

# Helping Students Make School Meaningful and Vital

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# Our Agenda

9:00	<b>What makes learning meaningful?</b> <i>Significant Moments in My Life as a Learner, Focus Stickers</i>
10:45	<b>How can students make their learning experiences meaningful?</b> <i>Grading Your Classes, How I Want to Be in a Group</i>
12:00	<b>Lunch</b>
1:00	<b>How can teachers make learning meaningful for their students?</b> <i>Values Work in the Curriculum</i>
2:00	<b>What gets in the way of meaningful learning?</b> <i>Passenger Manifest, Self-Kindness Gift Cards</i>

**What makes  
learning  
meaningful?**

# Significant Moments in My Life as a Learner

# List some of the significant moments in your life as a learner.

- What were some important learning experiences in school?
- What were some important learning experiences in your out-of-school life?

**List some of the significant moments in your life as a learner.**

- Who were some of your greatest teachers and mentors? What did you learn from them?
- Which peers or colleagues have taught you? What did you learn from them?

**List some of the significant moments in your life as a learner.**

- When did you struggle to learn something?
- When did you have fun while learning?

# List some of the significant moments in your life as a learner.

- What did you learn at home?
- When have you learned from being out of your element – in a new place, with new people, or from new perspectives?



# List some of the significant moments in your life as a learner.

- What were some times when you learned to relate better to others?
- What were some times when you learned to relate better to yourself?

**Does anyone  
have a prompt  
for the group?**

# Select and share:

Mark 5-6 of your most important learning moments.

Write each one on its own sticky note.

Put the sticky notes in (roughly) chronological order.

Share your “timeline” with a partner.

# Collaborative reflection:

- What does “meaningful learning” look like for my partner?
- How does “meaningful learning” look different for this person than for me?
- Even with all the differences between us, how do our meaningful learning experiences reveal similarities?

# Whole-group share:

- What did you learn just now?
- What kinds of learning moments do you want to create for your students?
- How can you bring your learner self into your classroom?

# Focus Stickers

**Think of a time when a learning experience went really well.**

It could be a class, an activity, or an assignment, or a learning experience outside of school.

**List things you were doing during this experience.**

Focus on what *you* were doing – not what someone else was doing, or what you weren't doing, or what the experience was like.

Mental actions, like thinking and wondering, count as doing.



**Find behaviors you could do in most of your classes.**

Underline behaviors you could do in most classes or while working on different kinds of assignments.

Pick one behavior that you think is particularly important.

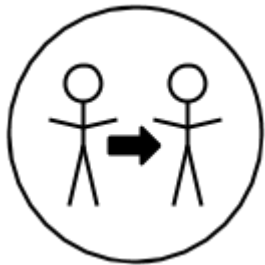
# Create a simple icon to represent the behavior.



