

15 Fail-Safe Ice Breakers for Middle & High Schoolers

When it comes to middle school and high school students, you know just any icebreaker won't do. It has to be something inclusive, engaging, and team-building—and one that doesn't require teens & tweens to immediately open up to their peers.

If you're looking for a good [first day](#) icebreaker for middle or high school classes as [you prepare to go back to school](#), we've got some ideas. Whether you're a [first-year](#) or veteran teacher, here are 15 fail-safe ice breakers that are proven to work well.

1. Silent Line-up

Challenge your students to silently line up by height. Easy, right? Now have them try it by birthday month in calendar order. In doing so, they must communicate without talking or writing. You can even divide the class into random groups and have them compete to finish first. When students are done, go down the line and see how well they did. As a wrap-up, discuss how students used nonverbal cues to communicate and underscore how much they can achieve without talking.

2. Common Ground

Ask students to gather in groups by how many languages they speak, how many pets they have, or other criteria. Once students are in their group, have them share which languages they speak or their kinds of pets. Then challenge each group to find other things they share in common, such as number of siblings, favorite video game, etc. (Split the groups if needed to be more manageable.) Adding an incentive for the group that finds the most commonalities could motivate students.

3. Tarp Flip Challenge

Put some tarps on the floor, and assign a group to stand on each tarp. Then challenge the groups to completely flip over the tarp without ever stepping off of it. You'll have to have a way to determine the different sides of the tarp (and may have to mark it). You also may need a volunteer or two to help you watch the groups to make sure they follow the rules.

4. 20+ Questions

This is the teacher variation on the popular game. Instead of thinking of something in the room, start with an item of personal importance. Tell your students you brought something with you but they will have to guess by asking only yes/no questions. Frame out some sample questions on the board, such as "Can you ____ with it?" and "Is it made of _____?" When students have guessed the object, show it and have them pose questions to you about it.

5. Snowball Station

Ask students to write three facts about themselves on a piece of paper but not to write their names. Offer prompts to make the task easier, such as favorite ice cream flavor, activities, number of siblings or pets, etc.

Then have students crumple their papers into a ball and one by one have them come up and toss their ball into a bin. Then have each student retrieve a “snowball” and guess the student who wrote it.

6. Count Up

This next exercise works well when students are standing or sitting in a circle. Challenge them to count, in random order, from 1 to the number of students. Anyone can start the count, and anyone can count in any order but no one can do two numbers in a row. If students speak at the same time, they have to go back to the beginning. It’s more challenging than you might think, and it promotes great teamwork.

7. People Bingo

[Create bingo cards](#) with attributes that could describe your students, such as “has traveled out of the country,” “speaks more than 1 language,” “has a dog,” or “can name all of the seven dwarves.” Then give each student a Bingo card and challenge them to find classmates who fit a category. The student that does must initial the board, and can only do so once for that classmate. This gives students the best chance to meet everybody.

8. A Strong Wind Blows

Set up a circle of chairs that is one less than the students in your class. Ask for one volunteer to stand in the center. The remaining students take a seat in the circle. The object of the game is not to be in the center. The center student will say, “a strong wind blows on anyone....” and give an attribute (for example, has a cat or likes pizza). Anyone who fits the category must find a different seat, allowing for the person in the center to sit in theirs. The one rule is that students cannot name a category that targets only one person (e.g. the one wearing black sneakers or the one named Alex). The more general the category, the more fun it will be as students scramble for different seats.

9. Giant Jenga

Buy a giant Jenga set and label each piece with a “get to know you” question. As students add their pieces to the tower, they must answer the question. Make the questions easy and fun, so students will not feel vulnerable. Examples may include “favorite candy,” “favorite cause or charity,” and “what they would do with a million dollars.” Ask for elaboration based on a student’s comfort level and the question.

10. Race for the Truth

Line students up and let them know that you will be reading a list of attributes. You can use similar ones to People Bingo or A Strong Wind Blows, above. If the attribute applies to them, they are to take one step forward. (Demonstrate the length of step expected.) The first one across the finish line wins.

11. Who Am I?

This classic game puts the name of a well-known figure on a student’s back, and the student has to guess who they have, based on asking yes/no questions of fellow classmates.

Pro Tip: Have students write the name of a famous person on an index card. This will ensure that the names are relevant to your class. Collect the cards and use them to tape on the backs of everyone.

12. World’s Worst Employee

Write down types of jobs on index cards. Then have student volunteers pick a card, and make up a quote that might be said by the world’s worst employee in that profession. Example: For an Uber driver, a student might

say, "I don't have a driver's license and I hate when people get in my car." The class then has to guess the profession.

13. Build-it Challenge

Pair or group students. Give them materials such as paper clips, drinking straws, Q-tips, string, paper, or other items. Then, challenge them to build a tower, a bridge, a class mascot, or another item within a certain timeframe. Then, have each group present their item to the class.

14. Two Truths and a Lie

This is a classic game that students will know well. Ask each student to come up with two truths and one lie about themselves. The other students vote on which is the lie.

15. Rock-Paper-Scissor Tournament

A throwback to their childhood, middle and high schoolers will love the chance to revisit this game. Start with pairs, and then have winners play winners until you're down to the final two. Remember that rock beats scissors, paper beats rock, and scissors beat paper.

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