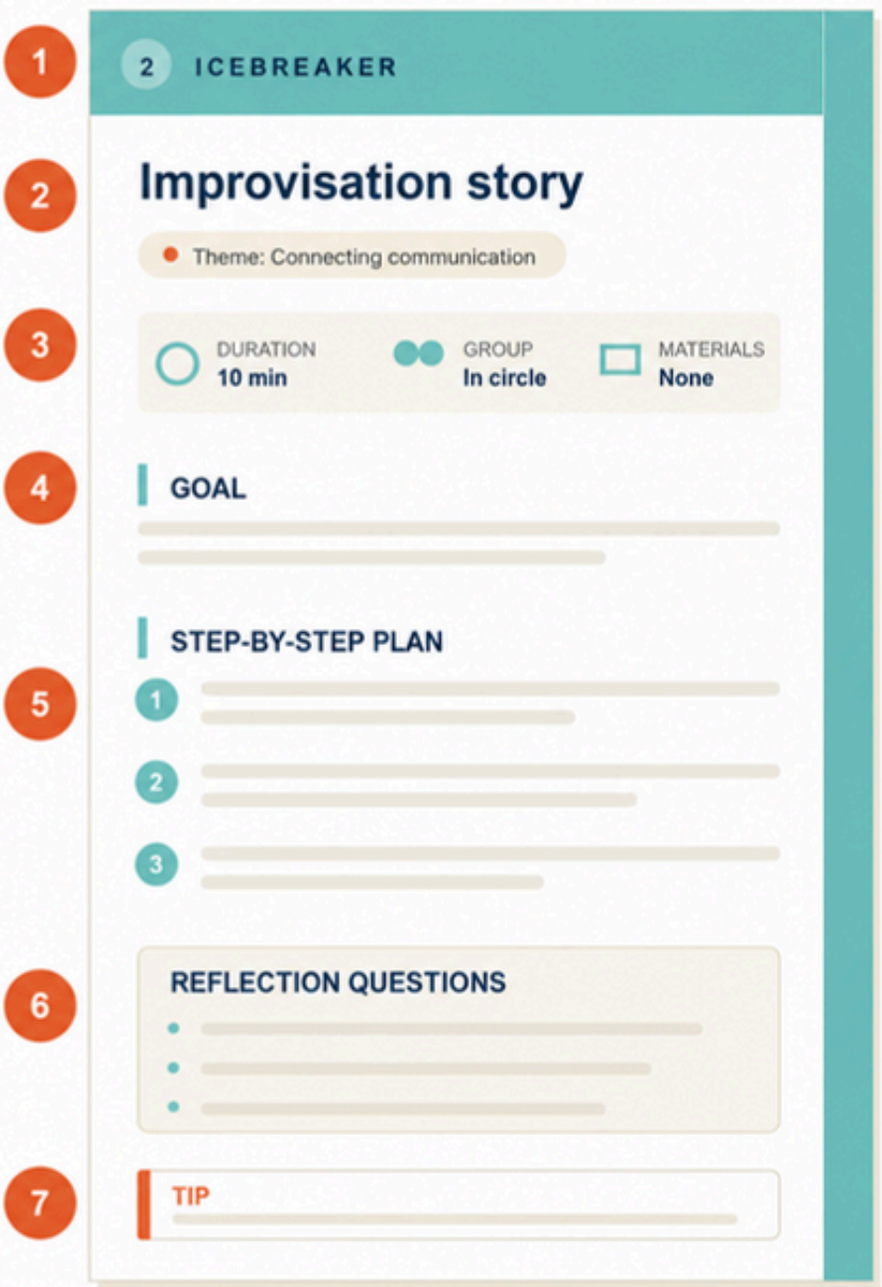
In both cases, maintain a clear rhythm: ensure variety, schedule breaks, and make clear agreements so that energy and safety remain intact within the group.

> **TIP**
> It is better to choose one methodology per building block and guide it firmly than to use three methodologies half-heartedly. Calm, confident facilitation often has more impact than excessive variation.

READING GUIDE

How to read a methodology

Every methodology in this workbook follows the same structure. This makes it easy to compare different methods, choose what fits your group, and prepare your workshop efficiently.



1. **Phase color & tab**
   The color and tab indicating which building block this is.
2. **Name & theme**
   The name of the method and the theme it belongs to.
3. **Quick info**
   Duration, group size and materials – at a glance.
4. **Goal**
   Why you use this method.
5. **Step-by-step plan**
   Step-by-step what you do with the group.
6. **Reflection questions**
   Questions for the debrief with the group.
7. **Tip & source**
   A practical tip, and the source where relevant.

Because every methodology sheet follows the same structure, you can quickly compare and combine methods, and prepare your workshop without spending a long time searching.



CORE BUILDING BLOCKS

The building blocks that belong in every workshop, regardless of the topic: check-ins to ground the group, check-outs to wrap up with care, and energizers in between to keep the energy balanced.

Joint agreements

Core building blocks — works with every topic

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 10 minutes	Whole group, semicircle	Whiteboard / board

OBJECTIVE

Agree together on shared objectives and boundaries for the workshop, and create clarity about intentions, expectations, and group agreements.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Divide the board into three columns: "I expect", "I try", and "I want the others...".
2. Each participant shares three things: one expectation, one intention, and one request to the group. Write each item in the correct column. Repetition is fine; as facilitator, you may add points yourself.
3. Review the lists together and choose five items per column that everyone agrees on.
4. Create one shared sentence per column using those five items: "From this workshop, I expect...". "During our activities, I try...". "I want my fellow participants...".
5. Write the three sentences clearly visible on the board.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Does everyone agree with the agreements?
- Can we uphold these values during the session?
- Is there an agreement missing that is important for safety and respect?

TIP

Keep the three sentences visible throughout the entire workshop. This makes it easy to remind the group when agreements come under pressure.

Group compass

Core building blocks — works with every topic

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 20 minutes	Whole group	4 large sheets of paper, Post-its, markers

OBJECTIVE

Making visible what participants need, and involving the group in creating a safe learning and discussion environment around polarization.

THE FOUR CORNERS

Needs
What do I need to do well with this?

To be assured
What do I find daunting or difficult about this topic?

Enthusiasm & energy
What am I looking forward to in this process?

Ideas
What would help make this a nice place?

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Explain the group compass: "Together, we are creating a compass for how we want to interact with each other in this group." Briefly explain the four corners.
2. Give everyone Post-its. Individual thought list: write down 1-2 things (words or short sentences) per corner.
3. Have participants move around the room and stick their Post-its on the correct sheet. Then, look at a few Post-its aloud from each corner.
4. Make 3-5 group agreements together. Write them on a separate flip chart labeled "Our Compass Agreements" and hang it in a visible place.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What surprised you about what others need or find challenging?
- Which agreements are most important for you to truly respect?
- How can this compass help when conversations become sharper later?

TIP
Use the compass at the beginning of a process. You can refer back to the resulting agreements later when a conversation becomes intense.

Emotion emojis

Core building blocks — works with every topic

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 10 minutes	Whole group	Emoji cards, a large sheet of paper (3 zones)

OBJECTIVE

Allowing participants to express how they feel about polarization in an accessible way, without immediately having to resort to heavy words.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Place emoji cards on the table or show them on a slide. Each participant chooses three emojis:
   - Usually: how do I usually feel about polarization?
   - Today: how do I feel today?
   - Desired: how would I like to feel?
2. Have participants place their emojis or draw emojis in the three zones of the sheet. This creates a visual representation of the group: where are we now, and where do we want to go?
3. Discuss what stands out in the plenary session. Draw the link to polarization: we view the same topic with very different emotions, yet we must still be able to remain in dialogue.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which emoji was the easiest to choose? Which was the hardest?
- Do you feel a difference between how you "usually" feel and "today"?
- What would help you get closer to your "this is how I want to feel" emoji?

TIP

Use this exercise as a check-in as well. For younger participants, you can have them draw emojis instead of using cards.

Fist to Five

Core building blocks — works with every topic

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 5 minutes	Whole group	No materials

OBJECTIVE

Quickly gauge how participants feel about a statement and make visible that there are gradations between "yes" and "no".

THE SCALE: 0 TO 5 FINGERS



STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Explain the scale and frame it: "We show how we feel with our fingers. It is not a mood, but a way to feel and listen."
2. Give a statement. On "three", everyone holds up 0-5 fingers simultaneously, without looking around first.
3. See where the group is sitting. Ask a few people to share briefly. No one is required to; the goal is to understand, not to persuade.

SAMPLE STATEMENTS

As check-in

- I feel energetic and present today.
- I feel safe to speak honestly in this group.

To open a topic

- I know very well what Constructive communication entails.
- I easily recognize us-versus-them thinking when it happens.
- I often check if information is correct before I believe it.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How was it to raise your fingers and show where you are sitting?
- Were you inclined to adjust your number when you looked around? Why?

TIP

Use Fists to Five at the beginning and the end of a conversation, so you can see the shift. A 1 or 2 is not a "problem," but an invitation to talk.

How full is your battery?

Core building blocks — works with every topic

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 5 minutes	Whole group	/

OBJECTIVE

An immediate energy check upon arrival: how much energy are you bringing into the room today? Not whether you enjoy being here, but what your true starting point is. This gives the facilitator a shared baseline and prevents someone from going through the entire session with an empty battery without anyone noticing.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Every morning you probably check your phone's battery. Today we're checking in with each other: how full is your own battery right now? Not 'how much do you like it here', but what is your energy level from 0 to 100%?
2. Standing / sitting: whoever sits above 70% stands up. Whoever falls below that remains seated.
3. Ask the people with low battery to say something briefly first; one sentence will suffice. Then the high ones. Low battery first is deliberate: otherwise, those people wouldn't dare say anything after the "full-energy" votes.
4. Don't fix, don't preach, don't motivate. Just acknowledge. For example, by saying the following: "OK, I hear that. We are going to be considerate of each other today."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What do you need to charge your battery?
- What have you already done today to take care of your battery?
- Is there anything you need to be able to keep up later?

TIP

Important: do not judge low batteries. No one needs to be “full” to participate in a session. What matters is that the group knows each other’s real energy.

Rose, Thorn and Bud

Core building blocks — works with every topic

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 10 minutes	Individually / in small groups	Paper, post-it notes, pens

OBJECTIVE

Looking back on the workshop in a simple way: what worked, what was difficult, and what has growth potential.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Each participant notes down three things:
   - Rose: did I find it valuable or strong?
   - Thorn: did I find it tricky, unclear, or difficult?
   - Bud: do I see this as an opportunity for growth or improvement?
2. This can be done individually on paper, on Post-its on a flip chart, or discussed in small groups.
3. As a facilitator, gather some insights during the plenary session.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What surprised you in your own answer?
- Will we see similar thorns or roses returning?
- What can we actually do with the "buttons"?

TIP

Always start with the Rose. Whoever first identifies what worked finds it easier to share what was difficult afterwards.

Plus/min

Core building blocks — works with every topic

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 20 minutes	Whole group / team	Sailboat drawing, post-its

OBJECTIVE

Reflecting on what worked and what held things back, and opening up tension within the group for discussion.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Hang up a sheet divided into three columns.
2. The group reflects together and fills in the columns:
   - Plus: what worked well?
   - Point of tension: Where was the friction or confusion?
   - Next step: what do we do with this?
3. Briefly discuss the next steps together in plenary.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Were the points of tension substantive or relational?
- How can we make tensions productive?
- What specifically will we take with us to the next session?

TIP

Always actually fill in the “Next step” column. Otherwise, the reflection will remain stuck on what went wrong, without anything being done about it.

Little figures in the tree

Core building blocks — works with every topic

DURATION
± 10 minutes

GROUP
Whole group / team

MATERIALS
Worksheet or free images can be found online under "Pip Wilson Blob Tree"

OBJECTIVE

A visual closing that allows each participant to show in a single image how they are leaving the session, without having to find many words. Ideal for groups with varying language levels, for young people who find it more difficult to express themselves verbally, or after intensive sessions where verbal energy has run out.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Hang up the drawing or place it in the middle of the circle. Give everyone a minute to look at the tree quietly.
2. Which figure feels most like you right now? Not how you want to be, but how you really are after this session.
3. One by one (or in a round of questions), everyone states which figure they relate to and briefly explains why. No one is required to, but sharing is optional.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which figure did you choose at the beginning of the session? Which one now?
- If your little figure had a message, what would he say?
- If the tree represented your current season, which one would it be?

TIP

Works just as well as a check-in. At the beginning of the session, the same tree: "Which figure are you today?"

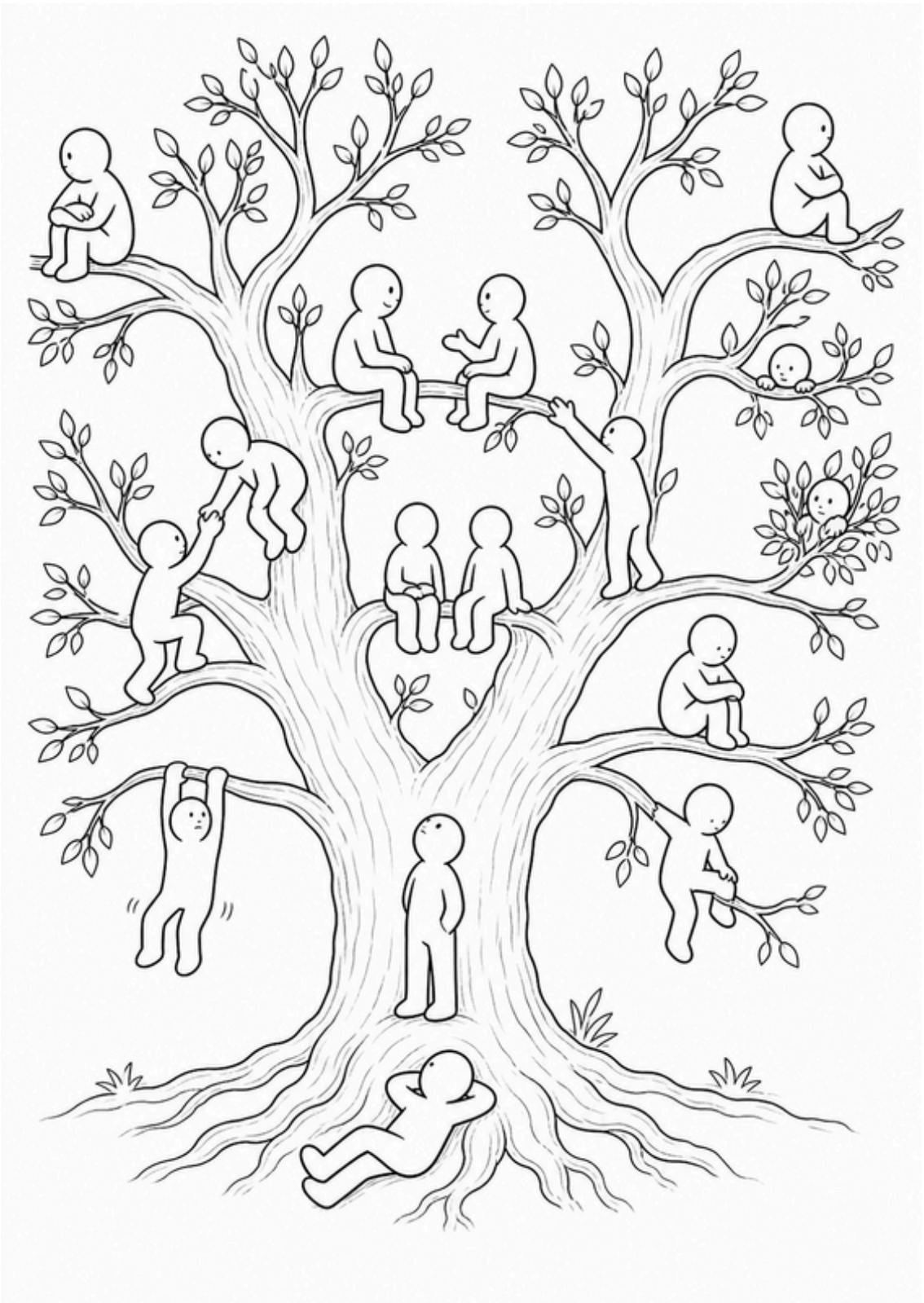
Source: Inspired by the Blob Tree work of Pip Wilson

WORKSHEET

Little figures in the tree

Part of the “Little figures in the tree” method Core building blocks

Show the tree and ask participants to choose a figure that matches how they leave the session. Anyone who wishes can briefly share why, without discussion or comments from the group.



How do you leave the room?

Core building blocks — works with every topic

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 10 minutes	Whole group / team	/

OBJECTIVE

Ensure that everyone leaves the room emotionally grounded, without pent-up tension, or unresolved unrest. Do not evaluate what we have done, but briefly check if people are ready to leave.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. "Conclude with one brief round of questions — no evaluation, no summary. One question: how do you leave this room?
2. Clarify what the question means. "With what energy are you leaving? Do you need anything before you leave? Is there anything you need to say so we can move forward smoothly?"
3. Everyone gets 20 to 30 seconds. No reaction from others. The facilitator nods and moves to the next person. Examples of what may be sounded:
   - I leave with a question in my head, I let it sink in.
   - I am tired but satisfied.
4. If someone mentions tension, anxiety, or irritation: acknowledge briefly, offer one concrete opening ("would you like me to hear what's going on after the session?"), but do not hold a conversation. The space is almost closed.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What weather are you going out in: clear blue, cloudy, rain, fog?
- What color is your departure today?
- Which animal are you leaving with: a lion, a cat, a turtle, a bird?

TIP

Someone who says "I'm still struggling with something" doesn't need to be resolved, but you don't just let it go. A brief acknowledgment plus an opening for later contact is sufficient.

One word, one attitude

Core building blocks — works with every topic

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 5 minutes	Whole group / team	/

OBJECTIVE

A quick, non-verbal check-out for groups tired of verbal questions, or for groups that struggle to express themselves verbally. One word plus one body language often captures more than a long sentence and gives you a picture of the group in 60 seconds.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. We will end briefly. One word, one posture. No explanation. You say one word that captures how you are leaving the room right now. With that, you perform one body posture that supports that word. Done.
2. The facilitator leads by example: "My word is 'satisfied'..." — while adopting a posture (e.g., straight back, relaxed arms, smile). Demonstrating is essential; otherwise, the group will stick to superficial words.
3. One by one, in the circle. Everyone briefly. No reactions from the group.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- If your attitude were a season, which one?
- Which color matches your word?
- If your posture were a place, where would you stand?

TIP
Demonstrating is essential. If the facilitator does not demonstrate, the group remains stuck with surface-level words. Also works as a check-in.

Counting together

Core building blocks — works with every topic

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 10 minutes	Whole group, in a circle	No material

OBJECTIVE

Strengthen active listening, non-verbal attunement, and group focus.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. The group counts aloud together from 1 to a number higher than the group size.
2. The rules are as follows:
   - No overlap: if two people say the same number at the same time, the group starts again at 1.
   - No signals to each other (nodding, pointing, counting on fingers)
   - No agreed order, everything spontaneous
   - No one counts twice in a row.
3. Observe the process and pay attention to the atmosphere. You choose when the exercise stops, even if the final number isn't reached.
4. Keep offering positive encouragement; the exercise is harder than it seems.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What made this exercise difficult?
- Could you "feel" when someone else wanted to speak?
- What does this say about listening in a group?

TIP

If the group gets stuck, offer these tips: do not rush, remain silent when you are not counting, look at each other, and pay attention to breathing and the group rhythm.

Mirror movement

Core building blocks — works with every topic

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 10 minutes	In pairs (A and B)	None, possibly music

OBJECTIVE

Tuning in to the other person, strengthening non-verbal communication, and becoming aware of leading and following.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Form pairs — agree on who is A and who is B. After you give the starting signal, A begins to move slowly.
2. B mirrors every movement of A as accurately as possible.
3. A gradually expands the movement, step by step: involving more body parts, more complex movements, a higher tempo, and moving in space.
4. After a few minutes, the roles are reversed: B leads, A mirrors.
5. Variation (advanced): start again, but now spontaneously switch leaders without talking — intuitively, nothing agreed upon.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What was easier: leading or following? Why?
- As a leader: did you take the other person into account, or did you take over?
- As a mirror: were you open, or did you feel resistance?

TIP

Soft music helps support focus and atmosphere. Ensure there is no talking; it is all about non-verbal synchrony.

Eye contact in motion

Core building blocks — works with every topic

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 10 minutes	Whole group, free in space	Open space

OBJECTIVE

Strengthen interaction and eye contact between participants, and establish safe contact within the group.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. The group walks through the room at a calm, relaxed pace.
2. These instructions apply while walking:
   - Be aware of your body posture
   - Walk in straight directions
   - Arms relaxed along your torso
   - Change direction regularly
   - Don't bump into each other
   - Make gentle eye contact
3. Is the group walking comfortably at a shared pace? Then add: if you meet someone's eyes, walk towards each other, look at each other for a few seconds, and introduce yourself by name. Then take a breath together, smile, and walk on.
4. When everyone has made contact a few times, call the group together in a circle.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How did it feel to make eye contact with someone you don't know very well?
- How did it feel to stand close to someone, in silence?
- When did you feel a real connection?

TIP

Join in during the first round yourself. As a facilitator, demonstrating the calm pace helps the group loosen up.

Chair Yoga

Core building blocks — works with every topic

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 10 minutes	Individual	Chairs, quiet space

OBJECTIVE

Body awareness. To regain calm and focus to continue following the workshop.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Have participants sit comfortably on a chair with a straight back.
2. Read the accompanying text below aloud calmly and slowly.
3. Then allow 5 minutes to write down experiences. Have participants share in pairs, small groups, or in plenary.

ACCOMPANYING TEXT — READ SLOWLY

Sit comfortably on a chair. Close your eyes if that feels good. Notice your feet and feel them. Feel the chair beneath you, and your hands. Bring your attention to your spine—notice the natural curve. Feel your face, your forehead, your jaw. Take a deep breath and feel your whole body. Notice where there is tension or pain. Do not change anything—just notice it. If necessary, breathe calmly towards that part. Take a moment of silence. Find your feet, your hands, your chair again. Take a deep breath, stretch if you wish. Slowly open your eyes and reorient yourself in the space.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What did you notice in your body — tension, calm, or something else?
- What has this moment of silence done to you?

TIP

Read aloud very slowly, with pauses between sentences. Your pace determines whether the group truly calms down.

Post-it Game

Core building blocks — works with every topic

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 5 to 10 minutes	4 or more participants	Post-its in 4 different colors per participant, 10 Post-its of one type

OBJECTIVE

Getting the group physically moving and increasing energy. Works especially well as a warm-up for a session or as an energy boost halfway through a long day.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Give each participant 10 Post-its of the same type (for example, everyone gets their own colour). Have them stick those 10 Post-its on their sweater, jacket, or arm, visible to the others.
2. At the starting signal, everyone tries to get as many different stickers as possible. Taking a Post-it from another participant and sticking it on yourself is allowed. Your Post-its only count if they are still attached to you. No running, no pushing, just quick exchanges.
3. Play for 2 to 3 minutes and then stop the game.
4. Everyone counts how many different Post-it types they have collected. The winner is the one with the most variety, not the one with the most Post-its.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How did it feel to see your own Post-its disappear onto someone else's sweater?
- Which type of Post-it was the hardest to get?

TIP

Write a value or keyword on each Post-it colour (solidarity, freedom, safety, equality, respect…). After the game, ask a short question: "Which values did you collect? Which ones would you have liked to collect?" This turns the energizer into a mini-opener for a conversation about values.

Source: inspired by JINT SONAR, Plakman.

Fruitsalad

Core building blocks — works with every topic

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 15 minutes	Minimum of 8 participants	Chairs, one per participant minus one (so always one short)

OBJECTIVE

Increase energy, get the group moving, and, depending on the statements used, provide a playful introduction to the topic you will be working on later. Works both as a pure warm-up and a gentle opener for a polarization process.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Arrange chairs in a circle so everyone can see each other, one chair fewer than the number of participants. The facilitator stands in the middle, or lets one participant come to the middle first.
2. The person in the middle calls out "Everyone who..." followed by a statement that applies to themselves. Everyone on a chair for whom the statement also applies *must* switch chairs. Meanwhile, the person in the middle tries to sit down as well. Whoever no longer has a chair becomes the new person in the middle and chooses the next statement.
3. Start with statements where little is at stake — "everyone who has a pet", "everyone who drank coffee this week", "everyone who has never been on a plane". The game picks up quickly and runs itself in 3 to 4 minutes.
4. After a few light rounds, the person in the middle may switch to heavier statements, see tip.
5. Stop the game at a high point, before it runs out of steam.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Have you discovered something new about someone in the group?
- Which statement would you prefer to see explored in more detail in a conversation later?

TIP

Examples of statements:

- Everyone who has ever felt one group as 'us' and another as 'them'
- Everyone who has ever changed their mind after a conversation
- Everyone who has ever had an argument about a current debate at the table
- Everyone who ever defended someone who was excluded

Important: Make the option explicit: 'You may also remain seated if the ruling applies but you do not wish to share" explicit, as some topics can hit close to home personally.

Source: inspired by SCI "Free to be you and me", Fruit salad.



CONSTRUCTIVE COMMUNICATION

Discover how to connect in words and in attitude, even when disagreement arises.

Diversity Icebreaker

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 25 minutes	In color groups	Cards (3 colors), board

OBJECTIVE

To give participants insight into their own communication and collaboration style and to foster appreciation for different styles within a group.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Explain that there are three communication styles:
   - Rood: direct
   - Blue: analytical
   - Green: caring
2. Let each participant choose the color that resonates most with them.
3. Form groups based on color.
4. Have each group briefly describe how they would approach a project (for example, organizing a neighborhood party).
5. Discuss together as a whole group: how do the approaches differ? What does each style contribute?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Do you feel at home in the style you chose?
- How can you leverage the strengths of the other styles?
- What happens when one style dominates in a group?

TIP

Combine this with a practical task (for example, making a plan together). This way, participants immediately experience the effect of different styles.

Source: Salto Youth

Words that resonate

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 20 minutes	Individual + small groups	Quote cards (worksheet)

OBJECTIVE

Allowing young people to express how they feel about polarization and society through short quotes, and opening a personal, safe conversation from there.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Lay or hang all the quote cards visibly in the room — on the table, on the floor, or in a line or circle. Set the blank cards aside: someone may write their own sentence on them.
2. Let the young people walk around the cards quietly and read them in silence. Each chooses the quote that matches how they feel today about polarization or living together. If none of the quotes fit, then they write their own sentence. Give them enough time for this.
3. Discuss in small groups: which quote did you choose, and why does it resonate with you? Emphasize that there is no "right" explanation.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Was it easy or difficult to choose a quote that suits you?
- Have you discovered anything new about how others feel about polarization?
- If you were to add one sentence to the set yourself, which one would it be?

TIP

Leave room for your own creativity; some young people prefer to use their own words rather than those of a famous figure.

WORKSHEET

Words that resonate: quote cards

Part of the "Words that resonate" method Constructive communication

Cut out the cards along the dotted line and lay them open in the space. Sheet 1 of 6.

You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean in a drop.

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.

We do not have to agree to let each other be human.

Every time you listen instead of shouting, the world becomes a little gentler.

Connection often begins with one simple question: 'tell me.'

We do not have to be best friends to speak respectfully.

Being vulnerable shows courage, not weakness.

I do not know right now — and that is also an honest answer.

WORKSHEET

Words that resonate: quote cards

Part of the "Words that resonate" method Constructive communication

Cut out the cards along the dotted line and lay them open in the space. Sheet 2 of 6.

Doubt doesn't mean you fail, it means you are thinking.

You may be tired of the debate and still care about the world.

It is okay not to have an opinion yet while everyone is already shouting.

If you remain neutral in situations of injustice, you side with the oppressor.

Nothing can be changed as long as it is not faced.

Sometimes I don't get angry about the difference, but about the lack of willingness to listen.

The louder we shout, the less we hear each other.

Speak a language everyone understands: kindness.

WORKSHEET

Words that resonate: quote cards

Part of the "Words that resonate" method

Constructive communication

Cut out the cards along the dotted line and lay them open in the space. Sheet 3 of 6.

*I don't need to know your story to know that you *do* have a story.*

You can be right at the same time and still choose to listen first.