paying close attention



taking the time to process and really understand



helping someone



checking to see what else needed to be done

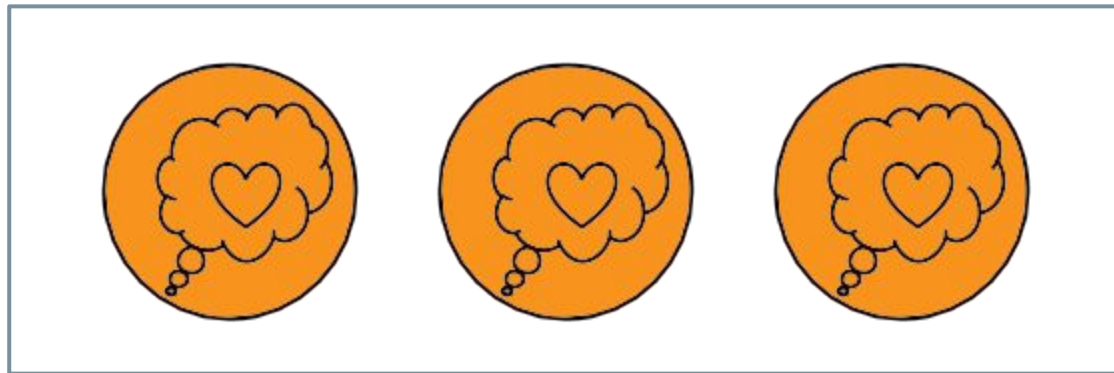


asking different people for their opinions



imagining the other person's feelings

**With a black marker, draw the icon on dot stickers.**



# Stick them in places where you want reminders to do that behavior.

Binder

Locker

Planner

Folder

Calculator

Calendar

Book

Laptop

Tablet

Notebook

Instrument case

Phone

Pencil case

Athletic gear

Desk at home

**Up next: How can students make their learning experiences meaningful?**

**How can  
students make  
their learning  
experiences  
meaningful?**

# Students don't get to choose what school is...

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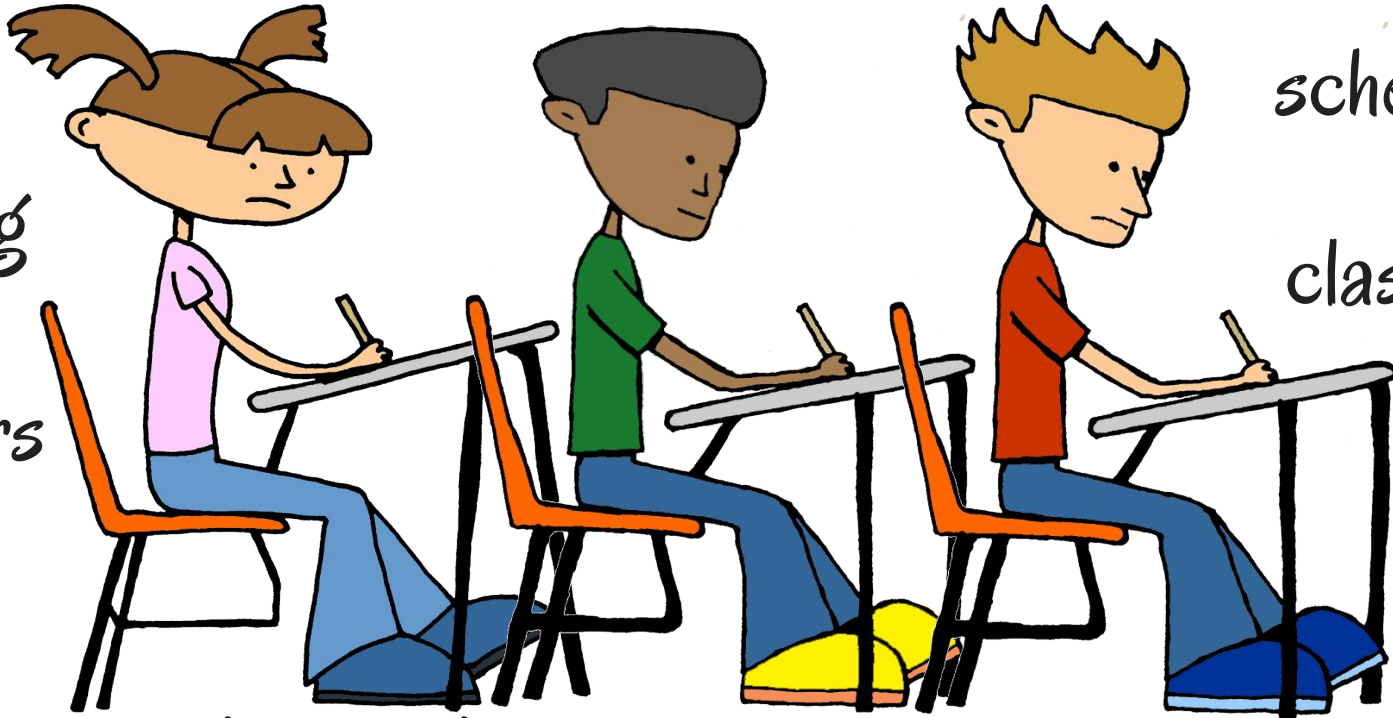
classroom layout

