

# unique and united

FROM CONFLICT TO UNDERSTANDING:  
A TRANSFORMATION TOOLKIT



## OVERVIEW

This toolkit directly supports **Students Rebuild: Unique and United** by inviting students to reflect on what makes them different, what they share with others, and how communities grow stronger when individuals feel seen and valued. The final performance or visual submission serves as a collective statement: while we may experience conflict and difference, we are capable of choosing empathy, care, and connection.

By documenting and submitting student work, whether through recorded performances, process photos, or reflections, educators help students see their creative voices as part of a larger, global conversation about belonging and unity. In doing so, students are not only learning social-emotional skills; they are contributing to a movement that affirms that our differences matter, and so does our ability to come together.

While these lessons are intended to be completed as a set, if you only have time to do one, film the acting or improvisation section and submit it to Students Rebuild as a piece of creative expression. Remember, each youth engaged or creative expression submitted sparks a \$5 donation to organizations empowering youth and building bridges worldwide.

This toolkit was created in collaboration with the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding.

### **About Tanenbaum**

Tanenbaum promotes justice and builds respect for religious difference by transforming individuals and institutions to reduce prejudice, hatred, and violence.

As a secular and non-sectarian non-profit, Tanenbaum works to promote religious peacebuilders who help counter extremism and violence in armed conflicts, and to reduce religious bullying of students, harassment in workplaces, and disparate health treatment for people based on their beliefs.

Tanenbaum's Education program works to teach students skills of respectful curiosity and positive communication, setting them up for lifelong success. We develop curricular and professional development resources and work with educational institutions to build environments where students of all religious and non-religious backgrounds feel safe, heard, and respected.

## LESSON 1: HOW DOES CONFLICT HAPPEN?

**Time:** 30 Minutes

In this drama-based lesson, students use movement, voice, and imagination to explore how misunderstandings happen when people have different expectations. Through a party improvisation, students experience playful moments of confusion and difference, and then reflect on how these moments connect to conflict. The lesson introduces the idea that conflict arises when two people want different things.

### Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Recognize that misunderstandings happen when people want or expect different things
- Use voice, body, and facial expression to play a character
- Identify a simple conflict: “Two people want different things.”

### Materials Needed

- Open classroom space for movement and circle activities
- Role Cards (provided at the end of this lesson PDF)
- Chart paper or whiteboard



## activity

1

### MOOD & MOVEMENT WARM-UP

Gather students in a circle.

Introduce mood:

Mood is how you are feeling at a certain moment in time. Your mood can change throughout the day. In the morning, you might be in a sleepy mood, at recess, you might be in a happy mood, and if something goes wrong in the afternoon, you might be in a grumpy mood.

Ask to consider their own mood, asking questions like:

- What mood are you in right now?
- What are some other moods have you felt recently?

Explain that sometimes our moods are visible to others. Briefly model one mood with your body and face, and then ask:

- What mood am I showing? How can you tell?

Instruct students to calmly walk around and demonstrate different moods as they move.

Provide the following prompts:

- Walk like you're serious.
- Walk like you're sad.
- Walk like you're happy.

Next, explain that voices also change with moods. Practice this together by following these prompts:

- Say "good afternoon" in a tired voice.
- Say "how lovely to see you" in a grumpy voice.
- Say "good afternoon" in a friendly voice.

#### Reflection:

Ask students to discuss the activity by providing the following prompts:

- How did your bodies and voices change to show different moods?
- How did that make you feel?
- How do you think the changes in body and voice made others feel?

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## PRETEND PARTY SETUP

### Quick Vocabulary (optional):

- **Character:** A person you pretend to be
- **Improvisation:** Making it up as you go
- **Conflict:** When people want different things
- **Stay in character:** Keep pretending the whole time

Explain to students that they will now engage in an improv (acting) activity. Provide the following instructions:

- Today, you're going to pretend that you are going to a fancy event, like a tea party or a special dinner held at a restaurant.