We have two ears and one mouth – perhaps that is no coincidence.

Empathy is not saying 'I understand you,' but asking 'do you want me to listen?'"

Every time you ask 'Why do you think that?' you build a bridge.

Your silence will not protect you.

One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world.

Even a small voice can cause a big wave.

WORKSHEET

Words that resonate: quote cards

Part of the "Words that resonate" method

Constructive communication

Cut out the cards along the dotted line and lay them open in the space. Sheet 4 of 6.

You can be loud, but also soft – both can be powerful.

Change often begins with one uncomfortable but honest conversation.

When we choose to love, we choose to move against fear and separation.

By constantly reacting to extreme statements, we only make them bigger.

Love is a form of civil resistance. If we focus more on each other, love is the war against fear.

Words seem innocent, but place them in the wrong place at the wrong time, and they become landmines.

If we commit to love, we move from a society of fear to a society of love.

If you don't stand for anything, you fall for anything.

WORKSHEET

Words that resonate: quote cards

Part of the "Words that resonate" method

Constructive communication

Cut out the cards along the dotted line and lay them open in the space. Sheet 5 of 6.

Life is choosing. But to choose well, you must know who you are and what you stand for, where you want to go and why you want to get there.

No one made a greater mistake than the one who did nothing because he could do little.

A joint global effort by engaged citizens can make a difference.

I do not see things as they are; I see them as I am.

The only thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history.

All the flowers of every morning are in the seeds of today.

The greatest threat to freedom is the absence of criticism.

As long as lions have no historians of their own, stories about the hunt will always glorify the hunters.

WORKSHEET

Words that resonate: quote cards

Part of the "Words that resonate" method

Constructive communication

Cut out the cards along the dotted line and lay them open in the space. Sheet 6 of 6.

As citizens, we all have a duty to intervene and be involved — it is the citizen who changes things.

If you argue with a stone, the egg is always wrong.

History teaches everything, including the future.

Follow the three Rs: respect for yourself, respect for others, and responsibility for all your actions.

I am all the bonds I build with others.

Concentric circles

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 20 minutes	Whole group, 2 circles	Question cards, timer

OBJECTIVE

Have young people engage in brief conversations with many different people, and let them practice listening and asking follow-up questions — even on sensitive topics.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Form two circles: the inner one faces outwards, the outer one inwards — everyone has a duo opposite them.
   Explain the rules of the game:
   - You listen attentively and do not interrupt.
   - You respond in first-person language (I think / I feel / I have experienced...).
   - After each round, the outer circle shifts 1 to 2 places.
2. Start with light questions to warm up.
   Procedure per round: Read out the question, A speaks for 1 minute while B listens, then switch.
   After that, the circle rotates.

EXAMPLE — LIGHT WARM-UP QUESTIONS

- Where do you feel most at home?
- Who do you prefer talking to when something is bothering you?
- What do you do to unwind when news or social media annoy you?

3. Next, add sharper but still achievable questions regarding polarization and difference.
   Remember: asking questions is always allowed; debating is not required.
4. Gather everyone in a circle. Discuss: what was it like to talk to so many different people? Did you hear anything that surprised you? Did this feel different from a classic debate?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Who did you actually talk to this time, while you normally almost never do?
- Which question did you find the most meaningful?
- Was it easier or harder to listen without responding?

TIP

Always start with light, personal questions before moving on to polarization topics. Is the group sensitive? Then let the young people formulate questions themselves.

Listening profile

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 20 minutes	In pairs	Pen and paper

OBJECTIVE

Increasing self-awareness and reflecting on your own way of listening.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Let participants settle in with a short breathing exercise: breathe calmly in and out, relax your body, straighten your back, and connect with your head and your heart before you start.
2. Everyone finds a partner.
3. The partners ask each other two questions:
   - What kind of listener do you think others see you as?
   - What kind of listener would you like others to see you as?
4. Participants briefly share what they have noticed and discovered.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What did I discover about myself after this exercise?
- How did this exercise impact me?

TIP

Calmly demonstrate the breathing instruction yourself. The group will naturally adopt the pace you set.

Improvisation story

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 10 minutes	Whole group, in a circle	No material

OBJECTIVE

Creating a story together, and in doing so practicing listening, adapting, and understanding each other.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. The group stands in a circle and is instructed to tell a story together, word by word.
2. Taking turns, in a circle, each participant adds a word.
   One word per turn, no more.
3. The group takes as many turns as needed to finish the story. As a facilitator, you remind them of the previous word and encourage them to let the story sink in—but you do not correct or "rewrite" anything.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- To what extent are you able to listen, adapt, and collaborate?
- Do you prefer to follow, or lead?
- How does it feel when someone steers the story in an unexpected direction?
- What can you take from this exercise into a real conversation?

TIP

Keep up the pace. Thinking too long about "the right word" takes the playfulness out of it.

Stories in Mirror Image

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 30 minutes	In pairs	Two stories, printouts

OBJECTIVE

Evoking empathy and helping participants understand others' perspectives.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Select or write two short, realistic stories on a topic (for example, safety, religious symbols, climate), with opposing viewpoints.
2. Divide the group into pairs. Each member chooses one story and perspective.
3. Let them formulate arguments from their chosen perspective, as if it were their own opinion.
4. The pairs conduct a structured conversation in which they question each other's arguments.
5. Discuss together as a whole group: what felt natural? What was difficult? What did you learn about the other person?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What was difficult about adopting a different perspective?
- To what extent has this exercise changed your perspective on the topic?
- How can this exercise help with having difficult conversations?

TIP

Choose stories that resonate with the target audience and avoid caricatures. Realism increases the impact.

Jigsaw room

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 60 minutes	In subgroups	Materials, worksheets

OBJECTIVE

Reduce us-versus-them thinking and prejudice by making young people interdependent through collaboration.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Choose a topic with subtopics and form home groups of 4 to 6 people, as diverse as possible. Appoint a leader per group to guide the process.
2. Divide the topic into as many subtopics as there are group members. Each member receives one.
3. Give everyone time to read and understand their own subtopic.
4. Form temporary expert groups: everyone with the same subtopic comes together, explores it in depth, and practices how they will explain it.
5. Everyone returns to their own home group.
6. Each member takes turns teaching their subtopic to the home group. The others ask questions for clarification.
7. Conclude with a quiz or short reflection, so everyone realizes that every piece of the puzzle counts.

EXAMPLE THEME — SOCIAL MEDIA & POLARIZATION

Five subtopics: 1) How algorithms determine your timeline 2) Echo chambers and filter bubbles 3) Recognizing fake news 4) How incitement arises online 5) What you can do about it yourself.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How did it feel to be dependent on others?
- What have you learned about collaboration and trust?
- How can collaboration prevent polarization?

TIP

Move from group to group during the activity. Intervene where someone is dominating and gradually let the group leader take over.

Source: jigsaw.org

Imagine

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 40 minutes	In small groups	A3 sheet, markers, post-its

OBJECTIVE

Encourage participants to reflect on what a society with much less extreme polarization would look like and what concrete steps they can take themselves.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. How does polarization feel right now? Ask briefly: where do you notice polarization? (online, politics, family, school...). Note a few examples in keywords on a flip chart, without engaging in discussion. This is simply the picture of the moment.
2. Divide into small groups. Each group chooses one focus area: school, neighborhood, online world, or politics. Write this at the top of their sheet.
3. Have the group draw two columns on their A3. On the left, "Now": what does polarization look like in their domain today? On the right, "Imagine that...": what does the domain look like if extreme polarization were much smaller? Ask for concrete, observable things.
4. Have the group look at the right-hand column. For each element, they come up with one practical step that they or their organization can take. Write this down at the bottom of the sheet or on Post-its in a different color.
5. Have the groups present briefly: 1 sentence about their "picture of now", 2-3 sentences about their dream vision, and 1 to 2 concrete steps. Then hang the sheets up as a "dream wall".

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which element of your dream vision appealed to you the most? Why?
- What would you notice first about your surroundings if the polarization decreases?
- Which of the proposed steps feels most feasible to you?

TIP

→ Ensure that the groups do not get stuck complaining about the “now,” but are given sufficient time to truly focus on the positive vision of the future. Let the exercise end with one or two collective agreements or resolutions.

The Language of Polarization

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 30 minutes	Small groups	Text excerpts, highlighters, paper

OBJECTIVE

Raising awareness about the role of language in polarization and practicing more connecting language.

PREPARATION

Collect a few excerpts in advance (news articles, social media posts) containing polarizing language — for example, expressions such as "the left-wing elite" or "the real Fleming".

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Analyze. Give the participants the excerpts and ask them to mark words or sentences that contain polarizing language.
2. Rewriting. Have the participants rewrite the excerpt in small groups using connecting language.
3. Read aloud and discuss. Have each group read the adapted text aloud and discuss the effect of the new language together.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is the effect of framing on how we see things?
- When have you used polarizing language yourself?
- How can you phrase things more empathetically and constructively?
- Which words evoke unnecessary us-versus-them thinking?

TIP

Combine with video clips or quotes from famous people to make the effect of language even clearer.

Living Library

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION
± 60 minutes

GROUP
Small groups or one-on-one

MATERIALS
Volunteer "living books", a comfortable space for conversation

OBJECTIVE

Making young people aware of diversity and developing understanding through personal encounters and stories.

PREPARATION

Recruit several volunteer "living books" well in advance: individuals with diverse backgrounds or stories who wish to share their personal narratives. The quality and diversity of these stories determine how successful the activity will be.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Explain the concept. Participants "borrow" a living book — a person — and listen to their personal story (approximately 10 minutes per story).
2. Engaging in conversation. Participants may ask questions and engage in dialogue, in small groups or one-on-one.
3. A group reflection follows after 2 to 3 rounds of discussion.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which stories touched you the most?
- How did this change your view of certain groups?
- How can understanding each other's stories reduce polarization?

TIP

Choose diverse stories that resonate with the lives of young people.

Source: SALTO-YOUTH,

Redefine the Conversation

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 30 minutes	Whole group and small groups	A board or flip chart with markers

OBJECTIVE

Learning to reframe heated concepts in a way that creates space for dialogue.

PREPARATION

Choose one current polarizing concept in advance — for example, "woke", "cancel culture", "climate activist", "national identity", or "tradition".

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. What does the word evoke? Ask the participants what they spontaneously think of when they hear the chosen concept. Write all responses on the board, without discussion.
2. Look for the underlying needs. Then ask: what underlying concerns or needs lie behind those reactions?
3. Reframing. In small groups, the participants rewrite the concept in connecting language. Examples: from "they are exaggerating" to "I worry about the speed of change"; from "they are dangerous" to "I feel uncertainty about safety".
4. Sharing. The groups share their reformulations with each other.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Did the atmosphere change when the word was phrased differently?
- What happens to a conversation when we focus on needs instead of labels?
- Is it possible to disagree without dehumanizing?

TIP

Combines well with "The Language of Polarization" — both methodologies practice redirecting harsh language.

Source: "Across Divides — Depolarization of Communication" methodology toolkit,

Polarization on pause

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 20 minutes	Individual + duos	Short poem, paper, pens

OBJECTIVE

Helping participants step out of the pace of the debate, pause to reflect on their feelings, and listen to themselves and others from a place of calm.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Explain that you are not holding a debate for a moment: “We are putting the debate on polarization on hold. We are slowing down and asking ourselves: what is this doing to us on the inside?”
2. Read a short poem or text excerpt aloud once slowly. Ask participants to listen only, without taking notes.
3. Read the same text a second time. Now ask them to pay attention to one sentence, word, or image that sticks in their mind and what feeling it evokes.
4. Let everyone work in silence for 3-5 minutes: write down the word or phrase that sticks, or make a small symbol or drawing to go with the feeling.
5. Have participants share in pairs or trios: which word did you choose, what feeling came with it, what did it remind you of? It’s not about giving the ‘right’ explanation.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What was it like to slow down first, instead of discussing immediately?
- Which word or sentence from the text is still sticking with you?
- Where in your life would such a "pause moment" help before something escalates?

TIP

Choose a text that is not demoralizing but leaves room for interpretation. You can also have young people bring or write a short poem themselves.

WORKSHEET

Polarization on pause: poem

Part of the “Polarisation on pause” method Constructive communication

Read this poem slowly

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I’ve heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

Emily Dickinson

The 4 corners of feeling

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 25 minutes	whole group	Tape or chalk, 4 A4s, list of situations

OBJECTIVE

Show that one situation can evoke different emotions — and that your thoughts and interpretations help determine what you feel.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Use tape or chalk to make a large cross sign on the floor: four corners. Place one sheet in each corner — happy, angry, scared, sad. Briefly explain in simple language what you mean by each emotion.
2. Read out one situation at a time (see examples below). Ask everyone to stand in the corner that corresponds to how they would feel. There is no right or wrong.
3. After each situation, follow up with a few participants from different perspectives: "What was your first thought? And what do you feel in your body?" Also invite someone from a different perspective to explain why they feel something different.
4. Point out what becomes visible: the same situation evokes different thoughts — and therefore different emotions.

EXAMPLE SITUATIONS

- At camp, someone makes a "joke" about your name, accent, or clothing.
- You post your opinion on Instagram and someone reacts harshly: "You are really stupid."
- You hear it being said in the group: "They belong more to that other group than to us."
- You arrive at the youth group and notice that the others have already planned something without you.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Did you find it surprising that others chose a different emotion in the same situation?
- What thoughts did you notice within yourself?
- Do you see how misunderstandings and arguments arise when we don't know what the other person thought or felt?

TIP

In us-versus-them situations, we often think that the other person is "exaggerating" or is "cold." This exercise reveals that people experience the same situation very differently — that realization alone reduces harsh judgment.

Depolarizing from within

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 30 minutes	Individual + pairs	questionnaire per participant, pens

OBJECTIVE

Initiating depolarization from within: teaching young people to articulate doubts, nuance, and understanding for the "other side".

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Give everyone the questionnaire. Have participants think individually and write down short answers (see questionnaire below).
2. Form pairs. Person A shares what they wrote down for up to 3 minutes; B listens without interrupting and notes down 1-2 questions.
3. B asks clarifying questions for a maximum of 2 minutes — solely to understand better, not to discuss.
4. Switch roles: B tells, A listens in the same way.
5. Short group wrap-up: ask 2-3 participants "What was the hardest part?" and "What insight will you take away?"

QUESTIONNAIRE

- Are there thoughts you prefer not to say out loud within your own group, for fear of the reactions?
- Have you ever doubted whether your own point of view is entirely correct?
- Are there things that people with a different opinion do or say that you can actually appreciate in some way?
- Do you think that people who think differently sometimes also have concerns or fears that are understandable?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Was there anything you could understand or acknowledge about the "other side"?
- Did your view change a little bit, or not at all?
- Which fears or needs did you hear that are actually very human?

TIP

Do not do this exercise during an acute conflict in the group, but as quiet reflection. It works best when no one needs to "defend" themselves.

Vulnerability and growth

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 30 minutes	Whole group, working in pairs	A quiet space, no materials

OBJECTIVE

Sharing a personal story to strengthen vulnerability, connection, and humanity within the group.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Introduce the topic. Bring the group together and set the tone: "I think we all have a scar somewhere here — maybe from when we were children, maybe from something clumsy we did. Often, these are moments when we were vulnerable, but that we can laugh about now."
2. Lead by example. As a facilitator, briefly share your own story about your scar (max. 2 minutes). Deliberately choose a lighthearted memory, preferably funny or one with a positive conclusion; this way, you set the example and create a safe environment.
3. Everyone chooses a story. Give the participants 1 minute to think about a personal scar story that they feel comfortable sharing today.
4. Sharing in pairs. Form pairs and have each pair find a quiet spot. Each person gets about 3 minutes to tell their story; the listener does not interrupt. After 5–6 minutes, everyone switches partners and tells the story again.
5. Conclude in the large group. Come together and conclude with the reflection questions.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How was it to share something personal — easy or nerve-wracking?
- What happened to the atmosphere when people told their stories?
- What did you feel when you listened to the stories of others?
- What does this say about vulnerability and connection in a group?

TIP

Please note: talking about scars can be a sensitive topic for some participants (think of scars from an accident or a difficult period). Make it clear beforehand that participation and sharing are entirely voluntary — anyone who prefers to choose a different, lighter story or simply listen is always welcome to do so.

Reconciliation Circle

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 40 minutes	Whole group, in a circle	Chairs in a circle, possibly a “talking stone”

OBJECTIVE

Practice Constructive communication in a safe setting.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Setup. Place chairs in a circle so that everyone can see each other. Introduce the basic agreements: listen without interrupting, speak from your own perspective (I-messages), and respond respectfully.
2. Sharing experiences. Invite participants to share how they experienced a specific topic or situation — for example, a disagreement, a moment of tension, or a difficult dialogue.
3. Listening and reflecting. The others listen actively, without reacting. After each speaker, short reflections can be shared, emphasizing what resonated or what was learned.
4. Connecting responses. Encourage responses that connect, for example: "I heard that..." or "That touched me because...".
5. Wrap up. Conclude with a brief round: what will you take away?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How did it feel to be heard?
- What struck you about how others shared or reacted?
- Which reactions surprised or moved you?
- How can you incorporate this style of communication into your daily life?

TIP

If necessary, work with the basic rules visible in the room (for example, on a flip chart) to help maintain a sense of safety.

Building Bridges Dialogue

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 60 minutes	Groups of 4–6 participants	A quiet space, a timer or clock, cards with example topics

OBJECTIVE

Allowing young people to practice a structured, connecting conversation about a sensitive topic in a safe setting.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Form groups and choose a topic. Make groups of 4 to 6 participants. Choose a topic together, or use cards with example topics (for example, racism, climate, or religion).
2. Explain the rules of the game. Three agreements:
   - One person speaks, the others listen without interrupting.
   - Everyone gets the same amount of speaking time (for example, 2 minutes).
   - Afterwards, someone else may respond, focusing on what he or she has heard.
3. Conduct the discussion rounds. Have the participants do one or two discussion rounds.
4. Wrap up. Conclude with a joint reflection.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How did it feel to just listen?
- What did you hear that surprised or touched you?
- How does this differ from a regular conversation?

TIP

Use a talking stick or an object that indicates who is speaking — that helps maintain conversational discipline.

Source: SALTO-YOUTH, Inclusion & Diversity

Powerful questions

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION
± 45 minutes

GROUP
Whole group, partly in small groups

MATERIALS
Flip chart with markers, aggressive questions, a short statement or post

OBJECTIVE

Young people learn to recognize the difference between assertive and inquisitive questions, and practice asking open, curious questions about sensitive topics.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Attacking vs. inquiring questions. Write 3 to 4 typical "attack questions" on the board (for example: "How can you be so naive as to believe that?"). Ask the group: "How does this make you feel when someone says that to you? Is this really a question?" Work together to transform these sentences into curious, open questions (what / how / which…).
2. Build a mini-toolkit. With the group, put an overview on the flip chart with four types of powerful questions: Clarifying: "What exactly do you mean by…?" Deepening: "How did you arrive at that opinion?" Perspective: "How do you think someone with a different background views this?" Feeling and experience — "Which experience or feeling plays a role for you?" Establish three basic rules together: a good question is open (what / how / which), curious (the answer is not fixed), and tied to something concrete (a text, statement, or situation).
3. Designing questions based on a statement. Show a short statement or post about polarization (for example: "Online, you can no longer have a normal discussion, only name-calling"). Have the young people (in small groups or in a plenary session) come up with three powerful questions: one clarifying, one in-depth, and one question asking for perspective or feelings. Read a few questions aloud and discuss briefly: "Which question makes you truly curious about the answer?"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Do you notice that in real discussions you tend to ask more aggressive or probing questions?
- In which context (online, at home, youth work, school) would you like to use this skill the most?
- How much would change if people asked just one extra good question before responding?

TIP

Emphasize that asking questions is not a weakness, but a way to keep a conversation open. Conclude by having everyone finish one sentence (verbally or on a card): "A question I want to ask more often in difficult conversations is…"

Silent dialogue

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION
± 40 minutes

GROUP
In groups, one large sheet per group

MATERIALS
markers, a central text, quote, or image on a sharp topic

OBJECTIVE

To demonstrate that you can also hold a conversation in silence and on paper. In this way, you create space for voices that are often drowned out in loud debate, and you view a complex topic from multiple angles.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. What is a silent dialogue? Explain: "We are going to have a conversation, but without talking. You will talk to each other using pen and paper on one large sheet — you respond to the text *and* to each other's comments, in silence." Basic rules: do not talk, only write, draw, or place arrows. Circle words, place question marks, and draw lines are allowed.
2. In the first round, they react to the text. Place a quote or short article on a pressing topic (polarization, racism, freedom of speech, social media...) in the center of each sheet. Instruction: "Read quietly first. Then, write around the text what you think, feel, or wonder about." Have them write individually and in silence on the same sheet for 5 to 7 minutes.
3. In the second round, they respond to each other. "Now you are not only responding to the text, but also to what others wrote." Participants can draw arrows pointing to other people's sentences ("Why do you think that?"), place an asterisk next to something they agree with, a question mark next to something they want to know more about, or add a counter-example or their own experience. Meanwhile, walk around and see if "conversations" develop.
4. Harvesting aloud. Break the silence. Have one or two people per group briefly share: what stands out about the sheet, where did discussion or tension arise, which remark really got you thinking? Hang the sheets up visibly and continue in a plenary session: "Did anything emerge on paper that might not have been said in a loud debate?"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How did it feel not to be allowed to talk, only to write?
- What have you learned about the topic by reading others instead of hearing them?
- How could a silent dialogue help if a topic is already highly polarized?

TIP

Choose the text carefully: sharp enough to provoke a reaction, but not so extreme that it shuts people down. Let participants write anonymously—this allows more room for honest responses. Optionally, pass around multiple sheets simultaneously and have the participants rotate.

Poems as a counter-voice

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION
± 45 minutes

GROUP
Individually, in small groups, and in plenary

MATERIALS
4 to 6 short poems, A4 sheets, pens, a flip chart or whiteboard

OBJECTIVE

To let people experience how language and poetry can touch, challenge, and connect. To make visible the images of "us" and "them" contained in poems and song lyrics, and to invite young people to write a short text themselves as a counter-voice against polarization.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Entering a text. Briefly introduce: "Poetry can say things that are difficult to say in a normal conversation. Today we will look at how poems speak about us, them, power, and hope. Afterwards, we will write a short counter-voice of our own." Place the poems around the room. Let the young people walk around, read in silence, and choose one text that touches them. Next to that text, have them individually note: one sentence or image that stays with them, and one word that captures the essence for them (hope, anger, loss, love, silence...).
2. Reading poetry through the lens of polarization. Discuss the chosen text(s) in small groups: Who is speaking here, what voice do you hear? Which "we" and "they" is being discussed, explicitly or between the lines? Which emotion predominates? What is the power of this text; does it make visible something that is normally pushed away, does it offer comfort, does it call for action? Collect the recurring feelings and keywords on a flip chart during the plenary session.
3. Write your own poem or slam poetry. Give the participants space to write a short text (3 to 8 lines). Optionally help with opening lines: "In these times I feel..." or "They say about us that... but I..." Focus on authenticity, not perfect language — spelling doesn't matter.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which poem would you hang up in a place where there is a lot of conflict? Why?
- Did your own text feel more like venting, connecting, or protesting?
- In your opinion, what can poems do better than an opinion piece or a debate?

TIP

Choose texts and slam poetry that match their language level and are relatable in content. Optionally, conclude with a small open mic.

WORKSHEET

Poems as a counter-voice: poems

Part of the “Poems as a counter-voice” method ● Constructive communication

Place the poems around the room. PAGE 1 of 4

I am not angry.
I am anger.
I am the door after it slams.
I am the word no one let me say.
I am the heat under the skin,
the quiet before the table breaks.
Do not ask me where it started
if you never asked what I carried.
I am not a storm.
I am the sky remembering
every stone that was thrown into it.
But listen.
If anger can be a wall,
it can also be a warning.
If anger can burn,
it can also point
to what was never protected.
I am not angry.
I am anger.
And I am trying
not to become
only that.

WORKSHEET

Poems as a counter-voice: poems

Part of the "Poems as a counter-voice" method ● Constructive communication

Place the poems around the room. PAGE 2 of 4

"Hope" is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

Emily Dickinson

WORKSHEET

Poems as a counter-voice: poems

Part of the "Poems as a counter-voice" method ● Constructive communication

Place the poems around the room. PAGE 3 of 4

Yesterday I
was clever,
so I wanted
to change
the world.

Today I am
wise, so I
am changing
myself.

-Rumi



Language barrier

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 40 minutes	Whole group	Incomprehensible form (see worksheet), pens, table for "civil servant"

OBJECTIVE

Let young people feel the impact of misunderstanding, and how powerless it is when you do not speak the language but depend on it. This is how you strengthen empathy with refugees and asylum seekers.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Enter in silence. The participants enter. Say nothing, do not greet them. After a minute of silence, hand out only the form and a pen. Say briefly and dryly: "Fill out this form. You have five minutes." No explanation, no answers to questions. Anyone who asks a question receives a response in another language or in incomprehensible sounds and gestures.
2. Fill out the form. Everyone tries to fill out the form. Let the tension be uncomfortable for a moment. After five minutes, say: "Stop. Hand in the form." Collect everything, without eye contact or a smile.
3. The assessment. Sit behind the table like a strict official. Call out one name at a time, look briefly at the form, and come up with a reason to reject it: "Question 3 is blank. Rejected.", "This answer is wrong. Refused.", "Too late. Next." No discussion. After 5 or 6 times, the group realizes this is unfair. Then step out of character: "Okay, I'm stopping playing. Let's look together at what just happened here."
4. Debriefing. Discuss how it felt: the incomprehensible form, the lack of explanation, the rejection. Which words, looks, or tone made it worse? Work together to build three steps to make it a connection:
   - Acknowledge: "I see that this is difficult."
   - Clarify: "What don't you understand, where are you getting stuck?"
   - Choice or step: "We are doing this step by step, I will help you with this."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- When did you notice you started getting stressed — at the beginning, in the middle, or at the rejection?
- How can you set boundaries for someone, say "no," without hurting that person?
- What do you want to do differently from now on when someone doesn't understand something?

TIP

Check beforehand whether there are young people in the group with their own (traumatic) refugee story. If so: announce the exercise clearly, allow those who wish to observe rather than participate, and ensure there is room for follow-up care.

Source: based on 'Language Barrier' from COMPASS — Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People, Council of Europe (coe.int/compass)

WORKSHEET

Language barrier: form

Part of the “Language barrier” method Constructive communication

Duplicate and distribute to participants

Application for asylum	
1. Appellido	
2. Primer nombre	
3. Fecha de nacimiento	
4. Pais, ciudad de residencia	
5. Ou genyen fanmi ne etazini?	
6. Kisa yo ye pou wou	
7. Ki papye imagrasyon fanmi ou yo genyen isit?	
8. Eske ou ansent?	
9. Eske ou gen avoka?	
10. Ou jam al nahoken jyman	

May I come in?

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION
± 45 minutes

GROUP
Groups of 3–5 participants

MATERIALS
The 3 role cards, a timer, paper and marker for the journalist

OBJECTIVE

Young people learn how quickly conversations harden under stress and power, how to state boundaries and rules without dehumanizing, and how the media can sharpen or humanize a story.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Warm-up: word checking. Have the young people write down words that often come up in discussions about migration — this way you can see how far their knowledge extends. Make it clear right away: we are talking about people, and offensive language is unacceptable.
2. Round 1 — Role-play. Assign roles to small groups (3 to 5 young people): person at the border, official/border control, media/journalist. The person at the border gets 30 seconds to say: "Why am I asking for protection or a chance?" The others respond as they imagine it often goes "in real life" — brief, firm, and suspicious is allowed, as long as it remains respectful. The journalist asks 2 to 3 questions in between.
3. Introduce nonviolent communication. Briefly explain the four steps: 1) what do I hear or see? (fact/observation) 2) what do I feel? 3) what do I need? 4) what am I specifically asking for? From now on, participants must summarize before responding: "If I understand you correctly, then... Is that right?"
4. Round 2 — the same conversation, now connecting. Ground rules: no labels ("illegal"...); summarize at least once before responding; stating boundaries and rules is allowed, but with respect and explanation ("I hear your distress, and I also want to ensure clarity and safety..."). The civil servant may say "no," but always with respect, explanation, and what *is* possible. The journalist now interviews in a connecting way: nuance, human, checking assumptions.
5. Breaking news. The journalist creates two versions of the news: a clickbait version (polarizing: headline + introductory sentence) and a connecting version (human and accurate: headline + introductory sentence + a quote that does not dehumanize). Ask the group to respond briefly: which version would you share, and why?