materials

curriculum

groupings

assessment tasks



schedule

building

classmates

teachers

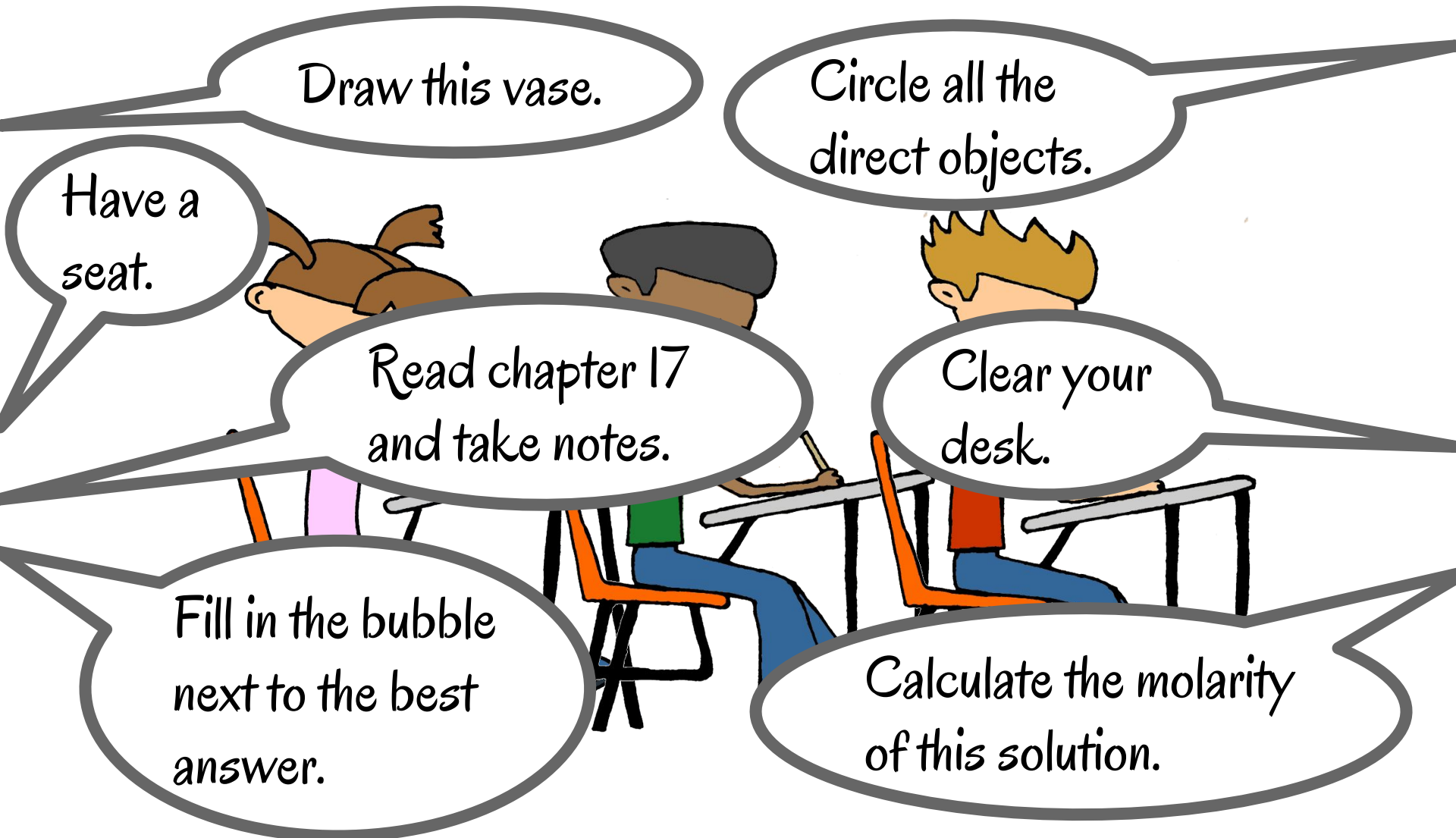
workload

instructional tasks

race + gender dynamics

# They come to our classrooms, and we tell them to do stuff.

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# Functions of a Task at School

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# Functions of a Task at School

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# Functions of a Task at School

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Is it OK if it's  
*almost* a page?

...t to think in  
...N ways

Does  
spelling  
count?

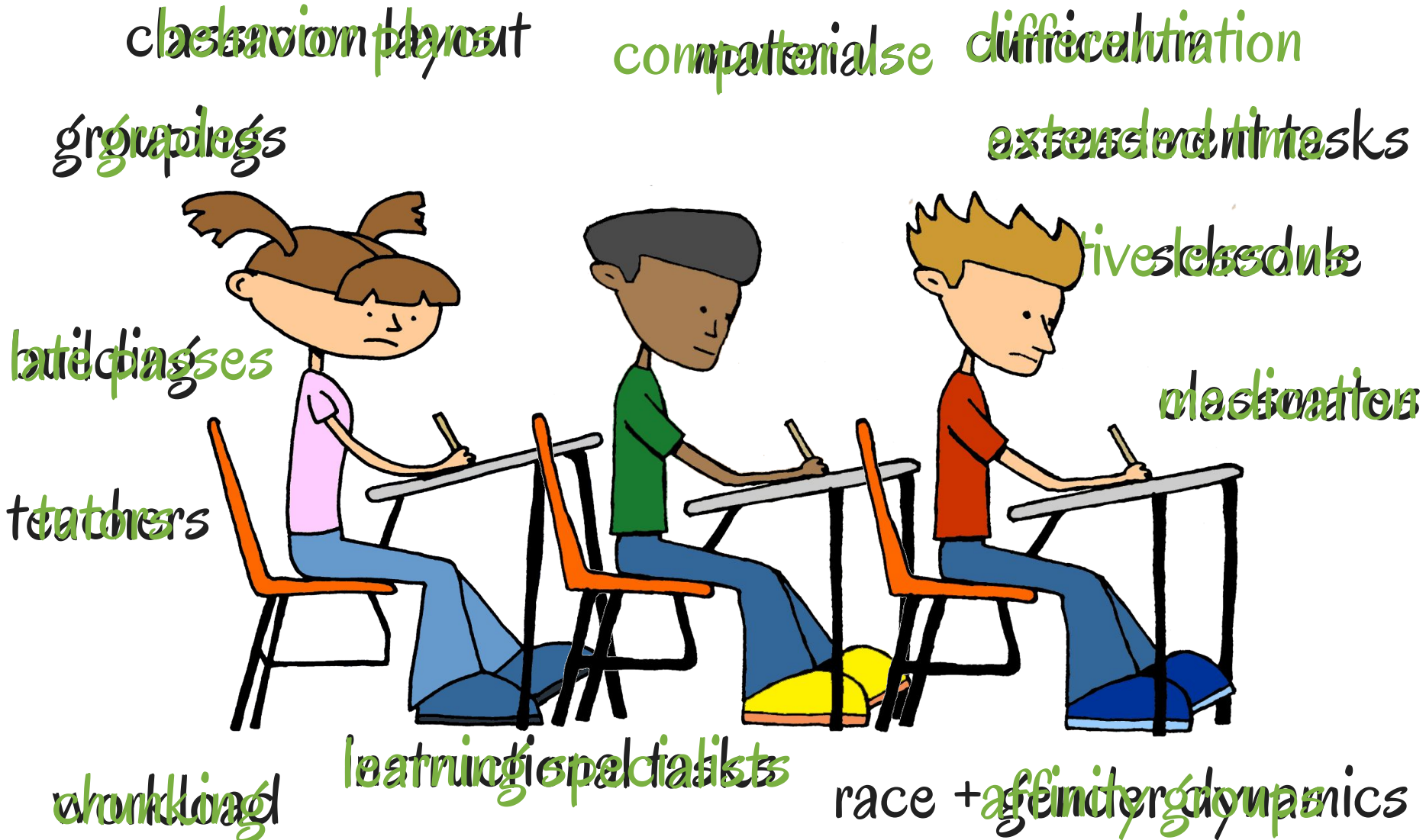
I have to get  
straight A's.