Ask:

- How do people usually act at a special event?
- What might be polite or expected at such an event?
- What could happen if people have different ideas about the "right" way to act?

Explain:

People from different cultures or families sometimes have different rules. That can cause confusion, even when everyone is trying to be polite. For example, one family might think it's polite to stand close to each other, while another family might think it's polite to give people lots of personal space.

3

## CHARACTER ROLES & PLANNING

Divide the students into 3–4 groups. Quietly give each group a **Role Card** with 1–2 clear behavior rules.

Read the roles aloud to each group, making sure other groups do not hear you. Also, ask the students to carefully consider how they will portray their characters by considering the following questions:

- How does your character move?
- How does your character talk?

Let groups practice in character for 1–2 minutes.

## 4 PARTY IMPROVISATION

Before beginning the activity, share the following expectations with the students:

- Stay in character
- Use your body, face, and voice
- Be safe and respectful

Instruct the students to walk around the room and politely talk to others at the party. Remind them that students in other groups don't know the rules they are following. If needed, provide conversation topics, such as favorite foods, games, or after-school activities.

Gently coach the students in their interactions as needed.

## 5 REFLECT & NAME CONFLICT

Gather students in a circle. They will now reflect on their interactions by replying to the following prompts:

- What did you notice about how others talked or acted?
- Did anything feel confusing or surprising?
- What kind of conflicts arose as you were interacting?
- If someone's words or actions confuse you, what could you ask to better understand them?

## 6 FINAL THOUGHT

Understanding each other doesn't mean we are all the same. We can be unique and united at the same time. When we try to understand one another, problems don't have to turn into big conflicts. Activities like these help us slow down, notice our feelings and ideas, and practice kind, caring ways to respond.

Teachers are encouraged to record this role-playing exercise and submit the photos or videos to [Students Rebuild: Unique & United](#). These short scenes highlight students' creativity and their ability to show how differences can be handled with empathy and respect. Sharing their work allows student voices to contribute to a larger, positive impact beyond the classroom.

## LESSON 2: TRANSFORMING CONFLICT

**Time:** 45–60 Minutes

In this lesson, students explore how conflicts grow or shrink based on voice, body language, and word choice. Through theater activities and short performances, students create scenes that show both escalation and resolution. The culminating performance reinforces the theme that we can be unique in our feelings and needs, yet united in how we choose to treat one another.

### Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Demonstrate how conflicts escalate and de-escalate through voice, body language, and word choice.
- Use feeling words and calm body language to reduce tension.
- Perform a short theatre scene showing conflict and resolution.
- Explain how people can be unique and united even when they disagree.
- Reflect on how theatre helps practice real-life peacebuilding skills.

### Materials Needed

- Open classroom or multipurpose space
- Whiteboard or chart paper
- Markers
- Sample Conflict Options handout (provided at the end of this lesson PDF)
- Optional: Rehearsal Checklist (provided at the end of this lesson PDF)