DEBRIEFING & REFLECTION

- Round 1 vs. Round 2: What was the biggest difference in tone? When did you feel the tension rising, and why? Which sentence made it worse, which softer?
- Positions vs. needs: Which positions did you hear ("do not allow", "help everyone")? Which needs lay beneath them — safety, fairness, clear rules, connectedness? Which needs aligned, despite differing opinions?
- Listening & Summarizing: How did it feel to be summarized? Was there a moment when you thought, "Okay, they understand me"? What made summarizing difficult?
- What would change if conversations proceeded like round 2 more often?

TIP

Note: Are there young people with their own migration or refugee experience? Give them the option to observe rather than participate. End on a warm note: acknowledge the emotions and clearly state that it was a simulation.

Source: based on "Can I Come In?" from COMPASS

WORKSHEET

May I come in?: role cards

Part of the "May I come in?" method ● Constructive communication

Print a set (3 cards) per group of 3-5 participants.
Cut out the cards along the dotted line.

ROLE A

Person at the border

Your goal: you want to get in, be safe, and have a fair chance to tell your story.

CHOOSE 3 ARGUMENTS

- ☐ I have the right to ask for protection.
- ☐ Going back is dangerous for me or my family.
- ☐ I don't have a safe place anywhere anymore.
- ☐ I can contribute with experience or skills.
- ☐ I am asking for temporary shelter.

CHOOSE 1 TACTIC

- ☐ You speak as a group or you speak alone.
- ☐ You behave emotionally, angrily, or quietly.
- ☐ You try to beg or negotiate.

CHOOSE A PROFILE

- ☐ Single parent with child
- ☐ Student being persecuted
- ☐ Someone in a medical emergency
- ☐ Journalist or activist on the run
- ☐ Family separated en route
- ☐ Young person without a support network
- ☐ Someone with a fake document
- ☐ Someone who only wants transit
- ☐ Required profession (healthcare, technical)
- ☐ Trauma, difficulty speaking

ROLE B

Civil servant — boundary & procedure

Your goal: you follow the rules, assess risks, and make a decision.

CHOOSE 3 ARGUMENTS

- ☐ We have rules; I have to check this.
- ☐ Do you have documents? Are they real?
- ☐ Our capacity is limited; it is busy.
- ☐ I must distinguish between danger and opportunity.
- ☐ There are also safety concerns.

CHOOSE 1 DECISION

- ☐ Everyone in
- ☐ No one in
- ☐ A few inside, with criteria

CONNECTING UPGRADE — ROUND 2

- I hear that you are afraid of _____. Is that correct?
- What I can do is _____. What do you need first?
- I guard boundaries and always remain human.

WORKSHEET

May I come in?: role cards

Part of the “May I come in?” method

Constructive communication

Print a set (3 cards) per group of 3-5 participants.
Cut out the cards along the dotted line.

ROLE C

Journalist — media

Your goal: you create "the story". You choose: conflict or connection.

ROUND 1 — CLASSIC PRINT

Ask 2 to 3 provocative questions

- Why would we help you?
- Aren’t you a ‘fortune seeker’?
- What do you say to someone who is afraid?

ROUND 2 — CONNECTING JOURNALISM

Ask 3 human and probing questions

- What do you want people to really understand about your situation?
- What is your greatest fear and your greatest hope?
- To the civil servant: what is your dilemma, from a human perspective?

BREAKING NEWS — WRITE TWO HEADLINES

At the end of the game, create two versions of the news.

CLICKBAIT VERSION

Headline + short intro

CONNECTING VERSION

Headline + intro sentence + a quote that doesn't dehumanize

depolarisatie.be

Three small connections

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 30 minutes	Groups of two or three	Post-its, pens

OBJECTIVE

Helping participants focus their attention on small moments of connection, respect, or nuance instead of solely on conflict and polarization.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Brief explanation. Introduce the conclusion: "Now let's look at three small things from today that showed that connection is also possible." It can be about the workshop, but also about something outside of it.
2. Three small connections. Have everyone silently write down three moments that felt good: a contact, a moment of truly listening, a gesture of respect. On separate Post-its: what happened, and why did it feel good?
3. Sharing in pairs or trios. Everyone shares one of the three moments: what was it, what made it connecting, and who caused that—yourself, the other person, the group, or chance?
4. Feedback. Ask a few volunteers to share a moment with the large group. Write keywords on a flip chart to create a mini-list.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Was it easier or harder to find three small connections?
- What does it say about us that these things did happen today?
- Do you see patterns in what "worked" — listening, humor, vulnerability?
- Is there one thing you would like to do more consciously from now on?

TIP

Keep it light and brief. Micro-moments count too — a nod, a question, a smile.

Appreciation – Sorry – Aha

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 20 minutes	Whole group, in a circle	Chairs in a circle, a talking stone to pass around

OBJECTIVE

Reflecting together on what went well, what you would have liked to do differently, and which insights stuck after a conversation about polarization. This strengthens connection, honesty, and awareness within the group.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Intro. Wrap up the session using three words:
   - Appreciation: something or someone for which you are grateful.
   - Sorry: something you wish you had done or said differently.
   - Aha: an insight or a click moment.
2. Silent reflection. Allow 2 to 3 minutes of silence. Ask the participants to think for themselves: an appreciation (for a person, statement, attitude, atmosphere...), possibly an apology (for something in this session or more broadly — for example, "I notice that I often judge quickly"), and an aha (something they now see differently about themselves, the other person, or about polarization).
3. Sharing round in the circle. Pass the talking stone around. Whoever is holding the stone shares one or more of the three: "My appreciation is...", "My apology is...", "My aha moment is..." The rest listen without interrupting.
4. Wrap-up. Conclude by acknowledging, as a facilitator, what you heard: much gratitude, recognizable doubts, shared aha moments. Make the link to polarization explicit: "If we can name appreciation, responsibility, and learning, that is a counterforce against hardened us-versus-them divisions."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What was it like to express something in the form of appreciation, apology, or aha?
- Which sentences from others have stayed with you?

TIP

Use this as a standard closing element for a series on polarization or difficult conversations. You can also visually display the three words on a flip chart so that participants have something to hold onto.

One pager

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 30 minutes	Individual work, concludes with a plenary gallery walk	A4 sheets (blank), markers, colored pencils, Post-its

OBJECTIVE

Young people summarize their most important insights on a single sheet. They connect words and images, and show what personally touched or changed them.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. What is a one-pager? Explain: "A one-pager is a single sheet on which you show, using words and images, what you take away from this process." Optionally, show one or two examples. Write on the board what must be included on the one-pager:
   - 3 key insights
   - 2 short quotes or sentences
   - 1 example that stayed with you
   - 1 personal resolution: "From now on, I want to..."
   - at least 3 images (symbols, arrows, colors)
2. Brainstorm on a scrap of paper. Allow 5 to 10 minutes of silence. Questions to ask yourself: What have I really learned or realized? Which exercise or quote is sticking in my mind?
3. Create the one-pager. Give the young people freedom in the layout, or draw a simple structure on the board with zones: a corner for quotes, the center for the main insight, and the intention at the bottom. Emphasize that readability is more important than artistry. Walk around and ask helpful questions: "What do you definitely want someone to see when they look at your one-pager?" Background music can help.
4. Gallery walk. Hang up all the one-pagers and have everyone walk around in silence to look at them.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which element on your one-pager do you find most important?
- Is there something you wanted to put on it but didn't dare?
- Which one-pager by someone else stays with you? Why?

TIP

Emphasize content from the start, not drawing talent. If necessary, use a very simple template with boxes.

Source: www.cultofpedagogy.com/one-pagers/

Which Sentence Worked?

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 20 minutes	Individually, then small groups	Post-its, pen, a large sheet of paper

OBJECTIVE

Have participants reflect on language that created connection, reduced tension, or enabled recovery. They build up a small stockpile of sentences that they can use later.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Explain: "Sometimes one sentence makes a conversation harder. Sometimes one sentence creates space again. Today we are looking for sentences that worked." Have participants reflect individually or in small groups on previous conversations.
   Question: Which sentence helped to connect or reduce tension?
2. Have everyone write one or two sentences on Post-its. Examples:
   - "If I understand you correctly, you say..."
   - I notice that this touches me.
   - Can you explain what you mean?
   - I want to start over.
   - "What I actually meant was..."
3. Have participants explain in small groups why their sentence worked.
4. Collect the sentences on a sheet: Sentences that create space.
5. Let participants choose one sentence they want to take with them.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which sentence created space instead of pressure?
- Which repair phrase suits you?
- What makes a sentence connecting: the words, the tone, or the moment?

TIP

Have participants formulate sentences in their own spoken language. A sentence only works if it feels natural.

Common Thread

Theme: Constructive communication

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 15 minutes	Whole group	A large sheet of paper or a board, stapler

GOAL

Jointly identifying what helped maintain connection during the session and what still requires attention.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Write on the board:
   - What helped connection?
   - What made connection more difficult?
   - What do we want to remember?
2. First, let participants think individually for one minute.
3. Collect answers in popcorn style (quick, spontaneous contributions). Write short words or sentences on a flip chart.
4. Look together at what keeps coming back. Ask: “What common thread do we see?”
5. Formulate one sentence together that the group wants to carry forward. For example: We listen better when there is first room for emotion.
6. Finish by reading that sentence aloud.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What helped me keep listening today?
- What do we want to take with us to the next meeting?
- Which agreement or attitude deserves more focus?

TIP

Let the common thread emerge from the group. As a facilitator, you may summarize, but do not assume what the group “should” have learned.



PART 2 - WORKBOOK

US-VERSUS THEM THINKING

Understand how us-versus-them thinking emerges, what its impact is, and how to build bridges across differences.

Polarization Thermometer

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 15 minutes	Whole group	Flip chart with a thermometer, markers, Post-its, or stickers

GOAL

Encourage participants to reflect on how "sensitive" the topic of polarization is to them personally, make visible that not everyone enters the conversation with the same feelings, and open the discussion without immediately diving into the content.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Explanation of the thermometer. Briefly explain what the zones mean: COOL · LUKEWARM · WARM · HOT. Emphasize that there is no right or wrong: "This is not a test. It is just a snapshot of how you come across today regarding this topic."
2. Choosing an individual position. Give everyone a Post-it or sticker. Ask: "When you think about polarization, the public debate, or politics, where do you stand on this thermometer today?" Everyone sticks it on the spot that fits best.
3. Look together. As a group, review the distribution on the flipchart. Ask a few open, safe questions: "What do you notice? Are we all sitting in the same spot, or very spread out? Is there anything that surprises you?" Have 2 to 3 volunteers share, in no more than one sentence, why they placed themselves there. This is not a substantive debate yet; it is purely about feeling.
4. Bridge to the rest of the session. Make the link with what follows explicit: "We see that we enter very differently — some cool, some hot. In the rest of the session, we are going to practice how to continue the conversation even *with* those different feelings."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is it like to see that others feel differently about the same topic than you?
- Do you recognize that you sometimes react "hotter" than you would like, or conversely cool down and distance yourself?
- What would you need to feel a little safer in conversations about polarization?

TIP

You can use the thermometer again later in the session ("Where are you now?") to make change visible.

WORKSHEET

Polarization Thermometer

Part of the “Polarization Thermometer” method ● Us-versus-them thinking

Print this page and hang the thermometer in a visible spot at the front of the room. Give each participant a sticker or Post-it and have them stick it on the spot that best reflects their feeling.

Polarisatiethermometer



More powerless

HOT

“This really fills me up; I get tense/angry/overstimulated from this.”

LUKEWARM

“I follow the topic, but it doesn’t affect me very strongly.”

WARM

“I’m involved;
I am concerned.”

COOL

“I feel fairly calm; I keep some distance from the debate.”

More hope

My name, my story

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 15 minutes	In pairs, followed by a group round	No materials

GOAL

Getting to know each other while gently stepping into the topic of identity and origin.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Lead by example: briefly state your own name so participants know what is expected.
2. In pairs, talk about your name. Give the pairs a maximum of 10 minutes (5 minutes per person) to tell each other about their name, based on four questions:
   - Who gave you your name?
   - Why did your name givers choose this name?
   - Does your name have a meaning?
   - Are you happy with your name?
3. The listening test. Now ask everyone (without announcing this beforehand) to repeat in the group what their duo partner said about their name. Then ask the person whose story was told: do you recognize yourself in this version? Do not comment yourself.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What does your name story say about you — and about where you come from?
- How did it feel to hear someone summarize your story? Was the version relatable?
- What is the difference between listening to pass on and listening to understand?

TIP

First, give the participants a minute of silence to gather their thoughts before they start talking. It makes the conversations slower and more honest. The listening test in step 3 is the didactic heart of this methodology — definitely do not announce it beforehand, otherwise everyone will switch to "listening mode" and you will miss the natural conclusion.

Gallery

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 15 minutes

GROUP
The whole group, in a circle

MATERIALS
Phones containing personal photos

GOAL

By sharing a cherished photo, create empathy and recognition for who people really are — beyond first impressions.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Choose a photo. Ask the participants to search their phones for a photo that is dear or important to them.
2. Show and tell one by one. Each participant shows the photo to the group and shares: what or who is in it, when was it taken, and why is this photo important to you? The others listen in silence; there are no reactions during this round. This is intentional: it promotes genuine listening.
3. Only respond at the end. When everyone has had their turn, give the group time to react or share what touched them.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Was there a photo that surprised or touched you? Why?
- What does it say about someone that they chose precisely this photo? What did you discover about the other person?
- Have you seen or heard anything that you didn't expect from someone in this group?

TIP

Please note that participation is entirely voluntary. Anyone who prefers not to share or comment on a photo is free to say so — that is a legitimate choice. Optionally, allow a minute of silence beforehand so that everyone can quietly find their photo.

Self-portrait

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 20 minutes

GROUP
Individual work concludes in a plenary circle

MATERIALS
An A4 sheet and a pencil per participant, colored pencils

GOAL

Expressing yourself through a drawing — not how you look on the outside, but who you are on the inside. This makes it clear that first impressions often do not tell the whole story.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Everyone takes a sheet of paper and a pencil, finds a quiet spot in the room, and draws the basic shape of a human body.
2. Decorate the drawing with colored pencils in a way that best represents you. It doesn't have to be realistic; be as symbolic as you like. Not how you look, but who you are on the inside.
3. Write your name at the top in your favorite color.
4. Everyone gathers in a circle. One by one, show your self-portrait and briefly explain what you have incorporated into it.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How well does your drawing reflect how you normally present yourself to others?
- How often do you actually show this "inside"?
- Did the drawings of others match the image you had of them?
- How did it feel to show your own drawing and to see those of others?

TIP

Make sure there are enough colored pencils so that no one has to wait. Anyone who prefers not to explain aloud what their drawing means may simply show the image.

A strong alternative format: have the portrait drawn by others, in parts. Participants sit in two circles (inner and outer circle), facing each other in pairs. Everyone receives a sheet of paper and a pen. Each pair starts: one person draws the other's facial shape on their sheet in 1 minute. Then the sheets are exchanged: everyone has a sheet with the basic shape of their own face. Now the outer circle shifts one spot — everyone has a new partner opposite them. On the signal, the new person draws the eyes. Switch back. Shift forward. Now the nose. Shift forward. Mouth. Ears. Hair. Add whatever is still missing. In the end, everyone has a portrait of themselves, drawn by six different people. Hang them up for a brief gallery walk.

The Megaphone

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 10 minutes	At least 10 participants (preferably 15–25)	Place where people can move freely, background music

GOAL

Making physically tangible how a group shifts — how a single voice that carries others along can slowly take over the entire room. A strong introduction to the concept of the silent center from Bart Brandsma's polarization model (see Part 1). What becomes visible here in 7 minutes mirrors what happens in society over weeks or years.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. One participant becomes the Megaphone. This person represents the connecting voice: listening, dialogue, and bridge-building. All others are Dampers; they stand for the silent middle, which prefers not to choose and remains quiet.

2. How do they move?
   - The Megaphone walks very slowly, foot by foot, with clenched fists and open arm movements. He or she makes a sound, e.g., a repeated exclamation such as "Listen!", "Together!", "Connect!". No words more than that.
   - The Dampers also walk very slowly, foot by foot. They hold their arms stretched out in front of them, rotating their hands slowly, as if they want to turn the sound away. They make not a single sound.

3. The Megaphone tries to take down the Dampers with a single tap on the shoulder. Whoever is tapped becomes a Megaphone themselves and adopts the same movement and sound. The more Megaphones walking around, the louder the sound becomes.

4. Everyone keeps moving foot by foot, no running. Optionally, put on soft music to support the tempo.

5. The game ends when everyone is Megaphone. Everyone keeps moving for a little while longer, before silence falls.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- **Did you feel a tipping point — a moment when the balance shifted?**
- **Bridge to the theoretical framework: in Brandsma's model, the silent middle is always the largest group. Whoever persuades the silent middle determines which direction it takes. Have you seen that happen here?**

TIP

Play a second round, but this time the Megaphone represents a polarizing voice instead of a unifying one — "Us!", "Against!", "Them!". Then compare: was the difference noticeable? Does the polarizing voice win faster, or just as fast? This opens a powerful conversation about how resilient the silent middle really is.

Source: Based on JINT SONAR, The Megaphone

Bingo

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 15 minutes

GROUP
At least 10 participants

MATERIALS
Printed bingo card per participant (see worksheet), pens

GOAL

Introducing the group in a playful way and immediately letting them experience that polarization is not “something from the news”; it is present in everyday moments — at the table, at school, online, among friends. By finding common ground with each other, everyone touches upon the topic without it becoming heavy.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Everyone knows it: every square on the bingo card must be filled in with the name of a person for whom the statement applies. One name per square, one square per person, so you cannot use the same name twice.
2. Give each participant a bingo card and a pen.
3. Approach people: "Have you ever had an opinion that wasn't expressed at home?" If the other person says yes, write their name in that box. Then find someone else for the next box.
4. Whoever is the first to fill all 12 squares calls out "Bingo!" and the game pauses.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which square was surprisingly easy?
- Which box was the hardest to fill in? Why?

TIP

This bingo card is just an example. Feel free to adapt it to best suit your participants and objectives.

WORKSHEET

Bingo

Part of the “Bingo” method

Us-versus-them thinking

For each square, find someone to whom the description applies. Have that person write their name in the square. Try to speak to as many different people as possible. The first person to fill a row, column, or diagonal shouts “Bingo!”.

...has spoken more than one language today	...has ever changed favorite football team, artist, or hobby	...has a friend with a totally different opinion	...has once discussed with someone who had a very different opinion
...experienced a tense conversation at the dinner table at home about a current debate	...has sometimes changed his mind after a conversation	...has had a first impression that turned out to be incorrect in hindsight	...does not always have the same opinion as the rest of the family at home
...once defended someone who was excluded	...knows a good question to calm a heated conversation	...once shared a news report that later turned out to be incorrect	...can disagree with someone without arguing
...has anyone ever slapped a label on someone without thinking about it	...has sometimes felt one group of people as "us" and another as "them"...	...want to learn more about how polarization works	...once discovered that two people view the same problem differently

Word Cloud of Opposites

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 25 minutes	Whole group, plenary	A large sheet of paper or a whiteboard, markers

GOAL

To get participants to reflect on us-versus-them thinking and stereotypes, and to make them aware of the power of language.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Draw two columns. Draw two columns on a large sheet of paper or whiteboard: WE on the left, THEY on the right.
2. Collecting associations. Ask the participants: what words, images, or associations come to mind when you think of "us" and "them" in a societal debate, for example, migration, climate, or religion? Write everything down without filter; just let the words emerge.
3. Analyze. Discuss together what is on the board:
   - What patterns do we see?
   - Which values or fears become visible?
   - Are these images based on real experience, or taken from media and public discourse?
4. Reverse. Try to turn the associations around: what if "they" suddenly becomes "we"? How do the words change then?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which words triggered you the most? Why?
- Where do you think your images come from?
- How did it feel to see a group of people referred to as “they”?
- What can you do to deal with us-versus-them language more consciously?

TIP

Use this exercise as a starting point for a conversation about how stereotypes originate and are perpetuated.

The Sneetches story

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 40 minutes	The whole group, then briefly in pairs	Projector/screen + sound, YouTube link, Post-its, flip chart

GOAL

Participants explore how us-versus-them thinking arises when one visible characteristic becomes more important than the person behind it. They examine how status, exclusion, and the urge to belong can divide a group — and how others can benefit from this.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Tell: "We are looking at a story. Pay particular attention to three things: when does a 'we' and a 'they' emerge, who feels excluded, and who benefits from the division?" Play video (±12 min) — Dr. Seuss' The Sneetches Full Version (YouTube)
2. Let the story sink in. Do not ask participants to react immediately.
3. Have everyone write down one word that sticks in their mind. Collect a few words on a flip chart.
4. Discuss in pairs or trios:
   - Which feature is made important?
   - When does difference become a ranking?
   - What do the characters do to fit in?
   - Who profits from or gains from the division?
5. Discuss in plenary: "Where do you see this mechanism at play today, without immediately pinning down names or groups?" Think of school, online trends, clothing, language, origin, gender, religion, social media, or political debates.
6. Let everyone complete one sentence:
   "Us-versus-them thinking becomes stronger when…" or "You can break the cycle by…"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- When does a difference suddenly become a boundary between groups?
- Who benefits if groups remain opposed to each other?
- What helps to see again that people are more than one characteristic?

TIP

Let participants discuss the mechanism first, not immediately sensitive social groups. This keeps it safe and prevents the exercise itself from triggering us-versus-them thinking again.

Source: Inspired by Dr. Seuss, The Sneetches and Other Stories (1961)

The waves of polarization

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 40 minutes

GROUP
Whole group with individual work

MATERIALS
Paper with three circles (see worksheet), Post-its in two colors, markers

GOAL

The participants are encouraged to reflect on where they see polarization in their own lives and environment, what consequences it has, and what small steps can help reduce its negative impact.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Explain: polarization is not just about disagreement, but also about its consequences — how people feel (fear, anger, fatigue), how relationships change (family, friends, colleagues), and how the climate in society shifts (trust in politics, us-versus-them thinking…).
2. Where do you see polarization? Brainstorm together: where do you encounter polarization — online, in the classroom, at home, in politics, in the media? Write down a few examples on a flip chart to make it concrete.
3. Impact map with three circles. Show the three zones on the worksheet:
   - ME: what does polarization do to me personally?
   - WE: what does it do to my relationships, my group, my association?
   - SOCIETY: what does it do to trust, democracy, and living together?

   Have the participants answer individually on yellow Post-its, for example: "I am getting stressed", "I avoid the news", "friend group is falling apart", "groups are no longer talking to each other". They stick their Post-its next to the corresponding circle.
4. Look, read, recognize. Have everyone walk around and read in silence what is hanging there. Then ask: what do you recognize, what touches you, are there things that surprise you?
5. From impact to action. Now hand out the green post-its. Question: what small things would help reduce these negative effects? Write down ideas per circle, for example: ME: "take a news break every now and then"; WE: "agree to listen first"; SOCIETY: "involve more young people in neighborhood conversations". Stick the green solutions next to the corresponding yellow impact post-its.
6. Joint conclusion. Together, choose a few actions that are feasible in your own context (school, youth work, organization). Note these down separately as "our next steps".

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- **Which impact of polarization do you find most worrying — on yourself, on relationships, or on society? Why?**
- **Was it difficult to come up with solutions? What makes it difficult, and what makes it hopeful?**

TIP

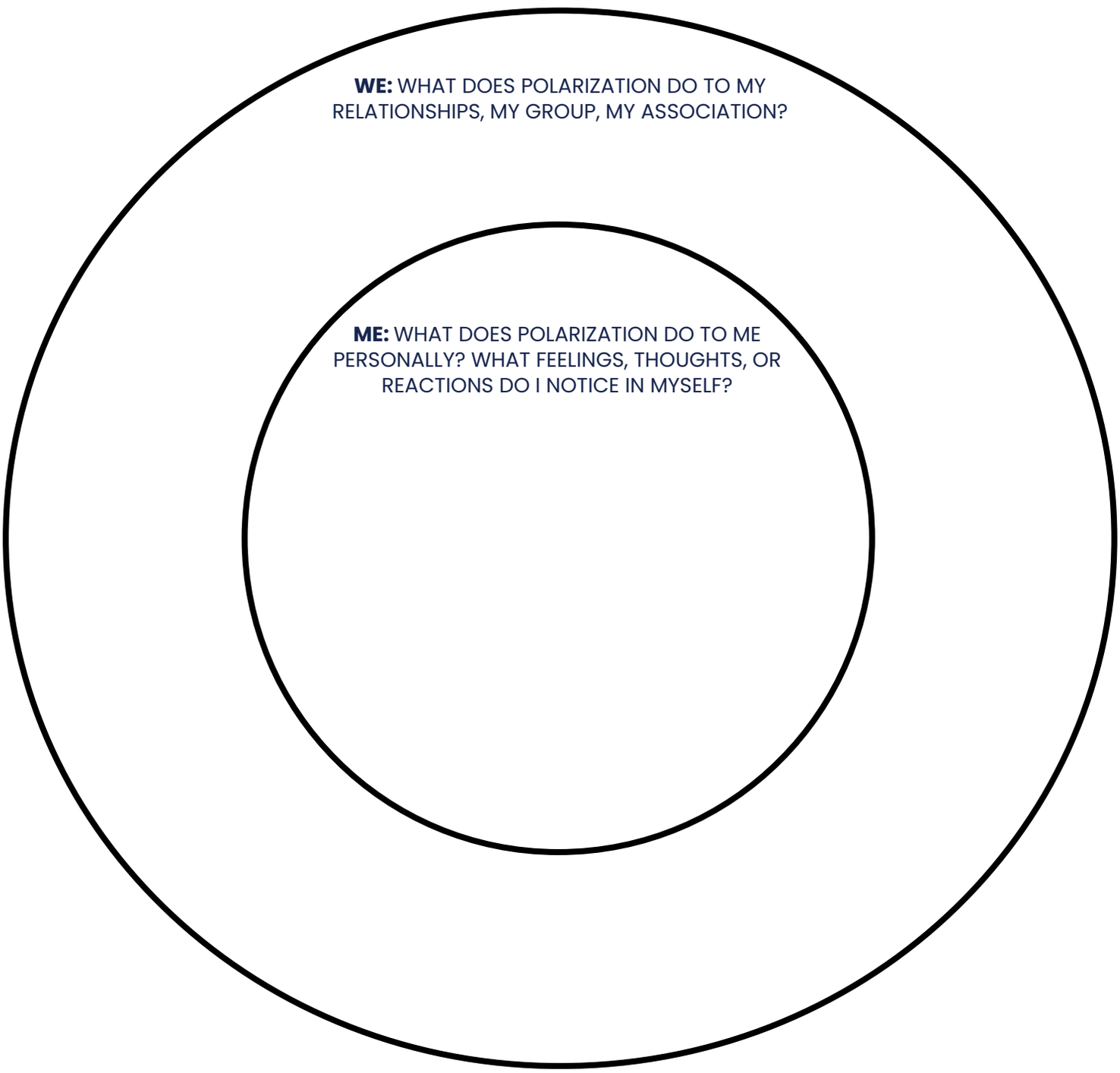
Ensure it doesn't turn into a round of complaining: the green post-its (solutions) are at least as important as the yellow ones (impact). At the end, have one or two participants summarize: "What do we take away from this exercise?" This strengthens ownership.

WORKSHEET

The waves of polarization: impact map

Part of the "Waves of Polarization" method ● Us-versus-them thinking

> **Print this worksheet large (A3 or enlarged A4 on the wall), or give each group an A4. Yellow post-its = what polarization does to you (impact). Green post-its = what might help (solutions). Stick them in the circle where they belong.**



Memory clouds

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 40 minutes

GROUP
Whole group, write individually, then in plenary.