anxious

When do you  
think you'll  
grade these?



# How do we respond when students avoid learning?



**Is there another way?**

# Transformation of Stimulus Function

(Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Roche, 2001)

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whistle

garbage

make holes for seeds

doesn't work

can't write

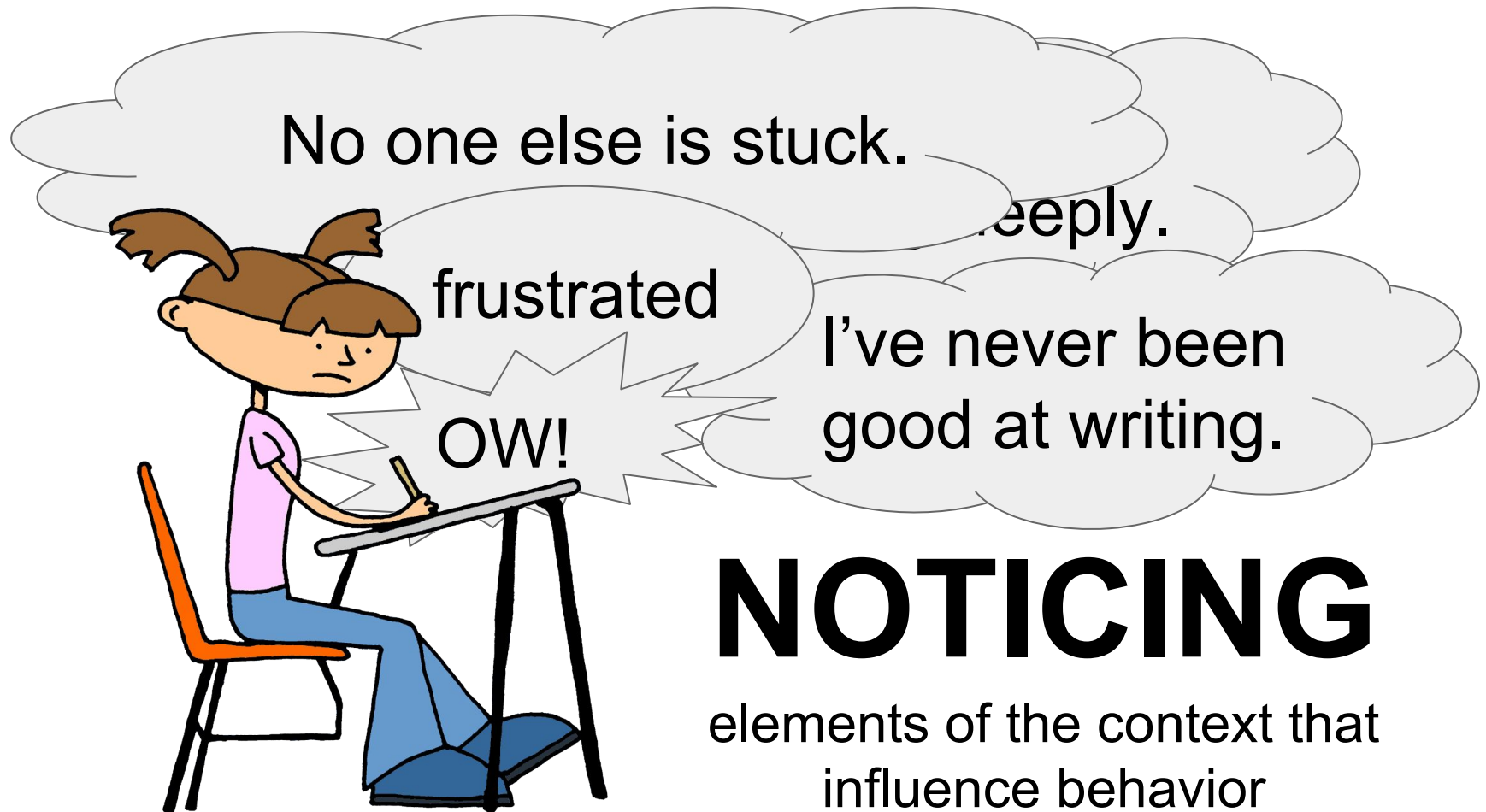
get clay from under fingernails

**How do we help students transform the functions of their assignments and interactions at school?**

# Flexible Context Sensitivity

(Villatte, Villatte, and Hayes, 2015)