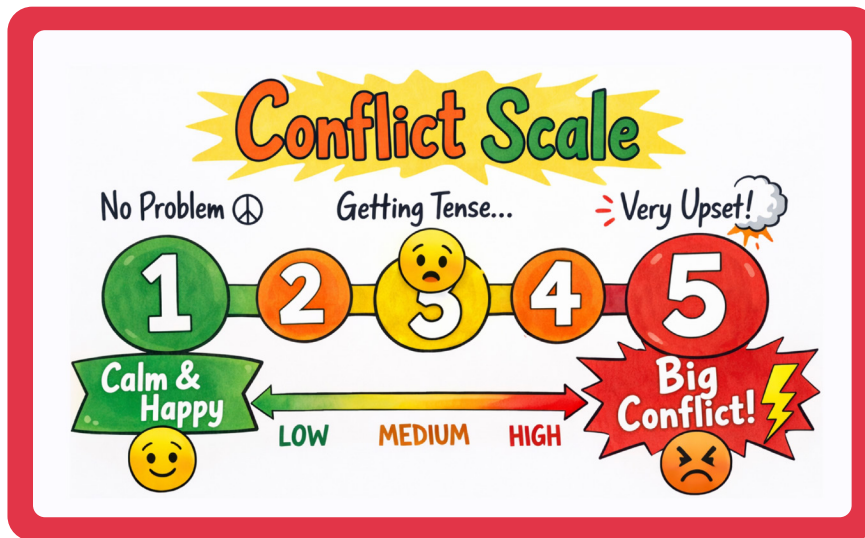
## activity

1

### WHAT IS CONFLICT?

Explain that conflict is when two people want different things or have different ideas.

Draw a simple Conflict Scale on the board:



Ask students to consider the following concepts:

- What makes a problem bigger?
- What helps calm a problem down?

Briefly list student ideas below the scale, aligning each suggestion to its appropriate place on the scale. Examples: loud voice, blaming words, calm voice, listening

Emphasize:

Disagreement isn't always bad. It's what we choose to do during a disagreement that matters.

2

## ENSEMBLE PRACTICE – WORDS MATTER

Explain that words can have a deep impact on the way people feel, and because of this, they can either worsen or lessen a conflict.

Blame words point fingers at someone else, while feeling words tell how you feel and what you need.

Write on the board:

### Blame Words

- “You always...”
- “You never...”

### Feeling Words

- “I feel \_\_\_\_.”
- “I want \_\_\_\_.”

Model both types of words to the students:

Blame: “You took my spot!”

Feeling: “I feel upset. I wanted to sit there.”

Ask your students to consider the consequences of using both types of words. Which of the words made the problem bigger? Which made it smaller?

Present the students with another possible conflict situation, and ask them to provide examples of Blame Words and Feeling Words to demonstrate how they contribute to conflict. Ex. someone cut in line.

Reinforce: The same problem can grow or shrink depending on our choices.



3

## CHARACTER ROLES & PLANNING

Students will create and perform a short scene depicting an everyday conflict. They will perform two versions of the scene: one using blame words and tense voices and bodies, causing the conflict to grow; and one using feeling words and respectful choices, illustrating how a conflict can diminish.

Place the students in pairs or small groups (2–4 students), and help them choose a small everyday conflict, like these:

- Two people want the same item
- Someone feels left out
- Friends disagree about a game
- Different ideas about a group project

You and your students may choose your own conflict topics or reference the Sample Conflict Options document.

Provide the students with this sentence frame to help them create a central focus.

Character A wants \_\_\_\_\_, but Character B wants \_\_\_\_\_.

As each group creates its short scene, remind them to include elements that will show conflict escalation in one version and elements that show de-escalation in the second version.

Version 1: Escalation	Version 2: De-escalation / Resolution
Louder or faster voices	Slower, calmer voices
Tense bodies	Relaxed bodies
Blame words	Feeling words
Interrupting or not listening	Listening
	Respectful responses

To facilitate the project, instruct students to:

- Keep dialogue short (2–4 lines per person)
- Focus on how they say words and use their bodies
- Clearly show the differences between the two scenes

While the students are rehearsing, circulate and support with prompts like:

- How could you make that feel bigger?
- How could you calm that down?
- What feeling word could you use here?

Encourage students to use the **Rehearsal Checklist** to ensure they are meeting all the requirements of the activity.

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## SHOWTIME

Each group performs its scene. Before watching, remind the audience to listen and observe carefully and respectfully. Remind them to pay attention to how voices, words, and bodies change. They should make special note of what makes the conflicts grow and what helps them shrink.

After each performance, guide a quick reflection, using questions like:

- What feelings did you notice?
- What made the conflict bigger?
- What helped make it smaller?
- How did the characters show respect, even though they wanted different things?

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## WHOLE-GROUP REFLECTION: BEING UNIQUE & UNITED

Gather students in a circle and reflect on the activity by posing these questions:

- What happened when the characters wanted different things?
- What did they do that helped them understand each other?
- How can people have different ideas and still be friends?
- When have you felt different from others in a group?
- What can we do this week to help everyone feel included and connected?