MATERIALS
a large sheet of paper, colored pencils, photo of the memorial

GOAL

The young people reflect on how we commemorate war and violence: what feelings and stories a monument evokes, which voices are amplified, and which are heard less.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Think of one memorial site. "We are going to create a word cloud together about how we feel and view war and remembrance." Have everyone think individually about one concrete place or image — a nearby war monument, an image or photo they know (Remembrance Day, war graves, TV footage). What words, feelings, and images come to mind? Both positive (respect, gratitude, freedom…) and negative (fear, trauma, nationalism, "us against them"…).

2. Draw the word cloud. Draw a vertical line in the middle of the large sheet. Explain the simple code:
   - Left side: rather negative associations
   - Right side: rather positive associations
   - Capital letters: feeling is strong
   - Lowercase letters: feeling is rather soft or weak

   Each young person writes their words independently on the sheet. Multiple words per person, no explanation — just words. Then let the group look at the whole cloud in silence for a moment.

3. Short table discussion. Stand in a semicircle around the sheet and discuss: What strikes you when you look at this cloud? Are there words that surprise you? Which strong feelings stand out? Does this resemble how you think war should be remembered? What is still missing?

4. Drawing a different cloud: how *do* we want to be remembered? Add a second layer of words to the same sheet. "Imagine: you get to decide for yourselves what messages young people will receive in the future about war and violence. Which words absolutely *must* be in the cloud?" Let them add new words; they can write over the old ones. Focus on: peace, learning from mistakes, never again, humanity, *all* victims, never just a single story… Look at it together again: does this second layer differ from the first, and how? Which words would you like to pass on to children later?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which word in the cloud touches you the most? Why?
- What would you like never to be forgotten about war?

TIP

Keep the tone calm and open, as this topic is more sensitive for some participants (family history, recent conflict) than it may seem.

Definitions

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 40 minutes

GROUP
Small groups of 3 to 4, then plenary.

MATERIALS
cards with 8 to 10 polarizing terms, blank cards, a flip chart, markers

GOAL

Making visible that words have no fixed meaning; they are loaded by perspective, power, and context. Becoming aware of how definitions can connect groups or pit them against each other.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Create definitions. Divide into small groups. Each group receives one or two words. Distribute cards with polarizing terms, e.g., activist, extremist, citizen, elite, traditional, progressive, radical, normal, illegal... Assignment: For each word, write at least two definitions: one with a positive connotation and one with a negative connotation. Formulate them as if they were in a dictionary — sounding factual rather than persuasive.
2. Read aloud randomly. Collect all definitions. Read them aloud anonymously and in random order. After each definition, ask the group: "Who agrees with this definition?" Participants raise their hands. Briefly note how many people agree. Repeat for different definitions of the same word so participants can see how one term elicits drastically different reactions.
3. Place all definitions for each word visibly side by side (on a board or wall). Vote twice per word:
   - Which definition do you think would be used most in media or politics?
   - Which definition do you personally find the fairest or most complete?

   Discuss the difference between those two voices in plenary; where does the gap lie between dominant and fair?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What happens when one definition becomes dominant in the media or politics?
- Who has the power to define words?
- When does a word become a label? And a label a box?
- How do labels influence how we view people?
- Can two people argue while actually interpreting the same word differently?

TIP

The methodology works best with abstract concepts (activist, elite, normal) and with group labels circulating in current debates (woke, gender-friendly, traditional). Avoid actual ethnic or religious group names ("migrants", "Muslims"). Definitions work best at the meta-level of language.

Source: Across Divides — Depolarization of Communication, methodologische toolkit.

Our place in the world

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 30 minutes

GROUP
Individual work, then in duos or trios, then plenary

MATERIALS
Participant worksheet, flip chart with the words name- roots- places

GOAL

The aim is to help participants discover how name, background, and their "place in the world" shape how we view ourselves and each other — and how that sometimes clashes with labels and pigeonholing.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Introduction: Briefly explain that we are often pigeonholed (Flemish / immigrant, religious / non-religious, left / right…), but that everyone actually has multiple layers: name, story, places, language, roots… "Today we pause to reflect on our name and our place(s) in the world."

2. Individual reflection. Have everyone fill out the worksheet — "NAME", "ROOTS", and "PLACES WHERE YOU ARE YOURSELF". Ask them to put words, symbols, or small drawings in each box.

3. Divide into pairs or trios. Have the participants divide in small groups based on three questions:
   - What does your name mean to you?
   - Which place(s) are important in your story?
   - Is there something that others often misunderstand about you based on your name, appearance, or accent?

   Emphasize that everyone chooses for themselves what they do or do not share.

4. Return to the large group. Write two columns on the flip chart: "What people see" and "What people do not see". Question:
   - What things about you do people notice immediately? (skin color, headscarf, accent, gender, age…)
   - What things do they not see immediately? (languages you speak, things you are afraid or happy about, talents, worries, faith, doubts…)

   List examples under both columns. Then explicitly make the link to polarization: "Us-versus-them thinking often starts from what people think they see in each other. But just look at how much is not visible on the outside."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- **Does it feel like people are guessing your name and roots correctly, or not?**
- **When have you ever felt pigeonholed? What was that like?**
- **What would you want people to ask or know first, before they judge you?**

TIP

Ask the participants to write down one sentence at the end: "This is what I want people to know about me, before they put me in a box." You can hang those sentences up (anonymously)—a strong closing statement that will stick for days.

WORKSHEET

Our place in the world

Part of the Our Place in the World methodology ● Us-versus-them thinking

Fill in this worksheet at your leisure. You may use words, arrows, or small drawings. You do not have to share everything with the group — you choose what you tell.

NAME

Where does your name come from? Who chose your name? Do you like your name? Do you have a nickname or another name that you use?

ROOTS

Which countries, cities, villages, or neighborhoods are part of your story? Are there any languages or cultures that are important to you?

PLACE(S) WHERE YOU ARE YOURSELF

Where do you feel most at home or most yourself? That could be a country, but just as easily a square, a youth group, school, sports club, online community…

What is a community?

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 40 minutes

GROUP
Individual work, then in pairs or trios, then plenary

MATERIALS
Large sheet with 2 columns "Community is..." and "Community is not...", a second sheet "My communities", Post-its and markers

GOAL

Explore together what community means to participants, which groups are important to them, and how inclusion and exclusion play out within those groups.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Where do you belong? Have the participants think individually and write on post-its: which groups do you think of when you hear the word community? e.g. family, friends, youth group, football team, online group, faith community, class... Everyone sticks their post-its on the "My Communities" sheet.
2. Community is / community is not. Work in a plenary session on the second flip chart with two columns. First ask: what makes a community safe or warm for you? (e.g. honesty, room for difference, looking out for one another...) Then: when does something *not* feel like a community? (e.g. exclusion, gossip, hard clique formation...) Write keywords in the appropriate column.
3. Delve deeper in pairs or trios. Have the participants share in small groups based on three questions:
   Choose one community from your life: when does it feel warm or safe, and when does it not?
   Do you recognize us-versus-them dynamics in that community? Who sometimes falls outside?
   What could change to give the community more room for difference?
   Let each small group briefly share one or two things with the large group.
4. Ask the group: looking at everything currently on the flip charts, what is a good community to us? Create a short working definition together. Example: "A community is a group where you are allowed to belong, where differences are allowed to exist, and where people look out for one another." Then explicitly make the link to polarization: "Polarization often grows where communities become pitted against one another, or where those who 'look different' are left behind. If we better understand what a community is and isn't, we can also more consciously recognize when 'us versus them' becomes rigid and who is being left out."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In which community do you feel the most "seen"? Why exactly there?
- When have you ever noticed someone being pushed out of a community?
- What are the small signs that a community is hardening into an us-versus-them mentality?
- What do we need to turn our group into a community where differences are allowed to exist?

TIP
Leave the working definition and a few keywords from “Community is...” visibly hanging in the room, and reuse them later for methodologies on us-versus-them thinking and polarization. In this way, it becomes a shared framework the entire series can refer back to.

Who am I?

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 50 minutes

GROUP
Individual work, standing movement phase, followed by duos or trios and plenary.

MATERIALS
An A4 sheet or worksheet per participant, 8 to 10 Post-its or small cards per person, pens, a large sheet of paper or whiteboard

GOAL

Helping young people experience that everyone consists of multiple layers and identities. Becoming aware of the difference between "who I am" and "how others see me". Opening up discussions about prejudices and simplistic views.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Introduction: Ask the group which words people often use to describe each other (Flemish, Belgian, foreigner, Muslim, atheist, gamer, activist, woke, farmer, Moroccan, Turk…). Write a few examples on the board and ask: which ones feel okay, and which ones feel painful or limiting? Frame it briefly: "Today we are looking at who you are and how quickly others construct a narrative about you from the outside."

2. My identity cards. Everyone works individually. Give each participant 8 to 10 Post-its or small cards. They write one word that belongs to them on each card; everything counts:
   - roles (daughter, big brother, student, youth worker…)
   - backgrounds (city or neighborhood, roots, language, religion, hobby, education…)
   - characteristics (quiet, chaotic, creative, shy…)

   Then have them sort those cards into three piles: very important (3–4 cards), quite important (3–4 cards), and less important or context-dependent (the rest). Briefly ask: "Are you surprised which cards are on top?" — not a plenary discussion yet, this is activation.

3. How do others see me? Have everyone stand up with the sheet in hand. Walk around in silence. Assignment: "Look at the other person with respect. Write down one word for this person: how do you think people often see them? A neutral or positive word ('sporty', 'serious'), or a label you suspect that person often hears ('immigrant', 'nerd', 'tough', 'difficult')." Write directly on the sheet or on a post-it that you stick on it. In this way, everyone receives "external labels" from multiple people. Emphasize respect — it is about the perceived image, not about "you *are* like that."

4. Comparing the inside versus the outside. Everyone sits down and looks at their own sheet or post-its: which words do you recognize, which surprise you, is something missing that is very important to you? Short round in pairs or trios:
   - 1 to 2 words that you find important yourself and that were also mentioned by others.
   - 1 word that others wrote that you don't like or wouldn't choose yourself.
   - 1 word that you find important, but that no one has written.

Who am I?

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 50 minutes

GROUP
Individual work, standing movement phase, followed by duos or trios and plenary.

MATERIALS
An A4 sheet or worksheet per participant, 8 to 10 Post-its or small cards per person, pens, a large sheet of paper or whiteboard

GOAL

Helping young people experience that everyone consists of multiple layers and identities. Becoming aware of the difference between "who I am" and "how others see me". Opening up discussions about prejudices and simplistic views.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

Plenary discussion — us-versus-them thinking in zoom-out.

5 Discuss together: which words came back often, which felt painful? What labels are people often given based on skin color or appearance, name, accent or language, or clothing (headscarf, brand, “trashy”, “alternative”)? How can such a label quickly become a singular narrative (“young people from that neighborhood are always…”, “girls with headscarves are…”, “white boys are…”)?

Make the link explicit: “Polarization often grows when one part of someone’s identity is magnified into the only thing that matters. Then you no longer see a person, but only the box.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which word that others wrote about you would you like to take with you? Why?
- Which word would you prefer to have less central in how people see you?
- When was the last time you yourself saw someone primarily as a label?
- What would change if you knew more layers of that person?
- What question could you ask from now on before passing judgment on "the other"?

TIP

Please note: preferably use this method in a group where there is already some trust. What others write on your sheet can be unexpectedly hurtful, even if well-intentioned. Agree beforehand that all words must be respectful; no one writes anything to hurt anyone.

Source: based on COMPASS activity "Who am I", Council of Europe (coe.int/compass)

Polarization circle

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 25 minutes

GROUP
Whole group, plenary with post-its

MATERIALS
A large sheet of paper with a drawn circle, Post-its, or markers

GOAL

Analyze the mechanisms of polarization and understand how groups and stories contribute to the emergence of contradictions.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Introduction of the model. Draw or project a large circle, divided into five zones — each zone captures a phase of the polarization process:
   - What happens? (the cause or trigger)
   - Who belongs with whom? (group formation)
   - What is being told? (the stories that emerge)
   - Who is no longer allowed to participate? (the exclusion)
   - How does it get stuck? (getting stuck or the impasse)
2. Choose a case. Together with the group, choose a recognizable situation involving us-versus-them thinking, such as a neighborhood conflict, a school discussion, or a media debate. If you need to find something quickly, search vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/zoek using terms like “polarization”, “headscarf”, or “asylum”. Choose something that is already behind us, so emotions have subsided.
3. Analyze the situation. Have the participants describe what happened in each zone. Write keywords or short sentences on Post-its and place them in the correct zone.
4. Exchange. Discuss together where opportunities lay (or lie) to stop or break polarization.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What did you notice while filling in the circle?
- Where did you see the contrast widen?
- Which stories have added fuel to the fire?
- How could it have turned out differently?
- Where do you see opportunities to reduce polarization?

TIP

Use simple examples and invite participants to outline concrete situations. Working visually (with colors or symbols per zone) makes the dynamics even more visible.

WORKSHEET

Polarization circle

Part of the "Polarization circle" method ● Us-versus-them thinking

Print this worksheet on A3 for the whole group, or on A4 for each small group. At the top, write which case you are examining. Then fill in each zone with post-its or markers — what do you see happening in this phase?

OUR CASE: .....



Fishbowl conversation

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 60 minutes

GROUP
Entire group, divided into an inner and an outer ring

MATERIALS
Chairs in 2 concentric circles, a timer, a board for observations

GOAL

Making a polarizing topic open for discussion and simultaneously making visible how a conversation about that topic unfolds: who speaks, who remains silent, which arguments are refuted or not, and where the tone shifts. By having participants alternate between speaking and observing, they train both skills simultaneously.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Set up two rings. Place chairs in two concentric circles. The inner ring consists of 4 chairs plus one extra: the empty chair (see tip below). The rest of the participants form the outer ring around it.
2. Theme and ground rules. Propose one polarizing topic, for example migration, climate, identity, or a current case from the news. That remains the topic for the entire exercise. Ground rules:
   - The inner ring conducts the conversation as if the outer ring were not there. Respectful, listening before responding, no interruptions.
   - Outer ring remains silent and observes.
   - Whoever from the outer ring wishes to contribute takes a seat on the empty chair, addresses the inner ring, and then returns to their place.
3. Give the outer ring an assignment. Divide the observation roles so that not everyone is looking at the same thing:
   - Who speaks a lot, who is silent? What stands out?
   - Which arguments are repeated multiple times? Which are never refuted?
   - When does the tone of exchange shift to us-versus-them?
   - Which words or sentences create space? Which ones dig their heels in?

   The outer ring notes briefly on paper.
4. Discussion round 1. The inner ring discusses for approximately 15 minutes. The outer ring observes.
5. Switch. Switch inner and outer rings (or let only those who wish to switch places). Resume the discussion for 15 minutes, possibly with a new perspective on the same topic.
6. Joint reflection. Gather around a whiteboard. First, let the outer circle members share what they noticed—not their opinion, but what they saw. Only then discuss the content of the conversation.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which arguments did you find strong, which surprising?
- How did it feel to just listen, without responding immediately?
- Where did you see the conversation shift towards us versus them? What triggered that?
- Which voice or perspective was missing from the inner circle today?

TIP
The empty-chair variant makes the fishbowl much more dynamic than the classic “hard switch”; use it as standard, it almost always works better. Explicitly assign different observation roles to the outer ring (distribute them as cards among the participants): this creates a richer picture afterwards than when everyone is looking at the same thing.

Source: based on Facing History and Ourselves — Fishbowl Discussion

What do you do if you are a witness?

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 60 minutes

GROUP
Small groups of 3 to 5, followed by a plenary session.

MATERIALS
a set of case cards (see below), paper and markers, a flip chart

GOAL

Making young people aware of their role as witnesses to us-versus-them behavior, injustice, or exclusion — and helping them develop from a bystander into an active, thoughtful response, even when intervening feels difficult.

PREPARATION

Examples of case cards. Choose 3 to 5 that fit the lived experience of your group:

- Everyday racism in a clothing store. A customer says to a saleswoman of African origin: "Wow, you speak good Dutch."
- Racial profiling while shopping. When an alarm goes off at a store gate, the salesperson shouts at Mo: "Show your pockets!" while the rest of the group is allowed to walk straight through. Mo is the only one in the group who is not white.
- Body shaming at the chip shop. Two girls giggle at each other about a man who just ordered a large portion of fries: "He'd be better off eating a salad instead of so many fries."
- Anti-LGBTQ+ and transphobia at the gender-neutral restrooms. Someone next to you says: "That's back in fashion, not being a man or a woman. Everyone used to be normal."
- Microaggression and physicality in a café. When a man with frizzy hair walks past, one of your friends touches his hair. The man turns around, startled.
- Ableism on the bus. Two people stand next to a blind man, make gestures, and laugh at him: "How many fingers am I holding up?"
- On the bus: someone makes a loud racist remark to a woman wearing a headscarf. You are sitting next to her.
- In the classroom: a student is laughed at every day because of their accent or clothing. No one intervenes.
- On TikTok: a good friend shares a post with a hateful undertone about migrants / queer people / a religious group.
- In youth work: a newcomer is subtly excluded by the older group. Not with insults, but with looks and jokes "for those who get it".
- At the table: an uncle or grandparent regularly makes negative remarks about "those refugees". Everyone falls silent.

TIP

You don't have to use all six. For a first session, three to four different types of discrimination suffice — choose what fits the theme you are working on or what has recently happened in the group. Also, ensure that racism is not the only form you show, otherwise you implicitly send the message that only racism is "real" discrimination.

What do you do if you are a witness?

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 60 minutes

GROUP
Small groups of 3 to 5, followed by a plenary session.

MATERIALS
a set of case cards (see below), paper and markers, a flip chart

GOAL

Making young people aware of their role as witnesses to us-versus-them behavior, injustice, or exclusion. And helping them develop from a bystander an active, thoughtful response, even when intervening feels difficult.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Start with a short question to the group: “When have you seen someone do something about injustice, gossip, racism, body shaming, or LGBTQ+ hate?” Gather a few examples. Then introduce two concepts on the board:
   - Bystander: you watch and do nothing.
   - Upstander: you do something, big or small, to help, protect, or set boundaries.

   Add the core motto: "Do you see discrimination? Just always respond in a way that feels safe for you." Immediately add: an upstander has five ways to respond, the 5 D's:
   - Direct: address directly, set boundaries, intervene.
   - Breaking through: defusing the situation by distracting: a joke, a question, something unexpected.
   - Pass on: seek help from someone with more power or expertise (teacher, youth worker, police if necessary).
   - Afterwards: support the victim afterwards: send a message, sit down together.
   - Document: record (screenshot, short video) as evidence for a report or a later step.
2. Divide into groups of 3 to 4. Give each group one situation card (or rotate them). Introduce a thinking framework to review each situation together (15 minutes):
   - See: what exactly happens? Who is affected?
   - Understand: what form of discrimination or exclusion is involved? How would you feel as a victim, bystander, or perpetrator?
   - Decide: do you have a role here? What is holding you back — fear of reaction, insecurity, "not my business"?
   - Do: Think of at least two possible upstander reactions. Which of the 5 D's fits your situation best? Which one fits you best personally?

   Have each group write down their best ideas on an A4 sheet.
3. Presentation. Each group briefly shares their case and their proposed approach. Do not look for one "right answer"; multiple responses can work.
4. Discuss in plenary. Discuss together what stands out: which actions recur frequently, and which are surprising? Which cases evoked hesitation, and which provided clarity? What does that say about when intervention is easy and when it is not?
5. Translating to your own life. Ask everyone to note individually: which response from this exercise am I taking away — and in which situation do I see myself using it? Let a few volunteers share.

What do you do if you are a witness?

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 60 minutes

GROUP
Small groups of 3 to 5, followed by a plenary session.

MATERIALS
a set of case cards, paper and markers, a flip chart

GOAL

Making young people aware of their role as witnesses to us-versus-them behavior, injustice, or exclusion — and helping them develop from a bystander into an active, thoughtful response, even when intervening feels difficult.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- When do you find it difficult to respond to injustice? Why?
- What is holding you back from intervening: fear, doubt, the idea that it is "not your business"?
- How does your reaction change if the "perpetrator" is someone from your own circle of friends or family?
- Have you ever had a moment when you thought afterwards, "I wish I had said something"?
- Which reaction from this exercise do you really want to take away, and what could you practice today?

TIP

Steer the group away from the grand-hero idea and toward small, achievable interventions. The five D's offer five perspectives — almost no one consistently chooses the same one, and they don't have to. What Distract and Pass On have in common: they work without direct conflict and are therefore often just as effective as a direct confrontation.

Be alert: some young people recognize themselves as targets in one or more of the six situations (racism, body shaming, anti-LGBTQ+, ableism). Make it clear beforehand that sharing personal experience is entirely voluntary — those who prefer to approach the situation analytically may do so.

Regarding Documentation: think before you film someone without permission. A screenshot of online incidents or a note afterwards is usually sufficient. Documentation is intended for reporting or evidence, not for public ridicule.

Source: Facing History and Ourselves — Responding to Injustice; framework "Bystander to Upstander"

The power of the environment

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 40 minutes

GROUP
Plenary, then in small groups of 3 to 5, then plenary again.

MATERIALS
One large flip chart per group, markers in two colors, worksheet with the scan structure

GOAL

Demonstrating that polarization is not just about individuals, but equally about the environment (school, online, sports club, media, youth work). Discovering which elements in such an environment reinforce or can curb us-versus-them thinking, and reflecting together on small changes that enable more justice and connection.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Where does polarization play out? Start with a plenary session. Write on a flip chart: "In which places do you see polarization or 'us versus them' thinking happening?" Have the group call out examples — in the classroom, on the playground, in youth work, on Instagram or TikTok, on the football team, in the media, in chat... Write down the environments without going into too much detail yet. Briefly frame: "Today we are not looking at the people themselves, but at the environment in which things happen. How does that environment sometimes push towards conflict or inequality?"
2. Conduct an environment scan. Divide into groups of 3 to 5. Each group chooses one environment they frequently interact with. Draw the name of the environment in the center of the sheet and four boxes around it:
   - Who is here?: Which groups or roles do you see here? Who feels "at home", who less so?
   - Rules and unwritten rules: Which official rules apply (school or house rules, platform rules)? Which unwritten rules do you notice ("you don't talk about this", "you make jokes about x here", "you have to be tough to fit in")?
   - Power and safety: Who has the most power (teacher, administrator, older youths, moderator)? Who feels safe, who doesn't, and why?
   - What pushes towards us-versus-them? What can connect?: In one color: things that reinforce us-versus-them thinking (separate cliques, specific hashtags, strict controls, media that highlight one side). In another color: things that connect (joint activities, clear agreements, safe adults, humor that does not humiliate).

   Send using keywords and arrows, no long texts.
3. Bring together in plenary. Have one person from each group briefly show their surroundings, and share one element that reinforces the 'us-them' mentality and one element that can connect. Then discuss together:
   - What stands out when we place all these environments side by side? Do the same patterns recur? (silence, shame, lack of safe spaces, role of social media, role of adults...)
   - What small changes in the environment could already make a difference? (clear conversation rules, a moderator, agreements about online behavior...)

   Put the answers on a separate sheet titled "What could we change?" and hang it up in a visible place.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In which environment do you feel the most pressure to choose a side? Why exactly there?
- Where do you see room for change in your school, operations, neighborhood, or online world?
- Who would you need to adjust something in that environment: a teacher, youth worker, moderator, or policymaker?

TIP
Choose environments that are recognizable to the group — not an abstract "society," but concrete places: classroom, chat, playground, sports club. Explicitly explain that it is not about seeking blame ("whose fault is it?"), but about gaining insight into how the environment plays a role and what the group can do about it.

WORKSHEET

The power of the environment

Part of the “The Power of the Environment” method ● Us-versus-them thinking

Choose an environment that you know well: a classroom, playground, sports club, chat, youth group, online community.
Fill in each box with keywords or small notes, no long texts. Use two colors in box 4.

1 WHAT IS IT LIKE HERE?

Which groups or roles do you see here?
Who feels "at home", who less so?

2 THE RULES

What official rules apply here? What unwritten rules do you notice? ("you don't talk about this", "you have to be tough"...)

THE SURROUNDINGS

_____

name of the place

3 POWER & SECURITY

Who has the most power? (teacher, administrator, older youths, moderator...)
Who feels safe, who doesn't?

4 US-THEM VS. CONNECTING

What reinforces the us-versus-them mentality in this environment? What could unite?

■ reinforces us-them ■ connects

Small, feasible, concrete: what could change in this environment to enable more connection?

Circles of care

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 50 minutes	Individual work, then in pairs or trios, then plenary	a worksheet with 4 to 5 concentric circles per person, markers, a flip chart

GOAL

Getting young people to reflect on the question "for whom do I feel responsible?" Making visible how our circle of care often starts close to ourselves and thins as people become more distant. And discussing how polarization can narrow or broaden that circle.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Start plenary: "For whom do you feel responsible in life? For whom would you make an effort, make time, perhaps take a risk?" Have the participants call out examples randomly: family, best friend, people in war zones, the neighborhood, the climate, homeless people, refugees, animals, future generations... Write everything on the flip chart, without any order. Box: "In a moment, we are going to make a map of the people or groups for whom you do or do not feel responsible."

2. Filling in my circles of care. Give everyone the worksheet with the concentric circles. Have them individually write names and groups in each circle:
   - Who truly belongs in the inner circle for you?
   - For whom do you also feel responsible, but less strongly?
   - Are there groups you do not feel responsible for? (they may place these outside the circles, or write them in the margin)

3. In conversation about differences. Let the participants share in pairs or trios, whoever wants to:
   - Who is in your inner circle? Did that coincide with what you had expected?
   - Was there someone or a group that surprised you? That you placed them so far outside or just as close?
   - Are there groups you have differing opinions about?

   Then provide feedback in the plenary session: "What do you notice when you listen to each other's circles?" Are some groups often sitting very far away? Are there groups that hardly put anyone in a circle?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Was it difficult to decide who belongs in which circle? Why?
- Is there someone or a group you would like to consciously bring closer from now on?
- Are there groups you had actually never thought about in terms of responsibility?
- How do media, politics, family, or religion influence your idea of "who you should take care of"?
- What happens to a society when people keep their circle of care very small? And what if it becomes too big and you burn out yourself?

TIP

Preferably use this methodology after a session on single stories or an exploratory us-versus-them exercise — the circles will land richer. Challenge the participants by introducing new actors ("and the people you have never met?", "and nature?", "and future generations?") and let them place these in their circles.