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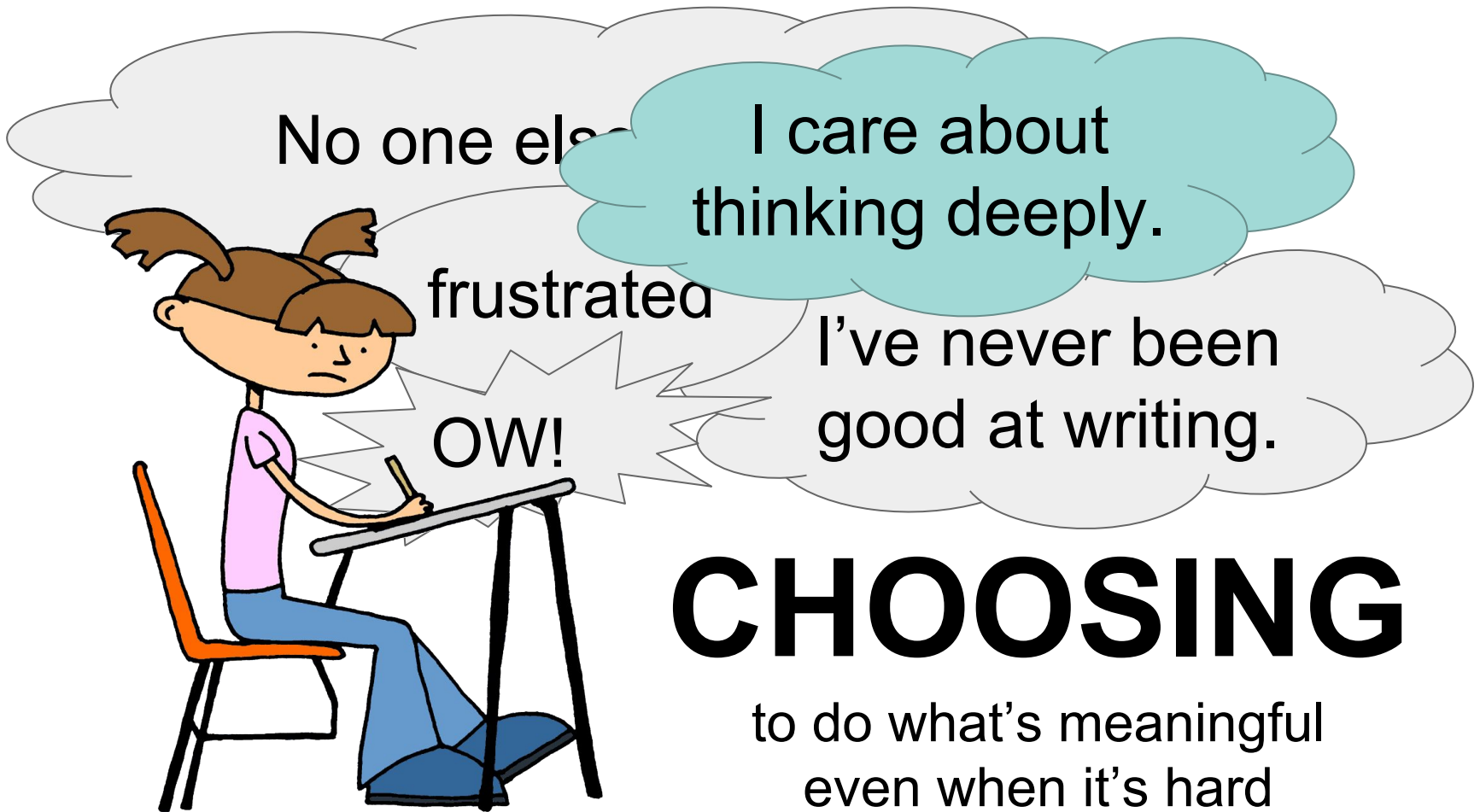




# Functional Coherence

(Villatte, Villatte, and Hayes, 2015)

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# EMPOWER Students to Notice and Choose to Do What's Meaningful