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## CLOSING MESSAGE

Our differences make us unique, and the choices we make in how we speak, listen, and act help us stay united. Conflict does not have to break relationships. It can be a chance to practice understanding and remain connected, even when we disagree.

Teachers are encouraged to record this role-playing exercise and submit the photos or videos to [Students Rebuild: Unique & United](#). These short scenes highlight students' creativity and their ability to show how differences can be handled with empathy and respect. Sharing their work allows student voices to contribute to a larger, positive impact beyond the classroom.

# HANDOUT 1: CULTURAL ROLE CARDS

## ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

*\*These roles can be amended as needed to suit the needs of individual students.  
Cut along the dotted lines*

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**The Purple Culture:** You like to meet new people and show respect. In your culture, you show respect by:

- Putting your hands together quietly when you start talking.
- Standing back from the other person and not touching them
- Beginning everything you say by saying “no harm, no harm...”

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**The Green Culture:** You like to meet new people and show respect. In your culture, you show respect by:

- Sitting and looking down when someone else is talking
- Counting to five before answering when someone asks you a question.
- Not starting the conversation. You only answer questions.

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**The Blue Culture:** You like to meet new people and show respect. In your culture, you show respect by:

- Clapping your hands loudly and putting your arms out in front of you when you start talking.
- Standing right next to the other person when talking.
- Looking at your feet when talking.

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**The Orange Culture:** You like to meet new people and show respect. In your culture, you show respect by:

- Always looking in the other person’s eyes when talking or listening.
- Smiling and laughing after someone talks to show you are listening.
- Talking whenever there is silence.

# SAMPLE CONFLICT SCENE OPTIONS

*(For Teacher Curation or Student Selection)*

## 1. One Game, Two Ideas

- Character A wants to play soccer.
- Character B wants to play tag.
- Conflict grows when neither wants to compromise.
- Calms when they listen and make a shared plan.

## 2. The Shared Supplies

- Two students want the same art material or book.
- Conflict grows through blaming or grabbing.
- Calms with turn-taking or sharing.

## 3. Feeling Left Out

- One character feels excluded from a group activity.
- Others don't realize how it feels.
- Calms when feelings are shared, and the group listens.

## 4. Loud vs. Quiet

- One character wants quiet time.
- Another wants to talk or play loudly.
- Conflict calms when both needs are acknowledged.

## 5. Group Project Disagreement

- Group members disagree about ideas or roles.
- Conflict grows when people interrupt.
- Conflict calms when they take turns and plan together.

## 6. Taking Turns

- Two characters want to go first.
- Conflict grows with arguing or rushing.
- Calms when they agree on a fair system.

## 7. Different Rules at Home

- Characters have different expectations about rules.
- Conflict grows through confusion or judgment.
- Calms through explanation and respect.

## 8. Borrowed Without Asking

- One character uses something that belongs to another.
- Conflict grows when feelings are ignored.
- Calms when responsibility and apology are shown

# REHEARSAL CHECKLIST: ARE WE READY?

Before we perform, check each box together:

## Our Scene

- Our scene is **fictional** and safe for a school audience
- Our scene is **2–5 minutes long**
- We are showing **one clear problem**

## Conflict Gets Bigger

- We use **blame words** (like “You always...” or “You never...”)
- Our voices get louder or faster
- Our bodies look tense or upset
- The audience can tell the conflict is growing

## Conflict Calms Down

- We switch to **feeling words** (like “I feel...” or “I need...”)
- Our voices slow down or get calmer
- Our bodies relax or open up
- The problem is solved or gets smaller

## Acting Choices

- We use our **faces, bodies, and voices** to show feelings
- We listen and respond to our partners
- We stay in character the whole time

## Final Check

- The change from **big conflict** → **calm conflict** is clear
- Everyone knows their role and feels ready