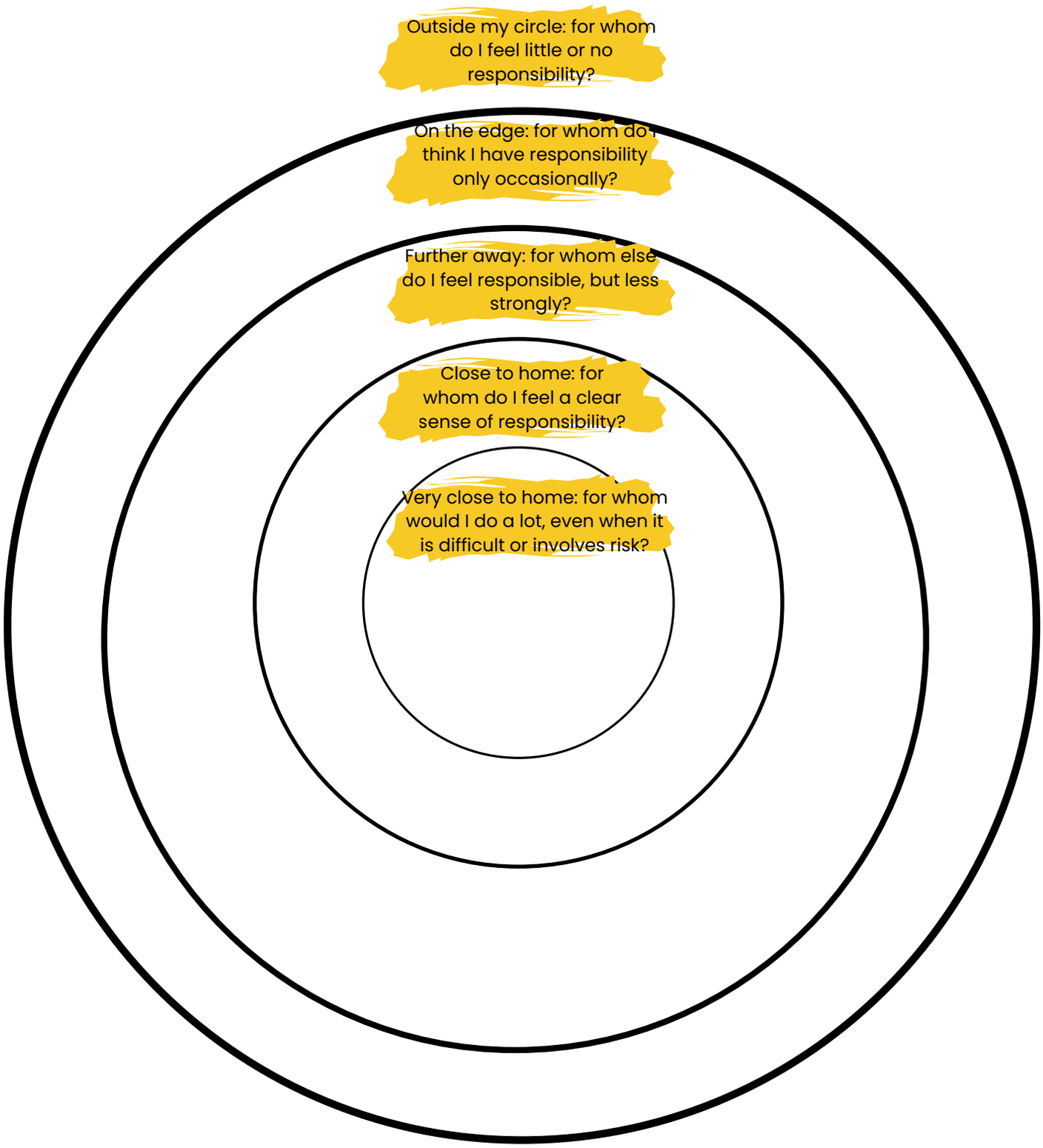
WORKSHEET

Circles of care

Part of the “Circles of Care” method

● Us-versus-them thinking

Write the people or groups for whom you feel responsible in each circle. The closer someone is to your inner circle, the stronger your sense of responsibility. You may write people or groups for whom you feel little responsibility in the margin, outside the circles. Use a few words or names, not long texts.



Look at your worksheet when you are finished. Which group surprised you—that you placed them so close or so far away? Circle it with a different color.

Stories from the past, questions of the present

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 50 minutes	Small groups of 4 to 5	4 video suggestions, a mobile phone, three worksheets per group, pens or markers, a flip chart or board

GOAL

Helping young people discover that themes such as us-versus-them, power, racism, exclusion, and solidarity recur in stories about migration and other societal tensions. By having four small groups each analyze a different story, the shared patterns emerge more clearly during the plenary discussion.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Form groups and choose a video. Divide the participants into four groups of 4 to 5. Give each group access to the four sample videos. Two methods:
   - Guided: you assign one video to each group (faster, more balanced distribution of themes).
   - Free: each group watches 30 seconds of each video and then chooses their preferred one (more engagement, takes a little extra time).

2. Zone 1: In the story (video). Each group watches their video, optionally twice. Then fill in Worksheet 1 together (four questions):
   - Who do you see in the video? Who are the most important people or groups?
   - What is it about? What is the tension or conflict?
   - Where do you notice us-versus-them thinking? Who belongs, who is on the outside?
   - Who has power or a voice here, and who has less?

3. Zone 2: In the world (today). Complete Worksheet 2. Assignment: “Find at least two contemporary situations in which you see something similar to what is in your video.” For each situation: what resembles the video, and what is different?

4. Zone 3: In my life and environment. Complete Worksheet 3 individually (not in a group — this zone is personal):
   - Do you sometimes feel like you belong to a "camp" in these kinds of discussions? Explain briefly.
   - Are there situations where you notice that people only know one story about "the other"?
   - What do you do when someone is excluded or speaks harshly about "those others"?

   Anyone who wishes may share it briefly within the group, but personal answers do not need to be said out loud.

5. Plenary: four stories side by side. Each group presents their video in 2 to 3 minutes and shares:
   - One element from Zone 1 that particularly stood out to them regarding us-versus-them or power.
   - One current situation from Zone 2 that stood out as a parallel to their video.

   Then, in the plenary session, look for the shared patterns throughout all four videos:
   - Which tensions recur in multiple videos?
   - Which voices are often missing — in which video and why?
   - Which current events came up in multiple groups?

   Make the link explicit: "Some patterns turn out to recur in different stories — different times, different people, the same us-versus-them mechanisms. Stories teach us to recognize those patterns, so that we do not simply believe a single story about 'the other'."

Stories from the past, questions of the present

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 50 minutes

GROUP
Small groups of 4 to 5

MATERIALS
4 video suggestions, a mobile phone, three worksheets per group, pens or markers, a flip chart or board

GOAL

Helping young people discover that topics such as us-versus-them, power, racism, exclusion, and solidarity recur in stories about migration and other societal tensions. By having four small groups each analyze a different story, the shared patterns emerge more clearly during the plenary discussion.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which story from another group touched you and why?
- Who in your video do you think suffers the most from a monolithic narrative about themselves or their group?
- If you were allowed to add one extra scene to your video to show more nuance, what would you show?
- What question about the world will you take with you after today?

TIP

If you were allowed to add one extra scene to your video to show more nuance, what would you show?

Source: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The Danger of a Single Story

WORKSHEET

Stories from the past, questions of the present

Part of the "Stories from the past, questions of the present" method ● Us-versus-them thinking

Four videos have been selected for this methodology, each from a different period, featuring different people and with a different migration motive. All are stories 'from the past', intentionally. The participants make the step to 'questions of today' themselves, on worksheet 2: which patterns from these historical stories do they recognize in the world of today? Each group chooses one video (or is assigned one) and gets to work on it using the worksheets.





TIP

Choose videos under 10 minutes. Watch them yourself beforehand — not every story suits every group. If you are working with a different specific topic (climate, racism, LGBTQ+, poverty), replace these four with videos within that theme.

WORKSHEET

Stories from the past, questions of the present

Part of the “Stories from the past, questions of the present” method ● Us-versus-them thinking

Four videos have been selected for this methodology, each from a different period, featuring different people and with a different migration motive. All are stories “from the past,” intentionally. The participants make the step to “questions of today” themselves on worksheet 2: which patterns from these historical stories do they recognize in the world of today? Each group chooses one video (or is assigned one) and works with it using the worksheets.





WORKSHEET

Stories from the past, questions of the present

Part of the "Stories from the past, questions of the present" method ● Us-versus-them thinking

Fill in these four boxes for your group's video. Start with the top two boxes (what you see, what happens) and then move on to the bottom two (us-them and power). Use keywords, not long texts. Not everything needs to have a "correct" answer. Worksheet 1/3

1 HOW?

Who do you see in the video? Who are the most important people or groups?

2 WHAT?

What is it about? What is the tension or conflict?

3 US-THEY

Where do you notice us-versus-them thinking? Who belongs, who is on the outside?

4 MIGHT

Who has power or a voice here, and who has less?

WORKSHEET

Stories from the past, questions of the present

Part of the “Stories from the past, questions of the present” method ● Us-versus-them thinking

The story in your video took place in a different time. What patterns do you recognize in the world today? Find two contemporary situations in which the same us-versus-them patterns or power dynamics recur — for example from the news, social media, your neighbourhood, or online. Work together in your group. Worksheet 2/3

1 SITUATION 1

- Brief description, what is going on?
- What looks like the video?
- What is just different?

2 SITUATION2

- Brief description, what is going on?
- What looks like the video?
- What is just different?

WORKSHEET

Stories from the past, questions of the present

Part of the “Stories from the past, questions of the present” method ● Us-versus-them thinking

Answer these three questions for yourself — not out loud and not in a group. You decide for yourself what you share later and what you don’t. It may also be about things you see happening, not only about what you do yourself. Worksheet 3/3

1 QUESTION 1

Do you sometimes feel like you belong to a 'camp' in these kinds of discussions?
Explain briefly.

2 QUESTION 2

Are there situations where you notice that people only know one story about 'the other'?

3 QUESTION 3

What do you do when someone is excluded or speaks harshly about 'those others'?

What do you take with you if you have to flee?

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 50 minutes	Groups of 5 to 6, with plenary discussion	3 Post-its per participant, pens, 1 worksheet per group

GOAL

Allow participants to experience what it is like to have to flee suddenly. Practice making choices, arguing, and building consensus. Strengthen empathy and solidarity with refugees, and question simplistic views about "refugees".

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Brainstorm briefly: "Why do people move to another country or region?" Write everything down: education, work, love, war, faith, climate, poverty... Then make a distinction:
   - Pull factors — what attracts (better opportunities, studies, work...)
   - Push factors — what pushes away (war, persecution, disasters, extreme violence...)

   Explain that this exercise is about push situations: people have to leave, not "just choose".

2. Set up a clear, fictional, but imaginable situation: "Imagine this: the situation in your city has become dangerous — war, severe persecution, or a major disaster. You are told that your house is now being evacuated. You do not know when, or if, you will ever be able to return. You are allowed to take only three things with you." Let everyone think in silence for a moment. Emphasize: there are no right or wrong answers — it is about personal choice.

3. Work in groups of 5 to 6. Everyone starts individually: 3 Post-its, one thing per Post-it, as concrete as possible. Examples (without directing):
   - Practical: passport, money, medicine, warm coat, phone, water...
   - Emotional or symbolic: photo, stuffed animal, holy book, piece of jewelry...

   Let everyone take turns showing their three things and briefly explain why.

4. Now the group of individual choices moves to one shared summit:
   - Choose 9 items together from all the notes on the table.
   - Arrange them in a diamond shape:
     - 1 item at the top (most essential)
     - 2 items in the second row
     - 3 items in the middle
     - 2 items in the fourth row
     - 1 item at the bottom (least essential of the 9)
   - Discussing, debating, trying to convince each other. Post-its may be moved as long as the conversation is still going on. The process is more important than the "correct" hierarchy.

   When all the groups are finished, let them walk around and look at each other's diamonds.

5. Discuss together:
   - Regarding the choices: which ones stood out? Were there any surprising or "illogical" things that people still wanted to include?
   - Regarding the process: what caused the most discussion? Were you primarily focused on practical matters (survival), or did you also consider emotional or spiritual things?
   - On realism: how would it feel if you really had to do this — without the time you were given now? Can people in real life always choose what to take with them? How is that for children?

   Then explicitly link it to us-versus-them thinking and simplistic narratives: "What images do you sometimes hear about refugees — 'they take everything with them,' 'they are ungrateful,' 'they come for money'? How does that differ from what you just felt and chose yourself?"

What do you take with you if you have to flee?

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 50 minutes	Groups of 5 to 6, with plenary discussion	3 Post-its per participant, pens, 1 worksheet per group

GOAL

Allow participants to experience what it is like to have to flee suddenly. Practice making choices, arguing, and building consensus. Strengthen empathy and solidarity with refugees, and question simplistic views about "refugees".

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Has your view of "people who flee" changed? If so, how?
- What do you see differently now when you think about the discussions on refugees in the media and politics?
- Which one question about migration and fleeing will you take with you after today?
- Suppose someone in your circle speaks very negatively about refugees. What would you want to say or ask after this exercise?

TIP

Check in advance whether there are participants in the group with personal experience of war, flight, or the asylum procedure, including indirect experience through family. For them, this methodology can hit very close to home. Make it explicitly clear beforehand that everyone may pause at any time, become less personal, or participate as an observer without explanation.

During the debriefing, you can provide current figures to anchor the exercise in reality — UNHCR publishes the number of people displaced worldwide annually. Also explicitly make the link to single stories: a single narrative about “the refugee” does injustice to the enormous diversity of situations, motives, and choices.

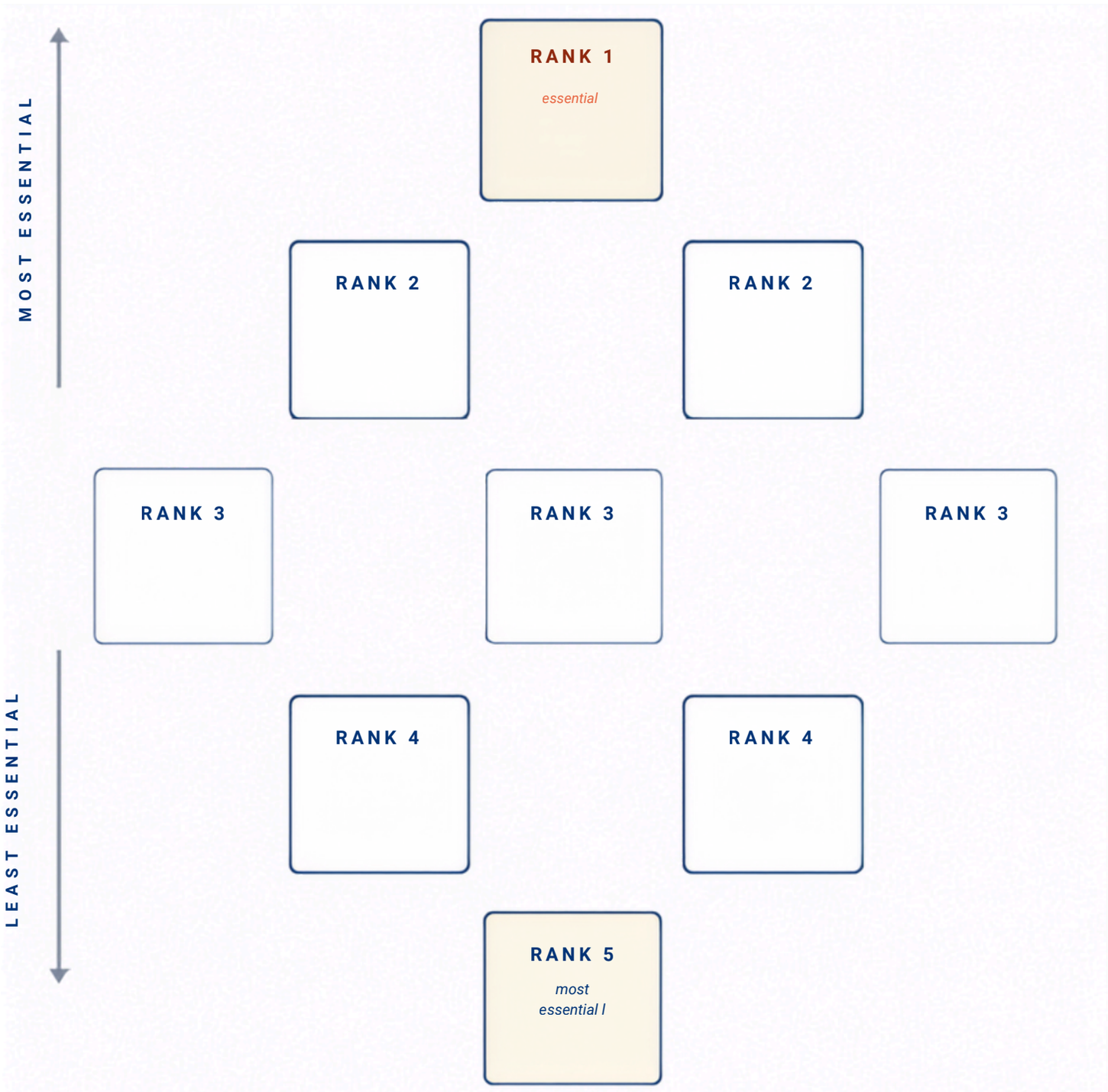
Source: COMPASS — Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People, Council of Europe (coe.int/compass). UNHCR for current figures (unhcr.org).

WORKSHEET

What do you take with you if you have to flee?

Part of the "What do you take with you when you have to flee?" method ● Us-versus-them thinking

Work together in your group. First, choose 9 items from all the Post-its on the table. Stick them in this diamond shape: at the top what you consider most essential, at the bottom what you can most easily do without. The process is more important than the final order, so discuss, revise, and convince.



WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED Walk around and look at the diamonds of other groups. Where is the biggest difference compared to yours?

If tomorrow comes

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 60 minutes

GROUP
Individual work, then in groups of 3 to 4, then plenary.

MATERIALS
A worksheet per participant, Post-its, a large flip chart or whiteboard, pens

GOAL

Encourage young people to reflect on how they view the future (hopes, concerns, risks). Explore which rights, values, and groups come under pressure as polarization increases. And let them experience that their choices and votes today influence the world of tomorrow.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Write on the flip chart: in 10 years! Ask the participants individually (1 to 2 minutes): "Write down three words that come to mind when you think about the future." Have them share briefly in pairs. Then, collect the entries in a plenary session on the flip chart in two columns:
   - Worries/fears & Hope or desires

   Make the immediate link to polarization: "In many countries, we see more tensions — us-versus-them politics, online hate, heated debates. Today we explore: what does that do to our future?"

2. Sketch two future scenarios. Work in groups of 3 to 4 on a simple diptych:

   Scenario A — polarization increases:
   More us-versus-them language in media and politics
   Groups live alongside each other without interacting.
   Hate speech is becoming more and more "normal"

   Scenario B — connection and dialogue grow:
   People learn to deal better with difference
   More say for young people and minority groups
   Active choices against hate and exclusion

   Assignment per group: "Imagine waking up in each of these two worlds, 10 years later. What does your day look like? What do you notice at school or work, online, in your neighborhood, in your family?" Have them write keywords under both columns on the worksheet. One person per group shares some images with the whole group.

3. For scenario A: Who loses the most? (minorities, young people, people in poverty...), Which rights come under pressure? (freedom of expression, equal treatment...)
   For scenario B: What is better than now? Which values are more strongly present then? (respect, equality, solidarity, critical thinking...)
   Write two columns on the flip chart: "If polarization grows, then..." and "If connection grows, then..." Have the groups add their examples.
   Finally, make it explicit: The future is not a neutral given. Polarization and connection vie for the same territory: the silent middle.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Does scenario A feel like science fiction, or like something that is already happening?
- Which elements from scenario B do you already see happening on a small scale?
- What did you discover about your own values and boundaries in this exercise?

TIP

Do not frame the methodology in an overly heavy-handed manner. There should be room for humor and optimism; otherwise, the conversation becomes paralyzed. The goal is awareness, not a doomsday scenario.
Important: avoid party politics. Focus on the mechanisms (us-them, exclusion, hate speech) and on human rights. Otherwise, the exercise slides into a political debate where participants quickly dig themselves into their existing positions, precisely the pattern the methodology aims to break.

Source: loosely inspired by COMPASS — "When tomorrow comes" (Council of Europe) Concept "silent center": see Part 1

WORKSHEET

When tomorrow comes

Part of the "When tomorrow comes" method ● Us-versus-them thinking

Imagine: it is 10 years from now. You wake up in the morning — first in scenario A, then in scenario B. What do you see, feel, and hear in each world? Fill in both columns with keywords or small pictograms. Work together in your group.

SCENARIO A
When us-versus-them thinking becomes stronger...

More us-versus-them in media and politics.
Groups live further apart from each other.

At school / at work

Online

In my neighborhood

In my family

SCENARIO B
When we remember how to connect...

People learn to deal with differences better.
Active choices against hate and exclusion.

At school / at work

Online

In my neighborhood

In my family

TODAY ALREADY What small thing from scenario B could you do today?

A mosque in Silentville

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 120 minutes

GROUP
minimum 15–20 participants, co-facilitator strongly recommended

MATERIALS
role cards + case sheet per participant, name tags per role, a flip chart with markers, a timer, a room that can be set up as a "board room"

GOAL

Understand how polarization and us-versus-them thinking can quickly escalate around sensitive issues such as religion and migration. Practice democratic debate: formulating positions, listening, negotiating, and voting. And make human rights concrete: which rights clash here and how do you deal with that fairly?

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1 Briefly announce: "We are going to role-play a real municipal council meeting. In Silentville, there is a dispute regarding the construction of a new house of worship. You will all be given a role and will soon have to help make the decision." Summarize the case or have everyone read the case from the worksheet:

- Silentville has approximately 80,000 inhabitants. Over the years, many families from various countries have come to live there, including Muslim families — some for three generations already, but for part of the population still considered "newcomers."
- The Muslim community wants to build a new mosque on an abandoned city site (currently a hangout spot, vandalism, and drugs).
- The city provides the land for free and pays 20% of the construction costs. A private investor pays 70%. The Muslim community must raise 10% itself.
- Just before the start of the works, there is a great deal of protest from citizens and associations. Therefore, the municipal council is organizing an open meeting: everyone is allowed to speak and vote.

2 Assign the roles — ensure there are at least 1 to 2 people for each role:

- Mayor of Silentville (chairperson of the meeting)
- Municipal council members: Tradition party · Populist party · Diversity party
- Associations: "Past & Future" (attaches historical character) · "Young Voices for Human Rights" · "Muslim Association Silentville"
- Ordinary citizens (no fixed position, can doubt, negotiate, shift)
- Journalists (observe during the debate, produce two news reports afterwards)

Give everyone their role card plus the case study. Explicitly ask them to step into the shoes of that role, even if it is not their own opinion.

3 Explain the rules of the debate: the mayor leads; anyone wishing to speak raises their hand; a maximum of 2 minutes per turn; voting takes place after approximately 40 minutes. Then have each group (party, association, citizens, journalists) prepare together:

- What is our official position?
- Which 1 or 2 key arguments do we definitely want to present?
- Where are we willing to compromise, and where absolutely not?
- Who could we potentially collaborate with? Who do we want to convince during the break?

In the meantime, set up the room as a council chamber — semi-circle, tables by party, name cards.

A mosque in Silentville

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 120 minutes

GROUP
minimum 15–20 participants, co-facilitator strongly recommended

MATERIALS
role cards + case sheet per participant, name tags per role, a flip chart with markers, a timer, a room that can be set up as a "board room"

GOAL

Understand how polarization and us-versus-them thinking can quickly escalate around sensitive issues such as religion and migration. Practice democratic debate: formulating positions, listening, negotiating, and voting. And make human rights concrete: which rights clash here and how do you deal with that fairly?

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

4 The municipal council meeting. The mayor opens: welcomes everyone, briefly reiterates the cas and the rules. Then the debate begins. The mayor gives turns to speakers — encourage short interventions, avoid long monologues. As a facilitator, ensure that the less outspoken roles also get a chance to speak. During the debate, tension and emotion are allowed, but no personal attacks on the actual participants — only on role-based arguments. After approximately 35 to 40 minutes, the mayor calls for a vote:

- Who is in favor of the mosque under the current conditions?
- Who is against it?
- Who advocates for an alternative? (explain briefly)

The mayor announces the result and closes the meeting. Then have the journalists draft two news reports: one polarizing version and one unifying one.

5 Stepping out of the role. This is essential; do not skip it. Before you start reflecting, literally take everyone out of their role:

- Everyone stand up, take a few deep breaths.
- Ask for their real name and real role one by one (pupil, youth worker, student…).
- Optionally symbolically: "Lay your role card on the floor or the table. You may now let it go."

Only then do you start the debriefing.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- A — About the process and the role:
  - How did it feel to be in your role? Recognizable or far removed from yourself?
  - Did you feel (in your role) that you had an influence on the outcome?
  - Has a conversation with another group shifted your position? How?
  - Were you surprised by the outcome of the vote?

A mosque in Silentville

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 120 minutes

GROUP
minimum 15–20 participants, co-facilitator strongly recommended

MATERIALS
role cards + case sheet per participant, name tags per role, a flip chart with markers, a timer, a room that can be set up as a "board room"

GOAL

Understand how polarization and us-versus-them thinking can quickly escalate around sensitive issues such as religion and migration. Practice democratic debate: formulating positions, listening, negotiating, and voting. And make human rights concrete: which rights clash here and how do you deal with that fairly?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- B — Link with the real world:
  - Do you think something like that can happen in real life, or has already happened?
  - Have you heard discussions about mosques, churches, synagogues, or other houses of worship? Which arguments resemble what we heard here?
  - How would you react if this were happening in your city or municipality?
- C — Human rights and polarization:
  - Which rights are involved here? (freedom of religion, non-discrimination, freedom of expression…)
  - Where did you see us-versus-them thinking in the debate? Who was portrayed as the "problem" or "intruder"?
  - Which single stories about Muslims or "traditional inhabitants" came up?
  - Which roles attempted to build bridges or add nuance; what made that difficult or courageous?

TIP

- A co-facilitator is not a luxury. For a game of this magnitude, it is essential.
- Emotional safety. There may be participants in the group who are Muslim themselves or who have experienced discrimination. State clearly beforehand: criticism in the game is about roles and arguments, not about real people in the room. Also make the option to participate as an observer explicit; no one needs to take on a role that feels too close to home.
- Brief the mayor thoroughly. Choose someone who feels comfortable chairing. Walk through the rules with them and give them explicit confidence: "You lead, I will interfere as little as possible."
- Keep the imagination within the case. If participants start concocting wild conspiracies, you may gently steer back: “The case says nothing about X; let’s stick to the facts.”
- Do not fight again in the debrief. Ensure that people speak as themselves again, not as a "Tradition Party" or "Muslim Association". Focus on what they have learned, felt, and seen, not on who was right.
- Connect with the local context. Possible closing: "What exciting discussions about religion and visibility are taking place in our area? Where do you see opportunities to strengthen dialogue instead of taking sides?"

Source: based on ‘A Mosque in Sleepyville’ from COMPASS — Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People (Council of Europe, coe.int/compass).

WORKSHEET

A mosque in Silentville (Case Study)

Part of the "A mosque in Silentville" method

● Us-versus-them thinking

Read this case carefully before you slip into your role. Remember: these facts are established for everyone. The rest—what the mosque would mean, who is afraid of it, what a reasonable compromise is—that is what the meeting will discuss in a moment.

1 THE SITUATION

Silentville is a city of approximately 80,000 inhabitants. The city has become more diverse over the past decades. Some residents take this for granted; others feel uncomfortable or suspicious.

On an abandoned city site — currently a hangout with vandalism and sometimes drugs — the Muslim community wants to build a new mosque.

There will be protests. Therefore, there is now an open municipal council meeting: citizens and associations may speak and vote.

2 PROPOSAL & QUESTION

THE PROPOSAL — THE FACTS

- The city gives the land away for free.
- The city pays 20% of the construction costs.
- A private investor pays 70%.
- The Muslim community must raise 10% themselves.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Will the mosque be built?

- Yes, as suggested?
- No?
- Or yes, but with adjustments — for example, a different location, different financing, or agreements regarding mobility and nuisance?

3 GAME RULES

- The mayor chairs the meeting.
- Whoever wishes to speak raises a hand.
- Presentation = maximum 2 minutes.
- Voting takes place after approximately 40 minutes.
- You speak from your role, not from yourself.

4 HUMAN RIGHTS LINK

In this case, three human rights play a role:

- Freedom of religion and belief
- Prohibition of discrimination
- Freedom of expression and participation in public debate

Sometimes those rights conflict with each other or with other interests (nuisance, safety, equal treatment of religions). A good municipal council meeting weighs the pros and cons — it does not act as if one right always takes precedence over another.

WORKSHEET

A mosque in Silentville (role cards)

Part of the "A mosque in Silentville" method ● Us-versus-them thinking

Print these pages in advance. Cut out the role cards so that each participant receives one. Read your role card in silence and step into that role, even if it is not your own opinion. That is exactly the intention: to feel what a different position feels like from the inside. Page 1 of 4

ROLE 1

Mayor (Chairperson)

You are: the mayor of Silentville. You chair the meeting.

Your goal: an orderly debate + decision (vote).
Your style (choose): strict / connecting / politically adept.
You guard: time, turn, respect.
Note: you have power through who you give the floor to and how you summarize.

ROLE 2

Councillor "Traditional Party"

You are: a municipal councillor who attaches great importance to tradition, tranquility, and "own identity".
Your position: rather critical or cautious.

CHOOSE 3 ARGUMENTS

- ☐ The city is changing too fast; people no longer feel at home.
- ☐ We must first listen to concerned local residents.
- ☐ Why is the city contributing? That is not neutral.
- ☐ We want certainty regarding nuisance, parking, and congestion.
- ☐ Compromise? Maybe, if there are strict conditions.

ROLE 3

Councillor "Populist Party"

You are: a council member who focuses strongly on safety, "our own people first," and emotions.
Your position: against, preferably stop completely.