classroom layout

materials

curriculum

groupings

**values**

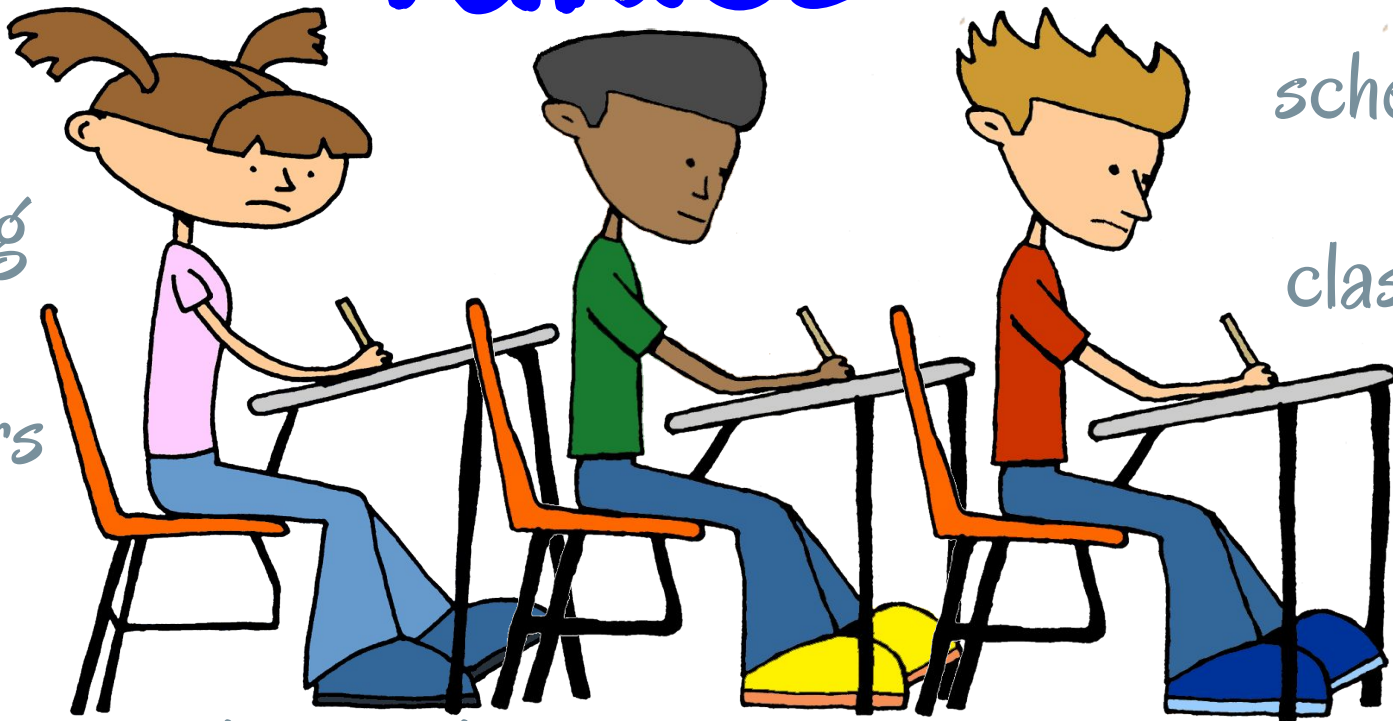
assessment tasks

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race + gender dynamics

# Grading Your Classes

# Yummy ≠ Healthy

	Yummy	Yucky
Healthy		
Junk		

# Fun ≠ Meaningful

	Fun	Painful
Meaningful		
Pointless		

# Fun ≠ Meaningful

What makes a class fun?

What makes a class meaningful?

*Please choose 3 factors that are most important for a class to be meaningful to you.*

Based on your 3 factors for what “meaningful” is to you, what grade would you give each class you’re currently taking?

What can you do to make your  
classes more meaningful?



# Follow-Up

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- In your home report, highlight suggestions you could follow to make your classes more meaningful (according to your own definition).
- Create a portfolio of work that gave you opportunities to make school meaningful in each of the ways you identified.

# How I Want to Be in a Group

**When things go well, what  
can be great about working  
in a group?**

**What can be horrible about  
group work?**

# If we want to maximize the benefits and minimize the drawbacks, what can we DO when we're in our groups?

Suggest behaviors that are:

- **Specific:** Help us imagine exactly what we can do.
- **Concrete:** Help us imagine actual physical behaviors, not states of being.
- **Positive:** Give *DOs* as opposed to *DON'Ts* so we know what to do, not what to avoid doing.

**How do you want to  
approach your group and  
your work?**

**Choose two behaviors that  
are important but  
challenging for you.**

**Choose two behaviors you  
most need your group  
members to do.**



**Share the behaviors you  
need your group members  
to do.**

# Follow-Up

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- Daily behavior assessment: How did you do? Tomorrow, what will you do more, the same, and less?
- Post-project journaling: How did it go in your group? What are some things your partner does well? What are some behaviors you want to work on next time you're in a group?

**Up next: How can teachers make learning experiences meaningful for students?**

**How can  
teachers make  
learning  
experiences  
meaningful for  
students?**

# Thinking Flexibly About Course Content

# Thinking Flexibly: Making Dinner

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1. Identify all the functions.
2. Add the desired functions.
3. Identify the most important functions.
4. Find an alternative that fulfills the most important functions.
5. Add the desired functions to the alternative.

# 1) Identify all the functions of an academic task.

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- Identify and analyze key themes in stories.
- Use the text as a model for writing.
- Read “classic” literature.
- Gain access to work of authors whose longer works students will read in high school and college.
- Compare and contrast different authors’ styles.

## 2) Add an opportunity for students to explore and enact their own values.

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- Identify and analyze key themes in stories.
- Use the text as a model for writing.
- Read “classic” literature.
- Gain access to work of authors whose longer works students will read in high school and college.
- Compare and contrast different authors’ styles.
- Write about a conflict that matters in the student’s life.



### 3) Identify the task's 1-2 most important academic functions.

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- Identify and analyze key themes in stories.
- Use the text as a model for writing.
- Read “classic” literature.
- Gain access to work of authors whose longer works students will read in high school and college.
- Compare and contrast different authors’ styles.

## 4) Find an alternative task that fulfills those 1-2 most important academic functions.

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- Identify and analyze key themes in stories.
- Use the text as a model for writing.

## 5) Add opportunities for students to explore and enact their own values.

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- Identify and analyze key themes in stories.
- Use the text as a model for writing.
- Relate to a coming-of-age story.
- Write vignettes that share a valued theme.
- Write about people, events, and things that matter to the students.
- Learn to use imagery to help the reader see and understand what matters.

# Thinking Flexibly: Designing Curriculum

**List all the functions of a task you give your students.**

**Incorporate an opportunity for students to explore and enact their own values into the task.**

**Identify the task's 1-2 most important academic functions.**  
**Find or create an alternative task that fulfills those 1-2 functions.**  
**Incorporate opportunities for the students to explore and enact their own values into the new task.**

# Creating Contexts for Students to Explore What Matters to Them

# Exploring What Matters

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**Show diverse models of work whose creators clearly care about their topics and are willing to be vulnerable.**

*What does the author (composer, artist, scientist) know? Feel? Want?*

*What does s/he want us to think or do?*

# Exploring What Matters

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**Make assignments open-ended enough that students can connect the work to their values but defined enough that they can meet expectations.**

*Too specific: “Paint a night sky.”*

*Too broad: “Paint anything!”*

*In between: “Create a fantasy version of what you see from your window.”*

# Exploring What Matters

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**Give post-assignment reflections that include process questions about values-consistent behavior.**

*What did you do this time?*

*How satisfied are you with the outcome?*

*What will you continue to do next time?*

*What's something different that you'll try next time?*



**Up next: What gets in the way of meaningful learning?**

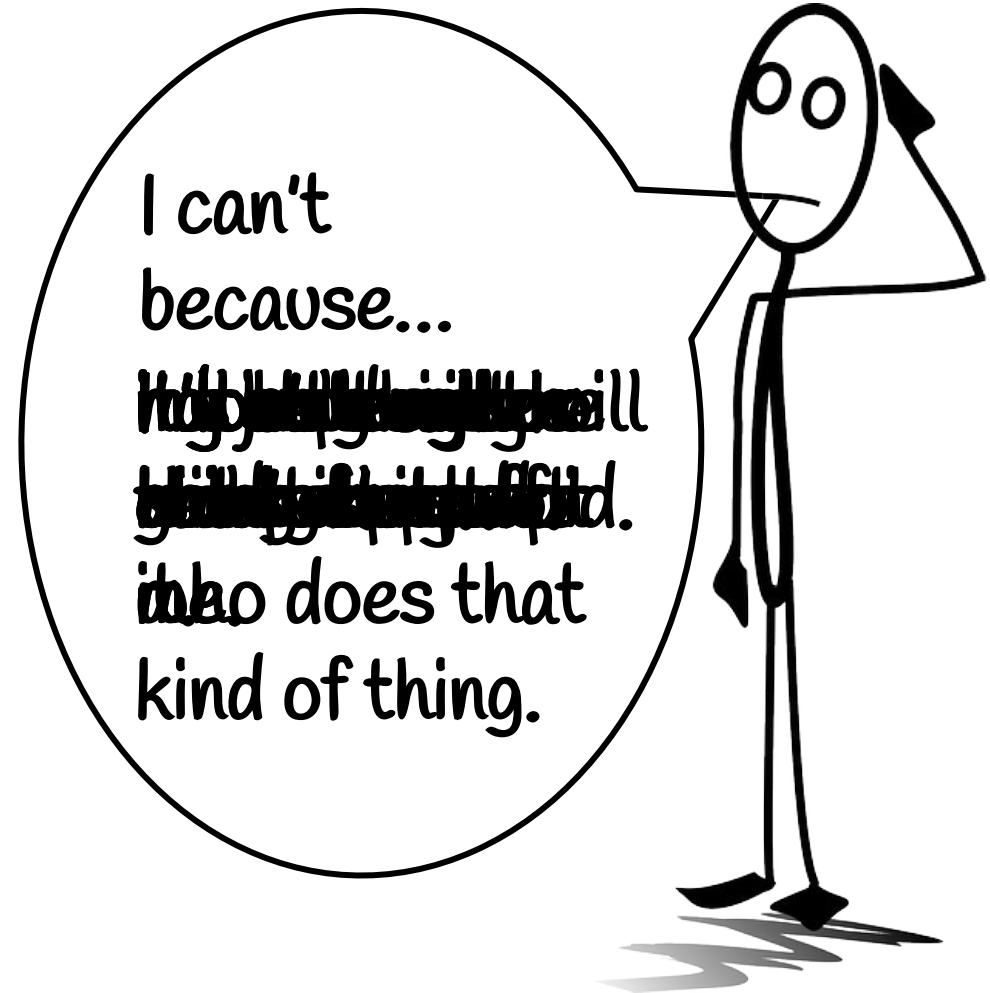
**What gets in the  
way of  
meaningful  
learning?**