CHOOSE 3 ARGUMENTS

- ☐ "The city has neglected its own identity."
- ☐ "We have a right to certainty and recognizability."
- ☐ "Safety and social cohesion come before symbolic projects."
- ☐ "Why is the city contributing when cuts are being made to other services?"
- ☐ This proposal was developed with insufficient consultation with the population.

Do you not feel comfortable with your role? Let the facilitator know; you can swap or participate as an observer. No one has to play a role that hits too close to home.

WORKSHEET

A mosque in Silentville (role cards)

Part of the "A mosque in Silentville" method ● Us-versus-them thinking

Print these pages in advance. Cut out the role cards so that each participant receives one. Read your role card in silence and step into that role, even if it is not your own opinion. That is exactly the intention: to feel what a different position feels like from the inside. Page 2 of 4

ROLE 4

Councillor "Diversity Party"

You are: a council member committed to equal rights, inclusion, and coexistence.
Your position: rather in favor.

CHOOSE 3 ARGUMENTS

- [ ] Freedom of religion applies to everyone.
- [ ] These people have lived here for a long time: this is their city too.
- [ ] A good solution can actually reduce nuisance (better than informal prayer rooms).
- [ ] We must actively combat discrimination.
- [ ] Compromise? Yes, as long as rights continue to be respected.

ROLL 5

Muslim Association Silentville (initiators)

You are: a representative of the Muslim community.
Your goal: permission for a mosque, with respect and dignity.

CHOOSE 3 ARGUMENTS

- [ ] We want an open building, with dialogue and transparency.
- [ ] We are contributing financially ourselves and working with an investor.
- [ ] We just want peace and structure: no nuisance.
- [ ] "We are citizens of Silentville: equal treatment."
- [ ] You are a citizen of Silentville, not a "guest." You may be proud of your community, and you do not always have to apologize for the fact that the mosque is being built there. This is a legitimate right.

ROLL 6

Association "Past & Future" (heritage / cityscape)

You are: a local association that wants to protect the character of the city.
Your position: undecided or opposed, depending on location/view.

CHOOSE 3 ARGUMENTS

- [ ] The cityscape and the neighborhood must be respected.
- [ ] Can't this be done on an industrial estate or another location?
- [ ] We want public participation and an architectural competition.
- [ ] Compromise: yes, provided the location/design is adjusted.

Do you not feel comfortable with your role? Let the facilitator know; you can swap or participate as an observer. No one has to play a role that hits too close to home.

WORKSHEET

A mosque in Silentville (role cards)

Part of the "A mosque in Silentville" method ● Us-versus-them thinking

Print these pages in advance. Cut out the role cards so that each participant receives one. Read your role card in silence and step into that role, even if it is not your own opinion. That is exactly the intention: to feel what a different position feels like from the inside.

ROLE 7

Youth group "Young Voices for Human Rights"

You are: a youth group committed to equality, dialogue, and anti-discrimination.
Your position: rather in favor, but with a connecting approach.

CHOOSE 3 ARGUMENTS

- ☐ Human rights are there precisely for difficult discussions.
- ☐ Stop us-versus-them thinking: young people want to live together.
- ☐ Organize moments of dialogue instead of polarizing.
- ☐ Additional proposal: neighborhood information, open mosque day, joint agreements.

ROLL 8

Neighborhood committee (against the mosque)

You are: concerned local resident(s) organizing against the plan.
Your position: against (or "not here, not now").

CHOOSE 3 ARGUMENTS

- ☐ We are afraid of crowds, noise, and traffic.
- ☐ "Why in this place? We bear the consequences."
- ☐ We don't feel heard.
- ☐ Note: you can also generalize unconsciously → this can reinforce polarization.

ROLL 9

Hesitant resident (in between)

You are: someone who doubts and above all wants peace.
Your goal: security, clear agreements, respect for everyone.

CHOOSE 3 ARGUMENTS

- ☐ "What specifically changes in my street?"
- ☐ Who pays what? And what if the budget goes off track?
- ☐ What agreements will be made regarding parking, hours, and management?
- ☐ You can build bridges by asking questions instead of shouting.

Do you not feel comfortable with your role? Let the facilitator know; you can swap or participate as an observer. No one has to play a role that hits too close to home.

WORKSHEET

A mosque in Silentville (role cards)

Part of the "A mosque in Silentville" method ● Us-versus-them thinking

Print these pages in advance. Cut out the role cards so that each participant receives one. Read your role card in silence and step into that role, even if it is not your own opinion. That is exactly the intention: to feel what a different position feels like from the inside.

ROLL 10

Local entrepreneur / trader

You are: someone with a business in the neighborhood.
Your position: pragmatic.

CHOOSE 3 ARGUMENTS

- ☐ More passage can be good for trade, but not if it turns into chaos.
- ☐ Create a mobility plan and clear communication.
- ☐ Renovating a dilapidated site is positive.
- ☐ Compromise: yes, if it is well organized.

ROLL 11

Police / Safety Advice

You are: someone who needs to interpret security information (without getting political).
Your goal: facts, not sensationalism.

CHOOSE 3 ARGUMENTS

- ☐ Nuisance depends on management and agreements, not just on the building.
- ☐ Stigmatization sometimes backfires.
- ☐ We recommend a clear contact person, agreements, and a reporting point.
- ☐ Please note: you may not "guarantee everything."

ROLL 12

Journalist / Observer

You are: press. You primarily observe.

Note: strong quotes, us-versus-them language, misinformation, bridging moments.
Write 5 sentences afterwards: "What do we think is the story?"
Extra: You may ask one question to each group during the debate.

Do you not feel comfortable with your role? Let the facilitator know; you can swap or participate as an observer. No one has to play a role that hits too close to home.

We get along very well

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 90 minutes

GROUP
At least 12 participants (3 per position)

MATERIALS
A space divided into a quadrant (four zones), tape to mark the axes, a pre-selected position with 4 viewpoints

GOAL

Exploring a polarizing topic four-dimensionally rather than as pro-contra. By having participants physically take positions in a quadrant and move when they hear arguments that convince them, it becomes visible that most societal issues have not two, but at least four viewpoints — and that changing one's mind is not a weakness, but part of the learning process.

PREPARATION

Choose one polarizing statement with four different viewpoints — not for/against, but four real alternatives. Examples from the EDUbox Us-versus-them thinking:

- "Do footballers earn too much?" → positions: Yes, they are overpaid / No, market value justifies it / The problem is not football but inequality / It is their choice to use that money for good causes.
- "Are we allowed to eat animals?" → Yes, it is natural / No, animals have rights / Only if they have been raised ethically / Only plant-based is sustainable

Divide the space into a quadrant (four zones marked with tape), with one viewpoint per zone.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Frame it briefly: "In the news, almost all debates seem to be pro-contra. But in reality, there are usually four or more valid positions on every issue. Today we explore one. You will be given four positions, one for each corner of the room."
2. Read the four viewpoints aloud. Hang them up visibly or lay them on the floor in each zone. Give the group a minute to read them.
3. Everyone chooses a zone, the one they agree with the most. Don't think too long; choose and stand. If you don't feel sure in the first minute, go into the zone that feels closest for now.
4. Each zone gets 5 minutes to collectively substantiate their position: why did you choose this one? What arguments? Appoint one spokesperson per zone for later.
5. Each spokesperson presents the position of their zone for 2 minutes. After each presentation: 15 seconds of silence. During that silence, everyone may move to a different position if they have just heard something that convinces them.
6. Discuss for 5 minutes per zone (now possible with new people). How has your position changed? Where can you argue better now?
7. The facilitator says: "At the end of the day, this group has to continue living together. What is one common insight that we can all agree on?" Briefly jot it down on a flip chart. No forced consensus on the statement, but something shared that transcends.

We get along very well

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 90 minutes

GROUP
At least 12 participants (3 per position)

MATERIALS
A space divided into a quadrant (four zones), tape to mark the axes, a pre-selected position with 4 viewpoints

GOAL

Exploring a polarizing topic four-dimensionally rather than as pro-contra. By having participants physically take positions in a quadrant and move when they hear arguments that convince them, it becomes visible that most societal issues have not two, but at least four viewpoints — and that changing one's mind is not a weakness but part of the learning process.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Did you switch zones during the game? What convinced you?
- Did you almost make the substitution but didn't? What held you back?
- Which of the four viewpoints was the hardest to understand and why?
- What have you learned about how to adjust your opinion without losing face?
- How does this format differ from a normal debate between pro and contra?

TIP
The 15-second period of empty silence after each presentation is methodologically crucial. Avoid having the next speaker start immediately; guard that silence. Without that breathing space, no one will move, and the methodology will turn into a series of speeches instead of a lively conversation between four viewpoints.

Builds on Take a stand, which works with a line (pro/con), this one with a quadrant (four). For groups familiar with the line version, this is the natural next step.

Source: based on EDUbox Us-versus-them thinking — VRT NWS, Hannah Arendt Institute, Mediawijs, Tumult and Flemish Peace Institute. Adaptation via "Constructively disagreeing" (Flemish Peace Institute, 2025).

Power Flower

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 60 minutes

GROUP
Group of random size, works individually and in duos or trios

MATERIALS
A printed Power Flower worksheet per participant · pens or markers · a space where everyone can work quietly and with some privacy.

GOAL

Making visible how far or close someone is to the dominant identity in society — not to judge, but to raise awareness of power and vulnerability. The more you align with the dominant identity, the more invisible advantages you typically possess. The methodology combines personal reflection with group awareness.

PREPARATION

Print the worksheet with the Power Flower: a flower with 16 petals, each an identity category.
Skin colour · gender · language · religion or worldview · educational level · socio-economic class · sexual orientation · age · physical or mental capacity · country of origin · place of residence (city/countryside) · family status · family composition · legal status · cultural background · gender identity Each category has two sheets: an inner one (your own identity) and an outer one (the dominant identity in Flemish society).

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Briefly explain: "A Power Flower is a flower with 16 identity categories. First, we fill in the outer petals together: what is the dominant identity for each category in our society? Then, you silently fill in your own identity on the inner petals. The more similarities between your petal and the dominant one, the more invisible benefits you often have."
2. Go through category by category. What is the dominant identity in Flanders today? For example: "white skin colour, Dutch-speaking, Christian or non-religious, higher education, middle class, heterosexual, middle-aged, no disability, born in Belgium, urban, married or in a relationship, nuclear family, Belgian citizen, Flemish-Belgian, cisgender." Some categories will spark discussion; that is OK. Write down together what the group views as the dominant norm.
3. Observe 15 minutes of silence. Everyone fills in the inner pages for themselves. You may leave blank any categories you cannot figure out.
4. Count for yourself: how many inner petals match the outer ones (= privilege)? How many do not (= vulnerability)? Color the matches with one color, the mismatches with another.
5. Work in groups of two or three. Discuss based on:
   - Which category was the hardest to fill in, and why?
   - Which category do you find most important for you personally?
   - Regarding the matches: have you ever noticed that they gave you advantages without you noticing?
   - Regarding the mismatches: what experience is associated with them?

   No one has to share everything. What you keep to yourself, keep to yourself.

Power Flower

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 60 minutes

GROUP
Group of random size, works individually and in duos or trios

MATERIALS
A printed Power Flower worksheet per participant · pens or markers · a space where everyone can work quietly and with some privacy.

GOAL

Making visible how far or close someone is to the dominant identity in society. Not to judge, but to raise awareness of power and vulnerability. The more you align with the dominant identity, the more invisible advantages you typically possess. The methodology combines personal reflection with group awareness.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

6 No round of questions about content, but brief: how was it to do this exercise? Ask about emotions and observations, not personal content. Some participants will have discovered something heavy; allow space for this with respect and silence if necessary.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which category did you fill in without thinking about it? Which one took effort?
- Which match surprised you?
- What mismatch caught your attention? Has it shaped your life?
- How does it affect you that some of these categories cannot be changed?
- How does this exercise change how you view people who have more mismatches than you?

TIP

This methodology touches deeply and can trigger uncomfortable feelings. Guilt for those with many matches, anger or sadness for those with many mismatches. Three safety rules:

- No judgment. Privilege is not "being guilty of something," it is an imposed position. You didn't choose it, but you can see it.
- No one is required to share. The Power Flower is primarily for yourself. Those who wish to reflect alone may do so.
- Allow time afterwards. Do not schedule a heavy work block immediately after this. A break or a light energizer helps the heavy work sink in.

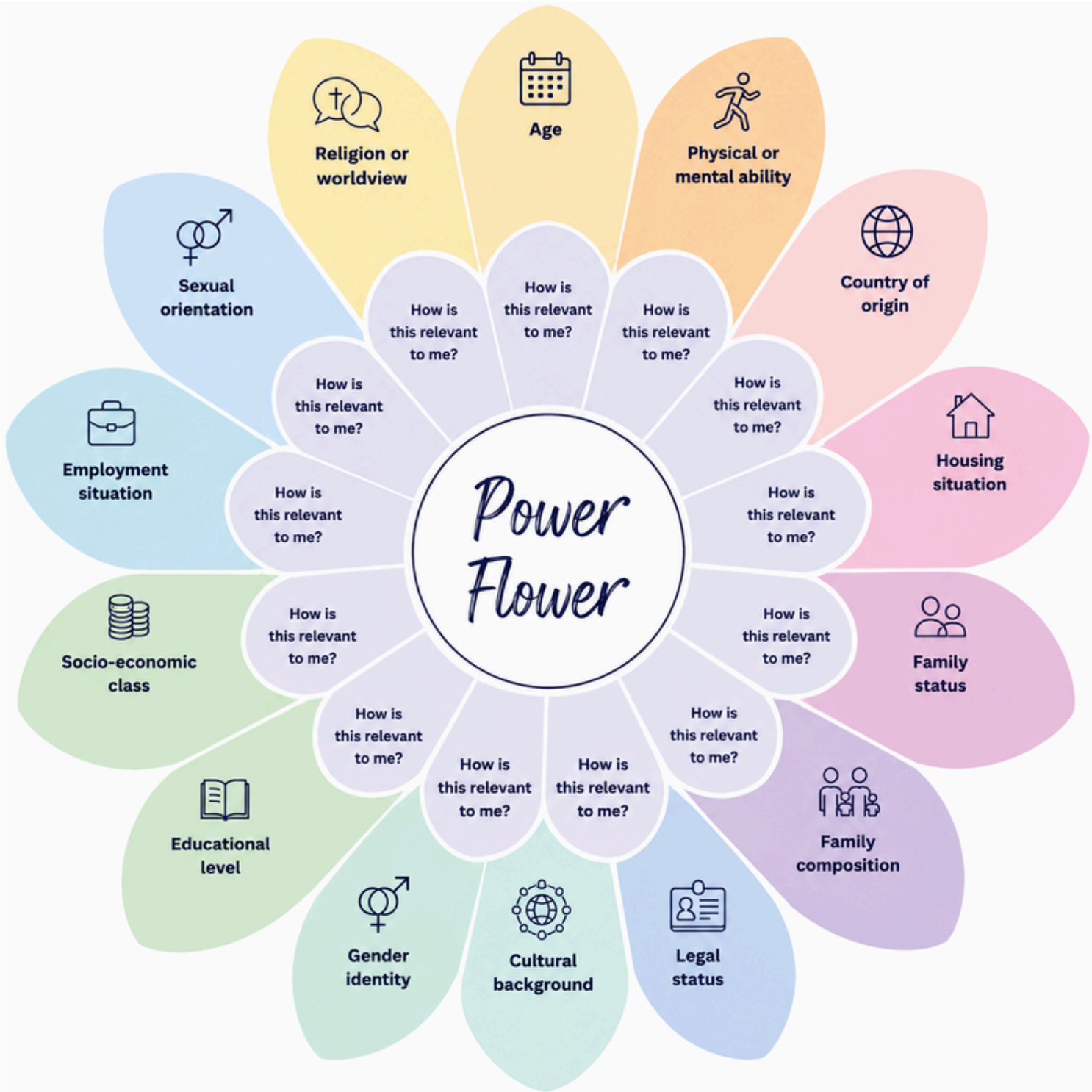
WORKSHEET

Power Flower

Part of the 'Power Flower' method

● Us-versus-them thinking

In the outer petals, you note together with the group what is often considered the dominant norm within our society. In the inner petals, you write your own identity. By comparing the two, you discover in which areas you stand closer to or further away from that norm.



There are no right or wrong answers. The goal is not to pigeonhole people, but to consciously reflect on identity, differences, similarities, and how they can influence our experiences.

Civic Self-Portrait

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 45 minutes

GROUP
Individual work, followed by plenary.

MATERIALS
Self-portrait worksheet per participant, markers, a sheet

GOAL

Encouraging young people to reflect on who they are as citizens — using metaphors of the body (head, heart, hands, feet…) to connect thinking, feeling, speaking, and acting. Making their own position, concerns, and small steps visible in a single self-portrait.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Brief question to the group: "When do you feel: I am part of society and I have a say in this?" Explain that they are going to create a self-portrait as a citizen, using body parts as metaphors (head for thinking, heart for what touches you, hands for doing, feet for the steps you take).

2. Have the participants write keywords and short sentences next to each body part on the worksheet:
   - Head: what have I learned, heard, understood?
   - Eyes and ears: what do I see and hear in my surroundings?
   - Heart and gut: what touches me? What am I worried about?
   - Mouth: how and where do I want to use my voice?
   - Hands: how do I want to interact with others? Who do I want to work with?
   - Feet: what small step do I want to take in the near future?

3. Let anyone who wishes share one or two elements, for example, one value for Heart, one step for Feet. Collect recurring words on a flip chart (values, concerns, forms of engagement). Have everyone indicate the concrete next step on their sheet — it can be a small one.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In which body part did you recognize yourself the most (head, heart, hands, belly…)?
- Which answers were easy to fill in? Which were difficult?
- Has this changed how you see yourself in discussions or in the face of injustice?
- If you were to remake your self-portrait in a year — what do you hope would be different?

TIP

Combine this methodology with Circles of Care. That methodology asks for whom you want to be responsible; the Civic Self-Portrait asks how you want to do that. Together they form a diptych: Circles of Care provide the map, the portrait the route.

Source: Facing History and Ourselves — Civic Self-Portrait (facinghistory.org)

WORKSHEET

Civic Self-Portrait

Part of the “Civic Self-Portrait” method

- Us-versus-them thinking

Fill in these portrait questions for yourself. You do not have to share anything you do not want to — this sheet stays with you. Write in keywords or short sentences. Some sections are easier than others; that is normal.

HEAD

What have I read, heard, or learned this year/this week that has made me ask questions about myself or my community?

EYES

What have I seen that influences how I behave? What do I pay extra attention to these days?

EARS

Which voices, sources, or ideas do I listen to to understand what is happening in society and what needs to be done?



HEART

What do I care about most in my surroundings or in the world? What truly touches me? What is my passion?

WORLD

How do I want to use my voice? What do I want to speak out about, and in what way?

GUT FEELING

What is my first feeling or intuition about how I should act? What am I worried about?

HANDS

How do I want to take action in my neighborhood, school, organization, or online? With whom do I want to connect or collaborate?

FEET

What are my dreams or hopes for the future of my community? What are concrete steps I can take to work towards them?

The river

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION
± 20 minutes

GROUP
Individually or in small groups

MATERIALS
Large sheet of paper with a river drawn on it, markers, Post-its

GOAL

Have participants reflect on their journey through the theme of us-versus-them thinking. They identify where things flowed smoothly, where they became blocked, and where things started to move.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Draw a river on a large sheet of paper. The beginning of the session is on the left, the end on the right.
2. Explain: "This river represents your path through today's topic."
3. Have participants place themselves somewhere on the river with a word, symbol, or Post-it.
4. Add symbols:
   - Rocks: where did I get stuck?
   - Bridges: where did the connection come from?
   - Flow: what set me in motion?
   - Shore: where did I need distance?
5. Ask participants to briefly share what they drew or pasted.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- **Where was it flowing for you?**
- **Where did you get stuck?**
- **Which bridge have you seen or built?**
- **What do you want to think about further after today?**

TIP

Allow for drawings and symbols. Not everyone can easily articulate what a session on us-versus-them thinking has unleashed.

Source: Based on the T-Kit methodology The River

Boats at sea

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 20 minutes	Individually, then in plenary	Flip chart with a sea and boats drawn on it, Post-its or cards, markers

GOAL

Have participants assess where they stand after the session: close to connection, still in turbulent waters, distant, on the way, stuck, or actually in motion.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Draw a sea with a few elements: calm harbor, storm, island, rocks, bridge, open water.
2. Give everyone a small paper boat or Post-it.
3. Question: “Where is your boat now after this session?”
4. Let participants place their boats.
5. Anyone who wishes can share briefly: “My boat is here because…”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Are you in calm or turbulent waters?
- What were the rocks today?
- Where did you see an island or resting place?
- What do you need to continue sailing?

TIP

This works well after an intense conversation. The metaphor makes it easier to name tension without reopening the content.

Source: Based on the T-Kit methodology Boats on the Sea

Train to Later

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 20 minutes	Individually, then in plenary	Large sheet with a train and wagons drawn on it, Post-its, markers

GOAL

Participants are asked to translate what they learned about us-versus-them thinking into concrete places in their own lives. The exercise helps ensure that insights do not remain lingering in the session, but are taken along into the future.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Draw a train with different carriages. Give each carriage a place or context:
   - At home
   - School or work
   - Online
   - Group of friends
   - Youth work or neighborhood
2. Explain: “This train departs for the future. In each carriage, we collect what we want to take with us to recognize us-versus-them thinking more quickly or to soften it.”
3. Have participants fill out Post-its individually. They choose at least two wagons and write one concrete action or point of attention per wagon.
4. Have participants stick their Post-its in the correct carriage. And briefly discuss what recurs in each carriage.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In which carriage do you see the most us-versus-them thinking?
- Where can you most easily change something small yourself?
- Which action feels feasible, not too big?
- Which carriage remains empty or difficult, and what does that say?

TIP

Steer clear of grand promises. “I am going to stop polarization” is too big. “I ask one question before I judge” is concrete enough.

Source: Based on the T-Kit Train to the Future methodology

My Little Bridge

Theme: Us-versus-them thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 15 minutes	Individually, then in plenary	Bridge cards or Post-its, pens

GOAL

Participants formulate one small, feasible bridging action that they can take after the session when they recognize us-versus-them thinking.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Explain: “A bridge doesn’t have to be big. Sometimes a bridge is one question, one gesture, or one moment when you don’t go along with the camp mentality.”
2. Give everyone a card with the sentence:
   My little bridge is...
3. Have participants individually formulate one concrete action. Examples:
   - I ask: “What exactly do you mean?”
   - I invite someone who remains silent.
   - I am not immediately sharing a polarizing post.
   - I'm checking if there is another story.
4. Have participants share what their bridge is in pairs.
5. Ask for a few examples in the plenary session. Collect them on a flip chart: Small bridges we can build.
5. Conclude by having everyone take their card or have a photo taken of it.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- When could you use this small bridge?
- What makes this bridge feasible?
- What would stop you?
- Who can help you really do this?

TIP

Let participants make their bridge small enough. A good bridging action fits into a single moment and does not require a perfect conversation.



PART 2 - WORKBOOK

CRITICAL THINKING

Learn to research information more carefully, recognize underlying assumptions, and view the world with greater nuance.

Take a stand

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 25 minutes	Whole group, in a space with a long imaginary "line"	Two A4 sheets, a prepared list of statements

GOAL

Making noticeable how quickly us-versus-them thinking arises, even with lighthearted topics. Taking the step from safe, humorous statements to softer conversations about polarization. Practicing daring to shift — listening to others and potentially revising your position.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Hang an A4 sheet with "Completely agree" on one side of the room, and "Completely disagree" on the other. Explain: for each statement, everyone chooses a spot on the line, from very convinced to the middle. Agree on three rules:
   - We respond with "I find / I feel / I think".
   - We laugh at the situation, not at each other.
   - You may change places if you hear something that makes you doubt.

2. Warm up with light positions. Start with positions where little is at stake, so that everyone understands the system and it stays light. Examples:
   - "Marvel is better than DC."
   - You eat fries with lots of sauce; otherwise it's a waste.

   For each statement: read aloud, everyone chooses a seat, and 2 to 3 participants briefly explain why. Then ask: "Does anyone want to move after what they have heard?"

3. The bridge to more serious topics. Make the link explicit: "We just saw how we end up in camps even over fries and superheroes. Now we are going to do the same, but with statements that touch closer to polarization and living together." Optionally, ask how it felt to visibly position yourself.

4. Statements with more substance. Choose 3 to 4 statements that suit your target audience. Examples:
   - On social media, people judge those who think differently too harshly.
   - It is better to remain silent about some subjects in class or at work.
   - You must be able to say everything, even if it is hurtful.
   - Young people are not taken seriously enough in political discussions.

   Follow the same steps each time: read aloud — everyone chooses a spot — 3 to 4 different positions get the floor (one side, middle, other side) — ask if anyone wants to move after hearing arguments. Important: no one is required to speak. Sharing is allowed, but not mandatory.

5. Brief debriefing. In the circle or still on the line:
   - How did it feel to visibly show your position on the statements?
   - Was there a moment when you wanted to move but didn't dare?
   - Have you heard anyone who really made you think?
   - What do you learn from this about how we talk about sensitive Themes in society?

   Make the link with polarization explicit: "In society, too, people often stand in 'camps'. Today we practiced looking at this consciously and listening to other positions."

Take a stand

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION
± 25 minutes

GROUP
Whole group, in a space with a long imaginary "line"

MATERIALS
Two A4 sheets, a prepared list of statements

GOAL

Making noticeable how quickly us-versus-them thinking arises, even with lighthearted topics. Taking the step from safe, humorous statements to softer conversations about polarization. Practicing daring to shift — listening to others and potentially revising your position.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- When do you feel the urge to side completely with one person?
- What helps you remain open to other viewpoints?
- Have you ever changed your mind after a conversation? What made that possible?

TIP

The heart of this methodology lies in step 1, rule 3, and step 4: you are allowed to change places. In a polarizing culture, changing one's mind is often dismissed as weakness ("lack of backbone").

State this actively: changing places is not weakness; it is a sign that you are listening and dare to reconsider.

A fun variation: let young people come up with a "crazy" warm-up statement themselves in step 2. This gives them co-ownership of the game, and you often get surprisingly good statements.

Describe the photo

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 25 minutes	Whole group, one person as "source" + the rest as questioners	Some attractive photos printed on A4 paper

GOAL

Experiencing how we construct images of reality through questions, assumptions, and interpretations. Becoming aware of what information we receive, what we miss, and what we fill in unconsciously. A first warm-up for the theme of critical thinking, preparing for how news, rumors, and social media enter our minds.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Invite one participant to look at a photo, ensuring the others cannot see it. Give the person a minute to look at the photo quietly.
2. The others may ask questions to form a mental image of what is in the photo. The "source" answers as precisely as possible but may not add anything of their own accord; they may only respond to questions.
3. After 5 to 10 minutes (depending on the dynamics), show the photo to everyone. Ask: "Was this what you had imagined?" Have a few people briefly describe what they had in mind before they saw the image.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What information was missing, and how did you unconsciously fill it in?
- Which information did different people interpret differently?
- How does this resemble how news or rumors spread?
- Which question should you have asked that you didn't ask?

TIP

Choose images that truly conceal something, a fragment that is questionable without context (e.g., a hand gesture that could be aggressive or friendly). The more room for interpretation, the richer the exercise.

Variation on the game! For the first photo: let the group ask as many questions as possible in 3 minutes. For the second: force one question per person. What is different about the mental image?

End with the meta-question: "In how many other situations in your life do you get information from a single source?"
"And do you have to fill in what you don't know yourself?" (think: news reports, rumors at school, screenshots without context on Instagram). That is the bridge to the rest of the Critical Thinking block.