# The Passenger Manifest

# What might stop you?

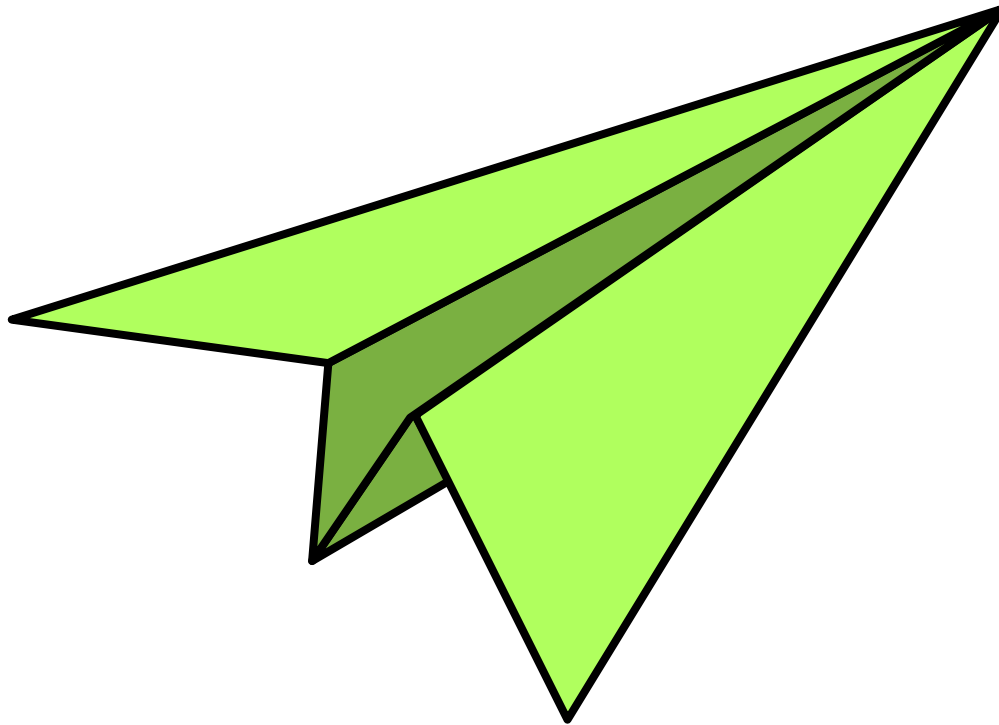
# “I Can’t Because...” – Barriers to Action

- Beliefs about myself
- Beliefs about what others might think, say, or do
- Beliefs about the situation



**Imagine each “I can’t  
because” is a person...**

# Make a paper airplane!

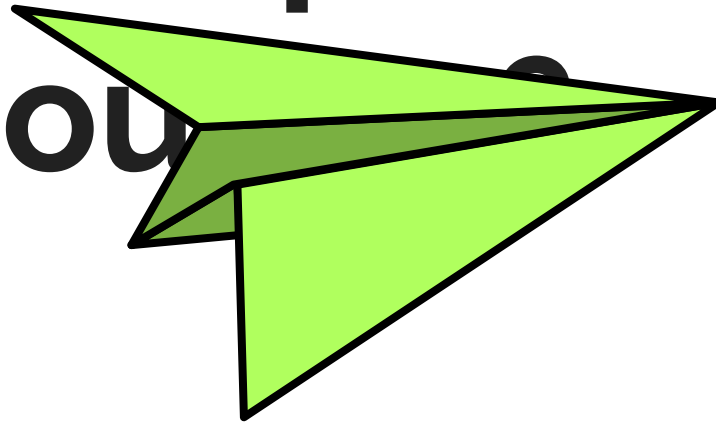


**If this plane  
represents your life...**



**HOW do you want to  
pilot the plane of your  
life?**

**What might happen  
when your passengers  
start shouting?**



# Overcoming External Barriers

Family members, friends, and allies can:

- Help you find creative work-arounds
- Expand the impact of your work
- Help you get resources (time, money, knowledge, stuff)
- Provide emotional support

# Trying Something New

What would you like to try?

When will you try it?

What “passengers” might show up?

What can you do when they show up?

Who can help you keep your plane on course?

# Situations When Students' "Passengers" Might Show Up:

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“I can't do my homework because...”

“I can't revise my work because...”

“I can't ask for help because...”

“I can't play goalie because...”

“I can't take this math test because...”

“I can't read Shakespeare because....”

“I can't try out for this play because....”

# Curriculum Connections

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- What passengers were on [a figure in history, politics, or science]’s plane? Where did this person drive anyway?
- If a friend [does an unhealthy behavior], what “passengers” might board your plane?
- Find passages in [a text] where a character faced internal barriers. Did the character heed their passengers or their values?

# Self-Kindness Gift Cards

**For you, what's the  
difference between  
self-indulgence and  
self-kindness?**



# Your Self-Kindness Wishlist

Exercising	Creating	Connecting with loved ones
Satisfying your senses	Playing	Resting
Connecting to a higher power (if you believe in one)	Nourishing your body	Preventing illness and injury

**Write one behavior from your wishlist that you will give yourself in an act of self-kindness.**

# THANK YOU!

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