The web between us

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 15 minutes	Whole group in a circle (8 to 20 people works best)	One ball of thin rope or wool

GOAL

Making literally and physically palpable how many connections already exist between people—before we even talk about polarization. A warm, activating starting point that immediately brings the group together around the theme: we are more connected than we often think; polarization attempts to break precisely those connections.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Everyone in a circle. Briefly explain: "We are going to make a web with this rope. Everyone adds one connection."
2. The first throw. Grab the ball of string. Name one thing that connects you to this group or to other people — a shared place (the school, the neighborhood), an interest, a value, an experience. Hold the end of the string and throw the ball to someone else.
3. The web grows. Whoever catches the rope takes turns naming something that connects them to someone else (in the group, in the world, with their family or friends). Hold onto the rope and pass it on. Continue until everyone has had a turn, possibly multiple times if the group is small. Help people with examples when they are stuck: "a value, a passion, a hobby, a place, someone who is important to you..."
4. If everyone is holding, stop. Let the group look at the web in silence for a moment — feel how many connections are visible now. Give it a few seconds.
5. Brief reflection (standing, rope still attached). What do you see when you look at this web?
   - Which connection did someone else mention that surprised you?
   - Bridge to the topic: Polarization attempts to break precisely these kinds of connections — through us-versus-them narratives, by shouting instead of listening, by reducing others to a single label. Consciously recognizing that the connections exist is a first step.

   Have everyone carefully let go of the rope so that the web lies visible on the ground.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How did it feel to help build the web?
- Which connection you mentioned had you never consciously noticed before?
- Where do you see polarization trying to break connections?

TIP

For groups that do not know each other yet: keep the prompts very light (a shared place, an interest). For groups that do know each other: dare to go deeper (a value, something you believe in).

Source thief

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 5 minutes	4 or more participants (more fun from 8)	Source cards (one per person)

GOAL

In a playful, physical way, demonstrate how easily we adopt other people's sources, often without giving it a second thought. A short opener that immediately illustrates how information spreads and how quickly we lose sight of the origin.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Each participant receives one source card, e.g.: "VRT NWS", "TikTok", "Knack", "my uncle on Facebook", "an influencer I follow", "a scientific study", "a meme on Instagram", "a column in De Standaard". That is your source for the next meeting.
2. Walk around and when you meet someone, shake hands and greet: "Hello, I am ... and my source is [VRT NWS]." The other person greets back with their name and source.
3. Upon letting go of the hand, you switch sources. You walk on with the other person's source, which now becomes your source for the next encounter.
4. Keep playing for 3 to 5 minutes — until everyone has exchanged multiple times.
5. Stop on signal. Everyone freezes with the source they have at that moment.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How did it feel to walk around with a source that wasn't "yours"?
- Have you caught yourself presenting a source as if it were really your source?
- What could you do from now on before you share something—a quick check?

TIP

The mix is exactly what it's all about; some sources feel more reliable than others, but in the game, they all get mixed up.

Three more challenging variants for groups that have grasped the basics:

- The Opinion Thief: instead of exchanging sources, you swap opinions on a current debate. Everyone receives a short statement. Confronting: how does it feel to have to "carry" someone else's opinion?
- The Fact Thief: cards with facts (partly true, partly half-true, partly false). Ties in with Real or Fake?
- The Trait Thief: cards with personality traits ("calm", "chaotic", "creative"). Works as a soft entry point.

Source: inspired by JINT SONAR, The Name Thief.

Media Bingo

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 15 minutes	6 to 30 participants	Bingo cards, pens, list of terms and examples

GOAL

Introducing young people to concepts surrounding media literacy, fake news, and online influence in a playful way. They learn to recognize more quickly which signals indicate that a message may be misleading, polarizing, or unreliable.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Give each participant or duo a bingo card with concepts related to online information. (See worksheet)
2. Explain: "I will read out a description, example, or situation shortly. Do you think you know which concept goes with it? Tick that box."
3. Read short clues one by one or show newspaper headlines. For example:
   - "A title primarily designed to make you click, often with strong emotion or exaggeration." → clickbait
   - "A message that looks like news, but is deliberately false or misleading." → fake news
   - "An online environment where you mainly see opinions that resemble what you already thought." → echo chamber
4. Whoever completes a row, column, or diagonal calls out "Bingo"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which concept did you already know? Which one was new?
- Which online trick works fastest for you: emotion, shock, humor, anger, recognition?
- What do you want to check from now on before you share or believe something?

TIP

Use lighthearted examples in the first round. For instance, an exaggerated headline about fries, sports, or celebrities. Only switch to more societal examples afterward. This way, it remains an icebreaker and not a heavy debate.

Source: Based on UnfakeSoMe Games - Social Media Simulation: Bingo, SALTO-YOUTH Toolbox.

WORKSHEET

Media Bingo

Part of the “Media Bingo” method

Critical thinking

Have the participants cross off terms on their bingo cards while the facilitator reads out short descriptions or examples. Whoever completes a row, column, or diagonal calls out “Bingo.”

Concept	Clue
Deepfake	“Image or audio in which someone appears to say or do something, but which is digitally created or altered.”
Conspiracy theory	A story claiming that a secret group is behind everything.
Influencer	“Someone online who influences what others think, buy, or share.”
Troll	Someone who deliberately provokes online to spark conflict or anger.
Screenshot	“An image of a screen, often without what came before or after.”
Opinion	“What someone thinks, feels, or believes.”
Emotional language	“Words that mainly evoke anger, fear, or indignation.”
Fact	“Something you can verify with evidence, numbers, or sources.”
Fact-check	“Checking whether information is correct by examining the source, date, evidence, and a second source.”
Manipulation	Deliberately steering someone in a certain direction with misleading or incomplete information.
Hoax	A false scare message that people forward as if it were true.
Reliable	“Information whose origin you know, that is supported by evidence, and that you can verify.”
Half-truth	“Something that is partly correct but leaves out important context, giving you a distorted picture.”

WORKSHEET

Media Bingo

Part of the “Media Bingo” method

Critical thinking

Read out short clues one by one. For some concepts, also show an example, such as a newspaper headline, meme, screenshot, or social media post. Have participants check the concept that they think fits.

Fake news	Clickbait	Deepfake	Conspiracy theory
Influencer	Troll	Screenshot	Opinion
Emotional language	Fact	Echo chamber	Fact-check
Manipulation	Hoax	Trustworthy	Half-truth

Real or fake?

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION
± 30 minutes

GROUP
Whole group, works in pairs or small groups of 3 to 4

MATERIALS
A mixed set of 6 to 10 news items, pens and paper, fact-checking worksheet

GOAL

Practice critical thinking by learning to distinguish real news from fake news. Gain insight into how disinformation fuels us-versus-them thinking, often targeting specific groups and sensitive topics. Provide a few concrete fact-checking skills that participants can use immediately.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Divide into pairs or small groups. Everyone receives the same messages and the Fact-check worksheet (see next page). Each group goes through the 6 steps for each message and determines: real or fake? Important: do not let them just guess, but have them briefly write down the arguments on the worksheet.
2. Go through the messages one by one in a plenary session. Reveal whether they are real or fake. For each message, ask the groups to share their reasoning: which clues did they spot, and which did they miss? Which step of the worksheet put them on the right track?
3. Summarize the skills you need to check the news. The worksheet provides 6 steps, but you must check at least the following:
   - Source: Who is publishing this? Does the sender exist? Is the URL correct?
   - Date: Is the message recent, or is something old being recycled in a new context?
   - Second source: does this story appear anywhere else? Do other journalists mention it?

   Briefly mention how algorithms ensure that we primarily see messages that confirm our own opinions (echo chamber). That is why fake news is extra effective: it fits into a narrative that we are already inclined to believe.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What was the last message you shared without checking?
- How does fake news influence your view of certain groups or themes?
- What role do social media play in reinforcing us-versus-them thinking?

TIP

Choose current, recognizable examples from the lives of your participants. Young people react more strongly to an Instagram or TikTok clip than to a newspaper headline.

WORKSHEET

Real or fake?

Part of the "Real or Fake" method

Critical thinking

Use this checklist to investigate a message, article, or social media post before deciding whether it is true or false.

Step 1 — Check the source

- What is the name of the website, newspaper, or account that published the message?
- Is this source known for factual reporting?
- Has this source spread disinformation in the past?
- Do you find the same report on other reliable news sites as well?

Step 2 — Check the author

- Who wrote the article? (Check the name/byline)
- Does this author usually write factual reports?
- Did you find information about his/her education or previous work?
- Is the author affiliated with an organization that could color the message?

Step 3 — Check the date

- When was the message published?
- Is the info outdated? (Do newer reports confirm or refute it?)
- Has the message been republished or edited without a clear update?

Step 4 — Analyze the content

- What is the main claim?
- Does the message provide evidence? (data, experts, research, photos, links)
- Do you see red flags? (sensational language, conspiracy theories, no sources)
- Does the report mention where it happened? Can you verify that through local sources?

Step 5 — Compare with other sources

- Do you find the same story on multiple reliable news sites?
- Have fact-checkers investigated it? (e.g. Knack Factcheck, Factcheck Vlaanderen, EUvsDisinfo)
- Is there an official response from experts, the government, or researchers?

Step 6 — Decide

- Does the evidence support the claim?
- Conclusion: is this message TRUE or FALSE? Or is it somewhere IN BETWEEN (partly true)?

WORKSHEET

Real or fake?

Part of the “Real or Fake” method

Critical thinking

Use this checklist to investigate a message, article, or social media post before deciding whether it is true or false.

Headline / claim	Source on card	Date on card	Short card text	QR code
Australia wants to set a minimum age for social media	VRT NWS	10 sep. 2024	“Australia wants a minimum age of 14 to 16 for social media such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook.”	
Kazou wants to ban mobile phones on holidays for children under 13	VRT NWS	30 aug. 2024	“Youth organization Kazou wants children under 13 not to bring a phone on holiday, because quick messages sometimes cause unnecessary panic.”	
“Facebook is for old people”	Knack Factcheck	29 jan. 2019	“Figures show that Facebook is less popular among young teenagers than before, but the conclusion requires nuance.”	
Four in ten young people doubt reliable news on social media	Nieuwsbarometer / MediaSpecs	2025	“Young people often encounter news on social media, but a large share doubts its reliability.”	

WORKSHEET

Real or fake?

Part of the “Real or Fake” method ● Critical thinking

Use this checklist to investigate a message, article, or social media post before deciding whether it is true or false.

Headline / claim	Source on card	Date on card	Short card text	QR code
French teacher has a breakdown in class	TikTok / X	dec. 2025	A video supposedly shows a teacher who can no longer handle teaching. The footage goes viral.	
Climate change is a hoax to take away people’s freedom	Online claim	No clear date	The claim says that climate change was invented by powerful groups to control people.	
Children in Germany died because of face masks	Social media / action letter	2020	It is claimed that children in Germany died from wearing face masks.	

The same story, different glasses

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION
± 30 minutes

GROUP
In pairs,
then in plenary

MATERIALS
A printed fairy tale per pair, choose a widely known classic

GOAL

Quickly learn to switch between perspectives, and discover how one story sounds radically different depending on who tells it. A direct exercise in critically reading sources: every story comes from somewhere, and that position colors what you hear.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Give each pair a printed fairy tale (e.g., Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, The Three Little Pigs). Ask everyone to go through it quietly, not to memorize it, but just to know the main points.
2. One person in the duo tells the story aloud in the third person, like a neutral narrator. ("Once upon a time there was a girl named Little Red Riding Hood..."). The other listens.
3. Every few minutes, the facilitator calls out a new "pair of glasses" (a different narrator position). With each new pair of glasses, the story starts over, and the other person in the duo now tells the story. Use 3 to 5 pairs of glasses; choose as many as you have time for:
   - In the first person as the main character. "I walked through the woods, my basket on my arm..." Tell the story as Little Red Riding Hood, or as the wolf.
   - In the first person as a minor character. Tell it as the hunter, the grandmother, or the mother who stayed at home.
   - In the first person as a chance witness. "I was just picking up a walnut when I saw her pass by..." A bird, a passerby, someone who saw it from afar.
   - In the first person as a setting. Tell the story like the forest, the cottage, the door, or the river. This is the most surprising perspective — let it emerge consciously.
4. Call everyone back into the circle and discuss what stood out.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How many different stories can exist about the same event?
- What changed about the story when you switched "lenses"? Not only who was speaking, but also what seemed important?
- In real discussions, we often hear one story, told from one perspective. Which other "lenses" are usually forgotten?

TIP
The scenery lens (tell it like the forest, or the door) seems crazy but is worth its weight in gold: it forces participants completely out of their habitual perspective. Save it for the end, when the group is already somewhat warmed up.

Defining propaganda

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 40 minutes	Whole group, with small group work	Worksheet with definitions, pen and paper, a whiteboard

GOAL

Young people learn what propaganda is and how to recognize it in media, advertising, news, and social media. Propaganda has no single, unambiguous definition, but all definitions share three core ideas: it is intentional, strategic, and it attempts to influence feelings, thoughts, or behavior.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Share two to three definitions with the group (see worksheet). Question:
   - What do you notice about these definitions?
   - Which words keep coming back? (influence, emotions, target audience, strategic…)

   Have the participants formulate one short sentence in small groups that they believe describes propaganda.
2. Give the groups 5 to 7 minutes to formulate their own definition based on the definitions and the examples from current events. Two guiding questions:
   - What absolutely must be included in the definition?
   - What makes a message propaganda and what does not (art, advertising, journalism)?

   Have each group briefly read out their definition. Write the keywords on the board and see what overlap there is.
3. Lead a short plenary discussion:
   - Why does the definition of propaganda change over time and context?
   - Is propaganda always bad? Why (not)?
   - Can something be art, advertising, and propaganda all at the same time?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- **What emotions does propaganda try to evoke?**
- **How does propaganda differ from information?**
- **To what extent do our own beliefs influence what we perceive as propaganda?**

TIP

At the end of the session, create a poster together with the keywords from your definitions and hang it up for the next session.

Source: Mind Over Media — Media Education Lab (propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com)

WORKSHEET

Defining propaganda

Part of the "Defining Propaganda" method ● Critical Thinking

Below are eight definitions of propaganda, written by various authors over a period of nearly 80 years. Read them carefully and look for the words that recur. Use them as a starting point for your own definition.

Propaganda is a means by which large numbers of people are incited to take action together. -- Bruce Lannes Smith & Harold Lasswell, Propaganda, Communication and Public Opinion, 1946

Propaganda is a form of information that plays on our insecurities and fears. -- Jacques Ellul, Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes, 1962

Propaganda is an intentional, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate thoughts, and steer behavior, in order to elicit a response that plays into the hands of the propagandist.

Propaganda is intentionally designed communication that elicits an emotional, instantaneous, and black-and-white response. -- Neil Postman, Technopoly, 1994

Propaganda is a method of targeted persuasion that attempts to influence the emotions, attitudes, opinions, and actions of a specific target audience for ideological, political, or commercial purposes, by the controlled transmission of one-sided (whether factual or not) messages via mass media and direct communication.

Propaganda is indifferent to truth and veracity, knowledge and understanding; it is a form of strategic communication that uses any means to achieve its goal. -- Walter Cunningham, *The Idea of Propaganda*, 2002

Propaganda is a form of communication aimed at influencing the attitude of a population in favor of a particular cause or opinion. -- Wikipedia, English article on propaganda, 2008

Propaganda takes many forms. It is strategic and deliberate, aimed at influencing attitudes, opinions, and behaviors. Propaganda can be beneficial or harmful, and can use truth, half-truths, or lies. To achieve its goal, propaganda appeals to our deepest values, fears, hopes, and dreams.

Recognizing propaganda

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION
± 40 minutes

GROUP
Whole group, with small group work

MATERIALS
4 to 6 examples of possible propaganda, print, or projection

GOAL

Learning to distinguish when a message is propaganda and when it is not, and discovering that this distinction is not black and white. Different people see the same image differently. Gaining insight into how propaganda works in a polarized society, especially on social media, where messages circulate faster than we can read them critically.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Start with one message (poster, meme, video). Ask everyone individually:
   - Is this propaganda? Yes / No / Doubt.
   - Why do you think that?

   Have them write it down briefly, before peer pressure influences their answer.

2. In groups of 3 to 4: compare answers and arguments. Look for similarities and differences — where do you differ the most from each other?

3. Plenary discussion. Discuss together:
   - What makes some consider this propaganda and others not?
   - Which characteristics are decisive?

4. Write down the characteristics that recur whenever something is called propaganda:
   - strong emotion or dramatization
   - clear intention to influence
   - simplification of a complex subject
   - enemy image or stereotyping
   - one-sided presentation of facts

   That list will become your own propaganda detector that participants can continue to use outside the session.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Why can two people judge the same image completely differently?
- What does this mean for discussions in a polarized society?
- Which messages did you see this week that match the characteristics from your list?

TIP

Be careful with political examples. This quickly pulls the conversation away from the mechanism of propaganda and towards the partisanship of the participants. Choose instead:

- Historical examples (WWII, old advertisements)
- Commercial examples (cosmetics, fast food, fitness) are relatable and less loaded.
- Harmless political examples (road safety campaigns, anti-smoking campaigns) are instructive and non-partisan.

Source: inspired by Mind Over Media (Media Education Lab) — propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com

Single story

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION
± 60 minutes

GROUP
Whole group, plenary with moments of personal reflection

MATERIALS
Projector or screen with sound, a large flip chart with three prepared columns, pens and markers

GOAL

Help participants understand what a single story is, and how to recognize it—both in the outside world and within themselves. Practice seeing and naming consciously missing stories.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Briefly explain what you are going to do: "We are going to watch a TED Talk about the danger of a single narrative about people or groups. A singular narrative means: one dominant image of a group that pushes aside all other narratives." First, ask the group: "Which sentences do you often hear used as singular narratives?" (e.g., "young people are lazy," "refugees are a problem," "Muslims are...", "farmers are..."). Write down 2 or 3 examples on a flip chart — no discussion yet, just as a starting point.

2. Play (a part of) The Danger of a Single Story by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.
Ask the participants in advance to pay attention to two things while watching:
   - moments where someone is reduced to a single image (Africa, Mexicans, Adichie's own family, her American roommate...)
   - moments where that image is broken or nuanced

   They don't need to take notes yet — just watch and listen.

3. Plenary, what is a single story? After the video, immediately in discussion with the whole group:
   - Which scene or line stuck with you the most?
   - Can you give an example from the talk where someone got stuck in a single story?

   Write a definition on the sheet together: Simple story = one repeated story about a group that reduces people to a single image and makes other stories invisible. Have 2 to 3 participants explain in their own words what they understand by it.

4. Work in plenary with the three prepared columns.
For 2 to 3 examples from the talk:
   - Column 1 — Situation: which specific situation from the talk? (e.g., the American roommate)
   - Column 2 — Single narrative: what dominant story lies behind it? (Africa = poverty, disease, war...)
   - Column 3 — Which other stories are missing? (the writer herself, the modern city, the complexity of lives...)

5. Collect your own examples in the plenary session. Take the step towards your own life world:
   - Have you ever noticed yourself that people only had one story about you or your group? Does anyone want to share an example?
   - Regarding which group did you notice that you yourself were inclined to believe only one story?

   Place examples in the same table or start a new sheet "Single stories in our own lives · What other stories should we tell alongside them?" Important: no naming & shaming of individuals — focus on the mechanics of the single story, not on who told it.

Single story

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION
± 60 minutes

GROUP
Whole group, plenary with moments of personal reflection

MATERIALS
Projector or screen with sound, a large flip chart with three prepared columns, pens and markers

GOAL

Help participants understand what a single story is, and how to recognize it—both in the outside world and within themselves. Practice seeing and naming consciously missing stories.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

6 Question: "Which example made the danger of the single narrative clearest to you?" Write it on the flip chart. Then have everyone complete one sentence individually, either verbally or on a Post-it: "After this exercise, I want to be more alert to single narratives about..." Conclude explicitly with: "Polarization becomes stronger when one story about 'they' is constantly repeated. The more different stories we know, the harder it becomes to pigeonhole an entire group."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which example made the danger of the single narrative clearest to you?
- When did you notice that people only had one story about you?
- Have you ever noticed yourself that you saw a group primarily through one story?
- What can help you consciously seek out multiple stories, especially when it comes to "sensitive" groups?

TIP

From now on, explicitly use the terms "single story," "dominant story," and "multiple stories" in later sessions. Constantly return to this perspective—"isn't this another single story?"—then it becomes a shared compass for the entire group, rather than a one-off insight.

"Source: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 'The Danger of a Single Story,' TED Talk 2009 (ted.com).

The Conflict trap

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 30 minutes	Whole group, plenary	Worksheet, one or two example cases, a flip chart or board

GOAL

Recognizing the build-up of a conflict and learning to intervene in a timely manner, before it escalates. The methodology operates at the level of individual or interpersonal conflict (an argument between two people, tension within a group of friends).

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Draw the conflict ladder on a flip chart or show the worksheet. Four steps, from low to high:
Step 1: Misunderstanding Signals: "Wait, what did you say?" — someone reacts more strongly than expected — something is being heard or misunderstood. Intervention: stop, ask for clarification, summarize what you heard.
Step 2: Judgment Signals: an interpretation becomes a conclusion about the person. "He always does that." "She is like that." Generalizations begin. Intervention: return to the concrete situation. "What exactly happened?" Step 3: Distrust Signals: you no longer assume that the other person means well. Assumptions about motives, preemptive defense, skepticism in body language. Intervention: direct check — "I notice that I think that you..., is that correct?" Take your time. Do not talk about the other person through third parties.
Stage 4: Enemy Thinking
Signs: the other becomes an enemy, no longer a human being. Dehumanization, forming camps, "us versus them" language, enlisting third parties for support.
Intervention: involve an external mediator, time-out, look for what still works (shared interests, common history).
2. Discuss a recognizable case together — for example, a conflict between neighbors, a discussion at school, or a fight within a group of friends. Place the conflict on the stairs together: where did it start, how did it escalate, and which step is it on now?
3. Have the participants reflect, individually or in pairs, on a conflict they know — from personal experience or from their environment. On which rung was it? When did it shift?
4. Discuss together where in the process intervention was possible, and where recovery was still possible. Three types of conversation here:
   - For yourself: what do you recognize when climbing the stairs?
   - To the other person: how do you address someone who is on step 3 or 4?
   - For the group: how do you stop group dynamics that push towards hostile thinking?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- **Which signals do you want to pick up better in the future?**
- **How can you contribute to preventing further escalation?**
- **What role do language and attitude play in climbing up or down the stairs?**

TIP

Use simple, recognizable examples from your group's everyday lives (a classmate who is always late, parents who stumble over the same thing). Avoid major current events that are so charged that the group is more likely to argue about the content than about the mechanism of the stairs.

WORKSHEET

The Conflict trap

Part of “The Conflict trap” method ● Critical thinking

A conflict rarely climbs in a single step: it rises gradually from misunderstanding to hostile thinking. Read, step by step, which signals you recognize (left) and which interventions are still possible (right). The higher the step, the more difficult the descent.

REPAIR

ESCALATION

4 ENEMY THINKING

The other is no longer a human being, but an enemy.

SIGNALS
Dehumanization, forming camps, "us vs. them" language, involving third parties

INTERVENTION
External mediator, time-out, find what still works (shared history, shared interests).

3 DISTRUST

You no longer assume that the other person means well.

SIGNALS
Assumptions about motives, preemptive defense, skeptical body language.

INTERVENTION
Instant check: “I think that you... Is that correct?” Take your time, not through third parties.

2 JUDGEMENT

An interpretation becomes a conclusion about the person.

SIGNALS
He always does that. “She is like that.” Generalizations begin.

INTERVENTION
Back to the specific situation: What exactly happened?

1 MISUNDERSTANDING

Something is being heard or misunderstood.

SIGNALS
Wait, what did you say?
Someone reacts more strongly than expected.

INTERVENTION
Stop, ask for clarification, summarize what you heard.

THREE LEVELS OF INTERVENTION

For yourself: what do you recognize in yourself?
To the other person: how do you address them?
In the group: how do you stop escalating dynamics?

Broad perspective on visuals

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 40 minutes	Whole group, choose individually + discuss in plenary	8 to 12 photos, Post-its in two colors, markers, a flipchart, and a smartphone per participant

GOAL

Discover how images influence our view of events, groups, and us-versus-them frames — and how astonishingly quickly we start filling in what we don't know based on a single photo. Practice concretely seeing that automatic filling in for what it is: an assumption, not an observation.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Spread all the photos out on the floor or on tables. Ask everyone to walk around in silence and choose one image that touches them the most. Next to their chosen photo, they write on a Post-it (color 1):
   - One word for how they felt.
   - One sentence: "I think this photo is about..."
2. Have them scan the QR code and look up the real story. On a second Post-it (color 2), they write:
   - Was my initial assessment correct, or was I wrong?
   - Which details in the photo misled me?
3. Ask for a few examples of "where were you completely wrong?". Write two columns on a flip chart:
   - "What we fill in ourselves" (first response without context)
   - "What we only know with context" (after the reality check)

   Discuss together:
   - What role do emotions play in our first reading of an image?
   - How can media (un)consciously amplify polarization by choosing one particular photo?
   - In which situations (news, social media, Instagram Stories) do you fill this in most often?
4. Have everyone complete one sentence: "From now on, I will pay more attention to images..." (the context, the source, what is *not* shown, my own assumptions, my quick gut feeling...) Collect those sentences on a flip chart titled "Our agreements as critical image viewers." Hang it up — preferably in a place the group visits often — as a lasting reminder.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- To what extent did your initial interpretation match the real story behind the photo?
- What assumptions did you notice in yourself based on a single image?
- What does this exercise say about how easily images can reinforce us-versus-them thinking?
- Which one strategy do you want to use from now on for images in news and social media?

TIP

Ensure that you thoroughly know the context of every photo yourself beforehand. If a participant touches on something personal or reveals a sensitive detail (for example, a photo that is religiously or ethnically sensitive), you must be able to frame it calmly and accurately. An unprepared reality check can backfire.

WORKSHEET

Broad perspective on imagery

Part of the "Broad perspective on visuals" method ● Critical thinking

On the following pages, you will find carefully selected photos. Each image is ambiguous: without context, you can see multiple stories in it. The real story lies behind the QR code on each photo. Distribute the photos across your workspace in advance — on the floor, on tables, on the wall — and ensure that all participants can walk around freely to choose.





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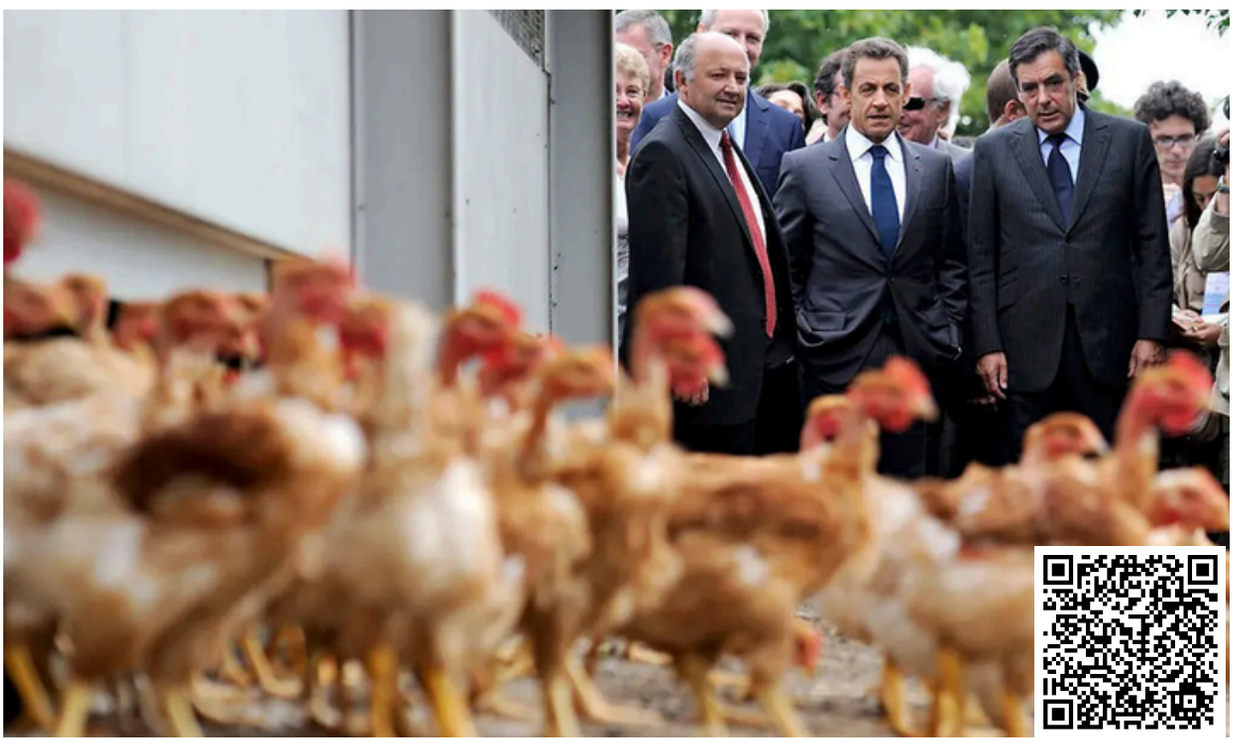
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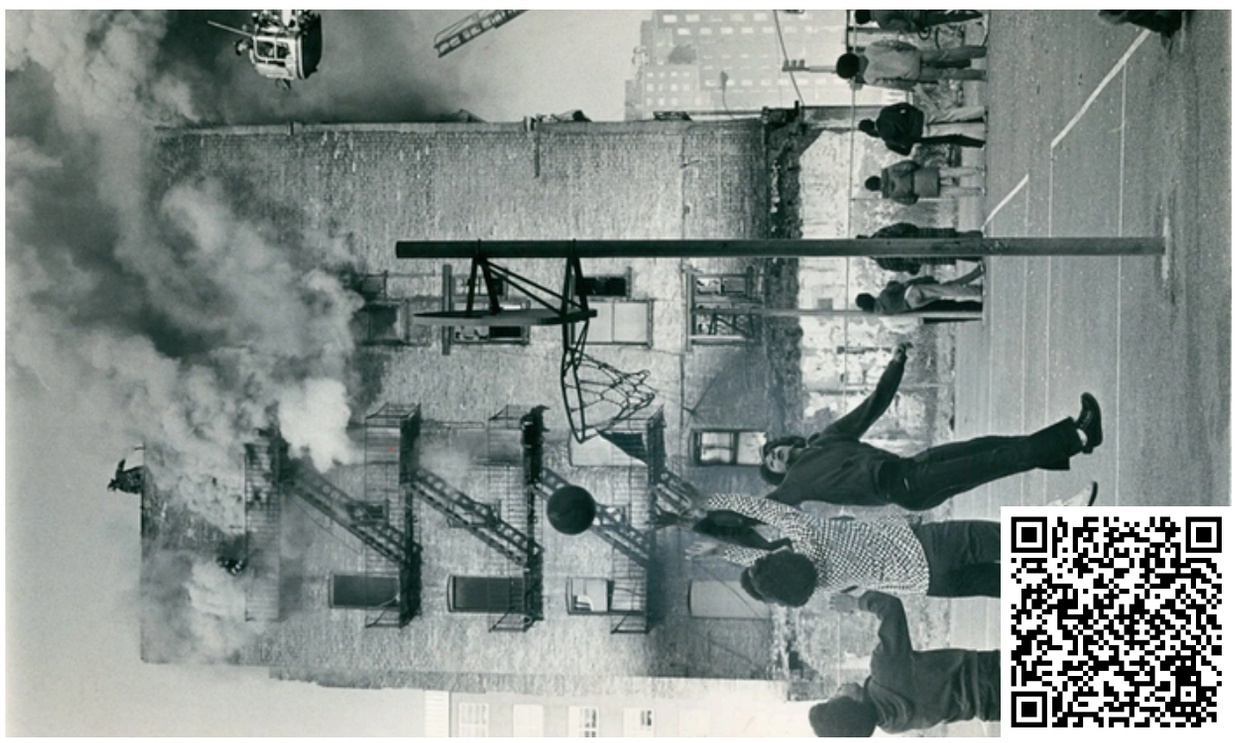
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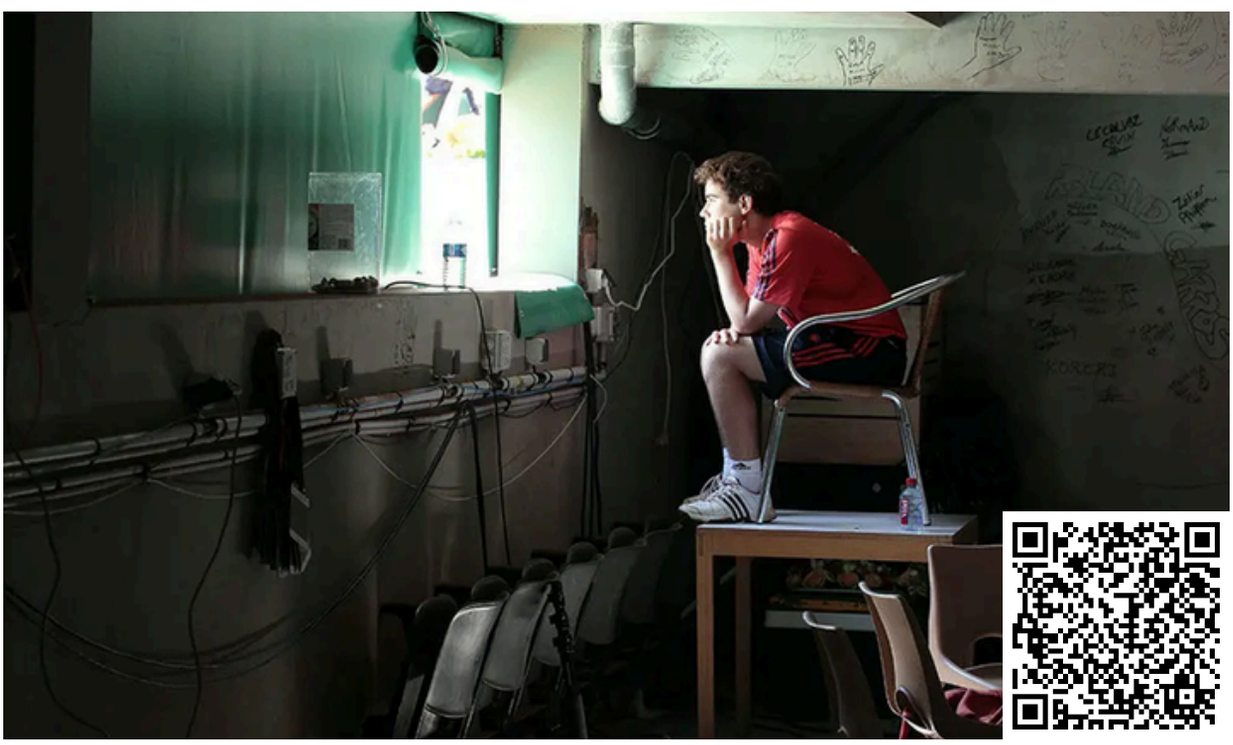
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WORKSHEET

Broad perspective on imagery

Part of the “Broad perspective on visuals” method ● Critical thinking

On the following pages, you will find carefully selected photos. Each image is ambiguous: without context, you can see multiple stories in it. The real story lies behind the QR code on each photo. Distribute the photos across your workspace in advance — on the floor, on tables, on the wall — and ensure that all participants can walk around freely to choose.





1 theme, 3 tracks

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION
± 50 minutes

GROUP
In groups of 3 to 4, with plenary comparison

MATERIALS
One chosen topic, access to various types of resources, worksheets, pens and markers, a sheet

GOAL

Allowing young people to experience that a topic looks completely different depending on the source. Teaching them to distinguish between facts, personal stories, and opinions. And above all: debunking simplistic narratives by deliberately placing multiple perspectives side by side.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Choose one concrete topic together that resonates with the group — or provide two or three options for them to choose from. Frame it briefly: "We are not going to prove who is right, but look at how different sources color our view."

2. Divide the three investigation tracks. Work in groups of 3 to 4. Give each group one of the three tracks — or have each group go through all three tracks if you have more time.
Track 1: Facts & context. Find 1 to 2 sources that primarily provide facts: figures, background, explanation of laws or regulations, neutral statement. Note:
   - What are the most important facts or figures?
   - What do we know for (reasonably) certain now?

   Track 2: Stories from people. Find 1 or 2 personal testimonies: interview, blog, or video from someone experiencing this. Note:
   - Who is speaking here? Who is this person or group?
   - What is this person going through? What emotions do you hear?
   - What do you understand better *because* of this story?

   Track 3: Opinions & Framing. Find 1 to 2 opinion sources: column, social media post, debate clip, commentary. Note:
   - Who is speaking here? (columnist, politician, influencer...)
   - What position does this source take?
   - Which words, images, or "us-them" language stand out? ("threat", "victims", "real Fleming"...)

3. Bring the groups together and have them place the three columns side by side. Discuss in plenary:
   - What did you know based solely on factual sources?
   - What did the personal story bring that you didn't see in the facts?
   - How do opinions and social media posts affect how you view the topic?
   - Where do you see exaggeration or framing? Where do you see nuance?

   Write three columns on a flip chart: "What is fact?" — "What is experience or feeling?" — "What is opinion or frame?" Let young people call out examples and fill them in together.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- **Which track do you spontaneously trust the most: facts, stories, or opinions? Why?**
- **What happens in a society that relies almost exclusively on a single type of source?**
- **Which habit do you want to take with you after today?**

TIP

Do not choose a theme that is too broad. One concrete situation works better than "migration in Europe," for example, "the reception crisis in Brussels 2024" or "the discussion surrounding wind turbines in our municipality." A theme that is too broad drowns participants in a sea of sources.

WORKSHEET

1 theme, 3 tracks

Part of “1 theme, 3 tracks” method

● Critical thinking

Fill in this worksheet together for your group. Find 1 or 2 sources that primarily provide facts: figures, background, explanations of laws or rules. Write them down briefly and concretely.

TRACK 1 – FACTS & CONTEXT

SOURCE (VISUAL)

Which source(s) did you use? Note down the title + date + where you found it.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTS OR FIGURES?

WHAT DO YOU KNOW FOR (REASONABLY) SURE NOW?

WORKSHEET

1 theme, 3 tracks

Part of “1 theme, 3 tracks” method

● Critical thinking

Find 1 or 2 personal stories: a testimony, an interview, a blog, or a video from someone who is experiencing this theme themselves. Not what others say about it, but what the person themselves tells.

TRACK 2 – STORIES OF PEOPLE

SOURCE (VISUAL)

Which stories did you find? Write down name + medium + date.

WHO IS SPEAKING HERE?

Who is this person or group? What is their background?

WHAT IS THIS PERSON GOING THROUGH? WHAT EMOTIONS DO YOU HEAR?

WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BETTER *BECAUSE* OF THIS STORY?

WORKSHEET

1 theme, 3 tracks

Part of “1 theme, 3 tracks” method

● Critical thinking

Find 1 or 2 sources of opinion: a column, a social media post, a debate clip, a commentary. Not what is objective, but what someone thinks — and how he or she expresses it.

TRACK 3 – OPINIONS & FRAMING

SOURCE (VISUAL)

Which opinion sources did you choose? Title, author, platform.

WHO IS SPEAKING HERE?

Columnist, politician, influencer, vlogger…?

WHAT POSITION DOES THIS SOURCE TAKE?

WHICH WORDS, IMAGES, OR "US-THEM" LANGUAGE STAND OUT?

WORKSHEET

1 theme, 3 tracks

Part of “1 theme, 3 tracks” method

● Critical thinking

Place the three worksheets side by side. What do you see now, compared to each other? Fill in these four boxes together.

BRIEF COMPARISON

ONE THING YOU LEARNED ONLY FROM FACTUAL SOURCES

ONE INSIGHT THAT YOU GAINED MAINLY FROM THE PERSONAL STORIES

ONE EXAMPLE OF FRAMING THAT YOU SAW IN THE OPINION SOURCES

WHAT HAS CHANGED IN HOW YOU VIEW THIS THEME AFTER THIS EXERCISE?

WORKSHEET

1 theme, 3 tracks

Part of “1 theme, 3 tracks” method

Critical thinking

In December 2024, Australia introduced a ban on social media for young people under 16. Fines for platforms that do not adhere to the age limit can run into tens of millions. A similar debate is underway in Belgium and the rest of Europe. Today, you explore three avenues regarding this question: should we restrict social media for young people under 16?

SOCIAL MEDIA BAN TRACK 1 — FACTS & CONTEXT

Social media ban



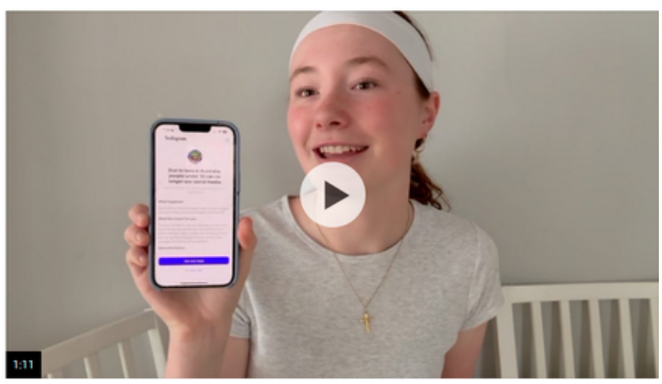
Australia has banned social media for kids under 16. How will it work?

4 days ago

Share Save

Helen Livingstone

Sydney



Under-16s in Australia are now banned from using major social media services including Tiktok, X, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat and Threads.

WORKSHEET

1 theme, 3 tracks

Part of “1 theme, 3 tracks” method ● Critical thinking

In December 2024, Australia introduced a ban on social media for young people under 16. Fines for platforms that do not adhere to the age limit can run into tens of millions. A similar debate is underway in Belgium and the rest of Europe. Today, you explore three avenues regarding this question: should we restrict social media for young people under 16?

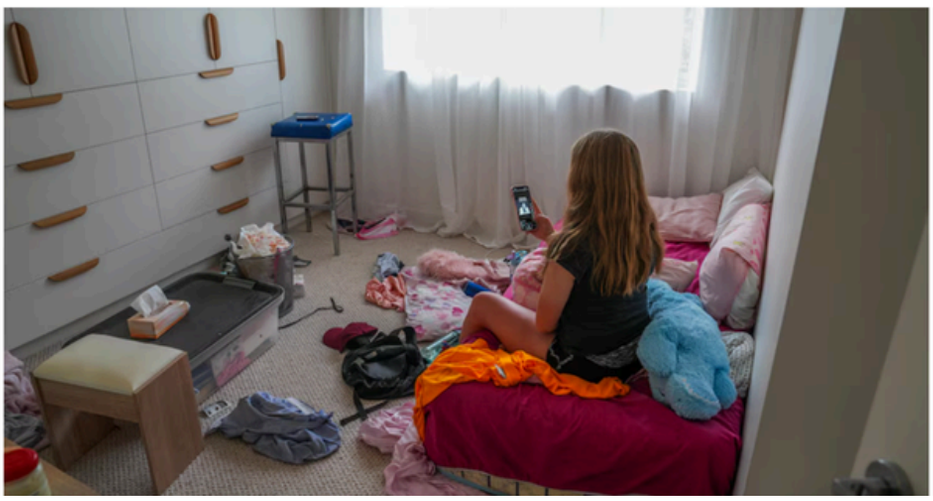
SOCIAL MEDIA BAN TRACK 2 – STORIES OF PEOPLE

Australia's grand social media experiment is finally live. Teens say nothing has changed

By political reporter Maani Truu

Social Media

Wed 10 Dec





"Pointless": Australia enforces social media ban as teens doubt its effectiveness

WORKSHEET

1 theme, 3 tracks

Part of “1 theme, 3 tracks” method ● Critical thinking

In December 2024, Australia introduced a ban on social media for young people under 16. Fines for platforms that do not adhere to the age limit can run into tens of millions. A similar debate is underway in Belgium and the rest of Europe. Today, you explore three avenues regarding this question: should we restrict social media for young people under 16?

SOCIAL MEDIA BAN TRACK 3 – OPINIONS & FRAMING



'Curiosity requires guidance, not secrecy', says psychologist on social media bans for teens



The social media ban won't work

On 26 November 2024, I spoke about how prohibition won't make social media platforms safer.

Prohibition doesn't work.

Prohibition is not how you make social media platforms safer or empower young Australians to navigate the online wo

The social media ban is not going to resolve the root causes of online harm. It's simply not going to work. All of us wa platforms and greater transparency for users, but this bill provides neither.

Let's not forget how rushed the process has been.

The government allowed for a consultation period on the bill for 24 hours. The Senate hearing for the bill was only thr locked out from having their voices heard because of this process. We absolutely need to protect young people onlin and selling of their data.

A blanket ban, though, is not the way to do it.

The recent parliamentary inquiry into social media heard over and over that an age ban will not make social media sa and it will have unintended consequences for young people. Yet here we are again, with the government and the coal ramming this bill through in the final sitting week of the year.

Why won't it work? This bill inserts a new definition of 'age-restricted social media platforms' which effectively puts a l

Propaganda techniques

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION
± 40 minutes

GROUP
Whole group, with small group work

MATERIALS
an overview of six propaganda techniques (see step 1), 4 to 6 examples, a flipchart or whiteboard

GOAL

Learn to recognize the techniques propaganda uses to influence people — and gain insight into how those techniques can amplify polarization. A direct hands-on exercise following the concept of Defining Propaganda and the practice of Recognizing Propaganda.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Introduction of six techniques. Write a short list of common techniques on the board, each explained in one sentence:
   - Appealing to emotions: using fear, pride, indignation, or compassion instead of arguments.
   - Repetition: repeating the same slogan or phrase over and over again until it starts to sound "true".
   - Enemy image: portraying a group or person as the cause of the problem.
   - Appeal to authority: letting an expert or a well-known person speak, or conversely excluding them.
   - Simplification: reducing a complex problem to a single cause or a single solution.
   - Stereotyping: representing an entire group through a single image or a single characteristic.

   For each technique, provide one small example (a slogan, a poster everyone recognizes). Keep it brief — the real analysis comes in step 2.

2. Give each group (3 to 4) one example. Three questions:
   - Which technique(s) do you recognize?
   - What is the effect on the viewer?
   - What does the creator want you to feel or think?

   Have the groups briefly write down their observations.

3. Have each group share their analysis. Note on the board which techniques occur most frequently.

4. Discuss together:
   - Which techniques work faster than others? (often: emotions + simplification)
   - Why are emotions usually more powerful than facts? (Because they don't have to pass through your critical thinking; they hit you directly.)
   - When does a technique become manipulative, and when is it simply "communication"?
   - Which techniques fuel specific us-versus-them thinking? (enemy image, stereotyping)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- When does a technique become manipulative? Where do you draw the line?
- How do these techniques contribute to polarization in public debates?
- What changes in a message when you consciously recognize the technique?

TIP
Keep the six-techniques list visible in the room, also in subsequent sessions. That way, it becomes a shared compass instead of a one-off insight.

Source: Mind Over Media — Media Education Lab (propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com).

Socratic dialogue

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 50 minutes	8 to 15 participants (in a circle)	a pre-selected statement, a place where everyone can see each other, pen and paper to take notes

GOAL

Critically examining together what the group actually thinks about a subject without it becoming a debate in which someone "wins." Socratic dialogue teaches participants to ask questions that clarify rather than persuade, and to listen rather than shout over others. The methodology works very effectively with sensitive societal topics (colonization, war, racism, gender, religion…) about which a normal conversation can quickly become hardened.

PREPARATION

Choose one concrete statement, case study, or philosophical question in advance. Examples: "Is freedom of speech absolute?", "Are you allowed to exclude someone because of their opinion?" The topic must be challenging for the group, not too easy and not too polarized.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Explain: "Today we are exploring a statement together. It is not a debate; no one has to win. We are going to ask each other questions to better understand what we actually think. I, as the facilitator, will not share my own opinion; I will listen and ask follow-up questions." Write the statement on a flip chart.

2. Ask each participant for a brief (one or two sentences) initial reaction to the statement. No judgment, no discussion yet. Everyone gets a chance to speak, even those who are unsure or say "I don't know."

3. Now the facilitator adopts a Socratic approach. For every statement made by a participant, you choose one of five question types to probe further and invite others to add questions:
   - Asking for clarity: "Can you give an example? What exactly do you mean by…? Can you say that differently?"
   - Asking for reasons and evidence: "Why is that so? How do you know that? What supports that?"
   - Asking for alternative perspectives: "Could the opposite be true? How would someone who thinks differently about this see it? Are there other possibilities?"
   - Asking about consequences: "If that is correct, what does that mean for…? How does that fit in with what you just said?"
   - Questions to conclude the conversation: "Was this conversation useful? Do we understand it better? Which questions were not addressed?"

   You don't have to use all five in every round; choose what fits. But make sure the conversation doesn't get stuck on clarity alone or reasons alone.

4. After 20 to 30 minutes of asking questions and probing: stop the conversation. Ask: "What do we see better now than when we started? What differences do you notice in how we think differently about this?"

5. Ask everyone for one sentence: "One insight I take away today is…". No one is required; whoever wants to may. Do not impose consensus; a good Socratic dialogue often ends with more questions than it began. That is not a failure; that is the intention.

Socratic dialogue

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION
± 50 minutes

GROUP
8 to 15 participants (in a circle)

MATERIALS
a pre-selected statement, a place where everyone can see each other, pen and paper to take notes

GOAL

Critically examining together what the group actually thinks about a subject without it becoming a debate in which someone "wins." Socratic dialogue teaches participants to ask questions that clarify rather than persuade, and to listen rather than shout over others. The methodology works very effectively with sensitive societal topics (colonization, war, racism, gender, religion…) about which a normal conversation can quickly become hardened.

PREPARATION

Choose one concrete statement, case study, or philosophical question in advance. Examples: "Is freedom of speech absolute?", "Are you allowed to exclude someone because of their opinion?" The topic must be challenging for the group, not too easy and not too polarized.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which of the five question types was the most difficult to ask?
- Was there a moment when you thought, "Oh, I hadn't really thought about that"?
- Did it feel different from a regular discussion? How?
- Which question do you want to ask more often in your own conversations from now on?

TIP

The facilitator's basic attitude matters a great deal. Avoid sharing your own opinion, even if you genuinely disagree with something. Your role is to maintain the question, not to provide the answer. This feels uncomfortable at first, especially if the group is moving towards something you consider superficial. But the discipline of listening and asking follow-up questions is precisely what makes the methodology powerful.

Builds nicely upon Powerful Questions; that methodology teaches participants to ask questions themselves, and this methodology puts the entire conversation in that mode.

Source: based on BurgerschapsReflex — Eef Cornelissen, Ama Amitai, Laura Van den Broeck and Jelle De Schrijver (Odisee University of Applied Sciences, ExploRatio research unit). Adaptation from Flemish Peace Institute, "Constructively disagreeing" (2025).

What are you doing after today?

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION
± 20 minutes

GROUP
Whole group, individual work followed by plenary

MATERIALS
A4 sheets per participant, markers, Post-its, a large flip chart

GOAL

Have participants identify what they personally take away from the process. Challenge them to formulate at least one concrete step for after today.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Ask the participants to briefly browse through their minds: "Think back to everything we did regarding polarization, us-versus-them thinking, boundaries, listening, stories... Which moments, sentences, or exercises stick with you?" Allow 2 to 3 minutes of quiet reflection time. On the board, write four hooks to help them organize their thoughts:
   - Emotions I felt
   - Insights that stayed with me
   - Conversations that touched me
   - Exercises I don't forget
2. Encourage a personal challenge. Hand out sheets of A4 paper. Write three sentence beginnings on the board:
   - "Something I want to do differently in conversations is..."
   - "When I see polarization in my surroundings, from now on I want..."
   - "One small step that I am really going to take this coming month is..."

   Question: "Choose at least one of these sentences and complete it. You may also fill in two." Important — write concretely. Not "be friendlier," but "actively invite one person in the class who is not getting a chance to speak to join the conversation." Steer towards this explicitly: the more specific, the greater the chance that it will actually happen.
3. Anyone who wants to can write their challenge anonymously on a Post-it and hang it on a flip chart. Two possible headlines for the wall:
   - "What I take away from this process is..."
   - "My challenge for the coming weeks is..."

   As a facilitator, read a few aloud (without names). Ask the group: "What stands out? Are there themes that recur often — listening more, judging less quickly, engaging in specific conversations, your own online behavior...?"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What do you need (from friends, youth work, school, home) to keep this up?
- How could you remind yourself? (a note on your phone, a sticker, a buddy, ...)
- If you look back in a few months, how would you notice that something has really changed?

TIP

A nice alternative: have everyone write down their challenge in a letter to themselves. Put the letter in an envelope, put a date on it (e.g., "three months from now"), collect the envelopes, and keep them. On the agreed date, send them back by mail.

Or use futureme.org to send an email to yourself in the future. Free and usable without an account.

Our check-reflex

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 10 minutes	Whole group	Large sheet or board, stapler

GOAL

Formulate three short checks together that the group wants to remember before believing, sharing, or responding to information.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Explain briefly:
   Critical thinking does not mean that you have to distrust everything. It means that you pause for a moment before you believe, share, or react to something.
2. Write on the board:
   Before we believe, share, or answer anything, we check...
3. Have participants call out which checks are important. Briefly note everything on the flip chart. For example: source, date, second source, context, emotion, evidence, who benefits from this, what is missing?
4. Choose the three most important checks together. Turn them into short sentences, for example:
   - Who says this?
   - What is missing?
   - Why does this affect me?
5. Read the three checks aloud together. Optionally, hang up the flip chart or have participants take a photo of it.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which check do we forget the fastest?
- Which check could prevent online arguments?
- Which of these three do you personally want to use more often?

TIP

Keep the checks short and conversational. Sentences like “First source, then angry” or “A screenshot is not proof” stick better than long formulations.

Do you want participants to conclude on a more personal note? Then have them each formulate one personal check reflex: one sentence they want to remember themselves before believing, sharing, or answering anything.

Before and after box

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 15 minutes	Individually, then in plenary	Two boxes or envelopes, cards, pens

GOAL

To make visible whether participants' thinking has shifted during the session. Not to measure who thinks "correctly," but to reveal change, nuance, and new questions.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. At the beginning of the session, set out a box with the title: Beforehand I thought...
2. Have participants fill in one sentence about the topic before the content exercise. For example: "About fake news I thought..." or "About conspiracy theories I thought..."
3. At the end, you give another card with the sentence: Now I think...
4. Have participants fill out their second card and put it in a second box.
5. Draw a few cards from both boxes and read them aloud anonymously. Discuss: what has shifted, what has become sharper, and which questions remain?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What has changed in how you view the topic?
- Which idea has become more nuanced?
- Which question has been added?

TIP

Use this methodology for a clearly defined topic such as fake news, single stories, or propaganda. Then the shift becomes more concrete.

Telegram

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 10 minutes	Individually, then in plenary	Cards or Post-its, pens, flip chart

GOAL

Participants briefly summarize what they have learned, what they are still unsure about, and what critical action they want to take away.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Explain that a telegram is short: no long explanation, just the essence.
2. Write three words on the board:
   Fact - Doubt - Action
3. Have participants write one short sentence or a few words for each word:
   - Fact: something I understand better now.
   - Doubt: something I still have questions about.
   - Action: something I want to do from now on.
4. Have participants share their telegrams in pairs.
5. Ask a few volunteers to share their three words or sentences with the whole group.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which doubt is important to take into account?
- Which action is small enough to actually do?
- What helps you keep thinking critically?

TIP

Keep it tight. This method works because it is short. Do not have participants write long explanations.

Treasure chest, backpack and trash can

Theme: Critical thinking

DURATION	GROUP	MATERIALS
± 15 minutes	Individually, then in plenary	Three sheets: treasure chest, backpack, trash can; Post-its; pens

GOAL

Have participants reflect on what was valuable, what they want to take away, and what they want to let go of or approach differently in their critical thinking.

STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Draw or prepare three symbols: a treasure chest, a backpack, and a trash can.
2. Explain briefly:
   - Treasure chest: what was valuable or interesting?
   - Backpack: what do you take with you for later?
   - Trash can: what thought, habit, or assumption do you want to leave behind?
3. Give everyone three Post-its. Have participants write one answer per symbol.
4. Have everyone stick the Post-its in the correct place. This can be done anonymously.
5. Read a few Post-its aloud and ask: “What stands out as a group?”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which critical reflex do you take with you in your backpack?
- Which quick conclusion, assumption, or habit can be thrown in the trash?
- What do you see recurring in others?

TIP

Make it clear that the trash can is not meant to throw away people or opinions. It is about habits that do not help, such as sharing too quickly, judging too quickly, or only believing sources that confirm your own opinion.



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